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- 1 Faced with the sheer diversity of the articles in this issue of *Echogéo* dedicated to urban structures and frameworks, ranging from the micro to the macro, we had to place the questions they address within a historical perspective, looking at the last half-century. The issues below are connected to the topics addressed in the papers, as well as outlining ideas that appear implicitly in the papers.
- 2 What are likely to have been the main themes addressed in this issue forty or fifty years ago, during the Fordist period of fast industrial-based growth in the European economy?
- 3 First of all, *the issue of “balancing metropolises” (“métropoles d’équilibre”) and urban networks*. According to this normative vision, territories were structured by the consolidation of large regional cities and by the hierarchical, pyramidal dispatch of services along the different levels of the urban network. The objectives were both to achieve the industrial decentralization of the Paris region (Île-de-France), and to revitalize/industrialize small towns in order to alleviate the negative effects of rural exodus and the extinction of agriculture where a large workforce was formerly employed. In periods of full employment, rural areas were required to serve the needs of a Taylorized industry in search of a labor pool.
- 4 Secondly, *the analysis of peri-urbanization* in terms of rapid population growth, which proceeded by contiguity and successive circles, outward from the edges of the main morphological conglomerations. Suburbanization was chosen in the case of the upper and intermediary social classes, while this choice was more imposed in the lower classes - although this move was then positively valued in the latter group too, even when people were moving to council estates. These properties were not at the time socially stigmatized as they are now, and were seen as an unquestionable improvement upon the living conditions of the past.
- 5 Finally, *the question of transport infrastructure* including routes and in some cases impacts. An analysis would have looked at three different scales: the main structuring motorways (and later on the railway routes) between Paris and the “balancing metropolises”; the transport infrastructures that created a polarized interconnection

of territories; and intra-urban networks, in particular in terms of road building schemes. These infrastructures, which necessitated large investments, were the result of an impetus and planning processes that had required close collaborations between political stakeholders and the State's main technical bodies. They were presented as a key requirement for economic development and modernity, and were the object of geographic studies that adopted a technocratic perspective, limiting themselves to just describing the infrastructures, looking at their potential contribution to regional development and at best discussing the conditions of their implementation.

- 6 In some respect, *this background and type of analysis do appear here in the only article dedicated to an emerging country: China* (as well as in other articles that have been submitted but not selected, on the evolution of urban networks in Africa). This article looks at industrial development in the inland area of the Zhejiang province, spreading from the main coastal conurbations - which are for their part already shifting towards tertiarization and consolidating their inner structures. This industrialization process goes along with rampant urbanization. It depends on a network of small and medium towns (on the Chinese scale) which consolidate each other and have allowed to maintain a relative balance, ensuring a "better" spread of populations and economic activity. Such urban developments go hand in hand with the construction of fast railway links. As these cities become surrounded by densely populated territories, their administrative autonomy and power grow stronger, allowing them to rule upon rural areas.
- 7 How does this apply to Western Europe, from the global through to the local scale (noting that the two largest scales are not present in this issue's articles)?
- 8 *At the most global scale of the political discourse, there is a tendency to promote discourses in favor of polycentrism* - a blurry and polysemous concept whose scales of relevance are often not specified (Vandermotten, Halbert, Roelandts, Cornut, 2008). This discourse is based on the assumption, which is not empirically verified, that more polycentrism would bring better balance and better development to Europe as a whole, and would form the grounds for sustainable development. When applied to Europe, this discourse is unanimously embraced as a promise that no portion of the EU's territory will be left behind, even though current trends favor competition over cohesion. We have seen that on the contrary, this discourse leads to a consolidation of Europe's central space to the detriment of peripheral areas (Lennert & Robert, 2007). When transposed to a national scale, discourses in favor of polycentrism are appealing for regions and city, which see it as more reason to hope. Local bodies base their ambitions on *benchmarks* that rely on stereotypical methods and conclusions. As a result, regional and local policies only create a windfall effect for investors, without really transforming the logics of their spatial behavior. This allows the State to disengage from its responsibilities in terms of local intervention.
- 9 *At the top level of the hierarchy of urban realities, metropolization* occurs within a globalized world economy, against the backdrop of a tertiarization in the countries of the Center's economies. What we are looking at here is actual metropolization - not the kind that cities of all sizes are now aspiring to, even when their structures are a far cry from the characteristics of actual metropolization. This concept covers the integration of a (very) large city as a node of international accessibility: a node in the financial, legal, commercial, technical and managerial networks of transnational economy; a place of production, or at least of control of technological production; and a major cultural

location. The description of such networks with their nodes and their functioning modes is well documented – see for instance the work of the GaWC¹, led by P.J. Taylor and J.V. Beaverstock, or, in the French-speaking world, authors that include C. Rozenblat. After Florida (2005), the economic success stories of metropolization have added value to and been valorized by a certain literature: it studies on the one hand the creative industries' concentration in such areas, and the metropolitan renewal that occurs through gentrification; and on the other hand, large-scale iconic, “flagship” projects. This dominant literature has little interest in the adverse social effects of these economic successes: with an increased concentration of high-level professionals in cosmopolitan metropolises, they exacerbate social divides, inflate property prices and generate a form of growth that creates too few jobs for less qualified populations. As a result, growth often goes along with high rates of unemployment, at least in the least privileged areas of these large metropolitan conurbations. Fortunately, some critical studies can also be found on these themes.

- 10 However, although in the peripheries – European peripheries included – the metropolises or at least the largest cities are those with the strongest economical performance, it is also possible to find regions structured around mid-sized cities, in the densest, most developed parts of Europe, that perform well – at least when their structures are compatible with post-industrial growth and can add value to niche economies in growth sectors, and to local cultural assets and heritage (David, Peeters, Van Hamme & Vandermotten, 2013).
- 11 This is due to the fact that, while in North-Western Europe the largest metropolitan areas benefit from economies of scale, the accessibility and quality of infrastructures, equipment and labor can be excellent in mid-sized cities, which are often not very far away from large metropolises. Hence the interest for *regional cities* and for the *development of regional urban systems*. Gingembre and Baude's article on “Home-work mobility in conurbation networks” (“Les mobilités domicile – travail dans les réseaux d'agglomération”) shows the autonomization of such systems, within which professionals are able to circulate. The article could be completed by an analysis correlating these local systems' economic (and social) performance with their structure and perhaps with their governance. However, the article convincingly shows that although such emerging systems have facilitated the mobility of the workforce, creating sources of potential employment, this benefits first and foremost high-level professionals.
- 12 *On the scale of each morphological conurbation, peri-urbanisation's* former, relatively simple image is not relevant anymore: that of young couples with children moving out towards the outer periphery in search of more affordable housing, in an environment they see as more pleasant, at the cost of an increased commute into urban centers. Today, as shown by Berger, Aragau and Rougé in the case of the Western suburbs of Paris (but this phenomenon can also be observed throughout Western Europe), peri-urban areas, at least around the largest cities, have developed a structure of their own, with a multiplication of employment and service centers. The populations' age, family status and professional structures have changed. They have also stabilized, and comprise less and less first generation immigrants from city centers. Some parts of the peri-urban space, in particular those closest to the city-centers, have aged, and some of the towns in those spaces have seen a decrease in their population – not just because of population ageing, but also of a negative migration balance. Peri-urban spaces have

sprawled out, often in a non-continuous manner, and transformed into “rurban” spaces, while the less well off were being pushed out to the outer margins. However, the average distance travelled by peri-urban populations on their home-work commute has only increased to a small extent, due to the emergence of secondary nodes.

- 13 Finally, the *intra-urban scale* is explored by Demailly through the theme of shared gardens. One could argue that this is micro-geography, bordering on the insignificant. However, this study is a good example of a certain form of post-modern geography, more widespread in the Anglo-Saxon world, where qualitative study is combined with a method similar to that of urban sociologists, with a preference for understanding – or simply describing – urban behaviors rather than analyzing spatial structure. Furthermore, this approach reveals *shifts in governance*.
- 14 Once again, it is useful to make a comparison with the situation that was prevailing during the Fordist period: general operations were led by the State and others by local authorities, in a *top down* approach that was only challenged towards the end of the period by sporadic community protest actions which were for the most part quickly dismissed.
- 15 Nowadays, the State tends to disengage, or to restrict its role to the setting of wide strategic orientations. However, the State retains a greater power in France than in other countries of Western Europe where structures are more regional or federal, and where in some cases like Belgium its remit has completely disappeared.
- 16 A varying share of responsibility in terms of local and urban development is transferred over to the regions and cities, without those being allocated sufficient resources: this leads to the creation of different forms of public-private partnerships, or to a complete withdrawal of the public sector in favor of the private sector in the name of so-called efficiency². However, the political frameworks that preside over this de-centralization are sometimes disconnected from the current realities of urban and regional operations. The article about mobility within networks of conglomerations shows that in France, most of this mobility takes place within one same region. There are however some significant exceptions, such as the persistence of two distinct Regions in Normandie, or on the contrary the functionality of a single Rhône-Alpes Region that associates independent units like the Lyon urban area, the French side of Geneva and the Alpine valley. Modifications in territorial frameworks are very difficult to achieve: they need to overcome the inertia of political powers in place as well as individual interests. This is visible for instance in the way that the population of affluent Dutch suburbs refuses to accept the creation of metropolitan provinces that could mutualize the expenses of central conurbations with the resources of the rich suburbs. In Belgium, the resistance to an extension of the limits of the “Région-Capitale”, or the obstacles to the implementation of a wider metropolitan area comprising of the capital and its periphery - although its powers would be very limited - are not just due to linguistic factors: they are also caused by the suburban local authorities’ refusal of having to bear the costs of the central areas, despite the fact that their inhabitants benefit from them on an everyday basis.
- 17 In a general environment that valorizes private sector action, where competition between cities is implicitly encouraged by references to a globalized economy, local authorities are paralyzed by the scarcity of their financial resources and are having to give in to the dominant ideology: the public sector must support gentrification, cosmetic improvements and cultural attractiveness for the creative industries. What

right-wing political powers are expecting from this evolution is quite clear. However, Lebeau's article "Une banlieue 'créative' dans le Grand Paris?" ("Creative' suburbs for Greater Paris?") shows that left-wing authorities are also giving in to this trend, although they are trying to spread a "democratic" varnish over such choices. The paper shows how illusory it is to expect to develop a "creative city" that can be both attractive under the terms of the dominant economy and socially inclusive, by pushing out the more alternative and rebellious forms of popular culture. Outside of France, the example of Brussels also shows that Socialist city authorities are all the more keen to "eradicate" urban poverty through gentrification and cosmetic policies that they are managing disadvantaged areas, and are therefore seeking to grow their tax income and to reduce the costs they are having to bear because of their very social makeup.

- 18 This gentrification, this desire to attract the middle classes, the "creative" classes and educated populations, requires for local authorities to provide opportunities for these classes to participate in governance. However, the article on shared gardens in the Paris region ("Les jardins partagés franciliens") shows the limitations of such initiatives: ultimately, decision-making remains the preserve of political authorities, even in the case of initiatives that appear as more spontaneous.

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NOTES

1. www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc.
2. With a British variant where the State tends to take responsibilities away from local authorities, which are powerless but sometimes difficult to control, and hand them over to national or ad-hoc agencies that delegate their mission to the private sector or to public-private partnerships.

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AUTEUR

CHRISTIAN VANDERMOTTEN

Christian Vandermotten, cvdmotte@ulb.ac.be, is a Professor Emeritus at Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium. He has recently published:

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