Gilles Pinson*

The governance of French towns. From the centre-periphery scheme to urban regimes

This article defends the idea that it is no longer satisfactory to study the forms of governance of the French cities through the centre-periphery analytical framework. The devolution of new functions to urban governments, the transformations on capitalism, and States' policies have turned French cities from mere implementation spaces of public policies built at other levels to central actors on urban policy production. The horizontal relationships connecting urban actors might be the first explanation for new scopes and shapes of local urban policies. It is therefore legitimate to study urban governance and policies in French cities through theoretical tools granting a primary role to the interactions between urban actors and groups and to the conflicts and coalitions in which they are involved. Amongst these theoretical tools the urban regimes approach seems particularly promising.

Keywords: France; centre-peripheries relationships; governance; urban regimes.

A governança das cidades francesas. Das lógicas centro-periferia para os regimes urbanos

Este artigo defende que as lógicas de governança das cidades francesas já não podem ser interpretadas apenas à luz dos quadros analíticos de centro-periferia. A atribuição de novas funções aos governos urbanos, as transformações no capitalismo, e as políticas do Estado reposicionaram as cidades francesas de espaços de mera execução de políticas públicas desenhados noutras escalas, para actores centrais na produção de políticas urbanas. As relações horizontais conectando os actores urbanos podem ser a primeira explicação para novos âmbitos e formas das políticas urbanas locais. Torna-se assim legítimo analisar a governança urbana e as políticas nas cidades francesas através de ferramentas teóricas que confiram um papel central às interacções entre os agentes e os grupos urbanos e aos conflitos e coligações que desenvolvem. Entre estas ferramentas teóricas, a abordagem dos regimes urbanos mostra-se particularmente promissora.

Palavras-chave: França; relações centro-periferia; governança; regimes urbanos.

INTRODUCTION

This article defends and illustrates the idea according to which studying the way French towns and cities are governed through the mere centre-periphery relationships analytical framework is no longer appropriate. This

* Université de Lyon — Sciences Po Lyon, Bâtiment administratif (D) - 3ᵉ étage - Bureau 307, 14 Avenue Berthelot 69365 Lyon Cedex 07, France. e-mail: gilles.pinson@sciencespo-lyon.fr

approach, which has long prevailed in Europe and particularly in France, considers that the "vertical" relationships between the state's central and field administrations, on the one hand, and the local political actors and local administrators, on the other, are the most important facets to consider in order to understand the way localities are governed. Besides, this framework attributes a decisive importance to the regulation and policymaking functions of central state representatives and tends, in parallel, to neglect the "horizontal" dynamics of mobilisation, alliance, and conflict entwining local actors, whether political or socio-economic. This approach is intimately linked to the history of the construction of territorial states in Europe which was characterised by the progressive expansion of centres into initially rebellious peripheries (Elias, 1975; Tilly & Blockmans, 1994). The challenges of military and political control of these peripheries prevailed for such a long period of time that they justified both institutional arrangements intended to limit the power and responsibilities of local governments and interpretative schemes emphasising the influence of the central state representatives.

The recent evolution in the relationships between the state and local governments and in policymaking processes, along with the transformations in capitalism and its relationships with urban spaces and the evolution of urban societies require a reassessment of the way French cities' governance is analysed. The attribution of an ever increasing number of functions to urban governments, the competition between cities triggered by globalised capitalism, and state policies more concerned with competitiveness than with redistribution, have made French cities not just spaces for the implementation of public policies but also actors in the elaboration of the policies and the strategic visions inspiring them. Local actors (elected officials, civil servants, economic actors, social movements and associations) are no longer in a subordinate position regarding the determination and implementation of urban policies. The "horizontal" relationships linking those local actors can now be considered as the first explanation of the content of urban policies and of the way they are conceived and implemented. Therefore, it seems legitimate to henceforth approach urban policy/policies in France through theoretical tools that attribute a fundamental role to the horizontal interactions between urban actors, groups and organisations, as well as to the conflicts, alliances, and coalition logics in which they are bound up as factors explaining the structure of the urban agenda and the content of urban policies. Amongst these theoretical tools, the "urban regimes" approach developed in the United States by Clarence Stone (1989; see also Orr & Johnson, 2008) and his followers seems particularly fruitful. The merits of this approach will be subsequently presented in this article, but we can already state that one of them is the fact that it consents to the articulation of a political economy approach, sensitive to the structuring character of the

capitalist framework, with a political science approach attentive to the political and social logics that shape urban policy and policies, whilst also not overestimating the role played by the influence of upper government tiers.

In this article, I shall first consider the theoretical approaches that have dominated the social science literature on local government in France and present the empirical reality — establishing strong asymmetries in the relationships between the state and localities — in which these approaches were rooted. I shall demonstrate how these approaches have left strong imprints on contemporary scientific production, whereas the empirical substratum at their origin has been substantially modified. In the second part, I shall consider how the transformations which occurred before and after the 1982 decentralisation laws finally allowed alternative analytical frameworks to emerge. These approaches and the governance approach in particular, have permitted the re-evaluation of the role played by urban actors in the governance of cities. In this section, I shall plead for an extension of these works through the deployment of urban regimes research programme and theory. Finally, in a third and last part, I shall seek to widen the subject to places beyond France and examine the possibility of defining and qualifying Southern European urban regimes.

THE LONG GOODBYES TO THE "LOCAL POLITICAL ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM"

The notion of a "local political administrative system" is part of the theoretical frameworks that have long dominated the approach to local politics in France. Developed by the researchers of Michel Crozier's *Centre de Sociologie des Organisations* (CSO), this notion refers to an approach that conceives of local political life, urban politics, and local actors only through the issue of their relationships of dependence and submission to central state representatives and their attempts to skirt the rules imposed by the centre. This kind of approach has profoundly marked the French way of dealing with cities and urban policies.

THE EROSION OF LOCAL AUTONOMY

Nevertheless, we must recognise that the approach which favours the dependent relationship between "local" and "state-national" is rooted in an empirical and historical reality that has witnessed the continued erosion of local autonomy, in particular that of cities, as a central power asserted itself, firstly royal, then imperial, and lastly republican. While it has undoubtedly been weaker than in Middle Europe (Italy, Rhineland Germany, Flanders),

the communal movement nevertheless did touch France. In the "historic interlude" (Weber, 1982) that separates the fall of the Roman empire and the failure of the Carolingian attempts to re-establish a Christian West on the one hand, and the emergence of nation states in the 14th century, certain French towns liberated themselves from feudal bondage and the power of the Bishops and obtained franchises and privileges from the crown (Chédeville *et al.,* 1980). An urban consular power quite close to the city-state model was established, in particular in areas of what today makes up Southern France. However, this communal movement was not sufficiently robust to oppose the influence of the rural nobility and the precocious emergence of a centralised royal power, which from the 16th century onward, progressively corroded the city privileges and replaced consular powers with those of crown representatives. Royal absolutism then brought a definitive end to this historic interlude.

The revolutionary period, and later the imperial episode, proved unfavourable to urban powers and worsened, rather than corrected, the process of centralisation. The revolution created the communes which, while again taking up the structure of the Catholic Church parishes, founded the basis for the eternal problem of extreme communal fragmentation (41,000 at the time of the Revolution and still 35,568 today). In its rationalistic logic, this endowed all communes with the same status, be they urban or rural. Furthermore, the urban power legitimately associated with the power of the mercantile corporations and, therefore, with intermediary bodies, was not reinstated by the revolutionary governments. The administrative power was transferred to the State representative, above all the prefects created in 1800. Neither the Empire nor the restored 19th century monarchies ran counter to this centralising tendency. On the contrary, even if the municipal elections suspended in 1797 were reinstated in the 1830s under the Restoration, the 19th century was characterised on the one hand by a strengthening of the central state and its military and civilian infrastructures and, on the other hand, by the unification of the public national space, thanks to the development of the press and parliamentarism, all factors that prove in no way favourable to any resurgence in urban power.

One has to wait for the stabilisation of the Republican regime from 1875 onward to encounter a new historical window of opportunity more favourable to the re-emergence of urban powers. The founders of the new regime carried the explicit intention of reducing the central state apparatus, compromised by its participation in the Imperial regime, and in order to achieve that, backed the construction of the Republic "from the bottom up" and, in particular, from the commune level. An era then began that some call the "town hall era" (*Politix*, 2001). The communes obtained the freedom of action to innovate in matters of public policies. That period saw towns —

not central State — invent urban planning (Gaudin, 1985) and trace the outline of the Welfare State. This capacity for innovation was also exercised during the first decades of the 20th century in the field of economic development, in particular in the communes directed by socialists willing to experiment with a French style "municipal socialism".

Nevertheless, that emancipative drive of the urban powers swiftly got broken by censorship of the *Conseil d'Etat*, the judicial body responsible for the control of the legality of government actions, and the return in force of the central state apparatus between the two wars. This movement toward recentralisation was confirmed by the Vichy Regime, which "nationalised" urban planning and made the central state a key actor in urban and construction policies. However, it was particularly with the 4th Republic (1946-1958) and even more especially so with the 5th Republic (1958-…) that the process of centralisation and the reduction of local governments' room for manoeuvre attained their high-water mark. Immediately after the war, an elite consensus emerged favourable to the construction of a powerful interventionist social state able to rebuild the country and to orientate its economy. The 4th Republic laid the foundations with nationalisations, the foundation of the social security system, and the creation of a powerful planning agency: the *Commissariat Général au Plan*. The 5th Republic, under de Gaulle, even reinforced the central State by systematising the powers of the state's upper echelons over an increasingly extended range of social activities and economic sectors (Jobert & Muller, 1987; François, 2008). This interventionist State, a kind of "revival" of Colbertism, also took on urban and regional challenges, and implements what Brenner (2004), in accordance with Martin (1989), qualified as "spatial Keynesianism". Amongst the main institutional developments of these political strategies is the creation of the *Délégation Interministériel à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale* (DATAR) in 1963, an agency meant to contain the growth of the Paris region and to orchestrate the industrialisation of the poorest regions and equip them with modern infrastructure. During this period, the central state also took control of most of the planning, housing, and infrastructure policies in cities.

The gradual rise in power of an interventionist and planning state goes hand in hand with the stabilisation of a specific power system associating state representatives and local officials, which sociologists from CSO termed the "local political-administrative system" (*système politico-administratif local* — SPAL) (Worms, 1966; Grémion, 1976). This system was mainly characterised by its asymmetry, given the sharp resource inequalities between state representatives richly endowed with financial and technical means as well as the legitimacy for action, on the one hand, and the elected local

authorities and local civil servants who were progressively deprived of such resources as state interventionism grew on the other.

That intervention has, in fact, deprived local actors, including those in towns, of their capacity for taking initiatives and innovating in matters of public policies. Their role was progressively limited to maintaining a local consensus and acting as intermediary between local society and state administrations. Even if the few local elected officials accumulating local and national mandates — as the French system allows — were able to obtain adjustments to the state policies, even if the associations of elected local entities and in particular the Association of the Mayors of France (*Association des Maires de France* — AMF) allowed mayors to influence the legislation concerning local communities (Le Lidec, 2001), even if thanks to their presence in Parliament — and in particular in the Senate — elected local authorities were able to block attempts at reforming the local institutional system, overall, the state central and field services had acquired a strong and almost monopolistic grip over urban matters. The central technocratic elites of the de Gaulle regime at the time considered the elected local officials as forces that resist change and modernisation and the *département* Prefects as their allies. Thus came the idea of promoting the regional level as the new scale for central state action and establishing powerful agencies such as DATAR, capable of overcoming obstructions put in place by local elites.

Naturally, such developments did nothing to improve the status of "local" matters as far as social sciences studies are concerned. Along with the sociologists of the CSO, some political scientists (Lagroye, 1973) depicted the elected local officials as busier consolidating electoral strongholds and mobilising the consensus in local society around state policies rather than trying to innovate or elaborate projects for their territory. In the 1960s and the 1970s, French urban sociology, when it was not totally insensitive to the political dimension, portrayed local political actors and administrators as totally marginalised by a central power that was carrying out an in-depth reorganisation of urban spaces for the benefit of the major national industrial groups (Castells and Godard, 1974).

DECENTRALISATION AND SURVIVAL OF ANALYTICAL MODELS

Paradoxically, the decentralisation laws of 1982 and 1983, which considerably upset the country's institutional architecture and centre-periphery relations, did not fundamentally transform the outlook of the social sciences on local and urban policies. Voted through at the beginning of the first presidential mandate of socialist François Mitterrand (1981-1988), these laws nevertheless carried important changes: they put an end to prefect tutelage over the acts of local communities, replacing control over opportunities by

a mere judicial control over the conformity of acts; they transferred strategic competences from state services to the local governments (the communes inherited urban planning, transportation, and social action, amongst other competences); and they made the rules for matters such as staff recruitment and access to credit more flexible. However, one should not attribute more importance to this surge in decentralisation than it actually bore in reality. The law did, more often than not, simply legally validate an evolution that had already begun back in the 1960s and which witnessed a gradual strengthening on the part of certain local communities in their capacity to produce public policies. What Lorrain (1989 and 1991) has qualified as a "silent change", above all, involved large cities which, even before decentralisation, had held an autonomous capacity for innovation and action in sectors where state services had invested little: public transportation, economic development, the rehabilitation of rundown housing stock, culture, social action, etc.

However, Lorrain's findings have remained relatively isolated in French literature concerning local policies. Despite decentralisation, most scholars remained obsessed with the social figure of the "*notables*", i.e. those archaic and omnipotent local elected officials able to monopolise relations with the centre. In the years following the reform, a certain number of studies drew stern conclusions regarding decentralisation (Rondin, 1986; Mény, 1987, 1992; Mabileau, 1991): rather than a democratisation of local political spaces and a strengthening of innovation in local policies, decentralisation further increased the already considerable power of some "*notables*" — mayors, presidents of general and regional councils — who recycle the same logic of action that they already practiced prior to centralisation consisting of favouring and courting the centre rather than mobilising those forces constituting local societies to promote a local development project. According to those studies, the decentralisation reforms missed their target. Territorial fragmentation, the quite undemocratic character of decision making systems, and the weak mobilisation of local resources within the fabric of public policies remained, according to those studies, important traits of local political systems.

If this kind of analysis, which continues to prevail in French academic fields interested in local and town policies, in particular in the political science field, is certainly the reflection of an empiric reality characterised especially by the weight of executives in local institutions, it is also the product of a rooted way to focus on elected officials and institutions and to systematically underestimate the polycentric and pluralist character of urban societies when looking at urban policies that still prevails. Not only does the "hold of the state curb the decentralisation of the outlook" as Cadiou indicates (2009, p. 35; see also Briquet and Sawicki, 1989), but even when the urban policies and politics are taken into consideration, the majority of

French political science studies, routinely endow the elected entities, the political institutions, the logics of political competition, and the building of electoral strongholds with a highly privileged role. It is very much the case with the studies carried out during the 1980s and the 1990s in accordance with the research by Lagroye (1973) on Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Mayor of Bordeaux from 1947 to 1995. One has to recognise that those studies (Petaux, 1982; Garraud, 1989) contain the huge merit of having updated the conditions under which the profession is exercised by the local elected officials and, in particular, that of the logic of the construction of "eligibility" (Abélès, 1989), of mobilising supports, and of constructing electoral strongholds. They have demonstrated that local spaces are actually political spaces. Nevertheless, one can reproach them over two biases. First, the approach to urban government is systematically centred on elected officials and on the "politics" side of their activities. Whereas, with a few exceptions (Fontaine and Le Bart, 1994), issues such as local administrations management, the construction of projects, and the activation and coordination of public policies are often neglected. This focus on issues, spaces, and practices of electoral competition tends, therefore, to render urban societies invisible, to neglect the materiality of the city and the set of problems that urban political actors may be faced with when dealing with urban society and materiality. Finally, despite the clearly sociological orientation of the studies, local societies are not made more palpable when compared to previous works. They are reduced to pools of resources to which the elected officials resort in order to confront electoral competition. Furthermore, these studies perpetuate a very French tendency to dilute the urban issue and its potential specificities in the generic and unsatisfying category of the "local". This lack of differentiation between local spaces is, once again, indicative of the difficulty of the social sciences in France when studying local policies to recognise the spaces and urban societies as realities that pose specific problems to the political powers.

This difficulty that the social sciences, and more specifically French political science, have in conceiving cities as potentially specific political spaces contrasts with the precocious constitution of the city, of the urban policy/policies as specific objects in the North American social sciences field. In the United States, the different forms of the State's construction, the rapid establishment of towns as "separate" political spaces (given the anti-urban ideology of the WASP majority, the greater presence of ethnic minorities, the establishment of urban political machines, etc.) has led researchers not only to pay more attention to the specificities of political life in the city, but also to the specific means of engaging in and implementing urban policies within a social context marked by racial cleavages, the role of large companies, and the logic of property or, furthermore, the exodus of the white middle classes to the suburbs and the secessionism of privileged

enclaves. Even if this way of postulating the specificity of urban policy/policies may have led to a certain isolation of the urban politics community within the field of North American political science (Sapotichne *et al.,* 2007), it has, nevertheless, had the merit of repositioning urban societies and their specific characteristics at the centre of studies on urban politics.

GOVERNANCE AND URBAN REGIMES

The two decades since 1990 have witnessed an evolution in the way French cities are governed and the urban policies made on the one hand, and an evolution in the way social sciences look at these subjects on the other. The most striking sign of this change in outlook is the dissemination of an approach in terms of urban governance. Today, evolutions in the forms of governance of French towns justify the taking of a new theoretical step that looks at cities as spaces governed by regimes.

FROM SPAL TO URBAN GOVERNANCE

The "*système politico-administratif local*" has had its day! The way the social sciences view local political spaces must, therefore, change. Whilst a certain number of significant traits of this "system" remain — in particular the fragmentation of the *communes* and the dominant role played by local and regional government executives — many other aspects of these local political spaces have changed considerably.

The first of these changes concerns the widening of local government competences and the reinforcement, in particular regarding large cities, of their technical and political ability to conceive and implement public policies. The decentralisation legislation certainly enacted a distribution of competences between levels of territorial communities but they also left unchanged a principle of "general competence" which has been in effect since the 19th century and which, in effect, provides the scope for intervention in a great many fields across every possible level. Large towns have, therefore, been able to develop their intervention in areas such as economic development, social assistance, housing, and culture, but also in the building and maintenance of university and judicial structures. During the years following decentralisation, these innovations were often the work of enterprising mayors, or indeed adventurers, sometimes acting in legally grey areas and, in some cases, even subsequently facing court cases. Later, certain public sectors underwent restructuring thanks to the advent of better trained urban professional bureaucracies; thanks also to the constitution of professional networks allowing for, on a national level, the circulation of expertise

on urban policies; and thanks equally to the refinement of internal and external financial control mechanisms. This reinforcement of the capacity for action on the part of communities, and in particular of larger cities, means that today local and regional governments are responsible for more than 70% of public investment expenditure.

The second major factor of change is the increase in power of the inter-municipal cooperation institutions, in particular in the urban context. Even before the decentralisation laws, because of the high level of fragmentation of the municipality map, some of them regrouped within these institutions, enabling them to jointly manage a number of services, networks, and utilities (transport, waste collection and treatment, water supply and sanitation) and to perform a certain number of strategic functions (urban planning, economic development, housing, etc.) on a larger scale, all without jeopardising the legitimacy of the communal space as the basic unit of local democracy (Baraize and Négrier, 2001; Desage, 2005). Therefore, France has followed the general tendency to favour the metropolitan governance formulas of what has been termed "neo-regionalism" (Savitch and Vogel, 2009), consisting of a middle way between the solution of generalised competition between communities advocated by the *public choice* supporters and metropolitan government formulas that consist of transferring essential functions and resources from the communes to supra-communal institutions governed by directly elected councillors. The political functioning of those new institutions is of an inter-governmental type and does, in fact, attribute a prominent role to the mayors of each municipality in inter-communal policy negotiations. The state has played an essential role in the acceleration of this inter-communal regrouping process, playing up financial incentives as well as threats of sanction. However, one must not neglect the role that shared and established working habits (acquired earlier within a framework of more malleable formulas of inter-communal cooperation) play in this process, as well as the socialising effect of inter-communal cooperation devices for planning and visioning, which have led elected entities to incorporate and internalise a need for cooperation.

The third element of change impacting on town government is the progressive delegation by the state of the "strategic direction" guiding the production of urban policies toward local actors. At the beginning of the 1980s, the decentralisation laws gave a legal frame to the retreat of the "dirigiste", planning and controlling central state and to the inexorable rise of the largest cities as political actors. The end of the de Gaulle era and the beginnings of the 1974 crisis marked the end of a development cycle for the state as planner. DATAR lost its influence and the central state as a whole experienced increasing difficulties in formulating a new project for the organisation of the national territory (Béhar and Estèbe, 1999). The revival of planning

in a regionalised and contractual format continued after decentralisation had little impact. Henceforth, it was to be cities and regions charged with the task of elaborating development strategies. Territorial projects can therefore only be local. That is how, throughout the last three decades, we have seen towns and inter-communal institutions expand their services to encompass economic development and carry out economic policies (Le Galès, 1993), revive spatial and strategic planning (Padioleau and Demeestere, 1991), develop international relations and marketing policies, and submit applications to organise major events. Therefore, French cities and urban societies have acquired the capacity to think independently and project themselves in an environment that has become more uncertain and more competitive. In short, they have learnt to elaborate visions and projects (Pinson, 2009a).

Finally, the last factor of evolution concerns the process of pluralisation that has affected French urban policy networks, in other words, the multiplication of actors intervening in the fabric of urban policies and city governance, plus the consequent dispersion of resources for action (Pinson, 2006). Whereas these action systems had remained relatively simple up until the 1970s and were essentially concentrated around state field services, elected officials and, in a secondary way, municipal services, they later became much more complex, with the increase in power of semi-public agencies and companies that gravitated around the administrations, taking over new fields of action, with the growing power of local branches of major real estate groups and urban utilities, with the new energy of certain organisations that represent economic actors or, furthermore, with the progressive autonomy of the state's local administrations, such as ports or universities, that play an increasingly important role in local projects and local development strategies. This proliferation of actors was accompanied by a dispersion of resources — financial, political, of expertise — permitting these actors to influence the drafting and implementation of urban policies. In order to make that pluralisation compatible with the constitution of a capacity for collective action, urban political actors had to innovate in terms of public action instruments, and we saw in the 1990s and 2000s the use of forms of action based on negotiation, deliberation, and repetition, such as contracts, projects, and other prospective initiatives (Gaudin, 1999; Pinson, 2004) becoming generalised.

In the French academic field, a new generation of researchers tried, in the 1990s, in line with the already quoted works by Lorrain, and often inspired by North American studies, to make the analysis of local political spaces more sensitive to the specificity of urban societies, to the logic of pluralisation gripping them, and also to the possible effects of the transformations of capitalism. Lorrain (1990 and 2002) documented the growing power of "infrastructure firms" such as Générale des Eaux (which became

Veolia) and Lyonnaise des Eaux (which became Suez). In his studies of local policies for economic development, Le Galès (1993) focused on the importance of the "locality effect" and more precisely on the role of local mobilisations and interactions between urban social groups to explain the content of these policies. Afterwards, inspired by the American political economy approach to city governance, he proposed the renewal of the approach of urban policies using the term "governance", a notion able to encapsulate the phenomena of the pluralisation of urban actors in conjunction with the decentring of public actors and regulations in urban production and management and instrumental innovation in urban policies (Le Galès, 1995). Borraz has explored, with an organisations sociology approach, the phenomenon of organisational proliferation in urban action systems and the renewal of practices by elected urban officials to cope with this new reality (Borraz, 1998; Borraz and John, 2004). More recently, researchers have tried to apply neo-Marxist and regulationist approaches to French cities, in particular by trying to test the hypothesis of a neo-liberalisation of the forms of urban governance (Jouve, 2009; Béal & Rousseau, 2008).

The majority of these studies share a certain number of findings and postulates that lead them to agree on the fact that French towns are no longer governed as they were in the 1960s and that a series of evolutions require the renewal of analytical frameworks. Firstly, despite the traditional weight of the central state in economic activities, and the transformations of capitalism and productive systems have had a strong impact on the relationship between the economy and the space, in particular in the sense of a localisation of economic interactions. These transformations, documented by geography and economic sociology, as well by the *École de la Régulation* (Boyer, 1986; Veltz, 1996; Benko and Lipietz, 2000), have re-evaluated the role of local spaces as purveyors of positive external factors, such as reduced transactional costs and inducing the development of interactions between economic actors and urban government organisations. Whereas their role in economic development had become marginal within capital concentration processes, the constitution of large national groups under the guidance of the state and its interventionism (Levy, 1999), the local communities and in particular the large towns and regions, have become key actors in economic development. This, inevitably, has had an impact on the practices and on the socialisation modes of the elected entities and the bureaucrats and, therefore, on the alliances and power relationships at the heart of towns. I have documented, based on British and Italian cases, the effects of the intensification of the connections with and between actors, who are purveyors of urban public action resources (economic actors and social groups, themselves purveyors of expertise), on the practices and forms of sociability of elected urban entities and on their relationships with the elec-

toral clientele, and on the work involved in maintaining that clientele (Mattina, 2007; Pinson, 2009b). To summarise, the daily immersion in policymaker networks and the mobilisation of support in the heart of social groups that hold the resources for action tends to replace the structuring of social groups whose only resource is the vote.

The second finding shared by these studies is the increasing complexity of French urban societies. The studies of organisation sociologists or of the political scientists interested in local realities pictured urban societies of the 1960s and 1970s as being relatively simple, organised around several social groups that were relatively easy to circumscribe. This simplicity was mirrored in the organisation of municipal administrations, which were still fairly meagre up until the 1970s. The simplicity of town social structures had the advantage of facilitating the work of mobilising electoral support. All the elected entity had to do was to obtain the support of organisations (the church, trade unions, associations, etc.) and of opinion leaders judged able to "hold" certain segments of local society and tap into their electoral support. The simplicity of the administrative structure facilitated the conception of urban policies which, in essence, were in any case the responsibility of state services. Borraz (1998 and 2000), Hoffmann-Martinot (1999), and Jouve (2006) demonstrated in their studies how this situation evolved. The increasing weight of the salaried middle classes, of immigration, and the amplification of mobility and internal migrations complexified the social structures of French cities, making more uncertain any possibility of structuring urban societies into effective electoral clienteles by means of well identified relays. The organisational proliferation that marked the structuring of urban and metropolitan bureaucratic structures in the 1980s and 1990s reinforced interdependence between organisations, the state, and the different levels of local communities, considerably complicating the production of public policies.

Verifying this increasing complexity leads directly to a third finding: that of the transformation in the means of producing urban policy. The multiplication of policy issues and fields of intervention for urban administrations, the proliferation of actors and organisations, and the dispersion of resources for initiatives made action devices more complex to manage. The importance acquired by urban policies and their increasing complexity led to the instrumental innovations mentioned above, but they also modified the balance of power at the heart of urban societies. Municipal, and in particular inter-communal techno-structures, have clearly changed, gaining influence at the expense of state representatives. Municipal and inter-communal executives, as well as their entourage (office, experts), have progressively marginalised councils. Social groups holding strategic resources for urban policies have increased their capacity to access decision making processes and influence

the latter to the detriment of groups whose only resource is the vote. Equally, the increasing complexity of the production of urban politics has profoundly transformed the role of the top elected officials, in particular that of "mayors" whose role is ever less structured by activities encompassing mediation, access to the centre to obtain the adjustment of rules or the maintenance of electoral clienteles, and increasingly by activities related to the production of visions and projects that lend sense and direction to policy networks and to the mobilisation of scarce resources for policies. To qualify this transformation of the forms of the urban political profession and exter-nalise the difference in particular regarding the figure of the *notable* entity, the term "leader" has been judged appropriate by certain authors (Le Galès 2003; Borraz and John, 2004; Pinson, 2009b).

If the use they make of the notion of "governance" can vary, however, the scholars quoted thus far can all be located in the "governance research field" (Pinson, 2003). They all come from a research perspective that seeks to trace the ways in which the governance of towns has changed. Receptive to studies on urban economic policies, they are observant of the potential effects of transformations in capitalism on the logic of urban policy production and on the governance of towns. They are also concerned with the repercussions that these changes may have on the sphere of policies and politics, on electoral competition, and on the modalities of political socialisation of urban social groups. Today, these authors and their studies have managed to structure French academic debate regarding local policies around the notion of "governance", which allows the incorporation of a certain number of changes that have occurred in the economic policies of towns, in urban public action, and in the forms political activities take in towns. Within the framework of that debate, they often confront researchers more sensitive to factors of stability and that frequently limit their approach to politics, to political competition types, to the construction of eligibility and electoral strongholds, and who contest the heuristic added value of that notion of governance.

FROM CENTRE-PERIPHERY RELATIONS TO ANALYSIS OF URBAN REGIMES

It is now time to take a new step forward in the approach to studying the forms of governance of French towns. A good way of doing so is to look at these towns with an approach adopted by North American studies on urban regimes. The main merit of these works is to shift the way one looks at towns and no longer consider the vertical relations between urban actors on the one hand, and local and central state representatives on the other, as evidently structuring the forms that urban governance actually take. On the contrary, the regimes approach postulates that horizontal relations, in

other words the conflicts, cooperation, and alliances that link actors, groups, and organisations physically present in the town, can be seen as factors that explain, as much or even more, the actual form of urban governance.

The main tendency in French studies on local government up until the 1990s has been to minimise the role of these horizontal relations. And quite rightly in most cases! During the period between 1950 and 1970, the central State was the main actor in urban policies and the major role of elected entities was to attract the attention of the State to the problematic specificities of their town or to negotiate the way national programmes would be locally implemented. The specific relationships between local actors and social groups seem to have had no impact on the content of urban policies and the way they were implemented. In political sociology studies of localities, those horizontal social networks are almost invisible: the "notable" collects electoral supports in a relatively simple fashion. These supports consent access to the national centre, the sole place where real political careers are made and where the resources to carry out urban policies can successfully be obtained. In both cases, what happens locally only makes sense in relation to the centre. In both cases, local spaces feature as dominated political spaces. In both cases, these subordinate spaces are drowned in a generic category, the "local space", which dilutes the socio-economic specificities of the places and does not allow for differentiating the dynamics characteristic of towns.

The increasing complexity of urban societies, the pluralisation of political systems, the fact that an increasing number of actors participate in designing and implementing urban policies, and that, at the same time, the state provides fewer resources for implementing those policies successfully, render this centre-periphery approach less and less feasible. In contrast, the governance approach allows for the integration of the economic context and the evolution of urban policymaking in the analysis of urban politics. As for the urban regime approach, it enables paying even greater attention to the horizontal interactions between urban actors of different natures and to urban coalition-making processes.

Developed in the United States by Clarence Stone (1989 and 1993) and transposed to the United Kingdom by Harding (1997 and 2000), the urban regimes approach has, in France, rarely been taken up, with the notable exception of the studies by Dormois (2006). This approach consists of a synthesis of urban political economy works on the one hand and of the intuitions of pluralism on the other. The first, mainly represented by the works of Logan and Molotch on "growth machines" (1987), insists on the fact that the political life of North American cities is largely structured around conflicts opposing local social groups to the urgency, pace, and forms of economic development in towns. With the retraction of federal

programmes, the growth issue has become central in the politics of American cities, and triggers most political conflicts. In these conflicts, more often than not, coalitions or growth machines are constituted and end up dominating the political agenda. These "growth machines" are constituted, on the one hand, by the elected urban officials who need the financial support of the local business elites in order to be re-elected and — on the other, by companies, real estate promoters, important land owners, local media, etc. — who have a vested interest in the town's growth and try, from the beginning, to have a say regarding urban policies, and in particular on urban planning. The application of the "growth coalition" model to French cities and, more generally, to European towns poses a problem because the large companies and what Logan and Molotch call "structural speculators" (promoters and large private landowners) do not have the weight they have in American towns, given the greater fragmentation of land ownership and the weight of public or semi-public land ownership (municipality, public enterprises, hospitals, religious orders, etc.) (Harding, 1994). On the other hand, the still significant weight of publicly redistributed incomes on local income makes European elected entities much less dependent on the great local private interests (Davezies, 2008). However, the "growth machines" approach has the advantage of looking more attentively at the major developments that have occurred in the governance of French towns. First of all, be they on the right or on the left politically, the majority of urban governments put urban growth as their major priority. Naturally, this growth is conceived as having to be "reasonable" or "sustainable" and cannot compromise the essential amenity that constitutes the town's standard of living framework, but is often presented as an insurmountable horizon. Subsequently, one observes in the coalitions mobilised around urban politics in France, as in the American "growth machines", the involvement of institutions and local agencies such as the local media, the universities, and also cultural institutions who all have a vested interest in growth. The pluralist approaches (Dahl, 1971), whose studies on the regimes recognise heredity, in turn insist on the great number of actors and organisations intervening in urban governance and the dispersion of resources (financial, expertise, and in particular, political legitimacy). These approaches insist more heavily than political economy approaches do, on the considerable importance that actors and political institutions can have, even in a capitalist context that grants a systemic advantage to those who hold capital. That weight can be expressed by the capacity to mobilise electoral support for a development project or by the grip officials can have on the regulatory framework through which urban development has to go.

The synthesis proposed by the urban regimes approach takes into consideration, firstly, that in a capitalist economy there is always a strong

possibility that there will be a "systemic bias" in urban politics favouring economic interests. That has always been the case in the United States, where towns collect their main fiscal revenues from the presence of companies. It is also increasingly the case in French towns where, although the resources distributed by the state or from social redistribution systems play a greater part in the local economy, it is nevertheless true that the elected officials have their eyes fixed on the departures and the arrivals of companies. These pressures exerted on urban government in a capitalist regime lead to, according to these authors, the constitution of government coalitions, "urban regimes", bonding government institutions and certain major economic interests in a lasting relationship. Furthermore, the regimes theory is more interested in the nature of the relationships linking the actors involved, and draws conclusions close to those of the pluralists. The systems of urban actors of American towns are characterized by a high level of complexity, fragmentation, and interdependence amongst actors and by the dispersion of resources. The central challenge of urban governance — it is no longer time for the elected entities to decide unilaterally, but to "introduce enough cooperation between the various elements that constitute the community in order to actually make things happen" (Stone, 1989, p. 227). Thus, the situations that pluralism entails render futile the resort to hierarchical leadership as a coordination mode. Cooperation comes instead from the capacity of elected officials and their administration to interest actors in their urban policies. This capacity comes from the stabilisation of governance arrangements, from the relations of trust and reciprocity between autonomous and interdependent actors. The relations are self perpetuating thanks to modes of action and interaction that do not question the autonomy of actors. Little by little, the stabilisation of these trusting relationships generates a capacity to cooperate and act collectively. The regime becomes the matrix for the city's capacity for collective action. Identified as such by coalition members, the regime becomes an asset worthy of being protected by each participant.

Finally, the picture drawn by the theory of urban regimes seems to be able to describe, with some subtle and occasional differences, the situation of French cities and their modes of governance. These towns are subject, more than previously, to the transformations of capitalism and are less protected by the state's umbrella and by Keynesian policies. The challenges of economic development, competitiveness, and attractiveness have become central issues. Urban elites are required to define a position in territorial competition, whereas the state provides almost no expertise or important guidelines on the subject. Therefore, projects are defined locally. On the other hand, the growing dependence with regard to private investment makes the urban elites ever more attentive to economic actors, which means

that, even when they are not physically present in French urban regimes, their supposed interests are broadly taken into consideration. As urban societies are increasingly required to build up their own projects, they simultaneously become more polycentric and pluralist. As the actors representing the state began to take a back seat, urban actors systems became occupied by an increasing number of local groups and organisations. As the links with the centre lose their strategic character, the most evident challenge of urban governance becomes that of making the pluralism of urban actor systems prosper, of making it compatible with the constitution of a capacity for action. The challenges involved in mobilisation, coordination, the building of stable coalitions, and the constitution of the town as a collective actor have become central issues. Innovation in terms of tools for urban public actions (associations, contracts, projects, pacts, charters), the emphasis on the major mobilising initiatives (large urban projects, strategic planning, major events, etc.) (Pinson, 2002) are all relevant elements revealing the importance taken on by the densification and management of horizontal relations in urban governance.

CONCLUSION: SOUTHERN EUROPEAN URBAN REGIMES?

The regimes approach has considerable merits. It allows for the reconciliation of political economy approaches and policy analysis approaches that are more sensitive to the inherent complexity of drafting and implementing urban policies and to the interdependent dynamics between actors. This approach also incorporates features that French political science very often neglects: the fact that cities are socially, economically, and politically complex phenomena, polycentric ecosystems in which questions regarding the coordination and mobilisation of actors around public policies and the integration of social systems are always emerging differently from that able to be observed somewhere else. Finally, because this approach perceives how coalitions within urban governance will always be dependent on the locally prevailing "social equation", the urban regimes approach is sensitive to the question of differentiation between the forms of urban governance within the context of the same national governance. Furthermore, what transnational studies on urban governance today demonstrate (Le Galès, 1993; Sellers, 2002; Pinson, 2009a) is that the infra-national variations can be more important than international variations.

No doubt one must henceforth try to qualify what could be the unique characteristics of European urban regimes, in particular the Southern European. Southern European regimes grant a much more important place to actors and organisation, which Stone tends to neglect: technical networks,

planning professionals, agencies, public and semi-public enterprises and their staff, infrastructural managers, and cultural institutions. These actors often occupy a more decisive place than do economic actors. Furthermore, public actors and institutions or semi-public institutions have, undoubtedly, a larger role given the historic importance that political regulations and welfare systems have. Top urban elected officials undoubtedly occupy a choice place in these regimes. They play an essential role in the mobilisation of the urban society components and in the construction of mobilising images and messages. One might perhaps propose that the reflex and interest in organising and mobilising oneself at the urban level is, without doubt, less rooted in groups that compose European urban societies than in their North American equivalents. In Europe, the state, even when withdrawn, is above all, a "state of mind".

REFERENCES

ABÉLÈS, M. (1989), *Jours tranquilles en 89: ethnologie politique d'un département français,* Paris, Odile Jacob.

BARAIZE, F. and NÉGRIER, E. (ed.) (2001), *L'invention politique de l'agglomération,* Paris, L'Harmattan.

BÉAL, V. and ROUSSEAU, M. (2008), "Néolibéraliser la ville fordiste. Politiques urbaines post-keynésiennes et re-développement économique au Royaume-Uni: une approche comparative". *Métropoles,* 4. Available at http://metropoles.revues.org/3502.

BÉHAR, D. and ESTÈBE, P. (1999), "L'État peut-il avoir un projet pour le territoire?". *Les Annales de la Recherche Urbaine,* 82, pp. 80-91.

BENKO, G. and LIPIETZ, A. (ed.) (2000), *La richesse des régions,* Paris, PUF.

BORRAZ, O. (1998), *Gouverner une ville: Besançon, 1959-1989,* Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

BORRAZ, O. (2000), "Le gouvernement municipal en France. Un modèle d'intégration en recomposition". *Pôle Sud,* 13(1), pp. 11-26.

BORRAZ, O. and JOHN, P. (2004), "The transformation of urban political leadership in Western Europe". *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* 28(1), pp. 107-120.

BOYER, R. (1986), *La théorie de la régulation: Une analyse critique,* Paris, La Découverte.

BRENNER, N. (2004), *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

BRIQUET, J. and SAWICKI, F. (1989), "L'analyse localisée du politique". *Politix,* 2(7), pp. 6-16.

CADIOU, S. (2009), *Le pouvoir local en France,* Grenoble, PUG.

CASTELLS, M. and GODARD, F. (1974), *Monopolville,* Paris/La Haye, Mouton.

CHÉDEVILLE, A., Le GOFF, J. and ROSSIAUD, J. (1980), *Histoire de la France urbaine,* Paris, Seuil.

DAHL, R. (1971), *Who governs? Democracy and Power in an American City,* New Haven, Yale University Press.

DAVEZIES, L. (2008), *La République et ses territoires: La circulation invisible des richesses,* Paris, Seuil.

DESAGE, F. (2005), *Le consensus communautaire contre l'intégration intercommunale. Séquences et dynamiques d'institutionnalisation de la communauté urbaine de Lille (1964-2003).* Thèse pour le doctorat en science politique, Université de Lille 2.

DORMOIS, R. (2006), "Structurer une capacité politique à l'échelle urbaine. Les dynamiques de planification à Nantes et à Rennes (1977-2001)". *Revue française de science politique,* 56(5), pp. 837-867.

ELIAS, N. (1975), *La dynamique de l'Occident,* Paris, Calmann-Lévy.

FONTAINE, J. and LE BART, C. (eds.) (1994), *Le métier d'élu local,* Paris, L'Harmattan.

FRANÇOIS, B. (2008), *Le régime politique de la Ve République,* 4th ed., Paris, Éditions La Découverte.

GARRAUD, P. (1989), *Profession homme politique: la carrière politique des maires urbains,* Paris, L'Harmattan.

GAUDIN, J.-C. (1985), *L'avenir en plan: technique et politique dans la prévision urbaine, 1900-1930,* Seyssel, Champ Vallon.

GRÉMION, P. (1976), *Le pouvoir périphérique. Bureaucrates et notables dans le système politique français,* Paris, Seuil.

HARDING, A. (1994), "Urban regimes and growth machines: Toward a cross-national research agenda". *Urban Affairs Quarterly,* 29, pp. 356-356.

HARDING, A. (1997), "Urban regimes in a Europe of the cities?". *European Urban and Regional Studies,* 4(4), pp. 291-314.

HARDING, A. (2000), "Regime formation in Manchester and Edinburgh". *In* G. Stoker (ed.) *The New Politics of British Local Governance,* pp. 54-71.

HOFFMANN-MARTINOT, V. (1999), "Les grandes villes françaises: une démocratie en souffrance". *In* O. Gabriel and V. Hoffmann-Martinot (eds.), *Démocraties urbaines: l'état de la démocratie dans les grandes villes,* Paris, L'Harmattan, pp. 30-45.

JOBERT, B. and MULLER, P. (1987), *L'État en action: politiques publiques et corporatismes,* Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.

JOUVE, B. (2009), "Ville: Le grand retour de la pensée critique". *Place Publique. Nantes/Saint-Nazaire,* (15). Available at: http://www.revue-placepublique.fr/Sommaires/Articles/retourcritique.html.

JOUVE, B. and GAGNON, A. (eds.) (2006), *Les métropoles au défi de la diversité culturelle,* Grenoble, Presses universitaires de Grenoble.

LAGROYE, J. (1973), *Société et politique. Jacques Chaban-Delmas a Bordeaux,* Paris, Pedone.

LEVY, J. (1999), *Tocqueville's Revenge: State, Society, and Economy in Contemporary France,* Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press.

LE GALÈS, P. (1993), *Politique urbaine et développement local: une comparaison franco-britannique,* Paris, Editions L'Harmattan.

LE GALÈS, P. (1995), "Du gouvernement des villes à la gouvernance urbaine". *Revue française de science politique,* 45(1), pp. 57-95.

LE GALÈS, P. (2003), *Le retour des villes européennes: sociétés urbaines, mondialisation, gouvernement et gouvernance,* Paris, Presses de Sciences Po.

LE LIDEC, P. (2001), *Les maires dans la République. L'Association des Maires de France, élément constitutif des régimes politiques français depuis 1907.* Thèse de doctorat de science politique, Paris, Université de Paris I.

LOGAN, J. and MOLOTCH, H. (1987), *Urban Fortunes. The Political Economy of Place,* Berkeley CA, University of California Press.

LORRAIN, D. (1989), "La montée en puissance des villes". *Economie et humanisme,* 305(6), pp. 6-21.

LORRAIN, D. (1990), "Le modèle français de services urbains". *Economie et humanisme,* 312, pp. 39-58.

LORRAIN, D. (1991), "De l'administration républicaine au gouvernement urbain". *Sociologie du travail,* 33(4), pp. 461-484.

LORRAIN, D. (2002), "Capitalismes urbains: la montée des firmes d'infrastructures". *Entreprises et histoire,* 30, pp. 7-31.

MABILEAU, A. (1991), *Le système local en France,* Paris, Montchrestien.

MARTIN, R. (1989), "The new economics and politics of regional restructuring: The British experience". *In* L. Abrechts (ed.) *Regional Policy at the Crossroads: European Perspective,* London, Jessica Kingsley, pp. 27-51.

MÉNY, Y. (1987), "France". *In* M. Goldsmith and E. Page (eds.), *Central and Local Government Relations,* London, Sage, pp. 88-106.

MÉNY, Y. (1992), "La république des fiefs". *Pouvoirs,* 60, pp. 17-24.

ORR, M. and JOHNSON, V. (2008), *Power in the City: Clarence Stone and the Politics of Inequality,* Lawrence, University Press of Kansas.

PADIOLEAU, J. and DEMEESTERE, R. (1991), "Les démarches stratégiques de planification des villes". *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine,* 51, pp. 28-39.

PETAUX, J. (1982), *Le changement politique dans le gouvernement local: le pouvoir municipal à Nantes,* Paris, Pedone.

PINSON, G. (2002), "Political government and governance: strategic planning and the reshaping of political capacity in Turin". *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* 26(3), pp. 477-493.

PINSON, G. (2003), "Le chantier de recherche de la gouvernance urbaine et la question de la production des savoirs dans et pour l'action". *Lien social et politiques,* 50, pp. 39-55.

PINSON, G. (2004), "Le projet urbain comme instrument d'action publique". *In* P. Lascoumes, and P. Le Galès (eds.), *Gouverner par les instruments,* Paris, Presses de Science Po, pp. 199-233.

PINSON, G. (2006), "Projets de ville et gouvernance urbaine. Pluralisation des espaces politiques et recomposition d'une capacité d'action collective dans les villes européennes". *Revue française de science politique,* 56(4), pp. 619-651.

PINSON, G. (2009a), *Gouverner la ville par projet: urbanisme et gouvernance des villes européennes,* Paris, Presses de Sciences Po.

PINSON, G. (2009b), "The new urban leaders: Changing modes of operation and legitimacy amongst local elected officials in Venice and Manchester". *In* H. Reynaert, K. Steyvers, P. Delwit and J.-B. Pilet (eds), *Local Political Leadership in Europe. Town Chief, City Boss or Loco President?,* Bruges and Baden-Baden, Vanden Broele and Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, pp. 225-246.

POLITIX, (2001), "Le temps des mairies", 53.

RONDIN, J. (1985), *Le sacre des notables. La France en décentralisation,* Paris, Fayard.

SELLERS, J. (2002), *Governing From Below: Urban Regions and the Global Economy,* Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press.

STONE, C. (1989), *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988,* Lawrence Kansas, University Press of Kansas.

STONE, C. (1993), "Urban regimes and the capacity to govern: A political economy approach". *Journal of Urban Affairs,* 15(1), pp. 1-28.

SAPOTICHNE, J., JONES, B. and WOLFE, M. (2007), "Is urban politics a black hole? Analyzing the boundary between political science and urban politics". *Urban Affairs Review,* 43(1), pp. 76-106.

SAVITCH, H. and VOGEL, R. (2009), "Regionalism and urban politics". *In* J. Davies and D. Imbroscio (eds.), *Theories of Urban Politics.* 2nd ed., Los Angeles, Sage, pp. 106-124.

TILLY, C. and BLOCKMANS, W. (eds.) (1994), *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe, A.D. 1000 to 1800,* Boulder, Westview Press.

VELTZ, P. (1996), *Mondialisation, villes et territoires. L'économie d'archipel,* Paris, PUF.

WEBER, M. (1982), *La ville,* Paris, Aubier.

WORMS, J.-P. (1966), "Le préfet et ses notables". *Sociologie du travail,* 3(66), pp. 249-275.