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## New Metropolitan Spaces and Metropolitan Strategies in the Face of Modernisation

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Résumé : Au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les espaces urbains traversent une période de croissance et de transformation radicale. Les villes s'étendent de plus en plus. Leur configuration spatiale devient de plus en plus décentralisée et fragmentée. La dichotomie traditionnelle entre hiérarchie urbaine et périphérie est en train de disparaître. Les nouveaux espaces métropolitains sont caractérisés par des processus de segmentation et de spécialisation à distance ainsi que par des polarisations sociales qui structurent l'espace. Les tentatives de planification des villes-régions essaient de rééquilibrer ces processus qui font éclater la ville. Cet article explore brièvement les transformations métropolitaines actuelles en utilisant une approche générique. Il se focalise également sur les stratégies des métropoles pour affronter ces défis dans le cadre de situations institutionnelles variées, un peu partout en Europe. En troisième lieu, cet article interroge les effets potentiels des projets urbains sur un rééquilibrage des transformations urbaines. Comment les grands projets urbains sont-ils conceptuellement élaborés ? Comment les alliances d'acteurs qui les soutiennent se forment-elles ? Comment les citoyens et les groupes sociaux sont-ils impliqués de manière à produire de nouveaux espaces plus intégrés ?

Mots clés : politiques urbaines, planification stratégique, projet urbain, démocratie locale

Summary : At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, urban spaces can be said to be in a stage of growth and radical transformation. Cities are highly expansive, both in scale and scope. The spatial configuration of urban spaces is, however, becoming more and more decentralised and fragmentary. The traditional dichotomy between urban hierarchy and periphery is disappearing. New metropolitan spaces are characterised by distance related processes of social and economic specialisation and segmentation, and often also by splitting social polarisation. The planning agendas in city regions

are trying to make add more balance to the process of disruptive urban development. This paper briefly explores the transformation of metropolitan spaces using a generic approach. The article also focuses on the attempts in metropolitan planning strategies to cope with these challenges under different typical institutional conditions of regions in Europe. Finally, the paper investigates the potential impact of strategic urban projects as regards a more balanced shaping of urban transformation. The questions dealt with are: How are urban mega projects conceptually framed, how are the supporting alliances mobilised and how are citizens and social groups involved in order to create new integrated urban space ?

Key words : urban policies, strategic planning, urban project, local democracy

## Introduction

In studying the potential of planning strategies in dynamic city regions, we have to be aware of the intense interrelationships between three dimensions of urban development : (a) the *economic* and *social* change of urban activities in the face of modernisation ; (b) the impact on the *spatial* shape of cities and the responses in *spatial planning* strategies and (c) the typical *institutional* conditions applicable to metropolitan planning strategies.

Although the actual trends within the three dimensions are closely interrelated, the trajectories do not necessarily converge, either in scope or in time. In many city regions the tendencies of economic and social change (ad a) have become so dynamic during the process of radical modernisation since the early 1990s that planning strategies (ad b) and institutional conditions (ad c) no longer adequately match the pace of the changing parameters. In fact, the divergences of social/ economic, spatial and institutional developments in city regions may explain the major current challenges facing the urban agendas. Before discussing the potential of planning

strategies, we therefore have to grasp in generic terms the radical nature of the contemporary social and economic change in cities.

This paper firstly discusses the changes in social and economic parameters of city regions and their impacts on the spatial configuration of urban systems since the early 1990s. A general approach is adopted to allow an exploration of the changes in urban space and the new challenges they have brought under the current conditions of modernisation given the many local differences. Next, we explore the potential of metropolitan planning strategies that attempt to respond to the challenges created by the new urban spaces. In order to grasp the potential of metropolitan planning strategies, we have to be aware of changing institutional conditions. The impact of institutional conditions is studied by comparing the dominant types of institutional conditions in European regions. Finally, we investigate the crucial role of mega projects in metropolitan planning strategies.

### **New urban spaces in the face of modernisation**

In urban literature, two general tendencies appear to dominate the conceptual and empirical explanations of the modernisation of cities. These are the simultaneous processes of globalisation and individualisation of urban evolution (Giddens 1990 ; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994 ; Bourdin 2000). The globalisation of social and economic relationships is enhanced by the ongoing differentiation, specialisation and rescaling of the economic process. The processes of economic specialisation and rescaling are embedded in relatively autonomous functional-economic networks, far beyond the reach of local administrations. As a result of this ongoing rationalisation, new forms of specialised production and consumption are starting to dominate the urban landscapes. Globalisation is having a major impact on the social physiognomy

of urban activities. Typically, social control and social integration in local relationships have become more and more dependant on exterior norms and rational organisation (such as planning, legislation, or international expert systems) and even then many of the risks of modern society stay cannot be controlled in such an uncertain world (Beck 1992). The 'meaning of locality' is becoming more and more detached from local spaces and has become more dependant on external linkages. Simultaneously, and partly as reaction to the tendencies of globalisation, new appropriations of local space are being sought in city regions. These appropriations define new forms of conviviality, and are strongly driven by individualisation. Individualisation implies a search for new social domains of gated and protected communality and social safety. The motto seems to be 'shape your own communities with like-minded persons'. The processes of individualisation also cross the boundaries of local spaces. The technological changes and the 'communication at distance' not only facilitated the growth of economic globalisation but also created new conditions for the social experience of time and space. Hence, very divergent experiences from completely different places can be juxtaposed in a simultaneous frame of time and space. This gives people new resources for multiple individualised experiences (Augé 1992, Lahire 1998). The social plurality of modern city life (the 'unknown' modern society) is characterised by this highly variegated and individualised juxtaposition of completely different experiences.

The double movement of both the rational organisation of global economic networks on the one hand and the new social appropriation of gated spaces of individualised experiences on the other is bringing pressure to bear from two sides on the traditionally tranquil concept of 'local space' (Bourdin 2005). The whole notion of locality has become extremely dynamic.

The radical nature of changing conditions for cities becomes manifest in the whole set of social and economic parameters, namely the economy, the labour market, the social composition of the city and the cultural identity. The driving forces of the transformation are the ongoing specialisation of production and consumption, the growing social plurality, and the increasing complexity and trans scalar nature of urban activities. The changing economic profiles are visible in the differentiation of highly specialised spaces which are widely dispersed over urban regions, such as managerial office spaces (leaving the inner cities and increasingly getting spread over urban regions at externally well accessible sites of location), specialised complexes for logistics and distribution (at urban edges and near to terminals of transport or airports), thematic office parks and research centres (widely spread over regions), and textured spaces for new cultural production (sites of heritage in historical inner cities). The city region of Amsterdam is a good example of such drastic changes over the last fifteen years. It may be noted – very typically – that even in this ‘planners paradise’ the most radical changes of the spatial economic configuration were not at all based on governmental plans, but rather on decisions made in non-local private sector networks (Salet 2006). There is also a high differentiation of new regional spaces for specialised consumption, such as large scaled formats for retail, entertainment, sport and recreation. Moreover, the urban labour markets tend to more differentiated, for example as managerial specialisations and, in particular, new employment in the creative urban economy. A new phenomenon is the emergence of a trans-national class of creative urban entrepreneurs (Scott 2000, Hutton 2004b).

In addition, the social profiles of new urban spaces are characterised by processes of ‘sorting out’ specialisation. There is evidence of more heterogeneity at the region-wide levels of scale, although social spaces tend to become more homogeneous at

local levels. Many urban researchers report increasing social polarisation (new instabilities in fragmental metropolitan regions). New tendencies towards the individualised appropriation of intimate spaces are being widely reported. The best known example is the permanent growth of 'gated communities'. There is also evidence of new 'thematic spaces' (for instance for elder people, for gays, or for tourists), or 'ethnic spaces' (new Chinese or other foreign communities in many western cities, etc.) (Ascher 1995, Sieverts 1999, Bourdin 2005). Both the specialised rationalisation of global processes and the new appropriations by way of individualisation leave their impacts on the urban spaces.

As a result, the physical shape of cities is changing dramatically. Until the 1980s, many city regions were still characterised by centric patterns of spatial configuration and by regulated urban containment, in sharp contrast to the intended openness of rural areas (Hall e.a. 1973). In most regions the central city, in particular the concentrated and multifunctional historic inner city, used to be the epicentre of regional and interregional activities. The current process of urban transformation is, however, characterised by growth and the differentiation of urban activities which are resulting in new metropolitan spaces that are enlarged and 'distantiated' in terms of scale and scope. 'Distantiation' means that activities are not controlled locally but are part of distance-related networks with their own margins of choice. New centres of specialisation are emerging in all parts of the urban region, including the historic centres of the major cities (in particular as selective residential areas for high income people and as new centres for cultural economy and tourism). The familiar contrast between urban hierarchy and urban periphery is changing into diverse forms of multi-centred urban activity dispersed over wide urban regions. The contrast between urban land and rural land is disappearing (at least within the boundaries of

enlarged metropolitan areas which are contrasting at a higher level of scale with the non-metropolitan areas). In the USA the splintering of post modern cities is a common phenomenon (Soja 1989, Hutton 2004a). Some observers refer to the new urban spaces as 'urban Archipelagos', as a 'cities without cities', based on the increasing decentralisation and distantiation of highly specialised spaces. The emerging metropolis is labelled as a 'Métapolis' or 'In-Between City' (Ascher 1995, Sieverts 1999). In any event, the current stage of urban transformation is characterised by a highly disruptive urban environment.

### **The agenda for metropolitan planning strategies**

The social and political agendas of metropolitan regions in Europe are gradually complying more and more with the new urbanisation parameters. The familiar concepts of compact urban containment versus open rural spaces had, for a long time, been institutionalised in the planning mentality of both the urban inhabitants and city administrators, politicians, private sector developers and civic groups. However, these concepts are now starting to change. Some cities still favour concepts of centrality and compactness, but now at a higher level of scale (in particular the level of urban agglomeration). Some other cities are moving more robustly from the compactness and proximity concepts and their rural contra moulds to new policy concepts of polycentric urban regions or urban networks. Of course, one has to be aware of the differences between city regions that are going through their own differentiated trajectories of time and space. In our investigations we found a growing awareness in most regions of the idea that patterns of spatial configuration have to be adapted to the radical changes of social parameters and we discovered that the new perception of decentralised and multi-centred city regions is already



widespread (Salet, Thornley and Kreukels 2003). The problem is rather one of how to deal effectively with new urban concepts in a context of metropolitan fragmentation.

The contours for new metropolitan strategies are brought to the fore in a diversity of regional platforms. Most frequently, metropolitan strategies aim to improve the overall network quality of the region in order to become both more 'competitive' in external relationships and to increase the 'social' and 'ecological' balances of the internal urban systems. In a large research program on urban change in the UK, the tendency to promote the integral qualities of the urban system by integrating the aims of economic competition, social cohesion, and sustainability in a concept of governance was found so frequently that it was labelled 'the new conventional wisdom' (Buck, Gordon, Harding, and Turok 2005). However, ambitions for this strategy of integration are quite different to achieving that level of integration in the context of metropolitan fragmentation. Actually, the comparative results of city regions in the UK were not very encouraging in this respect since the researchers observed more interest in most regions for goals which lead to economic competitiveness rather than to social redistribution and ecological balancing.

### **Interconnectivity as the key to strategic planning in the context of multi-level governance**

The direct impact of metropolitan planning strategies on urban change should not be overstated. Their role is more in the background than at the forefront of decision-making. The potential significance of strategic spatial planning is in the mobilisation of joint energies instead of the implementation of robust decisions. Strategic plans may allow the different interests of private sector and public sector organisations to converge (at different levels of scale) in shared visions and action perspectives for the future of the region. The operational policy decisions themselves, however, are

usually not directly implemented within the strategic planning framework but in their own operational settings of single project decisions, or in focused policy programs. The crucial significance of metropolitan planning strategies is that they may broaden the horizon and action perspectives of operational decision making. Strategic plans must make sense and should be shared in relevant alliances in order to inspire operational decision-making and to impact it. Strategic planning leadership is not necessarily a public sector quality and this type of planning can be stimulated as well by different sites of the private sector. Fulfilling the specific role of strategic planning requires a completely different attitude towards planning than operational decision-making. Instead of preparing specific interventions in the outside world through the use of legal and financial resources, strategic plans are based on communication and open windows to the outside world designed to mobilise and to coordinate the perspectives and the energies of the 'external actors' in joint perspectives.

In European city-regions it is not commonplace to consider the specific potential of strategic metropolitan planning in such open and flexible ways. More often than not, efforts are made to establish new planning authorities that are supposed to support integrative planning policy competences and to intervene directly in urban development. In our research into twenty city-regions in Europe we found many initiatives that were aiming to establish territorial planning authorities at the city-regional level of scale (for instance the efforts being made in English, German, French or Dutch regions). According to these diagnoses, new regional planning authorities were intended to replace the metropolitan fragmentation of public sector authorities and were also supposed to go beyond the partisan perspectives of local interests. The most common claim is that city-regions are in need of robust decisions on behalf of

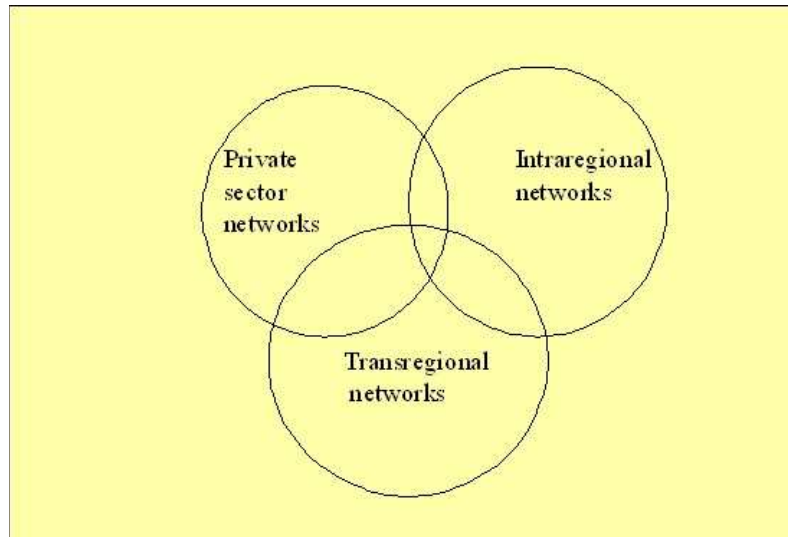
the well-balanced, region-wide development of cities. In practice, however, such planning authorities are extremely rare and, if established at all, do not last for long. There are some interesting examples established under very specific local conditions, such as the bottom-up and top-down supported regional authorities in Hanover and Stuttgart, and in Copenhagen. However, even there the planning competences are based on the accumulation of separate functions instead of universal territorial competences of governmental tiers that enable integral policymaking. Functional and multi-functional authorities (such as transportation or water authorities) are commonplace in many city-regions in the UK, Germany and other countries, but the establishment of new metropolitan wide authorities with universal planning competences has not been effectuated anywhere in recent decades (Jouve et Lefèvre 2002). The most common practice is for city-regional plans to be made in a complex domain of in-between relationships without a constitutional foundation for robust interventions (Salet, Thornley and Kreukels 2003). We can conclude, therefore, that thus far the outcomes differ strongly from the ambitions of administrative and planning reform.

One may ask whether this inconvenient outcome is a problem or an opportunity for a new sort of strategic thinking. Under the current, very changeable circumstances of emergent metropolitan regions, the question may be asked of whether the eternal claims for 'more capacities' and 'more competences' at the 'right city-regional level of scale' for 'territorial regional authorities' with 'robust planning strategies' might be very helpful in preparing shared strategic plans. The context of strategic planning in the emerging metropolitan spaces has become extremely complex as, firstly, the territorial and functional spaces of metropolitan activities are very changeable and not fixed at all and, secondly, they almost by definition do not match the boundaries

of territorial administrations and the action radius of the relevant social organisations. Furthermore, the interdependence between public and private agencies that operate at completely different levels of scale, has become more and more important. The context of metropolitan planning has become highly fragmentary and multi-dimensional as more and more external relationships are making their mark on urban development. Under the new conditions of multi-actor and multi-level governance, the crucial challenge for strategic metropolitan planning is no longer to get more territorial control over things but to organise effective strategies of interconnectivity.

A new perception of strategic planning as a form of co-production and interconnectivity instead of territorial universe is more responsive to the actual conditions of governance than the concept of an autonomous metropolitan planning authority. The new context of governance enables far more inventive alliances and contra-alliances than used to be the case under the typical national/ local welfare state connections of twenty years ago. Private sector networks (both cultural and economic networks) are proving to be more involved in metropolitan action after the gulf of liberalisation and the debunking of administrative states. Furthermore, economic and social networks increasingly transcend the territorial scale of the metropolitan region. They operate in their own functional networks that keep their own margins and opportunities. Moreover, within the governmental domain, the differentiation of responsibilities has resulted in both more devolution and more internationalisation. Devolution generated more action within the city-regions (between municipalities and regions). At the same time, internationalisation created new opportunities for trans-regional relationships: inter-city networks, inter-regional networks, and international urban policies (e.g. via the European Union).

**Figure 1. Three domains of action in metropolitan strategies**



Eventually, a completely new set of geopolitical alliances has been enabled by the recent differentiation of intergovernmental relationships.

Figure 1 illustrates the different dimensions of metropolitan action under the current conditions. A lot of new alliances are feasible in the cross-border context of governance. As far as metropolitan strategies are concerned it is not so crucial to be carried forward by strongly equipped metropolitan authorities as to be endorsed by alliances that interconnect the three different domains of action in metropolitan spaces.

### **Different types of institutional conditions**

Above we have discussed the need for cross-border planning strategies of co-production. However, the formal institutional conditions into co-production should not be neglected either. Different sets of institutional conditions on strategies of co-production enable different arrangements, each with their own potential and their own risks in the achievement of the new metropolitan agendas. In the last three

decades, a lot of administrative reforms have been attempted and partly put into practice in European city-regions. These have changed the formal relationships between local and regional agencies, but also the conditions for external relationships. The transitional outcomes of administrative reform are still highly complex and variegated. We will now analyse the impact of three different sets of ideal typical institutional conditions on the creation of cross-border planning strategies. In a comparative investigation of twenty European regions we found three dominant institutional types (Salet, Thornley and Kreukels 2003). Figure 2 illustrates the three institutional types.

**Figure 2. Three dominant types of institutional conditions to the intergovernmental relationships within metropolitan regions of Europe**

<i>Unitary</i> Metropolitan Government (e.g. Berlin, Madrid, Vienna, Prague)
<i>Hierarchy</i> meso-level government (e.g. Bayern-Munich; Catalonia-Barcelona; Veneto-Venice)
<i>Mediating</i> meso-level government (e.g. French regions, Dutch provinces)

#### **a. The unitary model**

The first type of unitary metropolitan government is typical for regions in which a large part of metropolitan space is covered by one region-wide administration without independent local government. As explained above, one might have expected this administrative form to be more prevalent because, in political analyses, the fragmentation of metropolitan areas is often considered to be a bone of contention. However, in none of our twenty cases did we find the unitary solution as

a response to recent trends in metropolitan fragmentation. All the unitary examples in our case studies were established for historical reasons and date from the beginning of the previous century (Berlin, Madrid and Vienna). Apparently, it is not that easy to establish unitary models in a context of fragmentation.

In our investigation we did not argue for or against the typical institutional conditions of the three models as such. Instead we hypothesised on the typical potential and risks for each of the three models. The typical potential of the unitary model is based on the efficient arrangement of metropolitan-wide governmental services. Indeed, such administrative functions as the arrangement of public transportation, electricity, sanitation, etc. can be arranged from one metropolitan-wide point. A further typical potential is the strong external presentation in the trans-regional connections and the diverse relationships with the private sector. However, in practice, the typical potential of the ideal and typical conditions is not always fully used. In our analysis of practical experiences we concluded that massive metropolitan authorities can easily turn into introvert bureaucracies that lack external connections with the outside world. The unitary model is also subject to typical risks. First of all, massive metropolitan authorities may find it difficult to maintain democratic relationships with the inhabitants. Citizens of massive administrations (like the four million inhabitants of Berlin or the 3 million residents of Madrid) may find it difficult to maintain direct contacts with the central administration, which could easily be regarded as technocratic. In practice, new local authorities might be needed with limited political powers (such as the Bezirke in Berlin). A further risk is related to the external relationships when new urban dynamics unfold outside the borders of the already massive metropolitan entities.

The surrounding municipalities may then find it risky to deal with the massive urban Moloch. In practice, this is a real concern in Berlin, Madrid and Vienna.

### **b. Hierarchic meso-level government**

The second model consists of two universal tiers of government in the metropolitan region, namely meso-level government and local government (both of which may or may not be subdivided into even more tiers of government). This characteristic of meso-level and local dualism also applies to the next type under c.. The difference is that the present ideal type is characterised by a hierarchical relationship. The meso-level government supervises and subordinates the local government. This type of formal hierarchy is to be found in federal or quasi-federal states where the meso-level government (the states) actually make up the federal state. These are very powerful tiers of government, sometimes equipped with even more powers as regards domestic policies than the federal government itself (as is the case in Germany, Belgium and parts of Spain). In practice, the powerful meso-level governments may or may not use their competences to constrain the urban constellations . A further typical potential of the powerful meso-level authorities is the external presentation in trans-regional relationships. On the other hand, it may be more difficult to maintain close relationships with private sector networks as meso-level governments are not fully aware of the local circumstances. A further typical risk facing this type of institutional condition is related to the sensitive relationships that exist with the urban agglomerations. Major cities usually develop close relationships with neighbouring municipalities and the bottom-up processes of urban agglomeration can easily be hampered by meso-level governments that exploit the formal hierarchy. Obviously, practices may differ but the risks are typical. In practice we indeed found that troublesome relationships existed between the



hierarchical meso-level governments and bottom-up urbanisation between Catalonia and Barcelona, Veneto and Venice, Bavaria and Munich. On the other hand, some metropolitan regions managed to overcome the institutional typical risks (for instance Baden Württemberg and Stuttgart, and Schleswig Holstein and Hanover).

### **c. Mediating meso-level government**

The final dominant, ideal, typical model also consists of dual tiers of government, namely at meso level and local level in metropolitan areas, but without the hierarchy of the meso level. Here, the local government is very powerful, particularly in the major city and its agglomerative surroundings, while the regional government occupies a relatively light, largely intermediating and coordinating position. This model can be found, for instance, in France and in the Netherlands. Typical hypotheses for the potential of this model are: The meso-level is in a good position for external intergovernmental contacts and it can invest a lot in connectivity between national, international and local governments and with private sector agencies. The relationships with the private sector activities may be a bit less promising (because of the distance to conditions locally). The most tricky relationships are those with the local governments and, in particular, with the major cities and their agglomerative surroundings. The intermediating region can be easily pushed aside by the well-equipped cities and urban agglomerations although this does not always happen in practice. However, it did happen in France in almost all the urban parts of the country during the first ten years of existence of the new regions (that were established in the early 1980s). However, in the second decade the regions survived and their typical intermediating institutional qualities were also acknowledged by national, international and local governments. Furthermore, the French regions maintain contacts with organisations in the private sector. In the

Netherlands, the provinces (which are very similar to the French regions) are very successful in the rural parts of the country. However, in the urbanised areas, the major cities and their agglomerative surroundings still find it difficult to make use of the added value of the intermediating provinces.

The general sets of institutional conditions and the ways in which the typical potential and risks are used in practice have a severe impact on the crucial challenge which is for metropolitan strategies to construct effective alliances for metropolitan planning strategies. The need to establish trans-regional strategies of co-production in these different and typical metropolitan arenas, each with a different institutionalisation of fragmentary responsibilities, requires a great deal of effort and innovative thinking in order for it to be successful. Regions may learn a lot from comparative experiences in other regions since we observed that practical experiences under the same institutional conditions differ considerably. However, it is important to compare regions with the same sort of institutional position and it makes no sense to compare German states with French regions, or with functional regions in England. To conclude, in searching for clues for effective metropolitan planning strategies, we think it is extremely important to make productive use of the potential of the typical institutional conditions that enable specified ways of organising interconnectivity (in different ways for the differentiated sets of institutional conditions). Learning experiences from other regions can also be selected in the same way. A further important clue in the search for effective metropolitan planning strategies is the close interrelationships between the indicative nature of strategic planning and the operational nature of decision-making in policy programs and strategic projects.

In the final section we will explore these interrelationships in more detail.

### **Framing strategic urban projects**

Politicians and planners are fascinated by the potential of urban mega projects not so much because of their absolute weight and volume (actually, the process of urban transformation is instead made up of hundreds of small projects rather than a few mega projects) but because mega projects can be used as strategic vehicles in order to demonstrate, in highly visible and symbolic ways, the direction of change which is the deliberate aim of strategic metropolitan plans. Strategic plans themselves cannot usually be implemented directly and their primary function is to embed operational decision-making. This is why political and social spokesman often have very high expectations as regards these mega projects. Of course, this is also the reason why possible failures to make a success of such model projects will be symbolically and similarly enlarged.

In the framing of the decision-making on strategic urban projects, we believe there are three crucial dimensions that are strongly interrelated :

- How are the projects *conceptually framed* in order to mark their strategic contribution to the process of urban transformation in symbolic ways? (Is the project symbolic for the strategic direction aimed at in strategic plans? Does it adopt integrative aims rather than a lone focus on the commercial value of new urban spaces? Etc.) ;
- How are the *underlying alliances* framed in order to support the conceptual frames (which coalitions of power and interest groups are formed, is the mobilisation of resources in line with the strategic aims of the project?). In this context, the above-mentioned institutional conditions governing the potential of interconnected strategic planning are highly relevant ;

- How is the *democratic involvement* of civic groups initiated in order to activate and mobilise urban inhabitants ?

With sponsorship from the EU Fifth Framework (project COMET), we recently coordinated research into the framing of the largest strategic projects in seven metropolitan regions of Europe (Salet and Gualini 2007). The following seven projects were selected :

- Amsterdam : *South Axis*
- Barcelona : *Forum 2004*
- Berlin : *Adlershof*
- Brussels : *Tour et Taxis*
- Copenhagen : *Ørestad*
- Strasbourg : *Illkirch-Graffenstaden*
- Vienna : *Erdberger Mais*

All seven projects are considered to be strategic projects and they were selected for this very reason. The common denominator of the projects is that all intend to give a strong impetus to the regional economy by focusing on advanced service sectors with international networks and on the creation of at least 20,000 jobs. As a result, the goal of contributing to the competitiveness is explicit in all selected projects. A further selection criterion was that the projects do not have a one-sided focus on the 'commercial value' of urban space but deliberately attempt to create new 'urban uses' of metropolitan space (Lefèbvre 1996), by aiming to facilitate multi-functional use (with residential use, retail, and social and cultural facilities in addition to offices) and by guaranteeing enough compactness to ensure efficient mobility, in particular as regards public transport. Usually, such environmental qualities are the aims referred to in strategic regional plans. We observed that the projects investigated are symbolically used as strategic vehicles in the process of urban transformation.

As regards the first research question into the framing of the concept, all projects appear to aim at the production of highly integrative urban quality by combining the goals that are sometimes metaphorically referred to as the 'new conventional wisdom' (the combination of economic, social and ecological goals in a frame of metropolitan governance) (Buck et al. 2005). However, the internal priority of these different goals and the symbolic visualisation appear to differ from project to project. Some projects focus a bit more on the goal of international economic competitiveness (this happened to be the case in the 'out of town' growth centres situated between city and airport like Amsterdam-South Axis, Berlin-Adlershof, and Copenhagen-Ørestad and also Strasbourg's techno polis Illkirch-Graffenstaden. The inner city projects of Vienna-Erdberger Mais and Barcelona-Forum 2004 are integrated more deeply into the existing cultural and spatial fabric. The same applies to the large industrial heritage project Tour et Taxis in Brussels. A further remarkable difference is in the level of scale at which the mix of activities is planned. In some projects, such as Forum 2004, Erdberger Mais, South Axis and Tour et Taxis, the aim of urban diversity is finely elaborated, while other projects prefer to cumulate the mix of activities at a higher scale in a sequence of rather mono-functional zones (Ørestad and Adlershof). Needless to say that the first examples will acquire more urban radiation than the second strategy.

The real significance of the project framing becomes clear if the second dimension of research is added based on the questions: Whose concepts are at stake? What alliances are in support of the conceptual frames, by which power and interest coalitions are the integrative concepts carried forward? Here, we found amazing gaps between the conceptual patterns and the underlying alliances in all projects. It appears to be extremely difficult to match the concepts and the underlying alliances

adequately. In most cases the conceptual frames are brought forward by the local or regional public planning elites and only the conceptualisation of the Tour et Taxis project in Brussels is headed by the private sector because of enduring stalemates between local and meso-level government. An interesting case is that of the Amsterdam South Axis. This project started as commercial concept by private sector agencies (to establish an 'outstanding economic centre of international allure') in sharp contrast to the existing strategic plans of the city and region of Amsterdam. However, after a number of years the local authorities joined the project and established a new strategic plan for the South Axis and added integrative instead of purely commercial goals. The other projects are completely public-led. Most amazingly, there is a striking lack of involvement of the private sector networks. As a result, the aim of improving economic competitiveness of the metropolitan region by undertaking mega projects is supported in most cases by the government and not by the private sector itself (with the exception of Brussels and Amsterdam)! Indeed, the economic objectives in Ørestad Copenhagen, Adlershof Berlin and Forum 2003 Barcelona are widely advertised by the governmental stakeholders but not yet brought into practice by private sector corporations. This is also the case – albeit far less intensely – in Vienna's Erdberger Mais and the techno-polis of Strasbourg. Most strikingly, national and international corporations often happen to locate their new economic investments at completely different places (in the case of Copenhagen this even means at different locations within the city of Copenhagen and in the case of Berlin in different regions of Germany).

The picture is completely different as regards the underlying coalitions related to the cultural and environmental goals of the mega projects. In this respect, Barcelona appears to be very inventive in involving cultural and environmental organisations

and the Forum 2003 Project even managed to include a range of international cultural organisations – such as OESO – with a view to the organisation of large-scale cultural events. Environmental model projects are also being developed within international frameworks. For instance, a large-scale sanitation project in Barcelona Forum 2003 acquired fame as a European model project. Actually, the modernised sanitation system became the foundation of the new public forum area! In Ørestad Copenhagen and Adlershof Berlin the university was heavily involved in the new project sites. Those behind the Amsterdam South Axis postponed the cultural facilities until the next stage of development and, until now, there has been no evidence of any significant involvement by the cultural sector (Salet and Majoor 2005). Brussels Tour et Taxis and Vienna Erdberger Mais deliberately focused on the preservation and refurbishment of old industrial heritage and attracted new users to these spaces (such as the Gasometer in Vienna) in order to symbolise the area's cultural economic future.

The experiences in the seven strategic projects are also different with respect to the trans-regional interconnections. The question is how intense the selected projects are embedded in geopolitical games of city-regional planning strategies, and whether the regions cooperate closely with other national and international regions, and whether there is evidence of cooperation with national and international levels of government (in particular the European Union)? In this trans-regional domain of metropolitan action we found a relatively low level of interconnectivity in most projects, except in the case of the notorious roles played by Barcelona and Copenhagen. The project planners in Barcelona are fully embedded in the geopolitical games of the metropolitan planning strategies. Metro Barcelona is represented and is actively participating in a plethora of inter-regional and European networks. No wonder

then, that the Forum project is introduced with international allure and is endorsed by many international networks (with a major impact being had on project decisions relating to the cultural ambitions, the environmental aspirations, the promotion of diverse infrastructures and social neighbourhood planning, etc.). The Copenhagen Ørestad project also scores high as being part of the trans-regional lobbies and networks of its strategic regional planners. Actually, the region was given the prestigious title of European model region (Copenhagen – Malmö), a recognition that also brought the initially hesitant national government on board the joint investments in the project. On the other hand, the strategic projects of the South Axis Amsterdam, Berlin Adlershof, Brussels Tour et Taxis and Vienna Erdberger Mais are organised in a highly introverted manner and are run rather as local projects. In the last ten years, Berlin has turned into the new political and cultural capital of Germany but the largest economic and integrative project of this city did not manage to involve more than just local users. Why did it not result in the interconnectivity of geopolitical networks in central Europe, why is this project not lobbied in trans-regional networks and brought to the fore in European projects? Here, as well as in the cases of the Amsterdam South Axis, Vienna Erdberger Mais, and also Brussels Tour et Taxis (although situated in the capital of Europe !), the lack of strategic trans-regional embeddedness becomes visible in the poor geopolitical endorsement of the major projects.

There is a succinct answer to the final question relating to the framing and the experimenting of the democratic processes. Inner city projects become politicised more quickly than new 'out-of-town' projects (see the projects in Brussels, Vienna and Barcelona). However, in general, our findings are negative. We did not find strong involvement of the urban inhabitants and civic groups in the selected mega



projects and only the city projects in Barcelona and Brussels were opposed by grass roots movements. However, in both the latter cases the popular voice was rather neglected by the project planners. In general, we concluded that mega projects are neglected by civic groups and vice-versa given that no major efforts were made by the project planners to take account of public opinion. The risk of acquiring tunnel vision – group thinking within the circles of the involved technocratic experts – is a real one in the context of these types of project.

## **Conclusion**

Metropolitan regions are searching for new strategic plans and symbolic strategic projects in response to the changing economic, social and cultural parameters of urban spaces. The conditions of multi-actor and multi-level governance require a new type of metropolitan strategy that no longer relies on simply wishing to install new regional planning authorities and to equip such territorial bodies with robust capacities. Instead this type of strategy requires new intermediate and coordinative approaches based on trans-scalar co-production in order to interconnect the cultural and economic spheres in the relevant private sectors, and the diverse governmental authorities within the metropolitan region, and finally the trans-regional alliances in order to position the region in external relationships. The character of the metropolitan strategy is moving away from inside-out planning attitudes towards outside-in strategies and from further the strengthening the instrumental capacities of territorial authorities to intermediating strategies of co-production. The use of urban mega projects as strategic pointers of urban transformation seems to be an attractive option but success is not guaranteed under the complex conditions of the fragmentary metropolis. A good fit is required between the framing of the concepts

and the underlying alliances of resources, as well as the more active involvement of the urban population.

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# METROPOLES

2007, n° 2

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