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Metropolitan Governance as Organised Anarchy: the case of the Paris region

The governance of metropolitan areas is, of course, fragmented, messy, and contentious. It involves a multiplicity of individual and collective actors, layered policies, overlapping jurisdictions, bricolage, and gridlock. However, some collective action takes place, some projects are built, and some policies are implemented. This article is part of a body of critical urban governance research that seeks to unpack the non-linear, conflictual, incomplete, and more or less democratic nature of the modes of governance in large metropolitan areas. It builds upon the analysis of policymaking in the Paris region to address this non-linear nature of metropolitan governance. Moving beyond coordination complexity or ungovernability, that mode of governance can be characterised in terms of “organised anarchy”. This is a social territorial world made of loosely coupled organisations, ill-defined or contradictory policy goals, power relations, and sometimes opaque policy processes. We identify four forms of collective action within the organised anarchy that characterises Paris metropolitan governance.

Keywords: metropolitan governance, urban policy, Greater Paris, collective action, organised anarchy

Introduction¹

Governing metropolitan areas is about managing urban growth, providing fundamental services to the population, organising transportation, policing, schools, housing, healthcare, energy, water and waste networks, culture, social services, combating pollution, preserving natural areas, and planning for the future. The list is long, the policies are multiple, their results vary, and failures are frequent. Governing also painfully requires a lot of political work, the making of coalitions, collective action about policies, implementation, instrumentation, debates about the priorities, some form of legitimacy, and some capacity to act. These governing activities are political: they include power relations, conflicts and conflict-solving mechanisms, predatory behaviours, exclusion of some groups, coercion on some groups, and the making of enemies. These activities are multisectoral and multilevel (Teles, 2023). Governing metropolitan areas also involves dealing with expanding urbanisation, and blurred boundaries (of the built environment, commuting patterns, socio-economic interdependencies, etc.) that mostly do not match political-administrative limits, often leading to a growing complexity of governing arrangements.

In the critical neo-Marxist tradition, critical urban geographers and planners have stressed in particular planning failures (Hogan, 2003, Bhan, 2013, Gilli, 2024, Cheschire 2014) or the limits of planning (Rydin et al. 2021), the general apolitical rise of technocratic governance (post-political theories) (Swyngedouw and Wilson 2014), the domination of neo-liberalism (Peck et al. 2013), the irrelevance of the metropolis in the face of the triumph of urbanisation processes in the Lefebvre or Harvey tradition (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015; Brenner and Schmid 2015), or even the irrelevance of cities or metropolis as territorial formation in a space of flux and circulation (McCann 2011). All this is important and well argued, in particular the critique of the conservative conception of cities or of the more positivist unpolitical conception of governance (Jessop 2002). Yet, this alone does not suffice to make sense of the governance of large metropolitan areas. Many governance activities, policymaking and collective actions take place in relation to local and multi-level actors, are framed by institutions, and are part of territorial formations that are more or less structured, or governed (Heinelt and Kübler, 2015, Savitch 2014). They rely on a multiplicity of policy instruments (or *dispositifs* in Foucault's terms) that cannot be put aside. Sometimes, all this policymaking activity may be of minor importance in relation to broader urbanisation processes, but most times, it is significant at least for some groups and for the transformation of those metropolises.

Our starting point derives from the fact that policymaking activities have expanded over the past two decades in a number of countries and cities in different continents: although a

¹ This paper is based on the conceptual framework that we developed in our recently published edited book (in French) on the governance of the Parisian metropolis. This book is part of a long-term collective reflection about the Paris governance that had started with a first edited book in 2020. The two published edited volumes are mainly addressed to a French and French-speaking community of academics, policymakers, professionals, citizens active in the fields of urban and metropolitan policies and planning in Greater Paris and France. The local debate about the governance of the capital metropolis is strong and contentious; and the books are our attempt to participate in this debate as social scientists. They also seek to contribute to analyse the Paris governance gridlock and failures that are emphasised by many academics and stakeholders. Drawing from that past work, this paper seeks to engage with a broader audience of urban studies scholars to discuss the conceptualisation of metropolitan governance as "organised anarchy". We warmly thank all the colleagues who have participated to the two edited volumes and, in the second volume, have accepted to engage with the "organised anarchy" hypothesis in their chapters. Thanks to: Félix Adisson, Thomas Aguilera, Camille Allé, Nadia Arab, Christine Barwick, Agnès Bastin, Emmanuel Bellanger, Jean-Baptiste Chambon, Antoine Courmont, Gilles Crague, Jacques de Maillard, Renaud Epstein, Vlad Gross, Ludovic Halbert, Charlotte Halpern, Joël Idt, Christine Lelévrier, Patrick Le Lidec, Dominique Lorrain, Nicolas Maisetti, Daniel Mouchard, Sébastien Pradella, Pauline Prat, Roberto Rodriguez R, Eric Verdeil, Mathieu Zagrodzki.

partial indicator², public expenditure as part of the GDP has been growing in Latin America, Asia and to a lesser extent in Africa which includes the rise of local and multilevel policies and the intensification of governance activities.³ In the EU, the land of public policies, public expenditure represents on average 49,6% of GDP in 2022 (36% for the US, 44% for the UK, 33% for China, 29% for India, 46% for Brazil). Local and regional authorities, one way or another, have been part of the increase in public spending, hence a rise of local governance activities in different parts of the world (even if not everywhere, see Le Galès 2021). In large urbanised areas, this has triggered the politicisation of the governance process and the making of complex and fragmented patchworks of individual and collective actors, including state organisations, local governments, metropolitan and regional governing bodies and agencies, political parties and elites, firms of all kinds, rooted business interest, non-governmental organisations, community groups, social movements, religious organisations, and unions sometimes. They have their own strategies, resources, and values. They interact, protest, follow the rules, ignore, and challenge them, hence the making of a *politics of urban governance* (Pinson, 2002, Heinelt and Kübler 2005, Le Galès 1998, Pierre 2011, Stoker, 2011). It brings to the fore the old question about conflicts, scale and coordination in metropolitan governance, negotiation and conflict-solving mechanisms or deadlocks and policymaking, their consequences and who benefits or loses (Cox, 2010, Storper, 2014)

Those activities cannot be only described as technocratic matters, nor just compared to the “good governance” principles (i.e. how actors *should* coordinate) which are sponsored by international organisations and global consultants (Peck, Theodore, 2012). That matters, but political conflicts are central to the governance of large urban areas (Davis 1994; Keil 1998; Heinelt and Kübler 2005, Storper 2014; Le Galès and Ugalde 2018; Andreotti 2019; Marques 2021). The latter are in part, but only in part, structured by coordinated forms of collective action with shared objectives. Most of the time, priorities are contentious and ill-defined, coordination failures and gridlock are frequent, as much as unforeseen or unintended effects. Some have called this ‘the ungovernable metropolis’ (Yates 1978; Jouve and Lefèvre 2004). Sometimes, there are also major different outcomes for different social groups, which are explained by clear political projects, either by left-wing progressive or clearly reactionary governments at different levels. Some, for instance in Barcelona under Mayor Ada Colau but also in highly unequal metropolises like Sao Paulo (see Marques 2021, Tomas 2019, Blanco and al. 2021) have implemented forms of redistribution, access to services and culture, strengthened collective goods and public space provision, welcomed stigmatised populations, mobilised on the climate crisis, opposed corporate platforms such as Airbnb or Uber (Aguilera, Artioli, Colomb, forthcoming 2025). Other governments have promoted the privatised city, competitive models with low taxes and limited social services, authoritarian control, harsh living conditions for immigrant worker populations, land dispossession, privileges for the ultra-rich and massive inequalities, with little regard for pollution issues, for instance in Gulf cities (Buckley 2013, Molotch and Ponzini 2019). All this can make a major difference in the lives of the inhabitants, for the better or the worse.

This article is part of a body of critical urban governance research that seeks to unpack the non-linear, conflictual, incomplete, and more or less democratic nature of the modes of governance in large metropolitan areas (Aguilera 2018; Le Galès and Vitale 2013; Marques 2021).⁴ We move away from prescriptive recommendations or mourns of ungovernability and seek to contribute to conceptualising the “disorder” of metropolitan governance and

² The authors are aware of the fact that the measure of public expenditure is a partial indicator (it does not include the breakdown by level of government nor private expenditure). However, it is used here to signal the expansion of governance activities, which also go with processes of decentralisation in many parts of the world.

³ <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/exp@FPP/USA/FRA/JPN/GBR/SWE/ESP/ITA/ZAF/IND>

⁴ The paper is part of the long-term research project « WHIG, what is governed and not governed in large metropolis » comparing Paris, Sao Paulo, Mexico, London and Milan. Thanks to all our colleagues that have worked and exchanged in the project and in particular E. Marques, V. Ugalde, M. Raco, C. Colomb, A. Andreotti.

policymaking. Our research objective is to contribute to refining, both conceptually and empirically, the forms of collective action in large metropolitan areas. To do so, we start from the general hypothesis that the organisational fragmentation, the conflicts and competition that characterise the metropolis – what we conceptualise as “organised anarchy” - contribute to shaping recurrent forms of collective action in the long run.

Building on longstanding research about policymaking in the Paris metropolis, and comparative research, we contend that the mode of governance of large metropolises can be fruitfully characterised in terms of “organised anarchy” (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972). Large metropolises include loosely coupled organisations, ill-defined and/or contradictory policy goals, and non-linear and/or opaque policy-making processes, and often characterised by “organisational saturation” (Borraz et al. 2022). In this world of loose ties, some actors (but not all of them) can establish strong ties in a selective and oriented way, reduce uncertainty, advance projects or oppose them. These forms of collective action based on strong ties and oriented toward well-defined goals are organised amid fragmentation, coexist within it, and to some extent take advantage of it. As they sometimes seek to take charge of some problems, they can also voluntarily or involuntarily pass them on to others, even making them worse. From this perspective, coordination and policy “success” and “failures” coexist in metropolitan governance. The question is for whom and with which effects. This requires moving our analytical lens from governance and *macro* processes to governance and *meso* processes, in order to take into account public policies and organisations as units of analysis.

The argument is examined in the case of the Paris metropolitan area where there is no shortage of governmental organisations, activities, policy programmes, instruments, and public investment (Lefèvre, 2021, Le Galès 2020, Le Galès, Artioli 2023). Despite the growth of other metropolitan areas in the country, the agglomeration remains the economic, political, and cultural driver of France, significantly contributing to the nation’s economy and serving as its administrative and cultural centre. It is a global financial, tourist and cultural hub. The metropolitan continuous built-up area counts about 10.8 million inhabitants, while the functional urban area (i.e. all the municipalities where at least 15% of the working population works in the central core), has a population of 13 million. This makes it one of the largest urban agglomerations in Europe, but one-third of the largest in the world, like Tokyo, Jakarta or Delhi (all above 30 million). As Lefèvre argued (2021), fragmentation dominates in Paris metropolitan governance. There is no hierarchy between local authorities, nor a single steering body or leader. Competition between political actors and layers of government is dominant. There is no shortage of governance failures either (persistent poverty and increased inequality, air pollution, socio-spatial segregation, housing shortage, road congestion, insufficient access to health services, blocked fiscal redistribution), but also sometimes progressive policies with important results, in some areas and/or for some groups (new social housing delivery, new public transportation offer, municipal social centres, cultural infrastructure, etc.). The intensity of policymaking activities, on the one hand, and the highly different results they produce, on the other make it an interesting case to delve into the collective action that shapes what appears as a ‘disorganised’ metropolitan governance.

The primary goal of the paper is to advance and discuss the relevance of the concept of organised anarchy for metropolitan governance research. We do not seek to provide an in-depth case study of a given policy sector or of a given level of government within the agglomeration. On the contrary, we build on a variety of strong, existing, empirical results about the Parisian metropolis to read them together in terms of collective action and policymaking. Specifically, the paper is based on two main types of sources: one, our long-term research on public policies in the metropolitan area - mostly in the fields of spatial planning, housing and transportation; second, a literature review about the political-institutional structure of the Parisian metropolis, and of case-studies of policy sectors at the metropolitan level. Part of those case studies, by both colleagues and ourselves, are published in two volumes edited by the authors.

The paper, first, revises the concept of organised anarchy in order to mobilise it in the context of a large metropolis. Second, it provides evidence of the density of organisations and their dynamics of creation within the Paris urban region to lay the ground for the organised anarchy. Finally, it shows that this world of loosely coupled organisations ignoring or opposing each other *offers specific possibilities for collective action*, of which we identify four modalities. The conclusion suggests this framework might be useful to explain the mode of governance and policymaking in other large metropolises.

Organised anarchy as non-linear urban governance

In this paper, governance is defined as a process of coordinating actors, social groups, and institutions to attain particular goals in fragmented, uncertain environments (Le Galès, 1998). Any research about governance in a large metropolis brings to the fore a multitude of individual and collective actors who have strategies and resources and are guided by their interests, norms and values (Kübler 2012; Pierre and Peters, 2012, Kübler and Lefèvre 2018). Private actors, interest groups, and citizens exchange resources, protest, sometimes follow the rules, or try to avoid constraints. These actors are more or less permanent and more or less localised. They are also more or less enrolled by institutions (in the sociological sense of formal or informal rules, norms and standards governing interactions between groups and individuals) which partly reflect trajectories, legacies, and past conflicts.

The paper does not aim to review all classic debates on metropolitan governance (Lefèvre 1998, Moore-Cherry and al. 2022). There is well-known, important literature that originated in the US in the 1960s, later in Europe and now in most continents dealing with fragmentation, pluralism or oligarchies, ungovernability, growth coalitions, urban regimes, electoral coalitions, neoliberalism, informal activities, corruption, modes of governance, technocracies, planning, multilevel governance, policy networks, leadership, democratic participation, central-local relations or policy implementation (including failure) in large metropolitan areas (Tomàs and Pyka 2023).

Let us just mention here that one of the most longstanding debates, both scholarly and politically, has revolved around the large number of governing bodies involved in metropolitan governance and the frequent lack of (or the suitability of) hierarchical vertically integrated metropolitan authorities (see Lefèvre 1998; Kübler 2012; Kübler and Lefèvre 2018). During the last fifty years, the movement of creation of new metropolitan authorities has often resulted in a "long series of disappointing experiments" (Lefèvre 1998, 13) since the newly created institutions have met resistance and/or achieved limited policy results. Unsurprisingly, urbanisation growth (in terms of built environment, commuting patterns, etc.) has often also exceeded their administrative limits. As Préteceille (1997) rightly observed, the scale of the metropolis does not lend itself to strong characterisations in terms of order, integration or hierarchical and rational government. Most metropolitan areas are characterised by "bricolage" governance practices (Storper 2014). That does not mean they are ungovernable.

Metropolitan areas are not just characterised by fragmentation. One stream of research has approached the question in terms of coalitions, negotiations, and networks between the multitude of individual and collective actors, beyond government, to identify the "governability" and governance, or even governmentality of large metropolitan areas. This has been especially emphasised in the context of (and of a response to) a globalised capitalist economy that puts pressure on both national and local policies of large urbanised areas (debates initiated by Sellers 2002; Savitch and Vogel 2000; Salet and Kreukels 2003; Kantor et al. 2012). Beyond the exchange between groups and the aggregation of interest, scholars have also emphasised modes of integration through shared norms, values, and the unfolding of numerous interdependencies (Kantor et al. 2012; Salet 2007). In a similar vein,

others have highlighted the narrative constructions of a metropolitan policy scale (Fricke and Gualini 2018). The influence of STS (science and technology studies), Callon and Latour in particular, has increasingly led urban researchers to identify not coalitions of actors but more fragile assemblages combining objects, actors, and devices (Raco, Brill and Ferm 2021; Söderström 2018). The debate has moved on with numerous papers on smart cities or environmental governance (Barns, 2018; Karvonen 2020).

An important share of the metropolitan governance literature is concerned with the problem of “governability” of extended urban areas, through the study of *how metropolitan-wide coordination and/or steering capacity is achieved*. This specific focal point brings limitations when it comes to the analysis of both the non-rational and the non-linear parts of metropolitan governance. First, it tends to adopt a dichotomy view of “success” and “failure”, and the latter is mainly interpreted as a lack of coordination and steering capacity. Yet this overlooks the political dimensions of governance failures: on the one hand, they can be the intended outputs of the deliberate action of some actors, hence a “success” in the view of these actors. On the other, they can be the unintended result or the externality of a coordinated action: sometimes, highly coordinated policies carry voluntary or involuntary negative outcomes for others. Second, this literature has mainly sought to picture *one* dominant form of governance per metropolitan area. This has been important both for internal analysis of each case and for comparative purposes (see Heinelt and Kübler 2005; Pinson 2002), yet it has ignored the *coexistence in large metropolitan areas of multiple forms of collective action*, more or less integrated and sometimes independent from each other.

Against these limitations, we contend that the concept of “organised anarchy” (originally developed by sociologists M. Cohen J. March and J. Olsen) combines the non-linear, partial and incomplete dimensions of urban governance (Le Galès, Vitale 1993) with the making of a particular mode of governance that is reproduced over time. They define as organised anarchy those organisational systems characterised by the coexistence within them of vague, multiple and potentially contradictory objectives, by limited knowledge and understanding of internal processes by their members (*unclear technology*), and by a changing composition, over time and from one decision to another, of the group of decision-makers (*fluid participation*) (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972). As Friedberg points out (1997, p. 272), this conceptualisation was a reaction, in the 1970s, to the dominant analysis in terms of rational-sequential decisions. This conceptualisation was radicalised with the famous “Garbage can model” to emphasise the random and contingent aspect of decisions and results produced within organisations. In this model, the “garbage can” (the decision) is a receptacle where problems, solutions, individual or collective actors, and choices to make are combined in a somewhat random and weakly connected manner, i.e. they are “*loosely coupled*”. A second key, and complementary, notion from the sociology of organisations is, therefore, that of “loosely coupled systems” or “low interdependent” where actors are poorly coordinated by common goals or values and standards. They also follow contradictory objectives. Loose coupling is defined by Orton and Weick (1990, 203) as “*a situation in which elements are responsive, but [...] also preserve identity and evidence of separateness*”. They emphasise that “*loose coupling is evident when elements affect each other suddenly (rather than continuously), occasionally (rather than constantly), negligibly (rather than significantly), indirectly (rather than directly), and eventually (rather than immediately)*”.

This model then inspired a major strand of research on public policy agendas and policymaking. Originally developed by John Kingdon (1984), this strand took up the idea of the limited rationality of the decision (notably because of the time pressures) and contradictory dynamics between the search for coherence and rationality, on the one hand, and inconsistencies and unexpected choices in public policies, on the other. By scrutinising the American federal government in terms of organised anarchy (1984, 85), Kingdon identified the interplay of three poorly connected streams: the stream of problems and

attention to these problems, the stream of available solutions, and the political stream where political entrepreneurs mobilise in order to couple solutions and problems.

However, beyond ambiguous solutions in search of problems and uncertainties, there are at times coordinated actions. Policy entrepreneurs, government organisations, and interest groups can steer policy decisions and program implementations. In other words, in the loosely coupled systems described in terms of organised anarchy, there are *also forms of partial order*, integration, recurrences, and power relations, which have been sometimes taken into account by the sociology of organisations (Moch and Pondy 1977). In other terms, ambiguities, inconsistencies, contradictions (the term is rarely used by these authors), and entanglements (same remark) do not prevent modes of coordination, which can be more or less stable, and more or less effective. Yet, this coordination is not necessarily hierarchical, nor rational-sequential.

Metropolitan areas are territorial formations that are different from the organisations these sociologists have worked on. However, the concept of organised anarchy might be useful to analyse their incomplete and non-linear governance. In large metropolitan areas, too, various public and private organisations are rather loosely coupled entities. Public policy objectives are often vague, multiple, or ambiguous. Several representations of the same problem - whether it be the production of housing, the creation of new transport infrastructure, the organisation of health or education provision - coexist and are sometimes irreconcilable. Even when the objectives seem clear or shared, the way to achieve them is not, the responsible organisations are multiple and hardly in relation to each other, and their respective operations are often opaque to external actors or even to their members. Finally, the composition of the groups participating in public policy varies greatly. This is due to the tangle of political-administrative scales and responsibilities, but also to the changing participation, depending on times and issues, of organised political actors such as interest groups, associations or social movements. Decisions here then refer to the dynamics of competition between solutions, problems and decision-makers with limited information, the seizing of contingent opportunities, and the pursuit and promotion of public policy solutions that are ambiguous and weakly linked to the problems to be addressed. At the same time, we argue that in metropolitan areas there also exist closer interdependencies (*tight coupling*) between certain organisations, stabilised, and associated with a capacity to act oriented toward change (or toward resistance to change). They exist at the same time as fragmentation and contradiction.

Of course, a metropolitan territory is not an organisation, not a system and even less a closed system. But organised anarchy and its related conceptualisations have long gone beyond the disciplinary borders of the sociology of organisations. It has been mobilised to analyse complex political-institutional sets with fuzzy boundaries, combining multiple types of individual and collective actors (first, the government and federal administrations of the United States studied by John Kingdon, with its political staff, administrative entities, agencies, sectoral experts, interest groups, etc.). However, the approach has been mainly used by the sociology of organisation, not so often, to analyse in particular higher education organisations, such as universities (Musselin, 1997, Massen Stensacker, 2019), training systems (Fontdevila and al. 2022), hospitals (Vallejo and al. 2020) or political parties (Wiesendahl 1999). In terms of methods, authors invariably used interviews and document analysis. There is no such thing as clear gaps in this literature, but sometimes researchers concentrate on the consequence in terms of non-rational actions and finalities. Beyond these important findings, there is also collective action that has to be explained and mechanisms have to be identified based on different cases.

We therefore take this approach for its heuristic value. We suggest that organised anarchy, conceptualised as a mode of metropolitan governance, makes it possible to articulate, on the one hand, the "garbage can", the non-sequential and non-rational combination of problems and solutions and, on the other hand, forms of strong and coordinated capacities for action

within it, tightly coupled organisations, oriented to the pursuit of objectives which are sometimes not ambiguous.

Our analytical focus is on collective action, namely the modalities by which individual and collective actors endowed with unequal resources organise themselves, mobilise, and pool resources. This perspective does not presume the purposes nor the rationality of the actors. It focuses on the concrete modalities of the action implemented within its constraints. This also implies to consider that the boundaries of the metropolis are not predetermined. The metropolitan dimension of collective action crosses different levels of government, sectors and political-administrative boundaries, while at the same time involving the voluntary overruns of those boundaries, their unexpected overflow, the strategies for maintaining them and their possible institutionalisation in the long term.

Paris metropolis as organised anarchy: multiplication of organisations, bureaucratic vicious cycles and institutional entanglements

Since the early 2000s, a stream of research has focused on the political-institutional system and the governance of the Paris metropolitan area (see Le Goix and Saint-Julien 2007, Chauvel 2021; Béhar and Delpirou 2020; Desjardins 2010; Enright 2016; Gilli 2014; Gilli and Offner 2009; Lefèvre 2017, 2021; Le Galès 2020; Le Lidec 2018; Wiel 2011; Orfeuil and Wiel 2012; Subra 2012, Artioli and Le Galès 2023). Building on this research, this section intends to provide evidence that the Paris urban region is a case of organised anarchy. We show that this is a social-territorial world without hierarchical centralised governance, populated with loosely coupled organisations, and marked by fragmentation, conflicts and bureaucratic vicious circles. The creation of new organisations is partially explained by the never-ending political work aiming at creating/reforming organisations to solve the problems created by the multiplication of organisations (Bezes, Le Lidec, 2016), what Castel and Henaut (2022) call neo-bureaucratic vicious circles.

Figures 1 and 2 represent the layering of local governments in the metropolitan area.

Figure 1: map of the Greater Paris Metropolitan Authority (dark grey) and its internal intermunicipal bodies [\(we will provide the HD version of the map, in English\)](#)

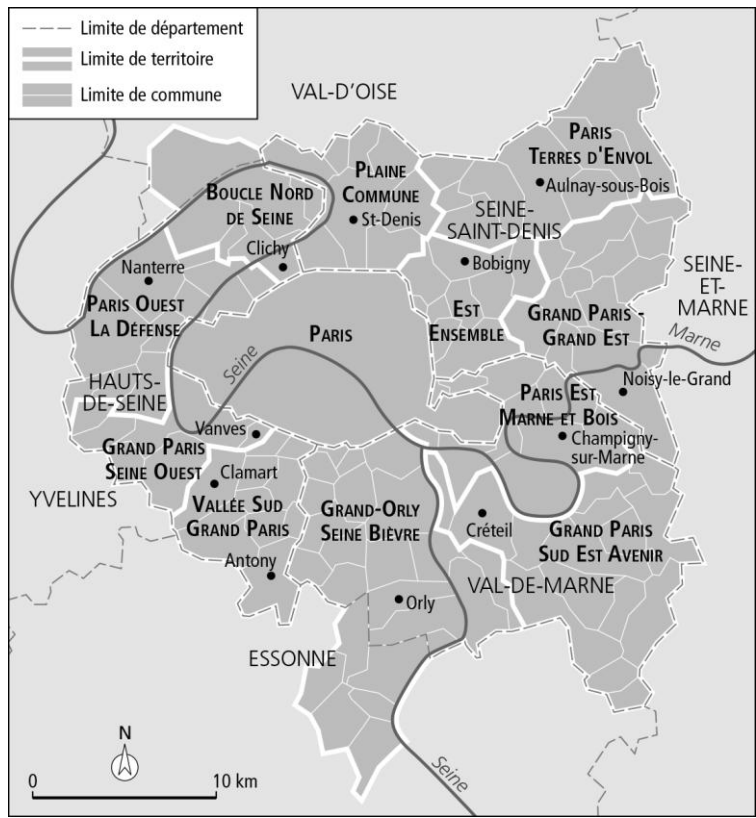
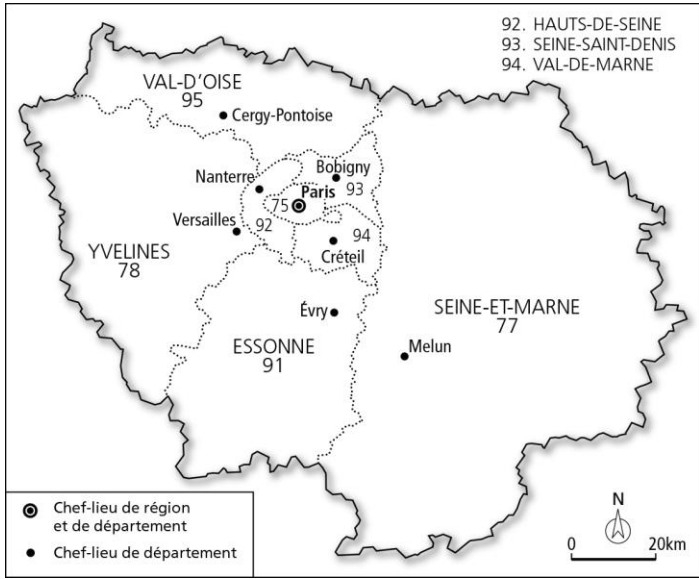


Figure 2 Map of the *Île-de-France* region and the *Départements* (



No hierarchical centralised governance and bureaucratic vicious circles

Firstly, there is no steering body, no "pilot" (Estèbe and Le Galès 2003) - for the Paris urban region. There is no single political authority and no hierarchical centralised coordination. In the Parisian region, there is no "leader", i.e. an actor "who would be able to express a coherent vision of the future of the metropolitan area, bring together the actors who count to support and implement this vision, steer the processes leading to it and legitimise it in the eyes of the greatest number" (Lefèvre 2017, pp. 121- 122, our translation). On the contrary, the Paris metropolis is characterised by a multi-level institutional tangle. As is usual in most

large metropolitan areas, no political-administrative institution corresponds to the functional perimeters of the metropolis whether defined by buildings or commuting. While the regional political authority the *Île-de-France* regional council (12M inhabitants) could be the metropolitan steering institution, it is not. It plays a key role in transportation but has neither the resources nor the political capacity to act as a steering body for the whole region.

Secondly, the metropolis is the space of many agencies and authorities with budgets and bureaucracies, all involved in policy-making. The number and scope have increased over the past four decades, as a result of the French decentralisation implemented in the 1980s. Attempts have long been made to list all of them (Desjardins, 2010; Estèbe and Le Galès, 2003). On the political-administrative side, they include:

- the Île-de-France Regional Council (12 million inhabitants, annual budget 5 bn€) and the 8 Départements, (major ones, Seine-Saint-Denis with 1,7 million inhabitants, budget 1,8 bn€ or the rich Hauts-de-Seine 1,6 million inhabitants, budget 1,9 bn€)
- 1,276 communes including the resourceful and powerful City of Paris which is one of them (2,2 million inhabitants, budget 10 bn€)
- 63 inter-municipal authorities, 547 sectorial or general inter-municipal bodies (water, energy, waste, etc.), the huge agency running 38 hospitals (Assistance Publique Hôpitaux de Paris, budget 8 bn€); national government services including the prefectures, the rectorates (education), the police prefecture. There is also the Paris Île-de-France Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- Major operators that provide networked services across large sections of the metropolis - for wastewater, stormwater and industrial wastewater treatment (SIAAP, *Syndicat interdépartemental pour l'assainissement de l'agglomération parisienne*), household waste (*Agence métropolitaine des déchets ménagers*, formerly SYCTOM), or mobility (RATP, SNCF, Île-de-France Mobilités).
- About 60 public or semi-public organisations are involved in economic development, housing and real estate development, including two major planning agencies (sometimes collaborating, often in competition).

In the 2000s, the institutional form of the Paris metropolitan area became the subject of exacerbated debates and political activities (Chauvel, 2021; Le Lidec, 2018; Lescloupé, 2021), triggered by the perception of the spectacular dynamism of London. Decentralisation reforms had reinforced an opaque dynamic of inter-municipal cooperation for the protection of very localised interests, a form of "defensive/conservative inter-municipal bodies" (Gilli and Offner, 2009, p. 102). Fragmented metropolitan governance and the lack of a metropolitan authority were put forward to explain the failure of the Paris metropolis to compete with London and to provide adequate services to the population. The reform work started in 2006, with the creation of a Metropolitan Conference spearheaded by the City of Paris, to which local authorities in the Paris region joined voluntarily. The French right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy subsequently created a junior ministry for the Development of the Capital Region in 2008 - hence marginalising the city of Paris - in line with Brenner's classic analysis of the rise of urban governance in Western Europe (2003) and new metropolitan governance made by States. The cycle of rationalising reforms then included a 2010 law to create an *ad hoc* company, the *Société du Grand Paris*,⁵ to develop a new ambitious metro system at the metropolitan scale (the *Grand Paris Express*). Finally, a much-disputed 2016 law created a weak new metropolitan government, the Greater Paris Metropolitan Authority (*Métropole du Grand Paris*)- and 11 new intercommunal bodies (*Etablissements publics territoriaux*) – which are the subject of constant criticism, widespread dissatisfaction and calls for an overhaul.

⁵ Today, it is named *La Société des Grands Projets*.

In a nutshell, this “Greater Paris” cycle of reforms has led to two major policy decisions of the last decades: the decision to develop a new metropolitan metro system in 2010, and the creation of a new metropolitan authority in 2016. These policies, distinct from each other, have layered on a system already densely populated with political authorities and policy programmes with overlapping and often unclear jurisdictions. Le Lidec (2018) accurately analysed that reform, and especially the creation of the metropolitan authority, as reinforcing the dual feeling of institutional overload and fragmentation identified by Gilli and Offner (2009), and modestly improving the capacities of government on a metropolitan scale.

Fragmentation, loosely coupled organisations, and conflicts

Loose coupling between all these organisations is widespread. In their various capacities, they all contribute to the development and implementation of public policies, invent programs, build local and metropolitan facilities, provide services to the population and derive political, symbolic or economic benefits. The importance and density of policy activities are massive in Paris: the number of policies has increased, policy instruments have multiplied, and budgets are substantial. From this perspective, metropolitan governance activities are located in countless public policy programs, plans, projects, schemes, charters, and contracts that are discussed, more or less decided upon and implemented, whether in urban planning, health, education, youth employment, innovation, mobility, climate change adaptation, safety, sports, open data, social benefits, culture, economic development, or refugees. In all public policies, a great number of policy instruments structure implementation (Lascoumes and Galès 2007). For instance, in housing policy alone, 180 housing policy instruments were identified in the Paris urban region (Findeisen and Le Galès 2021) initiated at different government levels. Their objectives are more or less defined and multiple. This accumulation over time leads to stark contradictions and unintended effects making the rational planning of housing policy very unlikely.

Contention is another key to interpreting public policies in the Paris metropolis. Some conflicts deserve particular mention (Le Galès 2020). First, the long-term conflict between Paris and the “suburbs” (Fourcaut, Bellanger and Flonneau, 2007, Bellanger 2020). It structures imaginations as well as social and physical spaces; it is reactivated by events, the riots of 2005 and 2023 for example. This opposition persists but has also been eroded thanks to the strategy of the former mayor of Paris (Bertrand Delanoë) and his communist deputy Pierre Mansat to work with the municipalities surrounding Paris (Lefèvre and Mansat 2021). The institutional conflict and competition between the *Île-de-France* Regional Council and the Paris City Council is a second modality of this opposition between Paris and the suburbs. Second, the conflict between the Paris City Council and the French State. The capital city is an old and classic problem for national elites who have historically always tried to control the capital (Prat 2020). If French municipalities have elected mayors since the 19th century, in Paris this only happened in 1977. The Mayor of Paris and the French government often clash leading to more autonomy for Paris (Le Galès and Mouchard 2023). Third, the conflict between the State and the *Île-de-France* Regional Council. That has crystallised around the new metro system, the *Grand Paris Express* (Desjardins, 2010; Passalacqua, 2020; Wiel, 2011). It has its origins in the gradual transfer, since the 1990s and as part of the decentralisation reforms, of planning and transport competencies to the *Île-de-France* region. In 2010-2011, two competing transport mega-projects were put forward by the region and the state respectively (Halpern and Le Galès 2020; Passalacqua 2020). The route of the Grand Paris Express currently implemented by the dedicated public company is the synthesis of these two different projects but does not put an end to the tensions between the region and the State around transportation. Lastly, the opposition between the municipalities, the *départements* of the *Île-de-France* region and other actors such as the Paris *Île-de-France* Chamber of Commerce and Industry or the agencies of the State. 1276 mayors (often in small municipalities) fiercely defend their autonomy. Mayors remain the focal point for citizen

demands, a driving force for municipal and inter-municipal public policies, but also a veto point for instance in the housing and planning fields.

These territorial oppositions intersect with those between political parties, their alliances and strategies at different levels. National politics plays a significant role in the governance of the capital metropolis and reinforces local and multi-level conflicts. As a result, even when some consensus exists on some metropolitan problems – such as air pollution or the lack of housing – metropolitan-level responses are often slowly implemented and uneven, or even non-existent. Priorities differ, and so do ideas on how to tackle them. Structuring conflicts produce “few common metropolitan policies” (Lefèvre 2017, 17), “parallel and poorly convergent approaches” (Gilli and Offner 2009, 15) and “atrophied public decision-making” (Gilli and Offner 2009, 95) at the metropolitan level.

This particular organised anarchy results in particular from the following facts: 1) the State has reduced political legitimacy, legal powers, or resources to govern the urban region; 2) the resourceful and high-profile City of Paris is limited by its frontiers; 3) the *Île-de-France* regional council has the scale but limited resources and expertise; 4) the newly created Greater Paris Metropolitan Authority is struggling to gain recognition, capacity and resources.

Four forms of metropolitan collective action to characterise Paris organised anarchy

Long-term research about the Paris metropolis has easily identified loose coupling between a range of organisations. There are plenty of them to support the “anarchy” part of the concept. Nevertheless, a social territorial world saturated with weakly coordinated and weakly integrated organisations offers multiple possibilities for collective action and tighter forms of interdependence, i.e. *tight coupling*. In Paris, those actors capable of establishing strong and lasting links between several organisations can, under some conditions, move a project forward, unless they come up against the refusal of a loosely coupled but sufficiently powerful coalition of opponents. This also gives the advantage to older tightly coupled forms of collective action to advance their agenda.

Within the Paris metropolis, we identify four forms of collective action that coexist between actors with unequal resources: 1) contingent coordination, 2) coordination through instruments and data; 3) coalitions, and 4) vetos and negative coordination. They can be understood as on a continuum between, on the one hand, the most loosely coupled forms of collective action to the tightest forms.

1) *Seizing contingent opportunities* is the first form of metropolitan collective action. New public policies, projects, and programs are the result of specific *windows of opportunity* where pending solutions and ideas will encounter problems to be resolved and are coupled together through the action of political entrepreneurs (Kingdon, 1984). Here, public policy is neither chaotic nor rational; it responds to a temporal order which has its share of contingency. Windows of opportunities open through political change (for example, an electoral change) or in connection with crises, and through the emergence of a new issue or the transformation of an existing one. It is at these precise moments that certain actors endowed with resources (political, financial, legitimacy, etc.) will mobilise to advance a particular program waiting for realisation, and which finds here an opportunity for accomplishment. This form of collective action is far away from the model of public policy coalitions, where actors jointly construct an analysis of problems and common action objectives over time. It is also far from the rational-sequential schema presented in major plans, according to which public policies would be the rational response to objectively identified problems. This is closer to the “garbage can” model. The results of collective action depend on constrained temporalities, competition and punctual mobilisations around opportunities. In other words, the problems, solutions, ideas, information, and land opportunities in circulation and available at a given moment, therefore necessarily limited and contingent, are linked to each other through the actions of certain actors. It is, therefore, a step-by-step collective action which is, on the one hand, dependent on opportunities and,

on the other, dependent on competition and power relations around these opportunities (which are never completely given, but which these actors help to construct).

Based on the study of the sale and redevelopment of the sites of the Ministry of Defence (a large land and real estate owner in the capital region) and the new headquarters of the ministry in Balard (Paris 15th arrondissement), Artioli's research (2023) shows the balance of power and the competition (political and in real estate markets) around land opportunities. The latter are seized by political entrepreneurs often with divergent interests. The transformation of these sites results here from the coupling of metropolitan problems in search of space, planning solutions in search of sites on which to materialise and demonstrate their validity, without necessarily a linear nor rational relationship between redevelopment solutions, problems to be addressed and the location of projects.

2) *Coordination through instruments and data.* As is well known in STS studies, instruments and data create, more or less voluntarily, frameworks for exchange between actors in the metropolis. In the organised anarchy of the region, territorial data in particular, and data about real estate markets (e.g. office space market) play this role (Arab and Crague, 2023; Chambon and Courmont, 2023). They make it possible to collectively produce information, exchange it, and reduce uncertainty. They sometimes align actors responsible for common issues or facing the same problems. They allow actors and organisations to know "what others are doing", to possibly imitate them and sometimes to implement the same responses. On occasions, but not always, they make it possible to develop or implement joint public policies. They are, to use the terms of Arab and Crague (2023) the "discreet supports of metropolitan integration".

Policy instruments can play a similar role. When it comes to the reduction of air pollution (which is a key policy issue considering that Greater Paris is among the most polluted in Europe), Rodríguez (2023) shows that there is not a strongly coordinated action. However, the implementation by the multiple municipalities of a specific instrument controlling the circulation of polluting vehicles, the Low Emission Zones (ZFE in French) frame a "prospective vision" (Voß and Simons, 2014) of the future and establishes a set of common rules that condition action at the metropolitan level. This structuring characteristic of the instruments gives Low-emission zones the capacity to induce isomorphism, which ultimately leads to the implementation of this policy in the majority of the municipalities of the Greater Paris area.

3) *The creation of public policy coalitions (and their institutionalisation)* sometimes in the form of a network or meta-organisations - voluntarily mobilised around a problem or a public policy is a third, classic form of collective action. Within the organised anarchy of the urban region, these coalitions are made up of political actors, administrations, semi-public and, sometimes private organisations, enrolled around a collectively constructed common interest. In these coalitions, interests are aggregated, activated, exchanged and resources distributed for the implementation of public policies which, otherwise, could not have been achieved (due to the absence of resources or the existence of institutional or sectoral boundaries). The implementation of public policies allows members of the coalition to derive political and/or economic benefits, which can strengthen and legitimise the coalition and establish its existence. Sometimes they become structured and produce shared norms, relatively stabilised modalities of internal coordination, decision-making, conflict resolution and representation. This has outward effects, on other public policy sectors or on other parts of the metropolis.

In the Paris region, coalitions are organised around specific territories and political projects *within* the metropolis. They become institutionalised and build a specific capacity for action over the long term in those areas. In the Red Belt composed of the municipalities surrounding the City of Paris, one can find a key case of an institutionalised coalition

(Seine-Saint-Denis and Plaine Commune). Several municipalities have united in a joined local authority since the 1980s, sharing an industrial history and deindustrialisation, a political and government culture of the French Communist Party, and their cooperation has been supported by leading mayors and deputy mayors (Bellanger and Lelévrier 2023). The coalition which carried this political project has been built around urban renewal, economic development and culture, and has taken advantage of windows of opportunity opened at other levels (the latest example: the hosting of the Paris 2024 Olympic Village and sports venues) while mobilising to attract financial resources from the outside (Adisson, Halbert and Maisetti 2023).

4) *The exercise of a veto, non-decision and negative coordination.* Sometimes, actors organise themselves to exercise a veto around a policy, a reform, or a project. To look at them involves carrying out the classic reversal of perspective in the analysis of public policies: taking an interest not in those actors who act "to" do something, but in those actors who occupy positions and/or have the necessary resources allowing them to block it (Bachrach and Baratz 1963; Tsebelis 2002). In the fragmented and non-hierarchical institutional landscape of the Paris region, the agreement of many actors is necessary to change the status quo. In this context, "uniting against" is a recurring and fundamental modality of action. We have highlighted above the different conflicts structuring the governance of the Paris metropolis: they can result in a veto. Local mayors are well-identified veto players in the metropolis, they are certainly not the only ones. Likewise, the objects of vetoes are often redistributive policies, internal fiscal equalisation in the Paris region, or constitutive policies (institutional reforms), but not only.

This form of collective action differs from the previous one - policy coalitions - for two essential reasons. Firstly, the actors involved generally have no other affinities (partisan, territorial, functional, etc.) or common interests other than the specific one of opposition to a given public policy or project. The failed fiscal redistribution of the Greater Paris Metropolitan Authority is a good example (Allé, 2023). Local mayors and their inter-municipal structures organised and successfully vetoed the project. The French state – in charge of legislating on the matter - repeatedly chose "non-decision", leading to a status quo compromise that leaves all future scenarios open and prevents the decrease of inequalities.

Second, when there is no blockage or postponement, the existence of divergent interests that can exercise a veto is resolved by what some have called "negative coordination" (Scharpf 1994): it produces public policies reduced to the only option that can survive all veto points. In other words, it leads to policies whose content does not respond to collectively constructed and relatively consensual objectives (as is the case for coalitions), but to "what remains" once all opposition has been anticipated or eliminated. The compromise studied by Le Lidec (2018) which led to the Greater Paris Metropolitan Authority with its weak institutional characteristics can be an example: it is both the only possible institutional solution and unanimously unsatisfactory.

These four modes of action coexist and are sometimes combined in metropolitan governance. Over time, they lead certain policy issues and sectors, or territories to become densely institutionalised into specific subsystems. In the Parisian organised anarchy, these tightly tied territories and/or policy sectors are often loosely coupled to others, with frictions at borders.

Conclusion

The conceptualisation of metropolitan governance as organised anarchy, combining loosely and tightly coupled actions and organisations, might prove fruitful beyond the Parisian case. Many large metropolises, sometimes ordinary cities too, may indeed be analysed as

organised anarchy, at least in part. The lack of centralised or encompassing hierarchical governance is frequent. Therefore overlapping jurisdictions, competing interests, and networked coalitions are defining features of the politics and governance of large metropolis. What this paper proposes, therefore, is a *meso*-level approach that contributes to investigating the multiple forms of collective action coexisting in metropolitan governance.

To think from Paris beyond Paris, it has to be noted that a *meso*-level approach that takes organisations and public policies (with their instruments and implementation processes) as units of analysis comes with the corollary that these organisations and policies - as much as the state and capitalism arrangements they are part of - are variegated. The organised anarchy does not offer an encompassing qualification of how metropolitan governance works everywhere, nor who its actors are and how they engage in, and with, policymaking. Rather, the organised anarchy offers, in our understanding, specific contributions to the metropolitan political and scholarly debate.

First, such a perspective moves beyond the questions of metropolitan (un)governability and metropolitan policy failures/successes to unfold non-linear and oftentimes non-rational modes of governance. It offers a lens through which to look at complex collective action in fragmented metropolitan worlds. It suggests that various forms of collective action coexist in metropolitan governance (we identified four in Paris, but others could be found elsewhere). It is their coexistence, their interplay which is more or less intense, and the conflicts between them that should be addressed to think about the results and effects of the policies, the winners and the losers, the mechanisms of stability and reproduction over the long term and whom they benefit.

Second, such an approach sheds light on the selective treatment of metropolitan problems, on the unexpected effects of certain programs or their propagation, on the impossible change of certain policies unanimously recognised as unsatisfactory, or even the failure of certain projects. By doing so, it points to the fact that some take advantage of forms of metropolitan “disorder”, whether because they protect the most advantaged groups and spaces, revealing power relations or because they leave it to large private actors (large developers, real estate companies, corporate platforms, etc.) the room for manoeuvre to navigate between multiple interlocutors and regulatory bodies.

Third, the paper provides a clear framework to compare metropolitan governance in different contexts assuming that some forms of organised anarchy explain unintended consequences of governance failures. However, it sets an agenda for exploring different mechanisms, modes of actions that, despite the never ending complexity of metropolitan governance, allow collective action to take place, some institutions and infrastructures to be built or some policies to be implemented, as shown but Hinze and Smith (2020). That would require systematic research into the question of “how are large metropolis governed”, in terms of mechanisms, modes of actions, instruments, conflicts and coalitions.

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