

# The Metropolis of Lyon: An Example to Follow by the GZM Metropolis?

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## Abstract

The French territorial system is marked by a historical very large communal dispersion. Strangely the French State, although considered very strong, has never managed to impose the merger of these municipalities, as was the case in most other European countries. This resistance of local elected representatives, often also national parliamentarians, then led the central government to use another strategy: their grouping in public institutions of intermunicipal cooperation (EPCI). The creation of the Metropolis of Lyon is, therefore, very original. Created by the law of 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2014, it is the only "metropolis" with the status of territorial collectivity and merges on its territory the Rhône department and the former "urban community" of Lyon. This metropolis is thus unique in France, and the authors will tend to verify whether it could serve as a model to follow by other metropolises, considering the case of the first institutionalised metropolis in Poland, namely the GZM Metropolis, which is struggling with structural problems. The GZM Metropolis was established in 2017 by the Polish Parliament's law and provided with a specific governance regime comparable to the "manager and council model" and decision-making based on a double majority of the municipalities and population. After the first five years of functioning, the leaders of this first Polish metropolis seem to be ready to adjust their metropolitan institutions, understanding its limits and searching for inspiration at the international level.

## Keywords

metropolis, territorial reform, metropolitan governance, France, Poland, intermunicipal cooperation

## 1. Introduction

The French territorial system is marked by a very large historical communal dispersion (Mabileau, 1994; Biard, 2009). Despite several attempts to merge municipalities, there are still 35,000 municipalities in France, of which 52% have less than 500 inhabitants and 97% less than 10,000 inhabitants. Only 6 municipalities exceed 300,000 inhabitants for a population of 67.8 million inhabitants in metropolitan France<sup>1</sup>.

This multitude of small urban units, considered to be of the same legal rank<sup>2</sup>, is both an opportunity and a disadvantage. It is an opportunity, because it allows the dissemination of national law and state policies for the purposes of French campaigns, the elected mayor being also an agent of the State responsible for the enforcement of laws and guarantor of public order. Nevertheless,

<sup>1</sup> Source INSEE: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6024136>. According to the Directorate General of Local Authorities (DGCL) of the Ministry of the Interior, there was in France to 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2021, 34,965 municipalities, including 129 overseas and 34,836 in metropolitan France ([https://www.collectivites-locales.gouv.fr/files/Accueil/DESL/2021/Colloc%20en%20chiffres/CL\\_en\\_chiffres\\_2021.pdf](https://www.collectivites-locales.gouv.fr/files/Accueil/DESL/2021/Colloc%20en%20chiffres/CL_en_chiffres_2021.pdf)), for a territory of 545,000 km<sup>2</sup> in metropolitan France (density of 120 hab/km<sup>2</sup> in metropolitan France). For comparison, Germany with its 358,000 km<sup>2</sup> and population of 83.7 million (density of 234 hab/km<sup>2</sup>) has 11,000 municipalities, including 22 with more than 300,000 inhabitants. Poland, whose population density is comparable to that of France (38.4 million inhabitants on a territory of 313,000 km<sup>2</sup>, i.e. a density of 122 hab/km<sup>2</sup>) has about 2,600 municipalities [Pol. *gminy*], of which 22 have more than 200,000 inhabitants (see Pyka, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> All municipalities have the same legal status and regime as regards their organs, competences, and finances, with the only exceptions being Paris, Lyon, and Marseille, and certain overseas collectivities. Similarly, the different levels of collectivities (municipalities, departments, regions) are considered equally, no hierarchy or supervision being allowed between collectivities, in the name of their free administration recognised by the Constitution.

these small municipalities often do not have the technical, human, and financial means to exercise their competences, and their independence and competition do not always make it possible to rationalise local public policies. Strangely the French State, although considered very strong, has never managed to impose the merger of these municipalities, as was the case in most other European countries. This resistance of local elected representatives, often also national parliamentarians (Borgel, 2013), then led the central government to use another strategy: their grouping in public institutions of intermunicipal cooperation (EPCI) (Saout, 2000). These EPCIs, about 1,253 nowadays, are of different nature and legal regimes, ranging from great respect for the autonomy of municipalities such as municipal unions to their submission imposed by law in very inclusive structures, with transfers of many municipal competences as for “urban communities” and “metropolises”.

The creation of the Metropolis of Lyon is, therefore, very original. Created by the law of 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2014<sup>3</sup>, it is the only metropolis with the status of territorial collectivity (while the others are simple EPCI) and merges on its territory the Rhône department and the former urban community of Lyon, an EPCI grouping now 58 municipalities. In addition, its governing bodies have now been directly elected since 2020 by the population, and no longer by the councils of the 58 municipalities that make it up. The primary public tasks of the Lyon Metropolis cover economic development; education; culture and leisure; solidarity; housing; mobility; energy; special planning; the natural environment; the management of water; waste and roads; and international cooperation (Chabrot, 2022).

The case of the Lyon Metropolis can be significantly instructive for the evolution of the GZM Metropolis<sup>4</sup>, Poland’s first statutory metropolitan association, established on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2017, based on the Act of 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2017, of the Polish Parliament<sup>5</sup> on the metropolitan association in the Silesian voivodeship. The GZM began operating in January 2018 with five main public tasks related to the planning of spatial order; social and economic development; the planning, coordination, integration, and development of public transport, including road and railroad transportation, as well as sustainable urban mobility; metropolitan passenger services; cooperation in determining the course of national and provincial roads in the area of the metropolitan union; and the promotion of the metropolitan union and its area. After the first five years of functioning, the leaders of this first Polish statutory metropolis seem to be ready to adjust their metropolitan institutions, understanding its limits and searching for inspiration at the international level.

Table. 1. Key characteristics of metropolitan areas under study

Key features	Metropolis GZM	Grand Lyon
Population (mln)	2.26	1.42
Total area (km <sup>2</sup> )	2554	534
Communes	41	59
Date of establishment	2017	2015
Legal status	statutory public-law association [Pol. <i>związek metropolitalny</i> ]	local authority [Fr. <i>collectivité territoriale de plein droit</i> ]

Source: Authors’ research.

The main problem analysed by the authors refers to the study of the results of establishing the advanced institutional model of the Lyon Metropolis, which is unique in France and Europe. The question is whether the introduced progressive solutions turned out to be effective and whether they have the potential to be transferred to other metropolises. To answer this question, the authors

<sup>3</sup> Loi n° 2014-58 of 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2014, on the modernisation of territorial public action and the affirmation of metropolises (Maptam).

<sup>4</sup> Acronym for “Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolia” (“Upper Silesian-Zaglebian Metropolis”); the designation refers to two historically and culturally distinct areas brought together in the new Metropolis around Katowice.

<sup>5</sup> The Act of 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2017, on the metropolitan association in the Śląskie voivodeship (Journal of Laws from 2017, item 730).

analyse the example of the GZM Metropolis, a unique institution of metropolitan management, but in Polish conditions<sup>6</sup>. In contrast to France, where the process of the empowerment of the metropolis dates back to the 1960s, establishing the GZM Metropolis in Poland is only the first step in this process. The authors question to what extent the solutions adopted in the Metropolis of Lyon can be used in defining further reforms of the GZM Metropolis, which revealed its dysfunctions and limits after the first five years of operation.

In the aftermath of globalisation, the emergence of metropolises that comprise new territorialities (Retaille, 2009) creates a challenge for states, which are trying to adjust their territorial organisation (Brenner, 2003) to the scale and extent of the problems they are reckoning with. The effects of this adaptive process on the institutionalisation of the forms and the levels of empowerment of the metropolises are very diverse, as are their results (Kaczmarek & Mikuła, 2007; Zimmermann, 2020). Lyon is one of the first urban communities established as intermunicipal cooperation entity by the French state in 1966 and has been functioning since 1969 (Bariol-Mathais, 2015). Progressively extending its area to 59 communes, 58 now with the merger of two municipalities on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024, it acquired under the Maptam law in 2015 the status of a metropolis as territorial collectivity, the only full-fledged unit of territorial government in France. This metropolis is thus unique in France, as it is based on new foundations in France and interesting for their effectiveness, provided that certain structural problems are solved (part 1). The authors will tend to compare Lyon's metropolitan path to theses of other international metropolises and verify whether it could serve as a model to follow. The case of the newly created in 2017 and unique institutionalised metropolis in Poland, namely the GZM Metropolis, will be considered, struggling after the first years of existence with serious problems calling for structural and institutional adjustments (part 2).

## 2. The originalities of the Lyon Metropolis as local society

The local authorities in France are administrative bodies, subject to national law and central decisions, and manage local public services with a certain autonomy under the control of the prefect, representing the State, and the administrative judge. However, municipalities have a particular dimension: often existing before the State, they are sometimes considered as "citizens' societies", as in the Constitution of 1791, and have retained as such a general clause of competence allowing them to act in all areas of local general interest if this area is not assigned exclusively to another authority (Le Lidec, 2007). At its creation, the Metropolis of Lyon also received this general clause of competence, which distinguishes it from other territorial collectivities such as the departments and regions that lost it with the law of 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2015, and from other metropolises, simple public cooperation institutions (EPCI) that have never owned it. This characteristic shows all the originality of this Lyon Metropolis. However, if it reflects the importance of this statutory transformation, it also leads to complications that must be solved.

### 2.1. The challenges of the statutory transformation of Greater Lyon

Local cooperation around Lyon has long been limited. The expansion of Lyon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was indeed carried out by annexation of the small neighbouring municipalities, arousing a real resistance of the other municipalities to this urban ogre. It was therefore the State that often had to intervene to impose the creation of an intercommunal transport union in 1941, then a multipurpose union in 1959, which was rejected by most municipalities, or, finally, an urban community by law of 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1966, bringing together 55 municipalities, and which would later be called Greater Lyon (Cohen, 2022; Scherrer, 1995). The creation of the modern Metropolis of Lyon was then doubly interesting. On the one hand, it was done on the initiative of the major local elected officials: the mayor of Lyon, also president of the urban community of Lyon, and the president of the Rhône department. This metropolis is, therefore, a bottom-up project, responding to local issues identified by the local actors themselves, and which has managed to impose itself on the central authorities.

<sup>6</sup> Aside from the GZM Metropolis, arising from Upper Silesian Metropolitan Area, the other notable Polish metropolitan areas are Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, Poznań, Gdańsk, and Łódź, which together account for over one half (54.5%) of the so-called metropolitan places of work (NACE R2 in the Eurostat classification).

Moreover, the president of Greater Lyon and the president of the Rhône, being also senators, they then controlled quite precisely the law creating the Metropolis of Lyon. On the other hand, and on the basis of the proposals of the Balladur Committee of 2009<sup>7</sup>, it enshrines a new type of territorial collectivity larger than the municipalities, taking over the social competences of the department, and better protected than the EPCIs. EPCIs are indeed rather limited structures: created by the prefect who can choose the type of public establishment, the powers exercised and the chosen perimeter that he/she can impose on even recalcitrant municipalities, they are limited by their status and in particular by the list of areas of intervention, and are directly controlled by the municipalities that are part of it and that make up its assembly (with at least one member of each municipal council), and the executive which it elects.

As a territorial collectivity, in the same way as the municipalities, the Metropolis of Lyon has, on the contrary, more important competences: in addition to the vast areas of the former urban community, it recovers notably the social competences of the department which can then harmonise them with its economic policies; it obtains a general clause of competence allowing it to intervene outside any exhaustive list; and, above all, it now benefits from the principle of free administration enshrined for local authorities in Articles 34 and 72 of the Constitution. This principle has two major consequences: its deliberative assembly must be elected directly by the population in accordance with democratic criteria, and no other collectivity can exercise over it any tutelage or hierarchical power. This allows it to free itself from the influence of the municipalities that weighs on the classic EPCIs.

It was in the spring of 2020 that the first metropolitan elections were organised, which clearly showed the stakes of this evolution. Indeed, the direct election of metropolitan councilors has brought out truly metropolitan electoral programmes, and has freed the metropolis from the control of the elected municipal officials of the 58 municipalities that compose it. Thus, it is no longer to the mayors that the president of the metropolis elected by this assembly and its majority must be accountable, but directly to the voters. This then makes it possible to bring out a local general interest freed from the pressures of elected municipal officials. For example, the policy of installing facilities that carry inconveniences traditionally located in poor suburbs (waste treatment plants, expressways, social housing, etc.) – or, on the contrary, that of valuable facilities often located in rich suburbs (theatres, parks, sports complexes, trams) – can now be thought of beyond the pressures of influential mayors, to be based on an overall reflection rooted in a truly general interest. The new ecologist majority of the metropolis thus set up bicycle expressways throughout the territory, reducing the place of cars despite discontent and trying to relocate social housing in rich municipalities wanting to avoid them. It sometimes comes into conflict with the municipalities opposing it, but then relies on the legitimacy given by the voters, on whose behalf it must fulfil its electoral promises<sup>8</sup>.

This extension over a vast territory of the powers exercised directly, or delegated by the other collectivities<sup>9</sup>, and the installation of bodies based on direct democracy thus enshrine a new local authority, undoubtedly more effective, and able to work to create a true *local human society*, larger than the traditional municipalities but transcending the EPCIs acting in essentially technical fields or departments too much distant and focused on especially social skills. However, such a change has clashed with local habits, causing a certain rejection of elected municipal officials, and is still seeking its consensual organisation.

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Committee for the reform of local collectivities *It's time to decide* of 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 (<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorff/id/JORFTEXT000020347348>), proposal 8 which takes up and supplements proposal n°259 of the 2008 report of the Attali Commission for the Liberation of French Growth ([https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran\\_NP\\_051790](https://francearchives.gouv.fr/fr/authorityrecord/Fran_NP_051790)).

<sup>8</sup> Some analysts remind, however, that the election of a new ecologist and social majority in 2020 was made in the very particular context of the COVID-19 crisis and remains marked by a very strong abstention that was beneficial to it. Other political scientists relativize this criticism, noting that the election results were not statistically really affected by this abstention (Cadiou in Chabrot, 2022, p.100).

<sup>9</sup> The metropolis can indeed receive from municipalities, departments, regions, and even the State certain competences by delegation (e.g. management of urban motorways, the policy of encouraging real estate investment, tourism, etc.)

## 2.2. In search of a new local balance

The last metropolitan elections by direct universal suffrage were combined with a recomposition of the local political system<sup>10</sup>, leading to a shift of majority in both Lyon and Greater Lyon in favour of a new ecologist and socialist team actively wanting to accomplish its programme. This upheaval then amplified the change in the nature of the metropolis and the expansion of its competences, which finally aroused strong resistance from some elected municipal officials to the new policies of Greater Lyon.

It is, in fact, from the creation of this metropolis that we must look for the fragilities of the system. Indeed, to move quickly and bring their project to fruition, G. Collomb, the mayor of Lyon and president of the urban community, and Mr. Mercier, the president of the Rhône department, agreed in secret, no other local elected official having been informed of their plan. Similarly, the elaboration of the legal status of “their” metropolis was done without any local consultation, the elected representatives of the municipalities of Greater Lyon being informed very indirectly of the ongoing negotiations, and waiting for the promulgation of the law to know its details (Chabrot, 2023, pp. 15-32). As a result, the project was not the subject of a real local consensus, chose very political institutional solutions, and the mayors felt trapped by this new community that deprives them of skills and competes with their legitimacy without providing them with visible compensation, especially with the appearance of the some radical policies of the new majority coming to offend them<sup>11</sup>, and with a new management team that seems to have much more dialogue with the inhabitants than with the mayors<sup>12</sup>.

A revolt was then set up, with opposition municipal elected officials using the press, judges, and the media to publicly oppose the metropolis’s decisions and denounce the authoritarianism of the new leadership team. Some municipalities have even announced their intention to leave this metropolis, a procedure that is legally difficult to implement, and a senatorial mission had to be created to study the situation and calm minds<sup>13</sup>.

Indeed, if the Metropolis of Lyon now has the financial, legal, and material means to implement its own will, its legitimacy directly competes with that of mayors and municipal councils who say they no longer find their place or are recognised within metropolitan institutions. Even local elected officials who are part of the new majority sometimes denounce the metropolis’ autism in terms of the development of their territories (roads, social housing, facilities, spatial planning, etc.)

It is necessary to know how to relativise these criticisms. They sometimes come from opposition political postures in a profound recomposition of the local political fabric where the newly elected want to make a name for themselves. In addition, mayors are already very present in the institutions, represented in the nine territorial conferences of mayors, which are discussed to increase their powers, particularly consultative, or in the metropolitan conference of mayors bringing

<sup>10</sup> Thus, the former mayor of Lyon and president of Greater Lyon, a socialist who became loyal to E. Macron, allied himself to retain his power with some elected representatives of the Right who were fighting him a few weeks before. On the Left, it is now the ecologist party that leads an alliance with other parties that have become a minority, such as the socialists and communists. In some constituencies, individual alliances may also have led to political paradoxes incomprehensible to voters. In general, we have finally witnessed a profound renewal of the political class in favour of younger elected officials from civil society.

<sup>11</sup> Bicycle lanes, cable cars, speed limits, pedestrian roads, and new tram lines (it is the metropolis that manages traffic and transport, and can impose its own solutions), etc. Even the implementation of a “low emission zone” pollutants (ZFE), imposed by law, has been accelerated by the new ecologist majority, leading to the faster ban in the next three years of thousands of the most polluting cars.

<sup>12</sup> If the majority in place claims to receive much more mayors and local elected officials than former leaders, municipal elected officials regularly complain in the press that they are not heard by the new ecologist and socialist majority. Conversely, never before have residents been so consulted, on speed limits or carpooling lanes of metropolitan motorways, on the ZFE, on the development of parks and squares or the city centre of Lyon, on water management, etc. Similarly, the metropolis’ websites and applications and its Development Council open to the civilian population have all been redesigned to facilitate this local participation.

<sup>13</sup> This senatorial mission published its report at mid-December 2022, choosing proposals that finally enforce the municipal authorities, not the metropolis one. To consult the report: <https://www.senat.fr/presse/cp20221207.html>

together the 58 leaders of the municipalities<sup>14</sup>. Finally, the old system also did not really give powers to elected municipal officials, where Greater Lyon was governed by a majority and by technical services that had very little dialogue with mayors, especially opposition mayors, as many testimonies confirm.

However, it is true that with the principle of free administration, the will of mayors can no longer prevent current metropolitan decisions, and two electoral legitimacies meet leaving little power to municipal leaders, with local voters as arbiters.

This system also has its advantages: the appearance of truly metropolitan projects that go beyond the short-term interests of mayors; the ability to decide effectively at the level of the metropolis allowing the real implementation of a programme validated by the voters; the irruption of the inhabitants in the life and the metropolitan choices<sup>15</sup>; the establishment of a system of powers/counter-powers imposing dialogue without preventing the decision; and, finally, the politicisation of metropolitan issues now under discussion in the public space and no longer reserved for discussions of corridors or assemblies.

However, a local society cannot be built on permanent conflicts between – structurally and in addition to political divisions – metropolis and municipalities, the president of Greater Lyon and mayors of peripheral municipalities, local elected officials and inhabitants. Institutions must be able to integrate these fractures into a dynamic that remains positive. The last word must undoubtedly go to the metropolis, having a better vision of the collective territory and its own interests, but the decision-making process must impose negotiation to prevent the consecration of an authoritarian and closed higher power. Should certain decisions, such as the budget or any investment of more than a certain amount, be reserved for qualified majority voting ensuring its support by a reinforced majority of the metropolitan council, including part of the opposition? Should we provide for mechanisms of rationalised parliamentarism at the local level (censorship, dissolution, forced vote of deliberations)? Should there be a suspensive veto for mayors' assemblies? Should the division of competences to limit the places of friction be reviewed? Should the autonomy of the intermediate levels between the municipalities and the metropolis be strengthened? Should all these authorities be merged into one, or at least the electoral districts and voting methods reviewed? Should the municipal and metropolitan elections which may have produced a lot of confusion in 2020 be decoupled?

Several solutions are possible. As we know, they can work as much as lead to new blockages. The obligation to obtain a reinforced majority for certain decisions may, for example, block any important policy if the opposition decides to reject *in principle* any project of the majority. The suspensive veto of mayors can lead to dubious compromises between metropolis and some mayors to obtain their support, to the detriment of a truly global vision of the policies to be pursued. The right of censorship or dissolution can lead to extreme media politicization on secondary issues. It is all about political culture and the willingness to pursue common goals.

However, what has changed in this local political game is still the consecration of the inhabitants as actors of the system, which shakes everything up. Now upstream during the elections, as well as downstream when choosing projects and their implementation, it is they who have the key to the decision and who must be consulted, in the name of a new conception of local democracy that can be called “domocracy” (from the Latin word “domus”: residence), which gives final power to the “inhabitants” and of which the Metropolis of Lyon perhaps represents the prototype of implementation<sup>16</sup>, whose improvement should be thought of rather than regretting its insoluble imperfections.

<sup>14</sup> After the last elections, only 24 mayors now sit on the council of the Metropolis (54 in 2014). It should also be noted that with the prohibition of multiple mandates, the president of the metropolis can no longer also be mayor of a municipality, whereas since its origin Greater Lyon was led by the mayor of Lyon.

<sup>15</sup> One of the great criticisms against the old system was that Greater Lyon, which had no legitimacy or democratic accountability to the voters, while it managed a budget of nearly 4 billion EUR taken largely from the incomes of residents and economic actors.

<sup>16</sup> The “domocracy” is based on the legitimacy of the inhabitants, the residents (from the Latin “domus”: residence, dwelling) to make decisions or to control the local elected officials they designate to implement their local general interest. On the question and on the institutional and political consequences it entails, see, for example, Chabrot 2002.

To provide a complete image of Lyon's metropolitan cooperation and its possible further evolution, it is worth mentioning the dynamic development of soft cooperation and planning (Allmendinger et al., 2015) on the larger territorial scale of the metropolitan region (inter-territoriality) (Vanier, 2010). The first recognition of the existence of the Lyon-Saint-Etienne metropolitan region was the creation of the association of the Lyon Urban Region (la Région urbaine de Lyon, RUL) in 1989. The Inter-Scot, created in 2004, is forging common land-use orientations and aligning public policies at the level of a metropolitan region (Thimonier-Rouzet, 2014). The Metropolitan Pole (Pôle Métropolitain), created in 2012 (Bariol-Mathais, 2017), one of 25 such public entities in France, has been a platform for political coordination and the definition of joint strategic actions for the six most important urban agglomerations<sup>17</sup> of the metropolitan region of Lyon and Saint-Etienne in terms of economic growth, innovation, research, tertiary education, culture, and spatial development. As a result, the empowerment of the metropolis at the level of Lyon's aggregation in terms of competencies, budgets, and democratic legitimacy goes in pairs with the emergence of several soft spaces of metropolitan dialogues and cooperation. The metropolitan governance system consisted of a set of different interdependent, crosscutting, and overlapping metropolitan cooperation and dialogue spaces, more and less institutionalised. A soft space of metropolitan dialogue can prepare the ground for the gradual emergence of the "harder spaces" provided with decision power. Nevertheless, transitioning from "soft" to "hard" is not the only appropriate direction.

### 3. The Metropolis of Lyon in the light of global metropolitan issues

Individual countries, and often individual metropolises, as in the case of Lyon, are working out their own paths, which results from the interaction of economic and administrative (management) effectiveness with the historicity (Touraine, 1973) of a given society, and thus of its foregoing territorial organisation, which is deeply rooted in the values, identities, and areal representation of its citizens. The adopted solutions are, therefore, not always optimal, but, rather, those that prove to be possible in the given time and circumstances. Despite wide differences in the paths of taken adaptation, comparative studies (Pyka, 2022) make it possible to identify certain basic regularities, which can also be applied to the case of Lyon, whose exceptional character among French metropolises must, however, still be emphasised. The adaptational paths taken in the process of metropolitanisation are, therefore, determined by, among other things, the degree of political autonomy of the local authorities, the role of the municipal leadership and its possible influence at the national level, and the role in the political agenda of the government of the "metropolis question" as an important developmental challenge.

#### 3.1. Lyon's metropolitan path in the comparative international perspective

Present-day France is an example of a nation that, despite unified structures and a reputation for centralisation, is marked by the strong position of the municipalities and the influence of political elites at the local level upon the central authority due to the prevalence of conjoined political mandates, including the phenomenon of mayors serving in the parliament (Lorrain, 1991; Pinson, 2010), until a law reform of 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2014, forbidding to be elected in national parliament and chief executive of local collectivity. In effect, despite the presence on the political agenda of the metropolis as an important direction for reform, what has been occurred in this regard is the emergence of simple public institutions of intermunicipal cooperation (EPCIs) as a substitute for territorial reform in a situation which, as mentioned previously, is marked by the inviolability of the municipalities and the defeat of efforts to combine them into larger units.

The situation differs significantly in nations with limited local government authorities' financial and political autonomy. This is, for example, the case in Canada, where the municipal units are, in a sense, products of the provincial governments, which significantly impact their competencies, e.g. in education and health care. The federal government's dominance over the local authorities

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<sup>17</sup> These are the agglomerations of Lyon, Saint-Etienne, Vienne, Porte de l'Isère, Villefranche-sur-Saône, and la Communauté de communes de l'est lyonnais (CCEL).

in effecting the empowerment of the metropolises in generating development processes paved the way for fundamental territorial reforms, which, under favourable political conditions, took the form of amalgamation of municipalities into new city-metropolises. This is what happened in 1998 when the provincial government of Ontario created the new city of Toronto (Boudreau & Keil 2006) and in 2000, when – by a decision made by the provincial government of Quebec – the municipalities of the island of Montreal were united into the new city of Montreal (Tomàs, 2012).

The commonalities described above can also be applied to Polish metropolitan regions. Although Polish local governing bodies certainly possess greater autonomy than their Canadian counterparts, they remain *de facto* increasingly dependent upon the central authority. The central government controls a significant majority of the funding for local authorities, and the share of their funding that is under their own control is declining as a result of a worsening economic situation and changes in the tax code that are prejudicial to local authority budgets. Moreover, the central government has tended to extend local authorities' responsibilities without increasing their funding. Unlike the situation in France, where mayors still influence in fact national powers even though they cannot be anymore elected at both levels, Polish local authorities are not able to influence the central government directly. In connection with the general ban on doubling electoral mandates, city mayors are not permitted to sit in the Polish parliament and, therefore, are unable to take part in shaping legislation that affects their cities. The relatively weak position of the local councils in relation to the central government can be associated with the marginalisation of the issue of metropolises in the overall policy agenda. This tendency became more marked with the accession to power of the present conservative government, whose electorate resides chiefly outside the major urban centres.

The observed trend indicates that in countries with weak municipalities, such as Canada, the metropolitan awareness of provincial and central political elite led to radical territorial reforms in the form of the fusion of municipalities into new bigger metropolitan cities. In the states, characterised by the strong position of local government (sitting in the parliament) and the awareness of the central political elite regarding the metropolitan issue, it may lead – like in France – to the development of a multitude of intercommunal structures in metropolitan areas that replace deep territorial reform. In Poland, a medium autonomy and the weak influence of municipalities on central government, combined with the marginalisation of the metropolitan issue, determined a very restrictive answer of the political system to metropolisation. In effect, after 15 years of discussion about the desired status of metropolitan regions, only one metropolis has been established, which was also connected with the setting of a population ceiling of two million. This is the GZM Metropolis, which came into existence on the basis of Bill 9.III.2017: For a metropolitan union in the Silesian voivodeship (Dz.U. 2017 poz. 730) (Pyka & Behr, 2019). The first years of operation of this sole Polish “institutionalised metropolis” have revealed the disfunction and limits of the adopted organisational model. In its current form, the GZM metropolitan union has not fulfilled expectations, and the upcoming local elections provide an occasion to discuss some revisions of the ways it has been structured and to seek inspiration from other countries.

In this context, the case of the Lyon Metropolis may offer some instructive lessons. The choice of the Lyon Metropolis as an interesting case for reflection on the evolution of the GZM Metropolis is dictated by several reasons. First of all, both of these metropolises are pilot projects in their respective countries. The Lyon Metropolis is France's only fully-fledged metropolitan local government unit (Galimberti, 2019). Its authorities are elected in direct elections in the metropolitan constituencies. This metropolis additionally absorbed the competencies of the department, taking over tasks in the field of social policy. Progressive solutions adopted in the Lyon Metropolis may indicate a development path for other French and European metropolises that can learn from its experience. The short history of GZM caused numerous comments mainly related to the statutory competencies of GZM, the composition of its governance body, and decision-making. The above issues are debated at the political and academic levels. Discourse on creating a “one city” and the direct election of the authorities of the GZM Metropolis encouraged the recent drafts of the new and amended Act on GZM Metropolis, which is now being discussed at regional and national levels.



### 3.2. The evolution of the GZM Metropolis in the light of the experiences of the Lyon Metropolis – a search for inspiration

Taking account of the ways in which the metropolises analysed herein have emerged, as described above, it is clear that they are quite revolutionary in comparison to the existing forms of local government in their respective countries, though they also represent elements in a broader trend of the governmental evolutionary adaptation process to the metropolitanisation. In relation to the French situation, the Polish one is distinguished most markedly by a lack of solid support for the empowerment of metropolises on the part of the central government, which has, on the contrary, tried to impede this process. As a result, despite the existence in Poland of seven notable metropolitan areas, only the Upper Silesian conurbation, marked by the highest level of administrative fragmentation, has received the formal status of metropolis (Pyka, 2018). However, this restrictive approach of the state results in inconsistency in the institutional architecture adopted in this metropolis. The legislature has not clearly addressed the question of what place the metropolitan union should occupy in the territorial administration system.

The GZM Metropolis is not a self-government territorial unit, but as a metropolitan union, it possesses some of its characteristics. In the first place, the union has competencies guaranteed in its establishing legislation, which it executes in its own name and responsibility. It also possesses legal personhood, and its autonomy is judicially protected. Its competencies include: spatial organisation; the social and economic development of the territory included in the union; public transit, including passenger vehicles serving a metropolitan network and participation in the planning of arterial roads; and the promotion of the union itself (Art. 12, Dz. U. 2017 poz. 730). The metropolitan union furthermore possesses a guaranteed income amounting to a 5% share of tax revenues from natural persons within the area of the union. However, the union's competencies are not taken over from the administrative level of the municipality (lack of transfer), but, instead, overlap with them. Moreover, their vague formulation and the absence of a provision of general competency have led to their increasingly narrow interpretation by oversight authorities, which frequently question the initiatives of GZM, especially in regard to its competencies in the area of socioeconomic development.

As a consequence, the GZM Metropolis in its present form has been restricted to the level of a technical organisation that limits its own role to that of a supplementary and supporting institution for municipalities. At the present time, the metropolitan union lacks real political agency and autonomy. It does not have the ability to take an active role in the creation and expansion of life chances for the region's inhabitants, which should result from its competencies in the area of social and economic development<sup>18</sup>. In the present situation, the GZM Metropolis is also not able to tackle the key challenges of combatting negative demographic trends (depopulation), to handle the need to increase the quality of human capital and develop metropolitan functions, to resist uncontrolled suburbanisation, to adapt to climate change, and to increase the ability to face further crises and shocks (resilience).

Drawing upon the experience of Lyon, which, having inherited the competencies of the *département*, is able to exercise influence in both the economic and the social spheres linked in local policies, it seems that the GZM Metropolis could go in that direction. The Metropolis in this case could, to a degree, evolve from a technostructure into *quasi* self-government territorial unit by extending its catalogue of competencies into other areas (e.g. education and health care). In this case, it would be necessary to identify precisely the union's competencies in the areas of social and economic development so that supervisory authorities do not block initiatives in these areas and that the actions of the GZM Metropolis in these critical domains would be effective.

Although the GZM Metropolis possesses its own funding sources, its officers are not chosen by direct popular vote, as is the case with the representatives of others self-government territorial units. The metropolitan union is governed, rather, by a manager without democratic legitimacy being selected by the leaders of the executives of the member municipalities ("council-manager form"

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<sup>18</sup> Social development is understood here according to the usage of Amartya Sen, i.e. as a broad process of the expansion of human possibilities, in which people are able to exercise their freedom (Sen, 1999, p. 315).

according to Mouritzen and Svava (2002)<sup>19</sup>, who take turns sitting in the deliberative body, i.e. in the assembly of the metropolitan union. The least effective, however, turned out to be the system of so-called double majority (i.e. of municipalities and the population), which was adopted as a basic decision-making principle. It may originally have appeared that such a system would guarantee an equilibrium between the core of the metropolitan area (13 urban municipalities) and the peripheral parts of the area (13 rural municipalities and 2 of mixed denomination). It soon turned out, however, that this mechanism could result in the large municipalities of the urban core being held hostage in policy decisions by the smaller localities of the periphery, which, viewing policy decisions through the lens of their own interests, block various key projects affecting the centre of the Metropolis. This phenomenon is also associated with a generally low level of social capital and mutual trust among the local elites of the municipalities, particularly the so-called rural ones, which did not participate in the first efforts at metropolitan cooperation that occurred in the core metropolitan area in 2007<sup>20</sup>. This makes it difficult for projects to be developed on the scale of the entire metropolitan area and favours thinking in ways centred upon the interests of individual municipalities.

In this regard, the experience of the Lyon Metropolis also represents a potential source of applicable solutions. One way to break the decision-making impasse that has afflicted the GZM Metropolis could be to provide for the direct election of, at a minimum, the chief executive of the metropolitan union. Ultimately, the selection of the metropolitan councillors could also take the form of direct election in the metropolitan (though not municipal) electoral districts, as long as there were guarantees that the elected representatives of the member municipalities would have representation in the power structure of the Metropolis. Relinquishing the principle of "double majority" would also seem to be indicated; this could be replaced by a system proportionately tying the number of representatives in the metropolitan assembly to the population of the respective municipalities, on the condition that each municipality would have at least one representative in the assembly. The evolution of the status of the GZM Metropolis towards being a self-government territorial unit will mean reconfiguring the structure of power and political interests in the local governments of the metropolitan area and the entire region. Nevertheless, development at the metropolitan political level presents a chance for concrete discussion and activity on the scale of the whole metropolitan area. This would undoubtedly result in a period of organisational and political turbulence. However, limiting the role of the GZM Metropolis to that of a technostucture will not allow it to grapple with the most important challenges facing the region, among them the increase in the quality and development of its human capital and the life prospects of its inhabitants.

The example of the Lyon Metropolis is also quite instructive with regard to strategies for introducing more significant reforms, including of territorial boundaries, that might disturb political relations and possibly the identity and social representation of the inhabitants of existing territorial units. Although the administrative fragmentation of the core of the GZM Metropolis is dysfunctional, a single fusion of its 13 member cities would seem to be impossible if for no other causes than the old cultural and historical divisions that have long distinguished them. The examples of Lyon demonstrates that significant territorial reforms cannot take place behind a veil of ignorance, concealing them from those participants – local authorities and populations – who will be directly affected by them. Therefore, any anticipated fusion of municipalities in the core of the GZM Metropolis, if it is going to be afforded popular consent, should be executed in small steps, of which the first one should refer to these municipalities that have already developed functional and sociocultural linkages.

Above all, it must be remembered that the present geographical area of the GZM Metropolis is the result of a given political situation and its boundaries. Therefore, it should not be considered as a definitive, exclusive demarcation, separating municipalities and their residents into those who

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<sup>19</sup> Depending on whether the membership unit has the status of city, urban municipality or rural municipality, these are, respectively, City Mayors, Town Mayors, and Village Mayors, which are chosen in direct general elections.

<sup>20</sup> Starting in 2007, 14 municipalities in the metropolitan area were gathered together as the Silesian Metropolis, which was an interurban union operating on general principles, without its own source of funding or legislatively guaranteed competencies. The legislation of 2017 established the GZM Metropolis (Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolia), numbering 41 municipalities and associated structures, in place of the Silesian Metropolis.

are within it and those who are outside it. Metropolises are rather “new territorialities” (Retaille, 2009), with mutable and evolving geographies determined in each instance by the horizons of their activities and functions. Anticipating the development of the GZM Metropolis should build on concentric circles that combine the formally rigid administrative borders of the metropolitan union with processes of fusing municipalities in the core area and the creation of territorial partnerships beyond its present boundaries, taking the form of “soft planning spaces” (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009). In the case of the GZM Metropolis, it also might be necessary to create at least two additional geographical units of “metropolitan territorial dialogue”<sup>21</sup>. The first one would lead to increased cooperation with the adjacent Kraków metropolitan area to create a metropolitan network resembling the pattern of the current cooperation between the Lyon Metropolis and the Metropolis of Saint-Étienne. The second would create a territorial dialogue between the GZM Metropolis and surrounding municipalities, which would support cooperation on the urban-rural continuum and foment thinking along the lines of “common metropolitan interests.” Here again, the example of the Lyon Metropolis can be inspiring. Despite its modest geographical extent, this metropolis has developed interesting and constructive inter-territorial cooperation at several levels, in the Inter-SCOT and Metropolitan Pole, mentioned in part 1.2.

#### 4. Conclusions

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the process of the adaptation of states and societies to the phenomenon of metropolitanisation is one that is long-term and evolutionary. Changes that are more radical in nature, if they are carried out without respect for the views of the various actors who are engaged in the process and affected by it, may evoke a counterreaction. Sometimes it seems that upon taking three steps forward, it becomes necessary to take one or two steps back, as, for example, occurred in Montreal with the de-integration of the newly agglomerated city of Montreal (Drouilly & Gagnon, 2005). It cannot be excluded that the metropolitan solutions undertaken in Lyon at present will also undergo revision or modifications in the direction of renewed importance of the municipalities, though this is certainly not inevitable. The process of the institutional and political emergence of metropolis is, therefore, problematic insofar as it represents an operation carried out upon the living social and political tissue of an urban area, which, as with a human patient, can result in reactions and side effects. By this same analogy, transplants can involve even greater risks, by which we are speaking of the importation of whole systems or structures from one metropolitan region to another, especially when this occurs in the international context. Every metropolitan region is working out its own path towards empowerment, a path that results from the influence of many factors, including, as described above, the role of municipal authorities in the existing political structure, the relation of local leaders to the central authority, and the overall attitude of the state towards the phenomenon of metropolitanisation. Likewise, exerting influence on the process is the level of social capital of the municipal elites (Nelles & Wolfe, 2022) and the readiness of inhabitants and political leaders of the region to take steps towards integration.

The foregoing considerations do not negate, however, the legitimacy of comparative studies. Although the importation of ready-made solutions from one metropolitan region to another may be fraught with difficulty, the observation of the trajectory of metropolises that are experimenting with various paths of development can present valuable sources of insight into the possible directions to be followed in the development processes of other metropolises. The recent modifications in the governing statute and function of the Lyon Metropolis constitutes a kind of laboratory and a mine of information for metropolitan regions that are presently at an earlier stage of administrative empowerment. It is the case with the GZM Metropolis, which, as stated above, has, in its present form, reached the terminus of its effective competence as a technostructure that plays a supplementary role in assisting the functioning of the member municipalities. As a consequence, the activities of the first and – for now – only administrative metropolis in Poland are centred to a large extent on

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<sup>21</sup> “Territorial dialogue” may be defined as all forms of information exchange, arrangement, and agreement between actors at various levels of local government who are engaged in territorial planning with regard to issues that constitute common objects of interest and concern.

the present rather than the future, on fixing up rather than creating, and a “project approach” and operationality take precedence over vision. In order to successfully meet expectations and face the challenges that confront Poland’s largest urban conurbation, the GZM Metropolis should be evolving towards being a metropolitan self-government unit for better efficiency and as “local society”, which is capable of playing an active role in the design of development trends in its region. This will require, however, the strengthening of its competencies, the enhancing of its democratic mandate, and the improvement of its decision-making processes. The existing model of selection of its leaders, the manner of undertaking decisions, and the organisation has shown itself to be ineffective. As a result of these deficits, the relations between the constituent authorities have more a bilateral than a multilateral dimension, and a transactional spirit dominates their interaction, rather than one of shared metropolitan interest. This situates the GZM Metropolis in a supplementary and supportive position to the municipalities and gives it a role that is merely techno-administrative rather than political, in which it is unable to undertake measures that are crucial for metropolitan development (Czornik et al., 2023). In this light, the example of the Lyon Metropolis is a source of valuable lessons, as it provides arguments for a more effective institutional model by which the GZM Metropolis could assume the form of a fully empowered and effective territorial authority at the metropolitan level.

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