The question of the government of large urban areas has once again been placed on the agenda of western countries by the reintroduction, since the end of the 1980s, of numerous experiments in the constitution of metropolitan governments. Nonetheless, it would seem that the matter needs a different approach to that of the 1960s and 1970s, that other boom period for metropolitan governments. The spatial extension of urban areas, the development of new information and communication technologies, the crisis of the welfare state — financial certainly, but also intellectual in its inability to produce relevant policies with which to tackle the problems which have arisen — European integration and ‘globalization’ present the question of metropolitan government in a new light. On the one hand, these elements establish that the search for metropolitan authorities is a matter of certain territories finding the necessary tools to provide them with the government structures which will, in the long term, arm them better than others to face and benefit from these developments. On the other, such changes mean that new actors must be introduced (certain local authorities, associations, the business community, for example) and mobilized if area-wide governmental structures are to be set up.

These developments involve more complex systems of actors, and different forms of action, based on flexibility, partnership and voluntary participation. Governance is a popular term today, used in both the academic literature and the media to describe the systems of actors (Le Galès, 1995a; Harding, 1994) as well as the new forms of public action (Dente, 1990). In this article, the term ‘governance’ is used to refer to the new forms of public action, presented by the supporters of metropolitan governments as necessary ingredients for the success of current experiments. Nonetheless, whilst investigating the ‘renewal’ of metropolitan governments through the way in which they are constituted, we have not forgotten that they remain closely linked to the systems of actors by virtue of the simple fact that the production of the actor and the action are concomitant. In addition, it is the actors who produce the arguments presenting current experiments as a success because they have adopted a radically different approach to that used in the past. The ‘top down’ approach characteristic of a good many previous attempts has been abandoned in favour of a new idea of the institution, which considers it to be the result of a process that brings into play the ingredients of ‘good governance’ directed towards achieving a consensus between the principal actors on the ‘common’ objectives. These arguments purporting to demonstrate the success of recent action should, however, be compared to the reality, which means subjecting it to a critical examination, with the emphasis on the ideological dimension of the process of

1 Metropolitan government, area-wide authority, metropolitan authority, metropolitan structure etc. have been used as equivalent expressions in this article.
metropolitan government building and, consequently, on the potential conflicts and obstacles which metropolitan government cannot resolve by magic. As such, the purpose of this article is, to a certain extent, to present a critique of the idea of governance, often presented as normative and a-conflictive.

We will tackle this question in two stages. Firstly, we will present the theoretical arguments behind experiments in metropolitan government in the 1960s and 1970s and compare them to practices in the various countries. Secondly, we will consider current experiments and present the most innovative, whilst examining, with a critical eye, the legitimization arguments which have accompanied them.

**Metropolitan government: theoretical arguments and experiments**

The expression ‘metropolitan government’ generally refers to a structure or institutional arrangements for the government of metropolitan areas. In its purest form, which might be termed the ‘metropolitan model’ (Sharpe, 1995), this structure has four main characteristics: (1) strong political legitimacy, obtained by the direct election of its political representatives; (2) meaningful autonomy from both ‘senior governments’ and basic local authorities, acquired as a result of adequate financial and human resources; (3) wide-ranging jurisdiction; and (4) ‘relevant’ territorial cover, consisting, roughly speaking, of the functional urban area. But on what is the constitution of such a model based, and how has it been arrived at?

**Metropolitan governments: why and how?**

*Why is metropolitan government necessary? A political choice*

The main argument in favour of the constitution of metropolitan governments has long been based on the need to make the urban institutional system correspond to the economic and social development of cities. A significant part of the literature3 on the question states that large units of government are more efficient in the production of a certain number of services because they can take advantage of the economies of scale that a vast territory and large population afford them. This is not the case with basic local authorities, which are usually smaller. Moreover, very many authors find it preferable that services provided for a population be paid for by that same population. In addition, they say, large structures allow resources to be better distributed within the territory, and their planning capability makes the localization of facilities, activities and housing more harmonious.

Political and social arguments do not seem to be to the fore in the justification of the constitution of metropolitan governments. For example, although the idea of a metropolitan community appeared as early as the late 1960s in the United States (Wood, 1958), the argument that the existence of such a community should be reflected in the institutional system has rarely been expressed. On the other hand, the argument that large structures are more democratic because they offer fewer opportunities for a small group to take control (since they are more open to the political game), and the argument that political participation increases in relation to the power of local government (Sharpe, 1988), are advanced more often.

All these statements, which are based on theory, have rarely been verified empirically (Keating, 1994; Newton, 1982). The supporters of public choice have not hesitated to remind supporters of the ‘metropolitan model’ of this. They have, for example,

2 Basic local authorities: in this article, ‘basic’ refers to the first tier of local government structure, such as districts in England, communes in France, Gemeinde in Germany, or municipalities in the USA.

3 The literature is plentiful. For an analytical summary of this, the interested reader may refer to Keating (1994), Lefèvre (1993a) and Newton (1982).
highlighted the difficulties of measuring economies of scale after setting up an area-wide structure of government; they have demonstrated the possibility of taking advantage of existing structures without recourse to such a heavy institutional form and have insisted on horizontal cooperation between local authorities as a substitute for metropolitan government. Some have criticized the undemocratic nature of the latter, drawing attention to the distance between local authorities and their citizens which results in the latter losing control of their elected representatives. As early as the 1960s, the public choice school replied to the American reformers’ principal economic and philosophical arguments in favour of the ‘metropolitan model’ (Ostrom et al., 1961). They denounced the monopoly of metropolitan governments in many services because such a situation favours neither innovation nor a reduction in production costs. Moreover, basing their arguments on Tiebout’s model (1956), they accused the ‘metropolitan model’ of not allowing individuals a free choice of localization. In a system with a single unit of government, residents cannot ‘vote with their feet’. Unhappy with the ‘basket of services’ offered them, they cannot take up residence within another government structure. For the supporters of public choice, institutional fragmentation and smallness are essential elements in maintaining competition; they alone permit individual choice. The organization of the American territory, in particular of its cities, is a reflection of this preference and as such should be maintained. Consequently, they suggest a different politico-institutional organization of cities, founded on a large number of government units, preferably single purpose. To provide public goods which justify economies of scale they suggest separating production and provision, since the former can be carried out by the local authority, other government structures or private companies, as appropriate. Finally, they count on voluntary cooperation between public authorities to meet the legitimate needs of the population that one town alone may not be able to satisfy.

It would be fruitless to look for objectivity in the two models put forward, because at base, they stem from different values and principles regarding the role and functions that a government unit should fulfill. Whilst certain supporters of the ‘metropolitan model’ highlight the need for an overall view of the urban area and the rejection of institutional forms which favour differentiation, indeed, social segregation (DeHoog et al., 1991; Lyons and Lowery, 1989; Williams, 1971; Wood, 1958) and insist on values such as solidarity and social equality, the public choice school defends the individual’s right to choose, the accessibility and accountability of political representatives, and competition. Economic and political arguments overlap here with the two traditional functions of local government: the role of service provider, and the more social and political role of representing a community (Sharpe, 1988).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the question of urban government reforms was presented as a search for correspondence between the functional territory (the urban area) and the institutional territory (the existing local government structure). Supporters of public choice pointed out the futility of such a search because there is no one functional territory, but on the contrary, a multiplicity of functional territories, depending on the goods or services under consideration. They maintain that there is no reference functional territory to which the institutional organization should adapt. This argument, pertinent though it may be, remains rooted in economic considerations and ignores, in part, the more political and social elements put forward by the reformers. Although it is true that in the 1960s and 1970s, the idea of functional territory (ies) referred mainly to economic aspects (efficiency in service provision was one of the elements which made the institutional reorganization of urban areas necessary), the idea is progressively taking on a new meaning. Admittedly, it is difficult to circumscribe the urban space, to fix limits to the urban area (Pumain, 1993), but it remains nonetheless true that a territory which may be termed ‘functional’ does exist, but it is not that of services and economic activities. It is

4 The name given to the supporters of the metropolitan model in the US.
similar in nature to the community identified by R. Wood, held together by a social cement which is being dangerously eroded today. Although it would seem incorrect to reduce the metropolis to a territory of commuting patterns, it is equally questionable to state that a metropolitan territory no longer exists. It is just that today, to a greater extent than yesterday, the metropolitan territory appears as a social construct, admittedly partly dependent on economic and technological factors, but not limited to these. And it is to this territory that current experiments in ‘metropolitan model’ renewal are directed.

The elements of metropolitan government: size, autonomy, competences and legitimacy

Although the idea of the ‘metropolitan model’ appears relatively simple, its implementation has proved more delicate. For the American reformers, and later, for supporters of the modernization of the institutional structure of the territory, fragmentation was the key problem. The term ‘fragmentation’ implies that there are too many local government units. Their number therefore had to be reduced, either by merger or by consolidation. The reduction in the number of local authorities was firstly a matter of their size, based, without any real experimental analysis, on an optimum dimension to be achieved. The Redcliffe-Maud Royal Commission ‘prescribed’ a threshold of 250,000 inhabitants, beyond which local authorities would not be viable. In all western countries, reforms to achieve the optimum size were implemented. Most of the time, mergers proved difficult and it was more a question of recomposing structures, either over the national territory as a whole, or in the largest cities only.

The question of the number of local government units generally goes hand in hand with the fragmentation of politico-institutional power resulting from the single-purposiveness of a certain number of local governments. The American example is an excellent illustration of this problem, with the proliferation in this period of the special district, a cooperation structure which, since it was single purpose in character, contributed largely to the multiplication of public authorities over a single territory. But in practice at least, the reduction of the number of local authorities did not extend to the suppression of all the basic structures making up the urban area and their replacement by a metropolitan authority. Although in certain cases basic local governments remained intact, most of the time they were reorganized and a metropolitan institution covering the urban area was added at a level above them.

Reducing the number of local governments is, however, not enough for the ‘metropolitan model’ to become a reality. Other transformations must be applied. The new structures must be powerful, autonomous and legitimate, since these three characteristics of the ‘model’ are closely linked. Power depends on the responsibilities the metropolitan structure enjoys as well as the financial means attributed to it. With regard to financial resources, no rules prevail, except the recognized need for them to dispose of their own resources. With regard to competences, the rule — explicit or implicit — grants authority to metropolitan institutions in ‘metropolitan’ affairs. In no particular order the latter are generally considered to be strategic territorial planning, the management of technical networks (transport, water, sewage and waste disposal), firefighting, and sometimes culture. Autonomy depends on the capacity of metropolitan governments to implement policies relative to their spheres of authority in the territories they control. If specific financial resources are necessary to do so, considerable human and technical resources must be added. Finally, metropolitan governments need political legitimacy if the actions they take are to be accepted and applicable to all, and first and foremost to the basic local authorities. The direct election of their executives by direct universal suffrage is thus considered an essential element in this legitimacy. This being

so, a basic question must be raised which determines the success or otherwise of experiments in metropolitan government: what institution, what level of authority, should hold the power in the metropolis? In this respect, various countries have adopted different approaches without ever really settling this thorny problem.

The implementation of metropolitan governments: a long series of disappointing experiments

The institutional arrangements which constitute the metropolitan governments set up so far can be placed in one of two categories: supra-municipal or intermunicipal. These categories correspond to very different principles and modalities as regards the power given to the metropolitan authority, without these being in any way determinant in the failures and shortcomings which followed.

Supra-municipality and intermunicipality in metropolitan government

Supra-municipality is constitutive of the purest type of ‘metropolitan model’ such as we have briefly presented it: direct political legitimacy, definite financial autonomy and multiple powers exercised over a relevant functional territory are the characteristics of supra-municipal experiments. Intermunicipality, on the other hand, groups together less complete forms. Firstly, the political legitimacy of the intermunicipal structures of government rests with the member (basic) authorities; it is they who are represented on the metropolitan councils. Secondly, intermunicipal structures rarely have financial autonomy, their resources deriving generally from the member authorities and from subsidies granted by the higher levels. As for their competences and the territory over which they exercise them, there does not seem to be a significant difference with more integrated forms of supra-municipality. In each case, we are dealing with two-tier arrangements because the basic local authorities have never been completely eliminated. The first tier, the smallest, is made up of these same authorities (communes, municipalities, districts, towns, municipios, gemeinde etc.) and the second becomes identified with the metropolitan structure itself, which holds a greater or lesser degree of power.

All the experiments in metropolitan government are situated between these two extreme modalities, to such an extent that it is sometimes difficult to place them in one category or another, since notwithstanding their ever-possible evolution from intermunicipality to supra-municipality (more rarely in the other direction), they can also, at the time of their creation, borrow elements from both (for example, they may have direct political legitimacy but very few sectoral powers and an insignificant source of revenue).

The English metropolitan counties established in the principal urban areas by the 1972 Act (with the exception of Greater London which had an area-wide political structure, the Greater London Council, as early as 1963) represent one of the most complete experiments of the pure ‘metropolitan model’. In fact, in the six largest urban areas, metropolitan authorities with directly elected representatives were constituted, with many ‘environmental’ powers and their own tax system (the precept). Nonetheless, the territories they administered seem singularly narrow in comparison to those suggested by the Royal Commission (Redcliffe-Maud and Wood, 1974) and the powers granted them clashed with those of the basic authorities, the districts, who viewed the birth of these area-wide structures unfavourably. In many cases, conflicts between the two levels arose (over planning, highway management and public transport). The history of the English metropolitan counties ended in 1986 when the Conservative Government abolished them and replaced them with ad hoc structures for a small number of services. The experiment had lasted ten years.

7 Probably more representative of the metropolitan model, but at the same time less well-known and fewer were the Scottish Regions, notably Strathclyde (Glasgow), created by the 1974 Act and abolished in 1995.
Nowhere else could similar structures be found. In 1964 in the Netherlands, the Rijmond or Greater Rotterdam authority was constituted. Although it had directly elected representatives, this institution possessed few powers (strategic planning, the environment). It was abolished in 1985. In Spain, the Franco Government created the Metropolitan Corporation of Barcelona in 1974 (CMB). The democratization of the regime led to the coming to power of a metropolitan council composed partly of representatives elected by the metropolitan population. The CMB disappeared in 1987.

In actual fact, intermunicipality was the most common mode of constituting a metropolitan structure. As early as 1954, for example, the Metro Toronto was created in Canada, whose council was made up of the mayors of the urban area’s 13 municipalities. Metro Toronto has extensive powers (planning, water management, sewage, waste disposal, highways and public transport). Still in existence, this structure has evolved towards supra-municipal forms and has become one of the most powerful metropolitan governments (Feldman, 1995). Several years later in 1970, the agglomeration of Montreal saw the introduction of an Urban Community (CUM) whose elected representatives were drawn from the 27 municipalities in the urban area. While in principle possessing very many powers, in practice the CUM has very few (planning, water, police and fire-fighting) as a result of the municipalities’ reluctance to give up their powers (Stancton, 1995). The CUM, which today only covers rather less than 60% of the metropolitan population, remains, in fact, dominated by the suburban municipalities. In France, ‘communautés urbaines’ (urban communities) were created in 1966 in 4 major cities (Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon and Strasbourg). These are structures with indirectly elected representatives. They have their own tax system and a great many powers (planning, technical networks and housing), but in actual fact, the French urban communities practise a ‘sprinkler’ policy (the allocation of funds which respect the political and demographic balance) and the municipalities have remained masters of their territory (the community never imposes action). They are not true metropolitan governments because they are not autonomous from the member municipalities (Sorbets, 1983) and the territories they administer, decided in the 1960s, do not represent more than part of the actual metropolitan area.

It is in the United States that the public choice school has been most successful.8 With very few exceptions, most of the American metropolises have not been the scene of politico-institutional upheavals of the type just described. More recently, the ideas of this school were presented as models (ACIR, 1992; 1988; 1987) at a time when the pressures exercised by the Federal Administrations in the 1960s and 1970s to create area-wide structures were lessening and disappearing. The American metropolises are, in fact, covered by single-purpose governmental structures, called special districts, which are truly autonomous local governments, responsible to a great degree for the politico-institutional fragmentation (Lefèvre, 1992), as well as municipalities which enjoy true autonomy as a result of home rule. However, the several attempts at constructing metropolitan governments in the 1970s have left their mark, despite the many failures of consolidation, annexation and merger. Three areas today carry a torch for the reformers’ ideas, even if the concrete results are still far removed from the ideal metropolitan model. Seattle, Portland and Saint Paul-Minneapolis all possess metropolitan authorities which resemble multi-purpose special districts and which have increased their powers since their introduction. The District of Portland even has directly elected representatives. But these areas seem to be exceptions.

Italy is the country which has proved to be most refractory to the metropolitan model to the extent that no agglomeration today has a structure of government capable of taking charge of even the least conflictive of sectors, such as strategic planning. Admittedly, there are the consorzi, a type of intermunicipal single-purpose association which manages water, sewage and in certain cases, public transport, but like the

8 With the exception, of course, of the British example with the abolition of the metropolitan counties.
American special districts and the French SIVU (single purpose joint authority), these establishments, by virtue of their single purposiveness, contribute to the fragmentation of the urban space, including within their own sector. For example, the Milan metropolitan area has at least 8 consorzi in the sewage sector! However, unlike in the United States, very many attempts to constitute metropolitan governments have been made in Italy (Lefèvre, 1993b) but these have come to nothing since they were carried out in a legal vacuum. This was the case in particular with the comprensori, planning bodies which in certain cases were responsible for services management at infra-regional level, that were introduced by most of the regions in the 1970s and were brought to an end at the beginning of the 1980s. This situation, which resulted in the refusal to consider the new structures as local authorities in their own right, stemmed from the inability of the local political system to produce a ‘capacity to govern’ at metropolitan level. Consequently, Italian cities had difficulty producing public policies, let alone institutional policies. Urban public action has thus been directed towards dealing individually with problems, which has meant a sectoral and functional approach (transport, housing and education for example) on limited portions of the urban territory, an approach which is very well summed up in the expression ‘metropoli per progetti’ (Dente et al., 1990).

Reasons for the failures
Two elements have had an adverse effect in the experiments presented above. On the one hand, metropolitan governments found themselves faced with problems of legitimacy which were crucial for their future. On the other, they were generally constituted in an authoritarian manner, which raises the question of the way in which the metropolitan model should be implemented.

The legitimacy of metropolitan governments, whatever the form chosen, rests, as we have seen, on foundations which are essentially functional (efficiency, economies of scale etc.). However, local authorities are only legitimate if the population recognizes itself in them and identifies with them, in other words because their legitimacy is above all based on political, psychological and social elements constructed over a period of time. These elements were lacking in the metropolitan governments and they found themselves confronted with three actors (local governments, pressure groups and populations) who did not recognize their legitimacy.

Existing local governments have always looked unfavourably upon the appearance of new autonomous and powerful political structures in a given territorial organization because this would call into question the authority and legitimacy of the existing system. Intermunicipality has been a way of resolving this problem in part, because it avoids conflicts of authority and legitimacy, since the latter generally rests with the basic local authorities. The other side of the coin is the weakness of the metropolitan governments. In the United States and in Italy, for example, local authorities have regularly opposed the creation of metropolitan institutions, either individually or through their national associations. In France, they have done everything possible to prevent the metropolitan structures set up by the law from becoming real local governments and have strongly opposed the direct election of their representatives. Here, as in Italy, decentralization has been largely in favour of existing local governents rather than area-wide authorities. In the United Kingdom, the metropolitan counties had to suffer the revolt of the former county-boroughs and cities (Wood, 1976). Everywhere, the legitimacy of metropolitan governments has depended on the capacity of central government to hold firm in the face of resistance from the local political system (Lefèvre 1993a).

Pressure groups and interest groups (parties, associations, the church and consular bodies) have also often considered territorial reorganization problematic because they are structured on another scale to that of the urban area (smaller, like the municipality or bigger, like the province or the département). The case of the political parties is perhaps
more significant. Bruno Dente (1988) has shown that in certain situations, such as that which exists in Italy, the political legitimacy of the parties was based largely on clientelist relationships. In this context, institutional fragmentation is necessary to allow the greatest possible number of parties to be represented. Thus any reform which aims to reduce this fragmentation calls into question partisan legitimacy and as such, must be resisted.

Last but not least, it is the populations themselves who do not recognize the constituted metropolitan governments as legitimate. Most of the time they do not recognize them because, since metropolitan authorities are based on a functional legitimacy, they do not feel the need to address them. On the one hand, the populations do not know what the powers of the metropolitan structures are, and on the other, when these structures are intermunicipal in form, they cannot promote themselves if they are to avoid a conflict of political legitimacy with the basic local authorities. Unrecognized by their inhabitants, the metropolitan governments consequently have great difficulty in mobilizing them when they are discredited (Leach et al., 1991).

But over and above problems of political legitimacy, there is the question of the constitution process of metropolitan governments. In actual fact, agglomeration structures have very often been set up in an authoritarian manner. This was the case with the French urban communities and British metropolitan counties, and the Metropolitan Corporation of Barcelona. The imposition of these metropolitan governments on the local actors did not encourage their acceptance and they were often considered as institutional products, manufactured entirely from the outside. As such, it seemed justifiable to try either to make them disappear, or to limit their powers as much as possible. This situation was also true for less integrated structures with fewer powers, such as the Rotterdam OOR, the Montreal Community and the Greater Copenhagen Council, to the extent that they often came into the world by a ‘forceps delivery’, which naturally left scars in the relationships between the local actors and the new institution.

With the exception of the federal states and above all, the United States, the introduction of metropolitan governments in the 1960s and 1970s was undertaken in a manner that can only be described as rigid, without taking local particularities into account. The legislation was usually national and determined the territories, competences and forms of government of all the metropolises. It was a monolithic idea of the government of cities which left the local actors little room for manoeuvre and gained its legitimacy by forming part of the reforms carried out, for the most part, by a central welfare state. The 1990s will radically shake these certainties and transform approaches to urban government.

Metropolitan governments and metropolitan governance: a ‘trompe l’œil’ success story?

The renaissance of metropolitan governments in the 1990s owes much to a difference in approach. Although the urban and international context has changed, ideas on the establishment of metropolitan authorities have now undergone a radical transformation, notably because they have learnt from past mistakes. The future of experiments currently in progress is nonetheless uncertain, because metropolitan governance is insufficient for solving the problems, old and new, which beset collective action in this sphere.

The renaissance of metropolitan governments in the 1990s: a success story linked to new forms of public action

Whilst the ten-year period 1980–90 confirmed the sinking or decline of the metropolitan model in certain countries, the years which followed saw experiments and projects for
area-wide institutions reappear. These seemed destined for greater success than their predecessors as a result of new ideas as to their design and implementation. 9

The renaissance of metropolitan governments
In Italy, first of all, the città metropolitane (metropolitan cities), resulting from Act 142 (1990) and which had not progressed since this date, have been rejuvenated by the Bologna experiment — in particular, the agreement signed in 1994 between the municipalities of the Province of Bologna — which has served as a model for the Rome, Turin, Genoa and Venice agglomerations (Provincia di Bologna, 1994a). In France, the 1992 Act on the administration of the territory of the Republic and the 1995 Act on regional planning adapted metropolitan government to today’s tastes with the creation of communautés de communes (communities of towns) and communautés de villes (communities of cities), 10 and immediately raised the question of the direct election of the councils of the area-wide structures. In the Netherlands, seven metropolitan regions have been invited by central government to think about the reorganization of their institutional system. The Rotterdam region has made the most progress because, following the constitution in 1990 of the OOR (Overlegorgaan Rijnmondgemeenten), a local coordination structure, a draft Bill is today being discussed which aims to constitute a real metropolitan authority for Greater Rotterdam (Toonen, 1996). In Germany, the Regional Community of Stuttgart (Verband region Stuttgart) was constituted in 1994 to include 179 municipalities and five kreise, and represents more than two million inhabitants. This structure has directly elected representatives and responsibility for a certain number of important services (strategic planning, public transport, waste management and economic development) (Hoffman-Martinot, 1994). In Spain, various types of structure are being developed to cover Greater Barcelona, Greater Madrid and Greater Valencia. These structures are limited to associations of municipalities (mancommunitat) or placed directly under the control of the autonomous communities (the regional tier) (Provincia di Bologna, 1994b). In Portugal, the debates set in motion at the end of the 1980s (Van den Berg et al., 1994) concerning the urban areas of Lisbon and Oporto are still in progress.

The situation appears just as favourable on the other side of the Atlantic. In Canada, in Toronto, although a debate is currently in progress on the future of Metro, the metropolitan authority, its development was confirmed as early as 1988 with the direct election of its council. Debates on regional planning have started up again with the creation, at provincial level, of a technical structure covering Greater Toronto and in 1991, the strategic plan for the metropolitan area was approved (Feldman, 1995). In the United States, the 1990 Act on air quality and the 1991 Act on intermodal transport have placed the Metropolitan Planning Organisations (MPO), constituted many decades ago on the initiative of the Federal State, back in the saddle.

All these experiments are naturally not on the same scale. Some (the French communities of towns and cities, the American MPOs) are merely hesitant steps towards metropolitan government, whilst others (Bologna, Stuttgart, Toronto) appear more fundamental. Moreover, certain metropolises (Montreal, Milan, the British and Swiss agglomerations) are still reluctant to push their previous experiments further forward or to undertake new ones. Nonetheless, it is no exaggeration to speak of the renewal or renaissance of the metropolitan idea in western countries, especially since in many

9 Anyone interested today in experiments in metropolitan governments should read the Italian publications, and especially those issuing from the ‘Progetto Milano’, piloted by the IReR, the work of AIM and that of the Bologna Progetto Città Metropolitana (PCM), and several more descriptive publications by the EURICUR. The complete references can be found in the bibliography to this article.

10 The communities of towns and of cities are voluntary public establishments for intermunicipal cooperation which necessarily have powers in matters of planning and economic development. They both have their own tax system based on the business tax.
respects, these experiments, having learnt from past problems, seem promising, notably in their conception of the institution and the methods implemented.

_Metropolitan governance or the new forms of public action in institutional policies_

The new forms of public action that we see emerging in most western countries (Gaudin, 1993) are characterized by more complex systems of actors. This complexity is due, over and above the factors already highlighted, to the disappearance of central government as the holder of supreme legitimacy and capable, by itself, of imposing, or at least shaping, a particular idea of public action. Today, the government’s weakness has found its corollary in the emergence of new actors who appear just as legitimate as the government and who act as equals. This is why the new forms of public action are developing under the sign of partnership and negotiation between the territorial authorities (from the government to local structures), the private sector, the associations, interest groups and the populations themselves. Examples of these forms of action are numerous and include, in no particular order, the Italian _accordi di programma_ (programme agreements) (Seassaro, 1993), the American State Growth Management procedures (Stein, 1993), and the elaboration of the new French master plans (Padioleau and Demeestere, 1991).

Institutional policies have not been excluded from these developments. Firstly, the processes of decentralization which occurred at the beginning of the 1980s in certain countries (Spain and France) and which are still continuing, have placed local authorities back in the saddle. This has resulted in the abandoning of authoritarian institutional reforms and the emphasis being placed on voluntary local participation and a flexible approach. Henceforth, the national character of institutional policies cannot be taken for granted. In France, a country with a strong centralist tradition if ever there was one, the change can be felt in the calling into question of the ‘republican’ idea of the country. Legislation improving decentralization has greatly reduced the constraints of previous cooperation arrangements by establishing ‘à la carte’ cooperation structures, which take on various forms. The local territory counts, and so institutional policies must reflect this variety (Lefèvre, 1996).

The present history of metropolitan governments is a good illustration of the development of institutional policies. Metropolitan governance highlights values of negotiation, partnership, voluntary participation and flexibility in the constitution of new structures. In doing so, it presents us with a radically different idea of the institution. It is no longer presented at the start, created in advance, ready-to-use, but appears as the result of a constitutive process. It is the process which radically transforms yesterday’s metropolitan model. Metropolitan governance does not consider the institution to be pre-established — on the contrary. The objective to be achieved (roughly speaking, the form and content of the metropolitan authority) is not fixed in advance, but becomes the product of the system of actors as the process unfolds. Thus, the process has its own dynamic, fed by the actors themselves. But this feeding is not left to chance; it is done through specific forms and negotiated procedures which frame and punctuate the process. Unlike the classic metropolitan model where the process of constitution was generally short but where the implementation proved, as we have seen, defective, the process here is long, and may stop or slow down at any time, but the result seems less uncertain because the legitimacy of the institution is produced by all the actors during the process of constituting the metropolitan government.

All the experiments in progress today do not follow these ‘recipes’, but all contain some of the ingredients and the most ‘advanced’ are presented as being those which integrate them best. This is why, in order to give substance to metropolitan governance, we will now develop the case of the Metropolitan City of Bologna, considered both in Italy and elsewhere (Conferenza Metropolitana, 1995a) as one of the European metropolises to have advanced furthest along the road.

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In February 1994, an agreement named the Accordo per la Città Metropolitana (ACM) was signed in Bologna by 48 municipalities and the province of Bologna. This agreement is based on a new idea of institutional construction. For example, it is not a question of instituting a cooperation structure *ex ante* and attributing certain pre-defined powers to it which will allow it to produce public policies for a pre-defined territory. Quite the contrary. It is the constitution of the institution (the metropolitan city) which is set as the objective to be achieved. The institution thus appears as a process which results from the implementation of public policies (Jouve and Lefèvre, 1996). This amounts to a reversal of Act 142, which prescribed the constitution of metropolitan cities along the lines of the British metropolitan counties and which had established a schedule for their implementation, which was never applied. Faced with the failure of this Act which may be assimilated into the decline of the metropolitan model, the Bologna area has taken up the reigns, considering it better to ‘fare da sé’ (take matters into its own hands).

The ACM works on a voluntary (municipalities only belong if they wish to and may withdraw when they wish) and flexible (municipalities may participate in all the action prescribed by the ACM, or only in part) basis, since overall, action is based on a partnership between the institutional actors. The ACM has created structures which are specific to the metropolitan level: a political structure, the Metropolitan Conference, composed of the mayors of the member municipalities and presided over by the President of the Province; a light administrative structure, the Secretariat of the Metropolitan Conference, responsible for managing the ACM; and three technical structures in the ‘economico-territorial’ (transport, environment and planning), administrative and financial, and health and social services sectors. The Metropolitan Conference is not a decision-making body because it is not a substitute for the municipal councils and the provincial council. It establishes the priorities of the secretariat and the technical committees which are voted unanimously. Above all, it serves as a forum where metropolitan questions can be discussed, even with municipalities which are not members of the ACM, but invited as observers. The technical committees work on particular projects (diagnosis and resolution of specific problems which have been on the agenda for a long time) and unite technical experts representing the various partners who have declared an interest in the project. More generally, the ACM has created observatories (observatory for metropolitan investment, observatory for the economy and its administration) and plans the development of more comprehensive projects (strategic metropolitan plans, a programme of administrative aid and training for municipal staff etc.) (Conferenza Metropolitana, 1995b).

The concrete expression of the partnership can be seen within the three technical committees which group together civil servants from the different municipalities of the province concerned with the same project. The rules for political exchange within the Metropolitan Conference — that is to say free cooperation between signatory municipalities on particular cases — favours the division of public policies into a multitude of micro-projects, which means that the interests of each of the interested parties can be satisfied. The technicians take charge of one-off cases such as the enlargement of a bridge, the harmonization of recruitment within local authorities, or the creation of a ‘city-card’ which simplifies procedures with the local administrative bodies within the metropolitan area for users. Each collective project thus has the potential to bring together different municipalities.

The Bologna method is today being reflected in other Italian metropolises. It is of a similar nature to the experiments in progress in the Netherlands, in particular the relaunching of the metropolitan idea in Rotterdam (Toonen, 1996; Hendricks and Toonen, 1994). The recent experiment involving the Urban Region of Lyon is not dissimilar, either. These experiments are thus radically altering the metropolitan model. Whilst what we are dealing with is a negotiated method based on partnership, voluntary participation and flexibility, two important innovations must be underlined.
because they have been introduced on the basis of lessons learnt during previous experiments, and tackle the question of the legitimacy of the metropolitan government head-on. Legitimacy has already been dealt with by implementing metropolitan authorities, but this alone is not enough because legitimacy does not depend solely on the way in which metropolitan institutions are constituted, it is also based on the political recognition of the institution by the actors concerned and, first and foremost, by the local authorities and populations. In this respect, three elements of what one might term ‘the new metropolitan model’ are fundamental. The first concerns popular legitimacy, hitherto greatly underestimated. The Italian Act 142 and its local applications (sometimes sanctioned by regional laws), like the Dutch bills on Rotterdam and Amsterdam, all contain measures which aim to submit the form and content of metropolitan institutions to a referendum. Secondly, these structures should not become additional institutional levels but should, on the contrary, be a substitute for the existing provinces, which partly eliminates the question of a conflict of power between them. In the case of Bologna and Rotterdam, for example, the future metropolitan institutions will have the rank of province. Finally, the breaking up of the central cities (their fragmentation into several new municipalities) and the territorial recomposition of certain municipalities has been enshrined in law in order to avoid a conflict of legitimacy and authority with the metropolitan institution (there cannot be two powerful authorities on the same territory).

All the ingredients for success would thus seem to be present in these experiments. Is metropolitan governance the philosopher’s stone which will reduce and annihilate previous conflicts? Or are we faced with just yet another attempt to constitute metropolitan governements which are destined, despite ‘governance’ innovations, to meet the same fate as their predecessors?

Metropolitan governance and government: the flip-side

The supporters of present experiments in metropolitan government do not deny the difficulties which still remain to be overcome. None of the current experiments can be assured of automatically proceeding towards its objective even where this has been defined in very general terms. On the one hand, traditional obstacles such as politico-institutional fragmentation still exist, to which have been added fresh problems linked to the present economic and social climate. On the other, the legitimacy of the metropolitan government, which can be seen notably in its acceptance by all the political, social and economic powers, may yet be called into question since behind this institution, what is at stake is no less than the structure and future of the territory in which the actors wish to live and develop. In this respect, the question of the raison d’être of metropolitan renewal still remains.

The persistence of the obstacles

First and foremost, metropolitan governance is not universal. Certain urban areas are willing and able to commit themselves to the new forms of public action and to make these the instruments of the new metropolitan structures. Others are still reluctant. The Milan metropolis, for example, has proved unable to build a system of actors capable of producing policies and a vision of the future for its territory (AIM, 1995; Gruppo CLAS, 1993). The PIM (Piano Intercommunale Milanese Centro Studi), a sort of metropolitan planning agency led by the municipality and the Province of Milan, has virtually ceased to function and the OETTAM (the economic and metropolitan area planning observatory), which included most of the local authorities in the urban area, has stopped its studies. The Urban Region of Lyon, long presented as the future

11 For a theoretical and empirical consideration of this question, see Le Galès (1995b).
product of a territory where coherence of public action was linked to the construction of a system of local actors and highlighted at the time of the elaboration of the new master plan (Padioleau, 1991), is having difficulty getting started, caught between the government’s will to see such a structure emerge and the reluctance of the local authorities.

This type of situation is still threatening ‘successful’ experiments like Bologna and Rotterdam, for the simple reason that the hour of conflict has perhaps not yet struck. In fact, in any one case, the question of passing from a technical structure (the OOR in Rotterdam, the ACM in Bologna) to a political structure remains. For the moment, the experiments have not gone far enough for political conflicts to break out, but they are nonetheless latent. In Bologna, although the success of the experiment is often presented as the result of the total domination of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) both in the province and throughout the region, this domination is being eroded today by the disappearance of the Party and its replacement by two new groups, the PDS (Partito della Sinistra) and the Rifondazione Comunista (orthodox communists) who probably do not share the same vision of the future of the Bologna metropolis, nor the sense that should be given to the future metropolitan government (Jouve and Lefèvre, 1996). There is no doubt that this question will shortly be raised when the purely political aspect of the ACM (the election of the future Mayor of the Metropolitan City and the metropolitan council) becomes a subject for discussion a year or two from now. At present, all these processes function by consensus; in fact this is sought above all and the lesser points of conflict are either minimized or avoided. But until when and in the name of what, will metropolitan governance be capable of solving this problem?

The same is true of centre-periphery relationships. In Bologna, Imola, the Province’s second city, wished to ‘secede’ because it revendicated special status and relative autonomy within the future ‘metropolitan city’. How should this matter be settled? In Rotterdam, as in Bologna, the breaking up of the central cities in several new municipalities (nine in Bologna and seven in Rotterdam) was suggested in order to ensure the support of the peripheral municipalities in the process of constituting the metropolitan authorities. The suggestion did not take account of the populations which in Rotterdam, voted by referendum against the dismantling of age-old municipalities which still have a meaning for the inhabitants. In Italy and in Bologna notably, where such referendums are prescribed by Act 142, the question of its date is still undecided. Some think that the idea of a ‘metropolitan city’ should be put to the electorate now in order to accelerate the process; others consider this consultation premature, arguing that the risks are too great and fearing that the process will come to a halt should the vote go against it. They prefer to count on the success of the Metropolitan Conference so that the populations can understand the advantages properly before pronouncing. For them, it is only when the Metropolitan Conference has proved its usefulness (its legitimacy deriving from its ability to produce effective policies, but we have seen that the functional argument was an insufficient basis for such legitimacy) that the time will be ripe to launch a referendum. This question must be settled before too long, but it would already seem that the breaking up of the central-cities is not the panacea hoped for by the supporters of metropolitan structures because it comes up against a legitimacy which is still more powerful, that of the municipalities.

**Technocratic projects dominated by the central-cities**

At the risk of making an over-hasty generalization perhaps, and one which must be verified by systematic empirical case studies, those experiments which seem securely established, have become so because they are led, or strongly supported, by the central

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12 These are in progress, carried out by a network of European researchers led by B. Jouve and the author, under the heading: Institutional Dynamics in European Urban Regions.
cities. This is the case in Bologna, where the ACM was launched on the initiative of the municipality of Bologna and the Province and it is these two authorities (of which the city of Bologna is the most powerful by virtue of its budget and technical and human resources) who are proving to be leaders in the process of constituting the ‘metropolitan city’. In Rotterdam, it is the central city which today presides over the renewal of the metropolitan authority as in the previous experiment (Hendricks and Toonen, 1994). In Stuttgart, the Mayor of the municipality has always been in favour of the most radical solution, that of a city-region, which would entail the disappearance of the municipality by a general merger with the existing kreise and a redivision into ‘arrondissements’. Where the reverse is true, when the central cities are not strongly motivated, projects founder or hang fire. In Milan, the arrival of a municipal executive controlled by the Lega, not greatly in favour of cooperation at metropolitan level, put a stop to the already foundering attempts to discuss the ‘metropolitan city’. In France, the Urban Region of Lyon is dragging its feet because the central city hesitates to commit itself further to a process it fears it will be unable to control.

To win the support of the peripheries, the central cities have understood that they must make concessions. The first is considerable: it is nothing less than their disappearance by being divided up into several municipalities, even though the problems and hesitations which have been observed invite the greatest possible reservations. The second is more pragmatic, but heavily symbolic. Some central cities agree to join cooperation and consultation structures without the representation their demographic weight would normally grant them. In certain cases they even agree not to form a majority, leaving this to the suburban municipalities.

If the central cities agree to play the game, it is because they are now aware that they need the peripheries in order to develop, or quite simply to keep their place, in the ranks of world cities. The urban hierarchy of today is international. The globalization of the economy has once again meant that the economy and functional considerations are factors which make the introduction of metropolitan governments necessary, no longer to provide urban services, but infrastructures and facilities that a ‘world’ metropolis, a ‘European town’, must have if it wishes to continue to play a major international role. Whether it be a question of land for facilities and housing, financial resources for building, or political agreements to bring an area-wide policy to a successful conclusion, the central cities need their peripheries to keep their place in international competition. In this respect, the metropolitan territory has become the scale on which the central cities reason. To do so, they must free themselves and go beyond their own administrative limits. The metropolitan government is to them, both a necessary instrument and an advantage in attaining their objective.

For all these reasons, the question of the ideological foundations for the renewal of metropolitan governments must be raised. A certain type of economic and social development pushed by certain actors prevails in metropolitan governance. The metropolis is considered as a collective actor that must be activated in order to maintain and develop an advantageous place in world competition. Even if one cannot totally agree with Padioleau and Demesteere (1991) when they state that ‘strategic action takes scant notice of objectives of redistribution and social justice’ (p. 138), a view which is largely invalidated by the Bologna experiment, it is nonetheless true that the supporters of metropolitan governments create a rather utilitarian and functional vision of the urban area. It is therefore not surprising that the populations do not necessarily identify with this vision, imperfect and hazy as it is, of the future of their metropolis, and which is reflected widely in the strategic planning documents (Conferenza Metropolitana, 1995b; SEPAL, 1990). The negative referendums in Rotterdam and Amsterdam bear witness to this distrust or lack of interest on the part of the populations. In Bologna, those ‘in charge’ of the ACM are fully aware of this (Conferenza Metropolitana, 1995a) and are trying to compensate for it by attempting to reactivate the ‘red political subculture’ (Jouve and
Lefèvre, 1996), by recourse to the territory as an integrator element based on common history and values. The existence of a metropolitan community is also once again invoked but it is not that of the American reformers of the 1960s, based on the ‘diffusion of a cultural ethos of the metropolis which covers previously independant communities and the hinterlands with a common set of values’ (Wood, 1958) and which would require a single unit of government. On the contrary, it is a question of a community which must be built by using existing resources, an arduous task, and one which does not seem sufficiently established for the question of the legitimacy of the metropolitan institutions to be considered definitively settled.

The renewal of metropolitan government seems to be carried by new local political elites whose legitimacy — but this is merely a hypothesis — will depend on their ability to combine two registers of legitimization, which in certain cases are apparently contradictory: the response to international competition and the keeping of values which are specific to their territory (solidarity in Bologna, for example). The success of their action depends on their ability to create such a synthesis. This takes time — and probably much more time than the short periods ‘programmed’ by the legislation or by the formal ‘agreements’ — and requires the processes involved in the constitution of the metropolitan institutions to be opened up to those actors hitherto neglected or avoided (citizen associations, the inhabitants, even the business community in certain cases). For these new elites, this carries an additional risk since opening up allows counter-powers to be set up, but it would seem that this is the price to be paid for the legitimacy — and consequent success — of metropolitan governments. But it should not be thought that the action of these elites can only be analysed in terms of strategic behaviours (to the extent of explaining them with the ‘theory’ of the plot for instance). Our work on the case of Bologna (Jouve and Lefèvre, 1996) shows that their action is largely conditioned by their socialization process.

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