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IN **L'ANNÉE SOCIOLOGIQUE 2015/2 Vol. 65** , PAGES 457 TO 482

PUBLISHER **PRESSES UNIVERSITAIRES DE FRANCE**

ISSN 0066-2399

ISBN 9782130650850

DOI 10.3917/anso.152.0457

Article available online at

<https://shs.cairn.info/journal-l-annee-sociologique-2015-2-page-457?lang=en>



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URBAN AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE: A STATE AFFAIR. *THE TOP-DOWN DIMENSION OF HORIZONTAL COORDINATION*

Renaud EPSTEIN

Translated and edited by Cadenza Academic Translations

ABSTRACT. – The concept of urban governance has proved quite fruitful in helping us to understand the transformation of French cities and urban policies in the context of decentralization. In contrast to their predecessors, who adopted a top-down approach to local government, French political scientists and sociologists working on urban governance in the 1990s emphasized the importance of horizontal coordination between various actors, social groups, and institutions. In doing so, they tended to overlook the state's specific role and resources. In this article, I propose bringing the state back into the scope of urban governance analysis in order to reconsider the vertical dimension of horizontal coordination processes. In the French case, the central government has delegated responsibility for implementing numerous national programs and ensuring their coherency to local authorities. However, this devolution does not equate to a further hollowing out of the state with regard to urban policies. On the contrary, decentralization allows the state to steer these policies at a distance, through new policy tools such as competitive bidding (i.e., calls for projects), performance indicators, and the encouragement of “best practices.”

KEYWORDS. – Center-Periphery Relations; Urban Governance; Urban Renewal; New Public Management; State Reform; Awards.

RÉSUMÉ. – Forcée dans les années 1990, la notion de gouvernance urbaine a permis de rendre compte de la transformation des enjeux et des modes de conduite des politiques urbaines dans un contexte de pluralisation des systèmes d'acteurs et de fragmentation des ressources. En y recourant, les politistes et sociologues ont insisté sur l'importance des relations horizontales entre les multiples acteurs, groupes sociaux et institutions intervenant dans les politiques urbaines, à rebours de leurs prédécesseurs qui se concentraient sur les relations verticales entre l'État et les villes. Ce changement d'axe analytique, de la coordination verticale à la coopération horizontale, a probablement été excessif, occultant le maintien d'une forme de centralité étatique

et le rôle spécifique qu'a pu continuer à jouer l'État dans la fabrique des politiques territoriales après les lois de décentralisation. Il paraît donc nécessaire de réintroduire l'État dans le chantier de recherche de la gouvernance urbaine, d'autant plus que les réformes néomanagériales des années 2000 ont profondément recomposé l'organisation et l'instrumentation étatique. En même temps qu'elles parachevaient l'autonomisation des villes vis-à-vis de l'État local, ces réformes ont doté le pouvoir central de nouveaux instruments d'intervention territoriale (appels à projets, indicateurs de performance, trophées et labels) qui lui permettent de piloter à distance l'action collective développée dans les villes.

MOTS CLÉS. – Gouvernance urbaine ; Labels ; Nouveau management public ; Réforme de l'État ; Rénovation urbaine.

In a context marked by the increased number of actors involved in local policies and the resulting fragmentation of resources (financial, of authority, and of expertise) among said actors, urban and local governance raises complex coordination issues. Faced with ever-changing public problems that can no longer be confined within the boundaries of local authorities than they can those of sector-specific divisions, coordination between state administrations and agencies, local bodies at different levels, and multiple public, parapublic, joint, private, and non-profit organizations is a major challenge for these actors. It is also a question of primary importance for researchers analyzing urban and local policies.

This was already the case half a century ago, when the local arena was merely one in which to implement measures developed on the national level that were as horizontally compartmentalized (with each government department in a position of monopoly in its sector of activity) as they were vertically integrated, from central administrations to decentralized government services that covered the entire country. The sociology of organized action, as developed in France at the Centre de Sociologie des Organisations (CSO) (Center for the Sociology of Organizations), was incidentally largely established around the study of what was then called the "local political-administrative system." Analysis of this system revealed modes of operation that were a long way from the bureaucratic ideal type, with the compartmentalization of sectors and the firm hierarchization of actors accompanying incessant negotiations and arrangements between bureaucrats and local elected officials (Worms 1966). Bureaucratic regulations therefore did not prohibit the existence of

informal mechanisms of coordination between local actors, the analysis of which served as a basis for Michel Crozier and Jean-Claude Thoenig (1975) to construct a theoretical model of systematic regulation—"cross-regulation"—and, in a more political approach to the center-periphery relationship, for Pierre Grémion (1976) to formalize the notion of "tamed Jacobinism."

Inter-organizational coordination is therefore not a new issue in local administration resulting from the changes experienced in this domain in the past few decades—it is intrinsically linked to it. This is because the local arena is a sphere in which multiple public policies are implemented and therefore where interdependencies between these policies are visible. But this topic, which was addressed through the lens of national administrations and therefore according to state-centric approaches, both sectorial and vertical, by researchers in the 1960s and 1970s, is now being formulated and analyzed in more cross-sectoral and horizontal terms. This is because major changes have been brought about by decentralization, the national reforms that accompanied and extended it, and the Europeanization of public policies, as well as the increasing power of regional and urban authorities, the growing role of private actors in public policies, the rise in all forms of circulation between regions at various scales, and the resulting socio-economic, urban, and environmental problems. Local administration is no longer based on the vertical orientation of standardized measures conceived and implemented by powerful national administrations, but on the mobilization of a multitude of public and private institutions and actors in the collaborative definition and application of ad hoc solutions to deal with problems, which are themselves expressed at the local level (Le Galès 1995; Duran and Thoenig 1996; Lascoumes and Le Bourhis 1998).

The success of the notion of urban governance, invented in the 1990s to understand transformations in the stakes, systems of actors, and modes of behaving in subnational public policies, attests to a noticeable evolution in the analytical frameworks applied to city governments, long focused on national administrations and state representatives' relationships with local officials (Le Galès 1995). This is because governance has corresponded to a change in analytical approach, from vertical coordination to horizontal cooperation, at times at the risk of masking the preservation of a form of state

centrality and the specific role that the state was able to continue to play in the production of subnational policies after decentralization.

In France, it was paradoxically thanks to institutional reforms in the first decade of the 2000s that the question of vertical relationships, between the state and subnational authorities, again became less peripheral to research on governance. Although this observation appears contradictory, it is because reforms concerning both local authorities (Acte II de la décentralisation [Decentralization Act II]) and state organization and instrumentation (Révision générale des politiques publiques—RGPP [French General Review of Public Policies] and the loi organique relative aux lois de finance—LOLF [Organic Law on Finance Laws]), combined to greatly accelerate the withdrawal of state involvement at the local level. As a result of these reforms, decentralized government services lost a significant portion of the expertise and resources on which they had relied following decentralization to invigorate partnerships between various local stakeholders. Reforms of the state's decentralized administration and the complete transfer to local authorities of many public policies that they had until then jointly managed with decentralized government services thus seemed to complete the ninety-degree turn that coordination had taken, from vertical to horizontal, justifying after the fact the disappearance of the state from analyses of regional or urban governance. In reality, the opposite was observed: the marginalization of decentralized government services was accompanied by new forms of state subnational intervention and a strengthened role in the piloting of many urban and local policies, which led to the state's reintroduction into discussions on the urban and local governance in France (Epstein 2005; Le Galès 2011; Béal 2011; Pasquier 2012; Aust *et al.*, 2013; Dupuy and Pollard 2014).

In this paper, I hope to further discuss this reintroduction of the state into research on urban governance. Since this research area firstly involves examining the modes of coordination within a pluralized and polyarchic subnational system, the first section of this paper will explore the development of analytical frameworks for urban and local governance, from which the state has gradually disengaged. However, the institutional reforms of the last decade force us to reconsider the state's role. By studying urban policy, and more specifically the Programme national de rénovation urbaine (PNRU) (National Urban

Renewal Program) introduced in 2003, I will show in a second section how these new public management-inspired reforms allowed the state to regain its ability to steer at a distance collective action at the local level. Going beyond this urban policy targeted at deprived neighborhoods, in the final section I will analyze renewed modes of subnational state intervention by focusing on three disciplinary instruments—calls for projects, labels and awards, and performance indicators—through which central power organizes a form of competitive regulation of local cooperation.

**“Decentering” analytical frameworks:
From a local political-administrative system
to urban and regional governance**

Up until the early 1980s, French cities and regions were administered rather than governed and the “local system” was analyzed by political social sciences using state-centric approaches that were both sectoral and vertical (Mabileau 1991). Coordination was therefore approached through the prism of deals made between local state representatives and public figures, informal practices of “ruse through rules”¹ (Gaudin 1993) that allowed the hierarchy of a centralized system to become more flexible. These analyses, developed in France’s post-war thirty-year boom to explain the regulation of a local political-administrative system, became obsolete—in their empirical foundations if not in their theoretical dimension—due to the rapid transformation of forms of economic, social, and political organization. The exhaustion of the post-war Keynesian model of growth, the increased power of urban working middle classes, and the development of consequent urban social movements all helped call into question a model of administering the local arena, based on a Taylor-style system of production governed by standardized norms defined by central experts. These factors also resulted in local public figures being challenged, which resulted in particular in a radical changeover in the political leadership of cities during the 1971 and 1977 elections. New issues stemming from a more bottom-up interpretation of issues then appeared in the public debate and in administrative

1. Translator’s note: Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material in this article are our own.

considerations. These included industrial redevelopment, socio-urban exclusion, and environmental conditions.

It was in this context, and in response to complex public problems that tested the capacities of past standardized responses, that the decentralization laws of 1982–83 were drafted and approved. They started a movement to “loosen the state’s grip” over urban and local governments (Le Galès 1999), which was prolonged and intensified during the decades that followed through processes of decentralization and the Europeanization of public policies, the emergence of regional and urban authorities, as well as the increased power of economic actors in regional governance. These changes led to a proliferation of centers of initiatives and power at the local level, the coordination of which proved to be a major policy issue. Indeed, this transformation had in no way been planned for in the laws on decentralization that ended the state’s bureaucratic hegemony in local affairs. On the contrary, the transfer of entire sets of powers and authorities to local and regional authorities was intended, by guaranteeing their autonomy in their respective spheres of authority, to remove the issue of coordination. This legal solution was rapidly transformed into a public policy problem, namely because the functional specialization of blocks of authorities not only maintained the horizontal (sectoral) compartmentalization of policies inherited from the past, but also superimposed a vertical layer onto it (between government institutions at different levels). It therefore reinforced interinstitutional compartmentalization, prompting new problems of unified action that were all the more difficult to manage given that the previous subordination of local authorities to the national government had disappeared, even though local issues required a cross-sector approach and links between levels of intervention (Duran 1999; Gaudin 1999).

How can public action that is necessarily partnership-based be organized in such a fragmented and polyarchic system? This question fueled discussions amongst political scientists and sociologists of French public action in the 1990s. New concepts and new ideas then emerged in academic writing to describe and explain forms of local government and how urban policies were defined and implemented: these included policy networks (Le Galès, Thatcher 1995), regionalized political exchange (Négrier 1995), urban leadership (Padioleau 1991; Smith and Sorbets 2003), local construction of the common

good (Lascoumes and Le Bourhis 1998), urban governance (Le Galès 1995), government by contract (Gaudin 1999), and institutionalization of collective action (Duran and Thoenig 1996).

Of all these concepts, governance was the one that prevailed in both common discourse and scholarly debates (Pasquier, Simoulin, and Weisbein 2013). It characterized a world in which government institutions had lost their monopoly on control of public action, which is constructed in a complex manner through the actions of a multitude of public and private actors, from the local stage to the global one. The concept's adoption sparked major controversies, related in particular to the ambiguities of a term that can lead, more or less intentionally, to the erasure of politics (Padioleau 1991). While these criticisms addressed the normative dimension of governance, linked in particular to the term's use by international institutions seeking to depoliticize their solutions by promoting them as "good governance," they were even more focused on the notion's vagueness.

For many authors, the concept of urban or local "governance" does not describe, much less explain, a specific phenomenon, but rather a set of changes that, though linked, nonetheless occurred according to individual rhythms and specific systems (Duran 1999; Simoulin 2013). Incidentally, the main proponents of a governance-based approach agree on it, and emphasize the notion's duality. This allows for a concise formula to be used that incorporates different developments, the combination of which renders porous the traditional boundaries between state, market, and society, between sectors and between levels of government. Above all, this approach is in keeping with an area of research on the forms of organization of collective action that is no longer based exclusively or primarily on hierarchical coordination but on cooperation (Kooiman 1993; Pierre 2000), particularly in cities that have seen a significant increase in the number of policy stakeholders. As Patrick Le Galès explained in an article that introduced this term into the French academic debate:

The concept of governance allows us to recognize fragmentation and inconsistency, and suggests an emphasis on forms of vertical and horizontal coordination in public action. It helps us to better take into account the strategic ability of actors, the diversity of processes of legitimization, the negotiation dynamic between actors [. . .]. This term also aims to mark the end of the era of the development of collective services and a nonetheless hierarchical style of relationships with the central government. (Le Galès 1995, 60).

Urban governance, understood as a field of research that looks at the regulation of collective action, was therefore largely based on questioning reconfigurations of the state, and its capacities and modes of action, though the state was no longer at the center of a research agenda that favored subnational government institutions and their relationships with social and economic actors (Borraz and Le Galès 2001). That said, the limitless “decentering” of studies using this approach, which often leaned too far horizontally, may be regrettable. Contrary to Gilles Pinson (2010), who considers that the French social sciences had a hard time breaking with old analytical models, and continued to analyze city government and the production of urban policies in terms of center-periphery relationships,² I believe that the success of the governance approach led—in contrast to the state-centrism long dominant in the French political social sciences—to many researchers disregarding the state, at best considered as one actor among others in a vast, scarcely differentiated network. In doing so, they made a ninety-degree turn in the direction of their analysis, from vertical coordination to horizontal cooperation, while skipping over resources of authority and legitimacy retained by the state, at the risk of obscuring the specific role it played in the production of local collective action.

Although it has lost the central position it occupied in the past, the state has not been banalized, losing all its distinctiveness within a pluralized system. Decentralization, meaning the transfer of powers from national administrations to local authorities, was extended by a parallel movement of internal decentralization within the state apparatus, which allowed these administrations, via their decentralized government services, to retain a specific, if not dominant, role in producing local policies, and to an even greater extent in driving forward partnerships between various stakeholders. Charged with regionalizing national policies, in collaboration with local authorities as part of project initiatives and contractual procedures (Pinson 2009; Gaudin 1999), decentralized government services used these instruments to reposition themselves locally by institutionalizing joint

2. In a break from this tradition, Gilles Pinson defends the use of new theoretical tools, in particular those developed in North American studies on urban systems (Stone 1989), which are focused on the horizontal alliances developed between economic actors and other groups and organizations present in cities.

policy-making (Duran and Thoenig 1996). As a result, the state was able to maintain its presence in a local system whose cards had been reshuffled in favor of local authorities, and particularly urban authorities: these gradually took the responsibility for defining the direction and content of public policies implemented locally in cities, while decentralized government services handled the procedural conditions for cooperation between actors.

Twenty years after the first decentralization laws, urban and local governance underwent another metamorphosis, sparked by a wave of New Public Management reforms (Bezes 2009). These reforms redistributed responsibilities among levels of government, changed the way policy goals are formulated, and transformed the organization and instrumentation of the state. The movement began with the August 1, 2001 loi organique relative aux lois de finances (LOLF) (Organic Law on Finance Laws), which resulted in a clear verticalization of state policies, reducing the margins of maneuver for decentralized government services to organize the regionalization of national policies (Debar 2013; Rebière and Weiss 2013; Bouvard *et al.* 2010). It continued thanks to transfers of powers organized as part of Acte II de la décentralisation (Decentralization Act II) in 2003–2004, which should have strengthened the autonomy of local authorities by organizing the “separation of competencies” that they shared with the state (Le Lidec 2007). These two reforms paved the way for the Révision générale des politiques publiques (RGPP) (French General Review of Public Policies), a vast initiative of administrative reorganization that resulted particularly at the subnational level in substantial cuts and extensive mergers of decentralized government services (Bezes and Le Lidec 2010). These services were seen as the big losers of the reforms of the 2000s. The staff and budget cuts, the reduced autonomy vis-à-vis central administrations, and the loss of most of the resources that had allowed them to conserve a specific role in local partnerships completed the decline of decentralized government services (Epstein 2013a).

These changes could have, after the fact, justified the state’s disappearance from research on urban and local governance. But quite to the contrary, the last few years have seen it be reintroduced to this field. This reintroduction has led to both empirical analyses that reveal combined phenomena—the state’s withdrawal and reassertion

in piloting regional policies in France (Epstein 2005, 2013a; Aust and Cret 2011; Béal 2011; Pasquier 2012), as in other European countries (Bernt 2009; Fuller and Geddes 2008; Faucher-King and Le Galès 2007)—and a resurgence, in the international academic sphere, of analytical frameworks focused on relationships between central and local governments (Jessop 2002; Brenner 2004; Dahlström, Peters, Pierre 2011). Contrary to the common sense that would have us believe that neo-liberalization is linked to a weakening of the state, these studies demonstrate how the spread of principles of competitive regulation in public action, embedded in New Public Management tools of government, was accompanied by a reconfiguration of the state that allowed it to regain its capacities to remotely pilot and coordinate autonomous actors (Kickert 1995; Pierre 2000; Hasenteufel 2014).

Remote steering of local partnerships: The urban policy scenario

Studying urban policy, which emerged at the same time as the first decentralization laws, allows us to better understand the changes in the ways policies are defined and implemented at the local level and the role played by the state in the steering of collective action.

The interest of this angle of study lies first in the fact that urban policy, directed at deprived suburban housing estates, played a key role in the decompartmentalization of French public action. Focusing on the multi-dimensional nature of these neighborhoods' issues—simultaneously urban, social, economic, and criminal—, urban policy sought to organize the cross-sector and inter-scale linkage of many policies, which entailed numerous kinds of cooperation: between state administrations, between the state and local authorities, between local authorities (particularly between municipalities in the same metropolitan areas) and, moving beyond government institutions alone, between these institutions, private interest groups and grass-roots movements (Dubedout 1983). Urban policy therefore served as a framework for the establishment of broad local partnerships. To do so, it relied on an instrumental triptych of diagnosis-plan-contract, through which it attempted to organize the mobilization of and cooperation between a multitude of actors united around the

same interpretation of issues (shared diagnosis), a collective strategy (regional or urban plan), and a procedural framework aimed at operationalizing that strategy (cross-sector contract). The instruments that it tested in the 1980s permeated French regional policies over the following decade, far surpassing the management of deprived neighborhoods alone.

Urban policy, because it can be considered as the originator of a new method of governance, can thus reveal the characteristics of this new approach that challenge, one by one, those used in the past: the primacy of locally-defined projects vs. the uniformity of national norms, a holistic approach vs. a sector-based perspective, contractualization between local authorities and decentralized government services vs. the hierarchy of the centralized model. While illustrating many developments included in the concept of urban governance, urban policy also helps elucidate changes in the state's role in local government. Decentralization has not resulted in the state's disappearance³ or downgrading in urban governance, but in its repositioning, summed up by Jacques Donzelot and Philippe Estèbe (1994) in the figure of "the animator-state" and theorized by Patrice Duran and Jean-Claude Thoenig (1996) in terms of the institutionalization of collective action.

Finally and most importantly, the heuristic value of urban policy stems from its major reform in 2003. Because the organizational formats and steering instruments introduced into this policy corresponded to those favored by New Public Management reforms in the 2000s, urban policy provides a useful perspective on the subnational effects of these reforms. Foreshadowing the coming into effect of the LOLF, the August 1, 2003 *loi d'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine* (Framework Act for Urban Renewal), known as the Borloo Law, redirected urban policy toward a program (national) focus, and away from the project (local) focus that had guided it until then. It established a national program of urban renewal that, by demolishing and rebuilding 200,000 social housing units between 2004 and 2008, aimed to promote a social

3. As some had predicted in terms of a "hollow state" (Peters 1994; Leca 1996), referring, on the one hand, to dynamics of globalization and Europeanization, which would hollow the state from the top and, on the other hand, processes of decentralization that would do the same from the bottom.

mix in deprived neighborhoods. Under this program administered by a semi-autonomous agency—the Agence nationale de rénovation urbaine (ANRU) (National Agency for Urban Renewal)—with a budget of 12 billion euros, urban policy abandoned the bottom-up and cross-sector approach that had characterized it, prioritizing instead the implementation of a demolition-reconstruction program, the objectives and content of which had been decided on at the national level, and the local version of which was carried out through calls for projects from cities. Decentralized government services and urban policy partner agencies were deliberately bypassed by this semi-autonomous agency, which was more concerned about the rapid realization of the objectives assigned to it by law than about their adaptation to city projects or links to other programs and policies.

Amid increasing decentralization, which should have increased local responsibilities and freedoms,⁴ the choice to entrust mayors with all the responsibility of developing and managing urban renewal projects may have seemed coherent. However, far from helping to strengthen the autonomy of cities, bypassing the local partnership structures of the urban policy led to the central state regaining control over local urban renewal plans. Rapidly, hundreds of cities, along with social housing landlords, began to develop and carry out huge demolition-reconstruction plans, faithfully respecting the urban development doctrine and objectives of the national agency. While the local partnerships that developed around these plans are more constrained than those that previously emerged in urban policy projects,⁵ they are also more integrated, particularly because past contractualizations were not accompanied by specific commitments or mechanisms of control and sanctioning that would have forced their signatories to respect those commitments (Marcou 1994; Auby 2001). At most, these contracts were a record of a commitment to participate in

4. The law of August 13, 2004, presented by its proponents as *Acte II de la décentralisation* (Decentralization Act II), was called the “*loi relative aux libertés et responsabilités locales*” (Law on Local Freedoms and Responsibilities).

5. The institutions involved in the social component of urban policy, associations, and neighborhood residents were not included in the development and management of urban renewal projects, which were carried out by empowered contracting authorities, mainly consisting of local officials, those responsible for cities’ technical services, and social housing landlords, with the assistance of service providers that were most often based outside the region.

state-overseen partnership schemes, in which the implementation of a project (or the project itself) was the subject of annual negotiations. That is not the case for agreements signed with the ANRU, which are about a program, and not one project. These are structured around lists of operations accompanied by specific financing plans and timetables, the progress of which is monitored on the national level via reporting systems and regular audits. Because payment of subsidies by the ANRU is conditional on the implementation of the contracted program, local signatories are strongly encouraged to respect it.⁶

Urban renewal therefore revealed paradoxical developments: on one hand, the PNRU made cities autonomous from decentralized government services in an arena that had been co-managed until then; on the other, it resulted in an enormous commitment by those cities to a costly national program that they implemented indiscriminately. To understand how the ANRU succeeded in mobilizing local actors around the realization of its program, it suffices to examine the institutional design of the PNRU and the instruments that structure it. Two of these instruments merit particular attention, as their coupling influenced local actors' behavior: the one-stop shop and competitive bidding (i.e. calls for projects).

Until 2003, cities and social housing landlords that wanted to carry out development initiatives in their social housing neighborhoods could obtain various forms of financial aid from the Ministries of Public Works and of Urban Affairs, the "1% Logement" (an employer housing aid program), and the Caisse des Dépôts (public bank). All these funds were pooled in the coffers of the ANRU, which became the "one-stop shop" for cities for this kind of operation. The creation of this one-stop service, justified because it was an administrative simplification, then led to the disappearance or drying up of all other "shops." Respecting a mechanism of institutional isomorphism theorized by Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1983), the reduction in the number of sources of available funding influenced local actors, forcing them to take into account the demands of their funders, which concerned the content of projects (demand for huge

6. Though an initially planned operation can be abandoned in favor of another one, this action leads to the loss of half of the funding foreseen in the agreement. Moreover, the financial regulation of the ANRU includes an automatic decommitment rule, inspired by European funding regulations, stipulating the loss of subsidies for operations that are delayed for two years or more in relation to the provisional timetable.

demolitions, in particular), the methods of their management, and the financial commitments of local partners.

Use of a national call for projects reinforced this constraint. The ANRU had the power of discretionary selection among projects submitted to it by cities. The list of neighborhoods that were beneficiaries of the PNRU and the amounts of subsidies allocated to each of these were not defined *ex ante* but resulted from a process of national competitive bidding. More than 750 neighborhoods were eligible for funding from the ANRU, whose budget quickly proved inadequate to respond to the flood of applications. Cities therefore found themselves competing for access to the resources offered by this one-stop shop, hurrying to secure a contractual agreement for their project with an agency whose support became increasingly frugal as its funds ran out. The development of urban renewal projects thus became a sprint. As the ANRU's funds ran out, its demands about both the content of projects and the amount of local joint financing became clearer and firmer. By using a system of calls for projects, the agency empowered mayors, placed on the front line to swiftly mobilize local actors around a shared project and champion it before the ANRU. But at the same time, this instrument strongly limited their autonomy. Within an intercity competitive system, those whose projects had been rejected risked having their access to national funds blocked for many years. Mayors and social housing landlords were therefore faced with a simple choice: propose a project that met the ANRU's expectations or give up for many years on any possibility of developing the built environment, outside spaces, or public infrastructure in social housing neighborhoods. Given that the sums of the subsidies at stake numbered in the tens and even hundreds of millions of euros, few local officials took that risk, as is shown by the proliferation of demolition-reconstruction projects across French cities, the majority of which had never envisaged such operations.

By using a call for projects made by a national agency, rather than contractual agreements between local governments and decentralized government services, the state withdrew from the local partnerships it had established in the context of urban policy. It gave mayors responsibility for mobilizing various stakeholders around a shared project and coordinating its implementation. But this increased autonomy of cities in relation to the state came with an increase in the constraints

influencing local actors. First and foremost, competition between cities for access to national resources encouraged cities to develop projects in total autonomy that corresponded perfectly to the agency's requirements. Second, implementation of operations by city authorities was tightly reined in by a centralized system of management through indicators. The PNRU's institutional design and instrumentation therefore not only prepared the state's withdrawal from local partnerships, but also allowed it to take on new capacities to orient and remotely pilot action being developed by urban governments.

Competitive regulation of regional cooperation

The case of urban renewal, far from marginal,⁷ therefore reveals a noticeable repositioning of the state within urban governance, contrary to the movement sparked in the 1980s by an urban policy that saw the state focus on driving cooperation between local actors, while leaving them with the task of defining the meaning and content of action. Abandoning this procedural function of the institutionalization of collective action for a more substantial role, the state again took charge of defining the aims and achievement of urban policies, while also delegating responsibility for their implementation and cross-sector consistency to cities.⁸ Far from being specific to the program in question, this redistribution of roles between the state and other actors in urban governance stemmed from institutional reforms that affect all public policies. Acte II de la décentralisation, the LOLE, and the RGPP all disrupted the administrative apparatus of the state, engaged in a dual process of reconfiguration at the central level (agen-
cification) and hollowing out at the local level. These administrative reorganizations were accompanied by changes in how the state intervened at the local level, proceeding less on the basis of hierarchies or partnership-based negotiation than on disciplinary instruments that allow the national government to mobilize and guide autonomous actors remotely (Foucault 2001 [1978]; Miller and Rose 1990). A new form of competitive regulation of local cooperation therefore

7. Because of the funding that it mobilizes, the PNRU is the largest urban program in the recent history of French planning policies, both at the national level and in many cities.

8. A process described vividly using an expression coined by British political scientists: "hands-off policy" (Carter 1989).

appears to be taking shape, the mechanisms of which we can understand more clearly by considering three tools of government⁹ now used extensively by the French state: the call for projects, labels and awards, and performance indicators.

Let us begin with the call for projects,¹⁰ which, from urban renewal to competitiveness clusters, and including sustainable cities and university buildings, became a normalized instrument of the subnational allocation of investment funding by the state and its agencies.¹¹ The “Investissements d’avenir” (Investments in the Future) program, launched in 2009 and better known as the “Grand emprunt” (Big Loan), provides an example here. After defining the program’s five priorities, the state divided the 35 billion euros from the Grand emprunt between ten national agencies, which launched over 50 calls for projects to local authorities, universities, research units, and companies. These calls for projects all followed the same formula: publication of a brief defining objectives and eligible actions, the content of expected proposals, and selection criteria; development of projects left to the initiative of local actors; national selection of a small number of recipients; signing of agreements specifying the planning, scheduling, and financing of actions to be carried out; and the establishment of standardized monitoring tools.

The call for projects is firstly an instrument for managing shortages. In periods of severe budgetary restrictions, it allows the state to be selective, i.e., to avoid spreading limited resources too thinly by allotting them only to the best projects (or those judged to be the best). In addition, this tool offers the advantage of respecting principles of autonomy and subsidiarity, as projects are developed at the initiative of local actors. Finally, competition for access to state program funding is meant to favor emulation, by driving applicants to

9. According to Le Galès and Lascoumes’s definition (2004), an instrument of government is “a technical device with a generic purpose that provides a concrete conception of the policy/society relationship and is supported by a conception of regulation.”

10. These are elements developed in Epstein (2013c).

11. Calls for projects are not limited to planning programs alone. Research policy (calls for projects by the Agence nationale pour la recherche (ANR) (French National Research Agency) and solidarity, employment, and youth policies (calls for projects by the Agence pour la cohésion sociale et l’égalité des chances [Agency for Social Cohesion and Equal Opportunities], the Fonds national des solidarités actives [National Solidarity Fund], and finally the Fonds d’expérimentation pour la jeunesse [Experimental Fund for Youth]) also succumbed to the charms of this instrument that is halfway between an invitation to tender and a subsidy.

be innovative in order to stand out. But the main impact of this competition is to encourage candidates to conform to national expectations, uncertainty about the results of the competition driving them to develop projects that faithfully respect the briefs, and even to anticipate the implicit selection criteria to maximize their chances of success (Epstein 2013a; Breton 2014). In particular, it drives them to deepen local partnerships, going beyond the at times formal agreements reached in the contractual approaches of the past. In fact, the negotiations organized under the aegis of the decentralized government services in no way guaranteed the existence of a shared project and therefore of any real cooperation between stakeholders, for whom it was often simpler to rely on the Prefect (the state's regional representative), responsible for organizing coordination of the former's actions or arbitrating their disputes. The national call for projects, which bypasses decentralized government services, was a game-changer. It is clear to all concerned that in the absence of an agreement between stakeholders, or if such an agreement was to be reduced to declarations of intent that did not include a plan for shared action and an integrated governance structure, their chances of being included among the winners of the national competition would be limited. Hence the call for projects is a disciplinary instrument, which enables a state with limited resources to obtain the free conformation of autonomous actors (Bruno 2008). Its effectiveness in this regard is all the stronger given that local authorities have seen their fiscal autonomy be reduced significantly over the last few years, and that the overall allocations given to them by the state are subject to a freeze that looks to be long-lasting (Le Lidec 2011). Because it is selective—and the more selective it is—the call for projects is a powerfully incentivizing instrument in situations of budgetary crisis, which allows the state to stimulate local cooperation and regain the capacity to steer urban and local policies at a distance.

The reassertion of the state's role in urban and local governance is not related solely to financial resources. It also stems from use of a second type of instrument that introduces purely honorific resources: labels, prizes, and awards. These recognitions, through which the state publicly assigns a value to a city or a project developed therein, have experienced a recent boom within the state's toolbox. Their development is particularly significant in emerging areas of activity,

characterized by a weak formalization of problems and solutions, an uncertain distribution of responsibilities between different institutions and professions, and a lack of legitimacy and financial resources (Epstein 2013b).¹² Labels that certify compliance with standards that goes beyond regulatory demands, and prizes used to distinguish exceptional cases can, once again, be considered as instruments to manage budgetary shortages, the functioning and effects of which are similar to those of calls for projects.

Like calls for projects, urban prizes and awards serve as incentivizing tools that rely on competitive mechanisms (Bergeron, Castel, and Dubuisson-Quellier 2014). These allow a state that no longer has the authority and funds required to impose its priorities and its solutions, nor even the necessary expertise to define them, to remotely influence urban agendas and city projects. The preparation of an application, in a limited period of time, places pressure on urban actors. It drives their emergence as collective actors and their innovation, with the aim of respecting the criteria for labels or, in the case of competitions, to do better than rival cities. The impacts of these instruments go beyond merely the cities that play the game of earning labels or winning competitions. In fact, distinctions and certifications contribute to mechanisms of policy transfer (Ancelovici and Jenson 2012), favoring the interurban circulation of objectives, techniques, or instruments developed in one place. By distinguishing one or a few cities, the state sets them up as models for the rest, providing these other cities with both a benchmark by which they can self-assess and lists of “good practices” with which to up their game. Similar to the Légion d’honneur analyzed by Olivier Ihl (2007), these recognitions thereby favor a mechanism of “honorific emulation,” which allows the state to influence the behavior of autonomous bodies.¹³ Although the prizes at stake are purely symbolic, they nonetheless carry value for urban governance actors. The latter have proven attached to these

12. These characteristics can be found in particular in the field of sustainable development, for which several dozen prizes and labels exist (Béal 2011).

13. In *Le Mérite et la République*, Olivier Ihl showed that the Légion d’honneur established itself, from the Consulate, as a government technique in the Foucauldian sense of the term. For Republican regimes of the nineteenth century, these honorific distinctions were effective and inexpensive instruments for managing behavior, the awarding of which allowed distinctions to be made between equal citizens, elevating those who had demonstrated their merits into role models.

labels and even more so to prizes, used by some as signs of distinction to valorize a city in interurban competition, and by others as models to follow to raise their level in this competition.

Here again, using tools of government that have more to do with soft law than command and control allows the state to regain its capacities to steer urban policies. That said, it is worth noting that the appeal of these incentivizing instruments appears all the greater because they are frequently linked to other, more classic, tools. This is the case with labels that can be linked to tax benefits and, to an even greater degree, prizes and awards that place winning cities in a position that enables them to influence the creation of new regulations and access national funding (Béal 2014).

To conclude, let us consider performance indicators, instruments favored by New Public Management reforms, whose use spread rapidly in French public policies after the LOLF placed them at the heart of the state's budgetary operations. By rebuilding state policies in the form of programs, organized around quantitative objectives whose realization was monitored by one or more performance indicators, this organic law aimed to increase the state's transparency and efficiency. While it did not produce the expected effects in this regard (Brunetière 2011), the systematization of performance indicators had noticeable effects on the relationships between different segments of the state apparatus and, even further, on the relationships they maintained with the various institutions participating in the implementation of their programs in regions. This is because these performance indicators, which serve as the basis for countless reporting, monitoring, auditing, and benchmarking mechanisms, had powerful centralizing effects, as shown by studies on reforms of the state in the United Kingdom (Faucher-King and Le Galès 2007). In this country that succumbed prematurely to quantophobia,¹⁴ the heavy use of performance indicators subjected local authorities and local public services to strong vertical pressures, using both the carrot (granting of honors, autonomy, and increased budgets for the most successful) and the stick (public embarrassment, reduction in grants, and even supervision). Because the LOLF did not establish an automatic link between

14. A neologism devised by Russian sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1956) to denounce the cult of quantification that gripped some social science researchers in the 1950s, who were convinced that "if a phenomenon cannot be measured, it does not exist."

performance and budgetary allocation, performance indicators did not produce as radical effects on this side of the Channel. Nevertheless, they allowed the state to regain its ability to steer local policies at a distance.

Urban policy programs provide a good illustration of the deployment of these indicators and the way in which they restructure exchanges between levels of government. The approximately sixty varied objectives and indicators that appear in the appendix of the Borloo Law are joined by performance indicators adopted by successive finance laws (between nine and sixteen, depending on the year), those that structure performance agreements signed by the state with the ANRU and the Agence nationale pour la cohésion sociale et l'égalité des chances (ACSE) (Agency for Social Cohesion and Equal Opportunities), and finally those that feature systematically in the agreements signed by these agencies with cities and operators in charge of carrying out their programs in neighborhoods. Within this large group of indicators, a few have been singled out by two agencies. This is particularly the case for the ANRU with the implementation rate for contracted operations, and, for the ACSE, the overall commitment rate of credits or cost per pupil subject to individual monitoring in the case of success-in-education projects. These "significant indicators" (Boussard 2001), used by the two agencies to monitor local implementation of their programs, heavily influenced the determination and hierarchization of local priorities, as well as the terms of their implementation (Epstein and Mboumoua 2012). On one hand, the demands of continuous reporting and regular audits organized by these agencies encouraged local actors to focus on developing these indicators alone (and therefore on achieving the objectives that they measured), to the detriment of all others. On the other, the ANRU and the ACSE used these indicators to compare the performances of different cities in terms of benchmarks (Bruno and Didier 2013). By showing how some cities lagged behind, or at least by revealing the gap that separated them from other cities on the measured criteria, the national agencies drove local actors to take action to catch up, while also naming benchmark cities whose "good practices" could act as models in this regard.

Conclusion

The institutional reforms of the 2000s paved the way for the state's withdrawal from joint management of urban and local policies, enabling it to delegate to cities all the responsibility for defining, implementing, and ensuring the consistency of said policies. The increased autonomy granted to cities vis-à-vis the decentralized government services, with which they had long shared these tasks, cannot, however, justify the removal of the state from research on urban and local governance. Far from creating a purely horizontal structure, the withdrawal of the state from urban policies in fact allowed a reconstructed state to equip itself with new tools to steer at a distance, which encourage a reconsideration of the vertical dimension of the construction of collective action at the local level.

Acte II de la décentralisation—which, in a period of budgetary restrictions, resembles a decentralization of shortfalls—and the different operations to reform the state created a new framework for urban governance, in which state intervention no longer comes in the form of the institutionalization of collective action, but in the competitive regulation of local cooperation. At the same time that it was strengthening local actors' autonomy, the state thus managed to discipline them, encouraging them to develop projects that matched national priorities. Introducing competitive bidding between cities, based on a new set of instruments consisting of calls for projects, labels and awards, and performance indicators, allowed the state to regain its capacities to collectively mobilize urban policy actors and guide their actions.

These changes, which are not limited to France,¹⁵ attest to the conservation of a form of state centrality that studies on urban and local governance considered to have disappeared too quickly. They raise new research questions, which are just beginning to be explored, in particular on the effectiveness and even more so the efficiency of remote steering, whose methods vary depending on the sectors considered (Dupuy and Pollard 2014; Négrier and Teillet 2013), and

15. The reconfiguration of the French state and the renewal of its instruments of regional intervention were mirrored in several European countries. However, the capacity of central governments to control activities developed by subnational actors by using these instruments varies significantly, depending on the degree of fiscal autonomy of local authorities and their modes of access to the center (Goldsmith and Page 2010, 5-7).

whose local effects appear highly unequal. All regulation has a cost and it is clear that the recent changes in the relationship between central and local government have had uneven effects. The payoff matrix is particularly unfavorable for medium-sized cities and rural regions that, in a competitive system, have limited collective resources compared to large urban centers. The slogan of “Egalité territoriale” (spatial equality) brandished by François Hollande during the 2012 presidential campaign, and its inclusion in the title of the Ministry for Regional Planning, can incidentally be analyzed as a form of recognition of the unequal distribution of costs within this competitive regulatory system. But this symbolic recognition did not translate to visible shifts in the priorities and methods of subnational intervention by the state, whose withdrawal from local partnerships seems destined to continue thanks to ongoing regional reforms.

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Translated and edited by Cadenza Academic Translations

Translator: Jesse Cohn, Editor: Faye East,

Senior editor: Mark Mellor

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