

3.1. Urban governance adaptation in an old industrial city: Liège¹

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Rise and fall of an Industrial City

Liège is one of the five regional cities of Belgium. It is located 85 kilometers from Brussels, 25 kilometers from the Dutch city of Maastricht and 40 kilometers from the German city of Aachen (see figure 1). With 661,478 inhabitants in 2013 (Statbel, 2014), the urban area of Liège is the third most highly populated in the country after Brussels (1,966,844 inhabitants) and Antwerp (1,002,249 inhabitants). The city is located in the Walloon Region (Wallonia) and is its largest urban area, the second being Charleroi (410,947 inhabitants). The area of influence of Liège, including the commuting area, has 772,890 inhabitants. Due to its peripheral position, Liège has fewer benefits from agglomeration effects (metropolisation) generated by Brussels as the national and European capital than other urban sub-regions in Wallonia (Halleux, 2013).

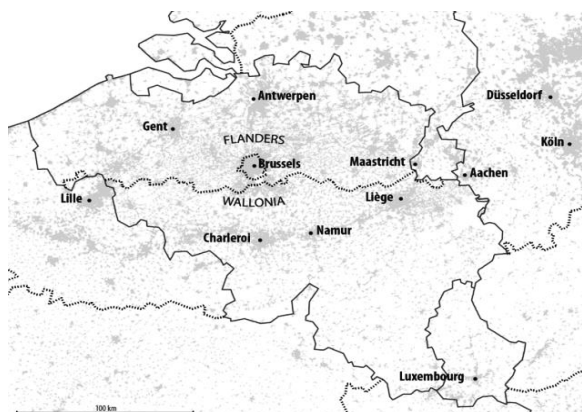


Figure 1: Location of main cities in Belgium and neighboring countries (from EAA, 2006).

Historically, from the 10th century Liège was the seat of a prince-bishopric, a status that has contributed to its religious and cultural influence. A center for pilgrimage and trade, during the Middle Ages it also developed pre-industrial activity, including coal mining and weapons manufacturing. Through these the small town became an important city in medieval Europe.

It was during the 19th century, however, that Wallonia underwent substantial industrial development based on the exploitation of mineral resources (coal) and the emergence of an important steel industry. This economic development propelled Belgium to the rank of second world industrial power, just behind England. The period also profoundly altered the Walloon industrial belt which includes the cities of La Louvière, Charleroi and Liège. These cities expanded rapidly, sometimes around a historic core, sometimes around mines and large plants, contributing to an early form of urban sprawl reinforced by a dense network of public transport. From this period, Walloon cities inherited a loose and polycentric urban structure organized around coal resources, features characteristic of Western Euro-

pean mining regions. Morphologically, Liège combines the characteristics of an old city deeply reconfigured by modernist urbanism with those of a traditional industrial city. Successive restructurings of the steel industry in Europe, characterized by production capacity reduction and relocation to coastal areas, have significantly impacted the economy of Liège, which is highly dependent on that industry. Between 1961 and 2009, the arrondissement of Liège lost 105,000 manufacturing jobs (-70%), including 20,000 in the coal mines and 45,000 in the steel industry (B. Mérenne, 2010). This gradual deindustrialization is ongoing, with the closing in 2014 of all the “hot phase” of the steel industry (blast furnaces, coke plant operations, etc.). It leaves Liège with high structural unemployment and many brownfield sites in need of redevelopment. At the same time, increasing car mobility, the presence of the waterway (the Meuse) and the central positioning of Liège in Europe have enabled it to develop new economic activities. Liège has the second largest river port in Europe and the eighth European airport for freight transport (2012), as well as internationally recognized technology companies. This transformation of the local economy associated with the creation of jobs in the service sector does not, however, currently generate any significant reduction of the unemployment rate. Structural economic changes affecting Liège have profoundly altered the morphology of the city and the challenges it faces. The metropolitan region must now struggle with the pauperization of some urban areas, transform its economy to support jobs creation, reinforce its position at regional and international levels, resist the metropolisation that concentrates highly specialized and strategic services in Brussels, and develop new projects to transform brownfield sites. These challenges are critical not only for Liège, but also for Wallonia: without an upswing in its two main cities, the Walloon region cannot count on a significant or across-the-board improvement in its socio-economic situation (Thisse, 2007; Halleux, 2008). To pursue these objectives, it seems the governance structures of many of the stakeholders must adapt to the new realities of Liège.

The adaptation of urban governance structures to internal and external changes in the Liège agglomeration

The evolution of the city of Liège since the nineteenth century has led policymakers at various times to pursue several projects of governance reform at a built-up or urban area scales. These projects reflected the concerns of the time but their aims were seldom achieved. In this research note, we have examined the ways in which administrative bodies have been reformed to adapt to changes in urban configuration, the national and international context and structural constraints. We will see that efforts to reform urban administration to overcome structural tensions have often been at best partially effective, and have been constrained by the local history of the agencies concerned and the limited rationality of actors.

The problem of managing urban growth during the industrial period

At the time of national independence, Belgium had particularly strong municipal divisions inherited from the old regime and the French occupation. It is against this institutional legacy dating back to 1794 that the industrial revolution there unfolded. The Liège agglomeration grew from 112,000 inhabitants in 1831 to 450,000 in 1930 (a 400% increase), which is far higher than the national average over the same period (214%) (INS, 1983). The rural exodus and migration concentrated an increasingly significant workforce in the Walloon industrial belt, people who settled directly around major industries, coal mines and existing urban centres. The result in the case of Liège was an intense increase in the built-up area of the town as people relocated to a heterogeneous set of secondary centres in a loose urban fabric held together by an extensive network of public transport. The borders of the central municipality of Liège were redrawn more than once to reflect population growth and incorporate newly developing suburbs, but in the end were incapable of encompassing the entire agglomeration. These developments put local public administration under pressure in the early twentieth century. In 1935, the Belgian government commissioned Baron Holvoet to assess the situation local authorities found themselves in. He noted that the central municipalities of urban areas had serious financial problems and had to struggle with problems of coordination affecting police and fire services, the development of utility networks (water, gas, electricity, etc.), safety and education (Holvoet, 1936). These challenges were typical across cities experiencing growth due to their industrial development. The response was services-based cooperation managed by the so-called "intercommunales". These supra-municipal corporations, recognized in 1921 by the Belgian legislature, brought together multiple municipalities for the purpose of supplying municipal-type services. The underlying purpose was both to mutualize and rationalize services where one municipality on its own was unable to respond adequately to demand. Having identified the problem as essentially one of coordination of public services, and that the provinces were incapable of taking care of such matters, Holvoet urged the parliament to create urban districts each with specific responsibilities (fire services, garbage removal, police, water/gas/electricity, technical education), to be financed by contributions from the towns they served. While the proposal generated heated discussion, it was never implemented, any more than other more radical proposals that envisaged massive mergers of municipalities. It was not until the occupation period during World War II that a "Greater Liège" (Gross Lüttich) was brought into being by merging the municipalities within the agglomeration. This merger was associated with the creation of internal districts with specific competencies. The order of the Deputy Secretary General for major cities justified the decision to merge these municipalities with reference to an urban situation *fragmented by obsolete territorial divisions whose*

preservation is contrary to logical and sound administration and the continued harmonious development of the urban complex (Moniteur Belge, 1942: 6498). This initiative applying a proven German model had as much to do with political control as with economic and industrial development. At the end of the war, the decision was annulled and the previous situation restored. This period had a significant impact on the urban coordination issue by affecting the reflections on the creation of an urban institution at the agglomeration scale.

Industrial decline and technological changes affecting Liège urban issues

The second half of the 20th century saw the beginning of the decline in the traditional sectors of Liège's economy: from the 1960s, the authorities started reporting a slowdown in the steel industry, while one by one the coal mines were closing (the last one bankrupted in 1977). The population of the Liège agglomeration was at that stage 455,000 inhabitants and they were still unevenly distributed among a patchwork of municipalities that had known little change since Belgian independence. It was in this context that some of the first discussions at this agglomeration level took place. In 1964, a symposium entitled *Tomorrow our cities ... Colloquium Liège 2000* (Demain nos villes... Liège en l'an 2000) was organized by the Liège Junior Chamber of Commerce, providing an opportunity to talk about the application of the Athens Charter, the impact of modernization and replacement of the built environment on the city center, reflections on the situation in other European regional cities (Nancy/Metz/Thionville, Cologne, Toulouse) and a draft outline proposing a spatial structure for the entire urban area of Liège (Englebert, 1965). This first plan, full of modernist ideas, was not implemented. It nevertheless constitutes a major turning point in the conceptualization of Liège at this spatial level. Two years later, in 1966, the Groupe l'Équerre published the voluminous report *Liège, métropole régionale: options fondamentales de développement et d'aménagement* (Liège, regional metropolis: fundamental planning and development options). It was part of the discussion concerning the development of "sector plans" in Belgium (affectation plans) and followed in the wake of post-war reconstruction efforts. In compiling the report, the authors drew on the expertise of a wide range of scientists and several previous studies: an environmental, cultural and socio-economic survey conducted between 1948 and 1952 (L'Équerre, 1958); an assessment of the Liège influence areas (1955); and research on urban centres and rural population centres in the Belgian southeast (1963). The report concluded that the agglomeration was in economic decline and sought to provide context for the sectoral studies that had been carried out to date. With the aim to consolidate the role of Liège as a regional city in the Europe of the Regions (the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957), the report had three main objectives: to respond to the emergence of unemployment and economic decline, to set guidelines for infrastructure investments across the agglomera-

tion, and to give operational tools which are adequate to respond to the changing context. This report was pioneering in several respects. First, it foresaw the future of the metropolis as agglomeration with the observation that *if each municipality is accountable for the development of its own territory, none can ignore [...] that the future of the city will not be done by a simple sum of local and diverse policy, but through communal thinking and determination* (L'Équerre, 1966). Then it organized the urban area into several influence zones (cantonal area), cantonal and regional centres, dense and less dense built up areas (figure 2). Finally, it forecast a population increase of 60,000 people per year (a figure that would prove to be largely overestimated), which would influence both housing construction targets and development of job-generating economic activities as well as setting aside of land needed for these purposes. While the document relied strongly on transport networks particularly in its aim to link Europe to the heart of the city, it only partially anticipated the indirect effects of ubiquitous personal car use.

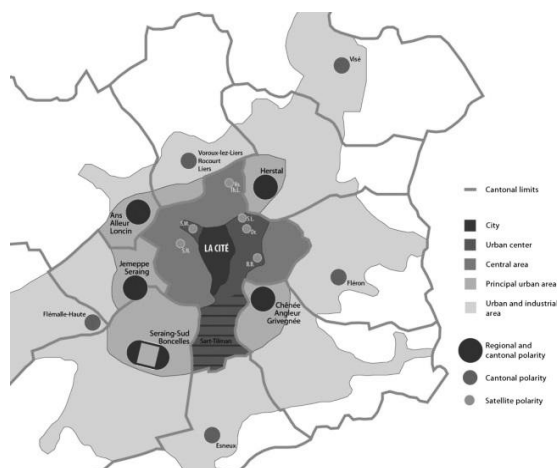


Figure 2: Projected development of Liège as a regional metropolis (from L'Équerre, 1966) as adapted by C. Breuer (Mérenne, 2010)

The development of this mode of transport would accelerate the trend towards peripheral suburbanization around the Liège agglomeration, reinforced by the transformations of the centre of the city (endless construction site, etc.), the impoverishment of some central neighbourhoods, the high availability of building land in the periphery and the weakness of planning guidelines intended to limit the phenomenon. The L'Équerre report invited decision-makers to develop a new institution, an urban community ("Communauté urbaine"), endowed with specific responsibilities and a deliberative assembly, in order to create a space of solidarity across the whole city and to coordinate development activities. In doing so, the authors based their recommendations on concurrent discussions about "supracommunalité" taking place in France (Law 66-1069 concerning the creation of urban communities of Lille, Lyon, Bordeaux and Strasbourg was promulgated in 1966). This represented a major step in the discourse about Liège, one which would exert a

broad influence on the content of local debates on urban governance during the second half of the 20th century. It seems clear that the time was right for developing new institutional structures specifically tailored to urban regions; the fragmented nature of municipal framework rendered them incapable of managing a range of overarching functions, thereby failing to support the need for economic development and intra-urban cooperation. It was from that point forward that the authorities in Belgium, still at that stage not a federal state, were encouraged to draw inspiration from legislative developments in France in their efforts to find solutions to this issue. Between 1966 and 1970, a variety of legislative proposals specifically envisaged the creation of federations of municipalities or urban districts. The debate was organized primarily around Brussels for historical reasons, but the other major Belgian cities were also involved. In 1971, the parliament, drawing strongly on the model of French urban communities, passed a law organizing agglomerations and municipal federations as supracommunal institutions. The law provided for the creation of five agglomérations (Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Charleroi and Liège) with mandatory and delegated powers (the latter from municipalities, provinces or even the state), their own power to raise taxes, and a deliberative assembly (Moniteur Belge, 1971). It also allowed for the creation of "federations of outlying municipalities" (fédérations de communes périphériques) around the agglomérations, and "municipal federations" in the rest of the country. The creation and the territorial extent of the first were under the control of the parliament, while the others were left to decide for themselves whether to work together. This was a not insignificant distinction, especially if analysed retrospectively with reference to the phenomenon of defensive associations of municipalities on the outskirts of major French cities, the aim of which was to prevent the gathering of dense urban areas (reputed to run deficits) with their outlying municipalities (supposedly more financially sound). This law reflects the desire to decentralize and devolve administration closer to those whom it affects and to improve its effectiveness (Moniteur Belge, 1971), in the context of structural change from a unitary state to a federal model (the three Belgian linguistic communities were created in 1970 with responsibility for cultural issues, and the three regions in 1980 to exercise certain territorial jurisdictions). This particular institutional context led the parliament to determine territorial extent only for the Brussels *agglomération*, following the proposal of Baron Holvoet in 1937. It was apparent that this boundary no longer corresponded to the reality of the national metropolis, but it was a conservative solution that would prefigure the Region of Brussels-Capital. The omission of any legislated determination of the territorial extent of the other agglomérations, including Liège, sidestepped a problem that had held up progress on this issue for several years.

Changes of municipal boundaries and increasing role of intermunicipalities associations

At the same time, the government amended the conditions under which municipalities could merge in urban areas (Moniteur Belge, 1971b) to accelerate the rationalisation of a municipal framework which was still very fragmented and territorially interspersed with both enclaves and exclaves. This 1971 Act, which expanded the possibilities offered by “the single Act” of 1961, achieved limited results, however. The response of the government was to dictate to the municipalities how they should amalgamate, a solution they imposed by law in 1975. This approach was a belated response to the post-war Fordist model, to increasing mobility and the increased cost of public services and infrastructure. It aimed to bring together within a single municipality urban center and their influence area (Vandermotten, 2008). The law has had broad implications for the organisation of all local government areas: on 1 January 1977, the number of Belgian municipalities dropped from 2,359 to 596. The Liège agglomeration incorporated 15 of these new municipalities or parts of municipalities and increased its population from 135,347 to 230,805 inhabitants. This process may have exceeded the scale of previous mergers, but its results were nevertheless patchy and imperfect. While in Namur and Charleroi much of the morphological agglomeration was integrated into a single municipality, Liège remained strikingly fragmented. In 1977, the municipality of Liège represented only 44% of its functional morphological agglomeration. If one compares with the case of Charleroi, where the central municipality accounts for 74% of the overall population, it is a quite low level.

The expected efficacy of the process has been limited by the political dynamics to which local elected officials and significant numbers of municipal staff have contributed.

This has entrenched some significant problems of governance related to the fragmentation of local government.

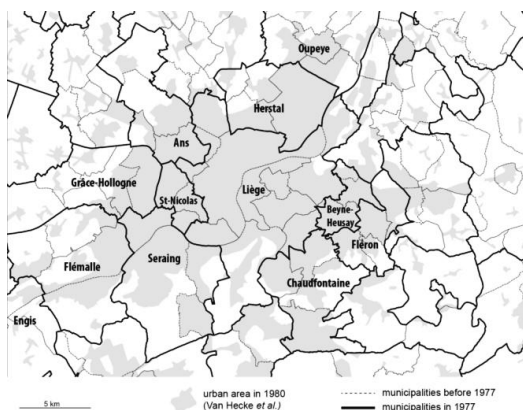


Figure 3: municipalities merging in 1977 and urbanisation in 1980 (Van Hecke et al. 2009) In bold, the name of new municipalities which were parts of the morphological agglomeration of Liège.

Aggravating factors such as the continued acceleration of residential suburbanization and the exurbanisation of economic activities have transformed the urban region, not only in terms of urbanisation, but also from the point of view of political

relations between the centre and the periphery: the industrial belt is deeply politically rooted on the left, while the suburbs and peri-urban areas are more to the right. Meanwhile, the radical nature of the compulsory amalgamations has significantly changed the debate on supramunicipalities (Boniver et al., 2011): On the one hand, political strife and the political fixes which had emerged during the project (Lazarri et al., 2008) effectively disrupted progress on local government reforms; yet, on the other hand, mergers brought a partial solution to the rationalisation issue and defused tensions caused by the incapacity of the municipal level to deal with local territorial issues and the strong urban heterogeneity. It should be noted that during this period the “intercommunales” have continued to grow. In Wallonia, there are currently 103 intercommunales for 262 municipalities, against 122 in 1997 (De Bruyckere, 2000) and 146 in 2006 (Debois, 2006). This more recent decrease in the number of such formal cooperations undoubtedly masks their relative weight in local governance structures, where they have gradually increased their influence in several strategic areas of local administration. For example, the Liège urban area has dealings with about twenty intercommunales (and their affiliates) in the domains of health care, telecommunications, drainage and water supply, economic development etc. Among these, the Société Provinciale d’Industrialisation, later renamed Services Promotion Initiatives (SPI) plays a strategic role. Founded in 1961 at the initiative of the Province of Liège, it has expanded into many economic growth areas, from management of business parks to delegated management of city-wide urban projects. Intercommunales have also seen their role profoundly changed by the ending of monopolies and as they have adopted many of the practices of private companies. A leading example of this is Tecteo, which started in electricity network management in the Liège area (ALE, 1923), and has since expanded its activities to telecommunications and gas networks, and more recently into publishing. At the same time, a subsidiary has taken stakes in various critical pieces of infrastructure in the Liège region (including Liège Airport). As the position of intercommunales in local governance has strengthened, they have become strategic urban actors, controlling significant resources and operating within or across sectors depending on location, forming a complex muddle of operational structures. They influence debates on urban governance and management in several ways. First, by generating economies of scale through the establishment of synergies and building up expertise in areas of municipal interest, they contribute to the effective provision of public and semi-public services benefiting multiple municipalities. Although this system is not ideal, it is working and is a partial solution for the inadequacy or failure of authorities at communal, provincial and regional levels to perform certain tasks. Second, by virtue of their position as part of the local political and administrative muddle, they function as loci of power and of clashes between local actors for control of resources and

prerogatives. Processes at work in these organizations are therefore subject to bounded rationality, and institutions themselves are quick to act to ensure their survival and extend their access to resources. Finally, it should be noted that all intercommunales areas of interest cannot overlap completely due to the diversity of the scales and objectives, relevance of project spaces and affinities between actors. These elements tend to reduce the need to establish supra-organs on top of the already complex organisation of Belgium's local institutions.

Attempts to introduce a "French" model of supramunicipalities: aspirations of an urban community

The 1990s saw the emergence of new reflections on supramunicipality in Wallonia. These emerged in the context of the socio-economic stagnation of Liège: industry had been hit hard by successive restructurings, suburbanization shifted sources of revenue to the periphery and the pauperization of the town centre had drained the municipality of Liege financially. It was particularly difficult to push through major infrastructure projects for the entire urban region due to the lack of political consensus between the different levels of power and the weak local actor action capacity. Several metropolitan projects became bogged down in endless procedures. At the same time, it must be noted that the municipal amalgamations only partially addressed territorial developments or, at economic and institutional levels, the transition to a post-Fordist society (Vandermotten, 2008). This period saw an abundance of cooperative initiatives among urban municipalities. They generally aimed to harmonise developments within the agglomeration and avoid intra-urban competition, particularly in residential and commercial development. Politicians started several initiatives, including discussion seminars and collaborative institutions in a bottom-up process. The press echoed these discussions: content analysis shows that election campaign periods tended to be conducive to the emergence of debates on the "Metropolitan region of Liège" (Breuer, 2008). In 1994 the association *Conférence des Bourgmestres de Liège* ("Conference of Liège Mayors") first brought together elected officials of all the municipalities of the district for themed discussions (mobility, retail, etc.). In 1996, Liège adopted a new urban plan for the whole urban region (SEGEFA *et al.*, 1996). It followed the development of the Walloon Regional Plan (PRATW) developed in the early 1990s. The report updated previous diagnosis taking into account the more recent phenomena of suburbanisation and exurbanisation. It analysed two scenarios: the first trend demonstrated that if the status quo was to continue, the prospects for the urban area would continue to degrade (breakdown of the industrial fabric, urban sprawl, decreased quality of life, commercial oversupply and accelerated suburbanisation). In contrast, the proactive scenario envisaged strengthening of the territorial structure and delineation of cooperation areas extending radially from the Liege

city centre. This prospective approach did not explicitly propose the creation of a structure of urban governance at urban region level, but rather demonstrated the risks of a fragmented management of the urban area. This study was augmented the following year by a research agreement on operational collaboration structures for Walloon municipalities wishing to pursue an agglomeration strategy (Mérenne *et al.*, 1997). It explored solutions adopted in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Quebec and the United Kingdom to develop strategic planning across whole cities and their suburbs. From this analysis, it appeared that structural flexibility, financial incentives (subsidies), adequate working parameters and appropriate competencies are the factors needed for an urban agglomeration strategy to succeed. The "French" model of urban community made a strong reappearance after several study trips in France. This model is characterized by a supra-municipal structure with its own taxing powers and more highly developed skills in the management of public utilities, economic development and planning. Local political parties were divided on the solution to adopt: The Greens pleaded for an institutional structure with strong democratic legitimacy, the Socialist Party placed more emphasis on the ability of the structure to work together with the existing intercommunales, the Christian Democrats challenged the powers of the future urban community, and the Liberals, relatively taciturn on this matter, questioned its scope. In 2000, the press reported that the debate became deadlocked, despite calls for a grand coalition (*union sacrée*) around the development of the Liege agglomeration. This was the result of opposition both between and within the parties, in which the issues of centre-periphery relations, where the boundary lines should run, and the debt of the central municipality played key roles. Against this background, alternative proposals appeared which drew essentially on the existing intercommunales as they stood, which significantly slowed down progress towards the creation of an urban community in Liège. While this was playing out, the economic situation of Liège continued to deteriorate. The main steel industries active in Liège announced the rolling closure of its plants, which prompted the convening of several public meetings on economic development across the metropolitan area, including the development plan and development of areas affected by the closure of the "hot phase" plants (2004). The recently-created association "Future of Pays de Liège" organised these events. The urgency with which the authorities had to respond to the new economic situation pushed them to favour an essentially economic approach of the agglomeration. It would also see the emergence of new actors related to the economic conversion such as the GRE-Liège (Economic Redeployment Group) in 2004, whose competencies gradually extended to strategic planning.

The role of 'external' actors in the development of projects and the construction of metropolitan infrastructure

In 2001, the St. Polycarpe agreements transferred responsibility for the municipalities and provinces to the regions. The Walloon government accordingly took on the issue of how to organise local institutions and planned to significantly reform them. A commission was established for the purpose: it brought together 9 members from the Walloon government, 9 members of the Walloon parliament and 9 local representatives. This "Commission of 27" was tasked with providing guidelines for reform of the various levels of local administration in Wallonia: the municipalities, the provinces and the intercommunales. This approach boded well for the achievement of significant breaks in territorial organisation and political geography - including for agglomerations -, but the political opposition between commission members didn't allow a change of administrative structures. The role of the provinces had particularly crystallised opposing positions, some parties (e.g. the Liberals) supporting abolition, others (socialists, centrists) supporting their retention with reduced powers. Two further factors in addition to this conflict between the parties help to explain the impasse. First, the regional parliament has a significant proportion of members elected at the local level who are inclined to slow down reforms they deem contrary to municipal autonomy or those of their own municipality. Second, the problem of how to manage agglomerations in Wallonia is not a uniform one across the region: Liège is the most populous and the most institutionally fragmented urban area since the limited merging process that took place in 1977. If this window of opportunity did not change urban governance structures, these have certainly been addressed, as evidenced by a document prepared by the Standing Conference of Territorial Development at the request of the Walloon government. Thereof, devoted to urban communities, concluded by saying that "While cooperation initiatives must come from the base [the municipalities], the Walloon Region must nevertheless make sure it provides a clear legislative framework, thereby allowing these initiatives to be developed and implemented within a consistent framework" (Barthe, 2003). However, the regional government had some difficulties positioning itself on this issue, and its code of local democracy adopted later did no more than transcribe the national law of 1971 on municipal federations which was already clearly out of date, as demonstrated by certain clauses such as the division and the repartition of buildings of the municipalities based on the number of fireplaces, an outmoded way to count households. Concerning the evolution of institutions, it had been very limited. This has had a double impact: on the one hand, the absence of a legislative solution forced local officials to come up with some creative approaches, devising innovative and flexible contractual collaborations; and, on the other hand, the lack of support from the regional authority weakened these experiences, as evidenced by the evolution of the Conference of Liège Mayors or the Urban Community

of Charleroi. In 2004, the regional Ordinance on Mobility and Local Accessibility has allowed the development of urban mobility plans (PUM) that are described as "guidance [indicative] documents for the organisation and management of travel, parking and general accessibility at the level of an urban agglomeration" established by the Walloon government (Walloon Government, 2004). A PUM must contain a territorial diagnosis, objectives for the movement of people and goods, agglomeration-level measures and recommendations in terms of land usage planning that aim to reduce commuting. The PUM project area concerned 34 municipalities and corresponded to the Liège arrondissement, or to the area represented by the Conference of Liège Mayors established in 1994. Because of the absence of an established plan of the spatial organisation of the agglomeration, the PUM Liège identified a territorial structure, zones of intermunicipal cooperation and agreed "purposed precincts" (vocations territoriales) across the urban area (PUM, 2008). Although completed and approved by the municipalities involved after an inclusive consultation, the PUM has not been validated by the Walloon government due to a significant disagreement on the creation of a motorway extension in the south of the city. This problem blocks *de facto* the entire project which contains, if not a full local territorial plan, the foundations of a "vision shared among the municipalities of a coherent territorial development" (Leblanc, 2014). This event is illustrative of the predominant role of the regional authority that has both resources (legal, financial, human, etc.) and critical competencies (economic development, regional planning, transportation, etc.). Several major projects are thus initiated by actors external to the Liège agglomeration, whose own resources and local institutional structure do not allow them to play a strategic role in large-scale projects. As a result, the development of the station for high-speed trains, the development of the regional airport of Liège or the tramway construction - to name just a few examples - slip from the direct influence of local actors. The influence of regional and pararegional organisations on the tram project is decisive. The project for the creation of a tramway involves the three more important municipalities of the urban agglomeration (Herstal, Liège and Seraing), located in the industrial belt along the Meuse valley. From 2018, the tram is expected to relieve downtown congestion and will link the main activity centres in this part of the city.

However, most of the project participants are not based in the Liège agglomeration. The project sponsor, for example, is the Walloon Regional Transport Company (SRWT) which has been mandated by the Walloon government to manage public transport in Wallonia.

After lengthy internal negotiations, the Walloon government has established the route of the tramway and the modes of managing and financing. It also organised citizen participation and public consultation.

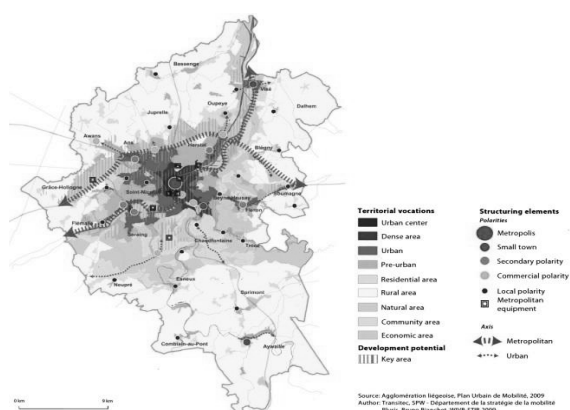


Figure 4: *Plan of territorial structure for the district of Liège proposed by the PUM (2008)*

The municipality of Liège, as the local authority, has handed over a portion of its powers to SRWT through a public service agreement (convention public – public). Finally, the Province of Liège has contributed a substantial part of the promotional material around the tram project (promotional video, presentation layout, etc.) and drawn benefits in terms of positive image. GRE-Liège has meanwhile been appointed to conduct a study into the extension of the tramway line along a corridor identified by the PUM. In the absence of a highly structured interlocutor in the urban agglomeration, the project is essentially being managed by other levels of government and parastatals. More recently, the Walloon government has introduced the concept of “communities of territory” in its draft of a renewed Regional Spatial Development Plan (SDER 2014), i.e. governance structure for strategic planning at the level of one or more “living areas”, corresponding to spaces of daily life a whole local community, organised around an urban centre. Among their objectives, these territorial communities are intended to help develop projects in territory planning, infrastructure, retail and economic development, quality of life, etc. The analysis of the functioning of these communities discussed earlier shows that this new approach is less a support to many emerging initiatives of supra-cooperation than a way to find a more appropriate level at which regional policies can be implemented (Van Cutsem, 2014). Currently, these territorial communities are not operational, but they will probably become an important framework for the future strategic and integrated management of the urban region of Liège.

Being in Europe and in the World: mobilising around international positioning

The late 20th century saw an increase in competition between cities. The weakening of national borders has benefited the globalization of trade, technological change has transformed the means of travel, the transformation of states has favoured the emergence of regional and sub-national actors. In this dynamic, not all cities are equal. Traditional industrial agglomerations like Liège are poorly equipped to rise in this changing and competitive context. In fact, they rarely have a size or sufficient level of attractiveness to generate metropolitan dy-

namics, they have degraded urban features, an economic structure unsuited to international competition and a negative image. Liège is no exception, as evidenced by various comparative studies in Europe (Brunet *et al.*, 1989; Rozenblat *et al.*, 2003.) where it came in at the bottom of the ranking, which had an explosive effect on stakeholders. Despite this, few local actors seek to proactively influence the indicators by which such things are measured, instead generally adopting a reactive position, as has been observed in relation to European audits on quality of life (Lemaitre, 2006). The paradigm of competition and territorial attractiveness has had an impact on city governance processes. By the 1990s, the dual aims of the metropolitan coordination became to increase the city’s visibility and to pass a population threshold of 500,000 inhabitants. This rough empirical boundary promoted by elected officials and some experts is believed to separate two categories of cities: the “European” cities, competitive and attractive in the new configuration of the continent; and other cities that are too small to claim more than a regional or local role. The need to “count in Europe” to attract investment and visitors gave a new impetus to supra or regional cooperation oriented towards a strategy of visibility and promotion. This rhetoric, which has supplanted the issues of rationality and intra-urban solidarity, is an attractive and consensual banner under which local actors can make common cause in order to face a fierce competitive “outside”. It also helps to sidestep the delicate matters of spatial and functional delineation of areas of collaboration, which were a persistent source of tension in the supra-municipality question. Liège’s cross-border cooperation with cities of the MAHHL network (Maastricht, Aachen, Hasselt, Heerlen, Liège) and the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion are both examples of this dynamic: building a transnational urban region, boosting effective collaboration and consolidating a position in the network of European cities. The European Union supports these efforts to strengthen European integration through Community legislation or with financial support (Interreg, etc.). It appears, however, that Liège has difficulties in claiming a leadership role in such cooperation and that the kinds of cooperation undertaken are on relatively targeted and limited topics. At the agglomeration level, Liège has tried for several years to position itself internationally and mobilise its actors around high visibility projects. These are not only tools of external communications used to change the perception of the city, but also vectors of mobilisation for resources internal to the agglomeration. Several projects illustrate this strategy: two of them are Liège 2017 and Liège together. In 2007, the city of Liège applied to host the 2017 international exhibition. International exhibitions are held between two universal exhibitions, they last 3 months and are the opportunity to host several countries on a 25 hectare site. They offer high visibility for the host city, and authorities typically hope to attract tourists and investors while putting local know-how on display. For the purpose of the application, the City of Liège mobilised national, provincial, regional and local authorities, plus

a wide range of private and public actors (sponsoring, events, etc.). The project not only generated a collective and positive momentum, it also prompted planning for the renewal of a deprived area along the Meuse, and the setting of deadlines for major infrastructure projects such as the tramway, which was to serve the exhibition site. However, it was another candidate city, Astana (Kazakhstan), which was chosen by the International Bureau of Exhibitions. The actors have nevertheless decided to proceed with the urbanisation of the exhibition site and to maintain the collective dynamic around a new project, showing a determination not to unwind the mobilisation process (Destatte, 2014). That new project, flowing from the "Liège Métropole Power 3" process, was formalized under the banner "Liège together". Liège, the open, creative and connected metropolis is the so-called *baseline* of the city. The approach aims to aggregate activities (such as conferences) around high visibility themes. The ulterior aim is the same as before: to attract tourists, investors, etc. Launched in 2013, the operation has not yet been underway long enough to allow a first assessment of its ability to structurally mobilise actors. While the objectives of these strategies are evident, the projects are primarily driven by local authorities in a selective *bottom-up* process. They allow a short term mobilisation around these initiatives, but also the formation of a denser network of actors. However, the risk of demobilisation can't be dismissed if concrete achievements prove not to be significant, are weakly supported or lost in a confusion of projects.

Conclusion: the urban region of Liège in search of a collective capacity of action, between hope and disillusion. Attempts to adapt urban governance in light of changes to external and internal contexts

The evolution of the management of the urban area of Liège is illustrative of attempts to adapt urban governance structures in response to structural changes in the economy, geopolitics, technology, etc. This evolution is the result of tensions exerted on the cities, resistance to change and the attitude of actors at different scales. On the basis of the Liège experience, we can identify three distinct periods. The industrial revolution and the rural exodus created the first of these. Rapid urbanisation in a fragmented municipal framework inherited from the old regime has resulted in major problems in coordinating the implementation and management of technical supply networks (water, electricity), health and sanitation (planning, drainage) and safety/security (police, fire). This lack of coordination found a partial answer through inter-sectoral and inter-municipal cooperation. However, this solution defused only a small portion of the tension between the new urban configuration and management issues. The initiative of merging the municipalities of the metropolitan area during the German occupation of the Second World War heralded a new direction, towards cities as zones of economic production. This experience came to a rapid halt, but the decline of economic conditions in the Liège region and the Fordist postwar economy gave new life to

the debate. On the one hand, the need to rationalise found a partial solution in the fusion of municipalities. On the other hand, the question of coordinated management of the agglomeration led to proposals for the creation of an urban community and initial spatial structure planning. Interest had primarily been focused on the management of public services and infrastructure, before treating intra-urban financial solidarity and harmonious development of the city. Proposals sought to gradually effect a smooth transition to the post-Fordist economy, at least in urban areas, but without real success. More recently, the growth of trade, European integration and economic developments have changed the context of cities. The rhetoric of inter-city competition and belonging to the network of European cities necessitates broad alliances of urban or metropolitan regions, primarily in economic terms. The attractiveness for residents and investment is central to such strategies, which mean in practice the concerted mobilisation of local actors in relation to the *outside*. The Liège agglomeration pursued this strategy which is flexible and generally consensual.

However, the "institutional bricolage" works...

The evolution of the governance structures of the urban area of Liège demonstrates the difficulty of establishing a collective actor with capacity to act in its own right and means to influence its own socio-economic trajectory. However, it should be noted that the institutional bricolage, or quick fix, put in place in Liège "institutional bricolage" does in fact work: it produces territorial results, is capable of generating large-scale projects, can attract private and public investment, manages (in some places) to maintain or improve urban quality and stabilise political configurations. The local governance system is more an institutional bricolage than a territorial engineering because it has largely been built incrementally on the existing structures, and has rarely been an outcome of any systemic ruptures. In particular, it responds to local conditions: the multipolar urban morphology inherited from the Industrial Revolution, the centre-periphery relations restructured by suburbanisation and the exurbanisation of certain economic activities, the multiplicity of actors operating on the territory and to the institutional complexity of Belgium, including the proximity of regional and municipal levels and the ambiguous function of provincial institutions. The durability of this pattern of urban governance is therefore probably due to its ability to adapt to the local context and, to some extent, to "run" the city effectively. However, this configuration of actors and the weakness of the city as "collective actor" have made it impossible to build a common territory project enjoying strong legitimacy and the wherewithal to be put into practice. The Liège "institutional bricolage" generates a collective capacity, but it struggles to respond to the great challenges the urban area is facing. Furthermore, it fails to coordinate large urban projects to give them a global coherence insofar each of these projects has its own temporality and its own network of stakeholders.

The multiplicity of actors and the nature of local leadership are probably not unrelated to this problem, which is revealed with even greater force in the major urban development projects and development strategies that emerge at different levels where local actors may find themselves deprived of their projects. As a consequence Liège is not able to fully take advantage of these projects. The situation also puts into question both the decision-making and the democratic legibility of the muddle of players. The regional actor will undoubtedly play a key role in strengthening local capacity to address urban issues. It has begun to rationalise institutions and set out new markers for a renewed supra-cooperation, but it should probably provide more active support for *bottom-up* initiatives and emerging cooperation through a contractual and accountable process. It is probably under these conditions that in the middle of the institutional bricolage, creativity and constraints, a collective action capacity can emerge that is sufficient to build a common strategy and influence the city strategy towards a desired future.

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