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Urban Sustainable Development and the Challenge of French Metropolitan Strategies.

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Translated from French by Jesse Tatum, Emmanuel Kobena Kuto and Jean-Yves Bart.

Abstract:
This article focuses on some salient issues of urban sustainable development in France, specifically with regard to six urban agglomerations: Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Montpellier, Nantes and Toulouse. The reticular dimension of these issues is analysed with reference to the ways a plurality of actors imagine, project and realise the construction of cities, rather than through sectoral points of view. This relational approach is divided according to a triple focus in which we successively address: firstly, the state of SD policies in the listed major French cities, in terms of contents and conception; secondly, their implementation from the perspective of instruments; and finally, the circuits of their realisation. Thus, urban SD appears within a (locally variable) set of linkages that place these issues firmly in areas of interrelations and intersections.

Keywords: sustainable development, city, France, environment, comparison.

Résumé :
Cet article appréhende quelques problématiques saillantes du développement durable urbain en France à partir du cas de six métropoles : Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Montpellier, Nantes et Toulouse. La dimension réticulaire de ces enjeux est analysée en regard de la fabrique de la ville, plutôt que par des entrées sectorielles. Cette approche relationnelle est déclinée suivant une triple focale : on aborde successivement l'état des politiques de DD dans les différentes grandes villes françaises, en termes de contenus puis d'énoncés, et leur mise en œuvre, sous l'angle des instruments et des circuits de concrétisation. Le DD urbain apparaît ainsi inscrit dans un ensemble (localement fluctuant) de chaînages, qui le situent résolument dans des espaces d'interrelations, sinon des intersections.

Mots-clés : développement durable, ville, France, environnement, comparaison.

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Urban Sustainable Development and the Challenge of French Metropolitan Strategies.[1]

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Introduction

From global warming to the recent Grenelle Environment Summit by way of social economy and solidarity, countless headlines attest to the fact that 'sustainable development' (SD) is of utmost importance on the political agenda. At the same time, there is by no means a unified interpretation, nor a single relevant territory (Hamman, 2008) from the 'global' to the 'local' levels. This denotes the extremely transversal scope of this issue that criss-crosses environmental, social and economic issues; and which is now the embodiment of not only global issues like poverty and North-South relations (Brunel, 2004 & Rinck, 2002), but also territorial ones. The leitmotiv of the 'sustainable city' attests to this, coming in the wake of other narratives such as urban ecology (Rudolf, 2008), an affiliation which suggests that environmental policies have taken leading dimensions in current practices.

Indeed, the subject of this article is the place of SD in French urban projects and strategies. It is based on a comparative study conducted for the French Ministry of Environment which addresses, with a processual dimension, the urban agglomerations of Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Montpellier, Nantes and Toulouse (Blanc, Blanc, Hamman and Henninger, 2008; Blanc & Hamman, 2009). This approach, based on important documentation and field work (observations and interviews) helps trace the complex relations between discourse and reality of current dynamics; including the implementation of SD urban operations, such as mutations in the perimeter of public action as typified by urbanisation. These relations converge in articulating the issues as urban SD, in the diversity of its usages (Da Cunha et al., 2005), becomes a 'portmanteau' – much like 'governance' (Gaudin, 2002) or even 'participatory democracy' (Smith and Blanc, 1997). The paradoxical strength of ambiguity is well known: far from being an obstacle in its dissemination, the imprecision that surrounds SD enables it to unite practices and experiences – otherwise incompatible in their determinants – through a 'candy floss effect' as it is called in communication sociology.[2]

To a large extent, this refers to a change of direction in the theme of SD since the 1990s. In returning to the idea of rediscovering aggregates in relation to the more 'operational' representations forged during the 1960s-1970s, particularly important in terms of the urban ecosystem and urban metabolism approaches (Barles, 2002) as well as the notion of lifecycle and sectoral analyses (where there are few social and symbolic dimensions), SD is better understood as a mechanism for transforming local administrations and policies through coherent collaboration between various services, levels of action and territorial jurisdictions (*Annales de la Recherche*

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[2] See Neveu, 1994, p. 88. The metaphor is borrowed from Erving Goffman.

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Urbaine, 2002).

This is linked to the issue of correspondence between strategies and concrete expressions. In this context, it is a fact that in terms of urban planning, concepts of projects and strategies have multiple definitions depending on the relevant actors and professional situations. This can "describe a system of intentions, a territorial development strategy with a strong political dimension, or, above all, the spatial realisation of these intentions" (Bacqué et al., 2007: 95). It is often thought that urban projects are the expression of ideas and sketches, whereas programmes provide details. This manner of thinking recalls the classic distinction made by Manuel Castells (1977) between project and urban planning (i.e. strategy). In this particular case, it is important to emphasise that, from the point of view of its operational nature, the implementation of urban SD corresponds to a shift from institutional logic to planning logic, in line with the theories of governance on urban 'co-production' (Arab, 2001). Gilles Pinson perceptively defines city planning as "the process of territorial mobilisation aimed at transforming the physical form, the economy and the image of cities in a context of inter-urban competition" (2006: 651). In concrete terms, this could be a case of "project management", as an official of the Lille Metropolitan Community explains:

"It's a rather sensitive point: when drafting Agenda 21,[3] an entire project management system was set up. [...] The consultation involves local authorities, but Agenda 21 and project management require us to work together. The SD department and the project management department developed some tools for co-operation for the project managers so that they would be able to answer" (Lille, 5 June 2007).

Thus, the transversal nature of these procedures is emphasised, as exemplified by a Montpellier public transport official:

"[As for] SD, our representatives are always and permanently within the logic of a fully integrated urban development project. This is not a sectoral policy vision in which someone says 'I am doing some roadwork here', while another says 'I am doing a bit of mass transport and social housing here…'. Everything is done with a vision of development that integrates all the data so as to deal with all issues in the most appropriate way" (Montpellier, 28 February 2007).

The idea of collective policy-making should be understood in relation to the diversity of levels and actors involved, particularly in an area as loaded with values as SD, as recent publications suggest (Tsiomis, 2007; Tsiomis and Ziegler, 2007). Nonetheless, we do not negate any difference between projects and strategies, as testified not only by the multiple territories we have identified, but also the forms and locations of circulation, where institutions are not the only factor in producing cities. We proceed from the flexibility of the SD concept: the classic reasoning in social sciences attached to "performative utterances"; "how to do things with words" to borrow John Austin's expression (1970). This reasoning assumes particular significance here in order to qualify the fluctuating contents prone to varied appropriations, to understand how these frameworks are disseminated and, ultimately, how they create reality effects thanks to this malleability. Hence, rather than the cities per se, our discourse is focused on these current issues, questioning the connections (or lack thereof) between fields of intervention, objectives and the actions undertaken – given that strategy can be assessed at these various levels.

In first of all addressing the state of SD policies in terms of content and conception in various major French cities, this article will subsequently focus on their execution from the perspective of instruments and circuits of implementation. Indeed, there are cases of well-planned SD policies, the

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[3] The 'Earth Summit' in Rio (1992) ended with 173 countries adopting the Agenda 21 approach for the 21st century. The local Agendas 21 are territorially implemented through a number of action plans of which the communities are in charge.

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implementation of which has been slow to be realised.

Urban SD Policies in Major French Cities

Approaching SD as a field of urban public action entails being attentive to the diversity of coexisting points of reference, which are articulated primarily around three issues: policy relevance scale in relation to the jurisdictions of cities and urban agglomerations; the reference points used by territorial bodies in their actions; and finally, the internal structures of metropolitan constructions which interact with the transversal concept of SD.

Territorial scales and perimeters of action

As Dominique Desjeux mentions (2004), social spheres are 'magnitudes' (*grandeurs*) assessed according to different scales, for instance the 'micro' and 'macro' social scales. Philippe Boudon rightly emphasises the resulting architectural discontinuity: "when the size changes, things change", i.e. the relative part of each element. In short, the scales and the area in question represent a point of view or a frame of reference which he calls a 'flexible designator' (*désignateur souple*) (Boudon, 1991: 6 & 23). With regard to urban SD, there are four main scales which, taken together, frame transversal coherence: the scale of housing, the scale of the commune, the scale of inter-communality and the scale of the metropolis.

A number of concrete projects are on the housing scale. Within the framework of 'eco-districts',[4] there is a dynamic increase in High Environmental Quality standards

(HQE)[5] which are particularly applied to public buildings, e.g. the East Multimedia library in the ZAC (joint development zone) of Bottière-Chênaie in Nantes (opened in June 2007).

In the larger framework of an area, joint development zones are growing in number throughout the cities in question. They constitute a possible support mechanism for urban SD, with a number of related dimensions included in a planning project. For example, the joint development zone of l'Ile de Nantes, a certified 'eco-district', organises the maintenance of green spaces near residential areas, develops tram and mass transport links in separate lanes, and produces photovoltaic energy for some buildings. These actions ensure a 'quality public space', to borrow the words of a local planner.

At the same time, the political engagement in the joint development zones re-works the classic division of relations between communes and inter-communality, and the leitmotiv of urban sustainable development contributes to confer legitimacy to these two levels. In each instance, defining the capacity of action is a function of the relevant jurisdiction. For example, one particular mayor, vice-president of the sectoral delegation on soft mobility in the Nantes Urban Community, claims to act first of all on the scale of the commune, professing to have a holistic view: "As an elected local or community representative, sometimes, we don't have the same territorial vision. I definitely see it [SD] at the local level. I see it less at the intermunicipal level because I'm not completely involved with it" (Nantes, 19 June 2007).

In addition, there are shifting boundaries of inter-institutional jurisdiction linked to transformations in the perimeter of public action. The case cited by a city council official of the Montpellier SAGE (Planning and Water Management Outline) illustrates this: "We've taken back part of the jurisdiction for fighting floods. But there is a

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[4] Although the term 'eco-district' has now spread throughout French metropolitan areas, its realities are quite diverse (Paquot, 2006).

[5] The HQE refers to a 14-target model developed at national level (Madec, 2002).

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joint association [of local authorities] in the Lez valley. We have delegated jurisdiction in general surveys and project cohesion to this association because the SAGE that was built in the Lez-Mosson catchment basin goes beyond the boundaries of the intermunicipal perimeter" (Montpellier, 28 February 2007). Beyond inter-communalities, the extension of local reference frameworks also passes through *ad hoc* functional scales which are found in associations of communes. The Lille Metropolis Natural Space is another example of this: "It's a tool, a mixed union which combines several old local green zones and parks associations, which means quite a number of communes working together", notes a representative from the Lille Metropolitan Urban Community (LMCU) (Lille, 5 June 2007). Due to their transversal nature and that of systems like the local Agenda 21, the issues of SD are well in line with an extended public policy framework, given that these types of discourses become vectors for legitimising metropolitan procedures: "The network of Agenda 21 communes contributes to overlaps in services; it has Agenda 21 officials who also think about these matters. It's therefore one of the axes of a transversal context, which helps in building and consolidating a metropolis", explains an official of the Nantes Urban Community (21 June 2007).

In some configurations, urban SD issues even come into question outside the national level of inter-local co-operation in cross-border terms: the Lille Eurodistrict shares sustainable planning issues with neighbouring Belgium. For example, the official in charge of SD in Lille highlights an original initiative aimed at raising citizens' awareness, within the Franco-Walloon section of the European program INTERREG IIIA: "A few days ago I was working with 'Eco-packaging'. There is a cross-border waste reduction campaign initiated by the City of Lille but only in part of the Urban Community. We are not in conflict; we are working well and with two Belgian inter-communities" (Lille, 6 June 2007).

Urban SD in locally-constructed reference spheres

It is inconceivable to analyse the links between territorial scales separately from the connections between locally constructed reference spheres – within which forms of SD are separately defined. The reference sphere is most often similar to the metropolitan framework, adapted to local conditions in various ways. Moreover, one can add to this a global interpretation of SD in some urban zones.

The Nantes metropolis is defined by its proximity to water, which plays a major role in shaping the area's development in its immediate environment. There are numerous references: shipyards, market gardens and, of course, the Loire river running through the city centre. In the words of an urban planner from l'Ile de Nantes, the *Rives de Loire* project "puts the Loire back at the centre of the metropolitan project. That's the idea, a bit like Barcelona, where they managed to turn the city towards the sea. At that point in time, Nantes, which has its back to the river, is going to turn towards the river and back to business and renewed activity on the river" (Nantes, 22 June 2007). In Montpellier, reference to the local level brought about changes in urban forms in terms of space management, including in relations with nearby rural and agricultural areas (Younès, Marcillon and Rebois, 2007). At the metropolitan level of reasoning, this involves slowing down urban sprawl and focusing on construction that extends towards the sea. A Green representative in the municipal council highlights the SCOT (territorial cohesion scheme) approach, dubbed 'inverted',[6] and the role of tramway networks which give

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[6] The SCOT started from a reversed map: "In the place of existing developed areas, we started from a map of agricultural and natural areas that had to be preserved at all costs, with the principle being to limit urban sprawl. We tried to fill in enclaves and fix the constructed boundaries in order to make them sustainable" (Deputy Mayor, in charge of SD, Montpellier, 1 March 2007).

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preference to connections over boundaries between local development zones:

> "There is a recommendation to make tramways urbanised and more compact; the tram has become a pillar of urbanism [...]. The city of Montpellier organised something under close supervision, basically in the form of joint planning zones. It developed the city in a more compact way, initially conceiving it along a north-west axis, in a south-westward direction towards the sea and with some large collective complexes in the front, etc. A whole neighbourhood…" (Montpellier, 1 March 2007).

However, spheres of conception in urban SD policies are not uniquely local ones, to which the case of Lille attests: the attention paid by officials to the social aspect of SD, in a territorial context involving undeveloped land left polluted by its industrial past, includes global references. It is equally important to advocate urban renewal itself and the relationship that is maintained with some regions in the south for the LMCU (Lille Metropolis Urban Community), which defines itself as a 'sustainable metropolis', as one SD representative of the LMCU notes: "In the new PDU (urban transport plan) under consideration, the goal is to achieve two-thirds of urban expansion in the already urbanised part of the city" (Lille, 5 June 2007). An official in Lille goes on to say:

> "It's not only for the residents of Lille. We are also twinned with a certain number of cities, including some in developing countries. In our public electricity market we have a clause [that stipulates] a shipment of 400 energy-efficient streetlights to Y. in Senegal, which has a very demanding and defective public lighting system. Lighting arrived there two or three weeks ago" (Lille, 6 June 2007).

Furthermore, the forum hosted in Greater Lyon, *Dialogues en Humanité*, demonstrated the concept of a point of reference on the global level, as the leader of the project explains:

> "The idea is to organise a meeting for people from around the world, including theorists and practitioners from all cultures, countries, and of all types of spiritualities. [...] The Dalai Lama will come in 2010. The idea is to get experts from around the world and from our regions" (Lyon, 10 October 2007).

Urban SD in the games of internal configuration of metropolitan spaces

The metropolitan areas under construction are confronted with tensions between city centre(s) and peripheral urban areas, and the concerns of urban SD are paramount in the issues of urban centrality. In this context, the Montpellier Urban Community re-engages with the social dimension of SD through the concept of 'proximity' of public facilities, as the comments from the following officials explain:

> "The act of managing – in terms of the proximity of services vis-à-vis the population – the expansion of the whole district rather than having large facilities only placed in some spots – whether it's in the city centre or in other sort of symbolic places – is a procedure that really consists of trying to cover the entire territory and of being truly in continuity with the population. I think this is one approach of SD."

> "We built three or four pools in the towns in the metropolitan area. [...] As for libraries, there are already three. So, there is a balanced view of the territory, and that's also part of SD" (Montpellier, 28 February 2007).

The case of Lille offers a double distinction which arguably focuses public action more on the periphery than elsewhere. This double distinction combines two elements: firstly, a socio-demographic factor, which concerns the influence of several communes (e.g. Roubaix or Tourcoing) and an extended urban continuity; and, secondly, political attention paid to projects with a social dimension (particularly in the declining districts located outside the city centres). The Deputy Mayor in charge of SD in Lille addresses this social diversity as follows:

> "The ANRU (National Agency for Urban Renewal) file concerns two districts: Lille Sud and Moulins. There are two connected sites; Wazemmes and Fives. Basically, we want to

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allow the inhabitants access to residential mobility within the city. Many of them would like to live in Wazemmes, and this problem is not allowing the poor [...] to live elsewhere. Middle class people come to live in these neighbourhoods that we want to renovate and diversify, because it's easier in that direction than the other way round" (Lille, 6 June 2007).

In other urban agglomerations, the aforementioned logics are often of a centripetal nature, which, however, still requires a process of legitimisation. This process involves the mechanisms of SD, particularly in the promotion of urban density and related services, such as the self-service bike programme planned to be available in Nantes: "In the first stage this will only be in the centre of Nantes, because it's something that can be used without having to travel more than five minutes on foot in order to find a bike. […] We'll start with the central-most part and then, if that works well, we'll perhaps be able to extend it to the neighbouring communes" (An official in Nantes, 19 June 2007).

These centre-periphery dynamics reflect, in particular, issues of urban mobility, as the mayor of a small commune near Nantes notes: "Each commune is always keen to keep an eye on the position taken by the city centre; […] whatever their political orientation. […] Transport is definitely more important in the centre – nobody's contesting that. But everyone wants to have efficient transport very close to them, beyond the city centre" (Nantes, 19 June 2007). Some objectives are designed differently in each urban area: in Montpellier, the focus is on connecting the periphery and other ZACs by tram to a pedestrian-friendly centre; while in Bordeaux and Toulouse, they have increasingly opted to focus their efforts on the communes of the agglomerations, e.g. in Pessac and Blagnac. In the Lyon Urban Community, the *Carré de Soie* project is symbolic of the choice of transport services designed to connect the city centre with the periphery, as a project manager remarks:

"The processes [...] are developed to improve

accessibility to public transport, particularly in the nearest suburbs, since today, the large urban transportation network – metro and tram – crosses peripheral boulevards in the direction of the communes in East Lyon. This allows for a number of areas to be within ten minutes of the super-centre of the agglomeration, which gives them significant value with some large public and private investments – and here I'm talking about the Carré de Soie project" (Lyon, 9 July 2007).

The Discourses of Local SD Policies

SD and metropolitan strategies combine to form a territorialized expression of discursive and concrete methods used to construct so-called innovative actions and concrete arrangements that are connected in order to be translated into practical terms. They have a specifically political dimension, indicated by the comparison of the discourses produced, which also reveals certain constants within the actions.

Some incarnations of urban SD

The problem of urban transportation especially stands out and is represented in the modes of public transport, such as the reserved (exclusive right-of-way) lanes of which the tramway has become a prominent and shared symbol. In Bordeaux, the tram is presented as an economic and social means of development, and as a large-scale project for the urban agglomeration. In addition to being able to serve half of the metropolitan population, it is seen as an anchor project that allows for the management of local urban planning in terms of corridors. In the Montpellier urban agglomeration, the role of the tram, also defined as one of 'integration', permits new urban considerations; particularly in the peripheral areas that are often keen to accommodate the terminus of these lines, which is an opportunity for communal development on the metropolitan level. At the same time, this network is a way

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to confirm the importance of the city centre, within the context of the development of the agglomeration.

Furthermore, in terms of SD, the tram network is a priority in order to encourage new behaviour from parts of the population, which should gradually serve to reduce automobile traffic. In the words of a Montpellier Urban Agglomeration Community official in charge of transport: "The clear objective put forward is the reduction of motor traffic in the city centre and the strongest modal shift possible in communal transport. This combines actions relating to road and rail management, parking management, development of transport networks with parking exchanges and creating bike lanes along the tramways" (28 February 2007). Constructing lines involves an effort of architectural valorisation and the development of green spaces along the route, as one official with the *Transports de l'agglomération de Montpellier* society (TAM) states: "The tram is important. […] It's quite a development; the implementation of a route that we can use. There is a great amount of vegetation in place: trees have been planted, and there is grass planted in the tracks as well" (2 March 2007).

A second course of action with which these cities are heavily involved is the improvement of living standards, with renewed urban spaces where SD seeks to combine concerns of environmental quality with the inhabitants' quality of life. In this respect, the case of Lille is significant: the 'renewed city' concept developed and presented as a top priority by the Urbanism Agency is a clear example, as the following list shows: "renewing the city; improving the environment; renovating former industrial sites; developing the city centres and public spaces; developing metropolitan natural spaces; developing the business zones; controlling urban development".[7] Around the former industrial sites that bear the signs of the past, urban SD expresses itself in the form of a chain: pollution, health, transport, and

quality of life:

"We had to experiment […] considering these polluted tracts of land so that they would not have an impact on the environment and the inhabitants who were living there, since the health aspect is very important to take into account. So this policy minimises transport, spaces, and therefore preserves a maximum of resources, equilibrium, activities in the communities, proximity to workplaces, close and varied shops, etc. It's really a policy that is theoretically extraordinary" (LMCU official, Lille, 5 June 2007).

In the same manner, in Greater Lyon, actions oriented towards improving environmental quality take into account the link between air quality, mobility, and health in order to respond to 'quality of life' issues in the metropolitan area: "In local public action, one of the most important ideas [is] that of the link between 'air-mobility-health'. […] It's transport organisation at the metropolitan area level that deals with the issues of quality of life, reducing automobile traffic, taking measures to improve air quality and reducing greenhouse gas emissions" (official in Greater Lyon, 9 July 2007).

The rise of SD discourse and institutional presentation

By giving urban agglomerations names like the 'Nantes Métropole' or the 'Lille Metropolitan Urban Community', for example, some inter-communities express their inclination for metropolitan area expansion. Inter-community newspapers (e.g. *Lille Métropole Info*, *Nantes Métropole*) frequently use these names so that their populations have become accustomed to them.

In this configuration, the concerns of urban SD are increasingly taken into consideration. In Greater Lyon for example, "the vision of Lyon 2020, which prioritises the concept of the 'metropolis', fully addresses these issues", as one Agenda 21 programme official emphasises (Lyon, 9 July 2007). This idea is also seen in the

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[7] LMCU's site: http://www.lillemetropole.fr.

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presentation of the Urban Community's website: "This metropolitan vision is part of a context of competition between cities at the European and global levels, and will make Greater Lyon visible on the international map".[8] In particular, the currently developed *Anneau Bleu* project in the Rhône department is aimed at transforming inter-city relations, urban development, leisure activities and natural spaces within a perspective that local policy-makers call a 'sustainable metropolis'.[9]

Another example in Lille is the 'Sustainable Urban Renewal 2015' charter, an urban renovation plan in which two-thirds of housing in existing districts will be reconstructed or renovated by 2015. This policy covers 45 neighbourhoods in 20 communes, which together form an area larger than the LMCU, and shows that construction in the metropolitan area involves SD, in relation to European references, as one official from Lille indicates:

> "DATAR [now known as the Inter-ministerial Delegation for Territorial Development and Competitiveness] called for metropolitan co-operation from 2003-2004, which was along the lines of re-organising agglomerations based on the 'metropolis' concept. The idea was [...] to form metropolitan territories – which were also project areas – allowing them to be able to face this competition between large European cities"
> (8 June 2007).

Moreover, the Urban Community includes the slogan 'green metropolis' within their SD approach, which symbolises "the personification of the Lille Metropolis Natural Space. In total, there are 1,200 hectares of natural areas for both the city's residents and tourists to enjoy. Green, welcoming, attractive… the city's wealth is its diversity!"[10]

Another example is the Nantes urban area. The creation of a Directorate-General for metropolitan planning within the Urban Community attests to both the display and the institutionalisation of a new level in the organisation chart. Here again, the issues of urban SD figure prominently, and the 'mission for environment and SD' is a component of the Directorate. The qualification of urban SD projects is progressively becoming part of this action framework, as the current 'eco-metropolis' slogan suggests, which complements that of 'eco-districts' – an example of which is the one in l'Ile de Nantes:

> "L'Ile de Nantes is an exceptional area located at the heart of the agglomeration; [...] it forms a complex historical urbanised zone. Today, the objective is to construct a new central point in the city for the Nantes/Saint-Nazaire metropolis, able to accommodate all urban activities. This is an ongoing project that is strongly supported by city officials".[11]

Thus, SD can be a useful tool for legitimisation in the context of a change in the scale of relevance of local public action. Subsequently, it is necessary to question the uses of SD in practice, as they affect the construction of cities, particularly through various instruments.

The Operational Capability of SD in a Modified Policy Framework

The statements on urban SD materialise by way of systems and tools, operating on various scales and with diverse modalities. These include new forms of expertise and renewed methods of 'making the metropolis' at both the national and international levels, derived from the action principles of SD.

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[8] See: http://www.grandlyon.com/lyon-2020.2071.0.html

[9] In the eastern part of the agglomeration, the Rhône splits into two sections which form a large loop and then converge. Within this *Anneau Bleu*, there are 3,000 hectares of natural areas that the Urban Community intends to link and conserve.

[10] See: http://www.lillemetropole.fr/.

[11] See: http://www.iledenantes.com.

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Systems and tools of implementation

The implementation of urban SD projects is initially generated by the production – both political and technical – of instruments, systems and tools (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2005). According to Bruno Latour (2006), these resources contribute to combine a problem (that they help to define), a public policy (and its legitimacy), and a group of actors (through consolidating coalitions). Whether they are generalised, normative, dedicated to SD or otherwise, these resources are listed in the table p.10 (which is not exhaustive).

Urban Agglomeration	**Instruments & tools of urban projects with a SD dimension**
Bordeaux	Local Urban Planning Scheme (PLU) – Bordeaux Urban Community (CUB): Urban Transport Plan (PDU) – (CUB); a number of ZACs (CUB & city); a collection of technical charters; Municipal Urban Ecology & Sustainable Development Charter (Bordeaux); PAE (Collective Development Programmes); noise mapping; continual assessment of air quality
Lille	PDU (Lille Metropolis Urban Community : LMCU) - PLU (LMCU) - ZAC (LMCU) - PAE (LMCU) – Reserved Lanes for Public Transport (TCSP); High Environmental Quality Standards (HQE); Agenda 21 (LMCU); PDU Quality Charter; ENLM Charter (Lille Metropolis Natural Space); City of Lille Clean Urban Plan
Lyon	*In Greater Lyon*: Territorial Cohesion Scheme (SCOT) - PDU - ZAC – Large-Scale Urban Projects (GPV); Urban Ecology Charter; local Agenda 21; Soft Travel Modes Development Plan ; Pedestrian Charter; Charter for the Development of Bike Usage; *Millénaire 3* Project; Eurobionet Programme; Participation Charter; Education Programme on Sustainable Development & the Environment; *In Lyon*: local Agenda 21
Montpellier	SCOT (urban agglomeration); PLU (city); Environment Charter (city); Project for City Planning & Sustainable Development (PADD) (city); PDU (urban agglomeration); Agenda 21 (city)
Nantes	SCOT Master Plan (urban agglomeration); PLU (city); PDU (urban agglomeration); PADD (city); ZAC (urban agglomeration & city); GPV (city); HQE; Agenda 21 (city); registered 'eco-district'; Natura 2000 Classification
Toulouse	Future SCOT Master Plan (urban agglomeration); PLU (city); PDU (urban agglomeration); PADD (city); ZAC (urban agglomeration & city); HQE; Agenda 21 (city); Environment Charter (urban agglomeration); Architectural & Environmental Charter (city); Urban & Environmental Charter (city)

Clearly, sustainable urbanism does not necessarily seem to be based exclusively on specific instruments. In the ZACs, for example, the actions of urban greening techniques, tramway lines, and environmental quality labels are combined. An official for the Nantes Green Spaces explains:

"There was a time when, in the ZACs, we didn't have much under control. Now, things are increasingly being clarified – in terms of conception, heritage, and environmental planning. The water law has seen some fountains (...) and really diversely developed areas come about. Now, we have some tools that are more restrictive for some, but which are much more interesting" (Nantes, 19 June 2007).

The promotion of the non-peripheral ZACs in the Nantes Métropole as a support mechanism for the management of urban density can also be cited:

"It is important that these ZACs correctly incorporate the required density in the city. In too many large cities, ZAC is synonymous with the peripheral urban areas, in particular, the smaller cities with a density that doesn't exceed 45 housing units. Personally, I believe in specific types of ZACs located within the city centre or at the periphery of existing small towns, to support their economy, and they can have the same acceptable density" (Nantes, 21 June 2007).

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The idea of networking, initially applied to public transport, also seems to be a way of SD configuration in metropolitan area construction. The regrets of one TAM official are thus understandable: "The urban agglomeration didn't expand as expected into Sète [a neighbouring city], where we would have had something more interesting in terms of intermodality" (Montpellier, 2 March 2007). In Greater Lyon, it is more in terms of the metropolitan network that the project REAL (Network Express in the Lyon Urban Area) is understood, which is the plan for improving public transport services (e.g. hours, equipment, train stations and exchange centres, ticketing, pricing), and is in partnership with the Region, the Department, and private companies.

Other instruments are more specifically dedicated to urban SD. Far from corresponding with a unique and transposable reality, these action frameworks are redefined by local policy-makers according to territorially important issues. The eco-districts reveal this factor: they are developed more as projects built separately with definitions and fluctuating contents, than through a standardised, approved method. In Lille for example, it is not simply a question of operations that are meant to be exemplary in terms of environmental issues (even if it is a question of reducing transport of construction debris by lorries), but primarily, of the renovation of housing in the old quarters with a voluntarist social dimension – as expressed by one SD official: "This breaks with the idea of brand new eco-districts in the peripheral areas of cities!" (Lille, 6 June 2007).

In accordance with their transversal nature, Local Agendas 21 are also constructive, as a mayor in the Nantes metropolis states: "We have many concerns about housing and economic activities, and when things will get going, we'll be able […] to co-ordinate everything with an Agenda 21" (Nantes, 19 June 2007). The consistency of urban SD plays out as much in producing facilities as in the rise of an expanded scale. With regard to the Agenda 21 in the Nantes Metropolis, one SD policy official remarks: "I

think that this creates a good cultural intersection, and actions are spread throughout all the networks of public policies. […] I think it's the right tool" (Nantes, 21 June 2007).

These different instruments and systems are commonly being used by actors – elected representatives and technical specialists – who call on external experts, or who are themselves recognised as such. Recourse to expertise is particularly understood though the pressure of making SD issues concrete, since they sometimes appear as distant or inconsistent from the daily routines of the cities' populations. An example of this relates to the project of l'Ile de Nantes, which, according to a development contractor, does not register with everyone, because it does not correspond with their experience of the area's toponymy: "For a lot of people, l'Ile de Nantes is a difficult concept to grasp because each one of these islets had a specific name: l'Ile de Beaulieu was the easternmost part, et cetera". Thus, the configuration of the new project entails the production of cognitive links, with which two architects-urban planners (François Walter and Dominique Perrault) are involved. The commissioned study provides ideas for a unified consideration of a territory which until now was seen as divided, and replaces it in the context of the Nantes metropolitan project:

"Between 1992-94, we had an extensive initial study by two urban planners who demonstrated, on the one hand, the importance of the link between l'Ile de Nantes and the city centre (a proximity which isn't obvious in the minds of the population); and then, another section of the study showed [that] there is a need for a project on the integration of the isle in order to reorganise the territory and to reconstruct the connecting links. [...] Next, a combined approach [...] showed the importance of this project – not only for the city of Nantes, but for the entire agglomeration, up until Saint-Nazaire – in demonstrating that we have here a territory set to become an important metropolitan centre. Also, there is the Rives de Loire *plan, which puts the Loire at the heart of the metropolitan project. [...] So, a great decade of studies concluded in 1999 with a survey launched by*

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the city in order to have a project manager of public space" (SEM [mixed investment company] employee, Nantes, 22 June 2007).

Circulating areas and actors of urban sustainable development

The first aspect of the territorial implementation of the projects and strategies of urban SD is combined with a second one, related to the exchanges of experiences and approaches that take place between cities. SD is carried out differently from one metropolitan area to another through processes of adaptation and tension, involving different filters and groups of actors, and these issues are embedded in local constraints.

Urban traffic works on several scales: between neighbouring regional metropolises; between large urban agglomerations at national level; and currently vis-à-vis other European urban experiences. The statements of a Nantes Metropolis policy official attest to the plurality of frameworks and contents spread:

"We have many ties to European cities, and with the Lille Urban Community for the eco-districts. [...] There is a bit of canvassing work, which happens through contacts and lets us see where they are in the other cities [...] be it in a precise project, or in the development of charters. [...] For management and water, we contacted the city of Douai. For eco-districts, we are also going to be interested in the South of France – as in Frontignan [a town near Montpellier] for example" (Nantes, 21 June 2007).

In effect, there are two conclusions to be made. First of all, the ideas and practices shared between French cities, for conceptual and practical plans, are currently commonplace, as one Bordeaux SD policy official declares: "We ripped everyone off! [laughs] We looked at a bit of everything all over. Greater Lyon is rather impressive. Speaking of cities, I looked at Toulouse, Nantes, Montpellier, Nice…" (6 March 2007). At the same time, these common points of action go along with individual local versions. The precision that this brings, as one

TAM official – rejecting the idea of directly copying – suggests: "There are some groups: Montpellier, Strasbourg, Orléans, Grenoble, Nantes… We have some preferences in terms of networks; we also work together, but they aren't models" (Montpellier, 2 March 2007).

The oft-cited case of dynamic standards in developed areas confirms the fact that imposing further conditions within the framework of national procedures is not a given; it goes more with limited compromises, influenced by local configurations, where things tend to occur on a transactional level. One Green representative of the LMCU regretfully expresses:

"In my opinion, we've missed out on a great opportunity to be an example because with all the ANRU [National Agency for Urban Renovation] projects on housing, the Region has kind of missed the mark; that is, of setting its financial contribution on the dynamic conditions and on housing, with the mark at 50 KW/h per m² per year. So for its part, the LMCU no longer sets the terms, and there I think that we missed an important stage. [...] We try to get the builders and the architects to co-operate, and to work with the most efficient ones, but if there's no starting point to go from..." (Lille, 5 June 2007).

Some European geographic areas of large proximity also factor into the scene: Lille tends to look in the direction of Northern European countries, "at sustainable districts in Germany, the Netherlands, and in the UK", as a policy official in the city states (Lille, 4 June 2007). If one takes Spain as an example, it is to 'draw inspiration' and not to 'reproduce', affirms the vice-president of LMCU: "I really like Barcelona. In terms of urban planning and development, it's accomplished. Everything's taken into consideration – there isn't a square centimetre that is neglected… benches, dust bins, waste management – there is urban integration, which is rather extraordinary. The objective isn't to reproduce 'Barcelonas' everywhere, but I think that we can draw inspiration from this city". The saturation of the European points of reference in the methods of

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comparative thought brought up by local actors shows here when our interviewee lauds the exemplary nature of his group on biogas: "The methanisation of waste to obtain biogas is excellent at European level. Eventually, we'll have 120 out of 400 buses that will run on biogas, and these buses pique the interest of other European cities" (Lille, 5 June 2007).

Another indicator of these processes of incorporating reference points is that the same 'model' cities (e.g. Freiberg, Barcelona) are regularly cited, as the Montpellier case corroborates: "With regard to waste, we have seen some examples elsewhere: Barcelona, Zurich and in Germany. In Spain, we were also looking at waste tire collection, which is still not widely practiced", notes a SD official in Montpellier (1 March 2007). In incremental terms, these interventions demonstrate the standardisation of urban SD projects because they allow for an increased comparability between different fields – in terms of positive assessments, or of placing innovations into perspective: "Nantes is said to be a good student, but that's in comparison to the others!", explains this Urban Community project manager; "There were some exchanges within the Agenda 21 framework between Rennes, Angers, Bordeaux, […] and between some other European cities – like Stuttgart and Breda – on our methods of intervention in former industrial sites; an exchange of best practices" (Nantes, 22 June 2007). The reference to European prizes, at the local level, can be understood in the same sense: "The projects are run very well […], since we received the European award for SD for our Agenda 21", notes another official in Nantes (21 June 2007).

It is a positive sign for the elected representatives responsible for urban SD issues that the administrative officials and technical experts (or even the 'city professionals') can be seen as intermediary representatives: actors/commuters who contribute to the development of links and modes of combining practices between usually separate worlds (Hamman, Meon, Verrier, 2002). For example, a LMCU vice-president emphasises visiting other cities in order to personally observe the experiences that interest him, and that he sees here as a priority among the responsibilities of his post: "I try to keep up. […] I went to Nantes to look at the development of the Territorial Climate Plan, and I'd like to see Lille have [as much] energy" (Lille, 5 June 2007). These modes of dissemination involve certain intermediaries and, correlatively, areas of exchanges. The cities in question are part of networks that are also collective settings where urban SD repertoires spread – at seminars or conferences, for example: "I'm starting to attend several seminars, national or international conferences. We meet in Nantes, Lyon, Lille and Grenoble – the four urban agglomerations that are very active in this subject. We see that we think about all kinds of interesting and innovative things", says a technical expert from Lille (5 June 2007).

Finally, developing city networks indicates that contact between actors – not only as points of references and territorial organisations, but also as arenas that are generally (in)formal and specialised, national or international – allows for the exchange of ideas and actions, and to see them in practice. In the Nantes Metropolis, one official responsible for eco-districts notes that the involvement of SD European networks aims to be exemplary in the territorial investment of the institution: "We really see a programme of action! And it's properly connected by twinning and exchanges with the European Community and European programmes, which don't exist anywhere else" (Nantes, 21 June 2007). The chart p. 14 more broadly reconstructs the involvement of the groups studied in some of the significant networks currently active in dealing with the issues of urban SD.

Networks of cities and of inter-communities involved in the issues of SD
(CU = Urban Community)[12]

	Bordeaux	Lille	Lyon	Montpellier	Nantes	Toulouse
Committee 21[13]	X (CU)	X (CU)		X (City)	X (City)	X (City)
Environment and Local Development (IDEAL)[14]	X (CU)				X (CU)	
Association 4D[15]		X (CU and Cities)	X (CU and Cities)	X (Cities)	X (City)	
Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI)[16]		X (CU)			X	
Association of Urban Communities in France (ACUF)[17]	X (CU)	X (CU)	X (CU)		X (CU)	
Eurocities[18]	X (City)	X (CU)	X (City)		X (CU)	X (City)
Global City[19]		X (CU)	X (CU and City)		X (City)	

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[12] The contributing networks that include at least five or six of the agglomerations studied appear in dark grey; and those that include at least two are in light grey.

[13] Source: http://www.comite21.org [French Committee for Environment and Sustainable Development]

[14] http://www.reseau-ideal.asso.fr

[15] http://www.association4d.org/sommaire.php3?lang=en

[16] http://www.iclei.org

[17] http://www.communautes-urbaines.com/

[18] http://www.eurocities.org

[19] http://www.globalcityforum.com

Conclusion

The working templates in the French projects and urban strategies of SD currently increasingly support sociological theories according to which 'space' is not socially neutral – neither in its organisation dynamics, nor in its working logic (Castells, 1972). Combining an approach focusing on the processes of urbanisation of large agglomerations and a rapidly transforming field like SD allows for analysing how new power relations unfold in a non-linear fashion (Ben Mabrouk, 2007). These power relations are played out on several territorial scales (e.g. housing, district, city, and inter-community), where symbolic and material transversal links are identified and constructed, relying on interdependences (of competences, action perimeters) and on their political expressions in order to legitimise new repertoires of public action.

In examining the formulated policies, their presentation and, subsequently, the comparative modalities of their implementation, the issue of the interconnections between both their discourse and their realisation appears. This creates the reconfigurations (e.g. of urban transport) where the metropolitan construct is firmly rooted in reality – not simply in discourse. In producing a renewed operational framework, the call to the leitmotiv of SD invites reflection: not only on certain weaknesses of strategies (which are constantly undergoing a dynamic process of realisation); but also, above all, on the range of that which is 'vague'.

Indeed, on an initial level, one notices some strong local similarities, such as similar iconographies (e.g. tramways, bike lanes, newspapers from institutions), formal logic and administrative posts that follow the same trend – i.e. the rise in prominence of SD policy officials, the appeals made by experts and the inter-communal services that are built around these questions. From this point of view, it can be determined that SD representations are relatively close to each other among the given six fields. At the same time, the fluidity of SD as a practical category is distinguishable. In terms of the sociology of innovation, we can posit the hypothesis of a split between formal structures, which are widespread (SD supporting urbanisation strategies as a myth that has been rationalised and is now in current use), and local administrative and social practices, contents where territorially differentiated realities can be found. We suggest that this split is a condition of the diffusion of urban SD and of the metropolitan framework, so as not to appear as being too restrictive. The comparative approach shows this very clearly, including in terms of linkages, where narratives of causality vary at local levels, alternatively borrowing from the registers of nature, transport, housing, quality of life and even health. The link between the various perspectives of this research is found in the interrelations and intersections (between scales, instruments and actors), in which sustainable urban public action takes shape and consistency while representing a game played on the margins. This context sheds light on the range and the current limits of this 'catch-all' register, characterised by hybrid processes, between the dissemination of innovative experiences, and the so-called "embedding" (Polanyi, 1944) within territories and their increasingly institutionalised political, economic and social structures.

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