# Exploring the Metropolitan Trap: The Case of Montreal

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## Abstract

*This article analyses the normative dimension of metropolitan governance in the case of Montreal. According to the main schools of thought (the reform school, the public choice school, new regionalism and the rescaling approach), there is an ideal scale at which to achieve specific goals such as equality, efficiency, democracy and economic competitiveness. These ideologically oriented conceptions of metropolitan governance are assumed by actors and used as symbolic resources to build their own strategies, i.e. to support or contest institutional reforms — what we call the metropolitan trap. The case of Montreal, which underwent two successive institutional reforms between 2000 and 2006, provides empirical evidence for this idea. Our analysis reveals that the Government of Quebec and local elected councils of Greater Montreal are trapped by these normative conceptions, especially the old regionalisms. However, scalar strategies do not compete equally, as the institutional context legitimates specific approaches to metropolitan governance.*

## Introduction

In this article, I argue that the metropolitan governance debate is fundamentally normative and that there exists a metropolitan trap. As will be examined in the first part of the article, the various schools of thought on metropolitan governance (the reform school, the public choice school, new regionalism and the rescaling approach) mobilize normative arguments (fighting inequalities, seeking greater efficiency and democracy, enhancing economic competitiveness) that entail a specific conception of metropolitan governance and a set of tools to put it into practice (amalgamations, metropolitan governments, voluntary cooperation, strategic plans, etc.). These approaches to metropolitan governance are policy paradigms (Hall, 1993), cognitive frameworks that influence political decisions and conceptions of metropolitan governance. Using Purcell's (2006) parallelism with the local trap, the metropolitan trap means that not only researchers but also political, social and economic actors associate 'the good' with a specific conception of the metropolitan scale (being reformist, localist, regionalist or rescaling).

This idea is developed in the second part of this article through an analysis of the case of Montreal, the setting for two successive reforms at the metropolitan and local levels (2000–02 and 2003–06).[1] In the context of metropolitan restructuring, provincial and local actors support different strategies with the belief that a particular scale (the metropolitan area, the megacity, the small municipality) will permit them to achieve their normative goals. As Boudreau *et al*. (2006: 11) state in their comparative analysis of Montreal and Toronto: 'Processes of political rescaling are embedded with a structural tension between actors and institutions struggling to define, according to their interests, the "best" territorial scale for dealing with contemporary social issues'. Scalar strategies do not compete in equal conditions. As the case of Montreal shows, some policy paradigms are empowered by the institutional context at the expense of others.

## Governing metropolitan areas: a normative debate

In their contribution to the second edition of *Theories of Urban Politics*, Savitch and Vogel (2009) review the analysis of metropolitan governance by highlighting the characteristics of what they consider the four main approaches to metropolitan governance: the metropolitan reform tradition, the public choice approach, new regionalism and the rescaling and re-territorialization approach. These four perspectives differ not only in the degree of institutionalization of cooperation but also in the conception of the principles guiding metropolitan governance. As illustrated in Table 1, each approach supports alternative forms of metropolitan governance (institutional reforms, inter-municipal competition and flexible arrangements) to pursue different

**Table 1** Characteristics of the approaches to metropolitan governance

| | Conception of institutional Arrangements | Normative Goals | Favoured Scale |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reform school (1900–20/1950–70) | Metropolitan government with legal and financial autonomy, covering the functional territory and with directly elected members (one-tier or two-tier) | Equality Efficiency Democracy | Metropolitan |
| Public choice school (1960–80) | Local autonomy and institutional fragmentation. Voluntary cooperation, if necessary | Efficiency Democracy Economic competitiveness | Local |
| New regionalism (1990.. .) | Flexible and horizontal relations among public and private regional actors (from government to governance) | Equality Democracy Economic competitiveness | Metropolitan |
| Rescaling and re-territorialization (2006*…) | Strengthening of the metropolitan scale or city-regional scale | Economic competitiveness | Metropolitan/ City-region |

*According to Savitch and Vogel (2009: 108)
Source: Elaborated by author

[1] This article is based on the results of my PhD dissertation (Tomàs, 2007) in which I analysed all the documents from parliamentary commissions between 1992 and 2006 dealing with metropolitan governance, including reports from the municipalities of Greater Montreal, the two provincial political parties and the main socioeconomic actors (trade unions, chambers of commerce and community organizations). Some 45 semi-structured interviews (with the protagonists of the reform, politicians and civil servants at the local and provincial level) were also carried out.

normative goals (efficiency, democracy, equality and economic competitiveness) on different scales (local and metropolitan).

From a reformist perspective, the metropolitan area is considered as a single political unit based on creating one integrated government for the entire metropolitan area — a one-tier (after amalgamations) or two-tier metropolitan structure (Stephens and Wikstrom, 2000). Megacities or metropolitan governments are responsible for redistributive policies and for ensuring equal access to public goods and services, in addition to promoting efficiency in the delivery of services and improving the quality of local democracy (Sharpe, 1995). By contrast, public choice theorists consider metropolitan areas as fragmented spaces. From their perspective, competition among small governments ensures greater efficiency and democracy (Bish and Ostrom, 1973). Considering the metropolitan area as a market, people choose where to live according to their preferences (Tiebout, 1956). Unlike the reformers, the authors of the public choice school consider the creation of a single metropolitan government to be contrary to individual choice: small governments are the right scale and cooperation should not be compulsory. Seen as old regionalisms, the conflicting views of the reform and the public choice schools have been defined as an 'unhelpful dialogue of the deaf' (Heinelt and Kübler, 2005: 13–14).

In the context of globalization and the internationalization of the economy, new regionalism appears as an alternative conception of metropolitan governance (Savitch and Vogel, 2000). In contrast to the previous centrist and polycentrist approaches, the regionalists argue that there are common interests across central cities and suburbs such as public transportation (Orfield, 1997). For these authors, metropolitan areas are made up of interdependent municipalities and other public and private actors who must cooperate to address common problems (Wallis, 1994). Instead of creating big governments, flexible arrangements that include a plurality of actors are the best way to promote economic competitiveness and deal with social inequalities and urban sprawl (Frisken and Norris, 2001). The move from government to governance can be an opportunity or a threat for local democracy, depending on the degree of transparency and accountability in public–private arrangements (Kübler and Wälti, 2001). New regionalists have been criticized in two ways: (1) they constitute a very heterogeneous group (Brenner, 2002); and (2) they are having difficulties in putting their ideas into practice (Swanstrom, 2001).

Already present in the new regionalist perspective, issues of economic development and competitiveness have become predominant in the rescaling and re-territorialization approach. According to authors following this approach, the restructuring of political scales as a result of globalization and the transition to a post-Fordist model (Jessop, 1994) has direct consequences for metropolitan governance (Keil and Boudreau, 2005). City-regions are part of a larger restructuring of the state (Brenner, 2004) and the places where the 'dirty work' of globalization occurs (Keil, 2000a). The re-territorialization process means the rearrangement of roles and functions of city-regions, and changes in relations with private and non-governmental actors (Savitch and Vogel, 2009). Critics of the rescaling approach focus on its tendency towards an economic determinism which reduces the significance of political and institutional variables, underestimating the importance of agency (Beauregard, 2006), in other words 'political struggle, the actors, the interests' (Le Galès, 2006: 719).

To sum up, each of the four approaches to metropolitan governance represents a specific conception of governance and the institutional arrangements to put it into practice. However, despite obvious differences, there is one feature that these perspectives share: the mobilization of normative arguments (Norris, 2001). Metropolitan areas are more than statistical definitions; they also express representations of the common good. In this case, the common good refers to the normative goals that a community wants to attain (democracy, equality, efficiency, economic competitiveness), the scales at which they should be achieved (in large or small municipalities, at the metropolitan or city-region level) and the means to be used (based on institutionalized or voluntary cooperation, restricted to the participation of elected officials or open to

other actors, etc.). Ideological and political factors are thus intrinsic to metropolitan governance (Négrier, 2005).

In his analysis of urban democracy, Purcell (2006) criticizes the tendency of researchers and activists to assume that the local scale is preferable to other scales in achieving a particular end, i.e. local democracy. We find the same problem at the metropolitan scale, with numerous studies arguing a causal link between size and democracy (Lyons *et al*., 1992; Oliver, 2001; Kelleher and Lowery, 2004), between having a metropolitan government and economic competitiveness (Fleischmann and Green, 1991; Carr and Feiock, 1999), between metropolitan structure and income growth (Nelson and Foster, 1999), etc. Centrist, polycentrist, regionalist and rescaling perspectives are alternative approaches to the common good, and illustrate different normative goals to be accomplished on a metropolitan or local scale. The link between goals and practices is evident for Lowndes (2005); these discourses on metropolitan governance are adopted by different groups, such as political leaders and civil servants, business organizations, social movements and community groups, experts, trade unions, etc. (for some examples, see Keil, 2000b; Oliver, 2000; Feiock and Carr, 2001; Hogen-Esch, 2001; Boudreau, 2003; Savitch and Vogel, 2004). We believe that approaches to metropolitan governance are policy paradigms (Hall, 1993), cognitive frameworks that influence both the way governments conceive public policies and the attitude of local actors towards metropolitan cooperation.

The opportunities to put into place a specific paradigm are determined by the intergovernmental system and institutional context, which legitimates certain actors and their normative views on metropolitan governance (Mossberger and Stoker, 2001; Sellers, 2002). As examined in the next part, in the context of two successive reforms, Montreal's political actors are trapped by normative theories on metropolitan governance (especially the old regionalisms). We analyse their rescaling initiatives to achieve particular ends, and how the institutional context explains their successes and failures.

## Metropolitan restructuring in Montreal: from equality to local democracy

In Canada, the decision to change the political rules at the municipal and metropolitan levels depends on provincial governments. Canadian municipalities have no legal standing in the constitution: they are created by provincial legislation, and it is this general legislation that defines what they can do and how they are managed, and determines their sources of revenue (Tindal and Tindal, 2004). In the case of Montreal, the main actor who defines the model of metropolitan governance is the Government of Quebec through its Ministry for Municipal Affairs. Its approach to metropolitan governance has traditionally been based on highly institutionalized reforms (mergers and creation of two-tier structures), which explains why local elected officials are the main actors in debates on metropolitan governance. In contrast to reform experiences elsewhere, like London for instance (Kleinman, 2002), other actors (such as economic and community groups) are secondary and less visible throughout the process (Hamel, 2001).

Regarding recent reforms in Montreal, the provincial government of Quebec and local elected officials of the metropolitan area of Montreal had very different conceptions of the goals to be achieved at the metropolitan and local levels. All of them agreed on the need to improve economic competitiveness at the city-region level; however, this idea was not strong enough to overcome opposing conceptions of democracy, efficiency and equality at the metropolitan and local scales. Provincial and local elected officials were trapped by their own definitions of the common good, making voluntary cooperation impossible.

### The reform in 2000: creating a more equitable urban system

Debate over metropolitan governance in Montreal began to emerge at the end of the 1980s. However, lack of governmental will and opposition of suburban leaders delayed

any political change until 1999, when the Government of Quebec decided to implement an ambitious municipal reform at the provincial level. Led by the *Parti Québécois* (PQ), this municipal reorganization had five main objectives: (1) promote greater fiscal equality; (2) develop a shared vision of the future of local communities; (3) foster the optimal conditions for economic development and competitiveness; (4) increase municipal efficiency; and (5) curb urban sprawl (Ministry for Municipal Affairs, 2000). The government wanted to build on the principles of the Quiet Revolution initiated in the 1960s; in other words, modernize local government and consolidate a new urban system. The reform was conceived at two levels: at the metropolitan level with the creation of supra-municipal authorities in Montreal and Quebec (Bills 124 and 134); and at the local level through the merger of municipalities to reduce institutional fragmentation (Bill 170). The combination of these two strategies of territorial restructuring was not new, but followed the path of previous reforms (Collin, 2002). Due to Montreal's specific cultural configuration, the government there introduced another level of administration at the end of the reform process, namely the boroughs, creating a three-tier model (constituted by the Montreal Metropolitan Community, the new City of Montreal and 27 boroughs).

At the city-region level, Greater Montreal was characterized by the overlapping of many administrative and political levels. Several reports and commissions had emphasized that the metropolitan area needed a 'sole and strong voice' to increase economic competitiveness in global markets. This idea was supported by certain local elected officials and economic actors such as the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce of Montreal. In 2000, the provincial government created the Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC), a two-tier agency for regional planning formed exclusively of Greater Montreal municipal officials. The MMC is financed by its members and provincial funds, has no capacity to levy taxes, has neither real redistributive powers nor a system of tax-based sharing, but (unprecedentedly) it currently provides some funding for social housing. The MMC cannot be considered a metropolitan government in the reformist tradition. Indeed, the creation of a strong government for the 3.4 million inhabitants of the metropolitan area (nearly half of the population of the province of Quebec) was rejected by both provincial representatives and local elected officials, who feared the creation of a new level of government (Sancton, 2001). Moreover, for the Government of Quebec, strengthening political power at the metropolitan level could weaken the position of the provincial government in relation to the federal government (Boudreau *et al*., 2007a).

At the local level, the most important merger involved Montreal and its 27 surrounding municipalities. The new City of Montreal corresponded to the wholly urbanized territory of the island of Montreal, with 1.8 million inhabitants. On the South Shore, eight municipalities were gathered together to form the City of Longueuil (380,000 inhabitants in 2002). On the North Shore, there was already a large city (Laval, numbering 350,000 inhabitants) resulting from the amalgamation of 14 municipalities in 1965. The reform reduced institutional fragmentation in the metropolitan area (from 110 municipalities to 63) and created three large poles: Montreal, Longueuil and Laval. In Montreal, the question of 'One Island, One City' went back to the late nineteenth century. Throughout the twentieth century there had been partial amalgamations, with the idea of merging all the municipalities gaining popularity in the 1960s. Historically, suburban leaders managed to avoid these mergers, participating instead in successive structures coordinating common services (garbage, water, roads, police, etc.), the last of these being the Montreal Urban Community (MUC, 1969–2000). Conflicts between the City of Montreal and the other members of the MUC regarding political representation and the financial contribution of each municipality have been common over the last 20 years (for more on the MUC, see Bélanger *et al*., 1998).

The PQ reform sought to reduce fiscal inequalities within urban areas. This is particularly significant in Quebec as municipalities have a limited number of fiscal tools available to them, namely a variety of taxes, fees and charges that are generally property related. These represent around 90% of municipal revenues, providing a considerable degree of financial autonomy. However, municipalities are closely monitored and

controlled by the provincial government, which establishes the range and variety of municipal taxation powers, and the ways and means municipalities can levy taxes (Collin and Tomàs, 2004). For Louise Harel, Minister for Municipal Affairs, the question of fiscal inequality was directly associated with that of social inequality. As revealed in the White Paper of 2000, which launched the reform, there were clear socioeconomic cleavages within the island of Montreal: considerable disparities in income between the central city and the suburbs and between eastern and western municipalities, concentration of immigrants and social and affordable housing in the eastern and central part of the island, lower taxes in some of the 27 suburban municipalities, and differences in the nature, quality and quantity of local public services and utilities (Ministry for Municipal Affairs, 2000).

The analysis of Collin and Robertson (2005) confirms the differences between the municipalities on the island of Montreal in geographic, historical, socioeconomic, urbanistic, fiscal and political terms. Differences were considerable in respect of residential property values and municipal property taxes.[2] Analyzing these differences and average family income, Prémont (2001) reveals huge inequalities between municipalities, creating fiscal enclaves. While municipalities such as Westmount, Outremont or Mont-Royal had high property values, high average income and low property taxes, in other municipalities such as Saint-Pierre, Pierrefonds or Montreal the situation was reversed.

The merger of all the municipalities of the island of Montreal was accompanied by moves to achieve a progressive harmonization of the local tax system which would lead to a unified fiscal regime by 2021. According to the Government of Quebec and the City of Montreal, amalgamation would eliminate tax havens and create a more equitable tax system. The quality and quantity of municipal services would be equal throughout the city, and the costs for these services would be equally distributed. At the same time, the government hoped to reduce municipal debt through economies of scale,[3] even if the experience of recently amalgamated Toronto suggested otherwise (Slack, 2000).

The merger had the support of the major unions, the Confederation of National Trade Unions and the Federation of Workers of Quebec, traditional allies of the government and a pillar of Quebec's model of governance (Hamel and Jouve, 2006). Moreover, the reform had the support of the Six Central Cities Group, a lobby formed by the mayors of some of the province's largest cities. Since 1994, they had been asking the government to force through amalgamations as a solution to the problems associated with suburbanization. Some community groups linked to social housing (and feminist groups too) thought that the merger would help to reduce social inequalities. By contrast, the restructuring was opposed by suburban citizens who, under the leadership of suburban mayors, created an anti-merger platform called *DémocraCité*.

The position of Greater Montreal's elected officials was characterized by a 'metropolitan malaise' or the failure to reach a compromise on metropolitan governance (Léveillée, 1998). Not only did they disagree on the institutional arrangements, but more fundamentally on the values that needed to be preserved and the ideal scale for their conservation. The different approaches to metropolitan governance that were adopted by local officials used the same rhetoric and all expressed the normative dimension of the metropolitan debate — for a detailed analysis, see Tomàs (2007). At the metropolitan level, the key issue was the nature of the MMC and its capacity to control urban and

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2  In 1998, the average value of a single family residence was CDN $137,500 in the City of Montreal, while it was CDN $322,400 in Senneville, CDN $393,200 in Mont-Royal, CDN $406,300 in Hampstead and CDN $450,000 in Westmount, all suburban municipalities (Prémont, 2001: 756). Before the reform, there were significant differences in property taxes, ranging from CDN $1.13 per CDN $100 evaluation to CDN $2.86. In Montreal, the rate was CDN $1.99, which placed it in the eighteenth position in terms of taxation (Ville de Montréal, 1999).

3  According to the City of Montreal, the amalgamation of all municipalities of the island would lead to savings in the order of CDN $27 to 30 million (Ville de Montréal, 1999: 32). However, according to Collin and Robertson (2005: 319–20), 'amalgamation did not lead to significant if any agglomeration economies'.

economic development. Most local politicians agreed on strengthening the economic competitiveness of the metropolitan area in global markets, but not at the expense of local competitiveness. Even if they accepted the MMC as an appropriate tool for international promotion, they rejected its strong intervention in local economic development and land-use planning. This was especially the case for the North Shore and South Shore municipalities, which had attracted recent residential and industrial development. Indeed, the island of Montreal itself was suffering from 'beggar-thy-neighbour' competition (Swanstrom *et al*., 2002: 356), losing population and economic activities to other municipalities in the metropolitan area, attracted by lower property and commercial taxes in towns with lower residential densities and more green space. Most elected officials also rejected the metropolitan fund for social and affordable housing, which was imposed by Minister for Municipal Affairs Louise Harel.

After the creation of the MMC, the positions of local politicians quickly polarized around the policy of amalgamations. There was a major conflict between suburban municipalities and the cities of Montreal and Longueuil, which reflected the opposing theoretical arguments of the reform and the public choice schools. The mayors of Montreal and Longueuil believed that their cities suffered too many fiscal and socioeconomic disparities. However, the mayor of Montreal actively promoted the creation of a megacity, through the campaign 'One Island, One City', while the mayor of Longueuil by contrast did not consider amalgamation to be the right tool to address central-suburban inequalities, although he accepted the governmental decision. The arguments of the suburban municipalities of Montreal and Longueuil, as well as the North Shore and South Shore municipalities, were close to the public choice approach. They defended the idea that a small and autonomous municipality guarantees the best conditions for citizen satisfaction, including greater efficiency in the delivery of services and a higher quality of local democracy. However, our analysis shows that 'suburbs' is not a homogenous category: suburban mayors refused amalgamations for different reasons.

The suburban municipalities of Montreal and Longueuil shared a common political culture and attitude towards democracy and municipal management that differentiated them from the central city (Belley, 2003). These differences were due to cultural–linguistic and socioeconomic factors. On the one hand, suburban political culture was rooted in an Anglo-Saxon tradition which sees municipalities as the expression of the civic values necessary to democracy (Boudreau, 2003). In the case of Montreal and Longueuil, a majority of the suburban municipalities that refused mergers were English-speaking (considered to be a linguistic minority). For them, each of their municipalities represented a unique space for the expression of anglophone cultural and linguistic roots that should be preserved at all costs.[4] On the other hand, these suburban municipalities were wealthier and more socially homogeneous than the central city (Drouilly and Gagnon, 2004) which led, as in other cases, to a minor compromise between economic classes (Swanstrom *et al*., 2002). However, as they demonstrated in the past and have shown in recent reforms, Montreal's suburban municipalities prefer to pay for common services at the metropolitan level than to join the megacity.

Local elected officials from the North Shore and South Shore described these municipalities not as suburbs but as *zone périurbaine* — the junction between the rural and the urban. Their position towards metropolitan governance tended towards maintenance of the status quo for three reasons: (1) they did not feel responsible for the fiscal problems of Montreal; (2) they were against the creation of more costly institutions; and (3) they thought that amalgamations were an attack on local democracy and local autonomy. Local elected officials, especially those of the North Shore, led a

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4   The campaign against mergers of the Union of Suburban Municipalities of the Island of Montreal comprised door-to-door visits, publishing of pamphlets and advertisements in the media, the holding of referenda, the financing of several studies and meetings, and a huge demonstration with the slogan 'Hands off my city'. The whole campaign must have cost around CDN $4 million (Desrosiers, 2000).

campaign to boycott both the MMC and mergers. As with other suburban mayors, they wanted to preserve their municipalities as the expression of the common good. However, their main concern was the control of economic development and regional planning to maintain local economic competitiveness.

Besides different socioeconomic characteristics and differences related to identity, conceptions of the common good are also linked to the spatial distribution of population within the metropolitan area. The City of Laval illustrates this idea. Once a popular suburban municipality, the epitomy of the suburban dream of the 1960s, Laval is now one of the centres (with Montreal and Longueuil) of the city-region. Its approach to metropolitan governance has changed along with its spatial position within the metropolitan area. Traditionally against any regional structure that would have power over its development, Laval's mayor has gradually adopted a 'central city discourse', i.e. the idea that suburban North Shore and South Shore municipalities should contribute to balance regional fiscal inequalities and contribute to the specific needs of larger cities (including Laval). In relation to the differences found between suburbs in their approach to metropolitan governance, Sellers (1999: 260) points out that 'residential inclusion reinforces interests in provision for the disadvantaged; residential exclusion undermines those interests'. In Montreal, citizens living in municipalities close to the central city are more likely to support financing public goods than those residing on the North Shore or South Shore. Their daily urban experiences differ and so do their representations of the metropolitan area, which are much more fragmented and localist in the case of the more distant localities. Political leaders of the suburbs of Montreal and Longueuil were against institutional reforms but accepted that they belonged to an integrated urban system, while local elected officials from other suburban municipalities rejected being a part of such a system.

Briefly, local elected officials had their own visions of the common good, revealed by a hierarchy of normative goals that included democracy, efficiency, economic competitiveness and equality materialized at the metropolitan level (Greater Montreal) and/or at local level (in small or big municipalities). Local elected officials were trapped by these opposite conceptions, making voluntary cooperation impossible. Through the restructuring of scales, with the creation of the MMC and the amalgamated cities, the Government of Quebec obliged local elected officials to share new political spaces at the metropolitan and local levels.

In the City of Montreal, the merger was accompanied by decentralization with the creation of 27 boroughs. As conceived by the PQ, the borough councils were responsible for managing local services such as local roads, garbage collection, recreation, parks, culture and community development, as well as for handling certain planning aspects and overseeing public consultation. Borough councils could make recommendations to the city council, especially on budget matters. They had no taxation powers and could not borrow money, but they could request the levying of a partial tax to help fund additional levels of services. Two reasons explain the creation of this new tier. First, there was a need to respect the linguistic status of 14 merged municipalities with English-speaking majorities in the new French megacity (as defined in its founding charter). This requirement explains the design of the 27 boroughs, which mainly reproduced the limits of old suburban municipalities. Secondly, the government thought that the creation of boroughs would preserve the sense of community of the merged municipalities, convincing them of the virtues of the reform. The fact that the boundaries of most suburban municipalities were respected paradoxically enabled the resistance of political leaders and community groups who were against the merger. Indeed, their territorial basis of organization and community ties remained virtually unchanged. In the 2001 local elections, the suburban leader Gerald Tremblay beat the pro-merger mayor Pierre Bourque. The new City of Montreal was officially created on 1 January 2002, with a mayor and an executive council formed mainly of suburban leaders. Those who opposed the megacity were the ones who had to make the new machine work. This definitely facilitated the launching of the subsequent reform.

## The liberal reform or local democracy as *leitmotiv*

The reform led by the *Parti Québécois* from 2000 to 2002 reveals the existence of opposite conceptions of metropolitan governance, not only among local elected officials of Greater Montreal but also between the Government of Quebec and suburban local elected officials. From the provincial view, the creation of the MMC would strengthen the economic competitiveness of Greater Montreal, mergers would eliminate social and fiscal disparities within the island of Montreal, and the boroughs would maintain the sense of belonging of the merged municipalities. For the suburban leaders of Montreal (as they stated in our interviews), the reform was considered to be the 'death of democracy' and a 'municipal genocide': it eliminated the institution which, along with the Canadian federation, best defined their identity. The Government of Quebec did not share this perception of local democracy and identity. This extract of an interview with Quebec's Prime Minister Lucien Bouchard expressed the governmental view:

> There is finally the level of municipal identity. It is important, but it is not what defines our human identity, our identity as citizens. It is not our life's ambition to be within an area called X, Y or Z at the municipal level. We should not exaggerate! The people of Outremont [a suburban municipality] will continue to meet at the same parks and libraries (Beaulieu and Cayouette, 2001: 16; author's translation).

The conception of the PQ was based on the idea that Canadian municipalities are not the product of the popular will, but rather of the will of the provincial governments that created them, while suburban elected officials had the opposite idea. These two conceptions did not exist under equal conditions, due to the constitutionally mandated organization which leaves local matters in the hands of the provincial governments. However, municipal reforms have political risks. Because of an electoral system based on uninominal districts with a simple majority formula, the link between voters and candidates is very close. If citizens disagree with provincial decisions in their district, they can pressurize their representatives in the legislature and they can 'punish' them in the next elections — as happened in the 2003 election.

In April 2003 (just four months after the official creation of the new cities), suburban citizens, encouraged by the promise of reviewing amalgamations, voted overwhelmingly for the Liberal Party of Quebec. With the new government led by Jean Charest, the debates on metropolitan restructuring became focused on the issue of local democracy. Between 2003 and 2004, the government approved three bills (33, 9 and 75) that changed the nature of Montreal's three-tier structure designed by the PQ. Briefly, Bill 33 reinforced the advisory and decision-making powers of Montreal's boroughs, as well as giving them greater control over the management of human resources and increasing their borrowing capacity. In practice, each borough would manage its own budget, set the level of services provided, plan infrastructure development, determine the uses for budgetary surpluses and be able to impose fees for different services. Bill 33 also replaced borough presidents with borough mayors, who would be directly elected by voters, increasing their legitimacy. However, suburban leaders were not convinced by these changes; they wanted to recover full local autonomy.

Bill 9 granted citizens living within 42 municipalities stemming from 'forced' amalgamation throughout the province the opportunity to express themselves in a referendum on the future of their erstwhile local communities. In Montreal, suburban leaders organized the campaign 'We want our city back!' to promote participation in the referendum and a 'yes' vote, while the City of Montreal led a weak campaign to defend the status quo. The referendum held in June 2004 resulted in the demerger of 15 boroughs in Montreal and four boroughs in Longueuil. In Montreal, nearly all communities (14 out of 15) with bilingual status opted for demerger and, with the sole exception of Montreal-East, all demergering areas had a majority of English-speaking residents and were wealthier than other suburban municipalities (Drouilly and Gagnon, 2004). Again, suburban citizens chose local autonomy, in spite of the costs associated with this decision.

Indeed, the reconstitution of merged municipalities by 1 January 2006 came with the creation of Agglomeration Councils for the island of Montreal and for the agglomeration of Longueuil (Bill 75). These new institutions are composed of representatives of both the reconstituted cities and the main city, and coordinate services shared among municipalities. In practice, suburban municipalities are responsible for services of proximity (similar to Montreal's boroughs) and 60% of their budget goes to the new councils of agglomeration, which are in charge of the many key services (land-use evaluation, public safety, waste management, public transit, social housing, etc.). Moreover, the secession of some communities has not meant the abolition of the progressive harmonization of the local tax system approved by the PQ. In other words, municipalities which chose to demerge had to adapt to the fiscal equalization plan in 2006 instead of 2021, meaning for most of them an increase in local taxes. As other articles have shown, secession movements illustrate the reluctance of secessionists both to lose political autonomy and to build metropolitan solidarity (Boudreau and Keil, 2000; DeFronzo Haseloff, 2002; Sonenshein and Hogen-Esch, 2006). In Montreal, even if the conditions for demerger were not the ones desired by suburban elites, they accepted them in order to protect the institution that defines their common good: the municipality.

The Liberal reform introduced a change of policy paradigm in relation to local democracy. In contrast to the previous reform, the Liberal Party's restructuring was a response to suburban demands for more local democracy (giving the boroughs greater powers and allowing secession from merged municipalities). The political shift has had consequences at local and metropolitan levels. Firstly, the increase of political decentralization in the City of Montreal has led to the direct election of borough mayors and councillors, who are accountable to borough voters but do not share any space for political discussion with other borough mayors. This has meant the end of the reformist idea of a single political identity for the whole of Montreal. Secondly, compared to the amalgamated city of 2002, the City of Montreal now appears as a federation of boroughs that compete to offer the best services, with the coordination of City Hall for certain policies. This may lead to different offers and differing quality of services between the boroughs, and affect the principle of equality within the City of Montreal (one of the principles that guided the previous reform).

Finally, the focus on the island of Montreal and accommodation to its diversity in the new city contrasts with the lack of debate at the metropolitan level. The legitimacy of the MMC, the institution that (unprecedentedly) gathers local elected officials from Greater Montreal (and not just the island of Montreal) around the same table, has been seriously affected by the merger/demerger struggle. Moreover, the MMC faces the opposition of small and medium-sized South Shore and North Shore municipalities. Local elected officials had not taken advantage of the possibility of building a shared metropolitan vision through the MMC, which has developed a reputation for technical and analytical prowess at the expense of a political role. Besides, the scales of mobilization for community movements and business organizations continue to be the City of Montreal and the borough (Boudreau *et al.*, 2007a; Fontan *et al.*, 2009).

In short, the period of reforms from 2000 to 2006 is characterized by a common element: the persistence of old regionalisms in the approach to metropolitan governance (Kübler and Tomàs, 2010). Both reorganizations included the creation and abolition of institutions at the expense of more flexible forms of metropolitan cooperation closer to new regionalism, following the Canadian trend (Sancton, 2001). In fact, several elements make the case of Montreal similar to that of Toronto: (1) the proximity in time (1998 in Ontario, 2000 in Quebec); (2) the use of amalgamations by provincial governments, following the idea that 'bigger is better'; and (3) the opposition to the reform. However, chief among the differences (such as the objectives guiding the reforms) is the fact that the reform processes had opposite effects regarding the strengthening of the metropolitan scale (Boudreau *et al.*, 2007b). In Montreal, there was no clear political support for the creation of the MMC and the transformation to the city-region as the legitimate scale for local elected officials and other actors. By contrast, Toronto may lack a metropolitan

institution but Greater Toronto has meaning for local actors, as illustrated by the emergence of the Toronto City Summit Alliance, a coalition of public and private actors who have embraced city-regionalism in the name of economic competitiveness (Boudreau *et al*., 2006). This brief comparison reveals that the analysis of metropolitan governance is inevitably related to concrete actors, with specific strategies and values that 'are filtered through national and local political cultures and history', as Vogel (2007: 263) states in his comparison between Tokyo and Toronto.

## Conclusion

In this article, we draw attention to the normative dimension of metropolitan governance and to what we call the metropolitan trap. The four main approaches to metropolitan governance — the reform tradition, the public choice approach, new regionalism and the rescaling approach — represent different conceptions of the common good, based on ideologically oriented ideas on democracy, equality, efficiency and economic competitiveness to be achieved at metropolitan and local levels. The analysis of two successive institutional reforms in Montreal shows how and why provincial and local political leaders are trapped by these normative conceptions in their struggle to influence metropolitan restructuring. Following their normative positions regarding metropolitan governance, they are unable to reach a collective solution. They disagree on three key issues: (1) the normative goals to be achieved (equality, democracy, efficiency and economic competitiveness); (2) the suitable scale for their achievement (in a large or small municipality, in the metropolitan area); and (3) the institutional form of cooperation (compulsory or voluntary, number of municipalities involved, etc.). The different conceptions of metropolitan governance held by local elected officials can be explained by the combination of the spatial location of the different municipalities in the metropolitan area, their socioeconomic structure and issues of identity related to language. These divergent conceptions of metropolitan governance, found even in suburban municipalities, make the creation of a single metropolitan vision impossible.

Moreover, the opportunities for actors to pass their own scalar agenda are filtered by the political and institutional context, which legitimates a particular conception of metropolitan governance. In Canada, metropolitan reforms depend on the will of provincial governments. Between 2000 and 2006, Greater Montreal went through two institutional reorganizations that transformed its model of metropolitan governance. Besides the creation of a metropolitan structure and decentralization through the creation of boroughs, the reform led by the *Parti Québécois* was centred on the merger of the City of Montreal and its suburban municipalities to reduce social and fiscal disparities between them, satisfying the demands of the central city. By contrast, the Liberal approach to metropolitan governance enhanced the value of local democracy in small municipalities — the paradigm advocated by suburban municipalities. The implementation of this conception resulted in partial demergers, the creation of a new agglomeration council and the strengthening of Montreal's boroughs.

Both provincial and local actors were trapped by normative theories of metropolitan governance and especially by the reformist and public choice conceptions. The neo-regionalist and rescaling idea that the city-region is the suitable scale at which to achieve greater economic competitiveness in international markets was supported by almost all actors; however, this general agreement was not enough to overcome other conflicts around the conception of equality and democracy among local elected officials in the metropolitan area and between the suburbs and the Government of Quebec. In the end, the metropolitan area of Montreal has not been strengthened as a result of the rescaling process: neither the provincial government nor local actors invest at the city-region level, the changes being merely technical and leaving this level without political importance. In conclusion, the example of Montreal illustrates that actors support normative positions regarding metropolitan governance; that they build their own scalar strategies; and that their chances of achieving their goals are influenced by the institutional context.

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## Résumé

*Cet article analyse la dimension normative de la gouvernance métropolitaine dans le cas de Montréal. Les principales écoles théoriques (de la réforme, des choix publics, du nouveau régionalisme et du redimensionnement) estiment qu'il existe un échelon idéal pour la réussite d'objectifs particuliers, tels que l'égalité, l'efficacité, la démocratie et la compétitivité économique. Orientées idéologiquement, ces conceptions de la gouvernance métropolitaine servent de ressources symboliques aux acteurs qui les adoptent afin de bâtir leurs propres stratégies, pour ou contre les réformes institutionnelles, d'où ce qui est appelé ici le 'piège métropolitain'. À cet égard, Montréal, qui a connu deux réformes institutionnelles successives entre 2000 et 2006, apporte des éléments empiriques. L'analyse révèle que le gouvernement du Québec et les conseils d'élus locaux qui administrent le Grand Montréal sont piégés par ces conceptions normatives, notamment par les anciens régionalismes. Par ailleurs, les stratégies d'échelle ne rivalisent pas sur un pied d'égalité puisque le contexte institutionnel ne légitime que certaines approches de gouvernance métropolitaine.*