Challenges for the Grand Parisian Metropolitanization

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In June 2016, the *Atelier International du Grand Paris, (AIGP)* organized a debate at the *maison de l'architecture en Île-de-France* with the daily newspaper, *Libération,* to consider eight years of international consultation on the 'Grand Paris' project. It was a moment to reflect on the progress of a host of newly born institutions working towards the construction of a Greater Paris metropolitan area. *Metropole du Grand Paris* is one of them, inaugurated in January 2016. It is an ambitious project redefining local government in the capital. The debate also evolved around the urban implications of the new ring metro system, the Grand Paris Express, the heart of the Grand Parisian project. During the same period, an open call was announced to renew the AIGP's scientific committee. However, at the time of writing, decisions have been taken by the Grand Paris actors to close AIGP and pass its activities to regional bodies with significant implications for relations between the central state and regional authorities. This article will consider some of the major challenges the Grand Paris actors face to support equity, democracy and social cohesion within a neoliberal context.

The process of Grand Parisian metropolitanization at the dawn of the 21st century has been unique and controversial. It is one of the very few contemporary planning paradigms where there is an explicit will to shape the formation of global city regions by the State. In this case, a State that still has powerful planning tools and promises equity and social cohesion. The *Grand Paris* project was initiated during Sarkozy's presidency back in 2008, using *AIGP,* a public interest group, as a think tank. Its governance was divided equally between the central state (Ministry of Culture and Communications, Ministry of Territorial Equality and Housing, the Prefect of the Île-de-France Region and the Prefect of Paris) and local government authorities (Île-de-France Regional Council, City of Paris, Association of Mayors of the Île-de-France Region, the Paris Métropole public organization). The legacy of the *AIGP* endeavor and its worldwide resonance are not only unique but will also be influential in developing methodologies to tackle the

increasing challenges of global city regions, which as Kantor et al (2012, p.3) argue are vast, varied and ever changing.

AIGP has been operating as a pressure group consisting of celebrities and globally influential figures from architecture and urban planning. As such, *AIGP* has succeeded in transmitting innovative concepts about the city's future to the politicians who represent the many local authorities of the Grand Parisian area. In addition, *AIGP* has contributed together with the *Société de Grand Paris,* (in charge of the construction of the new metro) to the location of the new metro lines. *AIGP* has also structured the working programme of l'*Apur* (*Agency of Urbanism of the city of Paris*). The newly created *Agency of Urbanism of Grand Paris Metropolis* has also emerged from the work of AIGP. During the public debate of June 2016, the departing members of the *AIGP* Scientific committee, as well as other experts, publicly articulated their visions for the future of Grand Paris. Some of them, such as the geographer Michel Lussault[i], were quite critical about the evolution of the means to construct the new Parisian agglomeration. Lussault wondered aloud whether the initiative was continuing to serve the general interest. Dominique Alba, General Director of *l'Apur,* went on to suggest a new role for *AIGP,* as an incubator of ideas and practices that emerge within the Grand Parisian territory[ii].

In truth, the struggle between the neoliberal and welfare state paradigms has been ever-present in this process, with the critics of Grand Paris alluding to the dominance of the former over the latter. The challenges of the Grand Paris metropolitanization process have been summarized by Enright (2016) by considering six goals, presented in three linked pairs: economic growth and equality, state productivism and democracy, competition and social cohesion. The threat, according to the critics, is that the first of each pair of goals will dominate, leading to a privileging of economic growth, state productivism and competition. This threat is embedded in the processes that generate any contemporary global city region, and threaten to leave behind equality, democracy and social cohesion. To avoid this, global city regions,

like Grand Paris, need extensive facilities, including transportation, education, health, housing and leisure. In addition, they need diverse opportunities for their inhabitants, environmental protection, social services and democratic institutions. All of which needs to be achieved by managing the unequal way benefits are distributed and by defusing the social antagonisms caused by financial capitalism. The challenge for the Grand Paris actors is to translate this endeavor into spatially and temporally concrete undertakings, creating dynamic relations between resources, space, policies and use.

The *making* of Grand Paris can be described according to its practices of metropolitan representation, its infrastructures of transportation and its structures of governance (Enright, 2016, p.4). In all three, there is remarkable work being produced, part of which is being implemented by the Grand Paris actors. At the same time additional challenges have emerged during the ongoing metropolitanization process (Atelier International du Grand Paris, 2013).

The first set of challenges lies in the fact that the Grand Paris metropolitanization does not start from scratch. On the contrary, it is about a continuous transformation of what already exists into a desirable new entity. Consequently, a series of tensions arise both on the representation and management levels of such transformation. The way to generate shared representation for Grand Paris by discovering the "deja-la" goes beyond metro lines, planification and super calculations according to Bendimerad, Eleb, Feraru and Simon[iii]. Such continuous transformation needs to take into account not only the impact of the "grands projets" creating clusters around new transport hubs, but also all those mutations of the existing territory (which can be understood through the 12 key issues proposed by *AIGP* to understand Grand Paris[iv]). Making publicly accessible means of representation of such mutations could be a way to confront the mismatch between the ways Paris is actually imagined, and its prevailing economic and social realities (Enright, 2016, p.31).

The work produced by the 10 teams assigned initially by *AIGP* has created valuable material which can be used to create common urban imaginaries across a fractured Parisian territory. Divergent approaches

became apparent, which attributed many different possibilities to the urban project: Firstly, on small scale interventions at strategic points in the city by Geipel and Andi (Atelier International du Grand Paris, 2013, pp.44-53). Secondly, a critique of large scale planification by l'AUC (Enright, 2016, p.55). Thirdly, on the power of architecture and urbanism to visualize, explore, discover and philosophize by Secchi and Vigano (Vigano, 2012). For the making of Grand Paris there should be as much activity of imagination and thought as there is of intervention and construction. However, the criticism of such work and its public exhibition was that, in spite of the State giving a sense of imagined solidarity to the fractured metropolitan landscape, the work acted as a distraction from regional politics (Enright, 2016, p.25). Tense politics already exist between the newly born *Metropole du Grand Paris*, the city of Paris, the Isle-de-France Region and the 131 communities at stake.

A second set of challenges lies in the impact of Grand Paris's transportation infrastructure. The Grand Paris metropolitanization process has mobility at its heart. Consequently, major tensions arise between the fundamental need for mobility infrastructure for social equity (access and movement) and the uneven urbanization patterns that yield inequality and exclusion (Enright, 2016, p.23). Such tension could be addressed by a concept coined by Enright - that of "metromobility". It "*describes a régime that cuts across diverse sectors of social life, a regime in which a polyvalent ensemble of social forces, paradigms and actors converge and conflict*" (Enright, 2016, p.123). In that way, we could see a shift of attention from Grand Urbanism based on transportation and major real estate projects towards the construction of an Everyday Grand Parisian Urbanism.

A third set of challenges comes from the structures of governance. Thanks to the creation of new governing bodies such as *Métropole du Grand Paris* and *Apur,* (*Agency of Urbanism of the city of Paris*), we see the creation of new tools to support collective action on the Metropolitan scale. However, the actual erosion of public life and an increasingly depoliticized public sphere threaten to tip the balance in favor of economic

growth, state productivism and competition, leaving behind the promise for equality, democracy and social cohesion. A way to avoid this, may be to search for the restoration of Grand Parisian public life, through a progressive approach to community building. Such an approach would consider communities as enablers of citizenship rights in social life, broadening citizenship and inclusion by enshrining new rights, i.e. political, social, housing and entitlements to work (Moulaert, Swyngedouw, Martinelli, Gonzalez, 2010). According to Moulaert et al. (2010, p. 6), such an approach could provide an alternative to the rather conservative approach of community building based on equal interests which leads to a fragmented society made up by subgroups structured around identity politics (religious, ideologies, ethnic, professional). The restoration of Grand Parisian public life should depart from socially innovative initiatives and processes that should take place first and foremost at the local level, in the neighborhoods. Urban neighborhoods should be seen as heterogeneous assemblages, pivotal sites for initiating and implementing social change that may then ripple through the Grand Parisian territory. In fact, one of the challenges of the Grand Paris process of metropolitanization is to focus on the diversity of daily experiences through the role of inclusive local communities, without reproducing existing socio-spatial inequalities. The work done by *AIGP* on small-scale interventions at strategic points in the city is a starting point. Social innovation should inform such work to become a means of fighting social exclusion and improving quality of life.

By unfolding a matrix of challenges across the three sets identified above, it becomes possible to see the complexity of such metropolitanization processes and the impossibility of tackling them within preset disciplines and practices. By acknowledging such complexity, some of the concerns about the future role of *AIGP, its successor bodies and* the newly-born Grand Parisian governing institutions, become apparent. They will need to address misalignments between highly complex urban processes and the underlying rationales of planning meant to guide them (Enright, 2016, p.128). Furthermore, the actors behind the Grand Parisian institutions will need to translate how metropolitanization processes manifest in actual spatial developments. To tackle such complex globalized urban processes, *AIGP's successor bodies* would need to be transformed into a permanent laboratory for the emergence of hybrid approaches across practices and

disciplines, such as architecture, urbanism, urban geography, economics and political science. More precisely, *AIGP's* successor bodies should remain as the platform for investigating how such hybrid practices could focus on equality, democracy and social cohesion and build bridges with the dominant Grand Parisian goals, those of economic growth, state productivism and competition. Through an action-research approach, become could have both an incubator of emergent ideas and practices within the Grand Parisian territory, and a means for developing a cohesive Grand Paris of the Urban Everyday.

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