

Engaging in Civic Dialogues

Citizen Involvement in the Lyon Metropolis

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Since the turn of the century, like many other cities in Western Europe, citizen involvement has become increasingly advocated in the Lyon Metropolis. The Metropolis currently has grand ambitions for citizen involvement: from its own website, it aims to '*Développer une démocratie plus décentralisée et plus participative, tel est l'objectif que s'est assigné le Grand Lyon.*'¹ Translated as setting an objective to develop a more decentralized and participatory urban democracy, the public authority stresses the importance of dialogue with citizens. With this aim, the Lyon Metropolis builds on the ambitious and ground-breaking *Charte de la participation*, developed in 2003 by the *Communauté Urbaine de Lyon* (since replaced by the administrative entity of *Métropole Lyon*, or Lyon Metropolis). With the *Charte*, Lyon was the first intermunicipal body of France to formulate a general participation policy. At the same time, and just like the rest of France, the political landscape of the Lyon Metropolis is strongly shaped by principles of representative democracy. Although residents' direct participation in planning decisions is therefore limited, their voice is heard through elected representatives and an evolving process of concertation. This framework of representative democracy underpins the approach of Lyon Metropolis to citizen involvement in the field of planning. Alongside is a palpable legacy of economic growth, industry and prosperity in Lyon, all of which have helped

¹ Translation: 'Developing a more decentralized and participatory democracy is the objective of Greater Lyon.' Grand Lyon, 'Les instances de concertation - La Métropole de Lyon', 2021a]. Online. Available HTTP: grandlyon.com/metropole/instances-concertation.html

shape a defining intrinsic logic of the city: a neoliberal energy and spirit of independence.

The Lyon Metropolis

Comprising the city of Lyon and surrounding suburban communes, the Lyon Metropolis is France's second-largest metropolis, situated in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region of south-east France. The Lyon Metropolis has 1.3 million inhabitants and includes 59 municipalities, of which that of Lyon is the largest and the most central.² The Metropolis is surrounded by hills and is located at the confluence of the rivers Saône and Rhône. Historically, this strategic location at the crossroads between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean Sea, close to Italy and the Alps, has made Lyon an attractive location for commerce and manufacturing. In particular, Lyon became an important centre for textiles production during the Renaissance. In 1536, its burgeoning silk industry expanded under King François I, who granted Lyon a monopoly on importing raw silk in to France. During the Industrial Revolution, an established and varied textile industry led to a substantial rise in mechanical and chemical manufacturing, with both industries still dominating Lyon's industrial landscape today. This centuries-long legacy of production and trade has guaranteed Lyon a thriving economy which in turn has created conditions for a formative characteristic of the metropolis: a neoliberal, independent spirit. With an emphasis on economic growth, this spirit has been a leading principle for the governance of Lyon during the 2000s. It should be noted that currently, Lyon is at a crossroads: during the 2020 elections, the political party *Europe Écologie-Les Verts*, in an alliance with left-wing parties, obtained a majority both at the level of the municipality of Lyon, and at the level of the Metropolis. Their win put an end to almost two decades of reign by Gérard Collomb, who combined the positions of Mayor of Lyon with the presidency of the Metropolis to roll out his neoliberal-inspired policy of urban development. The extent of change to urban policies this will induce is not yet clear, but a move away from the neoliberal policy model seems probable.

The footprints of Lyon's economic growth are also visible in its spatial patterns. In the nineteenth century, for example, silk making was concentrated in

² Agence d'Urbanisme, *Lexique métropolitain: les territoires lyonnais* (Lyon: Agence d'urbanisme, 2018)

Croix-Rousse, a hilly neighbourhood situated at the left bank of the Saône. The area is notable for its narrow, winding streets and covered passageways, or *traboules*, that were once used to securely transport silk. When modern industries came to Lyon in the nineteenth century, rapid population growth put tremendous pressure on the city centre. Correspondingly, the city expanded its urban developments to the right banks of the Rhône. As its economic strength grew, Lyon continued to spread widely by annexing surrounding (rural) land and villages into the first half of the twentieth century. Decades later, another population increase in the aftermath of the Second World War compelled the city to expand further eastwards. But while Lyon annexed surrounding areas, signs of social polarization crystallized. The economic wealth benefitted a limited group, who segregated themselves from the poor and settled in affluent neighbourhoods. Those neighbourhoods are situated in the western part of the metropolis, while the poorer areas are concentrated in the east, in large-scale and high-rise social housing areas. The upturn in Lyon's economy thus also had negative consequences over the years. In a ripple effect, spatial inequalities occurred.

A Representative Democracy

As across all of France, the Lyon Metropolis is led by principles of representative democracy. Based on citizens equally and directly electing representatives – that is, persons who may legitimately act on behalf of the public – representative democracy is intrinsically linked to republican logic. In other words, the government is supposed to be the representative of the public interest. The idea of representative democracy gained momentum in France in 1789, the year the French Revolution began. In the decade that followed, the political landscape of the country was radically changed. The preceding Ancient Regime – a privileged corporatist system founded by feudalists and monarchs – was abolished and the First French Republic was officially proclaimed in September 1792. Even more importantly, the prevailing republican logic elevated the interests of the public above those of intermediary bodies such as privileged guilds and parishes. Fast-forward to today, France continues to embrace representative democracy. The model remains in conflict with corporate groups which by definition represent the interests of specific communities. Obviously, and in practice, this coexistence is more complex and nuanced than a simple banning of corporatism in favour of increased focus on public interests, yet this dogma enormously shaped (and still shapes) the political landscape in France.

Representative Democracy and Urban Planning

The principles of representative democracy not only highly determined the political landscape of France, but also its urban planning. Following this representative tradition, the government has the strongest say in urban planning. We take a jump in time here and go to the years right after the Second World War, when urban planning developed strongly in France. In the aftermath of the conflict, France was a highly centralized country. The centralist approach applied to the field of urban planning, in which the State invoked its instrumental rationality and comprehensive knowledge to position itself 'above' others, resulting in centralized laws and detailed plans. However, from the 1960s on, the State slowly began to lose its belief in full centralism and started to move towards the principle of decentralization. Scattered throughout France, it created intermunicipal bodies to better advance the control of social and environmental challenges, and strengthen economic development. Known as *Communautés Urbaine*, the first four of these intermunicipal bodies were created by the State in 1969; among them was the *Communauté Urbaine de Grand Lyon*. But although decentralization was set in motion, urban planning remained a strongly centralized state affair.

The decentralization laws established by former Minister of the Interior, Gaston Defferre between 1982 and 1983 profoundly changed this. With these laws, numerous powers and responsibilities of the State, including powers and responsibilities in urban planning, were devolved to the municipalities. In the case of Lyon, they were transferred to the intermunicipal level, due to the existence of the *Communauté Urbaine de Grand Lyon*. As a result, the planning authority at the state level disappeared and local planning authorities were created at different levels and for different areas. In keeping with the tradition of representative democracy, their remit is to work for public benefit at a local level – all the while keeping in line with national interests. But despite taking a significant step towards decentralization, the State nevertheless retains control: only the State can determine the application, directives and objectives of French planning law, or *Code de l'urbanisme*. Nevertheless, the legislation affords a great deal of liberty to local planning authorities. In 2015, the *Communautés Urbaine* were replaced by the administrative entity Metropolis, gaining greater jurisdiction by the MAPTAM law (*Modernisation de l'Action Publique Territoriale et d'Affirmation des Métropoles*) of 2014.

The Representation of Citizens in Urban Planning

From presidents to municipal councillors, France's representative democracy sees citizens directly elect their representatives from national to local. Since the creation of Metropolises as an administrative entity, yet another layer of governance has come into existence: metropolitan councils. Although usually comprising a delegation of the municipal council, Lyon is unique in being the only Metropolis with a directly elected metropolitan council since 2020.³ In the Lyon Metropolis citizens are in a strong position as they vote for their municipal and metropolitan councils. In keeping with traditions of representative democracy, council members must represent the interests of the citizenry. As most urban planning decisions are undertaken by the Metropolis, the metropolitan council is therefore responsible for representing the public interest in urban planning.

Despite these representative principles, urban planning moves beyond mere representation by elected persons. In planning laws, such as the *Code de l'urbanisme*, the French legislator frequently uses the word *concertation*. Literally, the term refers to dialogues with citizens and private actors such as developers and landowners. But its legal definition stretches no further than the public authority's duty to organize public hearings and to publish information about urban development projects. Consequently, citizen involvement in France tends to remain at the lowest rungs of the ladder of Arnstein:⁴ it hardly goes beyond consultation. The republican logic does not allow admitting the legitimacy of individuals, community organizations or lobby groups in intervening in public decisions. It is within this context that citizen involvement rarely results in direct participation, or arrangements such as co-production and co-development. Nevertheless, the issue of citizen participation is gaining importance in France lately, in particular in the field of urban planning.⁵ The Lyon Metropolis is no exception to this statement.

³ Grand Lyon, 'Élections métropolitaines 2020', Online. Available HTTP: <https://www.grandlyon.com/metropole/elections-metropolitaines-2020.html>

⁴ S. Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (1969), 35 (4), 216–224

⁵ C. Gardesse, 'The fraught 'menage à trois' of public actors, private players and inhabitants: Problems of participation in French urban development projects', *Urban Studies* (2015) 52 (16), 3035–3053

Governance Structures in and Around the Lyon Metropolis

In 2015, the Lyon Metropolis became an independent administrative entity at the metropolitan level in France. The Metropolis is chaired by a president and controlled by a directly elected metropolitan council. The metropolitan council was dominated by moderates at first, who had a liberal approach to urban policies. However, in the 2020 elections, the Green party (*Europe Écologie-Les Verts*) in an alliance with left-wing parties obtained a majority in the metropolitan council.⁶ Operating above and beyond the remit of the 59 municipalities that make up the Lyon Metropolis, the strategic spatial plan, *Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale* is overseen by an intermunicipal body that manages planning decisions in an area slightly larger than the Metropolis' borders. It includes the airport *Saint-Exupéry* and its surrounding business districts. Further expanding, the Lyon Metropolis collaborates in the *Pôle Métropolitain*, including towns of Saint-Etienne Vienne, Bourgoin-Jallieu and Villefranche. The *Pôle Métropolitain* has been created as an informal cooperation structure in reaction to the extended influence of the Lyon Metropolis beyond its boundaries. The *Pôle Métropolitain* particularly focuses its attention on topics such as economy and mobility.⁷

Urban Planning in the Lyon Metropolis

Since the decentralization laws, urban planning has been an intermunicipal affair. Today, the Lyon Metropolis has the most powers in urban planning and related fields, such as public transport, economic development, culture, housing and environmental matters. During the last decades, Lyon Metropolis has used these powers in the development of several large-scale urban projects. Lyon Confluence, Part-Dieu and Carré de Soie are current, determinant development projects to plan and design the Metropolis. The urban project Lyon Confluence, which comprises housing, offices, commerce, and public space, redevelops the former industrial and harbour area of the city centre. The urban project transforms an industrial wasteland into a sustainable extension of the nearby city centre, while

⁶ A. Mestre and S. Zappi, *Le Monde*, 'Les leçons des municipales pour la gauche : alliances victorieuses PS-EELV, érosion du PCF, LFI invisible', 30 June 2020. Online. Available HTTP: https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/06/30/le-ps-et-eelv-forment-un-nouveau-duo-gagnant-a-gauche_6044640_823448.html

⁷ Agence d'Urbanisme, *Lexique métropolitain: les territoires lyonnais* (Lyon: Agence d'urbanisme, 2018)

retaining some of the unique industrial and harbour architecture. Lyon's central business district surrounding the central railway station, Part-Dieu, is also being developed into an attractive area offering potentials for Lyon's tertiary district to grow. The urban project Carré de Soie aims to reduce spatial inequality by redeveloping a former mixed residential and industrial area, initially developed largely in connection with an important artificial silk manufacturing plant in the eastern part of the Lyon Metropolis. The project comprises housing, offices and public facilities and aims to contribute to the revitalization of the eastern part of the Metropolis that suffers from high unemployment rates and poor housing conditions. The influence of the Lyon Metropolis differs between these projects. In Lyon Confluence, for example, the Metropolis was directly involved in the development project as landowner and developer. In the Carré de Soie and Part Dieu projects, the land ownership was predominantly private, and the role of the Metropolis was limited to the facilitation and regulation of private initiatives. Despite the role of the Lyon Metropolis in these and other projects, the municipalities also have a certain influence: the municipalities sign building permits and are in charge of the realization and maintenance of public spaces and facilities.

Citizen Involvement in the Lyon Metropolis

Despite being written 15 years ago, the general participation policy of the *Communauté Urbaine de Lyon* was remarkably forward-thinking in its description of the multiple layers of citizen involvement. In the policy five different levels are distinguished, ranging from informing to co-developing.⁸ These levels determine the relationships between the intermunicipal (now: metropolitan) government and citizens. The first, 'informing', relates to the government letting citizens know about intentions, decisions and actions. At the second level, 'bottom-up information', the government (or citizens) organizes activities to uncover civic expectations, for example through surveys, notebooks and petitions. The third is 'consultation': the government asking the opinions of citizens on a particular project or decision. Public inquiries and local referenda are examples of consultation instruments. The fourth level is called 'concertation' and refers to a dialogue between citizens and the government on a particular subject. Organized by the government, it aims to further explore the opinions of citizens while bringing public interest to the fore. The last type of involvement is 'co-development'. At this level, the government invites citizens or other actors to participate in a development project or to maintain a particular area.

⁸ Grand Lyon, 'Charte de la participation du Grand Lyon', [Lyon: Grand Lyon, 2003]

The Lyon Metropolis gives most priority to concertation, which corresponds with the French planning law. It is believed that concertation enhances legitimacy, clarity and transparency of government actions; promotes dissemination; ensures understanding of the public interest; increases the diversity and exchange of opinions. Furthermore, concertation procedures aim to advance efficiency by improving public service delivery and adapting projects and decisions to meet citizens' expectations. In addition to concertation procedures, the Lyon Metropolis set up an advisory board in May 2015, known as *Conseil de Développement*.⁹ The advisory board does not question the findings and direction of the elected representatives, but gives information to representatives or helps with concertation procedures. The advisory board consists of a variety of actors, ranging from voluntary citizens and citizens groups, to local entrepreneurs and cultural groups. They give voice to local people, and strengthen the exchange between organized and unorganized groups through dialogues and reflections. The elected representatives can ask the board for advice or receive unsolicited advice. To illustrate how citizen involvement takes place in practice in Lyon Metropolis, the urban project Carré de Soie serves as a useful case study.

Citizen involvement in the Carré de Soie urban development

The urban project

Carré de Soie is situated in the eastern part of the Lyon Metropolis, in the municipalities of Vaulx-en-Velin and Villeurbanne. The neighbourhood has a long history in the textile industries, the production of artificial silk (viscose) in particular. In the aftermath of the Second World War, and exaggerated by the economic crisis of the 1970s, a decline in industrial activities spelled the end for textile manufacturing in Lyon. An outcome of the steep downturn in industries was abandoned houses and factories. For decades, Carré de Soie has not attracted any (public) investment, resulting in degradation of the urban quality of the area, and generally contributing to a poor reputation. At the turn of the twenty-first century, however, the situation began to alter. Around this time, various organizations

⁹ Grand Lyon, Le Conseil de développement de la Métropole de Lyon, 2021e. Online. Available HTTP: <https://www.grandlyon.com/metropole/le-conseil-de-developpement.html>

showed an interest in Carré de Soie: cinema chain Gaumont Pathé build a cinema complex; the Rhône administrative *département* reopened a railway line between the city centre and the airport. These investments in the area prompted the mayor of Vaulx-en-Velin to request the Lyon Metropolis to make further investments. The Lyon Metropolis responded to the request and seized the opportunity to launch the urban development project, Carré de Soie, alongside investments in a leisure centre, metro and bus lines.

Consequently, Carré de Soie was to develop towards a high-density, sustainable and mixed-use neighbourhood. Started in 2004 and projected for completion by 2030, the development was based on an incremental development strategy,¹⁰ that implied a stepwise development pathway from one location to the next. Throughout the 500 hectares site, private developers were allowed to buy specific plots of land, with the Lyon Metropolis acquiring strategic parcels. Moreover, the urban project was guided by a spatial concept which prioritized green space provision. This provision was deemed particularly important due to the infertile and polluted ground caused by previous industrial activities. To that end, the concept included a canopy of trees, a green promenade that stretched from north to south, and the development of garden islands. The Lyon Metropolis established Mission Carré de Soie, a delegation of the Metropolis, to officially coordinate the project.

The First Level: Informing

The involved public authorities took various measures to inform citizens about the urban development project. The Lyon Metropolis and the municipalities of Vaulx-en-Velin and Villeurbanne opened a so-called *Maison du Projet*: an information centre that is accessible to everyone during weekdays. The *Maison du Projet* features documents, exhibitions and interactive models about the development. Furthermore, the information centre is the workplace for civil servants working on the Carré de Soie development. In addition to the *Maison du Projet*, citizens can get information by subscribing to a newsletter and visiting the website of the urban development, which features development locations, policy documents, concertation and current affairs.

¹⁰ L. Van Karnenbeek, *Creating the city step-by-step. When incremental development strategies meet institutions*. [Wageningen: Wageningen University & Research, 2020]

The Fourth Level: Concertation

In following the commitments outlined in its 2003 participation policy, Lyon Metropolis prioritized concertation in de Carré de Soie development, with multiple rounds organized. At the beginning of the project, public gatherings were called to communicate initial steps of the overall development. During these gatherings, the involved authorities informed the citizens, who in turn were given opportunities for dialogue. After these gatherings, concertation was organized per development location. The process employed a range of communication tools, including presentations, debates based on sketches of maps and photos, site visits, workshops, discussion rounds, and lists of recommendations. Most of these concertation procedures centred on public spaces. At one of the development locations, a former artificial silk production plant called TASE Factory, the design of a green space – Esplanade TASE – saw citizens work with urban planners and architects. Organized by Lyon Metropolis, the collaboration resembled co-development, the fifth level of citizen involvement in the 2003 participation policy. This co-development was considered highly innovative, particularly compared to the usual concertation procedures.

The concertation of inhabitants is further facilitated by the *Conseils de quartier*, or neighbourhood councils. With the law on local democracy of 2002 – known as the *loi relative à la démocratie de proximité* – the creation of these councils is obligatory in municipalities of more than 80,000 inhabitants. Because the area of Carré de Soie concerns two municipalities, there are two *Conseils de quartier*. These councils are created on the initiative of the municipalities to promote direct exchanges between citizens and elected officials. They have a board composed of elected officials, and representatives of inhabitants, associations, private companies and public organizations. They regularly organize meetings that are open to everyone. During these meetings, they address all kinds of issues, ranging from housing and urban planning to health, education and culture. Mission Carré de Soie provides technical support, and the ideas and observations of the councils are officially presented to the mayor (or vice mayor) in regular meetings. These meetings are planned at least three times a year but can be more frequent if there are topical issues to address. The councils are important actors in the concertation process in the Carré de Soie development.

Citizen Activism

Citizen involvement in Carré de Soie is mainly based on information and concertation. Nevertheless, the influence of citizens may also move beyond these formal arrangements, as the development location TASE shows. The land of the

17-hectare site of a former silk factory was bought by a private developer who proposed a development plan for a 75,000 sqm project with high-rise residential towers. Within the plan of the developer, the historic factory had to be demolished. In reaction to the development plan, the citizens of Vaulx-en-Velin mobilized, organizing themselves in an association to protect the historical building which they considered important industrial heritage. To protect the building, they legally challenged the building permits for two of the residential towers. As a result of this legal challenge, the entire TASE development had to stop: the development could only continue once citizens withdrew their legal challenges. The protest forced the private developer, the Lyon Metropolis and the Municipality of Vaulx-en-Velin to negotiate a renewed development plan. After almost two years, an agreement was reached. In this renewed plan, the private developer preserved the main factory building and renovated it with respect to the existing architecture. This example shows the powers of mobilized groups of citizens, beyond the official levels of involvement such as informing and concertation.

Discussion

In the Carré de Soie development, citizen involvement is mostly organized through concertation. As a consequence, the involvement of citizens is generally reactive. Citizens are asked to express their opinions about the projects or development plans that are communicated by the planning authority. The creation of the *Conseils de quartier*, with an agenda-setting capacity, does change the influence of citizens slightly: they have the ability to set topics on the public agenda. But their degree of liberty depends strongly on the will of the concerned planning authorities. In some instances, the planning authorities are even criticized for leaning too heavily on citizens. It raises questions about how the wider process relates to the representation of citizens. The bottom-up mobilization against the demolition of the TASE factory illustrates that there are also possibilities for citizens to intervene in the definition of urban development projects. However, the influence of citizens goes through opposition and conflict rather than through involvement or participation. Generally speaking, citizens in the Carré de Soie development mainly rely on the vastly institutionalized form of concertation. In current conditions, it does not appear that partnerships between public actors and citizens proceed to a model of participation on an equal basis.

Conclusion

For all of its neoliberal character and spirit of independence, the Lyon Metropolis nevertheless falls in line with the rest of France when it comes to citizen involvement. That is to say, it can only be understood in the context of the broader French political landscape. The legacy of the French Revolution clearly positioned citizens at the heart of representative democracy: they are represented by elected officials. Hence, the republican logic and representative tradition highly determine the relationship between the government and citizens in urban planning. Although citizens (and other interest groups) have little direct access to decision making in urban planning, they are represented by elected representatives. France's decentralization and metropolitan laws had a profound impact on urban planning: most notably, representation at the local and metropolitan level gained importance. The path towards decentralization showed that the French State is not impermeable to initiatives towards local representation. Representation in urban planning is therefore particularly shaped by the values of local politics. The municipal and metropolitan council currently represent citizens in the Lyon Metropolis, illustrating how representation at the local level is still highly valued. The Lyon Metropolis is particularly praised for being the first in France with a directly elected metropolitan council.

Despite the importance of representation, citizens are involved in urban planning matters through concertation, a legally prescribed procedure. It is the public authority's duty to organize public hearings and publish information about urban development projects. The Lyon Metropolis has developed a broader meaning of concertation: it refers to dialogues with citizens. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the Lyon Metropolis has increasingly prioritized citizen involvement. Its government was the first to formulate a general participation policy, in which they placed particular emphasis on concertation. Over the years, the position of citizens in concertation has been strengthened by various factors, including the establishment of the metropolitan and neighbourhood councils. The Carré de Soie development exemplifies a strengthened concertation procedure. Despite the strong notion of representation and concertation, the Lyon Metropolis is exploring the meaning of participation. The cooperation of citizens, planners and architects in the TASE development location is an example of such a participative initiative. Nevertheless, the Lyon Metropolis holds the strongest position, with representation and concertation as core principles. The adherence to the republican model in a representative democracy still suppresses more extensive types of citizen involvement, such as direct citizen participation.

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