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## Revisiting Municipal Reforms in Quebec and the New Responsibilities of Local Actors in a Globalizing World

*Pierre Hamel and Jean Rousseau*

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*Ce chapitre permet d'examiner les incidences des récentes réformes municipales au Québec. Bien que cette restructuration des politiques locales et municipales soit reliée au dernier courant de réformes, la conjoncture économique et politique est différente. Dans le contexte actuel, la décentralisation, la mondialisation et la redéfinition des responsabilités politiques des municipalités font dorénavant partie du programme politique. Le gouvernement du Québec légitime ses nouveaux projets de réforme en se référant à une structure de « gouvernance ». Cette structure serait celle qui relèverait le plus adéquatement les nouveaux défis urbains et métropolitains. Le Québec n'a toutefois pas mis en œuvre cette approche. Il a plutôt adopté l'approche technocratique, qui se préoccupait davantage des structures institutionnelles et est la continuité des courants de réformes municipales qui ont suivi la Révolution tranquille. Cette stratégie s'est avérée inadéquate et désuète, plus particulièrement pour ce qui est de la région de Montréal, parce qu'elle n'a pas tenu compte de l'apprentissage inhérent à tout projet de réforme majeur. Le gouvernement du Québec aurait dû être au courant de l'importance stratégique de mobiliser un système pour soutenir ses projets. Cette ligne de conduite aurait pu instaurer une gouvernance plus coopérative ce qui aurait été plus approprié dans la conjoncture actuelle.*

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Over the last fifteen years, Canada's city-regions, like other city-regions in the world, have been facing several changes that can be associated with globalization. This brought to the fore a series of questions about the role of territory or space, the availability of resources for municipalities to cope with new responsibilities, the capacity of local power to adapt to external pressures, and the forms of cooperation that municipalities should establish on a

metropolitan scale with economic actors, other local institutions, and upper tiers of government. These issues have been explored at length in the recent literature on urban governance and new forms of regionalism (Friskén and Norris 2001; Swanström 2001).

Surprisingly, in Quebec such questions have not been at the top of the research agenda for social scientists. This does not mean that local political actors and the Quebec government were inactive in this field. It has in fact been the other way round. Until now, politicians, technocratic civil servants, and a small network of experts have led the debate about the restructuring of local and municipal politics.

Our intent here is not so much to explain why social scientists have paid so little attention to the restructuring of local power in Quebec. Rather, we want to highlight some of the shortcomings of the recent municipal and metropolitan reform that took place at the turn of the new millennium by referring to contextual changes. However, although these changes help us understand why the institutional and governance framework has to be adapted to the new urban reality, this does not explain the political choices that were made by the Quebec government in its aim to modernize the municipal and metropolitan systems. That requires paying attention to the normative and political dimensions of those governmental choices – that is, looking at values, political opportunities, and institutional constraints. This represents the particular angle that shapes our discussion of these reforms.

In this paper, we shall discuss some of the limits deriving from the political choices that were made by the Quebec government with regard to municipal reforms. In doing so, we shall bring out an ambiguity inherent in the government strategy, which was particularly evident with the approach adopted by the Quebec government for the metropolitan region of Montreal. While trying to implement a new model of reforms based on what we call a governance framework, the government continued to use a technocratic model, involving a top-down perspective, which has been framing the various reform projects since the 1960s. The governance framework is based on the mobilization of municipalities and local actors with interests in metropolitan development, and the establishment of forms of decision making in which the government appears to be one important actor but is no longer the only one. This framework has come to be seen as the most relevant for dealing with challenges imposed by globalization,<sup>1</sup> especially for increasing the competitiveness of the city-regions. In this perspective, the emphasis is on the development of flexible and variable strategies of development that can cope with economic restructuring and the creation of new sectors of world-led economic activities. A key issue with governance is the process itself by which actors are mobilized and participate in decision making; the setting up of an institutional structure with a clearly delimited sphere of intervention is no longer the main issue. But even though the challenges imposed by globalization have

been raised in some reports and studies – and by the government itself from the 1980s onwards – the Quebec government chose nonetheless to reproduce its technocratic model.

The emergence of governance reveals a deeper transformation of Quebec politics that is still going on. It is linked to an attempt to redefine the role of the government within a new political context that is characterized by a decrease of the state's legitimacy and a questioning of its level of institutional capability. This new political context indicates a significant transformation of the framework structuring the public realm with regard to state intervention and citizen participation. We shall argue in this paper that the Quebec government did not take into account this new political setting when launching the recent wave of municipal reforms. Given its contested legitimacy and its limited resources, the Quebec government should have planned this process of reform better, especially by adequately explaining the rationale of the project and by creating a large regional consensus among the various local actors that would have helped legitimate the project. The learning dimension of municipal and metropolitan reforms was largely ignored. Although, in some respects, the Quebec government came to invoke the governance approach for justifying its decision, its intervention turned out to be a move against such an approach, for the government finally chose to put into practice an outdated model of reform that paid attention primarily to institutional structures.

Our paper is divided into three parts. First, we will recall the historical context of Quebec municipal reforms since the Quiet Revolution. In many ways, the recent wave of municipal reforms is a continuation of the previous ones. Second, we will present an overview of the recent wave of municipal reforms. We will look more closely at the political and institutional changes that have been implemented in Montreal and will highlight the predominance of the technocratic approach. Finally, we will analyse these reforms, discussing some of their limitations. We will refer to the recent debates in the literature concerning urban restructuring and governance in the context of globalization. Some issues explaining the limitations of the recent municipal and metropolitan reforms will also be discussed.

#### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF QUEBEC MUNICIPAL REFORMS (1960 TO MID-1990s)

The Quiet Revolution put the issue of reforming municipal structures at the front of the governmental agenda. The election of the Liberal Party in 1960 under the leadership of Jean Lesage marked the end of the long Duplessis era which, according to the leaders of the Quiet Revolution, had been a period of great backwardness – *une grande noirceur*. This election was recognized as the beginning of a new period in Quebec history. In this context, the modernization

of municipal politics was seen as a prerequisite that would clearly reflect this historical step. From the 1960s to the 1990s, several parliamentary commissions, study groups, reports, projects, and bills sought to transform and rejuvenate municipal institutions in conformity with the diagnostic that had been posed during the first years of the Quiet Revolution. However, none of them brought efficient and definitive answers. Thus, despite the intention to transform the municipal system, the project of thoroughly reforming the political values and structures of municipalities has remained on the political agenda.

#### IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE QUIET REVOLUTION

The 1960 electoral defeat of the Union Nationale government marked the end of the “Duplessism” that had permeated Quebec politics during the previous two decades. During those years, the predominant political discourse on Quebec society had been centred on the protection of its rural, Catholic, French-speaking, and conservative dimensions (Meynaud and Léveillé 1973; Bissonnette 1982; Bourque and Duchastel 1996). Premier Maurice Duplessis’s ideology had been based on the promotion of rural values. This representation of Quebec society had helped give rural municipalities a symbolic and political importance. At the same time, it served to mask the increasing gap between the Quebec polity and the socio-economic reality of Quebec society (Simard 1979; Dickinson and Young 1995). In contrast to the Duplessis discourse, Quebec society was already urbanized and industrialized at the turn of the twentieth century. The political weight given to rural municipalities and county councils by the Duplessis government was misleading.<sup>2</sup>

The election of Jean Lesage opened the door to a major restructuring of the Quebec political system in a very short time. First, the predominant political discourse came to emphasize the urban and industrial character of Quebec society and stressed Quebec’s backwardness compared with other countries and other provinces, especially Ontario. From the beginning, the liberal government insisted that Quebec society needed to be modernized and that the best way to achieve this was through a reform of public institutions.

Second, the discourse on Quebec’s need to catch up with its neighbours revealed a significant change in social relations. Three different groups that had become allied through their opposition to the Duplessis regime carried it out: the labour unions, the French-speaking petite bourgeoisie, and a group of Liberal intellectuals. They called into question the role of the old elites (clergy, rural leaders) and the representations of Quebec society associated with them. The election of the Liberal Party provided them with the opportunity to be empowered.

The third type of change introduced by the Quiet Revolution was the broadening of the field of state intervention. The Quebec government became

recognized as the key actor that would enable the province to catch up with other modern societies. This brought a major restructuring of the field of state intervention ranging from the complete replacement of the clergy in the education, social services, and health sectors to the establishment of new state agencies for promoting Quebec's economic development. This restructuring was based on a technocratic approach in which the Quebec government was presented as the key player in leading the reforms. With its strong legitimacy and significant resources, the government succeeded in implementing these reforms and mobilizing large sectors of the population. The province's public sector built up an expertise that has helped reinforce its central role in Quebec politics. The changes opened the door to the establishment of a new framework delimiting the boundaries of the Quebec public realm and specifying its forms of intervention and participation. This technocratic model of public action became predominant in the debate about regional development and municipal reforms.

#### THE INTERVENTIONS AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

The municipal system was not left out of this process of restructuring. The need to reform municipal structures was a major issue, since municipalities were perceived as outdated and inefficient (Meynaud and Léveillé 1973; Bissonnette 1982; Hamel 2001). The political and legal association between the municipality and the parish was called into question in connection with the requirements of an urban and industrial society. Moreover, the close links that had existed between the rural elite and the Duplessis government caused the municipalities to be suspect; they were easily seen as being opposed to the new and modern rationality advocated by the Liberal government.

This perception was reinforced by the increasing discussion about the specific problems faced by municipalities, notably the fiscal difficulties, especially in the case of rural municipalities. While having to face new demands for financing schooling and health services, the rural municipalities were confronted with a demographic decline and then with a diminution of their sources of revenue. Their lack of resources was also noticeable with respect to the funds required to support the establishment of industrial firms. In this context, the municipalities were increasingly dependent on governmental transfers and grants (Hamel and Jalbert 1991, 176–80).

Pierre Laporte, minister of municipal affairs under the Lesage government, became a strong advocate of municipal reforms (Meynaud and Léveillé 1973; Bissonnette 1982). In 1963–64 he established three commissions of inquiry: the Bélanger Commission on municipal fiscal issues, the La Haye Commission in charge of examining the urban question, and the Blier and Sylvestre Commission on the intermunicipal problems in the Montreal region. As minister, Laporte undertook a provincial tour, during which he discussed with

municipal representatives the project of municipal amalgamation. He insisted that municipalities had to be merged in order to reduce their number, and he emphasized the importance of intermunicipal cooperation. Amalgamation, he argued, would overcome rural isolationism and the fragmentation of Quebec territory into small units that could no longer cope with the requirements of a modern society. It would allow better and more diversified services to be provided to citizens. It would help municipalities attract businesses more easily and adopt rules on urban planning. And it would re-establish a better equilibrium between rural and urban municipalities while allowing for an improved and more rational management of Quebec territory.

#### THE BEGINNING OF A LONG PROCESS OF REFORMS

Over the three following decades, various bills, reports from study groups, parliamentary commissions, and proposals from organizations representing municipalities were released and debated. Of course, these discussions did not follow a direct trajectory. From the 1960s to the mid-1970s, the discussions about municipal reforms were framed by the tenets of the discourse on regional development diffused by the leaders of the Quiet Revolution (Bissonnette 1982; Divay and Léveillé 1981). They were part of the whole project of imposing a centralized management of Quebec territory in response to the imperatives of a modern, urban, and industrial society. All this followed the top-down approach, in which the municipal representatives were seen as potential obstacles whose attributes needed to be transformed. Following the economic difficulties faced by the Quebec government in the 1970s, the discussions began to be less ambitious and were no longer thought of as a great leap. The idea of planning at all political levels was gradually dropped and was replaced by a pragmatic management of the existing municipal actors and structures.

During the 1960s and 1970s some significant reforms had been introduced. In 1965 the Liberal government adopted Bill 13 on the voluntary merger of municipalities. However, the adoption of this bill did not result in a great movement towards amalgamation. Since the municipal representatives were recognized as the initiators and did not have any incentives or constraints, the amalgamation of municipalities occurred very slowly. Then, in 1966, Pierre Laporte tried to replace the existing county councils with modern regional organizations that would simultaneously represent urban and rural municipalities; but this proposal was set aside with the electoral defeat of the Liberal Party, and three years passed before these reforms were introduced.<sup>3</sup>

One important reform was the creation in 1969 of three supramunicipal communities: the *Communauté urbaine de Montréal* (CUM), the *Communauté urbaine de Québec* (CUQ), and the *Communauté urbaine de l'Outaouais* (CUO). These new structures were supposed to provide more efficient and, in

some cases, new services to the population, reinforcing the autonomy of municipalities (Meynaud and Léveillé 1973).

The reform momentum was modified somewhat with the election of the Liberal Party under the leadership of Robert Bourassa in 1970.<sup>4</sup> Despite the persistence of a technocratic bias, new elements were introduced. The economic role of Montreal in relation to developmental issues for the whole province was increasingly discussed. The government referred to the notion of “profitable federalism,” opening the door to a greater collaboration with the federal government.<sup>5</sup>

A more decisive shift in government strategy occurred when the Parti Québécois government adopted Bill 125 in 1979. The intention was to implement a comprehensive framework for the planning and management of Quebec territory, and also to redefine territorial management through the creation of regional county municipalities (RCMs). Even though these institutional structures implied a centralized control over the activities of municipalities, René Lévesque’s government justified this reform by discoursing on the decentralization of responsibilities and the democratization of regional politics. Nonetheless, some of the objectives discussed during the Quiet Revolution finally came to be achieved. The creation of ninety-four RCMs covering Quebec territory (excluding the territory covered by the three supramunicipal communities created in 1969) led to the demise of the county councils and established a new institutional structure for managing the municipal system.

#### THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF MUNICIPAL REFORMS

The preliminary discussions around Bill 125 revealed a change in governmental approach.<sup>6</sup> They showed the government’s intention to integrate local and regional decision makers further into the process of reform. This came to be seen as a prerequisite to a successful implementation of government intervention. In the meantime, significant changes had occurred in regional and local politics. Resistance at the local and regional levels helped to democratize these political spaces, which could no longer simply be seen as the persistence of rural conservatism. Other representations of these spaces, highlighting their cultural and social dimensions, became discussed in the debates. Of course, the political and institutional changes introduced by the Quebec government, such as the RCMs and the bills regarding territorial development and the protection of agricultural lands, transformed the local and regional institutions and structures.

However, the change in the government’s position did not mean that local and regional representatives became the main instigators in the development of policies on regional development and urban affairs. Although some changes were noticeable in the government’s discourse, the implementation of the

reform turned out to be a continuation of the predominant model of public intervention associated with the Quiet Revolution. The setting up of RCMs was instigated by the Quebec government. The RCMs' weak management capacity and the lack of sustained effort to increase their legitimacy reflected the government's desire to avoid greatly altering the power relations between the central government and the regional and local levels. Since then, the centralizing and top-down approach has remained predominant within the Department of Municipal Affairs.

## THE RECENT WAVE OF MUNICIPAL REFORMS IN QUEBEC (MID-1990s)

### A NEW CONTEXT FOR MUNICIPAL POLITICS

From the mid-1990s on, the Quebec government again began to discuss launching a process of municipal reform. However, since the adoption of Bill 125 in 1979, the political situation has changed significantly. The current political and economic context is different from that of the Quiet Revolution (except for the constitutional disputes about jurisdictions between the Quebec government and the federal government). The government no longer presents itself as the driving force orienting society towards the achievement of collective goals. The discourse on planning has been replaced by one emphasizing the establishment of partnerships with the private sector and the need to provide efficient, cheap, and competitive services to citizens, who are regarded as well-informed clients. The socio-economic summits organized by Lucien Bouchard's government in 1996 – which were attended by representatives of the business sector, labour unions, youth organizations, and the women's movement, among others – reflected a representation of the state as the creator of synergy and as a facilitator. This perspective also shapes the policy adopted by the Quebec government on regional development, in which the government is primarily defined as a supporter of regional initiatives (Quebec 1997).

In this context, the discourse on decentralization took on further importance. While allowing the state to revise its mission, the discourse on the decentralization of services opened the door to a restructuring of services along the lines of efficiency and proximity. This was the case with the 1992 reform of the health sector, which involved transferring some health services to new regional health boards (Michaud 2000). It should be mentioned that the discourse on decentralization has been shaped by neoliberal tenets on privatization and deregulation. More recently, the discussion on decentralization has included new elements – the establishment of new models of governance that include the government, the private sector, and “civil society” (community groups and non-profit-making organizations). This discourse on governance

refers to the limited resources of the state, which needs to find new forms of financing. It emphasizes the need to set up decentralized decision-making processes and to mobilize various actors to implement policies and reforms.

The other important element of this new context is globalization, which has come to be discussed as the new political horizon, both for the Quebec government and for the municipalities. These discussions refer mainly to the economic aspects of globalization. Indeed, globalization is most often synonymous with a global market imposing constraints on national and local actors, thereby revealing the predominance of a neoliberal and corporatist discourse (Boyer and Drache 1996). The strengthening of the global competitiveness of national economies has been presented as the most appropriate avenue for facing the challenges raised by globalization. The signing of the Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement, both of which were supported by the main political parties in Quebec, has helped to justify this economic reading of globalization.

One of the consequences of these discussions on the role of the state and globalization has been a new perspective on the role of local actors, especially metropolitan regions. This has involved repositioning them, so that instead of being seen as a subordinate and dependent tier of national government, they are seen as strategic actors that should develop new spheres of intervention that will allow them to compete in the global marketplace. This presupposes the adoption of a more flexible regulatory framework and the elaboration of strategies that would allow them to deal with national governments and external economic forces, such as multinational corporations. This brought up the question of Montreal, which requires a different perspective. Its economic vitality and its ability to establish economic and political relations in the international arena, notably for developing its own niche, became important political issues for the Quebec government.

Since the 1990s, the discussions about changing the governance of the municipal system in order to overcome what the government called the status quo began to be more and more intense. Paving the way for the municipal reform were various factors: the debates about the adoption of a policy on rurality, indicating the necessity of rethinking urban planning and the occupancy of rural territory; the 1996 *Politique de consolidation des communautés locales*, which aimed to facilitate municipal amalgamation; the adoption in 1997 of Bill 92 on the Commission for the Development of the Metropolis (CDM), which pointed out the need to address the problems of Montreal as a city-region;<sup>7</sup> and the debates on fiscal equity and the management capacity of municipal institutions.

It is important to mention that the creation of the CDM was an important shift in the government's discourse. The debates on the setting up of this commission revealed the increasing influence of a governance approach. Indeed, in 1996, when the provincial government announced its intention to promote

the Montreal metropolitan region, it stressed the importance of setting up adequate processes of consultation and participation. The involvement and cooperation of local actors were presented as a key element. This orientation framed to a large extent the unsuccessful attempt made by the provincial government to implement the CDM. It was to have been presided over by the minister of municipal affairs and the metropolis, and elected officials were supposed to rub shoulders with representatives of socio-economic groups and para-public institutions. However, the emphasis on processes was overtaken two years later by an approach focusing on institutional structures.

The failure of this strategy resulted from the difficulty of bringing together the interests of people living in the central city with those in the outer suburbs on the North and South Shores. The suburbanites held that they did not need the central city in order to survive and, more importantly, they did not want to pay for the central city's mismanagement of public services. The challenge of the metropolitan reform in 1996 was to convince the citizens from the outer suburbs that it was not fair to let only the citizens from the central city pay for regional functions that benefited the whole metropolitan community. However, this challenge turned out too problematic to be undertaken.

#### THE WHITE PAPER ON THE RESTRUCTURING OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE

The publication in 2000 of the White Paper by the minister of municipal affairs and the metropolis marked the beginning of the implementation of a new wave of municipal reforms. It reveals the influence of the traditional perspective, in which the creation or transformation of institutional structures was a major concern. In this way, this new wave of reforms was a continuation of the previous ones that had been based on a technocratic approach.

The portrait of the municipal situation in the White Paper appeared very complex.<sup>8</sup> The justification for the reform was linked to the resolution of many issues. First of all, as in the 1960s, the problem of municipal fragmentation as a result of having too many municipalities was pointed out. In addition, it was noted that the small size of the municipalities imposed severe limits on their capacity to address issues that go beyond their territorial limits and to assume new responsibilities. The large number of municipalities (more than thirteen hundred) raised important problems: the lack of a global vision on municipal politics; unproductive and unequal competition among them; a multiplication of structures, causing additional costs; and fiscal disparities between municipalities. The existing forms of intermunicipal collaboration, it turns out, were too limited with regard to these problems. The existing system of government grants had not created incentives to adopt these forms of cooperation or to implement amalgamations.

In addition, urban agglomerations were confronted with the problem of urban sprawl and with the lack of strong socio-economic dynamism that would

increase their competitiveness at the national and global levels. A section of the White Paper was dedicated to the specific situation of the three urban communities (Montreal, Quebec City, and Hull-Gatineau). Despite their achievement in many ways, their structures should be redefined to increase their competitiveness and their management capacity while achieving economies of scale. In the governmental perspective, increasing the management capacity of the supramunicipal tier should do this. The White Paper also discussed the implementation of the government policy on rurality. The objective would be to reinforce the decision-making capacity of the rural communities, which might imply amalgamating municipalities or strengthening the role of the RCMs.

The implementation of the municipal reform proposed in the White Paper rested on two complementary strategies.<sup>9</sup> The first was the forced merger of local municipalities, which the government went on to apply in the urban agglomerations of Montreal, Quebec City, and Hull-Gatineau. The second strategy was the creation of metropolitan tiers of governance, with the object of making urban agglomerations more competitive.

#### THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORM: THE EXAMPLE OF MONTREAL

In the Quebec government's discourse on the rationale for reform in the metropolitan region, the government referred to the arguments raised in the White Paper. In order to justify the new reform, the minister of municipal affairs and the metropolis referred to the need to build a more competitive city-region. To achieve this objective, the main tool appeared to be the reduction of municipal fragmentation through the amalgamation of municipalities. Two other dimensions also were present in the government discourse. One was planning and coordinating municipal activity on a regional scale. The other was reducing the gap, in terms of fiscal efforts, between municipalities. Fiscal disparities were a major concern in financing the infrastructure and services needed to develop the city-region, because the central city fiscal situation was a matter of serious concern.

The Quebec government used the former technocratic approach to implement this reform and imposed it by passing a law, despite the protestations and the opposition of many local mayors; the government did not attempt to build up a consensus on a metropolitan scale. This turnaround – the idea of imposing its view instead of convincing the population – was not explained by the provincial government, apart from its mentioning that there had to be a limit to the obstructionism of the local mayors.

With Montreal, the government followed a two-step strategy. The first step was the amalgamation of the municipalities on Montreal Island – the same strategy it employed with other urban agglomerations, such as Longueuil and Quebec City. Under Bill 170, it created a mega-city of 1.8 million inhabitants

that came into existence on 1 January 2002. The government also established an updated territorial-management structure through the creation of twenty-seven boroughs. These boroughs respected the former borders of the main urban neighbourhoods of Montreal and also those of the former suburbs. The new boroughs are responsible for delivering such services as urban planning, fire prevention, waste removal, social and economic development, culture and recreational activities, borough parks, local roadwork, and enforcing the ban on converting buildings into condominiums. In fact, the boroughs have only two exclusive competencies – fire prevention and infringements regarding the conversion of buildings. As for their other responsibilities, these are shared with the administration of the City of Montreal. The boroughs have no power of taxation. Their budget comes from the city council's grants. Consequently, the boroughs are administrative and consultative structures rather than decision-making centres. In other words, the municipal reform tends to reinforce the institutional basis of the City of Montreal while broadening its spheres of competency. Its new functions are supposed to allow Montreal to answer the challenges it faces in the contemporary context.

The second step of the municipal reform was the creation under Bill 134, of the Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC), which covers the territory of the census metropolitan region defined by Statistics Canada and includes more than 3.4 million inhabitants. By creating the MMC, the government wanted to establish a strategic authority with specific competencies: area planning, protection of the environment, economic development, international promotion, and management of metropolitan activities.<sup>10</sup> The MMC is composed of representatives chosen from the elected officials of the sixty-four municipalities within the five administrative regions that constitute the metropolitan region. The government gave the MMC the mandate of developing a metropolitan plan for area planning and development. The goal of this plan is to set up “a strategic vision of economic, social, and environmental development aiming at facilitating a coherent exercise of the Community's powers” (Quebec 2000, art. 127, par 1; our translation). The MMC's mandate also includes the supervision of agencies with a metropolitan vocation (the Metropolitan Transport Agency, the Agricultural Consultative Agency, and Montreal International) and the supervision of special commissions. In May 2001 five commissions were established in the following areas: transport, land-use planning, economic planning and metropolitan facilities, environment, and social housing.

Despite its metropolitan vocation in planning and management, the MMC does not constitute a regional government as such. Until now, it has had few powers and resources to convince the municipalities and economic actors to develop and share a common vision of metropolitan interests. Its capacity to design a real development strategy for the metropolitan region seems rather limited. In that context, it can hardly be assumed that a common vision and a substantial

intervention strategy would arise from the MMC's activities. It does not have the political or administrative powers that would allow it to establish some form of governance on a regional scale, in spite of the government discourse.

#### THE RECENT MUNICIPAL REFORMS IN THE CONTEXT OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING: SOME THEORETICAL REMARKS

The imposed metropolitan solution in 2002, based on the merging of municipalities on Montreal Island and the South Shore, coupled with a supramunicipal tier of coordination and planning on a regional scale – the Montreal Metropolitan Community – revealed the prevalence of the old technocratic model. By acting in a directive manner on Montreal Island and the South Shore while at the same time counting on the cooperation of the municipalities and other regional actors to achieve metropolitan governance, the Quebec government was sending contradicting messages to the local actors and municipalities.

Whereas the preceding sections examined the main municipal reforms since the Quiet Revolution, this section will analyse recent reforms. The strategy adopted by the government appears to be deficient, whether we look at the objectives of the reform or the manner of its implementation. The difficulties faced by the government can be explained from two complementary angles. At first, it based its reform on an inadequate understanding of the new reality of the city-regions. Recent socio-economic changes have given rise to a new framework for political action that calls into question the technocratic model. In addition, the Quebec government made some huge mistakes in planning its process. One of them was the lack of attention given to the learning component of the reform. In discussing this dimension, we shall attempt to provide some explanations of why the reforms failed, taking into account the contemporary urban context.

#### SOME REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE NEW METROPOLITAN CHALLENGES

In 2001, 80 percent of Canada's population was living in urban centres, an increase of 5.2 percent compared with 1996 (Liberal Party 2002, 1). Since 1941, the urban population has grown steadily. This increase is concentrated mainly in four extensive urban regions, including Montreal. After the Second World War, like other metropolitan regions in the Western world, Montreal underwent economic processes of restructuring that were closely linked to changes in urban forms. These transformations took place on a metropolitan scale and involved a new experience of mobility and centrality for residents (Ascher 1998). At the outset, the political and administrative consequences of these changes were difficult to grasp. Since the 1960s, they have been put back on the policy agenda (Andrew, Graham, and Philips 2002).

Over the last thirty years, metropolitan regions have experienced a series of transformations that have fundamentally affected city life, city forms, and the overall urban structures (Soja 2000; Bassand 2001; Dear 2002). The increasing segmentation of the labour market, coupled with the prevalence of the service-sector economy, has brought about a restructuring of the urban economy (Corade and Lacour 1995). One important consequence of this restructuring has been the relocation of social and economic activities, resulting in a redefinition of the hierarchy within and among cities. The new urban hierarchy has often been explained by referring to economic globalization (Kratke 1992). The impact of economic globalization on cities is noticeable in the new waves of immigration, among other things. It is also visible in several social and cultural changes that can be analysed in terms of the opportunities or constraints experienced by the inhabitants (Bauman 1998).

Such a perspective is in tune with the move to bring cities or other places back into our analyses of economic globalization. Several reasons are given by Saskia Sassen to explain the importance of including cities in our understanding of global processes, beginning with the fact that it “allows us to see the multiplicity of economies and work cultures in which the global information is embedded” (Sassen 1999, 141). The impact of globalization on localities varies depending on the leeway available to them as a result of market conditions and public resources. Thus, cities “behave strategically” in diverse ways, according to their capacity to mobilize local resources or to count on government support (Savitch and Kantor 2003).

The issue of regulating the new urban reality can be connected to a growing tension arising from the breakup of its main components and on the need to provide coherence for public action (Le Galès 1998). This tension raises several questions. Under what conditions can the central city or the city-region become a collective actor (Bourdin 2000) able to deal with superior tiers of government and external economic forces? Consequently, what are the dominant interests of the central city compared with those of the city-region? To start with, can the central city and the city-region share the same collective project, with all its economic, social, cultural, environmental, and urban components, as Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom (2001) suggest?

These questions are particularly important in the new metropolitan context. The need to revise the old planning institutions and the local political system in order to take into account the expansion of the metropolis’s territorial boundaries goes hand in hand with a repositioning of local actors. Here it is interesting to notice, following Christian Lefèvre (1998), how recent metropolitan governance reforms in most Western countries have been conducted with the cooperation of local actors, unlike the top-down approach of previous attempts. This strategy is linked to the “disappearance of central government as the holder of supreme legitimacy and capable, by itself, of imposing, or at least shaping, a particular idea of public action” (Lefèvre 1998, 18). In this

regard, the institution is not created in advance or in a “ready to use” form. Its appearance is the result of a constitutive process. From then on, “metropolitan governance does not consider the institution to be pre-established – on the contrary. The objective to be achieved is not fixed in advanced, but becomes the product of the system of actors as the process unfolds” (Lefèvre 1998, 18). In other words, the top-down approach has been replaced by a collaborative approach with local actors.

#### HOW TO EXPLAIN THE RESISTANCES TO THE REFORM? THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

Two questions should be raised regarding the strategies which the Quebec government chose to adopt. First, why did the Quebec government see in amalgamation a solution to Montreal’s problems, describing them in relation to a series of economic, spatial, social, and environmental processes, whereas their causes and consequences seem often to have been intertwined and can be connected to the weak economic performance of the city-region compared with the urban regions of other North American metropolises? Second, if it seems so important to organize planning on the scale of a city-region to make Montreal more competitive in this globalizing world, why did the government decide to build such a weak example of coordination and planning as the MMC?

For the time being, we do not have satisfactory answers to give. Nonetheless, it is necessary to recognize that, to a large extent, the diagnosis upon which the government based its reform may be considered adequate. What is problematic remains on the normative side – namely, how the forced amalgamation was privileged over other courses of action, such as a consensus-building solution on a metropolitan scale, in order to elaborate a pragmatic approach in reference to governance. We know that such an approach was attempted in the mid-1990s, but it was inadequate.

When it comes to municipal and metropolitan regionalism, one of the main issues remains the fragmented nature of local government. How is it possible to make planning work and to combine diversified, if not opposite, interests through steering institutions such as metropolitan coalitions or a metropolitan tier of government? Is it sufficient for a metropolitan entity or a specialized unit of planning to implement regulation and coordination for the whole region? Conversely, do we need a metropolitan government to limit suburban sprawl, to redistribute resources among the municipalities of the whole region (especially to the central city), and to take care of infrastructure, equipment, and services of regional or metropolitan range?

In the literature on metropolitan regionalism, two different paths have been explored in reference to these questions. In brief, some researchers suggest that a coercive structure is required, while other researchers think that cooperative forms of governance are preferable. For example, Mitchell-Weaver,

Miller and Deal have argued that “top-down directives, though out of favour, are necessary for managing metropolitan development and ensuring fiscal equalization” (2000, 868), but other authors think that piecemeal or ad hoc cooperation is preferable, because of the context of uncertainty within which local and metropolitan actors are evolving: “It is a question of a community which must be built by using existing resources, an arduous task, and one which does not seem sufficiently established for the question of the legitimacy of the metropolitan institutions to be considered definitively settled (Lefèvre 1998, 23).” In this respect, governance solutions appear to be a kind of institutional “bricolage” that has to be contrasted with sustainable political institutionalization.

What was at stake in this reform can be considered from a planning angle. In his conception of planning in the French context after the Second World War, Lucien Nizard (1973) brought to our attention the main functions that planning practices have to achieve in order to attain their objectives. One of these functions is particularly important in relation to the last municipal and metropolitan reform in Quebec – the function of learning, which is often coupled with the function of decision. As Nizard states, planning is defined in systemic terms as an attempt to regulate in a systematic way a part or the entirety of a social system, on which planning can act by reflecting its content.

Even though the learning function appears secondary in comparison to the decision function, its role remains difficult to bypass. More importantly, the learning function must be well managed. It is responsible for convincing those who will be affected (both by the planning process and by the new frame of action that is being implemented) that these are legitimate interventions that will improve the situation for everybody in the long term. So if the learning function is not well managed by the planners, the planning process and the subsequent process of implementation of the reform can fail.

With the recent municipal and metropolitan reform in Montreal, one can ask whether it was not the learning function, above all, that was not properly understood by the provincial planners in charge of the reform? We are referring here not only to those who were opposed to the forced mergers but more generally to all the local actors at one level or another who were concerned about the reform. The recent demerger movement reflects only one aspect of this. Other aspects are related to the sense of belonging to the metropolitan region, which was not of any concern to the planners during the implementation of the reform, although one of its main aspects was defined in terms of metropolitan governance. In other words, how can one create a metropolitan identity? What is the responsibility of planners in this regard? Is it necessary to create or build a metropolitan citizenship? Can a metropolis act as a collective actor? What are the conditions or the prerequisite for this?

At present, if Montreal is a metropolitan region in statistical terms, it is far from being one in social and political terms. Maybe we should look at the

recent municipal reform as the beginning of a planning process instead of seeing it as the result of a completed one.

## CONCLUSION

In April 2003 the provincial election in Quebec brought back on the policy agenda the issue of municipal and metropolitan reform. This can be explained principally by the electioneering motives of the Liberals, who promised before the electoral campaign – and stuck to the position during the campaign – to provide the municipalities with the opportunity to recover their previous autonomy.

After their election, the Liberals did not wait long to take action on these matters. Two decisions were taken. The first was to amend Montreal's city charter in order to increase the powers of the borough councils that had been created with the mega-city of Montreal. The second was to organize a referendum to give residents of the municipalities where the merger process – organized by the previous government – had taken place to be consulted, and to offer them the possibility of recovering a part of the powers lost by their municipalities through the creation of the mega-city. On Montreal Island, twenty-two former suburban municipalities decided to hold a referendum in June 2004. Fifteen of the twenty-two succeeded in getting back, in part, the position of their local municipality, as it had been before the forced mergers. There is no doubt that this move introduced renewed uncertainty on the local scene.

It is too early to assess the impact of the demerger process on the management of the City of Montreal. However, it is true that the Liberal government added a supplementary difficulty to the ones that the City of Montreal and the old suburban municipalities were already facing as they adjusted to the reforms introduced in 2000 and 2001. In other words, the reform on Montreal Island was not yet fully completed when the municipalities were confronted with a new political and administrative reality. At the same time, it is important to minimize the impact of the demerging process. Although fifteen municipalities had opted for demerger, they are small municipalities. Before the demergers, the population of the City of Montreal was of 1.8 million. Since the demergers, its population is now around 1.6 million.

Many analysts have seen the recent wave of reforms on the local and urban scene as producing a messy situation. It reveals that local issues are sensitive ones. The sense of belonging to local communities remains strong. It is true, however, as the defenders of the reform argue, that other values, such as equity and administrative performance, should counterbalance localism.

In the urban and economic environment affected by globalizing forces, social inequalities are increasing as much as conflicts of interest (Faure 2003).

Political urban leaders are experiencing a new role in connection with the growing importance of local milieu on the political scene.

Before the Quebec government directly intervened, we did not necessarily have the impression that the municipalities and the city-region were new political actors, especially during the debate over amalgamation and the creation of the MMC. The minister of municipal affairs and the metropolis considered municipalities an inferior tier of governance. This was clearly reflected in the top-down approach that was chosen by the Quebec government to implement the reform. In addition, some of the main issues that municipalities and city-regions are dealing with – for instance, environmental problems, social poverty, the social and economic integration of immigrants – were not thoroughly discussed during these events, even though they were mentioned in the White Paper. Institution building on a metropolitan scale, which is increasingly important to resolve the problems mentioned above, was not seriously discussed either.

When looking back to the beginning of the 1960s and considering what has been achieved since then in terms of urban and municipal restructuring, one should keep in mind that the Quebec government was obsessed with the technocratic discourse and rationality. In this respect, local actors should be very cautious about any initiatives taken by the government regarding reform of the municipal system. In other words, it seems that the responsibility of making social and political choices adapted to the needs of their own milieu depends on local actors above all. Consequently, it is the responsibility of local actors to bring back on the agenda not only the issue of power sharing among municipalities and with the provincial government, but also urban problems and the challenges related to the building of city-regions. It is more than ever on a metropolitan scale that these urban problems are increasingly experienced nowadays. This has to be reiterated strongly one more time.

## NOTES

- 1 We are aware that globalization has become a buzzword over the last decades. While being the object of an imposing literature, globalization constitutes also a controversial political issue. One important issue that has been discussed in the literature on globalization is that of local matters, especially the redrawing of local politics. We can mention in this regard the concept of “glocalization” proposed by Robertson (1992), which draws attention to the rearticulation between the global and the local. One important field of research on the transformation of the local revolves around the notion of global cities. The latter would constitute new actors that call into question the centrality of national states, notably by developing new spheres of intervention that were previously assumed by states, such as technological development and immigration. On the other hand, some authors focus

on the emergence of regions that would become global actors. Without necessarily supporting their premises, our analysis can be seen as a dialogue with these perspectives.

- 2 In 1960 the number of rural municipalities or, in legal terms, the municipalities of counties, was estimated to be around 1,300, representing 20 percent of the Quebec population. A council represented each municipality within the county, which also constituted at that time an electoral circumscription. It was composed of all the mayors and one prefect. In 1944 the Union of the County Councils was established. This association was a close and strong ally of the Duplessis government.
- 3 The release in 1968 of the report from the La Haye Commission on urbanism also contributed to reactivate the discussions about the need for municipal reform. While reinforcing the need to plan the urban development, the report also insisted on the idea of recognizing some centres for stimulating and at the same time orientating regional development. The report recommended the adoption of regional, interlocal, and local plans (Bissonnette 1982).
- 4 It should be mentioned that, some weeks before the election, the Union Nationale government had released the Remur program. Following from the creation of the three regional urban communities, this plan proposed the creation of twenty additional regional municipalities in the peripheral regions (four urban and sixteen regional communities) within the limits of the existing administrative regions. The emphasis was placed on the necessity of creating viable communities with some administrative autonomy.
- 5 This recognition of the participation of the federal government in regional development followed the signing of a Quebec-Canada accord in 1968 with the newly created federal Department of Regional Economic Expansion. This agreement recognized the involvement of the federal government with regard to regional development, calling into question the Lesage government's claim for exclusive competency in this matter. This new orientation by the Bourassa government was influenced by the Higgins-Raynauld-Martin report on the future orientation in matters of regional economic development. Among other things, the report emphasized the economic importance of Montreal as a pole of development (Bernier 1992).
- 6 The change in the government's attitude did not only result from the economic difficulties it faced. The government was also confronted with the constraints imposed by Canadian and U.S. economic relations. The Quebec government's space to manoeuvre appeared to be much more limited. This governmental orientation was also linked to ideological changes in Quebec politics. With the election of the Bourassa government, the ideology of planning was called into question and was gradually replaced by an ad hoc strategy.
- 7 Bill 92 was to a large extent a result of the report of the Groupe de travail sur Montréal et sa région (GTMR) set up in 1992. The mandate given to this group was to evaluate the situation and propose solutions to the economic, social, and administrative problems of the Montreal region. The report emphasized the need to improve the management capacity of local actors. These discussions about the

- situation of Montreal pointed out the necessity of reforming the municipal organization and the administrative procedures (Hamel 2001, 108–9).
- 8 Indeed, in the introduction of the White Paper, the minister mentioned that local institutions have to address common issues that are at the heart of the social, cultural, and economic development of Quebec society: territorial planning; protection of the environment; economic development in the context of a globalising economy; fiscal equity; and social justice (Quebec 2000, ix).
- 9 The government identified three specific objectives of the reform: (1) the adoption of a collective vision on the future of the communities; (2) taking into account the government's objectives with respect to planning and sustainable development, involving, among other things, prevention of urban sprawl and respect for agricultural activities; (3) increasing the efficiency of the municipal sector, which would allow for a decrease of the fiscal burden and at the same a more equitable fiscal repartition (Quebec 2000, 55–7).
- 10 The MMC has exclusive competencies only with respect to metropolitan-level facilities, infrastructure, services and activities, and the international promotion of the region. Regarding its other competencies, it has to share its powers with the City of Montreal and the city's boroughs.

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