



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED AND REVIEWED BY

Wenfang Tang,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China

*CORRESPONDENCE

Mariona Tomàs
✉ marionatomas@ub.edu

RECEIVED 16 October 2023

ACCEPTED 14 November 2023

PUBLISHED 29 November 2023

CITATION

Tomàs M and Pyka R (2023) Editorial:
Metropolitan governance: models, policies and
political processes. *Front. Polit. Sci.* 5:1322633.
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2023.1322633

COPYRIGHT

© 2023 Tomàs and Pyka. This is an
open-access article distributed under the terms
of the [Creative Commons Attribution License
\(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction
in other forums is permitted, provided the
original author(s) and the copyright owner(s)
are credited and that the original publication in
this journal is cited, in accordance with
accepted academic practice. No use,
distribution or reproduction is permitted which
does not comply with these terms.

Editorial: Metropolitan governance: models, policies and political processes

Mariona Tomàs^{1*} and Robert Pyka²

¹Department of Political Science, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain, ²Institute of Sociology,
University of Silesia in Katowice, Katowice, Poland

KEYWORDS

metropolitan governance, public polices, institutions, legitimacy, metropolis

Editorial on the Research Topic

Metropolitan governance: models, policies and political processes

The purpose of this Research Topic is to analyse different issues related to metropolitan governance, including institutions, legitimacy, actors and specific policies. The metropolitan areas emerging from current urbanisations processes become new spaces for the life and mobility of people. By contrast, metropolitan areas rarely fit into a given country's territorial and administrative organization as consolidated planning and governance spaces. The disparity between the functional area as a real geography of the problem and the existing political and administrative institutions represents a key metropolitan challenge. Indeed, the political process of building metropolitan capacities and policies materialize, among other things, in different governance models for metropolitan areas, ranging from high institutionalized models comprising the approval of laws and territorial reforms to soft cooperation and dialogue spaces involving different public and private actors. The metropolitan governance system consists of various interdependent, crosscutting, and overlapping more and less institutionalized metropolitan cooperation and dialogue spaces.

Metropolitan governance is based on legitimacy through results, meaning the ability to implement public policies and provide solutions to problems. At the same time, legitimacy can be built through political representation, including elections and mechanisms for civic participation. Metropolitan governance is also about creating a shared vision among public and private stakeholders. In fact, the success or failure of the various formulas of governance depends on the attitudes of metropolitan representatives: the willingness to cooperate and find a minimum common denominator in favor of the general interest. At the same time, a metropolitan institution may formally exist, but there must be a political will for it to work successfully. In this regard, multilevel cooperation appears as a key explicative factor of success, and specially the collaboration of national states.

The different cases examined in this topic (Montreal, Manchester, Valencia and São Paulo) reflect the diversity of institutional forms that metropolitan governance uncovers. Moreover, they show the difficulties in building a metropolitan consensus. The four articles of this Research Topic deal with the three classic dimensions in political science applied to a metropolitan scale: (a) polity (metropolitan institutions as part of a multilevel system of governance), (b) policies (the results of public decisions and capacities), and (c) politics (power relationships between different actors involved in governance).

The article on the metropolitan region of Montreal focuses on mobility issues. Built on the theoretical public policy framework, [Taki Imrani and Champagne](#) explore a recent transportation megaproject: the Réseau express métropolitain (REM), an electric

light-rail transit network spanning 67 km in the Greater Metropolitan Area of Montreal. These types of megaprojects involve significant governance challenges because of the involvement of several public and private actors defending specific interests. In the case of Montreal, the authors identify the factors that can influence the choice of governance models when setting the agenda. By mobilizing Kingdon's model, [Taki Imrani and Champagne](#) enrich a rather limited literature, applying public policy analysis in the sub-field of transport policy literature. Moreover, from an empirical perspective, the article documents a very unique “public-public partnership” applied to a transport infrastructure megaproject.

[Harding and Peake-Jones](#) analyse how the process of “devolution” in England in recent years has emphasized the place that Greater Manchester has occupied at the forefront of UK metropolitan institutional reform. Indeed, the creation of Greater Manchester Combined Authority cannot be understood without taking a long historical perspective and analyzing the multilevel governance system where this metropolitan region is embedded. The article is built on the authors' depth of knowledge as participants within the policy process in the field research site, together with their previous academic and professional research studies. In addition to the critical analysis of the reasons behind the process of creation of Greater Manchester Combined Authority, [Harding and Peake-Jones](#) provide empirical examination of the work done on the issues of work and health. Finally, the authors highlight how a mental construct called “Greater Manchester” has been built over the years and has succeeded in becoming significant within local economic, political and social representatives.

The case of Valencia presents the opposite scenario, where there is no intervention from the Spanish government and no capacity to collectively build something called “Greater Valencia.” Indeed, [Zornoza-Gallego et al.](#) analyse how the metropolitan area of Valencia is trapped in political powerlessness and institutional paralysis regarding the emergence of integrated metropolitan government. The authors highlight the dissonance between common knowledge about the proper directions, the necessary projects for the agglomeration's development, and the simultaneous absence of organizational and political agency needed to implement appropriate actions. In their article, they attempt to outline a way out of this impasse, demonstrating how, in these unfavorable conditions, the initiatives and existing enclaves of metropolitan cooperation can pave the way for the emergence in the medium term of a metropolitan government.

Finally, when analyzing metropolitan governance processes worldwide, it is also important to consider their development in countries of the Global South, where rapidly growing megacities are not as frequently studied as metropolitan areas in Europe or North America. [Zimmermann et al.](#) address the unique challenges of rescaling metropolitan governance in São Paulo Metropolitan Region after the fall of the military regime in the 1980s. The authors offer insight into the emerging complex governance system in which created in top-down logic São Paulo Metropolitan Region is overlapped by infra and suprametropolitan cooperation initiatives and structures as a reaction to the dynamic urban expansion of the region and the lack of central government initiative.

Building metropolitan governance is a dynamic, never-ending process. The example of Greater Valencia illustrates that mere metropolitan awareness and civic metropolitan capital are insufficient if there is a lack of the necessary political will and institutional framework at the metropolitan level. However, institutions alone are not enough to establish effective metropolitan governance if the actors do not see the value in cooperation. The cases of Greater Montreal and Greater Manchester contribute to the analysis of the constellation of actors that effectively build a metropolitan interest. At the same time, the metropolis is a living organism, a complex social system with spatially variable geometry, as the São Paulo Metropolitan Region exemplifies. Therefore, the design of metropolitan governance structures must inherently be linked to the continuous evolution of the metropolitan scope and institutional arrangements and the permanent questioning of any achieved status quo. Considering the dynamics of urbanization processes, the speed at which the world is changing, there is a need for resilient metropolises with permeable boundaries allowing relationships with their surroundings, including rural areas.

The general conclusion from the presented texts advocates that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The emergence of metropolises as new “territorialities” is a complex and highly contextualized process involving the clash of global imperatives (competition and attractiveness) with the historicity of a given society, especially its pre-existing institutional architecture, as well as territorial and political identities. While drawing inspiration from solutions and best practices from other metropolitan areas can be helpful, each metropolitan area must build its own way and craft the best solution for achieving effective metropolitan governance in a specific time and place.

Author contributions

MT: Writing—original draft, Writing—review & editing. RP: Writing—original draft, Writing—review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.