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The Metropolis and its neighbours

Lyon's inter-territorial cooperation in the light of its instruments Edited by Rachel Linossier

June 2026

Summary (short abstract)

The ^{fourth} publication from the POPSU Lyon platform focuses on the policies and instruments of cooperation between the Lyon Metropolis and the surrounding territories. Edited by Rachel Linossier, this volume analyses how the Lyon Metropolis uses various tools to manage essential public services such as water, waste and transport.

The Lyon Metropolis, a fully-fledged local authority established by the Maptam Act, exercises its powers within a fixed boundary that does not correspond to the city's actual catchment area. In response to this discrepancy between its institutional boundary and the 'lived territory', the metropolis has implemented a system of intensive inter-territorial governance with neighbouring territories (Dombes, Monts du Lyonnais, the Dauphiné plain).

This has resulted in the deployment of a variety of cooperation instruments, starting with the open joint authority, which remains the dominant tool for technical management (in the areas of water, energy and sanitation), as it allows entities with different legal statuses to be brought together whilst offering financial flexibility. However, for issues deemed politically sensitive, such as waste management, the Metropolis favours the conventional or contractual approach in order to avoid the deadlocks inherent in integrated structures

The transport sector is emblematic of the challenges (and difficulties) of cooperation. The former joint authority (Sytral) long suffered from conflicting interests between the central city and the Rhône department. To address this, a local public body (Sytral Mobilités) was established in 2022. Modelled on the Île-de-France system, this new model aims to achieve a unified fare structure and coherent planning across the department, whilst preparing major projects such as the metropolitan RER in close collaboration with the Region.

Other sectors highlight conflicts linked to these cooperation policies: the management of shared natural areas, such as the Grand Parc de Miribel-Jonage or the Pilat massif, for example, illustrates the tensions between the Metropolis's conservationist approach and the

of its neighbours to promote development. Here, as in other sectors, the Metropolis's financial commitment – which often constitutes the majority of funding – can fuel an image of a 'metropolitan ogre' imposing its environmental views. To overcome these tensions and ensure effectiveness, the instruments must be backed by genuine political will and a convergence of strategic interests.

In this regard, intermediary bodies such as Urbalyon (urban planning) and Aderly (economy) are pivotal resources. They provide neutral forums of expertise that facilitate technical dialogue and planning (such as through the inter-SCoT) beyond partisan divides. Conversely, the dissolution of the Metropolitan Cluster in 2022 demonstrates that alliances based solely on a political 'club' mentality remain fragile, as they are vulnerable to changes in electoral fortunes.

The book highlights the importance of moving beyond the centre-periphery model towards that of the 'metropolis of trust'. The ecological transition (land use restraint, water management, short food supply chains) could necessitate new forms of territorial reciprocity – more horizontal and agile – which would be of great value in ensuring the resilience of 'the metropolitan archipelago'.

Summary (long)

The ^{fourth} publication from the POPSU Lyon platform focuses on the policies and instruments of cooperation between the Lyon Metropolis and the surrounding territories. Edited by Rachel Linossier, this book analyses how the Lyon Metropolis uses various tools to move beyond the centre-periphery model and foster genuine neighbourly relations.

The text opens by highlighting the governance challenges posed by the relationships between the Lyon Metropolis and its neighbouring territories within a space described as a 'metropolitan archipelago'. The authors, Sébastien Bénéullière and Rachel Linossier, explore the shift from a centre-periphery dynamic – characterised by historical local resistance – to inter-territorial cooperation, made urgent by the process of urban sprawl. This complex configuration rests on a fragile balance between rigid institutional boundaries and a geographical reality marked by interdependence. Whilst the Maptam Act consolidated the Lyon Metropolis as a fully-fledged local authority, it confined it within the boundaries of Greater Lyon. However, the catchment area as defined by INSEE is much larger, encompassing a metropolitan belt subject to intense mobility flows and a multipolarisation of functions (residential, economic, recreational). This lack of alignment with 'lived territories' prevents the achievement of a certain 'scalar ideal' of governance

Historically, relations between Lyon and its neighbours (the Dombes, the Monts du Lyonnais and the Dauphiné plain) have been viewed through the centre-periphery lens, which fuelled mutual mistrust. Indeed, this dynamic has often been defensive: neighbouring territories sought to counter the hegemony of a 'Big Bad Lyon' in order to preserve their own political and economic balances. However, the authors highlight a mutual dependence: the metropolis was built thanks to its periphery, and vice versa. Past forums for dialogue, such as the Lyon Urban Region (RUL), long served

as forums for consensus on strategic issues (water, transport, agriculture) before disappearing, leaving a void in inter-territorial regulation

In the absence of broader institutional integration, cooperation takes the form of a tangle of mechanisms and the deployment of a wide variety of instruments mobilised by the metropolitan area to interact with its neighbours:

- The 18 joint authorities remain the primary tool, both for technical management (energy through Sigerly, planning through Sepal) and for strategic catchment area or development projects. Their flexibility allows for the adjustment of responsibilities and funding according to needs
- Project and expert bodies such as the Lyon Region Economic Development Agency (Aderly) or the Urban Planning Agency (UrbaLyon) help to pool engineering resources across the metropolitan area
- Flexible contractual arrangements such as agreements (as for cycle routes like ViaRhôna), memoranda of understanding (in the field of mosquito control) or charters (for waste recovery) complete this landscape.

The Lyon archipelago is therefore characterised by fragmented yet dynamic governance. Whilst the institutional framework sometimes struggles to organise cross-cutting cooperation, the proliferation of tools makes it possible to address crucial issues such as the environment, mobility and the management of urbanisation. This model of a 'multi-governed landscape' reflects ongoing adaptations in the face of new transitional regimes and the constant evolution of local political power dynamics.

The second chapter continues this exploration of the evolution of inter-municipal cooperation between the Lyon metropolitan area and its neighbouring territories, based on a study of **urban services management**. The authors, Rachel Linossier, Burno Loustalet and Eric Charmes, point out that, historically, the development and management of networked urban services (water, gas, electricity, sewerage, waste) have been crucial in shaping inter-municipal cooperation. These collaborations have been based on technical considerations and the pursuit of economies of scale, but have always had a political dimension and been guided by the quest for the 'appropriate territorial level' for each area of competence.

In the Lyon area, the predominant vehicle for these tasks is the open joint authority, which has the advantage of bringing together entities with varying legal statuses (municipalities, departments, the metropolitan authority, and public inter-municipal cooperation bodies) to manage shared objectives.

Territorial reforms, in particular the creation of the Lyon metropolitan area in 2015 and the transfer of departmental powers, have profoundly altered these structures across a range of policy areas:

- Energy and digital infrastructure: Organisations such as Sygerly (energy) and Epari (fibre-optic networks) have amended their statutes to incorporate the metropolitan area whilst adjusting their areas of operation
- Water management and the environment: The Gemapi remit (management of aquatic environments and flood prevention) has complicated inter-territorial relations; for example, in the Gier catchment area, cooperation between Lyon and Saint-Étienne is organised through an 'agreement' rather than via an expanded syndicate, in order to avoid

additional management costs and political deadlocks. Conversely, for outstanding natural sites (Monts d'Or, Grand Parc de Miribel-Jonage), the joint authority model remains the norm, with the aim of reconciling resource protection and development

- Waste: Unlike other networks, waste management is not organised under a single, overarching authority. It is based on bilateral agreements between the metropolitan authority and neighbouring authorities. This approach avoids the institutionalisation of political power struggles within a single body

The transport sector, which is the focus of considerable discussion in this chapter, perfectly illustrates the limitations and changing nature of trade unionism. Established in the 1960s, the Joint Transport Authority for the Rhône and the Lyon Metropolitan Area (Sytral) has long suffered from conflicting interests between the department and the Lyon metropolitan area regarding investment. Consequently, priority was given to the Lyon metro at the expense of services to outlying areas. Between 2015 and 2021, Sytral operated under a plural voting system organised by areas of responsibility, which ensured 'peace at home' but prevented a truly integrated transport policy across the wider catchment area. This period marked the impasse of 'à la carte governance'. To overcome this fragility, the joint authority was transformed in 2022 into a Local Public Body (EPL) named Sytral Mobilités, marking a break with the previous governance of Lyon's transport system and with the policies of cooperation between the metropolitan area and its neighbours. Modelled on the Parisian system, this body is chaired by the Lyon metropolitan authority, which holds the majority of seats, thereby clarifying the governance structure. Despite these advances, aligning institutional boundaries with geographical realities (catchment areas) remains a challenge. Cooperation continues through the Joint Transport Authority for the Lyon Metropolitan Area (SMT AML), which brings together the region and neighbouring urban areas (Saint-Étienne, Vienne, etc.) to promote intermodality. Finally, the proposed metropolitan Regional Express Network (RER) project is the new major undertaking, requiring an unprecedented convergence between the region and the metropolis within a framework of 'shared governance'.

Thus, whilst the joint authority remains the most appropriate tool for technical management, it is sometimes sidelined in favour of more flexible agreements to avoid diplomatic deadlocks in the face of a metropolis perceived as dominant.

The third chapter focuses on project-based cooperation led by the metropolitan authority with its neighbouring territories. These inter-territorial policies are centred on membership of joint associations, aimed at steering development projects that transcend administrative boundaries. Although strategic, these collaborative arrangements are 'variable in scope' and depend closely on the political commitment and shared interests of the partners.

Here again, the metropolitan authority's involvement in these structures stems from the 2015 territorial reform and the creation of the Lyon metropolitan authority, which replaced the Rhône department and the former urban community in several bodies, such as Symalim (Grand Parc de Miribel-Jonage), Smiril (the Rhône islands and îles) and the Plaines-Monts d'Or syndicate. Membership of projects such as the Port du Bordelan was facilitated by the NOTRe Act, which allows the metropolitan area to be an ex officio member of syndicates managing port facilities.

The motivations behind these partnerships are varied. Participation in the Plaine de l'Ain Industrial Park (Pipa) illustrates a strong reciprocal relationship in terms of economic development.

The metropolitan authority gains access to the large industrial sites it lacks, whilst the Plaine de l'Ain benefits from Lyon's influence and Aderly's expertise in marketing its land. The management of peri-urban natural areas (the Monts d'Or, the Pilat massif, riverine zones) serves the aim of protecting resources such as drinking water, regulating floodwaters and sustaining agriculture.

Despite this spirit of partnership, disagreements sometimes mar the collaborative efforts undertaken. For instance, the metropolitan area's 'environmental' approach, focused on conservation, clashes with the development and infrastructure objectives of neighbouring territories. Regarding the Grand Parc de Miribel-Jonage, long-standing conflicts between the department and the metropolitan area centre on funding and governance. As for Le Bordelan, the change in the metropolitan council's majority in 2021 led to a refusal to fund the marina, which was deemed a low priority in light of new environmental policies. Finally, in the case of the Pilat Regional Nature Park, investment remains modest and the project's momentum is struggling to translate into major initiatives

The authors, Rachel Linossier and Olivier Pillonel, ultimately emphasise that the joint association mechanism is not sufficient to guarantee balanced relations. In certain sectors, such as port development along the Rhône-Saône corridor, the multitude of stakeholders makes it extremely difficult to establish stable political leadership, despite the existence of framework documents such as the Lyon Port Master Plan. This final example shows that the success of such inter-territorial projects depends less on the legal framework than on the political will to define a shared vision and ensure reciprocity between the metropolitan centre and its neighbouring territories.

The fourth chapter explores the dynamics of 'territorial intermediation' between the Lyon Metropolis and its neighbours, going beyond the mere use of instruments. Indeed, the authors, Rachel Linossier and Olivier Pillonel, define territorial intermediation as a system of links and actors (institutions, organisations, individuals) that regulates relations between territories and is based on formal or informal cooperation mechanisms. Among these actors, elected representatives and technical officials act as facilitators by drawing on their networks of mutual acquaintance.

Other types of intermediation may take more institutional forms, such as development and urban planning agencies that transcend administrative boundaries to foster cooperation between territorial actors (local authorities, businesses and universities). Both contribute to treating neighbouring territories on an equal footing with the metropolitan area within governance structures and strategies.

As regards the planning process, the coordination of spatial planning operates at two levels: SEPal, a joint authority that draws up the SCoT for a narrower area (the Metropolis and two inter-municipal communities to the east), and the Inter-SCoT, a more informal body comprising 13 joint authorities in the Lyon-Saint-Étienne area.

The authors also offer a historical and critical review of the trajectory of the Metropolitan Pole. Created in 2010 to unite the six major inter-municipal communities, it served, for a time, as a driving force behind projects such as the Joint Transport Authority for the Lyon Metropolitan Area (SMT AML). However, the new metropolitan executive persuaded its partners to dissolve it, citing budgetary costs, a lack of

delegated powers and a lack of territorial continuity. The account of its dissolution highlights the dependence of cooperative structures on political decisions.

Finally, territorial intermediation can take the form of a project, examined here through the prism of green tourism and cycle tourism route committees (ViaRhôna, Voie Bleue). These flexible management approaches facilitate the development of shared infrastructure, provided they are backed by technical expertise and political support. The failure of the 'Voie des Confluences' project highlights, by contrast, the conditions necessary for the success of such initiatives.

The chapter concludes with an interview with Jérémy Camus, the Metropolis's Vice-President responsible for resilience and cooperation with neighbouring territories. He advocates a 'horizontal and agile' inter-territorial approach, prioritising close-knit relationships and 'reciprocal agreements' rather than rigid frameworks. The aim of his mandate is to build a 'metropolis based on trust', capable of forging balanced partnerships on issues of daily life that transcend institutional boundaries.

Rachel Linossier **concludes** this book on inter-territoriality and the tools for cooperation between the Lyon metropolitan area and its neighbouring territories by calling for a move beyond the centre-periphery model. This involves establishing more balanced relationships between the region's public institutions. In this regard, traditional tools, such as inter-municipal associations, appear to have reached their limits due to their rigidity and their dependence on partisan balances. Conversely, more flexible tools are beginning to prove their worth, starting with reciprocity agreements. Inspired by other metropolitan areas (Brest, Nantes), these enable bilateral collaborations on a case-by-case basis, such as those signed between Lyon, Villeurbanne and rural municipalities. Others, such as those utilised by urban planning agencies or in inter-SCoT initiatives, facilitate mutual learning between partners whilst remaining relatively insulated from political conflicts. Even more flexible tools, such as agreements, memoranda of understanding or partnerships, can prove effective when the projects underpinning them require less political oversight.

By charting a course towards solidarity-based cooperation adapted to transitions, the book thus illustrates the diversification of the 'toolkit', moving from rigid institutional frameworks to flexible agreements, opening up new prospects for the Lyon metropolitan archipelago.

Challenges and public policies

The book explores the complex dynamics of inter-territorial relations in Lyon, highlighting how the Lyon Metropolis, a fully-fledged local authority, interacts with its neighbouring territories to manage urban services and lead development projects. These interactions raise crucial issues, fuel institutional and political debates, and help to inform public policy in the face of contemporary challenges, particularly against the backdrop of a change in political leadership at the Lyon Metropolis following the municipal and inter-municipal elections in March 2026.

1. The relationship between institutional boundaries and lived territories

The central problem is the lack of alignment between institutional boundaries and lived territories (areas of daily life, employment or mobility), in a quest for an ideal scale that is often difficult to achieve. This quest and its paradoxes are evident across a range of areas of public policy.

- The ecological transition and resilience: A major challenge that is redefining metropolitan policies: land use restraint (the 'Zero Net Land Take' – ZAN – objective), air quality (Low Emission Zones – ZFE), and the preservation of natural resources such as water and biodiversity are governed by rules applicable to different administrative boundaries, even though the challenges are shared across these administrative borders.
- Mobility and transport: Here, too, population flows extend well beyond administrative boundaries. How, then, can a coherent and unified transport system be created across the metropolitan area? Examples since the creation of Sytral Mobilités or the proposed Metropolitan Regional Express Service (Serm) project abound, illustrating institutional hesitation and shared challenges.
- Technical management of networked services: Whilst inter-territorial cooperation appears essential to ensure the efficiency of networked services (water, sewerage, waste, energy), the conditions for achieving economies of scale and maintaining technical continuity have yet to be established.
- Economic development and attractiveness: Territorial cooperation could serve as a useful tool here for reconciling the objective of economic development with the conservation of resources at an inter-territorial level.

2. Legitimacy and governance of inter-territorial cooperation

The book highlights ongoing debates regarding the form and legitimacy of inter-territorial cooperation:

- Moving beyond the 'centre-periphery' model: Historically, relations within the region have been characterised by the hegemony of the central city ('the wicked Greater Lyon') over defensive peripheries fearful of being politically absorbed. How can we overcome this mistrust to create a more horizontal and balanced form of inter-territorial cooperation?
- Institutional engineering versus political will: Whilst the tools (joint associations, public-interest enterprises, associations) are never sufficient on their own, and collective will and the commitment of elected representatives are key factors in the success of cooperation, partisan conflicts and changes in government undermine the foundations of cooperation that have been painstakingly built up. The setbacks and misfortunes of the Metropolitan Cluster and its dissolution in 2022 illustrate the fragility of tools based on mere political 'club logic'.
- The choice of instruments: how effective are joint authorities? Admittedly, when tailored to the challenges and technical constraints, they can sometimes prove cumbersome. And might more flexible forms—such as agreements or reciprocal contracts based on

mutual recognition and reversibility, might not prove more appropriate in this context?

3. Interdependence, intermediaries and inter-territoriality

Finally, the book highlights two cornerstones of inter-territorial cooperation that could help establish a 'metropolis built on trust' – something that elected representatives, technical staff and citizens (?) are calling for.

- Revealing interdependencies: By objectively analysing flows and needs (via urban planning agencies such as Urbalyon), this action research helps to consolidate a shared assessment among neighbouring territories.
- Strengthening the 'intermediaries' of inter-territorial cooperation: The book emphasises the dual idea that neither tools alone nor hegemonic political will can sustainably build cooperation. Less visible but essential actors are at work here within urban planning and development agencies, and through the various agreements and projects that provide technical mediation, facilitate mutual understanding between elected representatives and technical staff, and ultimately enable the implementation of policies at the inter-territorial level.

As the metropolitan executive's new term of office begins, inter-territorial cooperation in Lyon is at a turning point. During the previous term of office, there were numerous signs heralding the shift from purely technical or defensive management to strategic cooperation necessitated by ecological and social transitions, requiring the development of new, more flexible tools and the restoration of political trust. Will these efforts be continued?

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🏙️ The Lyon Metropolitan Area and its neighbours: towards a new cooperation pact?

How can administrative boundaries be aligned with the reality of living and working catchment areas? This is the challenge of **inter-territoriality**, explored in the latest POPSU booklet edited by Rachel Linossier.

The Lyon metropolitan area is no longer confined to its institutional centre; it is a veritable 'archipelago' where mobility flows, environmental challenges and economic development transcend administrative boundaries and limits.

Here are the three key lessons that public policy can draw from this action research:

1. **Moving beyond the 'centre-periphery' model:** Long characterised by a defensive stance on the part of neighbouring areas in the face of the hegemony of 'Greater Lyon', the model is evolving towards more horizontal cooperation. The aim? To move from a competitive mindset to a 'Metropolis built on trust'.

2. **Innovation beyond the tools:** Whilst the joint association remains the 'Swiss Army knife' for technical services (water, energy), new, more flexible forms are emerging. The transformation of Sytral into Sytral Mobilités in 2022 illustrates this desire to integrate all the inter-municipal bodies in the Rhône region for a unified transport policy.

3. **The green transition as a new driving force:** Land-use restraint (ZAN), air quality (ZFE) and water management necessitate de facto solidarity between territories. These challenges are redefining the priorities of urban planning and development agencies (Urbalyon, Aderly), which play a pivotal mediating role.

The future of our metropolitan areas will not hinge on absorbing neighbouring areas, but on the ability to forge **reciprocal agreements** and 'win-win' projects.

📖 To find out more, explore the work of the POPSU platform on the future of urban strategies.

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