

**Call for papers**  
**2nd Annual Cambridge Conference on Regulation, Inspection & Improvement**  
**"The end of zero risk regulation: risk toleration in regulatory practice"**  
**Peterhouse College, University of Cambridge, 12 September 2007**

**abstract : 500 words**

**send to [enquiries@cbr.cam.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@cbr.cam.ac.uk) on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2007.**

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**GRALEPOIS Mathilde**

PhD Student

Cities and Environment doctoral program

University of Marne-la-Vallée/ French engineering institute

Latts/ENPC

6 et 8, avenue Blaise Pascal - Cité Descartes

F-77455 Marne-la-Vallée

(0033) 1 64 15 36 02

Mail : [Mathilde.Gralepois@enpc.fr](mailto:Mathilde.Gralepois@enpc.fr)

**Risk-tolerant regulation in administration:  
autonomisation of a special metropolitan policy in French local institutions.**

Since the early 1990s, risk management has entered the sphere of French local public institutions. The construction of administrative departments especially dedicated to risks is linked with territorial and urban policy in French metropolitan institutions.

Drawing on theories from social constructivism and political science, the argument of my paper, based on my ongoing PhD research, focuses on how risks – defined using a territorial approach as the confrontation between possibilities of an accident and various stakes (social, economic, cultural, environmental or patrimonial) – are tolerated as part of a complex urban network system and fully integrated as an urban policy. I study this question in the context of three local public institutions in France: the intercommunal councils of Nantes, Lyon and Le Havre.

First, we illustrate how a metropolitan risk policy has been constituted over time in urban intercommunal councils (a ‘syndicate’ made up of a large town and surrounding ‘communes’ responsible for the infrastructure, development and governance of the area), in parallel to, and then separated from, other urban policies such as civil security, health/hygiene or environmental issues. The agenda-setting theory (1) will help us to show the process of qualification and disqualification by actors, especially the role of advocacy coalitions (2) and the use of “*tools of government*” (3).

This sociological study allows us to define the political goals at stake in the construction of separated policies in an administrative organization. In the French context of decentralization, the mayor and his team, but also other local public actors, and especially urban intercommunal councils, have to prevent risk or they can be held accountable according to their domains of responsibility.

The construction of an institutional space of risk regulation illustrates how a metropolitan risk policy represents an area of political and administrative conflict between the traditional responsibility of the state (civil security) and territorial public expertise in environment, risk management and urban planning.

Following this, we study how risk management, as a traditional State responsibility, is entering the sphere of local public institutions thanks to the decentralisation of urban development and planning policy. In the three urban intercommunal councils of Nantes, Lyon and Le Havre, the construction of a metropolitan risk policy underlines the metropolitan goals at stake.

The “*explosion of spaces*” (4) has not only provoked urban sprawl and technological development. The metropolis is a node of economic integration and political power. Metropolitan risk is not defined by territorial administration in a scientific way. It is a social and political construction which reveals the main concerns of its economic and political development.

In an uncertain context of multi-level governance, metropolitan institutions reflect and act in terms of risks generated both exogenously, for instance technological and natural risks, and endogenously as for public network services (water, waste, transport...), but also in terms of the network spreading capacity of health epidemics or forms of pollution. We thus see that metropolitan risk regulation is more than tolerated; it is constructed within administrative and political organizations as a necessary regulation of urban network systems.

- (1) COBB Roger W., ELDER Charles D., *Participation in American Politics. The Dynamics of Agenda-Building*, Baltimore-Londres, John Hopkins University Press, 1983 ; BAUMGARTNER Frank R., JONES Bryan D., *Agendas and instability in American politics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, coll. American politics and political economy, 1993
- (2) SABATIER Paul & JENKINS-SMITH Hank C., *Policy change and learning: An advocacy coalition approach*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1993.
- (3) HOOD Christopher, *The Tools of Government*, Chatham House Publishers, 1983.
- (4) BRENNER Neil, *New States Spaces. Urban governance and the rescaling of statehood*, Oxford University Press, 2004.