

Tackling environmental and social mobility stakes in rural areas: New solutions for new actors?

A vidéki területek környezeti és társadalmi mobilitási problémáinak kezelése: új megoldások új szereplők számára?

AGATHE DANIEL

Agathe DANIEL: PhD student in urban planning, Mobility, Planning, Transports, Risks and Society Laboratory, MATRIS, Center for studies and expertise on risks, the environment, mobility and development, CEREMA; 44ter Jean Bart Street, 59000, Lille, France; Cities, Mobilities and Transport Laboratory, LVMT, University Gustave Eiffel, 6-8 avenue Blaise Pascal 77420, champs-sur-Marnes, France; agathe.daniel@cerema.fr; <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4832-2646>

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ABSTRACT: While rural mobilities are facing socio, economical and environmental challenges in France and in Europe, the French government passes a law to cover its whole territory of authorities responsible for organising mobilities so local authorities could address some responses to those different challenges. This reorganisation of mobility competences in France is leading to the arrival of new actors in those territories, namely some inter-municipal authorities. These actors are part of a complex and multiscalar system influenced by directives from the top and needs from the bottom. At the same time, the „repertoire of available solutions” appears to be evolving in rural areas. Indeed, rural territories are seeing the emergence of amenities previously absent around the road network: small multimodal hubs. What mobility projects can be observed now in rural areas? To what extent can we talk about changes in the repertoire of available solutions? Are those projects really new? In more general terms: what dynamics exist in the repertoire of available solutions for stakeholders in rural mobility? To answer, a literature review is completed by a multi-criteria analysis of the discourses of local authorities working on mobility in low-density areas. A sample of discourses is selected with the purpose of collecting data before and after stakeholders restructuring.

We argue in this article that this law reinforces the local role of inter-municipal authorities in local action through mobility. Nevertheless, those areas which were not lacking actors and inter-municipal authorities should now find its place in a pre-existent system. Besides, the state keeps an important role behind the scene and pulls the strings of those local public policies. Our analysis will first allow us to understand the introduction of inter-municipal authorities as new players in the local mobility stakeholder system. Second, this work will give us a greater comprehension of restructuring and its impacts on public action at the local scale. Finally, we'll see the state role remaining in local policies.

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KULCSSZAVAK: vidéki mobilitás; multimodális csomópont; közérdekű cselekvés; helyi közpolitikák; átszervezés

ABSZTRAKT: Miközben a vidéki mobilitás társadalmi, gazdasági és környezeti kihívásokkal szembeesül Franciaországban és Európában, a francia kormány olyan törvényt fogadott el, amely valamennyi mobilitás szervezéséért felelős hatóságok tevékenységére kiterjed. Mindezt annak érdekében, hogy a helyi hatóságok megfelelő válaszokat adhassanak a mobilitással kapcsolatos kihívásokra. A mobilitási hatáskörök újraszervezése Franciaországban új szereplők, nevezetesen néhány önkormányzatközi hatóság megjelenéséhez vezet ezeken a területeken. Ezek a szereplők egy összetett és többszintű rendszer részét képezik, amelyet felülről jövő irányelvek és alulról jövő igények befolyásolnak. Ugyanakkor úgy tűnik, hogy a vidéki területeken a „rendelkezésre álló megoldások repertoárja” fejlődik. A vidéki területeken ugyanis egyre inkább megjelennek a korábban a közúthálózat körül nem létező létesítmények: kis multimodális csomópontok. Milyen mobilitási projektek figyelhetők meg most a vidéki területeken? Milyen mértékben beszélhetünk az elérhető megoldások repertoárjának változásáról? Valóban újak ezek a projektek? Általánosabban fogalmazva: milyen dinamikák figyelhetők meg a vidéki mobilitásban érdekelt szereplők számára elérhető megoldások repertoárjában? A kérdés megválaszolásához jelen tanulmány a szakirodalom áttekintését az alacsony sűrűségű területeken a mobilitással foglalkozó helyi hatóságok diskurzusainak több szempontú elemzésével egészíti ki. A diskurzusok egy mintáját azzal a céllal választotta ki, hogy adatokat gyűjtsünk az érdekelt felek átszervezése előtt és után.

A tanulmány amellett érvel, hogy a törvény megerősíti a településközi hatóságok helyi szerepét a mobilitáson keresztül történő helyi cselekvésben. Mindazonáltal azoknak a területeknek, ahol nem hiányoznak a szereplők és a településközi hatóságok, most egy már létező rendszerben kell megtalálniuk a helyüket. Emellett az állam továbbra is fontos szerepet játszik a színpalak mögött, és mozgatja a helyi közpolitikák szálait. Az elemzés először is lehetővé teszi, hogy megértsük a településközi hatóságok mint a helyi mobilitási érdekképviselési rendszer új szereplőinek megjelenését, az átszervezés részleteit és hatásait a helyi szintű közt intézkedésekre. A tanulmány kiemeli az állam helyi politikákban továbbra is fennálló meghatározó szerepét.

Introduction

Like most Europeans, French citizens in rural areas live a great distance away from key facilities (Hubert, Pistre, Madre 2016; Shibayama, Emberger 2023). In addition, they face a lack of transportation system, and few alternatives to automobiles exist in their localities (Alexander, Hamilton 2015; Héran 2020). Thus, inhabitants of these areas depend on motorised vehicles – mostly cars – for accessing services (Hubert, Pistre, Madre 2016; Héran 2020). The consequences of this car dependency are threefold: environmental, economic and social.

- First, in 2022, 24.5 % of the European population lives in rural areas (FAO 2022) far away from key services. This distance turns them dependent on their car, as it has been analysed in Scotland (Gray et al. 2001). Road transport is one of the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHG) in Europe, alone responsible for 19 million tons of CO equivalent (European Environmental Agency 2024). Among all modes of transport, collectively responsible for 32% of total GHG emissions of France, road transport, and mainly the private car, accounts for the majority of these externalities. The latter accounts for 52% of transport emissions (SDS 2022). In 2017,

people living in France's outlying and rural areas used cars more than those living in urban centres, and covered distances one and a half times greater than those covered by urban dwellers (INSEE 2021). The vehicles of the former are responsible for 61% of GHG emissions, compared with 39% for urban dwellers.

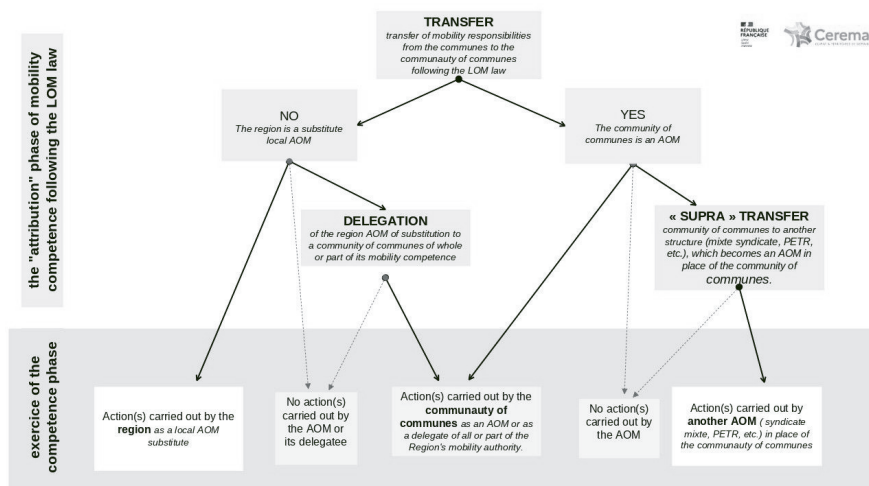
- Second, the consequences of this automobile dependence are also economic. The individual costs of mobility add up, such as taking the driving test, buying a vehicle, supplying energy for it and maintaining it (Amsellem-Mainguy 2021) and can be a motivation for working from home (Jouffe et al. 2019).
- Finally, there are social consequences. The most precarious people find difficulties in mobility (Escaffre, Gambino, Rouge 2007), and some of them remain confined to their homes for lack of mobility solutions (Lucas 2012). Mobility in rural and peri-urban areas generate inequalities which weigh more on intersectionally vulnerable people around the world (Jouffe et al. 2019).

Furthermore, while in 2018 the French government was reflecting about everyday mobilities, and aimed to draft a new law for the next year, the country saw the rise of large-scale social movements spreading throughout the country. Called the „Yellow Vest” movement due to their clothing accessory used during protests, the movement is mainly made up of suburban and rural citizens. They are protesting against rising fuel prices, which they depend on to get around to work or other activities. The above-mentioned issues are therefore recognized as problems under tension by the inhabitants of these territories, and require different and adapted responses to resolve them.

In 2017, the government launched the *National Mobility Conferences*. This nationwide citizen consultation lasted 3 months, and was being held in numerous towns and cities across France. The aim was to consult users, local authorities, operators, companies and associations in order to identify everyone's mobility concerns, with a particular focus on rural and peri-urban mobility. Six main themes were collectively discussed: clean, connected, supportive, intermodal, safe and sustainable mobility (SDES 2022). This marked a first step by the French government towards solving mobility problems in sparsely populated areas, and consisted of a recognition of the challenges these areas are facing. Following on from this, and in the wake of the Yellow Vests social movements, the French government promulgated the *Mobility Orientation Law (LOM)* in 2019. The major intention of this law was to eliminate „blank zones” (Borne 2019), according to the terms used by the Minister, meaning areas not covered by a local authority mobility organizer. Mobility competence is thus being offered by law to inter-municipal authorities – a grouping of municipalities for inter-municipal cooperation – that did not possess it, or transferred to the regions when the former did not wish to take it on. In addition, the law emphasizes three main

points: it promises to invest more and better in everyday transport; to facilitate and encourage the deployment of new solutions to enable everyone to be mobile; and to initiate the transition to cleaner mobility. Different ways of making public policies regarding the possibilities that the laws offers are described in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The various situations in which mobility skills can be acquired
A mobilitási készségek elsajátításának különböző helyzetei



Source: Daniel, Fabry, Pitaval 2023, 141.

This recent socio-political and environmental context invites us to consider the public mobility policies implemented in these rural areas in the years that followed the law, and this is what this article focuses on. To do this, we have chosen to take an institutional approach, focusing directly on the mobility stakeholders and their interactions. And since the French government has designated the inter-municipal authority as the relevant organization and scale for organizing mobility in its plan to reorganize local competencies, it is at this scale that the case studies were selected. This article is not examining institutions which benefited from an over transfer of the competence, after the inter-municipality authorities took the competence on its behalf. Determining the scale of the study does not exclude the analysis of the involvement of other local stakeholders, but mainly enables us to obtain comparable fields from an institutional point of view (whether or not they have taken on the accountability). Moreover, as inter-municipal authorities are the smallest public establishments for inter-communal cooperation, their administrative boundaries often encompass sparsely populated areas, or rural areas as defined by the *French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE)*. This allows us to investigate potential local responses to the above-mentioned challenges and how the French government gave them some capabilities to act in that direction. Indeed, as

Brenner focused on the rescaling of urban governance with state spatial policies in Western Europe over the last three decades (Brenner 2008), this work is questioning the alignment of rural governance with state mobility policies.

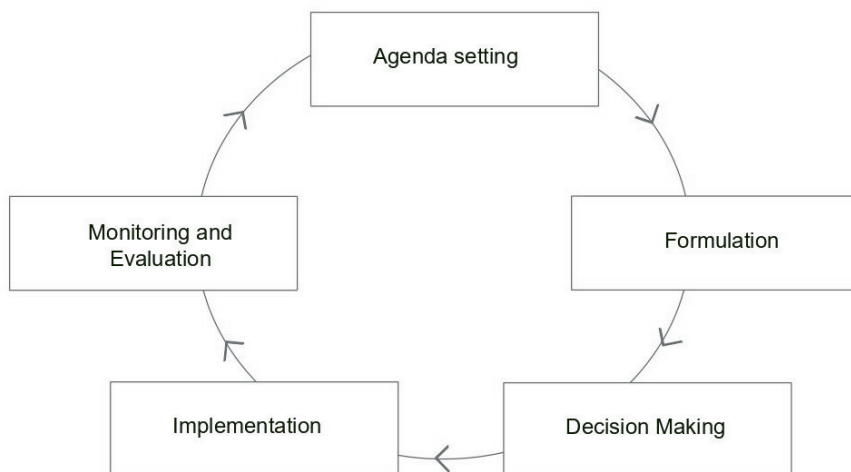
Daily mobility challenges affecting rural areas are being set on the national political agenda. In a context of reshuffling local stakeholders, new public mobility policies seem to be emerging. What are the dynamics inside the repertoire of available solutions for the various mobility stakeholders?

Theoretical framework and methods

Understanding the design of public policy

In the sociology of public action, this research work is part of the sub-field of public policy design. A first insight is given into the structure of the public policy cycle, defined by Howlett and Ramesh and illustrated by Figure 2 (Jann, Wegrich 2006). Public policy is born of the recognition of problems that have been set on the political agenda. As exposed before, we are witnessing this double recognition, both by the inhabitants of these inter-municipal territories, and by the government, which has put these rural mobility issues on the local agenda with the LOM.

Figure 2: The five stages of the policy cycle
A politikai ciklus öt szakasza



Source: Author's construction based on Jann, Wegrich 2006

Then comes the phase of the formulation of the public policy, and it's to this part that we turn our attention. How do inter-municipal authority formulate their public policies? Zittoun (2013) explains that a repertoire of available solutions exists for stakeholders designing public policies, and can be analyzed through discourses. He defines this repertoire as a range of „solutions”, each promoted by a „leader” through „discourses”, linking them to known, pre-existing problems. A solution becomes one by going through three phases. First, the solution must be made credible. Then, it must be shared, before passing through a discussion phase that can be more or less conflictual, until the solution wins out over other discourses (Zittoun 2013). This article examines national and local discourses in the design of mobility „solutions” for rural areas.

The main hypothesis of this work is that the interaction of top-down and bottom-up discourses contributes to and reinforces the design of mobility solutions in rural areas, but that the state remains the „leader” in the production of local „solutions”.

Analysis of institutional discourses

In his habilitation to direct research in communication sciences, Khainnar characterizes a discourse by the diverse forms it can take (oral, written, theatrical, formal, pedagogical, etc.), and through the fact that it is formulated by someone, involves physical objects in a specific context, and has a particular objective (Khainnar 2021). Thus, according to Khainnar's theoretical definition, the corpus studied as a whole is made up of discourses materialized in various forms such as strategic documents, digital platforms (communication websites or web interfaces), interviews with stakeholders in the recent context of mobilities in France, but also discourses in their material forms observed in the field such as mobility infrastructures or material objects offering mobility services. In this work, we analyze a corpus of inauguration speeches (2), government speeches (1), speeches made by state representatives via the *French Mobility platform* (1), 30 official documents such as calls for projects, laws, circulars, official deliberations, technical presentations, planning documents; physical multimodal facilities in the territories (14), and 31 interviews with various stakeholders involved in the design of the multimodal road hubs studied or in the services delivered there (40 interviewees in total).

Two comparable case studies

This article focuses on two inter-municipal authorities, the *Pays de Lumbres* and the *Vallée de l'Hérault*, both of which have taken initiatives to develop non-rail multimodal facilities and services in hubs. This article is not questioning small railway infrastructures as a solution in the repertoire of available solutions for

local stakeholders. First of all, the development of mobility services around small rail hubs is neither new in the repertoire of solutions available in sparsely populated areas, nor in academic circles. Secondly, to meet the challenges of rural mobility, rail facilities are not the most appropriate, as many areas of France lack them (SNCF 2022). In addition, the choice of these two inter-municipal authorities was born in a special context. As part of a doctoral contract at CEREMA – a public expertise and research establishment under the aegis of the French Ministry of Ecological Transition – the activities undertaken in parallel with conducting this research have enabled us to witness the organization of training courses and webinars destined for local authorities. In this context, several case studies were presented repeatedly, and were considered exemplary and inspiring by government experts. This is how they have been selected for this work, according to their particularities and also by the importance the state attaches to these different cases making relevant the analysis of its influence in shaping local public policies on mobility. Indeed, they are presented as innovative emerging solutions, a point we'll return to later in this article. Finally, these two selected facilities offer a wide range of services in a different way, and their multimodal and multi-service nature gives us an overview of the wider fabric of public mobility policies in sparsely populated areas.

If many classifications exist around the world, such as the ones defined by eHubs around electric mobility in Amsterdam, Nijmegen, Leuven, and Manchester, we are not only looking at their equivalent such as minimalistic hubs (one electric mode) or light hubs (at least two electric modes). We don't exclude hubs designed over non-electric modes, neither using one of the tree type of the LA Design Studio in 2016 where the rural one could be the equivalent of the smaller stations called „neighbourhood hub”, not taking in consideration the different road networks (Aono 2019). We follow for now the most global definition made regarding the international literature under the appellation of „mobility hubs” defined by Hachette, L'Hostis and Gragera: „an urban infrastructure designed to provide a variety of shared transport modes (at least 2) in the same place, where integration with public transport is highly recommended” (Hachette, L'Hostis, Gragera 2023).

These two cases were chosen firstly because we have an operational use multimodal road hub in their territory, enabling us to look back at the way it was designed, from the point of view of services, stakeholders and instruments. In addition, these two areas are interesting to compare for the diversity they represent (Robinson 2011). From an institutional perspective, the Pays de Lumbres is a Mobility Authority Organizer as it has taken the accountability by official deliberation, while the Vallée de l'Hérault has transferred the responsibility for organizing mobility to the region. From a geographical and spatial aspect, the former, located in the Pas-de-Calais region, is exclusively made up of communes of low or very low density, as defined by the INSEE. While the majority of communes are residential, five are productive and five others are

small polarities. The first major local urbanity located 10km away, Saint-Omer, is a 5th-tier urban unit regarding INSEE's definition, while others of the same rank (Calais, Boulogne-sur-mer) and higher (Dunkerque) are at least 39 km from the inter-municipal municipality's center, providing a small distant attraction. Unlike the Vallée de l'Hérault, in the Hérault department, which is mainly made up of low-density and very low-density communes, its central commune is already considered non-rural with its INSEE intermediate density. The inter-municipal authority is in the immediate proximity of a major urban centre: the metropolitan district of Montpellier. The latter, categorized as having a category 7 of density called an urban area, has a strong pull on the surrounding population. Four of its communes are small centres of activity, one is a tourist centre, and the others are more residential.

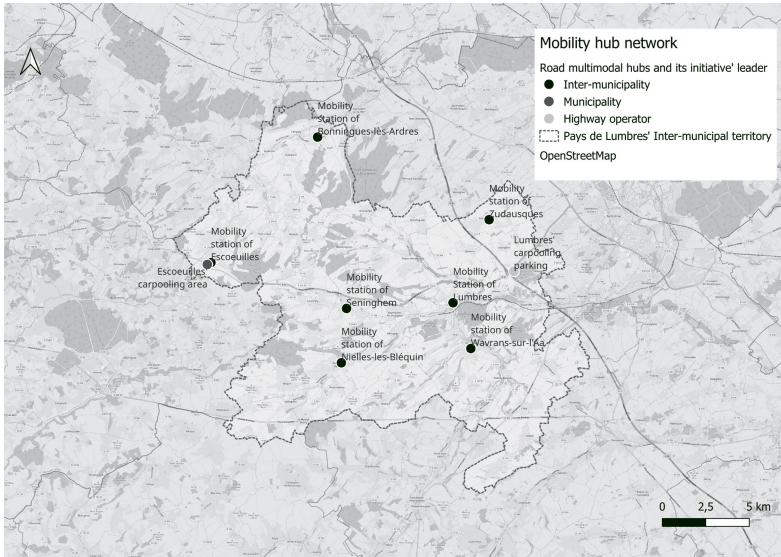
Figure 3: Case studies
Esettanulmányok



	<i>Mobility organizer authority</i>	<i>Population</i>
Pays de Lumbres	The community of communes	36 municipalities 24,172 inhabitants 89.7 inhabitants/km ²
Vallée de l'Hérault	The region	28 municipalities 41,070 inhabitants 85.4 inhabitants/km ²

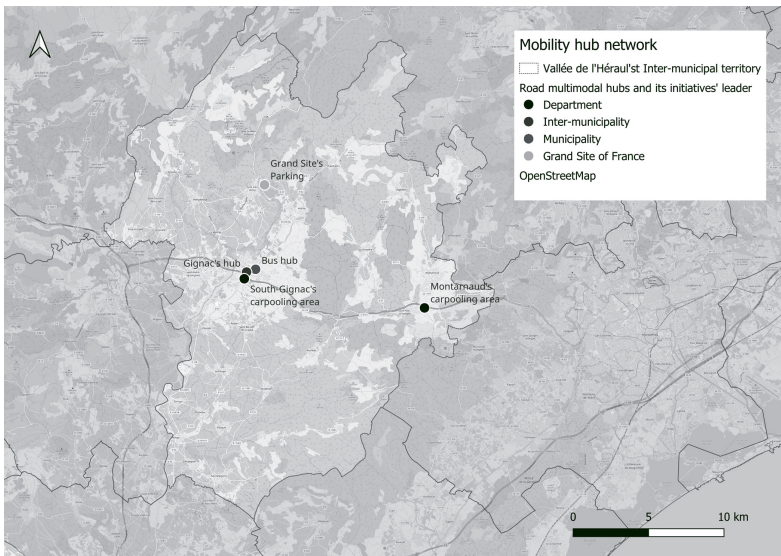
Source: INSEE 2020

Figure 4: Pays de Lumbres' Mobility Hub Network
 A Pays de Lumbres-i mobilitási csomópont hálózat



Source: Author's construction

Figure 5: Vallée de l'Hérault's mobility hub network
 Vallée de l'Hérault mobilitási csomóponti hálózata



Source: Author's construction

A blank zone for mobility?

The inter-municipal authority: legitimizing a role sometimes already taken on before the LOM

The development of „mobility stations” in the Pays de Lumbres was initiated when the inter-municipal authority elaborated its Inter-municipal Local Plan of Urbanism (PLUi) in 2018, in which the objective of „promoting sober, supportive and efficient mobility” was stated. Their main aims are to promote soft transport modes through the development of cycle paths, as well as shared mobility through carpooling and car-sharing services.

In 2019, the LOM is enacted, and the inter-municipal authority is already anticipating the assumption of its jurisdiction. In March 2020, the Pays de Lumbres drew up its Territorial Climate-Air-Energy Plan, which serves as an operational roadmap, with 7 of the 37 actions relating to mobility. When the time came to take a position on the assumption of jurisdiction in February 2020, it didn't hesitate to request the transfer of jurisdiction from its municipalities. It sees this process as an opportunity to legitimize the Pays de Lumbres inter-municipal authority (CCPL) as a Mobility Authority Organizer, and thus integrate the institution into the system of coordination led by the region.

As for the Vallée de l'Hérault, the initial stages of the local „Multimodal Hub” were born in the context of the development of a local urban project in the centre commune of Gignac. Indeed, at the same time, as the A750 Highway arrived in the commune in 2008 – the relocation of the town centre bus station inside this project was considered. The idea was to create a mixed-use zone with shops, housing and public facilities at the entrance of Gignac, in order to create a community hub there. Local studies have been launched for the development of this urban zone. At the same time, the department is launching studies for the introduction of a high-frequency bus service, and identified the need for three multimodal hubs in the Cœur d'Hérault area, created administratively by the three neighbouring inter-municipal territories: La Vallée de l'Hérault, the Clermontais and Lodevois and Larzac. One of the three multimodal hubs proposed Gignac as a receiving city in 2011. A specific mobility study was carried out between 2014 and 2015, enabling the inter-municipal authority to confirm the location at the entrance to Gignac in the urban project as the future bus station, so before they get to become responsible for mobilities.

In 2019, when the LOM was promulgated, the inter-municipal authority anticipated that the *mobility tax* would not be a benefit for setting up mobility projects. It's an employer's contribution paid to local authorities in order to finance public transport. At the same time, the President of the Occitanie region wanted to become the local Mobility Authority Organizer, asking inter-municipal authority to refuse the competence. The elected representatives deliberated in

this direction, but insisted in defining a partnership framework with the region about the issues their municipalities considered as priorities. They therefore requested a delegation of signature and authorization to take the necessary steps on subjects such as multimodal hub and car-sharing, among others.

To conclude about the two cases described above, the LOM has not introduced the inter-municipal authorities as a new stakeholder in the local mobility sector. Above all, it has legitimized actions already taken and reinforced the already nascent status of the inter-municipal authority as local stakeholders in the mobility sector. Indeed, prior to the LOM, mobility initiatives appeared in the strategic documents developed by the inter-municipal authority. On one hand the Pays de Lumbres made its Territorial Climate Air Energy Plan before; on the other, an urban project has been planned by the Vallée de l'Hérault inter-municipal authority. The LOM has also enabled the inter-municipal authority to initiate a dialogue with the region on mobility issues, where mutual recognition as mobility stakeholders has been achieved. In both cases, the LOM made bigger projects possible for these local stakeholders, allowing them to apply for funding, like to calls for projects or directly through the region when not an AOM. In both cases once again, the inter-municipal authority have become, or remain, the contracting authorities for the actions undertaken. However, in perspective with other inter-municipal authorities, two factors allow the two study cases to easily ask for funding and increase their mobility action on their territory. The fact that their project is already based on a longer reflection with other than just mobility action allows them to build a solid application, sometimes laying already on a first evaluation of their services and with other funds obtained thanks to other sectors. Besides, their advance on other neighbours' authority – competent or not – creates a significant advantage since their dossier is more advanced. As a counterpoint, those advantages for them reinforce inequalities between territories where some local authorities struggle to get their first fund for initiate mobility projects.

Highway concessionaires under contract with the French government

The Pays de Lumbres inter-municipal authority has another multimodal facility in addition to its „mobility stations”. The multimodal carpooling parking on the departmental road 942 at junction 3 of the Highway in Setques also offers a range of mobility services for different modes of transport. Although its initial layout dates back to before the LOM. In 2021, a 50-space extension has enabled it to reach a total of 112 spaces, following the application for planning permission validated in April of the same year. The site offers car-related mobility services (carpool parking spaces, electrical recharging stations) and bicycle services (sheltered bicycle racks), as well as other services such as farm products and catering distributors, covered waiting areas and waste garbage cans. At the entrance to this area, called Carpooling area of the Pays de Lumbres, two logos

refer to the partners who contributed to the emergence of this development: that of the inter-municipal authority, but also that of SANEF, to whom the A26 Highway is conceded. The concession contract between SANEF and the French government for the period 2017-2021 obliges SANEF to create carpool parking facilities on its network, with a minimum of 300 dedicated parking spaces and a list of specific facilities. A provision of 2.4 million Euro (excluding tax) has been set aside for this through the Highway Investment Plan. SANEF is committed to work in partnership with the local authority concerned, and the department has been asked to give a favourable opinion, as has the commune of Setques.

***Departments that continue to make mobility policies thanks
to other legitimate powers***

In the case of the Pays de Lumbres, a departmental mobility plan for the Pas-de-Calais department was drawn up in 2012. In 2015, an agreement was signed with its neighbour, the North's department to draw up an interdepartmental carpooling plan. The plan calls for 162 car sharing areas by 2025, with a total of 6,000 spaces. Until 2017, the department was responsible for organizing intercity and school transportation, before this was transferred to the region under the French law on the new territorial organization of the Republic (NOTRe).

In the Vallée de l'Hérault, multi-modal car-sharing parking have also been created. In 2011, the department already had a mandate objective linked to sustainable mobility. This was followed by feedback from local needs. Road agencies informed the department concerning unauthorized parking of vehicles near major routes where there was land potential to create car-sharing parking. The first evaluation for the Gignac Sud and Montarnaud carpooling parking date back to 2016, before the transfer of responsibility from the departments to the regions (Chapelon, Loubie 2019). The Gignac-Sud carpooling parking offers 43 parking spaces and 2 secure bike boxes, close to the A750 highway interchange. In Montarnaud, also close to the A750, the car-sharing parking offers 47 parking spaces, 3 bike racks, 4 secure bike boxes, 1 bike repair totem, 4 charging stations and 2 bus stops, including one with a sheltered waiting area.

These two case studies show that the Pas-de-Calais and Hérault department have been implementing public mobility policies in rural and peri-urban areas close to high traffic's roads, using their land holdings for which they were responsible. Adding to this, as early as 2000, the LAURE law made it mandatory to provide facilities „in the form of lanes, pavement markings or independent corridors” when building or renovating those roads, prompting the departments to consider cycling issues. For several years now, these various past and present responsibilities have prompted the department to draw up global, long-term development strategies to justify the relevance of the facilities undertaken. Today, with mobility facing numerous social challenges, the department mobilize

easily its social action power and responsibility to justify its active role in developing and reinforcing public mobility policies. The LOM now obliges them to collaborate more closely with other stakeholders who cannot sideline them.

The special role of associations... funded by public institutions

In addition to visible amenities in public spaces, residents' associations now offer – as they did before the LOM – mobility services for the most precarious individuals.

In the case of the Pays de Lumbres, the Rural Family's association coordinates a network of volunteers who are ready to carry out one-off journeys requested by beneficiaries. Subsequently, the association acquires a license-free electric car that can be reserved for more recurrent needs, while waiting to obtain a license to access the other services offered by the inter-municipal authority (car-sharing) or to purchase its own vehicle. In the requests for subsidies from the inter-municipal authority, the funding of the association for the development of services to complement the mobility stations was included, showing the presence of the inter-municipality in mobility issues through associations and an already existing partnership.

In the Vallée de l'Hérault, the Passerelles Synergies' association works for the same target groups, in two areas. Firstly, it provides assistance in passing the traffic regulation exam and driving license, at adapted rates, for people in economic difficulty or young people, notably through local missions. Secondly, it provides mobility advice in the form of local relays, providing guidance on the mobility solutions available via existing public networks, as well as on short and long-term leasing and vehicle purchase, and providing information on the various aids and services to which beneficiaries may be entitled. Its funding comes from a number of sources, including local authorities, local community social action centres or local missions. However, its biggest funder is the department's institution, with which the association has renewed an agreement every twelve months since its creation in the 80s. The department provides 331,000 Euro a year in funding for direct personnel costs and other direct and indirect operating expenses associated with the association's activities. In addition, the department has signed a second agreement to provide 8,000 Euro for a specific focus on sustainable mobility and solidarity. At the same time, the family allowances fund (CAF) – a public institution that supports financially individuals and families regarding their situation on behalf of the French government with a social fund – provides 90% of the funding for each estimate.

Regions still more or less involved

The Hauts-de-France region anticipated its actual role assigned by the LOM, of leading player of all the initiatives taken by the inter-municipalities. This anticipation starts when the inter-municipal authorities took on the mobility responsibility. As early as during the National Mobility Meeting In 2020, the institution therefore included in its Regional plan for land use, sustainable development and territorial equality (SRADDET) a definition of the various multimodal facilities (rail and road), based on their size, location and modes. The objective was to generate a common language throughout the region. In addition, it defines a mode of financing according to the nature of the facilities defined to best meet the needs of rural communities, based on the European Funding for Regional Development (FEDER) eligibility criteria and enabling territories not eligible for European funds to access the same financing from regional resources.

As for the region, in the case of the Vallée de l'Hérault where it is the Mobility Authority Organizer, strategic documents have been put in place to guide the territory's public mobility policies. In 2017, the first rail mobility hub scheme was voted through, and in 2018 a new commission was created at the region, called *mobilities and proximities*, as the departments' road transport authority was transferred to the region under the NOTRe law. On the same model as the rail scheme, the road mobility hub scheme was voted in 2018. Today, it is being structured along the same structure as the rail scheme, to provide effective and contingent support for road schemes from an engineering and financial point of view.

Whether or not regions have taken on the responsibility for mobility, they are taking on a role in the development of public mobility policies in rural and peri-urban areas. Whether through funding, guidance or support, they still seem to be in the process of structuring their activities, awaiting feedback on their needs from more local stakeholders. As its scale of action is broader than the inter-municipal authority limits, trade-offs have to be made, and its internal organizational procedures do not currently allow it to provide all the engineering or funding to all the inter-municipal authority in their territories, if it were to follow the model of those already in action. Some of them even feel „behind the times” and don't know how to go about it, due to a lack of local staff formed in the mobility area.

In conclusion, the French government's objective of eliminating the „blank zones” covering the territory of mobility-organizing authorities has been achieved in many areas where local action on mobility was already well established. Nevertheless, the LOM has created new interlocutors in addition to those already existing in the mobility ecosystem, complicating the institutional multilevel system of stakeholders as already demonstrated (Flipo, Ortar 2022).

This complex system faces many challenges before complementing solutions for improving rural mobility in their territory. First, they need to list and recognize every mobility service and amenity that has been implemented so far by other stakeholders to connect together their similar projects on a rural multimodal network. For now, all those initiatives seem to remain separated for different reasons. Lack of financial capacities for local stakeholders to create mobility actions in the sense they imagined it at the beginning suggests that connecting with other actors' initiatives is not a priority. Secondly, each local player keeps answering their specific objectives regarding their legal responsibility and their legitimation to act on mobilities. Sometimes mobility is just a way to fulfil a social or environmental objective, while for inter-municipality, it became their final objective. Third, the territory's actual and future scale projections of movements depend on the priorities of stakeholders and the network they are responsible for. Finally the LOM designated the region as the „manager” of initiatives only taken by the legitimate and legal stakeholder responsible for it: inter-municipal authority. This management turns all other mobility actions and actors invisible.

But since „new” solutions seem to be emerging by many different actors, we saw that the state only involved already existing stakeholders, for example associations or departments, into the partnership committee, giving emphasis to the inter-municipal authorities. But what about the role of the state in the emergence of all those initiatives, independently of the nature of the action?

The role of the state in local public mobility policies

Multimodal facilities: from technical production to the emergence of road mobility hub

The historical evolution of the technical literature produced by CEREMA and other institutions for technicians shows both changes in terminology and, above all, the emergence of interest in shared-use modes. First of all, in the 90s, The agency „Architecture, Research, Engagement, post-carbon” (AREP) published an Atlas of Multimodal Hub consisting of monographs on major stations (AREP 1999). It focused exclusively on rail transport in major cities. From 2002 onwards, interest began to focus on smaller towns, and the Ministry asked for a bibliography of multimodal hubs, built with other amenities under the name of PEM for Multimodal Exchanges Hub. This document lists major railway stations, but also metro and tramway stations and, for the first time, small stations, different of an urban perspective. Between 2003 and 2006, the ancestor of CEREMA published a series of monographs on railway stations, park-and-ride facilities and heavy urban modes in large and medium-sized

towns before publishing PEM in France. In the same year, the term „Exchange Hub” appeared in the Official Journal of February 12, 2006, and has been part of the equipment vocabulary since (CELF, 2006). Finally, it was in 2019 that interest began to focus on multimodal road developments, without necessarily focusing on heavy modes.

CEREMA – a public body under the aegis of the French Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion – representing the latter, is the first to define what is meant by the term „mobility area” in the LOM. Indeed, the law mentions: „the creation, design and management of multimodal hubs and mobility stations, particularly in rural areas, as well as the transport system to and from these hubs or areas” (LOM 2019). In the Mobility toolkit for sparsely populated areas published in 2023 for technicians, mobility stations are defined as „a special type of transit hub for sparsely populated areas. They are organized around the convergence of shared and active mobility services (such as carpooling, car-sharing or self-service bicycles) in a single and accessible location, in order to promote alternatives to autosolism. Unlike traditional hubs organized around heavy modes of transport, mobility hub can be characterized by light or even modular equipment, more modest investments and shorter development times” (CEREMA 2023, 2).

The French government is therefore inviting interest in new forms of multimodal road development. Locally, and in the Vallée de l'Hérault in particular, multimodal road amenities studied above are referred by the region and by the inter-municipal authority itself as „Multimodal Exchanges hub” (PEM). Gignac's PEM, built around a bus station offering public transport services, is not surprising given the evolution of the term, but the Montarnaud car-sharing parking was initially a car-sharing parking with a bus route running alongside. An appropriation of a term initiated by the state is observed in one of the areas studied, and a new name in another, since the Lumbres inter-municipal authority has named its facilities „mobility stations”.

An omnipresent state through earmarked funding

Let's take a look at the arrangements put in place by the inter-municipal authority, which have been designated by the French government as potential local Mobility Organizing Authorities.

In the case of the Pays de Lumbres mobility stations, the first funding came from the label and grant program „Territories with positive energy for gre development” (TEPCV) to two communes in the territory, and was obtained in 2018. This state subsidy was intended to finance 6 axes, the second of which was „Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution linked to transport”, which could take the form of renewing public vehicle fleets with electric vehicles, or developing public spaces to promote clean mobility. In the Project of planning

and sustainable development (PADD) of the PLUi of the Pays de Lumbres, there are objectives developing electric vehicle mobility. Following this first state-funded local action for mobility, the inter-municipal authority responded between December 2018 and February 2019 to two ADEME calls for projects: TENMode and AVELO. TENMode is a fund that accompanies the LOM with the aim of enabling local authorities to experiment in sparsely populated areas to then spread to all territories. In particular, this fund finances initiatives linked to shared mobility and active mobility, enabling the largest possible number of people to travel on a daily basis. This fund has enabled the inter-municipal authority to create mobility stations by adding self-service electric bicycles to the two electric car-sharing vehicles. In addition, the fund has enabled the community to increase the number of mobility stations from two to seven. Lastly, the 2019 AVELO call for expressions of interest has enabled these mobility stations to be linked to the hubs by a network of bicycle links.

In the case of the Vallée de l'Hérault, the Gignac „Multimodal Exchange Hub” has also received funding. The latter was made possible thanks in large part to a 70,000 Euro call for projects from ADEME: „Bicycles and territories”, which aims to support the construction of a strategy for the development of cycling facilities and the use of bicycles through the funding of studies and territorial engineering. In addition, 642,000 Euros have been obtained via the „Continuity for cycle” call for projects provided by the French Transport Infrastructure Financing Agency (AFITF) in 2019, the aim of which is to support multimodal infrastructure projects that facilitate cycle routes for users. The Vallée de l'Hérault has also benefited from 300,000 Euros from the Grant to support local investment (DSIL), whose third priority is to finance „the development of infrastructure in favour of mobility or in favour of housing construction”. However, it is the Prefect of the department, representing the state, who defines local guidelines and allocates this funding according to territorial priorities. Lastly, 510,738 Euros come from the France Green Nation fund, which aims to „accelerate the ecological transition in territories” by subsidizing projects that work towards „decarbonization and energy savings, adaptation to climate change and improving the living environment”. The region – the region's Mobility Authority Organizer – then contributed 152,000 Euro to enable the project to exist in the face of funding conditions that could not exceed 80% of the project.

In both cases, the majority of funding for these projects comes from the state. This funding is oriented by axes that can sometimes be seen as opportunities to finance a part of the local project, and sometimes as constraints preventing the project from going beyond the defined framework and the imposed financial limit. Once again, the state is very present in imposing its views on local authorities, which are nevertheless responsible for implementing public mobility policies. Nevertheless, all this ad hoc funding calls into question

not only the autonomy of local authorities, but also the sustainability of the funding available to them.

State dissemination of local initiative models

To support the LOM and local authorities in the development of mobility projects, France Mobilité has been created. This platform serves as an „operational complement” to the LOM and „is anchored in the actions in favour of innovation carried out by the Government.” The latter thus takes credit for local actions in his speech. As for the stakeholders who make up the platform, we find territorialized but public entities directly dependent on the government, namely ADEME, the regional directorate for the environment, development and housing (DREAL), CEREMA and the Bank of Territories. On this platform, mobility stakeholders can find a question-and-answer forum, a summary sheet on the role of the region and the inter-municipal authority in the assumption of mobility responsibilities, and a „how-to guide on the assumption of mobility responsibilities”. It is therefore directly involved in the dissemination of „projects” or project models.

In addition, the French mobility website lists the various local initiatives undertaken by local authorities and mobility stakeholders throughout France. The local representatives of the state grouped together in this platform select the communities that will benefit from the funds offered through calls for projects, before highlighting certain initiatives deemed to be innovative. Of the 309 projects online, 205 are categorized as being located in rural areas. Of these 205 projects, only 3 are what CEREMA defines as mobility hub. In 1 years’ time, the number of rural projects has risen to 516, still registering 5 projects around „mobility stations”.

If these multimodal projects remain a minority out of the total number of existing projects, it’s because the others focus mainly on a single mode or on a Mobility as a Service System. This manufacturing of „solutions” as they are called on the platform can be explained by the existing financing methods presented in the section above. Some local authorities create a local project and take advantage of the funding to implement and develop it, while others directly appropriate state funds earmarked for working by mode. In all cases, the state continues to promote certain local innovations, but local dissemination between communities or through the region should not be overlooked either.

The state kept an important paper in the formulation of local policy and as a way of rescaling its authority at a field level, multimodal hubs and their analyses testify to its omnipresence. The state gave a competence specifically to the inter-municipal authority, without providing them a full capacity to act freely in their new action field. At the same time, through funding and engineering support, the state spreads its own and universal vision of mobility development while a

local intermodal network seems complicated to link regarding the actual instrument coming with the competence. The state nourishes itself from what seems to be innovative technical initiatives from the bottom to encourage other local governments to take similar actions and create an unfair competitive arena for voluntary inter-municipality to get more local capabilities.

Conclusions

Sparsely populated areas outside of conurbation communities have recently been endowed with mobility-organizing authorities by the government. However, while some inter-municipal authority remain inactive despite having taken on mobility responsibilities (Daniel et al. 2023), their area of competence is not necessarily blank, and mobility initiatives may exist, given the various stakeholders already in place. For those who have taken on the responsibility and are already active, even if they face financial constraints, the LOM seems to have legitimized their actions and strengthened their presence in the mobility ecosystem.

Henceforth, the latter will have to coordinate with other stakeholders who were already present and had already set up projects before the LOM. New balances of power are thus emerging, and global cooperation is required. Although it would appear that the state is relieved of its responsibilities by this local delegation, it is still very much involved in the creation of local public policy. We find it not only in technical documents intended for the development of mobility projects, but also in the earmarked funding of local public policies and the dissemination of models. Its discourse is therefore omnipresent in the local repertoire of available solutions, alongside those of other stakeholders.

This calls into question the interactions that exist between the two scales. The hypothesis that local mobility solutions are the fruit of interactions between the national state and the local level is borne out in the case of the multimodal road schemes studied. One does not seem capable of implementing local public mobility policies without the other. Models and public actions seem to be disseminated at both levels, and multimodal solutions combine state opportunities and regulations with local willingness to act.

Moreover, the definition of a public policy is not as linear as it seems to be in the policy cycle of Howlett and Ramesh used as a theoretical framework in this work. As they explain it in their introduction: „the cycle may not be a single interactive loop, for example, but rather a series of smaller loops [...]” (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003). Thus, the formulation of a public policy takes place throughout its cycle, and not only in the formulation phase. It may also evolve during its implementation. For this reason, these questions are explored in greater depth in a thesis that looks at the making of public mobility policies through multimodal road development projects throughout their design.

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