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THE DEVELOPMENT OF METROPOLISES IN GERMANY AND FRANCE

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Abstract

The evolution of city regions and metropolises in both countries illustrates the theoretical debates on this particular geographical object. Political legitimacy, significant autonomy and a 'relevant' territorial area should form the basis of these regions. But there is a long way to go from this theoretical vision to practice. In Germany, a slow and contingent bottom-up process can be observed, whereas in France, following a long history of intermunicipality, institutional metropolises are emerging (MAPTAM law of 2014). *Metropolregionen* and *métropoles* thus differ. Germany shows incomplete and variable forms of metropolitan organisation, whereas French metropolises are satisfied with simple criteria of competences and resources. However, these 'intermunicipal' *métropoles* (one exception: Lyon) can also be compared with the large German cities, which are highly individualised political entities, with the city-states (e.g. Hamburg) being the most extreme cases. Two examples, Frankfurt and Lille, illustrate the comparison.

Keywords

Metropolises – governance – local power – Frankfurt – Lille

1 Introduction

In recent decades, most Western cities have experienced strong economic growth and an upturn in population. This has often been accompanied by suburbanisation, an increase in the numbers of commuters, the transformation of built form and redevelopment of land, and has sometimes been associated with conflicts about the location of large infrastructures. Numerous different political and administrative entities are included in these urban agglomerations. The speed of urban growth has often outpaced the pace of adjustment and adaptation. This chapter therefore addresses the following question: in light of institutional fragmentation and numerous social, environmental and economic challenges, what are the current trends in the administration and governance of metropolises in Germany and France?

Several investigations have shown that the process by which metropolitan administrative structures and governance forms emerge is a difficult one that meets resistance from constituted sub-national powers (Sharpe 1995; Lefèvre 1998). Ideally, metropolitan government should be characterised by three main features. First, it should have strong political legitimacy through the direct election of its political representatives. This would allow the activities of the metropolitan government to be recognised by all and render them enforceable, primarily in relation to the member municipalities. Second, such an institution should have significant autonomy in relation to other levels of government, attained through sufficient financial and personnel resources and extensive competences (spatial planning, economic development, administration of technical networks, culture etc.). This would make it possible to tackle the many challenges faced by the metropolises. Finally, the metropolitan government should have a 'relevant' territorial basis, roughly equivalent to the functional urban area (Lefèvre 1998).

However, there is a long way to go from this theoretical vision to practical implementation. As we will see in this chapter, the French forms of metro government only fulfil the criteria of competences and resources and even this does not apply to the large urban areas of Paris and Marseille-Provence. Germany is also characterised by incomplete and variable forms of metropolitan organisation. A comparison between the two countries is not straightforward for a number of reasons. France and Germany have very different urban systems, whereby German polycentricism contrasts with the French system dominated by the primate city of Paris and its region Ile-de-France (see Paris/Gustedt 2022 and Adam/Baudelle/Dumont 2022). Rankings of European cities reflect the different levels of influence of the metropolises of the two countries. Thus Rozenblat and Cicille (2004) categorise Paris as belonging to the first class of European cities, while Berlin and Munich are included in the third class. On the other hand, the fourth class contained four German cities (Cologne, Frankfurt, Dusseldorf, Hamburg) but only three French cities (Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse). The institutional systems of the two countries are also very different, with federalism on the one hand and a central state – albeit in a process of decentralisation (see Paris/Gustedt 2022) – on the other. These systems influence the status of metropolises and their institutional anchoring in the two countries. In Germany, the federal government

does not interfere in the organisation of local government. In contrast, for over 50 years France has been characterised by numerous institutional reforms initiated by the national government. This chapter aims to present and explain these contrasts through general discussion (see Section 2) and using empirical examples from the case studies of Frankfurt and Lille (see Section 3). Finally, a comparative analysis reveals the limits of metropolitan governance in the two countries (see Section 4).

2 Theoretical approaches to the institutionalisation of metropolises in Germany and France

The institutionalisation of metropolitan government has long been the subject of debate between two schools of thought (Tomàs 2020). On the one hand, reformers of the metropolitan region have called for the institutional consolidation of metropolitan regions through territorial reforms. In the 1960s, the creation of groupings of municipalities (called *communautés urbaines*) in France and of Metropolitan County Councils in England was a sign of this trend. On the other hand, other scholars – influenced by public choice theories – have emphasised the benefits of competition between autonomous municipalities. In the 1990s, supporters of new regionalism proposed softer institutional structures with variable geometries appropriate for tackling numerous tasks of metropolitan governance. Brenner (2004) supported the notion that the issue of managing the metropolitan regions is part of a more comprehensive process of restructuring state territories in the context of economic globalisation. An institutional structuring of the metropolitan region is said to be required to ensure international competitiveness.

Changes in the administration of metropolises in Germany and France in the last 15 years reflect these theoretical debates. The developments in Germany are part of a slow, bottom-up process contingent on context-specific conditions, while in France *métropoles* have replaced urban communities and represent an alliance between the mayors of the cities and national government.

2.1 Metropolitan regions in Germany

In Germany, metropolitan regions are an indistinct category. The term *Metropolregion* is used both analytically and politically. It became popular in German spatial development policy in the late 1990s when the *Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung* (MKRO – Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning) highlighted the new category of European metropolitan regions in various documents (Blotevogel/Schmitt 2006; ARL 2007). However, the federal government did not define the competencies or the institutional form of these new metropolitan regions (Feiertag/Zimmerman 2022). Thus they were not new territorial entities but variable forms of cooperation between municipalities, districts and private actors (including universities). The background was general concern about the competitiveness of the German economy (debate about the attractiveness of Germany as a location for business and industry) and the

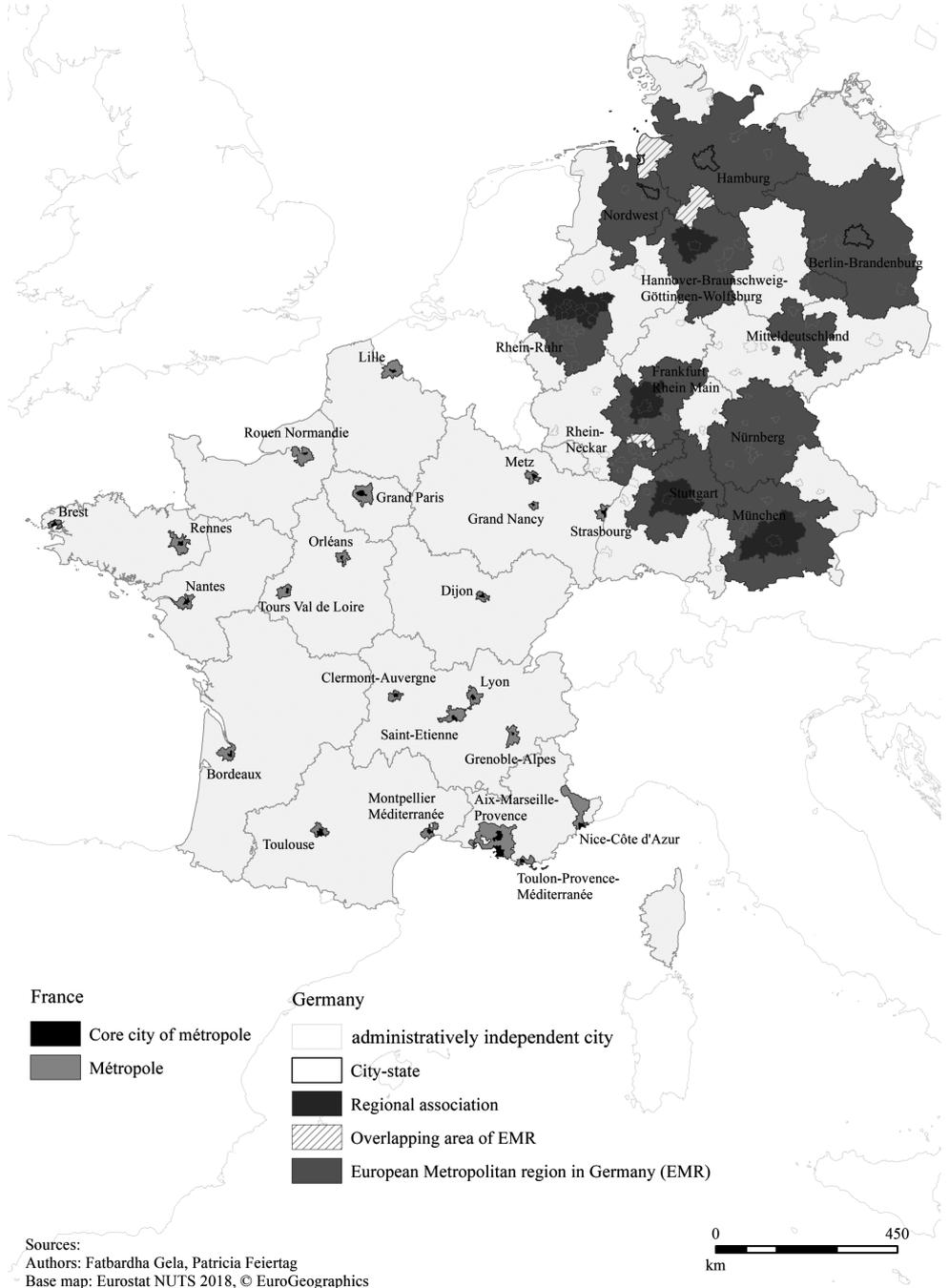


Figure 1: The institutionalisation of metropolises in Germany and France / Source: Fatbardha Gela and Patricia Feiertag (TU Dortmund)

lack of a German global city region comparable to greater Paris in France and greater London in the UK. The historical development of Germany's urban system has led to a polycentric pattern of cities which reflects the federal nature of the country. Important economic functions in different sectors are divided between the various city regions such as Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, Stuttgart and Rhine-Ruhr. It was assumed that strengthening these metropolitan regions and improving the links between them would benefit the economic development of the country. Five metropolitan regions were initially designated, later eleven, including those that were less competitive on a global scale. The metropolitan regions are nearly all very large (e.g. Berlin-Brandenburg or Hamburg), but their ability to manage regional development is comparatively limited (due to a lack of funding and competences).

The debate about the introduction of European metropolitan regions was also characterised by a focus on increasing disparities. Two strands of conflict were significant here: the question of partnerships between urban areas and the countryside and the question of a focus on a small number of globally competitive 'national champions'. This allowed at least a certain amount of attention to be directed towards the needs of small and medium-sized towns and city regions (Matern 2013). It is striking that the metropolitan regions are almost all in West Germany. It is also unclear how small city regions like Karlsruhe, Braunschweig, Kassel, Leipzig, Freiburg or Osnabrück can be included in this spatial policy discourse.

The discussion about metropolitan regions should not hide the fact that some very strong regional and planning associations have existed on a smaller scale (city regions) for decades. Such associations possess very considerable collective capacities in the fields of regional planning, landscape planning, public transport and economic development (Stuttgart, Hannover, Rhine-Neckar, Braunschweig, Ruhr region). Along with the districts and administratively independent cities, the associations are the most significant institutional structures for city regions.

Overall, the emergence of new spatial scales in German metropolitan policies since the end of the 1990s can be seen as combining a strong institutional core on a small scale (usually planning associations in city regions, some of which date back to the 1970s) with softer forms of governance on a larger scale (metropolitan regions) (Blatter 2006; Zimmermann 2017). The new multi-scale arrangements in German metropolitan regions are not, however, the result of a careful institutional structuring process but are linked to constellations of actors and the initiatives of other levels of government. This means that the agreements are unstable and may disappear.

The rescaling of functions must be considered together with the parallel trend of decentralisation and regionalisation, which can be observed in Germany and in other countries and is often intended as a cost-saving measure (austerity) (Zimmermann 2017; Fricke/Gualini 2019). The creation of European Metropolitan Regions in Germany involves the invention of a scale but is not necessarily the result of a change in political or administrative functions. The introduction of such European metropolitan regions promoted not just a focus on economic development but also – at least in a few regions – a limited degree of upscaling of policies and politics. Although the new and

(in terms of territory) larger scales were not created at the cost of the smaller ones, the process is characterised by conflict. We consider this process to be a further differentiation of regional policy. This differentiation is related not only to the emergence of different spatial scales (city region, metropolitan region, sectoral arrangements) but also to the motivation behind metropolitan policies. Although the primary driver behind the creation of the European metropolitan regions was competitiveness, other motives such as sustainable development and better public transport are found on smaller scales of governance (i.e. city regions). This differentiation can be termed *embedded regionalisation*. This renders the terms metropolitan region and city region somewhat indistinct and, at least in some German regions, leads to ‘overcrowded policy’ (Zimmermann 2017).

2.2 The French metropolitan arena

In recent years, France has also promoted the creation of integrated urban centres of power that are able to participate in global trends and administer large development projects (Zimmermann/Galland/Harrison 2020). However, these reforms stem from more comprehensive and older institutional thinking that aims to rationalise the number and size of municipalities, control public spending and develop financial solidarity on the intermunicipal scale.

The large intermunicipal reforms (*Chevènement Act*, 1999) or reforms of spatial planning (SRU Act, 2000) have not been conceived on the scale of the functional urban regions. Although they represent an important jump in scale, these reforms aim primarily to achieve a voluntary reorganisation of the most important territorial governing elites with indirectly elected representatives for large urban areas (Pinson 2004). The decade from 2000 was characterised by numerous fusions that led to a general increase in the size and competences of French groupings of municipalities.

As a result of this dynamic development, in the last ten years national governments with different political orientations passed two consecutive laws enabling the creation of metropolitan regions (Dubois 2015). The municipal administrative reform of 2010 laid the foundations for new, more integrated and comprehensive forms of intermunicipal cooperation, but continued to comply with the fundamental approach of the law of 1999, i.e. respecting the freedom of association of the municipalities. Confronted with a lack of willingness to act among the local authorities, four years later the government took further action regarding the largest cities (MAPTAM Act, 2014). The *métropoles* thus became a legislative entity and there was a clear break with the policies of voluntary groupings that had dominated proceedings in France since the decentralisation legislation. The law planned to create ten *métropoles* in common law (many of which would replace existing urban communities) and three *métropoles* with special status (Greater Paris, Lyon and Aix-Marseille-Provence)¹, all by 1 January 2015.

1 In the meantime, more metropolises have developed. On 1 January 2020 there were 22 metropolises in France.

The MAPTAM Act is the result of an alliance between the mayors of large cities and the government. The former often linked this position to a mandate in parliament (Demazière/Sykes 2021). In many cases the change of status was seamless as the *métropoles* are only a continuation of existing urban communities, often with relatively identical territories and competences. Like the urban communities which they replace, the municipalities combine strategic competences (planning, land regulations, economic development, transport, sectoral schemata) with the provision of everyday urban services. What is new is the relationship between the *métropole* on the one hand and the superior authorities and the state on the other. The law stipulates that the *métropoles* can extend their competences by using conventional paths to gain specific competences previously carried out by the department, the *région* or even the state.

The situation in France requires closer scrutiny. While the creation of strong metropolitan government in most of the French cities was effective, the three largest city regions, Paris, Lyon and Marseille, were treated differently.

In response to considerable opposition from the local political elites (Béhar 2019; Olive 2015), Greater Paris (131 municipalities, 7 million inhabitants) and the *métropole* of Aix-Marseille-Provence (91 municipalities, 1.8 million inhabitants) profited from specific statutes. In both these cases the obligatory fusion of the intermunicipal territorial bodies was toned down by the creation of *Conseils de territoire* (CT – territorial councils) which group municipalities together. These CTs undermined the development of metropolitan autonomy. In line with the balance of political power, the *métropole* can return a proportion of its authority to the CT. The metropolitan council is obliged to consult the CT on all decisions that concern the *métropole* and the CT has the right to place items on the agenda of the metropolitan council. The law also provides for the transfer of certain competences from the *métropole* back to the municipalities. The two largest French cities are thus weak forms of metro government with territories that are actually governed by three levels of power: the municipalities, the territorial councils and the metropolitan council.

The situation of the third largest French agglomeration, the *Métropole de Lyon* (59 municipalities, 1.4 million inhabitants) contrasts with that of Paris and Aix-Marseille-Provence (Demazière 2021). Political consensus on the local level allowed more advanced legislation. Within the boundaries of the former *communauté urbaine*, the *métropole* brings together the competences of the urban community and of the department of Rhône. The law transfers responsibility for improving competitiveness and solidarity in this new region to the new *Etablissement public de coopération intercommunale* (EPCI – Public Body for Intermunicipal Cooperation) and makes it responsible for all competences in the fields of social integration and the protection of vulnerable groups, tasks that were formerly the responsibility of the department. *Métropole de Lyon* is currently the only city region in France with the status of a regional authority. Nonetheless, these extremely integrated competences, which are often cited by central government as a model, have their price. *Métropole de Lyon* currently includes only part of its functional urban region because several of the local political elites opposed integration in the new institution.

The debate about the metropolises reveals the field of tension between two different scales, that of the urban project as the responsibility of the municipality and that of strategic spatial planning on the scale of the city region, which in the French case still needs to be created. Depending on the individual case and local power constellations, legislators may well have hesitated given the choice between a strong *métropole* with a small territory and a large one which includes much of its functional urban region but is politically weak (like in the cases of Paris and Marseilles). Often, a narrow definition of the *métropole* is not in keeping with the challenges presented by the spread of urban sprawl into the countryside, social segregation, large commercial zones, energy consumption and overstretched transport systems (Demazière 2018).

There are various forms of interterritorial cooperation between the *métropoles* and their surrounding regions and also of dialogue between the *métropoles*, which allow the cities to react to issues that extend beyond their immediate vicinity. Most of these EPCI-initiatives are not, however, particularly institutionalised. In 2010 *pôles métropolitains* (metropolitan poles) were introduced as a very flexible form of governance. They have the legal status of a joint syndicate and consist of a number of EPCI, ranging from two intermunicipal bodies (Nîmes, Alès) up to 20 (Caen, Normandy) (Bariol-Mathais 2017). Since 2014 (MAPTAM Act) the syndicates have been able to open up to include other partners such as the department or region, universities, harbours, economic development agents, tourist agents, chambers of trade and industry, and urban planning agents. In contrast to the *métropoles* the metropolitan poles do not adhere to the two principles of exclusivity of competences and territorial continuity. They can create a network of cities in the form of a group of geographically distant intermunicipalities which work together to tackle interterritorial problems and planning issues (Dugua 2015: 312). This institutional form is valued by local actors as a *'bouffée d'air frais'* ('breath of fresh air') as it is not subject to the general logic of territorial reforms but offers more flexibility and opportunities for experimentation (Vanier 2017: 19). About 20 metropolitan poles have developed. Half of them do not include a *métropole* as a member but are formed by smaller EPCI.

Twelve *métropoles* are members of one or even two established or developing metropolitan poles: Lyon, Saint-Etienne, Nantes, Rennes, Brest, Rouen, Strasbourg, Nancy, Metz, Clermont-Ferrand, Toulouse and Grenoble. The metropolitan poles are thus not an alternative to the *métropoles* but rather a complementary model.

A metropolitan pole can assume responsibility for strategic planning on the level of metropolitan regions, as in the case of Nantes/Saint-Nazaire. This model allows the EPCI to focus on operative activities to implement the *Schéma de cohérence territoriale* (SCoT – Scheme for Territorial Coherence; see Paris/Gustedt 2022). This remains, however, an unusual approach as in many large agglomerations the area covered by the SCoT is much smaller than the scale of the *métropole*, e.g. in Lyon where ten SCoTs cover the metropolitan region (Dugua 2015). The poles tend to be weak structures that can initiate action and offer added value through a joint approach. Could they be a step towards an additional scale of local governance in metropolitan regions?

3 Metropolises: Government or governance? Two case studies

In both countries the way in which the metropolitan governments function differs from territory to territory, reflecting the regional characteristics and the interaction of the different actors. This can be illustrated with two case studies.

3.1 Frankfurt Rhine-Main

In the 1970s, the Frankfurt Rhine-Main region was a pioneer in the field of metropolitan governance structures in Germany. In 1975 an *Umlandverband* (regional association) was created for Frankfurt which was responsible for a whole range of planning functions and other tasks (including waste). The region was provided with a directly elected regional assembly, although its autonomy was limited by a second chamber for the mayors of the region. This meant that the association was never able to achieve its full potential and was little esteemed by local residents (Lackowska 2011). In 2000 the *Umlandverband* was replaced by an institutionally weaker association. The regional assembly was no longer directly elected but consisted of representatives of the municipal parliaments. In terms of functions, the association was largely reduced to its role as a planning association. It was the only planning association in Germany to assume responsibility for land-use planning (actually a municipal task) and for landscape planning, but it lost responsibility for regional transport planning and waste. Despite considerable opposition, the region covered by the association was enlarged and is now roughly equivalent to the functional urban area (with 75 instead of 43 municipalities). This reform was preceded by intensive debates on the governance of the region in the 1990s, in which business representatives also played a major role (Blatter 2006). Thus in 1996 the business initiative Rhine-Main was founded, bringing together about 150 internationally active enterprises which then produced their own spatial vision for the region. Due to the fragmentation of the region, there was concern about its image abroad, as regions like Paris or London had clearer messaging. Other perceived disadvantages included the lack of cultural offerings. While the business initiative tended to represent the large and international enterprises, the *IHK-Forum Frankfurt* – an association of the *Industrie- und Handelskammer* (IHK – Chamber of Commerce and Industry) – pursued a similar but different discourse. The IHK also represented smaller enterprises who called for the development of local infrastructures. It was not, however, possible for a unified pro-development regime to emerge. The reform in 2000 was specifically targeted towards fragmentation and voluntary, issue-specific cooperation. Thus in addition to binding land-use planning and landscape planning, the municipalities and private actors were called upon to find forms of regional cooperation in the fields of transport, the regional landscape park, culture and economic promotion. The regional council was viewed as the appropriate vehicle for this cooperation; here the mayors of the region were to develop solutions under the guidance of the leadership of the city of Frankfurt. This was only partially successful so that the government of the federal state introduced a further reform in 2011: the regional council was abolished and the existing association somewhat strengthened. It was provided with an advisory board made up of representatives of business and civil society and, with the municipalities, was allowed to extend its

activities into other fields (regional park, marketing, mobility, sport and recreational facilities). In 2018 this range of responsibilities was further extended to include energy and digitalisation. The execution of the association’s tasks is based on voluntary cooperation and is pursued with varying levels of commitment.

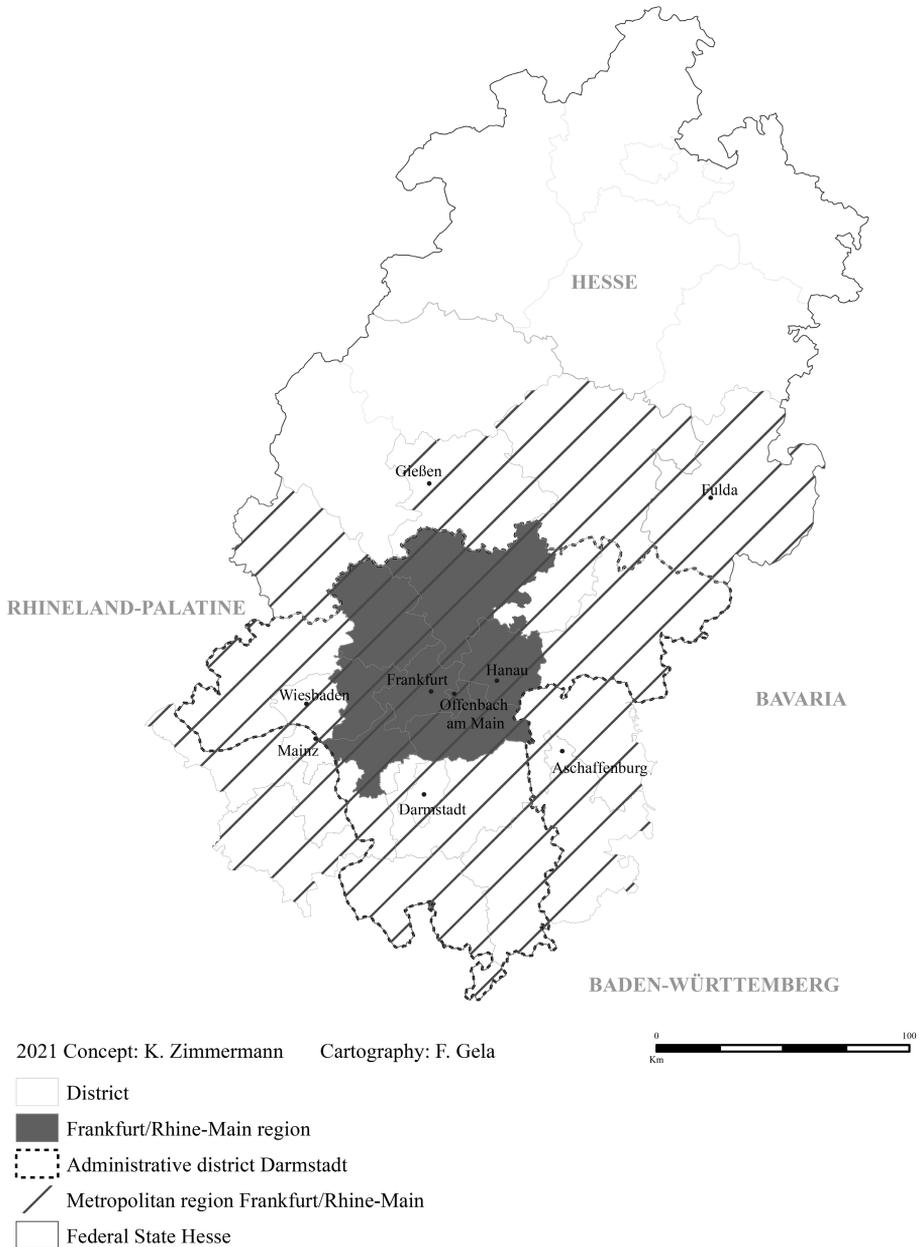


Figure 2: The metropolitan region Frankfurt/Rhein-Main. Source: Fatbardha Gela (TU Dortmund)

Like other German city regions, in the 2000s discussion in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main turned to the possibility of a larger second level of metropolitan governance. The initiative of the so-called European metropolitan regions in Germany (e.g. Munich, Berlin, Hamburg, Rhine-Ruhr, Stuttgart) was a joint initiative of the federation, the federal states and the relevant municipal politicians with the aim of creating national champions of international standing. However, there were no institutional changes or funding. The focus was rather on a successful attention-attracting policy. In Frankfurt/Rhine-Main the idea was not terribly popular, partly because the metropolitan region crossed the boundaries of three federal states (from Mainz in Rhineland-Palatinate to Wiesbaden, Darmstadt and Frankfurt in Hesse, to Aschaffenburg in Bavaria).

There is a great deal to be said for this large functional urban area, but it is difficult to organise politically because of the different levels of responsibility and competence between the federal states and municipalities. The region therefore remained a fuzzy concept. It was only very recently that new initiatives were launched to develop a concept for this metropolitan region. In May 2018 the IHK Frankfurt organised a *Day of the Metropolitan Region* and founded a strategy forum that included the governments of the federal states together with representatives of the IHKs and the municipalities. This project remains work in progress. Large infrastructure projects such as the extension of the airport (building of the fourth runway complete, Terminal 3 under construction) and considerable investment in regional public transport have also proved possible thanks to the government of the federal state setting clear priorities here. Generally, the situation remains one of metropolitan governance with multilateral structures, numerous actors and no clear centre.

The planning association is now confronted with the problem of finding enough space for the construction of housing in this rapidly growing region. Many suburban municipalities that used to be characterised by strong rates of growth have now left this growth path and do not wish to activate more development land in order to preserve local quality of life.

This case study illustrates the role played by the economy in debates about the organisation of the metropolitan region and the limits of the implemented solutions with regard to space and competences.

3.2 The European *métropole* of Lille

The case of the *métropole* of Lille is a good example of the situation of the *métropoles* in France, both in terms of the age of the administration, formed in the wake of the first reform of 1966 which allowed the creation of urban communities, and also in terms of the challenges faced by spatial planning. These issues are both generic (the relation between the *métropole* and neighbouring regions) and specific (related to the border-crossing location of the *métropole*).

In 1968 the founding of the *Communauté urbaine de Lille* (CUDL – Urban Community of Lille) led to institutional restructuring with the amalgamation of the Lille agglomeration, the Roubaix-Tourcoing agglomeration (which the Insee² still listed in the 1962 census) and the Armentières agglomeration to the west. At this time the urban community was responsible for technical competences: roads, sanitary facilities, the development of commercial zones, the organisation of public transport, etc. In 1969 the state then commissioned the urban community with the development of the New Town of Lille-Est. In this context the CUDL introduced an automatised metro system. The CUDL also supported a policy aimed at reducing the volume of unhealthy housing left as a legacy of the industrial revolution.

The *bifurcation métropolitaine* (metropolitan bifurcation) (Paris/Stevens 2000) occurred in 1989, when Pierre Mauroy, mayor of Lille and ex-prime minister, became president of the CUDL. A year earlier had seen the start of the large urban project Euralille to complement the introduction of Lille as a halting point for the TGV between Paris, Brussels and London. Pierre Mauroy now campaigned for a large-scale metropolitan project for Lille that supported Euralille but also included other ventures such as the future Union district between Roubaix and Tourcoing. Symbolically, the urban community of Lille was renamed *Lille métropole communauté urbaine* (LMCU, 1997), following the example of the Métropole de Lyon. A metropolitan consensus developed across the political parties but was primarily reliant on the personality of Pierre Mauroy. This political stability proved fragile and lacked a clear majority. There is also a highly active civil society in Lille, following the example of the *Comité Grand Lille*, a coalition of actors founded in 1990 by the emblematic business leader Bruno Bonduelle. The *Conseil de développement de Lille métropole* (Council for the Development of the Metropolis of Lille), founded in 2002, has wholeheartedly continued the task of providing opinions on the public policy of the *métropole*.

The aim is to put Lille on the European map. When France applied to host the 2004 Olympic Games Lille was chosen over Lyon and, more tellingly, Lille was able to increase its visibility by becoming the European Capital of Culture.

The 2002 *Schéma directeur* (SD – master plan) is an important planning document with innovative principles about how to structure the city according to the concept of urban regeneration. This approach to the revitalisation of urban districts in crisis combines the development of the economic and social environments and acts as a model for many French cities. Development on the edge of the city is restricted while working-class areas characterised by unemployment and social disadvantage are prioritised. As a true laboratory of urban regeneration (Paris/Mons 2009), the *métropole* is expediting a process of economic transformation towards a creative economy (Liefoghe/Mons/Paris 2016), for instance with Euratechnologies, one of the largest incubators for start-ups in Europe. However, this process of metropolisation is not sufficient to solve the social problems of those who are excluded from these new developments. Indeed, it is possible that it simply exacerbates their difficulties (Collectif Degeyter 2017).

2 *Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* (Insee – National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies)

With the majority that the Socialist Party and its allies achieved in 2008, Martine Aubry, ex-minister, mayor of Lille and from 2008 to 2014 president of the LMCU, broke the existing political consensus concerning the urban project. More recently, the government of the region has reflected the lack of a clear majority in the municipal elections of 2014. The political group that represents the small suburban municipalities plays a central role in an executive that includes all parties with the exception of the extreme right. The SCoT of 2017 broke with earlier principles and favoured suburban development. Here the limits of representation on the second level are felt: citizens directly elect their municipal councils and thus their mayors but not the metropolitan councils.

Subsequent to the MAPTAM Act, the transition to the *Métropole européenne de Lille* (MEL – European Metropolis of Lille, 2015) led to an extension of its competences, e. g. with social urban development and the resumption of responsibility for the department roads. The region must consider the MEL for its own planning documents (SRADDET or SRDEII, see Paris/Gustedt 2022).

Furthermore, several suburban areas (small municipal communities) were required by law to join the MEL. In 2020 the MEL had 95 municipalities and 1,170,000 inhabitants. Within this region there are 29 municipalities with less than 2,000 inhabitants; 52 with between 2,000 and 20,000; ten with between 20,000 and 60,000; and four with more than 60,000 inhabitants, including the central city of Lille, which has just under 233,000 residents and hence accounts for almost 20% of the population of the *métropole*. This further reduces the influence of the cities (Lille, Roubaix, Tourcoing, Villeneuve d'Ascq) within the institution, which in any case is threatened by the atomisation of political power and characterised by the importance of rural municipalities that control the land available for future development. There is hence interest in a new reform that should follow the example of Lyon by introducing the direct election of the metropolitan councils. This would allow each political grouping to present its urban project to the electorate, thus avoiding negotiations after the elections that are detrimental to democracy.

In the territorial context the Lille *métropole* also faces particular challenges. As the most important urban area in the region Hauts-de-France, Lille is expected to strengthen the region, especially economically. Interaction with the other areas is difficult however, as they often accuse Lille of 'metropolitan arrogance'. In 2007 a DATAR call for cooperation in the *Aire métropolitaine de Lille* (AML – Metropolitan Region of Lille) led to the founding of an association of the wider area of Lille with 2,900,000 inhabitants and elected officials for the larger agglomeration, including the former mining and steel district. A lack of true political will led to the demise of the project and the association was dissolved. Recently the *métropole* signed a cooperation agreement (2018) with the coastal area of Côte d'Opale and, particularly, the urban municipality of Dunkerque. It remains to be seen how this will develop.

Located on the border between France and Belgium, the Lille agglomeration has a unique cross-border location. The agglomeration stretches across the border and for 30 years has encompassed a region of cooperation with 3.8 million inhabitants, while

2.1 million inhabitants reside in the Eurometropolis³ of Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai (with 3550 km²). This French-Belgian agglomeration has developed from the former *Conférence permanente intercommunale transfrontalière* (COPIT – Permanent Intermunicipal Border-crossing Conference, 1991-2006), which in 2008 was replaced by the *Groupement local de coopération transfrontalière* (GLCT – Association for Cross-border Cooperation) and finally by the *Groupement européen de coopération territoriale* (GECT – European Association for Territorial Cooperation), the first of its kind in Europe. Many hopes were placed in this cross-border cooperation, which was characterised by the high level of participation of civil society. After a promising start, political changes caused by elections in both countries and political confusion led to a lack of progress in the cooperation region. Initiatives in the fields of the environment, employment, learning languages etc. were launched.

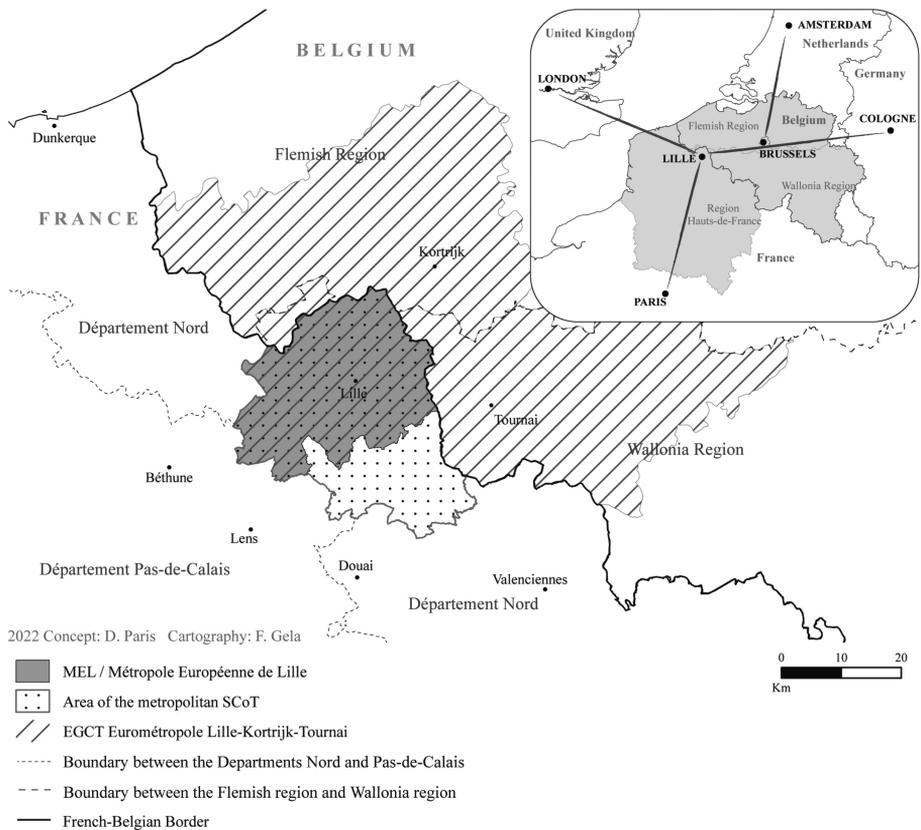


Figure 3: The cross-border metropolitan region of Lille. Source: Fatbardha Gela (TU Dortmund)

3 <http://fr.eurometropolis.eu/> (28 April 2022).

The case of Lille shows the complexity of metropolitan governance, which comes to a head here due to the many different institutional and functional levels that reflect the metropolitan reality (municipalities of greater Lille, MEL, Eurometropolis and the French, Walloon and Flemish intermunicipalities that comprise it, greater Lille including the former mining basin, metropolitan region). As a functional spatial system, greater Lille has developed in variable geometries. But today the MEL has the best integrated and most efficient institutional framework of the French *métropoles* and continues to develop in both spatial terms and in terms of its administration. Nonetheless, the question of the direct election of the metropolitan councils by local residents continues to be an important issue for all the French *métropoles*, with the exception of Lyon.

4 Critical perspectives on the institutional organisation of metropolises in Germany and France

A comparative analysis is used here to address two strands of debate. Attention is directed first to the most important public actors in the metropolitan regions in terms of determining their budgets and competences. In Germany the large municipalities seem particularly relevant here, while in France the pairing of the *métropole* and central city municipality requires consideration (in the case of monocentric agglomerations). We then ask why France has chosen new institutional forms to manage the development of the largest agglomerations while in Germany the term metropolitan region refers to a soft form of governance.

4.1 Who is the most important actor in the agglomerations?

Debates about the governance of metropolitan regions often focus on the capabilities of metropolitan institutions in relation to the diverse issues relevant to the development of the metropolitan regions (employment, innovation, housing, public services, climate etc.) (Zimmermann/Galland/Harrison 2020). This is the background against which we wish to discover whether, among the numerous organisations involved in the administration of metropolitan regions, there is one important public actor best able to influence the agenda of such regions. In other words, who governs the metropolitan region?

In Germany, the administrative structure differentiates between municipalities that are part of a district (*Landkreis*) and administratively independent cities (*kreisfreie Städte*). These administratively independent cities are usually the large ones. They have a broad portfolio of public tasks and a high degree of political autonomy. Municipalities that are part of a district, on the other hand, are small and medium-sized towns and small municipalities and do not perform all public tasks themselves. These are undertaken by the district (e.g. building supervision, public transport, schools, health services, hospitals, waste disposal, roads). There are 107 administratively independent cities and 294 districts. Since administratively independent cities perform both municipal and district tasks and have a directly elected mayor,

they are administratively and politically stronger than the districts, which are associations of municipalities with jurisdictional status. Administratively independent cities are responsible for almost the entire range of services of general interest, social services and welfare, urban planning, infrastructure, public transport, schools, culture, economic development, social housing and health services. This is reflected in the municipal budgets and employment figures (Table 1).

	Cologne	Munich	Frankfurt/ Main	Dortmund
Budget*	€4.7 billion	€6.8 billion	€4.1 billion	€2.4 billion
Employees	18,800	32,845	14,000	9,853 (2018)
Area	405.2 km ²	310.4 km ²	248.3 km ²	280.7 km ²
Inhabitants	1,061,000	1,472,000	758,574	601,000

* Expenditures, debts not considered

Table 1: Figures for some administratively independent cities in Germany (2019) /Source: municipal budget reports, website presentations of cities

For France we investigate the case of four large monocentric *métropoles* outside of Paris. For polycentric *métropoles* such as Aix-Marseille-Provence or Lille, the data related to the central city are not representative⁴. In contrast to Germany, the data must be considered on two scales in the French context: that of the central city and that of the *métropole*.

Table 2 shows that the German and French cities are not alike in any of the criteria considered. In terms of both population and area the French cities seem very small. Thus Lyon, for instance, the third largest city in France, has almost three times less inhabitants than the third largest German city, Munich, and an area that is six times smaller. The difference in population can be linked to the characteristics of the national urban system: polycentric on the one hand and polarised by the Ile-de-France region on the other hand. The difference in municipal territory can be explained primarily by the processes of municipal amalgamation that Germany has experienced (see Paris/Gustedt 2022), while in France the only answer to municipal fragmentation has been the creation of EPCI, with the *métropole* as the newest of these.

4 For example, the 2019 budget of the European *métropole* of Lille totalled €1.828 billion. That of the city of Lille totalled €0.415 billion, €0.331 in Villeneuve d'Ascq, €0.196 in Roubaix, €0.182 in Tourcoing. The sum of the budgets of the four main municipalities thus totalled €1.124 billion, i.e. more than half the budget of the MEL.

		Lyon	Bordeaux	Toulouse	Nantes
Central city	Budget (2018)*	€0.76 billion	€0.45 billion	€0.71 billion	€0.46 billion
	Employees	8,000 (2016)	4,500 (2016)	7,900 (2015)	4,500 (2018)
	Area	47.87 km ²	49.36 km ²	118.3 km ²	65.19 km ²
	Inhabitants	521,000	256,000	480,000	311,000
Métropole	Budget (2018)*	€3,344 billion	€1,958 billion	€1,431 billion	€1,378 billion
	Employees	8,700 (2016)	5,000 (2016)	3,100 (2015)	3,300 (2018)
	Area	533.7 km ²	578.3 km ²	458.2 km ²	523.4 km ²
	Inhabitants	1,390,000	797,000	768,000	646,000

* Expenditures, debts not considered

Table 2: Key figures for several monocentric métropoles in France /Source: websites of municipalities and métropoles, budget reports

If we turn to a comparison of German cities with French *métropoles*, differences remain. The population of the *Métropole de Lyon* is still smaller than Munich, although the area is greater. The same is true of all the examples examined here, with the exception of Dortmund, the eighth largest city in Germany, which lies in the Ruhr area, a region where strong urbanisation is linked to past processes of industrialisation. It should be borne in mind that in France, with the exception of the larger areas of Paris and Aix-Marseille-Provence, the creation of the *métropoles* was not accompanied by a legislative reassessment of the boundaries of the administrative units. Often local elected representatives pushed for the enlargement of existing groupings of municipalities. This was the case for Bordeaux, Lyon, Nantes and Toulouse (and also for Brest, Montpellier and Nancy, i.e. every second *métropole* created by the MAPTAM legislation). The four *métropoles* presented in Table 2 have experienced strong demographic and economic growth and suburbanisation in recent decades, justifying an extension of their territories. There are only a few cases where a *métropole* was created through the amalgamation of an existing voluntary grouping with another EPCI: Grenoble, Nice and Rouen (Demazière 2018). The *Métropole Européenne de Lille* fused on 1 January 2017 with a suburban *communauté de communes* (community of municipalities in a rural area) with a population (5,900 inhabitants) smaller than the threshold stipulated in the NOTRe legislation. This tiny extension had great consequences: it led to the enlargement of the metropolitan council from 179 to 184 members and the re-election of the president and vice-presidents. This example may illustrate why elected representatives of the metropolitan EPCI hesitated (and probably continue to hesitate) to amalgamate with the EPCI of the urban fringes.

Fifteen years ago Alain Motte pointed out that while the size of the functional urban region was viewed by governments, researchers and technicians as a key factor in the analysis of territorial dynamics and the implementation of public planning measures, this is much less the case among local elected representatives (Motte 2006: 19f). Today, with the exception of Aix-Marseille-Provence, French *métropoles* have much smaller territories than the functional urban region. Many of them even have a smaller population than the population of the corresponding built-up area. This is particularly the case for Paris, Lyon, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Nantes, Nice, Grenoble and Toulon, i.e. eight of the most populous urban centres in France (Demazière 2018).

With regard to budget and employment figures, comparing France and Germany is not easy. For German cities, Table 1 gives a slightly distorted picture. Since the 1990s, many municipalities have transferred services to new organisational forms (private-public partnerships – PPPs, independent companies still owned by the municipality) or privatised public service providers such as hospitals, energy suppliers and municipal housing companies. In some cases, however, these companies are still under the control of the municipalities, but no longer appear in the balance sheet. A thorough comparison is therefore difficult. In terms of territorial size, it should be noted that almost all independent cities are quite large due to amalgamations and the annexation of smaller municipalities, which mostly took place in the early 1970s, although some date back to the 1930s. To maintain proximity to local citizens, the administrations of larger cities have councils on city district level. The three city-states Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen also have some political autonomy as well as administrative capacity at the district level.

The influence of new public management in France is also considerable. The transformation of urban communities into *métropoles* occurred at the same time as central government reduced funding to local authorities (-11 billion euros in 2015-2017), after a twenty-year period characterised by annual increases in funding levels. The budgets of the *métropoles* tended to grow, a trend that is explained by their assumption of new responsibilities but also by the transfer of competences from the municipalities and the voluntary amalgamation of services with them. In Lyon the budget of the *métropole* more than doubled between 2014 and 2016, from 1.8 to 3.9 million euros, thanks to the transfer of competences from the department of Rhône. In Nantes, the city's spending sank by almost 16% between 2014 and 2018 while the budget of the *Nantes Métropole* increased by 27% in the same period. The same situation can be observed in Bordeaux. The reality of the structure of the French *métropoles* is that it is a zero-sum game: the new institutions are largely fed by transfers of funding and personnel from the municipalities. Figures concerning the human resources attached to the municipality or *métropole* tend to be quickly outdated. In Toulouse, for instance, responsibility for the organisation of large cultural and sporting events was transferred from the city to the *métropole*, leading to a change of employer for a thousand municipal employees. In Bordeaux 15 municipalities (of 28) decided in 2016 to amalgamate a number of their municipal services with those of the *métropole*, thus increasing overnight the number of those employed by the *métropole* from 3,000 to 5,000. The growth in the number of French *métropoles* may have reached its limits. Are they not ultimately hyper-integrated complexes that

may collapse under their own weight? However, the German-French comparison demonstrates that the German cities employ even more staff than the French *métropoles*, some of which still have less employees than the central cities. In France, in the light of current proposals, the elected representatives are calling for responsibility for everyday tasks to be returned to the municipalities to allow the *métropoles* to refocus on their strategic role.

4.2 Hard space or soft governance: Why?

France and Germany show no convergence in terms of their institutional responses to the identification of economic, social and spatial challenges nested in metropolitan regions. We would like now to explore the reasons for such differences between two neighbouring countries jointly engaged in the European project.

To understand why institutional forms of metropolitan government emerge or not, we may ask: under what circumstances do local governments (like municipalities) seek cooperation for planning and coordination? Hulst and van Monfort (2011) studied the horizontal coordination of municipalities in eight European countries, including France and Germany. They found that there is a great variety with respect to the tasks, the scope, the degree of institutionalisation and the decision-making powers of cooperative arrangements. Their main argument to account for the diversity across nations is as follows: ‘municipalities are not very willing to establish joint authorities with formal decision-making powers to coordinate local policies. Therefore, quasi-regional governments seldom arise spontaneously. Local governments generally prefer planning forums, where decision-making takes place on the basis of consensus and local government autonomy is not at risk’ (Hulst/van Monfort 2011: 131).

According to Hulst and van Montfort (2011), the pressure on local governments to provide for regional coordination and planning through cooperation is lower when there is a strong intermediate tier of government with the formal competencies, resources and willingness to coordinate local policies or to establish regional plans. This is the case with some federal states in Germany, but the governments of the federal states use their powers to different degrees. Some intervene, other demonstrate the ‘shadow of hierarchy’ but never really use their powers, and the majority take a rather voluntarist attitude. The private sector has restricted influence as well. By contrast, in France, where the *régions* have limited policy domain and do not possess formal competencies in relation to local government, the pressure to formalise a metropolitan tier comes from the national government. The creation of *métropoles* seems marked by a triple continuity. The first is temporal: since the designation of *métropoles d’équilibre* (balancing metropolitan areas, 1964) and the creation of the first *communautés urbaines* (urban communities) in 1966, the point of view of the French national government has not varied on the need to go beyond the municipal level to deal with certain issues. This continuity is also institutional: the MAPTAM Act created a new type of EPCI and not a new form of local government (with the exception of Lyon). Thus the tradition of intermunicipal cooperation prevails, although the democratic deficit increases as more policy fields are attached to the

métropole. Finally, we have already underlined the continuity of territorial perimeters with those of the *communautés urbaines*, Grand Paris and Aix-Marseille-Provence aside.

For its part, the bottom-up German approach to metropolitan government has its limits. Many intermunicipal associations have operational and organisational autonomy but in terms of decision making they are creatures of the municipalities. Only the few regions with directly elected regional assemblies (Stuttgart, Hannover, the Ruhr since 2020) diverge from this pattern. In addition, the bottom-up approach is thwarted by the existence of an intermediate level (the federal states) which coordinates public interventions and defines the institutional framework for ‘metropolitan’ cooperation. In the case of metropolitan regions straddling several federal states, such as the Frankfurt Rhine-Main Metropolitan Region, metropolitan problems must be spatially redrawn; at worst they are ignored. In France, under the leadership of different governments over the past half century, a form of ‘hard’ metropolitan government has emerged. In the imaginaries, the metropolitan question is attached to that of large cities (Harrison/Fedeli/Feiertag 2020). This image was essential notably because for thirty years certain elected officials have launched bold and striking urban projects: urban regeneration operations, tram lines, business centres... Metropolitan power is of major importance at the political level and is a notable actor in terms of projects, but it is spatially narrow. Is the movement of intermunicipal cooperation which laid the foundations for the creation of *métropoles* actually a confinement? How is it possible to organise cooperation with peri-urban spaces that are part of the metropolitan system but claim to be autonomous? Here we see the full potential of *pôles métropolitains* to integrate *métropoles* into soft spaces.

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