

RETURN OF THE METRO-MODEL?
GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING IN
METROPOLITAN REGIONS UNDER CHANGE.
AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF
FRANCE, ITALY AND GERMANY

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Abstract

The governance of metropolitan regions is currently re-defined in many European states due to changes in the welfare states and ever-increasing global competition. In some states such as France and Italy, but also in Germany we observe the emergence of scale-specific governance arrangements and planning policies, partially bottom-up and contingent upon regional contexts, partially triggered by incentives and legislation of the central government. Italy and France, for instance, have recently adopted national laws introducing new institutional forms for metropolitan regions, the *Métropole* and *Città Metropolitana*. In the federal state of Germany, there is no such thing but there have been soft incentives of the national level leading to the nomination of eleven *Europäische Metropolregionen*. This chapter compares the recent developments in France, Italy and Germany and seeks to answer the question of who and what drives metropolitan reforms.

Keywords: Metropolitan Governance, Métropole, Città Metropolitana, Europäische Metropolregion.

1. Introduction

Recent legal reforms in France and Italy changed the status quo of metropolitan governance arrangements in these two countries to a significant degree. These reforms took shape in national laws and indicate in both cases a central government-led reform with the purpose of creating stronger metropolitan governments or even quasi-jurisdictions. In a way, the institutional solutions now in implementation contradict the position of the New Regionalism that was fashionable for many years (Norris, 2001; Rodríguez-Pose, 2008). This position highlighted competitiveness and soft and flexible forms of governance such as agencies, partnerships and networks. Considering the direction of recent reforms in Italy and France it's worth asking the question: do these reforms indicate a shift in the metropolitan governance debate? Is the metropolitan reform position fashionable again? In order to answer

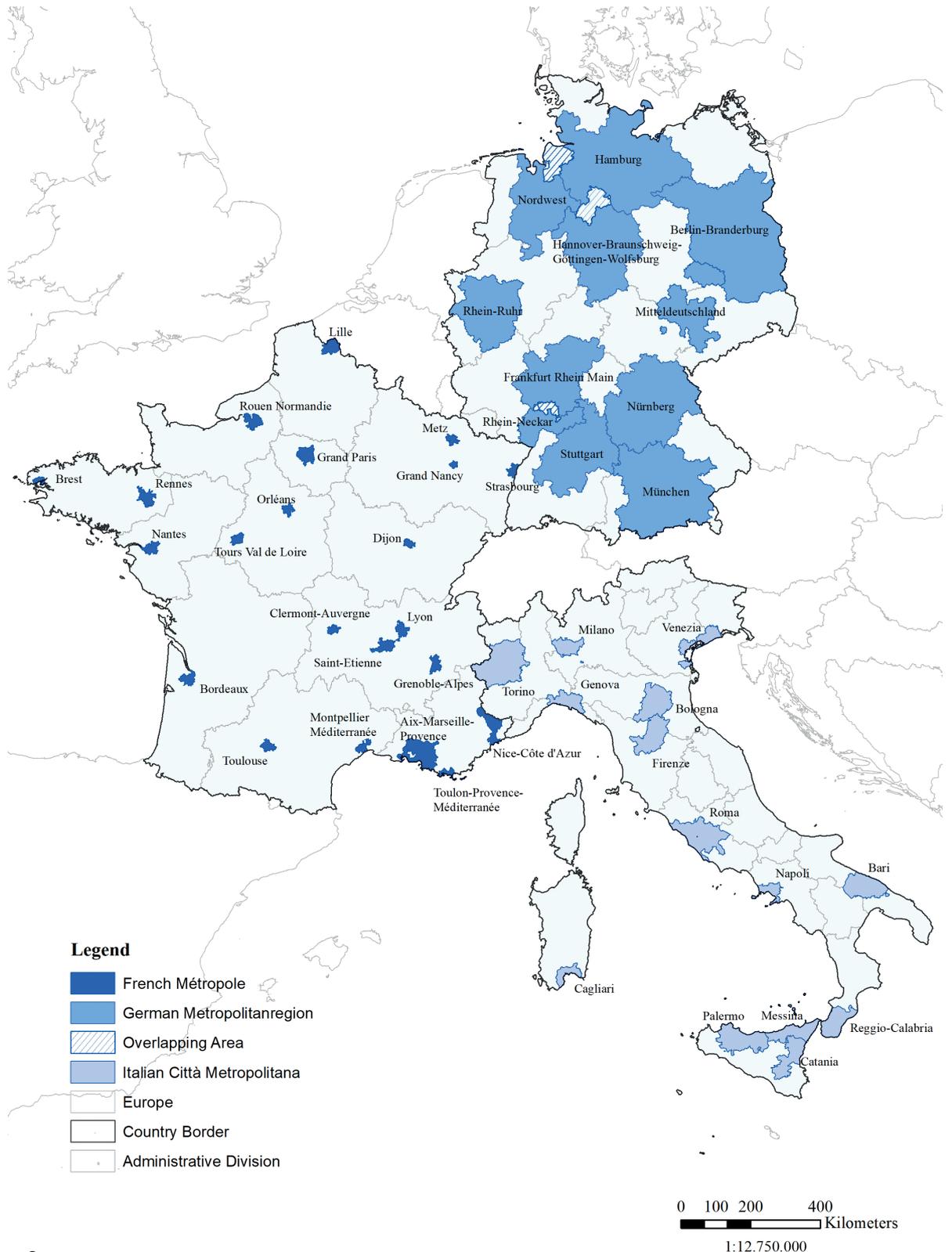
this question, this chapter compares the recent developments in France, Italy and Germany and seeks to answer the following questions:

- Which public functions are attributed to and accomplished at the metropolitan level?
- What kind of governance forms are established? Can we observe convergence?
- Which are the implications for strategic territorial coordination on this scale?

Germany, France and Italy have been chosen for a number of reasons (figure 1). The recent reforms in Italy and France, although following ongoing discussion since the 1990s, can be considered as critical junctures—at least on first sight—. Germany has been chosen because Germany presents a different local government system and, due to federalism, there is less state intervention. Germany is a dissimilar case from an institutional point of view but still, in some city regions, the metropolitan reform position is fashionable. The developments in the mentioned three states illustrate different pathways: we can characterize the German way as bottom-up, slowly emerging and therefore contingent upon regional contexts. In France and Italy, we observe more top-down approaches with strong incentives and new regulations given by the central government. However, although the state spatial strategies targeting metropolitan regions in the three countries use the vocabulary of coherent strategic governance and bounded territory, the empirical world reveals an assemblage of contradictory ideas about how a territory should be organized and governed.

In the paper, we will present the description and subsequent analysis of the development paths in national spatial development policies with regard to the concept of metropolitan regions in the three states. However, the term metropolitan region is fuzzy and in some cases, the term city region might be more appropriate. Hence, empirically the comparison is organ-

Figure 1. Metropolitan institutions in France, Italy and Germany



Sources:
Base map: Eurostat NUTS 2016, © EuroGeographics
Geographic Coordinate System: GCS_WGS_1984, GCS_RGF_1993, GCS_Monte_Mario

ised around four dimensions: institutional aspects, functional aspects (competition vs. welfare policies), ideas (reasons and arguments in favour of metropolitan reform) and spatial aspects (size and inter-scalar relationships). This differentiated approach allows for a more nuanced description of convergent or divergent trends.

The institutional dimension covers how competences are distributed in the multi-level system and which kind of institutions have been established in city-regional cooperation. The functional analysis of metropolitan governance distinguishes functions related to social reproduction and welfare such as housing, public transport, public services, environmental policy as well as func-

tions related to competitiveness and economic development (marketing, economic development, innovation policies). The dimension of ideas covers reasons and arguments used to justify reforms, showing the intended direction of changes (austerity, modernization of the public sector, competitiveness, territorial coherence). The spatial dimension refers to the perimeter of governance arrangements, taking into account the eventual overlay of different institutions dealing with city-regional problems and their relation to each other.

The article presents mid-term results of empirical research in the three states. Based on the current stage of our research, we will concentrate on national policies and discourses on metropolitan governance (what we call the politics of metropolitan governance). The research includes case study work in six metroregions (two in each country).

2. Change driven by national initiatives

Metroregions are increasingly seen as political objects of national policies as well as international policy discussions (Metropolis, 2017; Ahrend & Schumann, 2014; Rodríguez-Pose, 2008). In fact reforms of metropolitan governance are heavily influenced by national legislation and respective policy initiatives with the purpose of solving coordination failures in the public sector and land use planning or supporting the position of the big cities in global economic competition. International benchmarks and rankings as well as networks of metroregions such as METREX as well as definitions in use by ESPON or the OECD indicate the universal character of metropolitan governance (Ahrend & Schumann, 2014).

However, national urban systems (in terms of functions and morphology) as well as institutional frameworks and traditions of local self-government differ to a large extent and these factors have implications for the design of metropolitan governance in national contexts. Regions differ in size and often we find tailor-made local solutions—not only in a decentralized context as Germany but as we will see also in France—. Still, in all three countries under scrutiny, the national government showed significant interest in strengthening the metropolitan layer of planning and policy-making.

In Italy, a first trial by the national government in 1990 was largely a failure because the law only called for voluntary cooperation of municipalities of the major city regions (Tortorella & Allulli, 2014). The financial crisis, that forced Italy to implement harsh austerity measures, opened a window of opportunity to introduce the *Città Metropolitana* (CM) as a new intermunicipal body replacing the provinces in the fourteen biggest city regions. The *Città Metropolitana* found its way into the new constitution already in 2001 but it was the spending review act in 2009 and subsequent legislation in 2012 and 2013 that forced the regional governments to implement the CM in 2014.

In France, the tradition of intermunicipal cooperation is much stronger and older (Négrier, 2005). The

strengthening of the intermunicipal level has been an ongoing step-by-step process, dating back for decades in most city regions, e.g. to the first *communautés urbaines* introduced in the 1960ies. Still, in 2012 a debate about the territorial and functional reorganization of the state emerged in the context of the financial crisis, discussing the abolishment of the *départements* and more efficient forms of local government due to small municipalities and an overlap of competencies between territorial levels, resulting in high administrative costs compared to other countries. A sequence of legislative acts starting in 2010 introduced territorial reforms that led to a shift of competences towards regions and municipal groupings in the multilayer system, established a nation-wide coverage with intermunicipal groupings even in rural areas and enlarged territorial units by reducing the number of regions, setting a minimum size for municipal groupings and giving incentives for municipal amalgamations. Metropolitan regions were targeted by two subsequent laws in 2010 and 2014¹, the first one offering to the largest city-regions the possibility to transform existing municipal groupings into the new institutional form of *Métropole* and the second one coercing it for all municipal groupings with a minimum of 400,000 inhabitants, being the core of a functional urban area of 650,000 or more. Due to lobbying activities of smaller city regions, the criteria to voluntarily become a metropolis where weakened several times, e.g. to include former regional capitals (Beyer, 2017; Geppert, 2017). Thus the number of *Métropoles* grew from one (Nice) created in January 2012 to 22 until January 2018: Nice, Lyon, Bordeaux, Nantes, Toulouse, Grenoble, Lille, Montpellier, Rennes, Rouen, Strasbourg, Brest, Aix-Marseille, Grand Paris, Nancy, Tours Val de Loire, St Etienne, Clermont-Ferrand, Metz, Dijon, Orléans and Toulon. For the three biggest metropolitan areas Grand Paris, Aix-Marseille and Lyon, the law MAPTAM has created tailor-made institutional forms.

The German way of dealing with the challenges of metropolitan development and inter-municipal coordination differs a lot. In absence of national legislation, it's the task of the sixteen states to create metropolitan regions and respective institutional forms (Zimmermann, 2017). Some states have done so in the past but we can't say that strong metropolitan associations or even jurisdictions are a widespread phenomenon. The exception from the rule that national government plays no role in metropolitan politics is a joint initiative of the sixteen states and central government to create so-called European Metropolitan Regions (Blotevogel & Schmitt, 2006). The idea goes back to the discussion on the competitiveness of the German economy in the late 1990s. One of the arguments was that a network of big cities is the backbone of the German economy—in absence of a global city such as Greater Paris or the South-East of England—and needs political support, also from the European Commission.

To conclude, we can identify different patterns of national metropolitan policies:

¹ *Loi de réforme des collectivités territoriales (Loi RCT)* from the 16th december 2010 and *Loi de modernisation de l'action publique territoriale et d'affirmation des métropoles (Loi MAPTAM)* from the 27th january 2014.

- Coercion (Italy *Città Metropolitana* and France in the largest *Métropoles*),
- Incentives (France: new functions as well as financing) and
- Argumentative support (Germany).

3. Dimensions of Metropolitan Planning and Governance in France, Italy and Germany

3.1 Metropolitan institutions

France: Métropole and Pôle Métropolitain

When referring to institutions at the metropolitan level, the main attention is given to the *Métropole*, a hard, highly integrated form of municipal grouping corresponding to the metropolitan reform model. Soft, flexible networks have been promoted in 2004 by a national call for cooperation, now included in the laws RCT and MAPTAM under the name *Pôle Métropolitain*, and have been implemented in nineteen city regions until 2017 (Bariol-Mathais, 2017). Despite this, they have hardly played a role in national debates and do not control own resources. In nine city-regions, both institutions coexist or are in the making: these are Nantes, Rennes, Brest, Strasbourg, Rouen, Lyon, Nancy, Toulouse, Grenoble.

The *Métropole* is along with *communautés urbaines* (CU), *communautés d'agglomération* (CA) and *communautés de communes* (CC) one of four forms of municipal groupings created by national legislation and are the one having most competencies and resources. The *Métropole* are —with exception of Grand Lyon— organised as so called *établissement public de coopération intercommunale* (EPCI), meaning a “collaborative institution established by a group of municipalities, ruled by an assembly of representatives from the municipalities and a president” (Geppert, 2017, p. 226) and the possibility to raise own taxes. Grand Lyon is the only one where the municipal grouping has been merged with the *département* and has the status of a full-fledged local authority. This includes being competent to act in any domain if public interest is at stake (Geppert, 2017).

The *Métropole* fulfil a wide range of functions, partly prescribed by law, partially transferred by the municipalities on a voluntary basis. To do so, they possess large administrations (e.g. about 8.700 employees in Lyon and about 3.300 employees in Nantes). The existence of specialised technicians enables a professionalization of services and tasks transferred to the metropolitan level, especially for the small municipalities with less than 10.000 inhabitants. In terms of legitimacy and representation, the mayors of the member municipalities continue to play an important role within the metropolitan institutions as presidents and vice-presidents.

The creation of the *Métropole* has to be discussed as part of a longer trajectory of intermunicipal cooperation that replaces municipal amalgamations. This model has limitations in size if the small municipalities continue to exist and to play an important role for democratic representation and identification. The na-

tional laws leave room for locally fitted institutional rules and an adaptation over time. The law MAPTAM only represented a minor change for city regions such as Nantes that had already up scaled a wide range of municipal tasks to the intermunicipal level in the years before.

Italy: Città Metropolitana

In Italy, the Delrio law (2014) introduced the *Città Metropolitana* (CM) in fourteen Italian agglomerations (Turbertini, 2015; Crivello & Staricco, 2017). The CM is a new type of jurisdiction, replacing the provinces and being responsible for strategic planning. The implementation of the law still is cumbersome as the CM inherited some weaknesses of the provinces and in most cases, the spatial perimeter is much too small (Milan, Florence). In fact, Valeria Fedeli argues: “Rather than identifying a definitive boundary, the law should have focused more attention on devices able to generate and regenerate ‘territories of (for) policies’, ‘territories by design’, which should be based on the reciprocal, even if temporary, engagement of actors on a specific problem...”. (Fedeli, 2017, p. 269). It’s not an easy task to judge whether the CM constitutes a new (also in terms of stronger) institutional arrangement or whether the CM is just giving a new name to the former province without changing the factual capacity to act. The role of the CM is more coordinative than being an independent layer of policy-making and planning of important public policies such as transport, land use, tourism and environmental protection. At least during the transition period, problems of financing and endowment with staff hamper the establishment of a genuine layer of metropolitan policy-making. In terms of legitimacy and representation, the new body is more or less under the control of the member municipalities. The mayor of the core city is by law the head of administration and political leader of the CM. The assembly is rather small (24 councilors for city regions with more than 3 mill. inhabitants, 18 councilors for city regions with 800.000 to 3 mill. inhabitants and 14 for city regions with less than 800.000 inhabitants). Councilors are not elected directly for the regional assembly but have their mandate in the municipal council. The Metropolitan Conference constitutes the second chamber and gathers all the mayors of the city region. It exerts advisory and consultative functions (Tortorella & Allulli, 2014). To conclude, the institutional framework and the current conditions all justify the criticism of Italian scholar when writing about the recent reform (Fedeli, 2017; Crivello & Staricco, 2017). Still, the new instrument of the strategic plan provides the opportunity to give some strategic guidance for the development of the Italian city regions. The fact that the instrument is defined in a rather open and loose way in the national law turns out to be a disadvantage and advantage at the same time. In fact, preliminary evaluations show that the new arrangement and the new instrument were taken up differently in the 14 regions. Some city regions seem to have reached a new stage in the evolution of cooperation and it’s no surprise that the city region of Bologna is among the more promising cases because inter-municipal cooperation happened before the Delrio law and a first strategic plan has been made in this region already in 2013 (Jouve & Lefevre, 2002; Vandelli & Morisi, 2017).

Germany: Europäische Metropolregionen and City Regional Associations

The practice of metropolitan governance in Germany reveals less dynamic changes than Italy and France. What we rather observe is a continuous and flexible adaptation of existing legal frameworks based on the never challenged idea of autonomous self-government (Zimmermann, 2017). The 1990s brought some changes as the inclusion of private actors came up and new formats such as public-private-partnerships for tourism or marketing have been implemented in quite a few city regions. Major reforms took place but were exceptional. The most remarkable observation in Germany, that needs to be highlighted against the experience of the other countries, is the emergence of several scales of governance in quite a few of the German metropolitan regions. These multi-scaled arrangements are the result of the above-mentioned joined federal initiative called European Metropolitan regions. Priority for metropolitan regions was a relatively new idea in the context of German spatial planning that followed for decades the principle of equal and balanced living conditions. Prioritisation of a specific type of cities over others such as small towns, the peripheral or rural areas, was (and still is) uncommon. Following a controversial discussion about which city region deserves the distinguished title, the joined conference of ministers of the sixteen states and federal government responsible for territorial development and spatial planning opted for eleven regions (Harrison & Growe 2014). These regions are extremely big, cross borders of the states and include also large rural parts, thereby implementing the principle of urban-rural partnership. Different from Italy and France, the nomination does not imply any funding nor new functions. The regions are expected to agree upon some form of self-governance based on voluntary cooperation between public and private actors. However, due to a lack of incentives, most regions struggled to fill this void. As a result, the case of Germany presents a two scaled constellation: metropolitan regions that are large in size but weak in terms of governance and smaller city regions that are strong in inter-municipal governance. In fact, the real world of metropolitan governance in terms of institutional coordination of public transport, land use and landscape planning, economic development etc. is to be found on this smaller level. These arrangements are contingent upon local politics but some are quite strong and even have directly elected regional assemblies (Stuttgart and Hanover, the Ruhr region starting from 2020, Heinelt et al., 2011).

3.2 Functions at the metropolitan level

When the question of how to govern best a metropolitan region is at stake, functional argument is very influential. Which kind of function is accomplished best at the metropolitan level is linked to the type of institution and the area covered by them. Following Blatter (2008), we may argue that large, loosely organised cooperation territories are suitable for competitiveness issues, whereas welfare functions are rather exerted within stronger institutional arrangements (jurisdictions) in smaller areas covering the core city and surrounding municipalities. In the following, we describe how this turned out in the three countries.

Economic Development

Public functions related to competitiveness and economic development are city marketing, promotion of economic development and attraction of investors, innovation policies and large-scale urban projects. This focus favours light, performative forms of governance with a flexible, project-oriented geometry and the inclusion of private actors, particularly from the business sphere (Blatter, 2008). Hamburg and Lyon are prototypes of that kind of public policy orientation. Both cases have in common that actors from the economy have pushed metropolitan cooperation forward and have initiated a strong regional marketing. Competitiveness is not only addressed by policies of Grand Lyon but also on the larger scale of the *Pôle Métropolitain* (Carpenter & Verhage, 2014).

Blatter argues that this kind of performative policy characterised by an early self-designation as a metropolitan region, the successful establishment of the metropolitan region as a brand and a clear focus on large projects and events like in Hamburg, corresponds best to the German concept of 'European metropolitan regions' promoted at the national level since the 1990ies (Blatter, 2008, pp. 143-144).

In the case of Italy, economic development is part of the functional portfolio of the strategic planning approach but not anchored in the governance arrangement in a specific way. The functions allocated to the CM are identical with the former province. So we can't say that economic development constitutes a specific governance function in the context of CM. Private actors are not part of the arrangement.

Welfare and Cohesion

A focus on welfare and social reproduction functions is specifically targeting the residential population of the city region, and includes policies such as housing, public transport, public services and environmental policies. Many of those functions are provided at a territorial level above the municipality (i.e. the county level as second tier of local government) but not necessarily at a metropolitan level. Joint service provision is common for network infrastructures such as water provision and wastewater treatment, energy and public transport and has often been the beginning of inter-municipal cooperation in form of single-purpose organisations.

In our small sample, the French *Métropole* is the only one integrating most of the welfare functions. Still, social service provision is the core competence of the *départements* in France. The *Métropole* would have the legal possibility to take it over but are not very keen to do so because of the high costs related to it. Lyon is an exception: in this case the all the *départemental* function were taken over by the *Métropole* of Grand Lyon (including hospitals). Environmental protection in France is a task of the regions (Geppert, 2017, 233). The *Métropole* has compulsory competences concerning air pollution, energy transition and climate. Housing is in France a task at the metropolitan level. The municipal groupings elaborate a strategic document (*Programme local d'habitat* PLH) for the

whole territory that can be integrated into the land use plan (e.g. Lyon).

In Germany, housing and social services are a task of the counties and county-free cities. Due to the large size of the European metropolitan regions in Germany, those functions are not organised at that level. Planning associations and other types of inter-municipal associations in city regions usually have functions in regional planning and landscape planning, public transport and, in some cases, regional parks. For instance, creating a network of green corridors and bicycle path both for residents and tourists has been one of the core tasks of the regional planning association in the German Ruhr Area. The metropolitan city of Hanover is exceptional in this regard as the functions are rather similar to Lyon. So, Lyon and Hanover share some characteristics in this regard and are among the strongest metropolitan governments in Europe.

In the case of the CM the main function is the coordination of public services and infrastructures of regional relevance. This may include public transport, waste management, provincial streets, etc. The provision of social services is not the main task of the CM but with regard to territorial cohesion, the Italian government created a programme for the structural funds period 2014-2020 called PON Metro (*Programma operativo nazionale plurifondo Città metropolitane 2014 2020*). The programme explicitly refers to urban regeneration but gives priority to disadvantaged areas in the core city.

Territorial Coordination

Territorial Coordination on the city regional level is partially the task of planning associations founded for this purpose, partially taken over by the metropolitan institutions described above. This task can be carried out either in form of an informal strategic coordination or in form of a binding planning document.

In France, planning has been upscaled in the current generation of plans, both strategic planning and land use regulations. Urban planning is a compulsory competence of the *Métropole* and is now carried out at the intermunicipal level, producing one regulation for all the municipalities of the *Métropole*, whereas the right to deliver building permits remains at the municipal level. In addition to that, a strategic document, the so-called SCoT, is produced at a larger scale covering several municipal groupings. This document is binding for land use planning; it is not parcel-sharp but fixes densities and the maximum of housing units per municipality. This task is carried out by planning associations that coordinate the process and usually rely on public planning agencies (*agences d'urbanisme*) for the technical work. This association has institutionally evolved to a *Pôle Métropolitain* in the Cases of Nantes-St Nazaire and Pays de Brest, meaning that it has enlarged its competences and is meant to contribute to plan implementation by initiating projects and preparatory studies.

Germany has a long tradition of regional planning and territorial coordination and in many city regions planning (i.e. Stuttgart) was the main issue leading the creation of city-regional associations of municipalities. Due to the high development pressure in most of the

German city regions, the existing arrangements have reached their limits. A network of cities in the Ruhr area and the planning association Frankfurt/Rhine-Main introduce a new type of plan, the regional land-use plan. The land use plan usually is a local plan but can be shifted to a regional planning association, giving the competence to allocate land uses in more details than a regional plan. In the case of the Ruhr area, six municipalities have adopted a regional Land Use Plan in 2010, the planning region Frankfurt/Rhine-Main in 2011.

Territorial coordination is the main function of the CM. The instrument is the strategic plan that is expected to give guidance for the territorial, social and economic development of the region. Due to the broad approach, the existing strategic plans show a high variety of methodological approaches, goals and contents. The strategic plan is more a procedure than a plan led approach and his binding quality is vague. The plan led approach is more visible for the regional territorial plan, a spatial planning instrument taken over from the province (*pianificazione territoriale*). The regional territorial plan is binding for the municipalities and coordinates land use, in particular for infrastructures and green spaces. However, regarding the capacity to steer the territorial development, the plan is less precise and detailed compared the German and French equivalents.

3.3 Ideas driving metropolitan reforms

The dimension of ideas, meaning shared systems of ideas, is used in political science as one of the factors explaining political change (Blyth, 2002). As we have seen above, the national level of policymaking supported the strengthening of some kind of metropolitan governance during the last decade in all the case study countries. The governments refer to some extent to similar arguments supporting the institutionalisation of metropolitan regions, but we can see that the ideas are prioritised differently from country to country, depending on their national context.

The primary ideas that have been associated with metropolitan regions and used to justify the territorial reforms regarding metropolitan institutions are competitiveness (mostly in Germany), efficiency in the public sector (stronger in France and Italy) and austerity (largely in Italy).

Legitimacy is —if mentioned at all— rather a counter-argument supporting the continued relevance of municipalities as metropolitan governance is not yet democratic enough, without a direct election in many cases and seen as too far from the citizens to identify with it (Geppert, 2017). Again, Germany is an exception as two city regions (Hannover and Stuttgart) have a directly elected regional assembly and a third one, the Ruhr region will have direct elections in 2020. In Italy, the issue of legitimacy has been raised by academics as they see shortcomings in the way the *Città Metropolitana* is now institutionalized.

Competitiveness

The rise of metropolitan regions has often been associated with the logic of economic competitiveness in

a globalised world (Jonas, 2012). In fact, we find this idea in the German as well as in French discourse but in Germany, discourses on regionalism are different with regard to the spatial scale. While the creation of the larger European Metropolitan Region was driven by arguments of competitiveness, the strengthening of city regions in terms of governance is based on a broader agenda of better coordination of planning and public policies. Here, the ideas of effective and efficient public service provision and cohesion are used often in combination with competitiveness.

Regarding the European Metropolitan regions in Germany, the name already evokes that those city regions are supposed to have enough weight to compete with other large city regions on a European scale. Within the national spatial vision (*Leitbilder*) from 2006 and the updated version from 2016, metropolitan regions are the key element visualised in the map "Competitiveness and innovation"² and are supposed to be the main engines of economic growth: "The German metropolitan regions of European importance are the essential national economic areas with a high productivity and are facing international competition" (MKRO, 2016, p. 8). This highlighting of metropolitan regions produced a domestic discussion if a paradigm change neglecting the equal provision of public services was about to happen (Blotevogel & Schmitt, 2006), although the metropolitan regions did not receive any specific funding from the federal level. Hesse & Leick (2013, p. 349) argue that metropolitan regions are equated with economic growth in the spatial vision and that this connotation produced a dynamic to expand the number and size of metropolitan regions because of political pressure from local and regional actors.

When talking about metropolitan cities, the French government and experts³ are using the idea of competitiveness as a dominant idea as well. On one hand, the global city discourse is evoked, describing the condition of an increased competition of cities (keywords European competition, Globalisation). On the other hand, they refer to the metropolitan reform discourse, arguing that competitiveness could be increased through integrated metropolitan institutions with functions such as marketing, economic development and innovation. But it has to be underlined that the idea of competitiveness only takes a minor role in the overall debate about the territorial reforms that were deemed to be necessary by the government. In line with this, the metropolis themselves are only one element and the reform of municipal grouping concerned all French municipality. One could even argue that the reforms induced deeper changes in rural municipalities than in some of the metropolitan regions that had already highly integrated municipal groupings before (e.g. Nantes).

The idea of competitiveness competes with the idea of the equal treatment of territories both in Germany

and France (territorial cohesion and urban-rural linkages). Competitiveness as an argument is comparably weak in Italy.

Efficiency

This idea relates to an increased efficiency of the public administration achieved by functional reforms, the merging of administrations and a modernisation of the state. This is by far the most important idea behind the territorial reforms in France (Beyer, 2017; Geppert, 2017; Vanier, 2017). Keywords such as an excessive number of layers, redundancies and dysfunctioning are frequently used to justify the need for action. The reforms were supposed to rationalise the distribution of competencies and lead to more coherent policy making at the local level (see e.g. Sarkozy, 2009). One of the roots are small municipalities with low administrative capacities due to the fact that unlike in many other countries only minor municipal amalgamations have taken place. In addition, in France high expenses for public administrations are relevant. *Métropoles* are one of four types of municipal groupings that are supposed to solve the problem of fragmentation.

In Germany, an enhanced efficiency of the local level of administration in large city regions has been an important argument for the local debates in the Hanover region justifying the amalgamation of the city of Hanover and the Kreis Hanover and thereby creating the strongest, most integrated metropolitan institution in Germany (direct election, large competencies) (Blatter, 2008). But it did not play a key role in the national initiative to nominate European Metropolitan regions. The conception of metropolitan regions behind is favouring very large, loosely coupled regional cooperations with a focus on marketing and large-scale projects (Blatter, 2008). The vision document 2016 evokes the idea of efficiency only in the context of large-scale networks of regional actors as well as traffic connections and does not attribute it to the European Metropolitan regions.

In Italy, simplification and higher efficiency of the public sector is an ongoing issue and the provincial level turned out to be the weakest one in the political struggles (Bachetti, 2011). Since the introduction of the CM in the 1990s was a failure, the province tried to take over the role of a coordinating unit in Italian city regions with mixed results (Fedeli, 2017). The reform in 2014 clearly had the purpose to create stronger agency for territorial development and better coordination of services.

Austerity

Austerity pressures in the wake of the financial crisis can be an argument for inter-municipal cooperation to be able to cope with reduced budgets. According to Raudla & Tavares, this has been the case in Italy, the UK, the Netherlands and Iceland. Whereas in Italy na-

² This is the first one of three vision maps that are included in the document in 2006. The *Leitbilder* 2016 contain four strategic concepts: 'Enhancing competitiveness', 'Ensuring the provision of public services', 'Controlling and sustainably developing landuses' and 'Shaping climate change and the transformation of the energy system'.

³ A document analysis of six speeches of the president or minister, one report of an influential expert commission and one publication of the ministry has been carried out: Sarkozy 22th October 2008 and 5th march 2009, Hollande 20th November 2012, Hortefeux 19th January 2010, Lebranchu 10th April 2013 and 29th January 2014, Comité pour la réforme des collectivités locales 2009, Ministère de l'Intérieur 2011.

tional reforms were carried out, the increased inter-municipal cooperation in the three other countries resulted from bottom-up efforts of the local governments struggling with fiscal constraints (Raudla & Tavares, 2018). In fact, the analysis of policy documents shows that the relevant argument in Italy was cost savings by eliminating the provinces.

In France, the financial crisis and budget deficit created international pressure from the EU and the International Monetary Fund for administrative reforms (Beyer, 2017). Nevertheless, austerity only played a very minor role in the debates around the laws RCT and MAPTAM. The idea is marginally used to support the need for a more efficient territorial administration. In line with that, the French reforms rather aimed to stabilize public expenses and did not suppress any territorial level.

In the German debate about metropolitan regions, austerity did not play any role at all at the national level but in a context-specific way on the local level. In fact, cost savings was one argument among others when the reform in Hanover was accomplished in 2001 (long before the financial crisis). Due to the high debts of many German municipalities and a shrinking population in some regions, especially peripheral ones, austerity is rather an issue in connection with sufficient service provision (e.g. medical, education) in areas with a low population density or former industrial areas with a high share of unemployment.

3.4 The Spatial dimension of metropolitan cooperation

There are considerable differences in size between countries and between different regions in one country when talking about the politics of metropolitan governance. Furthermore, which is the appropriate perimeter of a metropolitan region can be answered differently, either by a political definition (as area of cooperation) or analytically (as functional area). Therefore the spatial dimension of a metropolitan region is not clear-cut.

The metropolitan level in the national multilevel systems

Metropolitan regions are an additional (or alternative) territorial level of the public administration but are in most cases no full-fledged territorial authorities. In France, the municipal groupings called *Métropole* come very close to this status. With the exception of Grand Lyon, they are not replacing any of the four levels municipality (*commune*) – *département* – *région* – state (*état*) and are forming together with the other three types of municipal groupings an additional nationwide level between municipality and *département*. Both have handed over parts of their competences to the new layer and have been weakened by the emergence of the *Métropole* (Beyer, 2017). *Métropoles* are in general smaller than a *département*, ranging from approximately 143 to 3.150 km² with a median of 491 km² (*Département* without *outre-mer*: from 105 to 9.976 km² with a median of 5.880 km²).

In Italy, the *Città Metropolitane* have replaced the former provinces and are now forming the second tier of local government between municipalities and regions in the fourteen city regions. Their size ranges from rather large perimeters in the case of Torino (6.830 km²) and Rome (5.363 km²) to smaller ones in the case of Milan (1.575 km²), Genova (1.838 km²) and Venice (2.472 km²).⁴ In most cases they do not coincide with commuter sheds or other criteria to define boundaries of city regions, Milan being the extreme case (Fedeli, 2017).

In Germany, the *Europäische Metropolregionen* are much larger entities, ranging from 5.637 to 30.546 km² (2017, Monitoring IKM). Instead of an additional horizontal level below the *Bundesländer*, their logic is to overcome administrative borders, especially in the case of the three city-states Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen. Seven out of eleven metropolitan regions cross the borders of the German states. At the same time, the metropolitan cooperation spaces partially overlap, meaning that some municipalities are partners in two metropolitan regions.

Spatial fit: administrative and functional boundaries

In France, the *Métropoles* consist of the urban core of the metropolitan regions with a few surrounding municipalities: most of them roughly correspond to the continuously built-up area, whereas some (e.g. Lyon, Nice, Bordeaux, Toulouse) are even smaller than that. The large *Métropole d'Aix-Marseille-Provence* is the only one corresponding in size to the functional area⁵, whereas the others are smaller (Geppert, 2017, p. 235f). The *Métropole* is composed of member municipalities, meaning that its perimeter is defined by municipal borders. Their territory is situated within one *département* and one region apart from the exceptional cases of Aix-Marseille and Grand Paris crossing departmental borders. This logic is in line with the hard institutional form.

In Italy, the former borders of the province were kept without adapting them when the *Città Metropolitana* was created. This leaves unsolved a problem that is virulent since the last territorial reforms of the provinces in the 1990s. Some of the provinces are small, just covering a suburban perimeter but not a functional metropolitan region. The Florence-Prato agglomeration is a case in point (Paba et al., 2017). This makes the core cities stronger.

Due to the soft, loosely coupled governance arrangements of German metropolitan regions, the nomination of Metropolitan regions by the MKRO was not linked to a clear definition of the area. The question of drawing a border was in some region first raised when initiating a regional monitoring in 2005 (Pütz, 2016). The outline of the cooperation area has remained fuzzy, variable depending on topics and underlying frequent redefinition. It has become larger because of political reasons not to exclude anyone (Hesse & Leick, 2013) and build urban-rural partnerships.

⁴ Source: <https://osservatorio.urbanit.it>

⁵ *Aire urbaine* defined by INSEE as group of adjoining municipalities where at least 40 % of the employed resident population works in the centre.

Enlargement of metropolitan cooperation areas?

To conclude this section, we can say that the three states show different trajectories. In France, the focus is on integration and bundling of functions in a given territory, or to put it in a different way: evolution of institution while keeping the territorial dimension stable. The ultimate result is the strengthening of the core city, not least because its mayor usually is also the leader of the *Métropole*. Still, the question what remains for the *départements* is left open. The exceptional case is Aix-Marseille where the government imposed also a new territorial form, i.e. bringing together two cities that did not cooperate much in the past, the ultimate result being an enduring conflict. In the case of the first *Métropole* Nice, four municipal groupings voluntarily merged to reach the necessary size. A further expansion of the *Métropole* towards the functional area is also limited by the small size of municipalities. This would complicate governing the metropolis and eventually slow down decision-making. The solution found so far is an enlarged perimeter for planning. Some ScoT cover larger areas and some regions make use of the InterScoT (joining several ScoT). In addition, soft forms of cooperation within a *Pôle Métropolitain* e.g. in the case of Lyon – St.-Etienne and Nantes – St. Nazaire have been established.

A more flexible and multi-scaled approach in defining governance territories is hardly visible in the Italian case. The boundary of the former province is identical with CM. In a more top-down oriented approach, some regional governments use their spatial planning tools to create functional regions. This is, for instance, the case for the Piana Fiorentina, a regional landscape park in the Florence – Prato – Pistoia sub-region (based on so-called PIT, *Progetti Integrati Territoriali*).

The enlargement of cooperation areas under the scheme European Metropolitan Regions in Germany was driven by two partly contradictory arguments: 1) in a globalized and highly competitive economy only large and visible city regions will succeed; 2) due to the norm of balanced living conditions an arrangement for urban-rural partnership needs to be established.

4. Conclusion: International comparison of Governance and Planning in Metropolitan Regions

The comparison reveals path-dependent patterns in all three countries. In absence of detailed and binding national legal prescriptions, the German metropolitan governance arrangements are highly dependent on local context and the willingness of the state government to support the creation of city regions. The advantage is that—at least in principle—inter-municipal coordination and service provision can be established on all spatial scales and in all functional realms that are considered appropriate. Central governments in France and Italy exert more influence, providing one size fits all solutions. However, in the case of France, we observe a loosening of this tight framework, allowing for more variation. Italy reveals a similar pattern, the difference being that the cities did not have a choice and that we can't observe smaller city regions that take the opportunity to become stronger. What distinguishes France and Germany from Italy is the emergence of multi-scaled arrangements (i.e. the

Pôle Métropolitain and the *Europäische Metropolregion* as an additional layer above the city regions) but in both cases, we can't speak of a clearly differentiated approach.

Does form follow function? Yes and no. Although the creation of metropolitan regions is influenced by functions (competitiveness), metropolitan policies are done at the national level and contingent on the urban system, the structure of territorial authorities and traditions of spatial development policies. The difference in terms of spatial relationships between the three countries is intriguing. While in all three countries the misfit between administrative boundaries and functional urban regions is one of the major drivers of reforms, the solutions differ to a large extent and deviate in most cases significantly from the functional interwoven area. In France as well as in Italy the recent reforms seek to adapt and make stronger existing institutions while not changing the spatial perimeter (i.e. the *communauté urbaine* and province). Germany displays a different solution, trying to include the rural hinterland. The counterpart of the French *Métropole* and the Italian *Città Metropolitana* in terms of functions and size is in Germany not the EMR but regional planning associations (referring to city regions).

What differs in Italy is the lack of clear functionality of the CM as the municipalities did not shift any responsibilities. In fact, the biggest difference between the three states is the type of ideas and the functional prescriptions. Austerity has led to a territorially un-specific and functional vague reform in Italy. The agenda is more mixed in Germany, also in terms of separating scales functionally. In addition, we state that competitiveness is not very decisive but efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector is a much stronger idea (driven by austerity in Italy and less in France).

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