METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE IN GERMANY –AN EXAMINATION OF CROSS BORDER METROPOLITAN REGIONS

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1   INTRODUCTION

In the recently published Swiss Spatial Development Report (SSDR) sustainable development is outlined as the basic principle of the proposed overall spatial concept. As one strategy for metropolitan regions to implement the overall spatial concept it names the development of metropolitan governance structures (ARE 2005). For the last years, Switzerland has taken up the concept of metropolitan regions politically. In Germany it is already well established and was first introduced in the middle of the 1990s. This article will therefore try to exploit the experiences of German cross-border metropolitan regions for the Swiss metropolitan regions faced with similar (federal) structures.

The Swiss context of metropolitan governance will be briefly considered in section 2. The theoretical background of metropolitan governance will be explained in section 3 and evaluation criteria will be established. In section 4, those criteria will then be used to examine and compare the structures of cooperation of three German metropolitan regions (Hamburg, Rhine-Main, Rhine-Neckar) each stretching over three federal states. The article will focus on the extent to which the structures of cooperation in the above mentioned case studies fulfil the criteria of metropolitan governance. The research is based on current literature of metropolitan governance and publications by and on the relevant regional actors.

It will be argued, that the structures of cooperation of the examined regions have been undergoing profound changes recently. The findings show that they partly fulfil the criteria of metropolitan governance. A number of shortcomings will be identified as well as positive developments of potential interest for other regions.

2   THE SWISS CONTEXT OF METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE

The SSDR identifies five metropolitan regions (Metropolitanregionen) in Switzerland: Zurich, Basel, Geneva-Lausanne, Bern, and Tessin. As development poles they are intended to contribute to nation-wide sustainable development through dynamic economic growth (ARE 2005).

On the agglomeration level: Since 2000 the federation has introduced an all-embracing agglomeration policy. In this context the federal government, cantons and communities have elaborated a code of practice for improved horizontal and vertical cooperation within agglomerations. The overall objective of this code is to support the agglomerations in building up governance structures for the entire agglomeration. As a result, a large number of governance structures have been developed during the last few years.

In contrast to this all-embracing approach on the agglomeration level, all-embracing governance structures on the metropolitan level are neither defined nor in place. However, there exist already a multiplicity of cooperation initiatives (partly as a result of the mentioned agglomeration policy) that can be considered as first indications of metropolitan governance such as the "Greater Zurich Area", the "Plattform Aargau-Zurich" or the "Agglo Obersee" in the metropolitan area of Zurich, the "Trinationale Agglomeration Basel" and the "Verein Region Bern" or the "Conseil du Léman" and the "Comité régional Franco-Genevois" in the metropolitan region Geneva-Lausanne. In any case, most of those governance structures do not cover the whole metropolitan region and/or are lacking implementation competence. A basic problem is the lack of or very weakly developed regional identity on this level. The traditional Swiss federalism with a very strong local autonomy and identity is probably a cause for this as are the very small administrative entities (compared to European average).

In recent years metropolitan regions and thus metropolitan governance have gained political importance in the Swiss context as it has in the German. Having considered the political context in Switzerland, the following section will look at the theoretical background of metropolitan governance.

3 GOVERNANCE IN METROPOLITAN REGIONS – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Today urban areas are characterised by complex and increasing functional and territorial interdependencies in a regional context. Metropolitan regions in particular face a multitude of challenges that can only be dealt with efficiently at the regional level due to these interdependencies. Traditional modes of government have proved to be inadequate, calling for new instruments on the regional level integrating additional actors from the business and civil societies (Benz, 2005: 404ff).

Metropolitan Governance will be used in this article as a particular form of regional governance of metropolitan regions. According to Fürst, regional governance describes a combination of government and network based negotiating systems that integrates actors of different levels of action. This regional process- and issue-orientated self-steering structure is based on voluntary participation but it should be at the same time capable of producing binding decisions (Fürst, 2002).

Following the OECD principles (OECD, 2001) and Fürst (Fürst, 2004: 48ff) this vague definition will be complemented by criteria, functioning as an evaluation framework for the analysis of the governance structures of the case studies. The main criterion is the capacity to act as a basis to deal with policies at the level of the entire metropolitan region. To evaluate this capacity to act, factors in three categories can be identified:

1. Metropolitan tasks
The generally relevant tasks to be performed at the level of the metropolitan region are:
- developing strategies based on the principles of sustainable development;
- planning at a regional level;
- coordinating and steering regional programmes, projects and actions;
- providing services (in e.g. communication, mobility, trade fairs and congresses, social services, recreation and ecology);
- facilitating regional competition;
- fostering regional identity.

To transfer competences from traditional local steering structures to governance structures affecting the entire metropolitan region is an important condition for being able to deal with the above mentioned regional tasks.

2. Participation of relevant regional actors
The particularity of metropolitan governance structures is the integration of actors of different levels of action (government/administration, economy, socio-cultural sector). A common regional identity is thus an essential precondition for intensive cooperation of these different actors.

3. Coherency of the organisational infrastructure
The organisational infrastructure is coherent if it takes into consideration and integrates the existing institutional infrastructure. Furthermore, it must follow the principle of transparency and it must contain a clear and well known allocation of rights and duties. It must also be legitimised on a political level and by democratic procedures to be able to produce (self-) binding decisions. In addition, it is an advantage if the governance structures comprise of a regional agency functioning as a development motor with sufficient financial and personal resources.

The cooperation perimeter is focussed on the entire metropolitan region. Metropolitan regions are defined as agglomerations that are characterised by their extraordinary significance within the international network of city regions. They are distinguished by economic strength, strong infrastructure, political and economic decision-making levels, a small-meshed network of product-oriented service providers and a high demographic potential (IKM, 2003: 1). Metropolitan regions are agglomerations of three groups of particular metropolitan functions, namely the innovation, the gateway and the regulations function (Blotevogel, 2000: 147).

4 METROPOLITAN REGIONS IN GERMANY – CASE STUDIES

The term (European) Metropolitan Region was introduced into the German discussion as a spatial planning concept in 1995 by the German Ministerial Conference on Regional Planning. It defined a network of seven metropolitan regions that was extended in 2005 by four further regions. As motors of the social, economic and cultural development the metropolitan regions shall sustain the competitiveness of Germany and Europe and contribute to the European integration. They shall develop a joint responsibility within not only the functional regions but also with the peripheries. The introduction of the concept of metropolitan regions has added to the start-up and advancement of regional initiatives without any financial or instrumental support (Sinz, 2005: Iff). Sustainable development as the legally binding overall principle for all levels of spatial planning in Germany is also the guiding principle of regional planning in metropolitan regions.

Three German metropolitan regions were chosen as case studies for this article: Hamburg, Rhine-Main (around Frankfurt on Main), and Rhine-Neckar (around Mannheim). This choice was determined by the fact that these are the only metropolitan regions stretching over the territory of three federal states (having in mind the Swiss situation), that the institutional arrangements of the regions is changing considerably, and that the regions are characterised by different relations between the states and the local level.

4.1   Characterisation of the structures of cooperation

A short characterisation of the structures of cooperation of the case study regions is given below.

Hamburg

The Hamburg metropolitan region -Metropolregion- is made up of the federal state of Hamburg and counties of the states of Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony. In 1991, these three states established a Joint State Planning Department representing three institutional layers and bodies respectively. Firstly, as a strategic layer a steering group, a planning council, and a regional conference; secondly, as operational layer a support committee and working groups; and lastly, as third layer an office of the Metropolregion is about to be established.

This structure includes mainly public actors on the state level and allows only for minor participation of the local level and for non-public actors. The cooperation is informal but implementation-oriented by deciding on a list of primary and model projects. The above mentioned intended office (third layer), an improved participation of the local level and of non-public regional actors and institutions is anticipated in the near future. A further body on the strategic layer will be added to the structures, namely a regional council, to improve explicitly the participation of further regional actors and institutions on the decision-making processes.

Rhine-Main

The boundaries of the Rhine-Main metropolitan region are regarded as being blurred, though among regional key actors especially from the economic sphere the understanding is that the region stretches from the state of Rhineland-Palatinate over Southern Hessia to Bavaria (Blatter, 2004: 10). No institution or organisation has been officially assigned with integral responsibilities for the entire region. Instead, a number of public institutions with differing and partly overlapping competences and spaces of responsibility adds a large number of initiatives with a diverse membership and objectives as well as regions of reference. In 2005 this multitude has even led to a 'First Initiatives Platform' of more than a dozen organisations. No binding arrangements facilitating regional cooperation exist between the states.

In particular, three motors for the development of the regional structures of cooperation should be highlighted:

1. The planning association -Planungsverband- established in 2001 for the very core of the region only in Hessia. During its first years of existence, it consolidated and occupied topics on the regional agenda. The purpose was to take on functions of a regional agency, providing initiatives going well beyond its assigned responsibilities and boundaries and even across state borders such as the Regionalpark RhineMain or the regional business development association that also counts universities and providers of infrastructure like the airport operator among its members. Its statutory responsibilities limits the planning association basically to regional land-use and landscape planning.

2. In 2000 the Lord Mayor of Frankfurt started an initiative by inviting the Lord Mayors and county supervisors from all of Southern Hessia as well as from Mainz and Aschaffenburg, the two most important cities outside Hessia constituting the region, to join a regional conference -Regionalkonferenz-. This conference decides on major regional initiatives (e.g. bids for the Olympic Games and as Cultural Capital of Europe) and sets up working groups that facilitate for example cluster

networks or regional culture projects. The initiative is partly but explicitly set up to prevent state level intervention in the region, which the law creating the planning association allows for.

3. In 1996 regional actors mainly from the business community founded an economic initiative –Wirtschaftsinitiative-. This was intended as a platform for economically oriented debates and also projects on the Metropolregion-level, however, it became an important player in the region. In 2003 the initiative became the facilitator of a vision defining process for the Rhine-Main region being open to everybody interested (more than 1,000 so far). This regional workshop -Regionalwerkstatt- aims not only at a vision but at a voting for priority projects and at their funding and implementation (Masterplan).

Rhine-Neckar

Since 1969 state treaties between the states of Baden-Wurttemberg, Hessia and Rhineland-Palatinate have provided the basis for cooperation mainly on spatial planning but also on development tasks by establishing a municipal planning association -Raumordnungsverband-. The association has developed into an advocate for regional development that facilitates a large number of initiatives for economic, cultural and for example sporting development. The state treaty has been amended in July 2005 reshaping the association responsible for an enlarged territory and strengthened in its role as regional advocate. From 2006 it will be responsible for regional development and management, supported by the take-over of the responsibilities for business development and location marketing, for regionally important congresses, fairs, culture and sports events.

In 2000 regional key actors from the political, the economic, the scientific, the cultural, and the social level started regional talks -Regionalgespräch- on regionally important issues leading to a vision for the Rhine-Neckar-triangle as the region was now called -Vision 2015-. The vision named important objectives and a number of projects. The key actors involved in this process have founded an initiative for the future -Initiative Zukunft Rhein-Neckar-Dreieck-. It is supported by the largest private company in the region (BASF), which not only finances its office but is also sponsoring its projects. The initiative now shares the role as regional motor with the planning association in a mutually sustaining manner. In 2004 and 2005 respectively, the foundation of the initiative was broadened by the involvement of a large number of private companies and by public participation activities.

4.2   Synthesis of the structures of cooperation

The case study regions will be examined and compared below according to the criteria established in section 3.

Metropolitan tasks

Hardly any competences are being transferred to the governance structures on the regional level from the established public decision-making levels (municipalities, counties, states), except for regional planning in Rhine-Neckar, parts of business development in Rhine-Neckar and Rhine-Main, and marketing in all of the regions. This transfer of competences can be seen as the result of intensive debates in all the regions.

All regions experience strategy processes in addition to traditional spatial planning. Processes of strategy development marked the starting point in the Hamburg region (Regional Development Concept RDC) or were an important catalyst for deepened and more complex structures of cooperation for Rhine-Neckar (Vision 2015). Though both have no formal basis they show a remarkable orientation on implementation. An internationalisation strategy of the region is in preparation by the Metropolregion Hamburg. The statutory strategy process by the regional planning associations for Southern Hessia finished in 2005, in parallel with the privately organised Regionalwerkstatt designated to the whole region and to be finished in early 2006 might have similar positive effects. But they are far more fragmented and not as inclusive regarding the key regional actors compared to the other regions.

Only the Rhine-Neckar planning association has been assigned the responsibility of formal planning for the metropolitan region and will hold implementation competence from 2006. In both of the other cases regional planning is limited to the state borders. Network-based initiatives are not able to relieve public institutions in regional planning significantly.

All of the regions own only marginal formal instruments of steering and coordinating due to minimal financial and human resources and control over subsidising funds. Steering and coordination is mainly limited to participation and shareholding in 'soft' projects and in initiatives and networks. The regional level is hardly gaining influence in 'hard', especially infrastructure, projects.

The involvement of key regional actors controlling larger resources allows for the coordination of regional projects though. For the Hamburg and Rhine-Neckar regions funds designated only to regional projects and supplied by the states or regional actors respectively are controlled at a regional level.

Neither formal regional institutions nor informal networks are directly involved in the provision of infrastructure except for the Rhine-Main Regionalpark. 'Hard' infrastructure though important for the metropolitan gateway function stays mainly under municipal or state control. For state driven, especially highly capital intense, infrastructure state borders mean considerable obstacles for regional influence. With the additional responsibilities for the Rhine-Neckar planning association from 2006 new opportunities will open.

An important indirect involvement is given by the formulation and planning of infrastructure projects, especially through the operative programme based on the Hamburg RDC or the Rhine-Neckar Vision 2015. In all the regions the operation of public transport is organised on a regional level; in Rhine-Main limited to Hessia with a traffic management including counties of Rhineland-Palatinate being planned. The states are involved in all of the transport organisations though.

The formal institutions lack activity on regional competitiveness due to deficits in the involvement of actors. The Rhine-Main business development association though has universities and infrastructure providers like the airport company as members.

Many of the informal networks were at least co-initiated by business community actors for enhancing the regional economic competitiveness. The regional networks to enhance competitiveness often started with an easy task to agree on, focussed on outward marketing 'to put the region on the map'. High ranking actors involved in the Rhine-Neckar future initiative take the patronage for objectives of Vision 2015.

By doing so the patrons and the initiative advance inward regional marketing, supporting the perception of regional challenges and the identification with the region. Only in Rhine-Neckar, regional marketing has been institutionalised.

Participation of relevant regional actors

All regions are characterised by recent and ongoing considerable changes regarding the structures of cooperation and the actors involved. The regions lack the participatory involvement of actors from different levels of society and they differ considerably. The Hamburg approach is organised mainly top-down as it includes first of all political and administrative actors; the Rhine-Neckar constellation is organised bottom-up by including both public sector actors and increasingly also business and academic actors; Rhine-Main is characterised by contradicting approaches by the regional public actors, the state of Hessia, and the private actors. These contradictions might have added to the particular relevance of private actor networks compared to the other regions.

The Rhine-Neckar is the most promising development regarding the structures of cooperation of the last years. This development has led to a new state treaty. A proposed reform of the Hamburg structures of cooperation paves the way for participation of further actors adding to the state level. In contrast to both regions the states responsible for parts of Rhine-Main do not demonstrate a similar level of commitment to the region, though two of the states are involved in the Rhine-Neckar region, too. Though the states are only marginally involved in the structures of cooperation in Rhine-Main and Rhine-Neckar they hold significant influence by providing the legal parameters.

The understanding of the region among the regional actors and the inhabitants differs considerably between the regions. The clearest understanding in Rhine-Neckar is based on the long-lasting cooperation experience across the state borders. The lowest level of congruence of the regional understanding in Rhine-Main is nurtured by the multiplicity of regional institutions and networks with differing definitions of the region.

Coherency of the organisational infrastructure

No additional institutions or even administrative levels have been created for metropolitan steering so far. The metropolitan governance level has not led to overlaps of competences except for the Rhine-Main region, where the planning association and the regional assembly of Southern Hessia are jointly responsible for regional planning.

The Metropolregion Hamburg has clear structures but those structures are lacking real decision making powers. Rhine-Main is characterised by opaqueness regarding the allocation of competences; while Rhine-Neckar will display a fairly clear allocation of competences to the planning association from 2006. For all the informal networks it can be said that the agreements are only weakly self-binding for the actors with regard to future reliability.

No regional institution has directly elected and thus legitimated representatives only responsible to the regional interest. The institutions of all regions are legitimated indirectly democratic or politically. The network-based initiatives involve

large numbers of relevant regional actors, but mainly from the political, administrative, and business communities. The limited participation of actors is to be regarded as problematic in relation to the legitimacy of the process and the agreements made. This holds for all the regions. The networks have been expanded their legitimating basis by the recent participatory visioning processes.

One or even some nuclei for a regional agency can be found in all regions. For the Metropolregion Hamburg the regional office is to be installed shortly. The Rhine-Neckar planning association and the future initiative both take on this role in a complementing way. For Rhine-Main the planning association, the economic initiative, and the regional conference with its office assigned to the Frankfurt Lord Mayor try to take on relevant functions without obvious coordination though. As an additional player the state of Hessia keeps trying to enforce guidelines for cooperation in the central part of the region, e.g. by demanding the creation of cooperation bodies on culture or on location marketing in 2005 threatening with the creation of bodies under compulsion.

5   CONCLUSION

The analysis of the cooperation structures of the three German metropolitan regions allows for the conclusion that all of the regions have developed at least the basis of metropolitan governance, basically characterised by diverse combinations of government and network based negotiating systems. The structures have undergone accelerating change throughout recent years. This might be seen as a strong indicator for the growing relevance of governance structures in the context of metropolitan regions.

To meet the criteria identified for metropolitan governance as described in section 3 the structures will have to be further strengthened and improved. The main shortcomings in the case study regions are the following:
• The opaqueness not only regarding the allocation of competences but also the spatial and functional perimeter of the metropolitan region constricts regional cooperation in general due to a lack of regional identity. Here, state boundaries crossing through the regions accounts for part of the shortcomings.
• The various regional networks and initiatives commit a large and generally growing number of regional actors to regional decision-making processes, but still a deficit is to be stated. This holds especially for actors outside of first of all the public sector and also actors from the business community.
• The regions are still lacking implementation competences in regional issues, made worse by loose coordination between network-based and institutionalised processes, hence alleviating the legitimisation of the processes.
• Though the integration of federal states into regional cooperation structures is not a prerequisite, a positive attitude or even active support seems to be urgently necessary for cross-border regional cooperation.
• Crossing state boundaries seems to be of higher and potentially more constraining relevance for metropolitan regions of outstanding economic and political importance for one or more of the federal states concerned, than for regions being rather peripheral for the federal states. The state level might be worried about a metropolitan region gaining the capacity to act as a potentially arising political rival.
• Though (regional) planning institutions are significantly involved in the regional cooperation structures the processes are notably driven and characterised by issues of interregional competitiveness exhibiting a backlog demand in other issues for sustainable development.

On the other hand, the three regions have already advanced in some important aspects of metropolitan governance, with some of the findings being of potential interest for other regions in Germany and in Switzerland:
• The initiation of a process to formulate a strategy for the development of the metropolitan region has shown to function as an impulse for the development of governance structures as well, especially as the strategy formulation is often a bottom-up process.
• The formation of a cross-border institution assigned with (only a few) explicitly regional competences also takes on the role of facilitating the regional cooperation structures and acts as a promoter of regional interests, not least vis-à-vis the federal states level. As born regional actors, institutions of regional planning are predestined for this role.
• Business development and (external) regional marketing are especially shown to have potentially initialising effects for regional cooperation in metropolitan regions. First, economic functions and thus economic actors are of high importance in metropolitan regions. Second, both are minor fields of conflict potential and obvious cooperation benefits.

Metropolitan governance as political steering strategy will gain additional importance, as the findings from the case study regions suggest. This will probably hold for the Swiss situation as well. In this context the elaboration of the SSDR on the federal level can form a basis for the further development of governance structures. For the future it needs to be seen to

which extent the metropolitan regions are able to implement metropolitan governance structures with an increased capacity to act.

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