

'How Can We Explain Diversity in Metropolitan Governance within a Country?' Some Reflections on Recent Developments in Germany

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Abstract

In the debate on metropolitan governance, a commonly expressed hypothesis is that the reconstruction of statehood can take metropolitan governance along a variety of paths. This is especially true for Germany, where we can identify a great diversity of organizational forms of cooperation at the level of metropolitan agglomerations. This article addresses the question of how diversity within a country with more or less uniform institutional structures can be explained on the basis of a comparison of three German regions. We examine whether and how such differences can be explained as a combination of structural and other variables. Our starting hypothesis is that case-specific structural variables matter — for example, the position of the core cities of the regions in the international hierarchy of cities, the economic structure of the regions, or the dominance or polarization within the regional party system. Furthermore, the hypothesis will be considered that spatially embedded cooperative actor behaviour and actor-related factors, including political leadership and specific incentive structures or windows of opportunities, also matter. We conclude that such a double reading of the transformation of metropolitan governance is the most appropriate way to understand differences in metropolitan governance arrangements.

Introduction

Metropolitan governance has been a subject of attention for practitioners and academics in the United States and in Europe for many decades now. It has attracted renewed interest since the 1990s, when a huge variety of metropolitan-reform experiments were collated more or less convincingly under the label of 'new regionalism' (Savitch and Vogel, 2000; Norris, 2001; Brenner, 2002; Heinelt and Kübler, 2005a). However, 'new regionalism' is an ambiguous project that does little to explain the diversity of metropolitan arrangements in general, or even in an individual country such as Germany (see Kantor, 2008, for a similar argument). Inter-local coordination in metropolitan areas for various functional domains, such as spatial planning, economic development or transport, has been on the agenda in Germany for quite a while (Blatter, 2005; 2006; Fürst, 2005; Heinz, 2007). Germany's strong tradition of spatial planning has had a significant influence on

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metropolitan governance, but no blueprint for the content and organizational form of these arrangements exists. We are now observing the emergence of a highly differentiated landscape of metropolitan-governance arrangements with reference to functional scope, geographical scale, institutional form and even content of policy (Blatter, 2006; Heinz, 2007). These recent developments in Germany raise two questions. First, many scholars give sound reasons for the dissimilarity of metropolitan reform, basing their arguments on theoretical reflections as well as on empirical work (Norris, 2001; Basolo, 2003; Feiock, 2007). Even in Germany, where a strong tradition of inter-municipal cooperation exists, observers of the current situation see a 'mismatch between existing necessities and suboptimal solutions' (Heinz, 2007: 91). Estimations about the potential of metropolitan reform to balance pros and cons usually identify more hindrances to cooperation than factors that facilitate it (Fürst, 2005: 156–8; Heinz, 2007: 109–12). It seems we are better at explaining failure than at identifying factors that will ensure the success of metropolitan reform initiatives (Basolo, 2003). Basolo states that rational approaches are well suited to explain the failure of voluntary cooperation in metropolitan regions because competitive behaviour and problems of collective action prevail (*ibid.*). This is convincing from a theoretical point of view, but does not explain why regionalism is still debated in many places as an effective and attractive solution to metropolitan problems. However, contrary to theoretical concerns, metropolitan governance seems to be a viable option. We would like to identify opportunities that allow actors, under certain institutional (and structural) constraints, to achieve particular objectives for a metropolitan area — and clarify the reasons why actors in other regions have failed. This approach is empirically and theoretically consistent with the perspective of regional regime research (Hamilton, 2004; Nicholls, 2005).

Secondly, the new diversity in metropolitan governance challenges explanatory frameworks (see Feiock, 2007). We do not claim that this diversity presents a wave of new forms of metropolitan governance, which started in the late 1990s and followed more homogenous forms that were identified in North America and Europe by Brenner (2002; 2004) and in Germany by Blatter (2005). However, we have to accept that although a rescaling of administrative and socio-economic functions is simultaneously taking place in most metropolitan areas in Germany, a contested politics of rescaling has led to various outcomes (including failures). Our own empirical observations give reason to doubt the structural determinism that is apparent, for example, in the work of Brenner — for a similar observation see Le Galès (2006) and Savitch and Vogel (2009: 115); see also Basolo (2003) and Feiock (2007), on the appropriateness of rational choice models. We also believe that metropolitan regions in Germany are strategic sites for the reconstruction of statehood to a minor degree only. More manifestly, they are contested political arenas in which economic and non-economic interpretations of localism and regionalism compete with each other and where influential federal states are cautious when answering the question of how to govern metropolitan regions.

Our hypothesis is therefore that changes in metropolitan governance can lead to a 'progressive' case (a powerful, integrated metropolitan organization) or to a 'regressive' case (if fragmentation or even secession prevail) and that these diverse paths cannot be adequately explained by global or European economic imperatives or by national institutional frameworks, but by a combination of structural aspects and local-opportunity structures used and sometimes created by local actors (Sellers, 2002). Together with Boudreau *et al.* (2006) we believe that a *double reading* of evolving metropolitan-governance arrangements is the appropriate way of theorizing the complex causalities underlying the recent diversity in metropolitan institutions. This double reading refers 'on the one hand to the actual content of the policies aimed at the metropolitan scale, their *raison d'être*, the macro-economic logics that underlie them, and, on the other hand to the configuration of actors and institutions which evolved strongly in the last 20 years' (*ibid.*: 7). This calls for a more precise understanding of how actors create and change metropolitan institutions under certain structural conditions.

Rather than solving the predicament of structure and agency in one or the other direction, we suggest applying an ‘older’ contribution to the debate on the relationship between ‘structure’ and ‘actor’ (or ‘structure’ and ‘process’): the two-filter model developed by Elster (1979: 113; for a similar approach see Scharpf’s 1997 ‘actor-centered institutionalism’). In Elster’s model, the societal context (social inequalities, the social structure of a community, etc.) in general, and the institutional structure in particular, are considered a first filter. This filter can be altered by the creation of special ‘incentive structures’ or institutional reforms. However, the first filtering process still offers local actors a more or less broad ‘feasible set’ from which, in a second filtering process, they have to choose one of the possible or available options. The basic components of this second filtering process consist of the political definition of challenges in a particular socio-spatial context, the mediation of conflicts on how to respond to these challenges, as well as the definition and pursuit of common objectives about how to govern effectively and in a way that is perceived as legitimate. These components point to specific, contextually embedded formal and informal interactions as well as to a place-related ‘logic of appropriateness’ (March and Olsen, 1984). Actors are thus not only able to choose a particular pathway for governing but are also in a position to reshape constraints and to exploit the enabling potentials of given contextual conditions.

To support our argument empirically, we have chosen three German cases — Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, Rhine-Neckar and Hanover. We have selected these cases (and a case-study approach) because, up to the end of the last century, different regions in Germany revealed similarities in their metropolitan-governance arrangements through various phases (as will be shown in the next section). However, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, developments have taken place in different directions, particularly in these three cases. While in Hanover a newly established form of consolidated metropolitan *government* evolved on a voluntary basis — that is, through more or less unanimous decisions by local politicians — the metropolitan-governance arrangement in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main is fragmented (in terms of scope and scale) and characterized by severe tensions between municipalities, as well as between municipalities and the state of Hesse. Rhine-Neckar represents a stable case of metropolitan *governance* that involves public actors and a broad spectrum of societal actors (mostly from the business sector).

To answer the question of how to explain these differences, the article is structured as follows. In the second section, the three selected cases are briefly described in order to highlight their different trajectories and to set the scene for the empirical considerations related to these cases. In the third section, possible explanations that could form the basis for answers to the core question are outlined. Having grounded these explanations in the scholarly debate, we then consider step by step, whether and how these can account for the differences between the three cases. In the final section, we draw conclusions that point to the relevance of actor-related aspects within institutional, socio-economic and political settings.

The three German cases: Hanover, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main and Rhine-Neckar

Inter-municipal cooperation has been on the agenda of German metropolitan regions since at least the 1950s, with booms in the 1960s and 1970s and backlashes in the 1980s (Blatter, 2005; Heinz, 2007). At some risk of simplification, we can say that developments in all German regions were more or less similar. In the 1960s, and up until the 1970s, integrated solutions and consolidated forms of metropolitan *government* were widely accepted and partly implemented in regions such as Hanover and Frankfurt/Rhine-Main. In both regions, even the most consolidated organizational form of

metropolitan government — the regional city — was debated as a serious option in the late 1960s (Hanover) and early 1970s (Frankfurt/Rhine-Main). At the same time as the Greater London Council was being abolished in the 1980s, consolidated forms of metropolitan governance that had defined the 1970s were being criticized in Germany, and their competencies were restricted (in Hanover and Frankfurt/Rhine-Main) or abolished (for instance, in Brunswick). The 1990s marked a renaissance of metropolitan reform in almost all German metropolitan regions and some of the changes made in the 1980s were reversed. But, in the last decade of the twentieth century, the previously parallel development of German regions began to diverge. This is particularly apparent in the three metropolitan regions of Hanover, Rhine-Main and Rhine-Neckar. From the mid-1990s onwards, these regions showed the highest political dynamic of all metropolitan regions in Germany in the realm of metropolitan institution building, and the reforms that were accomplished resulted in far-reaching changes when compared to the results of more modest reforms in other metropolitan regions. Today, the governance arrangements in these three selected regions may be considered to be the most dissimilar in Germany. Therefore, they provide a perfect basis for addressing the question of how diversity in metropolitan governance emerges.

The region of Hanover

The region of Hanover consists of the city of Hanover (with 515,000 inhabitants) and the surrounding former county of Hanover with 20 municipalities of between 15,000 and 65,000 inhabitants. In total, the region's population of 1.1 million inhabitants represents 15% of the inhabitants of the state of Lower Saxony, of which Hanover is the capital. Furthermore, the metropolitan region contains 18% of workplaces and produces 20% of the GDP of Lower Saxony, which indicates that this area represents the (economic) heart of this federal state.

In 2001, the region of Hanover was formally established as a territorial entity by law (see Priebs, 2002; Blatter, 2005: 138–40; 2006: 131–2, 137–8). This resulted in an amalgamation of the city of Hanover (which up to then had held the status of a county-exempt city) with the surrounding county of Hanover. Furthermore, the existing regional planning association was abolished and its tasks were allocated to the new regional administration. In addition, some planning responsibilities of the government office for the region, a middle tier of the federal state administration, were transferred to this newly established territorial entity. However, the formation of this new territorial entity was not imposed from above. Instead, the Lower Saxonian parliament followed the will of all affected municipalities and all political parties of the Hanover agglomeration.

The metropolitan region of Hanover now has the formal status of a county within the vertical structure of the German political system. Therefore, it is (1) politically represented by a directly elected regional president who is also the head of the administration; and (2) '(self-) governed' by a directly elected metropolitan council consisting of 84 councillors, of whom 53 (the majority) come from the area covered by the former county and 31 from the core city of Hanover. This metropolitan council allows for a redistribution — among municipalities — of costs arising from the responsibility of German counties and county-exempt cities to finance social assistance for people-in-need out of their own budgets. The Hanover region is also responsible for the provision of other social services (e.g. hospitals), for spatial planning, waste disposal, economic development and leisure facilities (such as the zoo), for schools that provide vocational training, for environmental protection and for the organization of public transport (Arndt and Priebs, 2004). The metropolitan region of Hanover is characterized not only by its clear governmental structure and bundle of competencies; it also shows features of governance arrangements consisting of horizontal networks between public and private actors — for example, 'hannoverimpuls', a company responsible for economic development, which is owned by the city and the region of Hanover and is sponsored by local enterprises.

The Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region

Frankfurt (with about 650,000 inhabitants) is not only a core city of the southern part of the state of Hesse, but also a node in the globalized financial sector and one of Europe's international air-traffic hubs. However, the so-called Rhine-Main region has no clear monocentric structure with Frankfurt at its centre. Instead, the region has a polycentric structure that can be ascribed to the existence of several cities, whose populations range from 100,000 to 250,000 — including Offenbach and Hanau at Frankfurt's borders, Darmstadt and Wiesbaden (the capital city of Hesse), as well as Aschaffenburg (in Bavaria) and Mainz (in Rhineland-Palatinate). Furthermore, the Rhine-Main region contains at least five counties (depending on how the region is defined geographically) that act as strongholds of local interests in the debate about a possible consolidated metropolitan government.

In 2000, the state of Hesse abolished its former planning association, a multi-purpose agency founded in 1975 with a directly elected assembly that was once considered to be the frontrunner for governing metropolitan affairs in Germany. The reason for this intervention was the broad discontent among municipalities (Bördlein, 2000: 540). The agglomeration law replaced the old planning association with two new institutions: the 'Council of the Region' and a new planning association with reduced competencies. The 'Council of the Region' consists of 28 representatives from the municipalities and counties forming an inner circle around Frankfurt and is obliged to find viable solutions for metropolitan-wide problems. Up to now, this process has ended in a deadlock as the federal state is not willing to exert coercive power. Models of various sizes are under consideration for the future organization of metropolitan governance in the area. While some politicians (mostly Social Democrats) still argue for a 'big solution' in terms of the size of the region (advocating a region encompassing approximately five million inhabitants) and a directly elected council and president, the mayor of Frankfurt (a Christian Democrat) favours a small city-county with a directly elected council (with 1.3 million inhabitants in 26 municipalities). The task of the new planning association is essentially that of regional planning. The number of municipalities is higher compared to the former planning association (75 instead of 43), but the functional scope of the planning association has been reduced. It only has indirect legitimacy (through representatives from the municipalities).

The two core institutions are surrounded by further public and private metropolitan initiatives that are partly connected but refer to different spatial scales and different sectors such as culture, transport, economic development and research. One influential independent initiative is the 'Wirtschaftsinitiative Rhine-Main' (Business Initiative Rhine-Main), which was founded by some of the leading CEOs from the banking sector together with the CEO of Frankfurt airport in 1996.

As a result, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main can be seen as 'the only region in Germany in which the idea of functional specialization and "variable geometry" have found strong political resonance and have explicitly shaped institutional reforms' (Blatter, 2006: 138; see also Blatter, 2005: 144–8; Hoyle *et al.*, 2006). However, there is no evidence that this is the result of a deliberate regional strategy. The different initiatives partly compete with each other for hegemony over the future fate of the region.

The Rhine-Neckar region

The Rhine-Neckar area is a polycentric region in the southwest of Germany which includes the cities of Heidelberg, Mannheim and Ludwigshafen. The relevant feature of this region is that two major reforms occurred within a short timeframe, which changed the institutional set-up of the region and resulted in an enhanced capacity for successful cooperation. The continuous process of institution building had to overcome a major obstacle: the networked agglomeration characterized by dense economic and social

interdependencies is divided by the administrative and political borders of three federal states, each having legislative autonomy in many fields, including spatial planning, transport and environmental protection. This institutional fragmentation was, in fact, one of the major obstacles to successful regional development — at least from the perspective of leading regional actors from the political sphere as well as from the economic sector. A first treaty on cooperation on regional planning between the three federal states was signed in 1969 but gave the regional planning association only limited competencies. A new reform initiative with rather modest results came to an end in 1998. The inadequate institutional framework for regional cooperation remained intact because of opposition from the three federal states. The opposition in at least two of the federal states faded away when a strong coalition of regionalists (staff from the regional planning association, local politicians and the business community, including BASF and SAP) bundled resources and political influence to convince the opponents of reform.

Since 2005, this metropolitan region is formally defined by a new treaty between the states of Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Hesse. As a result, there is now one planning association and one regional plan instead of three planning associations and their respective regional plans. Besides planning responsibilities, the planning association has the further responsibilities of economic development, regional transport planning and management of the regional park. However, it would be simplistic to reduce this particular type of metropolitan-governance arrangement to the planning association, because this association is the organizational core of what is called the 'European Metropolitan Region Rhine-Neckar'. In contrast to Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, this region has an organizationally and politically vibrant basis. Since 2006, the planning association, the chambers of commerce and an association called 'Zukunft Metropolregion Rhein-Neckar' ('Future Metropolitan Region Rhine-Neckar') — which represents business interests but also includes universities and other organizations — have become the shareholders of a regional development agency (RDA) with significant financial power and staff. The task of this RDA is not only business development but also the development of leisure, culture and sports facilities (and corresponding events). The area that this agreement covers consists of more than 200 municipalities, of which eight are county-exempt and the others are part of seven counties. This region is home to 2.4 million people and is what we mean by the 'metropolitan region Rhine-Neckar'.

How can we explain the diversity in form and content in the three cases?

To answer this question, we start from the hypothesis that central-local relations or a polycentric or monocentric structure of the region matter. Then we turn to case-specific economic, fiscal and political-structural aspects. Finally, we address factors that are actor-related or refer to a particular historical-opportunity structure. The fact that economic aspects and fiscal disparities are core issues on the metropolitan reform agenda has been proven by various scholars (Orfield, 1997; Savitch and Vogel, 2000; Hamilton *et al.*, 2004). Political fragmentation has been addressed less often, but seems to be of great importance in a political system such as Germany where, besides two large national parties (the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats), a diverse local-party system exists.

Central-local relations

Hamilton *et al.* (2004) propose analysing metropolitan governance from a relational perspective. Local government is the key actor, but the likelihood of metropolitan governance to evolve depends on central-local relations — such as financial flows and authority relationships — as well as on the horizontal power relations between the

municipalities in a region. All these institutional aspects can play a role. This has been shown in an international comparison by Heinelt and Kübler (2005b: 193–8) in the course of their reflection on the impact of local government systems on the formation of metropolitan governance.

However, the local government systems, as well as the distribution of competencies between different levels of government, are more or less similar between the three chosen German regions.

Legislation for municipalities and inter-municipal cooperation is the domain of the German federal states and differences in respect of issues that pertain to this article are rather small. All changes in inter-municipal cooperation need the approval of the government of the respective states or even their parliaments. However, as there is a strong belief in local self-government, direct interventions in local affairs, such as can be found in the Canadian provinces, are unlikely in Germany (see Boudreau *et al.*, 2006). In general, state governments as well as federal agencies support voluntary inter-municipal cooperation to solve problems of metropolitan development (Heinz, 2007: 110). However, there is only a small difference between *factual support* for problem-solving capacities and *political concerns* about the emergence of a powerful regional actor that may become a 'state inside the state'. This is particularly true for metropolitan organizations that have directly elected bodies (and therefore have independent legitimacy) and a broad bundle of competencies in large metropolitan regions. All German federal-state governments share this ambivalent attitude. We can conclude that the influence of German federalism on the divergent outcomes in the chosen cases is rather limited.¹

Against this background, the differences outlined above can hardly be explained by the institutionalization of vertical and horizontal power relations, because these conditions are more or less the same across Germany.

The difference between polycentric and monocentric structures

Besides institutional settings, one would be inclined to think that a region's polycentric or monocentric structure will have a major influence. Herrschel and Newman, for instance, suggest that a dominant core city might be able to enforce a metropolitan agenda, while a polycentric structure heightens competitive behaviour between cities (Herrschel and Newman, 2002: 66). However, our examples show that there is no reason why a polycentric agglomeration is per se disadvantaged. In fact, the remarkable development in Rhine-Neckar occurred in a polycentric agglomeration with a large number of municipalities and three core cities.

The relevance of the economic structure of a region

The economic structure of regions in terms of the dominance of certain sectors or the composition of a particular sector could be relevant in an explanation of certain metropolitan-governance arrangements. In particular the existence of a knowledge-based economic sector and business-oriented service providers, which are seen as crucial components of a dynamic metropolitan economy, can be related to specific strategies or attitudes towards metropolitan governance. In fact, knowledge-based economies do follow a different logic to manufacturing-based economies in respect of place-based infrastructure (Storper and Manville, 2006: 1250). But does this logic shape preferences with regard to metropolitan governance? We would like to put forward some hypotheses here.

1 Exceptions are the three city-states (Bremen, Hamburg, Berlin) that have the status of a federal state. Inter-municipal cooperation follows a different logic there.

Table 1 Sector composition of regional economies 2004

Region		Employees in Manufacturing (%)	Employees in Services (%)	Development of Employees in Services 1995-2004 (%)
Frankfurt/Rhine-Main	Mean	21.5	67.8	11.5
	Highest	29.7	79.0	19.3
	Lowest	12.0	59.5	3.8
	<i>Frankfurt (city)</i>	12.0	79.9	8.7
Rhine-Neckar	Mean	28.4	61.7	5.0
	Highest	37.8	73.6	16.3
	Lowest	15.6	48.7	-4.4
	<i>Heidelberg</i>	15.6	73.6	9.5
	<i>Ludwigshafen</i>	48.7	28.9	-2.8
	<i>Mannheim</i>	23.5	65.0	1.9
Hanover*	Mean	21.6	69.3	3.2

*After the reform, data for Hanover are only available for the whole region.

Source: Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (2004)

Table 2 Companies included in DAX and MDAX by economic sector and metropolitan region

Region	DAX	MDAX	Companies Included in DAX and MDAX	
			Service Sector	Manufacturing Sector
Frankfurt/Rhine-Main	5	2	3	4
Rhine-Neckar	2	5	2	5
Hanover	2	1	2	1

Source: German Stock Exchange

The dominance of economic sectors in the three regions

One can argue that metropolitan regions in which the service sector is dominant look for flexible forms of cooperation, which can be changed fairly quickly — in contrast to the manufacturing sector, which is designed for more stable collaborative networks (in respect of supply chains as well as neo-corporatist state-society relations).

This explanation seems to be plausible for Frankfurt/Rhine-Main: not only has the increase in employees in the service sector between 1995 and 2004 been the highest among the three cases (see Table 1), but business-oriented service providers are of specific relevance in this region (see Schamp, 2002). At the same time, if we look at the sector composition of companies included in the DAX (the most important stock index in Germany) and the MDAX, it becomes clear that the manufacturing sector is still well represented in Rhine-Main (see Table 2).²

2 The MDAX (Mid Cap DAX) includes 50 enterprises from classic branches, mostly from Germany. Its list of 50 enterprises is updated twice a year. The MDAX is therefore considered to provide insight into the current economic situation in Germany.

At first glance, Hanover also fits this explanation because the manufacturing sector plays an important role there too.³ The service sector in the Hanover region is relatively strong as well, not only in terms of the proportion of employees in this sector, but also with regard to its contribution to regional GDP (NIW and Nord/LB, 2005: 19). Furthermore, the Hanover region is the third German region (after Rhine-Main and Munich) in a ranking of locations of business-oriented service providers (NIW and Nord/LB, 2005).

However, when compared with the other two metropolitan regions, Rhine-Neckar's features differ: it is a region in which the 'old' as well as the 'new' economy (represented by BASF and SAP, see also Table 2) play an important role.⁴

The location of core cities in the hierarchy of cities

Our second hypothesis is based on the international ranking of a particular region. Blatter (2006) observed that global city regions prefer 'soft' institutions; in other words: 'The higher the city region is located in the hierarchy of World Cities, the stronger the governance approach is geared towards functional differentiation and deterritorialization; and correspondingly, the lower a city-region is located in the hierarchy of World Cities, the stronger the governance approach contains functional integration and represents the logic of spaces of place' (*ibid.*: 145); — that is, towards consolidation and spatial integration. Blatter therefore argues that 'global companies [contributing to the ranking of the city in the hierarchy of World Cities] and their employees produce political pressure to disentangle the institutions that serve the logic of spaces of flows from the institutions that represent the logic of spaces of place' (*ibid.*: 146).

Our third hypothesis is closely linked to the second and refers to the lifestyle preferences of skilled workers and the related strategies of enterprises to attract such employees. While the ideal typical contrast of *sun, skills and sprawl* (which describes a certain pattern in California) against *inner-city density* (which describes a pattern in London or Paris — see Storper and Manville, 2006: 1251) might be of less heuristic value for our cases, the general assumption that global enterprises try to influence decisions in planning and metropolitan development is plausible and can be proven empirically, on the one hand, for the situation in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main as well as, on the other hand, for the development of the Hanover region. But, as Blatter (2006: 145) emphasizes, 'correlation is no causation'. This means that it has to be proven empirically whether (and how) such pressure really has been exerted by global companies and their employees. In the case of Frankfurt, we can merely affirm that global companies (particularly from the banking sector and the airport) have established, together with other companies and business organizations, their own functionally oriented organizational infrastructure (the Business Initiative Rhine-Main), which has initiated dialogue about the future development of the region. But it concentrates on ideas for various aspects of regional development that are thought to provide guidance for future decisions in the areas of culture, sports, knowledge, mobility and economic development. At best, the business sector tries to influence the agenda of metropolitan initiatives selectively, but not the governance arrangement as such.

Furthermore, this third hypothesis hardly applies to the Rhine-Neckar region. Not only do the three core cities in this region not appear in rankings such as that of World Cities (Hall and Pain, 2006), more remarkably, global companies such as BASF and SAP support a governance arrangement that is functionally structured (namely, the association 'Future Metropolitan Region Rhine-Neckar', which is driven by economic interests) and

3 A VW plant that focuses on the manufacture of commercial transport vehicles provides most of the jobs in the private sector and is highly relevant to supplier plants in the Hanover region.

4 BASF is considered one of the largest chemical manufacturers in the world. It has been located in the Rhine-Neckar region (Ludwigshafen) for more than a century. SAP is one of the leading providers of business software in the world and was founded in the 1970s in a village in the region.

Table 3 Total tax income per capita (in euros) in the three metropolitan regions (2004 and 2003)

Region		2004	2003	Development 1995-2004
Frankfurt/Rhine-Main	Mean	685.30	685.74	84.80
	Standard Deviation	255.56	243.70	99.55
Rhine-Neckar	Mean	497.37	515.20	29.26
	Standard Deviation	281.17	339.09	68.30
Hanover*	Mean	454.00	470.00	-36.00
	Standard Deviation	111.70	138.20	

*After the reform, data for Hanover are only available for the whole region.

Source: Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (2005; 2006)

at the same time strongly linked and embedded in 'institutions that represent the logic of spaces of place' (Blatter, 2006: 146) such as the planning association, which is the core regional actor that deals with statutory planning functions. This fact indicates that flexible forms of cooperation that allow fairly rapid adaptation to changes can be embedded in relatively stable patterns of collaboration. This may explain why actors from the business community have promoted, to a remarkable extent, the metropolitan-governance arrangement found in this region.

Therefore, the hypothesis that the dominance of a certain economic sector or the position of the core city or cities in the international hierarchy of cities matters seems plausible for two of the three cases, but its impact cannot be proven empirically for them.

Disparities: differences in fiscal incomes between municipalities within the three regions

The relevance of total tax income and changes in tax income

Data about overall tax revenue in the three regions (see Table 3) show marked disparities in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, while Hanover seems to be a more balanced region in terms of tax revenue. Aside from the small municipality of Walldorf, where the headquarters of SAP are located, data for Rhine-Neckar also show some disparities, but not as explicitly as Frankfurt/Rhine-Main.

A comparison of total tax income for the three regions from 1995 to 2004 shows a slight decrease for the region of Hanover. Tax income in Rhine-Main increased significantly but reveals intra-regional deviations and different dynamics of tax income development — at least at the level of counties and county-exempt cities. This trend is true for the Rhine-Neckar region to a minor degree.

Regarding the question of how to explain the development of different metropolitan-governance arrangements, a possible answer could be that a decrease in tax income and a relatively small deviation within the region contributed to less competitive or confrontational interaction between municipalities in the Hanover region. By contrast, a strong increase in tax resources and large regional deviation may have strengthened competitive and self-oriented attitudes of municipalities and counties in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, making collaborative interactions difficult. Rhine-Neckar is situated between these two cases: although there are disparities in this region, it seems that they are not interpreted as zero-sum games. While global enterprises such as SAP and BASF are local tax payers, the prevailing interpretation in Rhine-Neckar seems to be that the whole region benefits from their presence.

The relevance of self-generated tax income

However, aggregated data about general tax revenues for each region do not reveal much about intra-regional competition and the strategies of particular cities to increase their tax income. This is particularly true for Germany, where the general tax income of municipalities is influenced by equalization schemes between the federal states and within each federal state. Therefore it is necessary to take a closer look at the self-generated tax income of municipalities. A well-known hypothesis states that wealthy 'edge cities' or suburbs do not need cooperative strategies through which to handle interdependencies and to distribute unbalanced expenditures for public infrastructure evenly between core cities and suburbs. Moreover, as proponents of the public-choice approach on metropolitan governance have argued (see, for example, Frey and Eichenberger, 2001), such municipalities compete with each other for the location of business as well as for the wealthier population strata. In order to reflect on the empirical relevance of this explanation for different forms of metropolitan governance, we shall consider how large the discrepancies are between rates of business tax in the three metropolitan regions (this tax being the most important source of self-generated tax income for German municipalities). The answers to this question could be relevant to an explanation of different forms of metropolitan governance, because we may assume that small differences between the rates of business tax in a metropolitan region are linked with less competitive behaviour of the municipalities regarding the location of business.⁵

The average collection rate of business tax is 395.7 for the region of Hanover, and 460 for the city of Hanover. The rate for the city of Hanover, which has not changed over the years, is 64.3 points (14%) higher than the average for the surrounding municipalities (of the former county of Hanover) and 95 points (about 20%) higher than that of the municipality with the lowest rate.

Rates and divergences are different for the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region: on average the rate of 315.5 for the whole region is about 20% lower than the rate for the region of Hanover. Furthermore, although the city of Frankfurt now has the same rate as the city of Hanover (namely 460), it has (in contrast to the latter) decreased as a result of a decision by the city council, from 515 in 1999. Nevertheless, Frankfurt's rate is still 144.5 points (about 31%) higher than that of the surrounding municipalities and 180 points (nearly 40%) higher than that of the municipalities with the lowest rates.

The average rate of business tax in the Rhine-Neckar region is about 360 (in 2005), which is less than that for Hanover but more than that for Frankfurt/Rhine-Main. But there are still no clear patterns related to the different rates of business tax in the Rhine-Neckar region. Two of the three core cities (Mannheim and Heidelberg) have higher rates than the surrounding municipalities (415 and 400, respectively). But the business tax rate for Ludwigshafen, the third core city, matches the average of the region exactly (360). The lowest rates (300 and 290) are found in the two municipalities where global software enterprise SAP is located. As these municipalities are no direct neighbours of the core cities of the region, this fact cannot be regarded as competitive behaviour or a 'race to the bottom'; it is simply the result of fiscal affluence.

These data on the rates of the business tax indicate higher competition between the municipalities in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main than in the region of Hanover. This makes a (voluntary) collaboration between the municipalities in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main difficult and also puts pressure on Frankfurt, as the core city, to reduce its rate of business tax. By contrast, the case of the city of Hanover demonstrates that, within the achieved metropolitan-governance arrangements, the rate of the business tax has remained stable

5 The following data on the rates of business tax are from 2007 for the region of Hanover, and from 2008 for Frankfurt/Rhine-Main. The data for the region of Hanover are provided by its administration and for Frankfurt/Rhine-Main by the chamber of commerce. The data for Rhine-Neckar are taken from various publications of the Offices for Statistics of Rhineland-Palatinate, Hesse and Baden-Württemberg.

Table 4 'Effective number of electoral parties' in municipal councils according to local elections between 1994 and 2006 in the three metropolitan regions

Region	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Frankfurt/Rhine-Main	3.04	3.08	0.5267
Rhine-Neckar	2.42	2.60	0.7631
Hanover	2.73	2.69	0.2999

Source: Own calculation based on data from offices for statistics of the three federal states

over many years. The case of the Rhine-Neckar region reveals a situation in which competition seems not to be the main driving force for raising or lowering the rate of the business tax.

When we consider the question of whether and how the level of disparity in fiscal income of municipalities can explain different metropolitan-governance arrangements in Germany, we can thus conclude that a decrease in total tax income and a relatively small deviation within the region — as shown in the case of Hanover — has contributed to less competitive and confrontational interaction between municipalities. A strong increase of tax resources and a large regional deviation — as in the case of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main — is related to competitive and self-oriented attitudes on the part of municipalities, making collaborative interaction difficult. However — as shown in the case of Rhine-Neckar — disparities do not per se lead to interpretations of a zero-sum game and related conflict-laden interactions. Instead, the location of some strong local tax payers in a metropolitan region can be interpreted as beneficial for the whole region and as an asset that must be secured by collective action.

Party fragmentation

For the German case it seems reasonable that stable metropolitan governance will depend on the two-level game that municipal leaders have to play in regional politics. The fragmentation of municipal councils between parties may play a role in so far as heterogeneity within councils can limit the prospect of a clear preference for a particular reform path and can weaken the stability and reliability of the positions of the representatives of these councils (that is, the mayors) who articulate views about the future of metropolitan governing and the institutionalization of regional cooperation in regional arenas.

Table 4 presents the 'effective number of electoral parties' (ENEP), according to Laakso und Taagepera (1979), in local elections between 1994 and 2006. In the calculation of the ENEP, higher values indicate a more equal distribution of votes between a larger number of parties and lower values indicate a concentration of votes on a limited number of parties.⁶

The figures in Table 4 indicate the highest concentration of votes on a limited number of parties in Rhine-Neckar, which fits the observation that in 27.2% of the municipalities in this region, one party gained more than 50% of the votes in local elections in this period. Although a fairly large standard deviation points to differences between the municipalities in Rhine-Neckar, this finding indicates that a relatively clear majority of

6 The calculation is as follows: in a case where four parties receive 25% of the votes each, this results in an 'effective number of electoral parties' of $1/(0.25^2 + 0.25^2 + 0.25^2 + 0.25^2) = 4$ parties. In a case where one party receives 40% and three parties receive 20% each, this results in an 'effective number of electoral parties' of $1/(0.4^2 + 0.2^2 + 0.2^2 + 0.2^2) = 3.57$ parties. And in a case where one party receives 70% and three parties 10% each, this results in an 'effective number of electoral parties' of $1/(0.7^2 + 0.1^2 + 0.1^2 + 0.1^2) = 1.92$ parties.

one or a limited number of parties can be found in this region, which would enable municipal actors to interact in a more or less stable and reliable way. The same applies to Hanover, although the concentration of votes is lower than in Rhine-Neckar. Frankfurt/Rhine-Main is characterized by a higher number of parties and a more balanced distribution of votes. In such a constellation, more difficulties can be expected for articulating a clear position of a municipality in negotiations with other regional actors to develop stable and reliable governance arrangements with other actors in a region. This indicates that institutional fragmentation (that is, the number of jurisdictions in a region) does not necessarily hinder comprehensive regionalism but that the interplay of political and institutional fragmentation does have an influence on regional cooperation.

The relevance of actor-related factors

The case-specific structural variables we have considered explain the evolving forms of metropolitan governance to an extent. But they are not cogent in every case and sometimes lack consistency. Based on a number of examples of recent metropolitan reforms, Heinelt and Kübler (2005b) argue that actor-related variables play a crucial role in achieving (or not achieving) metropolitan-governance arrangements — without neglecting institutional or other structural variables (for a similar conclusion, see Sellers, 2002; Boudreau *et al.*, 2006; Otgaar *et al.*, 2008: 246–57).

Leadership and boundary-spanning individuals

Those who point to the importance of political or, more specifically, metropolitan leadership, emphasize a clear actor-related factor (see Heinelt and Kübler, 2005b: 191; see also Fürst, 2005: 158 and Nicholls, 2005). Their hypothesis is based on the premise that overcoming institutional fragmentation as well as creating functionally overlapping governance structure and achieving more consistent metropolitan governance requires *networkers* and *consensus facilitators* who are seen as *neutral brokers*, and who have the trust of others in a metropolitan area, that is, who are not perceived as (purely) self-interested actors who play their own game.

Examples of such crucially relevant actors were, in the case of Hanover, the former chief executive officers of the city and the county of Hanover and of the planning association. They initiated the debate about a new form of metropolitan governance in 1996 through a jointly authored article. Because it was clear that they were at the end of their political careers, they were regarded as experienced local politicians and trusted as neutral initiators and promoters of a new common vision for the whole region (see Prieb, 2002: 148). They subsequently succeeded in convincing others and facilitating broad consensus about a form of metropolitan governance that was finally established by law by the Lower Saxonian parliament in 2001.

In a similar fashion, the chief executive officer and the elected director of the planning association of Rhine-Neckar were successful in building a coalition with local politicians as well as with members of the parliaments of the three federal states. They stimulated debate and promoted a common vision for the future of the region, which convinced not only the government of Baden-Württemberg but also those of the neighbouring states of Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate. More importantly, they took the opportunity to convince representatives from the business sector of the feasibility of a metropolitan region in this area and facilitated broad consensus. In 2003, the vice chief executive officer of BASF wrote an open letter to regional politicians. He declared decreasing competitiveness in the region as an ‘issue of life and death’ and effective metropolitan governance a key issue for the next decade.

The opposite applies to Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, not because, for instance, the mayor of Frankfurt or other municipalities or the presidents of the counties do not have any ideas on how to govern metropolitan affairs — of course they do. However, whatever each of

them suggests is seen by others as a selfish attempt to strengthen the position of their own local-governmental entity and to weaken the position of the others. This reaction is not only a result of observable mistrust but also of weakness (or absence) of metropolitan leadership and the ability of actors to perform as neutral brokers who may facilitate consensus about certain common perspectives.

Cooperative actor behaviour

Finally, consensual behaviour may be highlighted as a crucial actor-related aspect in achieving metropolitan governance because, assuming that a particular governance arrangement is not imposed by upper levels of government, an agreement between the relevant regional actors is required. As Heinelt and Kübler argue (2005b: 190), relying on 'negative coordination', that is, respecting the positions of others and taking them into account with regard to one's own actions (including speech acts) without communicating with others, is a kind of *sine qua non* for avoiding conflict-driven interactions. Based on this, a 'positive coordination' can evolve step by step, that is, communication about a new solution may either be reached by bargaining (through communication bound to given interests) or arguing (through communication that entails convincing others and being open to new solutions or insights).⁷

Solutions that are based on arguing require open-minded interaction between participants who are open to problem definitions, policy objectives, and so on, articulated by others and who are open to new insights. Furthermore, this kind of (communicative) interaction necessarily relies on a 'triadic' structure,⁸ because participants have to refer to commonly shared and accepted problem definitions and perspectives to solve problems (Saretzki, 1996: 34–5).

In the Hanover region, the Greater Hanover Association, which has a history going back to the 1960s (Blatter, 2006: 131–2), played a remarkable role as a 'socializing agency'. This role related particularly to common perceptions of regional challenges as well as the formation of a shared understanding of what metropolitan governance should be about. Additionally, a relationship of trust (if not friendship) was built between the relevant actors across the parties and municipalities that were involved in its policies and especially in the debates that took place in its council. Within this context, 'agents' who should have represented the interests of their municipalities (and parties) developed preferences that differed from their 'principles'.

In the Rhine-Neckar region, a similar tradition of regional cooperation can be found that dates back to the 1960s and has been supported by the business sector since the late 1980s. In this regard, the formation of a metropolitan-governance arrangement in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main falls behind the other two cases.

Conclusion

As we have shown, institutional structures that determine tasks and responsibilities as well as power relations are less relevant to an explanation of different paths towards metropolitan governance, as these structures are too similar in the observed cases.

Case-specific structural variables are, to a certain extent, useful in explaining diversity in forms of metropolitan governance, but they are no more than political opportunity structures. The position of core cities in the international hierarchy of cities and the

7 For the distinction between 'positive coordination' and 'negative coordination', see Scharpf (1997). For the distinction between 'bargaining' and 'arguing', see Elster (1991) and Saretzki (1996).

8 Bargaining lacks a 'triadic' structure. Instead, it is structured 'dyadically' with respect to the orientations and preferences of those interacting in a given situation.

economic structure of the regions in general on the one hand, and different metropolitan-governance arrangements on the other hand, do show 'correlations'. However, it cannot be proven empirically how the structural and economic determinants these variables indicate have affected the formation (or non-formation) of certain governance arrangements. Fiscal incomes of the municipalities and income disparities are more clearly linked to forming or blocking metropolitan-governance arrangements that enable actors to coordinate their activities purposefully. This is especially true for business taxes, which in Germany represent the most important self-generated resource of income for municipalities.

Fragmented local party systems have some explanatory power — especially in the Rhine-Main region. By contrast, the majority of one or a limited number of parties in municipal councils in the Rhine-Neckar region, and to a limited extent also in Hanover, can be seen as an aspect that enabled municipal representatives to interact in a more stable and reliable way and to negotiate metropolitan-governance arrangements successfully.

Actor-related differences between the three regions may be argued to have contributed greatly to the particular metropolitan-governance arrangements in each of the three cases. In Hanover and Rhine-Neckar, it is clear that relevant *networkers* and *consensus facilitators* who were regarded as *neutral brokers* and were trusted by others, have been able to overcome a fragmented government and governance structure to achieve a metropolitan-governance arrangement that is able to coordinate activities in a metropolitan area in an effective way. The opposite is true for Frankfurt/Rhine-Main. Here, mistrust and a lack of ability on the part of actors to perform as neutral brokers, form networks and facilitate consensus about certain common perspectives have led to a fragmented metropolitan-governance arrangement that is hardly able to coordinate activities effectively.

Finally, the crucial actor-related impact of consensual behaviour on achieving metropolitan governance is barely visible in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main. By contrast, such behaviour has clearly played a decisive role in developing metropolitan-governance arrangements in Hanover and Rhine-Neckar. Furthermore, it is remarkable that the former planning associations in these two regions contributed greatly to consensual behaviour, whereas the former planning association in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main has been contested and therefore people have mistrusted its ability to fulfil the function of bringing about and securing consensus-oriented interactions in the metropolitan area. Instead, it has led to confrontation among actors in the region about its very existence and its outputs.

Recent episodes of reform in all three chosen regions began in the mid-1990s when, in Germany, the underlying lines of reasoning in the debate about metropolitan regions changed. Economic development and competitiveness in the globalized economies of Europe were emphasized more than other goals (Blotevogel and Schmitt, 2006). While this debate offers a consistent rationale for a particular form of metropolitan regionalism, the results, content and institutional set-up of the three metropolitan-governance arrangements have developed in remarkably different ways since the beginning of this debate. Against the background of a two-filter model, political-opportunity structures and the way actors make use of them seem to be of great relevance for explaining existing differences.

'Varieties of city regionalism' (Kantor, 2008: 125) prevent easy generalization and challenge consistent explanatory models (Basolo, 2003: 458). This is particularly true for the recent wave of metropolitan reforms. Closer scrutiny shows that different motivations and ideas are at work here. Given the large number of case studies and normative prescriptions (such as 'new regionalism') in the study of metropolitan governance, a lack of comparative work seems to prevent theoretical insights about the resurgence of metropolitan governance. This is true not only for the German debate but also for other national contexts (see Basolo 2003; Feiock and Carr, 2004; Feiock 2007; see also Blatter, 2006). In our effort to explain why different metropolitan-governance arrangements are

considered to be appropriate options, our attempt to combine structural and actor-related variables has explanatory power, provided that enough contextual knowledge is available.

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Résumé

Selon une hypothèse couramment évoquée dans le débat sur la gouvernance métropolitaine, la reconstruction du statut d'État peut amener la gouvernance métropolitaine sur des trajectoires très diverses. C'est notamment le cas de l'Allemagne où on peut identifier une immense variété de formes organisationnelles de coopération au niveau des agglomérations métropolitaines. Cet article s'intéresse aux possibilités d'expliquer cette diversité dans un pays aux structures institutionnelles plus ou moins uniformes en s'appuyant sur une comparaison de trois régions nationales. L'étude examine si et comment ces différences peuvent émaner d'une combinaison de variables, structurelles ou autres. L'hypothèse de départ s'attache à l'importance des variables structurelles propres à chaque cas comme, par exemple, la position des villes-centres des régions dans la hiérarchie urbaine mondiale, la structure économique de la région, ou bien la dominante ou la polarisation caractéristique du système de partis régional. De plus, l'étude prend comme hypothèse que le comportement coopératif des acteurs imbriqués socialement, ainsi que les facteurs liés aux acteurs, sont également important, y compris les structures de leadership politique et d'incitation spécifiques ou les fenêtres d'opportunité. La conclusion montre que cette double lecture de la transformation de la gouvernance métropolitaine convient le mieux pour comprendre les différences entre les dispositifs de gouvernance des métropoles.