4 Germany

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4.1 Metropolitan governance in Germany

In Germany, metropolitan governance can hardly be discussed as a national or nationwide uniform phenomenon. A preference for flexible and place-based institutional solutions for metropolitan regions is observable instead of a nationwide approach (Zimmermann 2017, 254; Schmidt 2013; Fürst 2005, Blatter 2006). Instead of one type of metropolitan institution introduced by national law, various forms have developed via voluntary cooperation of local self-governments or by state law (or contracts between states when the city-region crosses state borders). The three city-states Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen are themselves strong metropolitan governments, but functional interdependencies with the adjacent cities and counties due to commuter relationships and settlement development induced the need for an additional layer of governance (Zimmermann 2017, 255). Hence, in the case of the three city-states, the creation of metropolitan governance arrangements implies cooperation between local self-governments and between state governments at the same time.

National government has only a weak influence on governance and planning in city-regions as spatial planning, regional policies and local government are a domain of the 16 states. One of the rare nationwide initiatives in the field of metropolitan policies is the concept of “European metropolitan regions” as new spaces for governance that was introduced in spatial planning (*Raumordnung*) as a joint initiative of states and the federal government in the late 1990s (Harrison and Growe 2014; see below). This indicated a change in the way city-regions and agglomerations were seen. Before this initiative, the policy discourse referred to smaller city-regions as agglomerations or densely populated areas (*Ballungsraum* or *Verdichtungsraum*) (Fricke 2017, 299).

4.1.1 *Metropolitan institutions: place-specific models of multi-scaled metropolitan governance*

This decentralised and non-uniform way of dealing with problems of metropolitan development is well accepted in Germany. Thus, it is up to

each city-region to find institutional solutions for a stable coordination of municipalities as well as private actors. This laboratory-like situation has both produced outstanding cases of effective metropolitan governance as well as fragmented regions with a rather weak degree of integration and coordinated action. There is a broad consensus in academia as well as in the world of practice that more effective inter-municipal coordination in most of the German city-regions is needed, but in contrast to many other European states changes happen by way of continuous and flexible adaptations of existing legal frameworks and institutions instead of nationwide frameworks (Zimmermann 2017; Priebs 2019).

Inter-municipal associations (*kommunale Zweckverbände* or *Regionalverbände*) are the most frequently used instrument for the organisation of public services and planning functions in city-regions (Zimmermann 2017, 254). They are characterised by binding inter-municipal decision-making structures and have their own administration (Priebs 2019, 105–106). First experiments took place since the beginning of the 20th century in the Ruhr area and Berlin. The early 1970s (e.g. Frankfurt, see 4.2.1) and 1990s (e.g. Stuttgart, see 4.3.1) was a period where the establishment of metropolitan governments was very much en vogue. A more recent example is the Rhine-Neckar region (2004). The portfolio of tasks and institutional strength varies between city-regions.

Throughout history, the amalgamation of municipalities or municipalities and counties has also been used to cope with issues of rapidly growing agglomerations. One example is Berlin with the creation of a regional city (*Groß-Berlin*) through the annexation of the smaller municipalities contiguous with the core city in 1920 (Priebs 2019, 55). Much more recent cases are the Hanover region and the city-region Aachen. In 2001, the county of Hanover and the former regional planning association were amalgamated with broad consensus of the local actors. In addition, several of the tasks of the government office for the region of Lower Saxony and the city of Hanover have been shifted to the region (e.g. environmental planning) (Blatter 2008, 147–148; Priebs 2019, 114–115; Zimmermann 2017, 258). The city-region Aachen, founded in 2009, is smaller and has fewer functions compared to Hanover. Similar solutions have been discussed for other city-regions as well, e.g. Frankfurt during the 1990s, but a consensus was never reached. Therefore, the Hanover region and city-region Aachen remain exceptional cases for Germany.

Territorial reforms to reduce the number of municipalities and counties by mergers were frequent in the 1970s in western Germany,¹ but not to the extent to form city-regional entities. In some cases, e.g. Stuttgart (see 4.3.2), the core city was even excluded from enlargements. Another wave of territorial reforms took place in some federal states in the 2000s, motivated by attempts to reduce costs and to increase the efficiency of the administrative structure of counties by “economies of scale”. In less populated areas, this upscaling came into conflict with the principle of local self-government

guaranteed by the German constitution: the state's constitutional court of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern stopped the amalgamation of counties in 2007 and pointed out that the new entities with a size between 3,000 and 7,000 km² would not correspond to what is considered the everyday world of residents (Heinelt and Egner 2011, 120).

Amalgamated city-regions such as Hanover have a directly elected council, just like a county. Direct election of the assembly can also be established in regional associations, if their statutes provide for it. In Germany, this is only the case in Stuttgart Region (see 4.3.1), the city-region Aachen, the regional association Saarbrücken and starting from 2020 also in the Ruhr Area. The difference to the Hanover region is that the counties still form a tier of local self-government within the Stuttgart Region and the Ruhr Area and that the regional assembly does not have the political function as a representative body of local self-government. Nevertheless, it can be regarded as a strong form of input legitimacy that differs significantly from governance-like forms of metropolitan politics (Zimmermann 2014, 187, 195).

Despite the creation of metropolitan institutions, counties continue to exist as a second tier of local self-government in city-regions. The amalgamation of counties and core cities is rare. Counties act at the same time as “(1) a *multi-purpose state administration*, (2) an *association of municipalities* and (3) a *territorial unit exercising local self-government* beside (above) the level of municipalities” (Heinelt and Egner 2011, 107). Large cities, however, have the status of county-exempt city, meaning that they fulfil all functions of a county and of a municipality. All cores of metropolitan regions are either county-exempt cities (*Kreisfreie Stadt*) or city-states (*Stadtstaat*), the latter ones with even more autonomy as they are sovereign states. Apart from a few exceptions, all cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants have the status of a county-exempt city, but there are also numerous cities with only 40,000–50,000 inhabitants that have this status. This depends on the settlement structure in the federal state, but there are also historical reasons. All in all, 107 cities in Germany have the status of county-exempt city (see Figure 4.1). The 301 German counties vary enormously with regard to population size, surface and population density. The biggest counties such as the Uckermark (3,060 km²) even exceed the size of the federal state Saarland (Heinelt and Egner 2011, 109).

4.1.1.1 The nationwide initiative “European Metropolitan Regions”

In many German metropolitan regions several regional scales of governance have emerged over the last decades (see Figure 4.1). They are the result of local initiatives and / or incentives provided by other governmental layers (Zimmermann 2017, 262). One of those incentives was the joint “Initiative European Metropolitan Regions in Germany” (*Initiative Europäische Metropolregionen in Deutschland*) taken by the Federal and State Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning (see Table 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Metropolitan regions and Regionalverbände in Germany 2018 Concept: P. Feiertag Cartography: F. Gela

The concept of “Europäische Metropolregion in Deutschland” was first mentioned as a new spatial category in the action framework (*Raumordnungspolitischer Handlungsrahmen*) enacted by the Standing Conference of Federal and State Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning (*Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung*, MKRO) in 1995 (MKRO 1995, 27).

Table 4.1 European Metropolitan Regions in Germany

<i>European Metropolitan Region</i>	<i>Population (million, 2017)</i>	<i>Area (km², 2019)</i>
Rhein-Ruhr	12.8	15,425
<i>thereof Regionalverband Ruhr</i>	5.1	4,439
<i>thereof Rheinland</i>	8.7	12,278
Berlin-Brandenburg	6.1	30,546
München	6.1	25,545
Frankfurt Rhein-Main	5.8	14,753
<i>Regionalverband Frankfurt Rhein-Main</i>	2.4	2,674
Stuttgart	5.4	15,425
<i>thereof VRS</i>	2.8	3,654
Hamburg	5.4	28,529
Hannover Braunschweig Göttingen Wolfsburg	3.8	18,623
<i>Hanover Region</i>	1.1	2,290
Nürnberg	3.5	21,781
Nordwesten	2.8	13,771
Mitteldeutschland	2.7	10,563
Rhein-Neckar	2.4	5,637

Source: Website IKM

Initially being six regions (Berlin/Brandenburg, Hamburg, München, Rhine-Main, Rhine-Ruhr, Stuttgart), the number increased to seven in 1997 (including Halle/Leipzig-Sachsendreieck) and 11 in 2005 (including Hannover-Braunschweig-Göttingen, Nuremberg, Rhine-Neckar and Bremen-Oldenburg) (Blotevogel 2005, 642). Since 2005, this number of metropolitan regions has not changed and is not likely to grow any further, though the Rhine-Ruhr Region is de facto split up into three cooperation spaces and no longer exists as a territorial framework for policies and politics (Zimmermann 2017). However, cross-border regions with metropolitan functions have been introduced as an additional category (see Figure 4.2). They have been targeted by two calls for model projects² and were encouraged to build their own network IMeG (*Initiativkreis metropolitane Grenzregionen*), which was founded in 2011. These regions were included in the revised national spatial vision for spatial development from March 2016 (Hager 2016).

The initiative to label European metropolitan regions nationwide cannot be considered as reconfiguration of the existing formal arrangements for metropolitan governance and does not change the diversity of institutional solutions (Zimmermann 2017, 254). Metro regions have been included in the national spatial vision and in state plans of the *Länder* but they have not been the cause of a territorial or functional reform granting them any competencies or financial resources. It is more an affirmation of the function of a metropolitan region relevant in terms of location marketing. Fricke (2020, 240) describes them as “rhetoric label related to positive expectations”. In part, existing organisational bodies have been labelled as European metropolitan region or at least nominated as a representative within the national

Figure 4.2 Map competitiveness in the updated spatial vision 2016

network of metropolitan regions, whereas at the same time additional regional and inter-municipal initiatives for cooperation have emerged on different scales. Apart from putting them on the European map, the support of the national ministry and its agency are limited to including the metropolitan regions as new spatial category in spatial strategies and spatial observation and monitoring as well as encouraging cooperation in form of calls for model projects (*Modellprojekte der Raumordnung MORO*).

4.1.1.2 Multi-scaled governance

The European metropolitan regions described in federal documents mostly have a larger spatial dimension than existing city-regional institutions (see 4.1.4) and therefore lead in Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Hanover, Munich and Bremen to multi-scaled arrangements with an additional level of regional cooperation. As can be seen in Figure 4.1, a likely pattern is the combination of county-exempt cities, a strong institutional core on a smaller scale (usually a regional planning authority or *Regionalverband* in city-regions) and softer forms of governance on larger scales (European metropolitan region). Hence, the multi-scaled arrangements consist of two or even three levels of governance and cooperation. In Stuttgart and Frankfurt, strong core regions with statutory planning functions and equipped with further tasks are supplemented by an additional layer of the larger European metropolitan region. In Munich, the regional planning authority is a less crucial part of the governance arrangement because its competence is limited to regional planning while we have a multi-purpose association in Stuttgart. An additional voluntary association of municipalities and counties covering a larger “Großraum München” exists since the 1950s: the “Planning Association for the Wider Economic Area” (*Planungsverband Äußerer Wirtschaftsraum*). Its role is a service provider for smaller municipalities but takes at the same time a regional perspective by coordinating traffic and settlement development on a voluntary basis and articulating interests in the region (Zimmermann 2017, 259). The association “Europäische Metropolregion München EMM e.V.” constitutes a third layer and is even larger. This voluntary cooperation between local governments, partners from the business sector, universities, research institutes and civil society organisations is financed through membership fees and has the aim to promote the economic development of the whole region and to increase its attractiveness and quality of life (Zimmermann 2017, 260).

In some cases, such as Stuttgart (see 4.3.3), the larger metropolitan scale remained a weak layer with low problem-solving capacities. In smaller and polycentric regions, where a single city cannot mobilise the critical mass to become internationally visible, local actors perceived mutual benefits that can be realised through cooperation (Zimmermann 2017, 257). City-regions such as Nuremberg and Rhine-Neckar used this opportunity to establish new metropolitan governance structures in the context of the national

European Metropolitan Regions initiative. The Rhine-Neckar region is worth mentioning in this context because this region spans over the borders of three states (Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Württemberg). Though being an association made of cities and counties, the creation made the signature of an inter-state treaty necessary because the task of statutory regional planning will be accomplished by the cross-border planning association (Nelles 2012).

Note that these multi-scaled metropolitan governance arrangements exist in addition to the five levels of the German multilevel system (Heinelt and Egner 2011, 107):

- Federal level (*Bund*);
- Federal states (*Länder*);
- Government offices for the regions (*Bezirksregierungen*; in eight out of 16 states);³
- Counties (*Landkreise*) and county-exempt cities (*kreisfreie Städte*);
- Municipalities (*Städte und Gemeinden*).

Thus, they add to the complexity of territorial administration (see 4.3.1). The only exception is Hanover as in that case, the region has substituted the county and the former planning authority.

4.1.2 Functions: production functions, regional planning and mobility

As we have seen in the previous section, metropolitan governance in Germany is implemented in various organisational forms, policy sectors and scales. As the institutions show high variations, the number of functions they fulfil diverges as well. There are no compulsory functions delegated to all German city-regions. Functions are either defined by the members on a voluntary basis depending on agreed common interests or fixed on a case-by-case basis by state laws (e.g. Stuttgart, see 4.3.1). German city-regions are an institutional level above the counties and for the most are not responsible for social production functions such as social housing, schools, social public services and environmental policies.

The federal states have almost total responsibility for organising their internal structure and this includes local government and inter-municipal arrangements. The local level has the right of self-government guaranteed by the constitution and is formed by municipalities as well as counties as second tier (Zimmermann 2017, 254; Heinelt and Egner 2011). Over the last decade, the *Länder* governments have decentralised a number of tasks. Thus, municipalities and counties play a vital role in administering and implementing both national and state policies. Also, a high share of employees in the public sector are working for municipalities or counties apart from teachers, the police and university staff employed by the states. The tasks and competences of municipalities and counties as well as the

grants they receive to fulfil those tasks differ from Land to Land (Heinelt and Egner 2011, 106–108). The local level was originally mainly responsible for social reproduction functions such as social services, housing and recreational facilities, planning and urban regeneration. The functional portfolio of the municipalities was expanded in the period of deindustrialisation, so that the municipalities were given financial and legal means to take action, for example to promote the renewal of old urban quarters or to expand public transport (Zimmermann 2020). Whereas production functions, i.e. measures to promote competitiveness, were more likely to be articulated at state and federal level. This separation of scale-specific functions became blurred in the 1980s and 1990s when cities, and later on city-regions, gained relevance as the main sites of economic globalisation (Mayer 1996; Brenner 2004).

When describing the functions delegated to city-regional institutions, we have to keep in mind that many city-regions are nowadays characterised by multi-scaled governance arrangements and, in addition, single-purpose associations for tasks such as public transport, water supply or waste treatment have not necessarily been absorbed by other more comprehensive metropolitan institutions. Therefore, functions carried out at the city-regional level can be split between several institutions and these may refer to variable geographies.

Functions depend on the scale and type of institution. The initiatives of the 1970s focussed on planning issues, public transport and other public services, whereas governance forms created during the new regionalism period of the 1990s or triggered by the Initiative European Metropolitan Regions had a focus on economic development and internationalisation (Zimmermann 2017, 261–262). According to Blatter (2008, 157–158), the integrated steering of regional settlement development and burden-sharing for investment in regional infrastructure demand formalised regional institutions, whereas light, performative forms of governance with a flexible, project-oriented geometry and the inclusion of private actors, particularly from the business sphere are suitable for production functions oriented towards large-scale competitiveness such as regional marketing, promotion of economic development and attraction of investors. Hamburg metropolitan region is a prototype of the latter functional profile, that corresponds best to the concept of a European metropolitan region:

The ahead of time self-designation as a metropolitan region, the successful establishment of the metropolitan region as a “brand”, the clear focus on major flagship projects and a joint bid for the Olympic Games are clear indicators of such a form of governance (own translation).⁴

(Blatter 2008, 143–144)

Water supply and wastewater treatment (since the 1920s) as well as public transport and waste disposal (since 1970s) are organised via inter-municipal associations in most city-regions. However, apart from public transport

associations these types of single-purpose inter-municipal cooperation often only concern a small number of adjacent municipalities and are not extended to the city-regional level. Hanover and Stuttgart are exceptions in this regard. In Hanover region, waste disposal as well as public transport is carried out by the region (Zimmermann 2014, 186). Stuttgart Region has the responsibility for regional public transport, i.e. construction and operation of the light rail system (*S-Bahn*) and also a limited competence in waste management.

Recently, some city-regions have taken up new activity fields such as broadband networks (and digitisation), wind energy and electro-mobility. They are not the responsible level for authorising, constructing or operating these infrastructures, but support the municipalities and help to establish common framework conditions in the city-region. In the cases of Stuttgart and Frankfurt (see 4.3.3 and 4.3.4), the regional associations facilitated a joint tender for broadband expansion. Potential sites for wind energy are indicated in the regional plan (Stuttgart) or regional land use plan (Frankfurt). E-mobility is, among others, supported by a masterplan for fast-charging infrastructure.

Social services, education (kindergartens, schools) and health care (hospitals, local health authorities) are provided by the local level, either by the cities or the counties. Social benefits for the unemployed, handicapped or elderly people as well as health services account for a large share of the counties' expenditure (Heinelt and Egner 2011, 117). Hanover region is also responsible for the management of public hospitals (Zimmermann 2014, 186) but it is an exceptional case as it has replaced the county within the area of the city-region.

Regional planning and regional landscape planning are well established in Germany (see Figure 4.5), but political relevance and organisational forms differ from state to state (Schmidt 2009, 1915). In some states such as Hesse or North Rhine-Westphalia the government offices of the regions are responsible for statutory regional planning. Many other states have created single purpose inter-municipal authorities responsible for statutory regional planning (*Planungsverbände*) (Zimmermann 2017, 254). The authorities *Verband Region Stuttgart*, *Verband Region Rhein-Neckar*, *Regionalverband Ruhr*, *Regionaler Planungsverband München* and *Region Hannover* elaborate statutory regional plans. In some city-regions, the tasks of the planning authority have been expanded, combining regional planning with other tasks such as public transport, regional parks, regional business development and tourism (Stuttgart, see 4.3.1). The city-states are specific cases with regard to regional planning, because their local land use plan replaces the regional plan as well as the state plan. The federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg have established a joint state planning agency (*Gemeinsame Landesplanung Berlin-Brandenburg*). In the case of Bremen, an informal regional development concept as well as projects for implementation for a wider city-region have been developed by the inter-municipal association *Kommunalverbund Niedersachsen Bremen e. V.* (Blatter 2008, 145). In

Hamburg metropolitan region, the elaboration of a joint spatial vision was discussed in the mid-2010s, but was not supported by all partners. As an intermediary step, thematic maps regarding demographic development and building activity with data from 1990, 2000 and 2010 have been elaborated for monitoring purposes and joint understanding of the spatial structure.

Local land use planning is a municipal task in Germany, carried out by the cities themselves or several small inter-municipal associations within a city-region. For example, the Stuttgart Region consists of 179 municipalities and is covered by 79 land use plans (see 4.3.2). Frankfurt is one of the few exceptions with a regional land use plan (RFNP) for the entire city-region (see 4.2). The instrument of a regional land use plan has been introduced in national planning law in 1998 (ROG § 13 Abs. 4) with the objective of reducing deficits in the interaction of the local and regional planning levels for meeting the complex challenges in city-regions (Domhardt and Hilligardt 2011, 398). However, 20 years later it has remained a niche solution with only two approved RFNP in the entire country.

Germany's city-regions are also active in the field of green and blue infrastructure, either via shared responsibility for the maintenance of green spaces in-between municipalities (e.g. regional corridors or green belts) or by co-financing municipal projects (e.g. regional landscape park in Stuttgart). Creating a network of green corridors (*Grünzüge*) and bicycle paths both for residents and tourists has been one of the core tasks of the regional planning authority in the Ruhr Area (RVR).

The functions of regional marketing, business development and tourism are usually carried out at a city-regional scale, either by the core institution or a development agency organised as a public-private partnership. Associations with public and private partners such as the *Europäische Metropolregion München* EMM undertake voluntary actions with the overarching goal to promote the visibility, the economic development and the quality of life of the city-region (Zimmermann 2017, 260).

Large cultural or sports events such as the Olympics, the European Capital of Culture or an International Building Exhibition (IBA) also have the function of raising international awareness. City-regional institutions are often involved in these voluntary initiatives and bring local actors together. In the case of the European Capital of Culture 2010, the regional planning authority of the Ruhr region played an essential role during the process of application and implementation (Schmidt 2013). In the Stuttgart Region, the planning authority VRS was part of the consortium that submitted a bid for the Olympics.

4.1.3 Ideas behind the concept of European metropolitan regions: competitiveness among global cities despite a polycentric urban system

The introduction of metropolitan regions as a spatial category has been discussed in Germany as a paradigm shift in spatial planning (*Raumordnung*) and regional development. German spatial planning followed the principle

of equal and balanced living conditions (*Gleichwertige Lebensbedingungen*) for decades. It is linked to a good standard of services of general interest in the proximity of citizens and the central-places concept as well as balanced economic growth. Regional development policy was (and still is) concentrated on peripheral or economically underdeveloped regions. Priority for metropolitan regions was a relatively new idea in this context.

The name “European metropolitan regions in Germany” already evokes that those city-regions are supposed to be able to compete with other large city-regions on a European if not a global scale. In response to the challenges of European integration and the intensification of globalisation, spatial planning at the federal level centred in the middle of the 1990s on the task of positioning major cities and regions within European and global circuits of capital accumulation by emphasising the importance of a limited number of metropolitan regions due to their competitiveness (both nationally and internationally) and their role as economic drivers of the national economy (Harrison and Growe 2014, 29). Germany has a polycentric urban system instead of one global city. Still, several city-regions were well positioned within European circuits of capital (Harrison and Growe 2014, 30).

The European metropolitan regions have been included in the national spatial vision (*Leitbilder der Raumentwicklung*) of 2006 and its updated version from 2016. The *Leitbilder* 2016 contain four thematic vision maps: “Enhance competitiveness”, “Ensure the provision of public services”, “Control and sustainably develop land uses” and “Shape climate change and the transformation of the energy system”. Metropolitan regions are the key element visualised in the map on competitiveness and are interpreted as 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, 8). This increased relevance given to metropolitan regions triggered massive resistance against the concept from the Associations of German Counties and Municipalities (Kawka and Staats 2016, 535), fearing a redistribution of subsidies towards metropolitan regions at the expense of rural spaces and towns. It was discussed if a paradigm change neglecting the equal provision of public services was about to happen (Blotevogel and Schmitt 2006; Harrison and Growe 2014, 32). In fact, the vision acknowledged the enhanced role of metropolitan regions, but there was a reluctance to actively push them and they did not receive any specific funding from the federal level.

The national spatial vision from 2006 and its update in 2016 (see Figure 4.2) show the attempt to reconcile both principles of competitiveness and equal living conditions by depicting larger metropolitan zones of influence including rural areas (*weitere metropolitane Verflechtungsräume einschließlich ländlicher Räume*). The entire country is divided into such zones of influence of metropolitan cores in order to avoid left-over spaces (Hesse and Leick 2013, 353). Of course, the distance between Berlin and

the coast of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern or Munich and the Czech border is huge and that the interlinkage is not that strong can be illustrated by the main transport infrastructure, at least when not thinking in terms of daily commuters (see Figure 4.2). Metropolitan regions are depicted in a multi-scaled way, consisting of a metropolitan core and further locations of metropolitan functions linked by transport networks, the immediate metropolitan zones of influence (*engere metropolitane Verflechtungsräume*) and the larger zones of influence that have been attributed to the metro regions. Thus, analytical elements regarding metropolitan functions, population density and transport axes are combined with a normative interpretation of desirable spatial relations. On this new map of Germany,

the territorial boundaries of the politico-administrative Länder are nowhere to be seen. What we see instead is an idealized structure of more networked forms of regional cooperation and collaboration on a regional level. Identified as “large-scale areas of responsibility”, each area is shown to comprise an existing metropolitan region and a wider “area of influence”. Of particular note is how the boundary lines remain ambiguous. They also do not correspond to any known administrative or functional boundary. (Harrison and Growe 2014, 33)

The concept of large-scale partnerships for territorial cohesion (*großräumige Verantwortungsgemeinschaften*) was introduced in 2004 during the workshops for the preparation of the national spatial vision, although some doubts were raised as to whether these supra-regional partnerships were a mere rhetoric for appeasement (Hesse and Leick 2013, 353). How they could be realised in practice was explored later on by a national call for model projects for supra-regional partnerships (2007–2013) issued by the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung, BBSR). Despite a dominance of the metro regions in the discourse (Hesse and Leick 2013), the federal initiatives to support the implementation of the national spatial vision did not target the institutional organisation of metropolitan cores, but instead addressed the cooperation with their hinterland and urban-rural-partnerships.

A proposal of recommended competences for metropolitan institutions was part of the national spatial development report (*Raumordnungsbericht*) 2005, though without any binding impact (BBSR 2005, 189). The report included a chapter on metropolitan regions in Germany as part of a chapter on spaces with particular need for intervention. The federal government is responsible for spatial observation and has the obligation to present national spatial development reports at regular intervals to the parliament. The shift in focus of the following reports show that metropolitan regions have lost momentum in the national discourse. The following spatial development report (BBSR 2012) did use the term of metropolitan region, but

already far less prominently. Their importance for growth and innovation was confirmed without addressing their internal organisation. The most recent report, dating from 2017, has the title “*Daseinsvorsorge sichern*” (securing services of general interest), clearly confirming the idea of equal living conditions as central concern for Germany’s future spatial development. The report focuses on the central-places system and speaks of regional centres (*Oberzentrum*) and big cities, not of metropolitan regions. Overall, metropolitan regions are today well established in the thinking of professionals and academics, but political attention has shifted again towards peripheral areas where services of general interest are under pressure due to a shrinking and ageing population, tight public budgets and privatisation. In urban agglomerations, the key issue, which receives a lot of media coverage, is housing shortage and rising rents, producing higher living costs and gentrification.

4.1.4 *Spatial relationships: fuzzy boundaries of metropolitan regions*

How many city-regions should be called “metropolitan regions” has been defined based on political decisions at national level, but their exact delimitation has been left deliberately open. Schematic cartographic representations are used to leave the decision of the appropriate governance space to the *Länder* and the local actors themselves (Kawka and Staats 2016, 537; Fricke 2020, 237–240). Despite the blurry boundaries in the national vision maps (see Figure 4.2), some indications were given due to cities represented on the map. This has already been the case in earlier official representations from 1997 and 2006 adopted by the conference of ministers MKRO (see Figure 4.3).

The seven, or respectively 11, metropolitan regions are depicted in a very schematic way as a hexagon or network of several hexagons in case of the polycentric metropolitan region *Sachsendreieck*, later re-named Central Germany. Apart from the core cities of the metro region, other cities at the fringes are represented either as part of the metro region – or outside of it. Although the national vision maps themselves do not have any direct binding power, these choices had an impact on the local spatial definition of the European metropolitan regions, if they were supported by the *Land*. For example, in Stuttgart the national maps represent the metropolitan region larger than the pre-existent city-regional institution Region Stuttgart and therefore called for an additional layer of metropolitan governance (see 4.3.2). In contrast, Rhine-Ruhr has never been institutionalised as one single metro region such as suggested by the national representation. The large metro region had initially been picked up by the state plan of North Rhine-Westphalia but did not have the full political support of the *Land* because of the unfavourable split of the *Land*. The municipal actors did not endorse the idea either due to too heterogeneous interests and mentalities. Therefore, this

Figure 4.3 Representation of metropolitan regions in Germany 1997 and 2006

large area formed of ten counties and 22 county-exempt cities never became a governance space (Blotevogel and Schulze 2010, 256–257). Instead, the two subspaces Ruhr and Köln/Bonn have been formed and are both part of the network of German metropolitan regions (*Initiativkreis Europäische Metropolregionen in Deutschland* IKM) (see Figure 4.4). Düsseldorf is left as a stand-alone city.

The European metropolitan regions did not initially have a clear spatial reference, but resembled variable geometries of cooperation (Fricke 2020, 240). The necessity of a clear boundary first arose due to monitoring activities of the network of metro regions IKM, supported by the federal agency BBSR (Pütz 2016). The delimitations used in subsequent monitoring reports (see Figure 4.4) show, however, that the spatial outline of the metro regions is not definite. The evolution is most obvious in the case of Hamburg, where additional partners successively joined the club or in the EMR Central Germany. Changes also occurred in Munich, Nuremberg, North-West

Figure 4.4 Evolving delimitation of metropolitan regions used by IKM monitoring

(Bremen) and Köln/Bonn. In addition, those delimitations chosen by the local actors themselves deviate significantly from the spatial imaginary of the national vision map (see Figure 4.2). Both clearly show, however, that the concept of European metropolitan region does not correspond to the territory of a new jurisdiction with container-like boundaries. The cooperation spaces of European metropolitan regions partially overlap, meaning that some counties and municipalities are partners of two different metropolitan cooperation spaces. In addition to that, they cross administrative borders, especially in the case of the three city-states Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen. Seven out of 11 metropolitan regions cross the borders of federal states.

Europäische Metropolregionen such as defined by the organisations representing them in the network IKM are large entities, ranging from 5,637 to 30,546 km² (2017, Monitoring IKM). In contrast, planning regions for regional plans only cover between 525 and 8,291 km², depending on the federal state (Schmidt et al. 2018, 646). Lower-Saxony has small planning regions compared to the other federal states: apart from Braunschweig region (*Regionalverband Großraum Braunschweig*, see Priebs 2019, 116), they correspond to the counties. Ten European metropolitan regions are much larger than the regional planning regions of their core cities (see Figure 4.5). Rhine-Neckar is an exception, where regional planning association and European metropolitan region are congruent. Some European metropolitan regions are composed of several regional planning regions such as Stuttgart (see 4.3.2) or Berlin-Brandenburg with a joint state plan for both federal states. The smaller core regions Ruhr (6a on Figure 4.4) and *Verband Region Stuttgart* (11a) correspond to the territory of a regional plan and the responsible planning association.

As additional larger scales of metropolitan cooperation have emerged due to the initiative European metropolitan regions, we can speak of a partial re-scaling of metropolitan governance (Zimmermann 2017, 261), whereas planning scales have not been modified. The differentiation of scaled metropolitan policies as well as openness and frequent change of cooperation spaces renders the notions “metropolitan region” and “city-region” fuzzy.

4.2 Frankfurt/Rhine-Main: still a fragmented territory?

The Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region is a fuzzy political concept with a flexible geography and a range of collaborative arrangements (Nelles 2012; Hoyler et al. 2006; Schmidt 2013). As we will show later, there are several spatial delimitations present but for various reasons there is no commonly accepted understanding of the perimeter of the Rhine-Main region. In part, this is due to the fact that cooperation is based on actors and functions and not necessarily on congruent space. We refer predominantly to the territory of the planning authority because membership of the 80 municipalities is mandatory and the planning authority is an agency with a high degree of centrality within the network of regional initiatives. We will, however, demonstrate

Figure 4.5 Planning regions for regional plans ©BBSR Bonn 2019

that the scales, perimeters and actor composition for cooperation vary in this region, mostly depending on the task.

The core city (Frankfurt am Main) is the dominant urban centre with 747,000 inhabitants. The territory of the planning authority, which is responsible for a special type of regional land use plan, has 2.4 million inhabitants meaning that the core city has a 31% share of the regional population. The second and third biggest cities in the planning region are Offenbach (127,000, directly bordering Frankfurt) and Hanau (96,000). The size of this region is 2,460 km² (Regionalverband FRM 2019). It is usually called an “agglomeration” (*Ballungsraum*).

The region for statutory regional planning is the territory of the government district southern Hesse (size: 7,444,82 km², 4 million inhabitants, ten counties, four county-exempt cities and three cities with a special status).

On a larger scale, it has become quite common to refer to a metropolitan region. This is a huge area with a polycentric structure and fuzzy boundaries. Besides Frankfurt am Main, there are a number of cities with a population between 100,000 and 250,000 inhabitants, like Offenbach and Hanau, Darmstadt and Wiesbaden (which is the capital city of Hesse) as well as Aschaffenburg and Mainz which are in the federal states of Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatinate (Mainz is the capital city of the latter). This area comprises 18 counties and seven county-exempt cities with roughly 5.8 million inhabitants and crosses the borders of three states: Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Bavaria.

4.2.1 *The institutional arrangement*

The relevant institutional actors in the region of southern Hesse are the district government of the region (*Regierungspräsidium Darmstadt*), responsible for statutory regional planning, the planning authority (responsible for a regional land use plan), the counties and the county-exempt cities.

The history of regional planning and inter-municipal cooperation in this region goes back to the late 1950s and 1960s. In 1965, the Regional Planning Association Untermain (*Regionale Planungsgemeinschaft Untermain*) was established as a more formal arrangement with a rather small perimeter. Its successor, the *Umlandverband Frankfurt* was established in 1975 and was much stronger. The *Umlandverband* or UVF had a directly elected regional assembly and a broader portfolio of functions (Scheller and Langhagen-Rohrbach 2004). Forty-three municipalities around the city of Frankfurt were members of this association. Among the responsibilities of the *Umlandverband* were (Freund 2003, 133):

- Inter-municipal land use planning and coordination of land use (including landscape planning);
- Provision and management of leisure facilities of regional importance;

Figure 4.6 Frankfurt/ Rhine-Main region 2021 Concept: K. Zimmermann
Cartography: F. Gela

- Technical infrastructure, traffic planning and the public transportation system, water supply, energy provision, sewage treatment, waste disposal.

The UVF was, therefore, a kind of multi-purpose association and met the zeitgeist of the metropolitan reform era (Heinz 2007). In fact, in the 1970s it was the metropolitan organisation that was considered to be the most innovative one in Western Germany. However, the power of the UVF was limited by its internal structure. Apart from the directly elected council, a municipal chamber existed, composed of representatives of its member municipalities. The municipal chamber was necessary as land use planning is a municipal task. Hence, every municipality needed to be provided with

Table 4.2 Regionalverband Rhine Main in the multilayer system of the Regierungsbezirk Southern Hesse

<i>Level</i>	<i>Number of institutions</i>	<i>Directly elected assembly</i>	<i>Name of institution</i>
Land (federal state)	1	yes	Hesse
Regierungspräsidium (district government)	1	no	Regierungspräsidium Darmstadt
Regionalverband (regional planning authority)	1	no	Regionalverband
Landkreis (county)	5 (10/18)	yes	<i>Hochtaunuskreis, etc.</i>
Kreisfreie Städte (county exempt)	3 (4/7)		<i>Frankfurt, Offenbach, Wiesbaden, Darmstadt, (Mainz, Aschaffenburg, Gießen)</i>
Gemeinde (municipality)	80 (184/ca. 300)	yes	

Note: numbers in brackets refer to the district and the metropolitan region

participation rights during the plan preparation process. Both chambers rather competed and unfortunately, the UVF's performance varied significantly between the various fields of interest (see Freund 2003, 133).

As a result, criticism of the UVF never stopped and during the 1990s the debate on an appropriate and effective metropolitan governance arrangement in the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region gained considerable momentum and the UVF was in the middle of this turmoil. It was, however, not only the underperformance of the UVF but also the wider concern about economic competitiveness of the region that triggered the debate.

In any case, the gap between formal competence and actual capacity to implement policies provoked claims for the abolition of the UVF rather than calls to equip it with more powers. As a first step of change in the governance of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main the state government of Hesse took waste management away from the competence of the UVF. At the same time some classical conflicts emerged: the city of Frankfurt focussed on the fight for a financial equalisation scheme for the city and its surroundings, whereas the economic elite and the press (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) concentrated increasingly on issues of competitiveness (especially on raising the attractiveness of the metropolitan region for investors; see Blatter 2005, 145).

As a result, and separate from the changes which were undertaken by political-administrative actors, the private sector initiated activities on behalf of the metropolitan area. These joint activities grew out of a growing consciousness of challenges resulting from worldwide competition and the creation of the European Common Market in 1993. In the middle of 1991, the chambers of commerce (in short IHKs) of the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main area intensified their cooperation and established the IHK-Forum

Rhine-Main. This Forum has a catchment area larger than the planning authority (Blatter 2005).⁵

In 1995, another organisation for economic cooperation was established: the Economic Development Agency for the Region of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main (*Wirtschaftsförderung Region Frankfurt/Rhein-Main*). This time the UVF was the initiator and established this agency as a kind of counterweight to the IHK-Forum. But it quickly lost its ideological stance and turned into a marketing-association of a considerable capacity to attract new municipal members (Blatter 2005, 145).

Only a year later, in 1996, about 150 enterprises established the Economic Initiative Frankfurt/Rhine-Main (*Wirtschaftsinitiative Frankfurt/Rhein-Main*). The main reason for founding this initiative was a shared concern about the lack of a “unified regional image” (Hoyler et al. 2006, 130). The creation of – at least – three initiatives from the business sphere (IHK-Forum, Economic Initiative Frankfurt/Rhine-Main and the Economic Development Agency for the Region of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main) indicates that economic development and competitiveness of the region in comparison with other regions worldwide was a reason for concern in the late 1990s. At the same time, it is justified to ask why there are three initiatives with partly overlapping but also competing agendas.

The 1999 elections for the Hesse parliament (*Landtag*) brought significant change for the governance of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main as the result of the election led to change of government (Christian Democrats (CDU) and Liberals (FDP)). According to the coalition’s position the best way to deal with the administratively fragmented metropolitan region was by means of sector specific municipal cooperation. As the metropolitan area is in any case polycentric and as the residents still retain their local identity, voluntary cooperation between the municipalities was seen as the best and only possible way of coordinating decentralised and fragmented activities. The government issued a law on the “strengthening of the inter-municipal cooperation and planning in the Rhine-Main Region”.⁶

The law abolished the *Umlandverband* and transferred in April 2001 the planning responsibilities to a newly created planning authority (*Planungsverband Frankfurt/Rhein-Main*). This new planning authority comprises a much wider catchment area than its predecessor (75 municipalities instead of 43), but this geographic extension went hand in hand with less powers. At least at the beginning, the association was in fact more a single-purpose association, whereas the UVF had formally (and early on in reality) a wide range of responsibilities. The new planning association is responsible for the preparatory land use plan (*Regionaler Flächennutzungsplan*) and for the landscape plan (*Landschaftsplan*) for the area covered by its members. In German planning law, the preparatory land use plan is a municipal plan, but in the region Frankfurt/Rhine-Main this task has been shifted to the planning authority. Because the territory of the new planning association included 75 rather than 43 municipalities,⁷ the

plan exhibits a stronger regional dimension and was therefore considered to be an innovative instrument for the coordination of land use in metropolitan areas.

Apart from its limited range of competencies the new planning association also lacks – in comparison with the UVF – direct democratic legitimacy, as the regional chamber is not composed of directly elected members but of 93 representatives from the 75 municipalities who are the members of the planning association. Each municipality sends one representative, but the vote is weighted according to size (note that this describes the situation before the accession of five municipalities in April 2021):

Votes (according to inhabitants)

Frankfurt	12
Offenbach	4
Hanau	3
Bad Homburg	2
Rüsselsheim	2
70 other cities	1

The chamber is organised into four fractions, currently the Social Democratic Party (SPD) has a majority (44 votes), followed by the conservative CDU (32), an independent list (11) and the Green party (6) (Regionalverband FRM 2020, 8).

The law also defined a list of public tasks of regional importance but not to be accomplished by the planning authority and gave one year for the municipalities to find collaborative new solutions for these tasks on a voluntary basis (MetropolG Land Hessen 2018). If this is not done, the federal state was empowered to impose an obligatory association. The tasks covered were waste disposal, water management, social and cultural infrastructure, regional parks, marketing and attracting investment and public transport.

The body being responsible for this process of finding voluntary solutions was the “council of the region” (*Rat der Region*) that gathered the county presidents and mayors of cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. The voluntary character of this process was put into question as the Hesse government preserved the right to force the municipalities to cooperate if this did not occur in a bottom-up way. The restriction of federal state intervention is couched in vague terms. Cooperation should be imposed only for key policy areas (listed in the law). This issue of the possible intervention of the federal state government led to a strong reaction from the municipalities (Heinelt et al. 2011), which argued that the law was unconstitutional, i.e. it cut across the constitutional guarantee of local self-government. The main reason for such a strong reaction was the fear of being forced to give up some competencies (as well as a share of financial resources) and the non-voluntary inclusion of 32 municipalities that had not previously been

members of the UVF. The appeal was rejected by the Hesse Constitutional Court in May 2002 and the law came into effect.

Apart from the two bodies created by the law, various other initiatives in the metropolitan area have flourished since the year 2000. This can be seen to be a result of the underperformance of the organisational setting established by the law of 2000.

The council of the region was not very welcomed by the political leaders of local governments and their engagement in this context of forced voluntary collaboration was rather low. Instead, in May 2000, the mayor of Frankfurt initiated a regional conference that brought together the mayors of the big cities and the presidents of the counties of the area. The composition of the conference emphasised the extended boundaries of the metropolitan region insofar as it reached much further than the council of the region (i.e. beyond the boundaries of Hesse). The principle of dialogue characterising the interactions of this body is underpinned by the fact that the host of the conference was rotating.

The success of council of the region in finding arrangements for all the mentioned tasks of regional importance was limited and where solutions were found, the state government played a facilitating role (i.e. in the field of culture). The state government did not use the option of a top-down intervention but instead, in 2011, changed the whole setting again. The ineffective council of the region was replaced by a board of the region. This board has similar tasks but fewer members and a more effective mode of decision-making (i.e. the representatives of a municipality are not obliged anymore to vote concordantly). In addition, the planning authority and the board of the region should cooperate more closely which gives the planning authority more influence. The current structure is as follows: the board of the region (*Regionalvorstand*) is the main body in terms of leadership and decision-making (§§ 14, 15 MetropolG). Members of the board are the director of the planning authority and up to two deputy directors. In addition, up to eight honorary members (representatives of the civil society but in reality, mayors as well as members of the parliament of Hesse), the six county presidents and the lord mayors of Frankfurt am Main and Offenbach are full members of the board. The board also has members with a guest status (no right to vote). These are the mayors of adjacent cities that are not formal members, such as Darmstadt and Wiesbaden. There is also an advisory board and the members are the chamber of commerce, the regional transport association (RMV), the chamber of crafts, the economic initiative and the German Trade Union Federation (DGB). In other words, the regional board fulfils two functions: it leads the planning authority and defines the regional key tasks as suggested by the law in a more concrete manner. At the same time, the board has the mission to find arrangements for these key regional tasks (so-called *Ballungsraumaufgaben*) if the board does not consider the planning authority to be the appropriate agency. Hence, the board of the region has the clear mission to find arrangements for the accomplishment

of regional key task but has considerable leeway to do this. This may imply that a function is delegated to a private agency.

Besides the planning region with two levels (regional land use plan, statutory regional plan), several other initiatives exist in different sectors. As these initiatives coincide with specific tasks or functions (culture, mobility, economic development, regional landscape park) we will introduce them in section 4.3.3. on coordination of public policies.

4.2.2 *Spatial relations within the metropolitan region of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main*

As has been mentioned, the Rhine-Main region is characterised as polycentric and in terms of its governance spaces as fuzzy. It has become common for many actors from the region to distinguish between the metropolitan region and the agglomeration (*Metropolregion* and *Ballungsraum*). The latter is the planning region for the regional land use plan, with Frankfurt and Offenbach being the dual urban core, surrounded by a polycentric system of cities, towns and suburban settlements. The notion metropolitan region indicates that there are many public policies that need coordination and collaboration on a larger scale (across the borders of the three states).

In addition, there is the statutory regional planning region which covers the entire territory of the government district of southern Hesse.

The metropolitan region emerged in the 2000s (see section 4.1) but initially found only limited response in the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region. The territorial frame crosses two state borders (Rhineland-Palatinate, Hesse and Bavaria) and represents about 5.8 million inhabitants. In terms of governance, it is weakly institutionalised. Following a longer period of debates, in 2018 a strategy forum (*Strategieforum*) was founded as a result of an initiative of the chamber of commerce and industry Frankfurt.⁸ It found support of the state governments, hence it is not a genuine municipal initiative. Today, representatives of four state governments (Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Baden-Württemberg und Bavaria), the lord mayors of Frankfurt and Mainz, the county presidents of Hochtaunuskreis, Rhein-Neckar-Kreis and the region Bayrischer Untermain (Aschaffenburg) (i.e. a representative of local government from each of the four states) and the regional planning authority (the latter also represents municipalities) and the presidents of six chambers of commerce and industry are members of the steering board. The agenda of the forum clearly is economic development (entrepreneurship, smart region).

Although this arrangement is more stable now, clear boundaries of the metropolitan region do not exist. To give an example: in 2010, the chamber of commerce, the chamber of crafts and the Federation of Associations of Entrepreneurs of Hesse (*Vereinigung der hessischen Unternehmerverbände e.V.*) financed a study on functional and territorial interdependencies of the region. The report suggested to take also areas in the far north of Frankfurt

into consideration as being part of the functional region (Prognos 2010). Hence, there are flexible spaces for cooperation and delimitation depends on the perspective and interest of the actors (see next section). It is possible to divide the region into economic functional sub-regions and clusters but this does not necessarily transform into political cooperation (Hoyler et al. 2008; FrankfurtRheinMain GmbH International Marketing of the Region 2018; Ebert 2016).

In order to describe the spatial pattern of the Rhine-Main region we may refer to the TSPN framework (Jessop et al. 2008). The core of the region is covered by a territory (the planning authority with obligatory membership). Besides the territory there is a range of functional networks and scales, some are more stable, some are more in a state of flux and they also refer to different spatial frameworks (flexible geographies). There are largely two dynamics: expansion (metropolitan region, now also including the Rhine-Neckar-County of Baden-Württemberg) and concentration (planning authority as institutional core). In fact, in 2019, the mayor of a smaller municipality in the north-east of the planning region (Limeshain) expressed the desire to become a full member of the planning authority. Accession is possible for municipalities that share a border with the planning region and this is the case in Limeshain. During the process three further villages (Echzell, Glauburg, Ranstadt) and the town Nidda followed and in April 2021 these five municipalities acceded the planning authority that has now 80 members.

4.2.3 Coordination of public policies within and beyond the perimeter of the planning authority

As has been mentioned already, the case of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main displays several task-specific arrangements that differ in terms of organisational form, actor composition and territorial outreach. In fact, it is the subject of a long debate where the region ends and which areas belong to it (Hoyler et al. 2006). As the planning authority is at least to a certain degree the organisational core of this arrangement, we will start with the policies coordinated by the planning authority. The functional portfolio of the planning authority is defined in the law but the law opens an opportunity to allocate more functions to the planning authority when the board of the region agrees upon this (see above). For the time being the planning authority has the genuine task of regional land use planning and landscape planning. In addition, the law mentions a number of key regional tasks calling for better inter-municipal coordination. The law specifies that the board of the region is encouraged to find solutions for these tasks. This does not necessarily mean that the planning authority will accomplish these tasks in full competence. Many options are possible and the planning authority may just be a partner but is allowed to take the initiative as long as the board of the regions decides this.⁹

These are:

- Sports and recreational facilities;
- Cultural facilities of regional relevance;
- Marketing and economic development;
- Regional landscape park Rhine-Main;
- Regional transport planning and management.

In 2018, after a regular evaluation of the law, some additional remits have been added. The new tasks that are mentioned now in the law are housing and spaces for new settlements, sustainable sourcing of water, preparation of a regional energy and climate protection concept, and the design as well as implementation of a digitisation strategy. Note that this means that the board of the region may take the initiative in a variety of forms. As we will see in the following sections, the board and the planning authority became active in a variety of policies such as energy, mobility and digitisation.

4.2.3.1 *Regional land use planning*

The Regional Authority (*Regionalverband*) FrankfurtRheinMain is responsible for the regional preparatory land use plan (*regionaler Flächennutzungsplan*) (Regional Authority FRM, 2014; Schmidt 2013). In German planning law, the preparatory land use plan usually is a municipal plan, being the structural element in a local two-tier system of land use planning. In the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region this task was shifted to the Regional Authority in 2001. The regional land use plan controls the location of function in space (settlements, business zones, infrastructure, green spaces), but does not regulate details of urban design. The Regional Authority seeks to implement the general principles of German land use planning and gives priority to brownfield development and the inner cities along the major public transport axes.

The plan has to be developed in collaboration with the government office of the region responsible for the regional plan. Therefore, a tension between regional planning and inter-municipal land use planning (*Regionaler Flächennutzungsplan*) is not surprising. The new planning association was criticised by interviewees for its narrow delimitation and for responsibilities which overlapped with the competencies of the government office for the region. Since 1980, the government office for the region in Darmstadt has been responsible for the regional plan (*Regionalplanung*), the planning association (as mentioned above) for land use planning (*Flächennutzungsplan*) and for landscape planning (*Landschaftsplan*).

The former *Umlandverband* rendered a plan similar in character already before, but since 2001 it covers 75 municipalities instead of 43 (80 in 2021). This increase in size of this plan intensified the need for coordination with regional planning (*Regierungsbezirk*). Hence, the regional land use plan has

to be developed in collaboration with the government office of the region. The planning region “Southern Hesse” is much bigger than the territory of the Rhine-Main planning authority but the latter forms the densely urbanised core (see Figure 4.7). Both plans operate with different scales (1:50,000, 1:100,000). As part of the technical solution, the regional land use plan becomes part of the regional plan, or to be more precise: it substitutes the

Figure 4.7 Frankfurt/ Rhine-Main region in the multilevel system 2021 Concept: K. Zimmermann Cartography: F. Gela

regional plan in the area of the planning authority. Although this sounds technically complex, the experts can manage to prepare the two plans in a coherent way. Still, this solution is unique in Germany.

When the elaboration of the new regional land use plan started in 2018, municipalities and planning authority and the government office of the region agreed to change the scale of the new plan from 1:50,000 to 1:25,000. Hence, it will be more detailed and the difference between the regional plan and the regional land use plan becomes clearer. Major issues for regional planning are large shopping centres and finding enough space for housing. For the regulation of shopping centres, a regional retail concept (*Einzelhandelskonzept*) is in use. This concept tries to protect the (small-scale) retail business of the inner city from the adverse effects of large shopping centres outside the city. Mobilising space for affordable housing is an unsolved problem.

4.2.3.2 *Regional Landscape Park*

In the mid-1990s the former planning authority UVF promoted the idea of a regional landscape park as a connected system of green space for recreational purposes. The motivation for this was twofold: on the one hand there was a lack of high-quality green areas that can be offered for recreational activities such as cycling and hiking. On the other hand, the planning authority wanted to protect green spaces and agricultural land. The planning authority followed an idea of decentralised implementation already in 1997: the planning authority did the strategic coordination and smaller groups of municipalities were envisioned to take the responsibility for a subarea of the park (in terms of implementation and maintenance). The implementation of this idea was taken away from the planning authority in the context of the reform in 2000/2001 and delegated in 2003 to a new special purpose governance form. This organisation started operation only in 2005 and is organised as a two-level system. Six decentralised agencies (usually municipalities and / or a county) are responsible for the management and maintenance of the park in a defined subarea. In total, 45 municipalities and two counties are active on this implementation level and the planning authority is involved in two of these operational partnerships. All these implementation agencies work together in an umbrella organisation (a limited liability firm, seven counties, six cities, the planning authority and the state government of Hesse are the stakeholders, also financially). The umbrella organisation is responsible for marketing but also for financing. The regional park is a highly valued initiative as there is a lack of high-quality green space and leisure facilities. Substantial financial support derives from Fraport, the owner of the airport.

4.2.3.3 *Digitisation*

Digitisation and the extension of broadband access has been added to the list of tasks of regional importance in 2018. Since 2019 the planning authority moderates a process called “Gigabit region” that includes nine counties

and three county-exempt cities, in total more than 161 municipalities. Again, this is more municipalities than the authority has in terms of members, hence this is seen more as a task for the metropolitan region but the process is moderated by the staff of the planning authority. Joining forces makes sense as a larger group of municipalities can negotiate for better conditions with the firms. Another goal is the extension of the 5G standard that is necessary for some measures and projects in the area of mobility.

A letter of intent was signed in May 2019, a feasibility study has been published, and a public procurement process started in late 2019. The next step is the foundation of a limited liability company (GmbH), which will be led by the director of the planning authority.

4.2.3.4 *Cultural policies*

Culture is another task that is mentioned in the law as one of the pending issues where the board of the region was encouraged to find a joint solution. Again, there are several initiatives active in the region and they differ in terms of membership and spatial reach. The Cultural Region (Kulturregion) is a voluntary association of 52 municipalities and counties and the planning authority. It was established in 2005 (www.kulturregion-frankfurt-Rheinmain.de). The Cultural Region is built up from below by municipalities (together with the planning authority) and tries to coordinate their specific interests (especially in respect of joint financing). The Cultural Region organises events and exhibitions and supports cultural initiatives that are active in the region.

In 2006, yet another cultural initiative came about – the *Kulturfonds Frankfurt Rhein-Main GmbH* (www.kultur-fonds-frm.de). This is an initiative bringing together the federal state government, larger cities such as Frankfurt, Wiesbaden and Darmstadt and two counties for supporting high-level cultural offers that are seen as crucial locational factor.¹⁰ The *Kulturfonds* is stronger compared to the Cultural Region due to financial help of the state government but membership is smaller. Initially it was the state government, Frankfurt, Wiesbaden, Darmstadt and the two counties Hochtaunuskreis und Main-Taunus-Kreis as these are places where high culture events usually take place. In 2020, the city of Offenbach and the smaller towns of Oestrich-Winkel and Bad Vilbel joined the association. Therefore, currently there are ten members (Hanau joined earlier). The municipal members pay two euros per resident, the counties 1.60 euros per resident and the state government contribute a similar sum. Overall, the goal of this initiative was enhancing the attractiveness of the region.

A third actor is the Cultural Initiative Frankfurt/Rhine-Main (Kulturinitiative Frankfurt Rhein-Main) that was established in 1998 and then converted into an association in 2003 (www.kirm.de/kirm/satzung.htm). The Cultural Initiative gathers representatives of culture-related organisations in the region (as well as individual actors) in order to jointly

run cultural activities and by these means, support the development of a cultural identity for the metropolitan area. The Cultural Initiative is more an organisation for people being active in culture and the media. Municipalities are less relevant.

4.2.3.5 *Economic Development and Marketing*

Economic development and marketing is a shared task between the municipalities and several special-purpose associations. In particular, the smaller municipalities see a great benefit in inter-municipal cooperation as they can mobilise more resources and critical mass. Economic competitiveness became an issue in regional policy in the early 1990s. The initiation of the IHK-Forum Rhine-Main by the chambers of commerce and industry of the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region was a clear reaction to this. The chambers of commerce and industry usually operate locally. The Forum is a sort of platform that allows the various IHK to have more political weight and influence and bring regional topics on the agenda. The main motivation was a shared concern about a lack of coordination of local policies (infrastructure in particular, but also land use planning) and a lack of a common vision for the economic development of the region. The IHK Forum presents ten chambers covering a large area spanning from Mainz to Aschaffenburg.

The Economic Development Agency for the Region of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main (*Wirtschaftsförderung Region Frankfurt/Rhein-Main*), established in 1995 with the support of the UVF, has a different mission. It represents the interests of municipalities and also offers services for the member municipalities. Today also other actors such as technology clusters and Fraport are involved.¹¹ Thus, membership is broad and the weight of the organisation is considerable. The aim of the agency, now connected to the planning authority, is the coordination and fostering of metropolitan-wide cooperation in the field of economic development.¹²

The Economic Initiative (*Wirtschaftsinitiative*), founded in 1996, is still active but focuses more on the bundling of interests within the region (agenda setting).

In 2021, we can see a more consolidated situation and increasing culture of effective division of work – although on first sight the actor constellation still seems to be complex and initiatives can hardly be separated. The following actors and initiatives are relevant:

- *FrankfurtRheinMain International Marketing of the Region* is responsible for the attraction of foreign firms and investors (<https://www.frm-united.de/ueber-uns/>). Hence, the agency is very active internationally (Southeast Asia and North America). Stakeholders are 34 towns and counties, the chambers of industry and commerce and various other affiliated organisations (the agency is operational with direct contact to firms).

- The *Association for the Promotion of the Frankfurt Rhein/Main region* (Verein zur Förderung der Standortentwicklung, <http://www.verein-frm.de>) is an agency that acts also within the region. This association has a slightly different actor composition (state government of Hesse, City of Frankfurt am Main, Planning Authority (representing the other municipalities and countries), the Economic Initiative and Deutsche Bank). Its main purpose is agenda setting and it is also operational but with a focus on structural aspects of regional development.
- The international attraction of high skilled workforce is the task of the *FrankfurtRheinMain International Office (Willkommensportal)*. This agency is organisationally part of the planning authority but a joint venture of the chamber of commerce Frankfurt and the planning authority (www.find-it-in-frm.de).
- *Perform* is a digital spin-off of the IHK-Forum and was established in 2016. Perform is an open online platform for the generation and promotion of ideas (together with Chambers of Crafts / Handwerkskammern). It is an open digital forum and follows the principle of crowdsourcing and bottom-up initiatives. The success is questionable until today but its visibility is high. One success, according the interviewees, is the higher recognition of congested streets and traffic jams on the commuter routes. This issue has been raised for a long time, but it gained recognition and wider support once it was placed as a project suggestion on the Perform platform. This is a form of digital regionalisation.

The economic initiatives and organisations were partly competing in the late 1990s and early 2000s, or at least they presented different visions and organisational solutions for the region. Today it is a network of initiatives with different but interwoven membership structures. A good example is the project FRM2030 (FrankfurtRheinMain GmbH International Marketing of the Region 2018). The purpose of this project was the creation of one or several visions for the metropolitan region. The final report also included measures and initiatives that would contribute to the implementation of the vision. The project was initiated by the planning authority and the association for the promotion of the Frankfurt Rhine/Main region (Verein zur Förderung der Standortentwicklung FrankfurtRheinMain). The FrankfurtRheinMain GmbH International Marketing of the Region was coordinating the project on behalf of the planning authority. In addition to the above-mentioned institutions, the Business Initiative, the state government of Hesse, the city of Frankfurt, the Frankfurt Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Perform Initiative were also members of the FRM 2030 steering committee.

4.2.3.6 *Mobility*

The UVF had the responsibility for a mobility master plan but with the abolition of the planning authority in 2000 the task has become void as the

new planning authority is primarily responsible for land use planning. As a consequence, although there are a range of mobility-related problems in the region, there is no overall planning authority or integrated mobility concept for the area since 2000. Besides this lack of coordination, major problems are the high number of commuting people and lagging investments in rail infrastructure.

In 2011, a mobility masterplan has been published as a study by an agency called ivm. As the task of public transport has been mentioned as one the tasks waiting for regional coordination in the law of 2000, the establishment of ivm in 2005 can be considered as a trial to organise the task of regional mobility planning in a more flexible way. The agency is a limited liability company owned by a large group of municipal shareholders and the state government of Hesse. The number of shareholders increased over time but not all municipalities of the planning region are involved. It is not a planning authority and has no implementation or planning powers. It is more a think tank that municipalities can hire for the elaboration of plans and mobility concepts when needed. Hence, the masterplan of 2011 was not a binding plan but a document giving recommendations and found limited attention.

In 2021, however, the planning authority published a mobility strategy as mobility has been added to the task of regional importance in 2018. Although the planning authority calls this document SUMP (with reference to European standards) this is not an integrated transport plan but a collection of measures and priority projects. For most of the suggested projects the authority has no competence for implementation as the state government declined the request to give the legal competence for a binding mobility master plan (*Generalverkehrsplan*) back to the planning authority. An exception is the regional bicycle highway system. The municipalities delegated the coordination of this project to the planning authority. In terms of spatial reach, it is important to note that besides the legal members of the planning authority also the other municipalities of the counties Gross-Gerau, Wetterau and Main-Kinzig-Kreis participated in the process (in total 108 instead of 75 municipalities). The concept includes 22 measures and the overall goal is: a 65% share of environmentally friendly mobility in the regional modal split and the realisation of the so-called five minute region (i.e. the availability of a public mobility option within a reach of five minute walking distance). Many of the proposed measures are feasibility studies, including an expertise on the viability of more restrictive mobility policies (Regionalverband FRM 2021, 17).

The planning authority has no competence for busses or regional railways. This is in the competence of the counties and cities that collaborate within a single-purpose association (RMV). The RMV is responsible for an area much bigger than the planning region and manages regional railway connections (*S-Bahn* and regional trains). The RMV covers 15 countries and 11 cities and these counties and cities are also the stakeholders together with the state government of Hesse. Hence, the RMV is

not an association of transport providers but of local governments. They delegated the planning, managing and financing of public transport to the RMV. The members order a service and the RMV coordinates the implementation.

Infrastructure planning is done on a case-by-case basis. For the S-Bahn, for instance, this is done on an inter-municipal level through the creation of planning agencies for each new route. Usually this is a complex process that takes long time. A tangential connection in the west of the region has been under debate for about 30 years. The planning agency (*Regionaltangente West Planungsgesellschaft*) was founded in 2008 and encountered quite a few problems in coordinating the municipal stakeholders. The new line will start operation in the late 2020s.

4.2.3.7 *Energy*

In 2016, the planning authority published an energy concept for the region. This is a voluntary initiative and service for the municipalities as the planning authority gives advice, promotes renewable energy projects and identifies the sites for wind turbines in the regional land use plan.

Several of the organisations mentioned in this section are gathered in an umbrella organisation called “*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Dachgesellschaften*” (Working Party of Regional Associations) which is moderated by the regional planning authority. This is more a voluntary forum of knowledge exchange and coordination, but it is the only arena where all the initiatives come together, though only for knowledge exchange and a minimum of strategic coordination. At the same time, this demonstrates that the planning authority has gained recognition as a central actor in the networked governance of Rhine-Main (see Table 4.3).

4.2.4 *Conclusion*

After years of conflicts and competing regional initiatives, there is a more consolidated and pragmatic approach of metropolitan governance in the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region. The arrangement is still multipolar and more a “network of networks” with thematic overlaps and flexible geographies of cooperation. But it seems that all the initiatives have found a *modus operandi* that avoids double work and concurrence. Instead, a mutual acceptance and task-specific division of work seems to be in place.

The last moment in time, when a more consolidated solution was a disputed issue, was 2015 when the lord mayor of Frankfurt invited a wide range of actors on his own initiative to the Frankfurter Paulskirche to celebrate “The day of the metropolitan region”. A declaration was signed but not much has happened in terms of consolidated governance (Bender et al. 2015). During this event, a treaty on the metropolitan region Rhine-Main between the states of Hesse, Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatinate was also discussed but never formalised.

Table 4.3 Networks and initiatives with participation of planning authority

<i>Organisation / Initiative / Agency</i>	<i>Role and relationship of planning authority</i>	<i>Since</i>
Economic Initiative / Wirtschaftsinitiative	Member	2005
Association for the promotion of the region / Verein zur Förderung der Standortentwicklung	Foundation of the association Wirtschaftsförderung Region Frankfurt RheinMain	1995
Regionalpark Durchführungsgesellschaften/ Implemenation Agencies	Joined the Regionalpark-Dachgesellschaft Share: 6,7 % Regionalpark RheinMain Südwest GmbH Share: 11,76 % Regionalpark RheinMain Taunushang GmbH Share: 11,11 % Gesellschaft zur Rekultivierung der Kiesgrubenlandschaft Weilbach mbH Share: 25,0 %	2005
Strategieforum Metropolregion Cultural Region / Kulturregion	Authority represents municipalities	2015
Standortmarketinggesellschaft	Shareholder	2005
Frankfurt Rhein Main GmbH	Share: 3% Director of planning authority is member of the governing board	2005
Gigabitregion	Planning authority leads the process, Director is head of limited liability company	2019

Even the IHK Frankfurt Rhine-Main, which was certainly a driver in the public debate on a potentially consolidated metropolitan government (i.e. the bundling of tasks in one organisation) changed its mindset and accepted the strategy forum. This is a soft form of collaboration between the states and local and economic actors (instead of a treaty), that nevertheless operates on a high political level (the state chancelleries).

Voluntary collaboration in different constellations and formats instead of never-ending debates about the appropriate metropolitan government seems to be an appropriate description of the mindset of actors. The metropolitan region is better established as a territorial frame than it used to be ten years ago (Heinelt et al. 2011). However, due to the abstract scale this territorial frame does not prevent conflicts when municipalities litigate about a location of a commercial development area or a large retail centre. The strategy forum has no powers here.

As a result, the only two remaining issues are infrastructure and mobility and strategic territorial development (housing in particular).

- 1) Mobility planning is less well coordinated. There have been attempts to create a regional vision in 2011 (without resonance) and there is an organisation addressing mobility issues for the municipalities (ivm GmbH). But there is no binding mobility plan or body coordinating

infrastructure planning. There is also no informal platform or arena or joint vision or commitment for coordinating the individual mobility strategies of cities (streets in particular). The planning authority is now responsible for the masterplan mobility but this seems to be only little more than a plan for regional bicycle lanes. However, the service in public transport (regional trains, local busses and trams) is coordinated well by the RMV. But the fact that there are so many commuters is not reflected in a regional mobility policy. The RMV is doing a good job in coordinating the service but some infrastructure projects are lagging behind (Extension of the S-Bahn) and there is also no link to the strategic dimension of the regional land use plan (pro-active coordination of territorial development, housing and mobility policies). Though some interviewees saw the problem they don't see the need for an authority taking care of the mobility problems. Problems of coordination are addressed when they occur or project-based (as has been shown by reference to the RTW Planungsgesellschaft).

- 2) Strategic territorial development. The planning authority is responsible for the land use plan and the landscape plan but not for the strategic coordination of regional development, hence the integration of transport and land use planning is weak. Also other issues such as climate change and economic development are only seen through the land use plan. Hence, we cannot speak of integrated spatial or strategic planning.

In terms of ideas guiding the policies we can say that effectiveness and efficiency are less relevant than in France and Italy. Economic development in a way is an important factor. Everybody (including the state government of Hesse) agrees that a successful region needs some coordination of land use (zoning of commercial areas). But detailed policies and projects are not on the agenda, this is done by the municipalities. The joint promotion of commercial zones is not foreseen but this is done implicitly with the support of the planning authority as they have a database. Still the municipalities compete and practice a kind of venue hopping.

The overall evaluation of the relevance of regionalisation in the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main for public policies is nevertheless cumbersome. Effective single purpose arrangements such as the RMV (public transport) and promising initiatives such as the Gigabit Region (digitisation) stand in contrast to complex arrangements in land use planning and the regional landscape park.

4.3 Stuttgart: well established showcase example of metro governance?

Stuttgart, the capital of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, is located in south-western Germany. Since decades, the region is renowned for its automotive and engineering industry. Its geographic location was however seen as being peripheral during industrialisation in the 19th century

(Basten 2011, 276), whereas today the region has a higher centrality and connectivity due to a dense highway infrastructure, European integration, air traffic and investments in rail infrastructure (Frank and Marsden 2016, 259). The core city of Stuttgart is by far the dominant urban centre with 630,000 inhabitants out of 2.8 million in the city-region. With 23%, the share of the regional population is however relatively low. The region, as defined by the regional planning authority *Verband Region Stuttgart* (VRS) comprises 3,654 km². It has a polycentric urban structure as the core city is surrounded by several medium-sized cities of 40,000 to 95,000 inhabitants within a 25-kilometre radius (Esslingen, Böblingen, Sindelfingen and Leonberg, see Figure 4.8). The region is also characterised by many small cities and villages.

The Stuttgart Region experienced enormous population growth after the second world war, almost quadrupling its population between 1950 and 1960 (Basten 2011, 276). During the 1960s up until 1998, the city of Stuttgart lost residents with a temporary exception of the first years after German unification. This trend changed at the end of the 1990s and population growth has accelerated since 2010. Today, the city of Stuttgart has reached the population it had at the beginning of the 1960s (Website

Figure 4.8 Stuttgart Region 2021 Concept: P. Feiertag Cartography: F. Gela

Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg 2019). The population loss was in part due to suburbanisation and particularly households with higher incomes and families leaving the city (Heeg 2003, 164). Accordingly, population dynamics in the city-region varied with continued population growth until the 1970s and an overall population gain of over 500,000 inhabitants between 1961 and 1998. During the last decade, both core city and the region as a whole have been growing, but both population growth and building activity in terms of new housing units have been substantially higher outside the city of Stuttgart. Statistical data confirms that the core city gained young citizens in the education phase (18–25 years), whereas adults in the family phase (30–50 years) moved out of the city (ILS 2019). Before the creation of the regional planning authority, the rapid settlement development was scarcely controlled and led to massive land consumption and increase in car traffic. Land consumption was decoupled from population growth and the settlement area in the Stuttgart Region grew about 88% between 1965 and 2000 (Stark 2009, 73). Today, the settlement area is still expanding but growth rates have considerably slowed down despite population growth (VRS 2016, 19).

The Stuttgart Region has a strong automotive industry, engineering and mechanics sector with Mercedes/Daimler, Porsche and Bosch as large, internationally known companies as well as many small and medium-sized companies (Basten 2011, 273, 277). The highly export-oriented manufacturing industry was hit by a recession in the 1990s, leading to a job loss of over 100,000 between 1990 and 1997 (Heeg 2003, 166). However, the economy recovered in the 1990s and 2000s with job loss going hand in hand with a massive increase of productivity. The secondary sector continues to be highly significant for the regional economy despite tertiarisation, also in terms of well-paid jobs and its contribution to the regional GDP (Basten 2011, 277).

An essential feature of the governance arrangement in Stuttgart is its multi-scaled character where a strong institutional core (Verband Region Stuttgart) with a directly elected regional assembly and a bundle of functions (regional planning, public transport, etc.) is complemented by softer forms of voluntary cooperation. The core is organised as public authority and has along with Hanover the highest degree of institutionalisation of all city-regions in Germany (Fricke 2020, 157). In addition, strategic decisions are implemented by means of network building and network management (Benz 2003, 509).

The following key characteristics concerning metropolitan governance and planning will be highlighted in this chapter:

- Regional planning authority *Verband Region Stuttgart* with directly elected assembly created in 1994;
- Lean administration complemented by agencies with additional shareholders as partners;

- High stability of the governance arrangement, functional profile and spatial dimension over more than 25 years;
- The idea to strengthen the economic competitiveness was a key driver during its foundation, but is no longer the central legitimization for its existence;
- The wider metropolitan region (*Europäische Metropolregion Stuttgart*) has never fully materialised as an additional layer.

4.3.1 *The institutional arrangement Verband Region Stuttgart*

The Stuttgart region as we see it today was created during the “second golden age of Metropolitan Government Reforms” (Lefèvre 2001, 16) in the 1990s and has remained stable since. It is one of the most integrated metropolitan institutions in Germany (Walter-Rogg 2018, 132). Even internationally, the Stuttgart Region is one of the rare examples with a directly elected assembly (Tomàs 2019, 35) and is acknowledged in academic contributions as a model for city-regional management (Pribs 2019, 263; Fricke 2020, 157; Frank and Marsden 2016, 248; Klinkenberg 2010, 392).

4.3.1.1 *The emergence of a unique governance model for Stuttgart Region*

The governance arrangement for Stuttgart Region is different from other city-regions in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg and resulted out of a combination of the state’s reform policy (regionalisation “from above”) and several political issues within the region that were pending since the 1970s (regionalisation “from below”). The fact that it came about was due to the exploitation of a favourable opportunity for reforms and the commitment of local actors (Benz 2003, 512).

Inter-municipal cooperation and regional planning started with voluntary municipal planning associations in the 1950s and included the City of Stuttgart since 1967 (Pribs 2019, 255). During the 1970s, territorial reforms strengthened the medium-sized cities in the surroundings of Stuttgart by increasing their size and administrative capacity, whereas the core city itself was not enlarged. The federal state created compulsory regional planning associations in 1972 throughout the entire state, replacing the voluntary municipal associations (Zimmermann 2011, 192–193). In addition to these large regions, six smaller neighbourhood associations were created in 1974 in the agglomerations of Baden-Württemberg with the task to elaborate inter-municipal land use plans, in case of Stuttgart for the core of the agglomeration (Stuttgart and the first ring). The first regional plan (*Regionalplan*) for Stuttgart came into force in 1977 and the inter-municipal land use plan in 1984 (Pribs 2019, 255). However, both the regional planning associations and the neighbourhood associations were limited to spatial planning tasks without any competences for implementation and were

not able to address the bundle of problems of the metropolitan development in policy fields such as transport successfully (Zimmermann 2011, 193). Distribution conflicts between the municipalities concerning the financing of regional infrastructure were common (Benz 2003, 505).

At the beginning of the 1990s, the pressure to take action increased due to rising unemployment in Stuttgart caused by an industrial crisis, the growing awareness of competition between regions in the European common market and pending infrastructure investments of regional relevance (Basten 2011, 279). The mayor of Stuttgart as well as CEOs from large firms called for an intervention and the state government accepted these queries (Zimmermann 2011, 195; Benz 2003, 506; Prieb 2019, 256; Walter-Rogg 2018, 133). The former regional planning association was transformed by law (*“Gesetz über die Errichtung des Verbands Region Stuttgart”* (VRS) from 7 February 1994) into a regional jurisdiction (*Körperschaft öffentlichen Rechts*). The main changes of the reform were a directly elected assembly with a first election in June 1994 and some additional tasks beyond regional planning, particularly concerning regional transport and economic development. Hence, the VRS has gained democratic legitimacy and additional possibilities for implementation of the development strategy defined by the statutory regional plan. The latter is the main legal instrument of the VRS with the possibility to enforce projects of regional relevance if cooperative problem solving fails (*Planungsgebot*) and to align municipal plans to the aims of the regional plan. As the municipal neighbourhood associations in the Stuttgart Region have been dissolved when the VRS was created (Prieb 2019, 257), i.e. the local land use plans (*Flächennutzungsplan*) were since then again elaborated by the individual municipalities.

This strong position of the VRS increases the chances of achieving a negotiated solution with the municipalities (Benz 2003, 505–506). The first regional plan has been approved in 1998 and partially updated in 2002 with focus on large-scale retail (Prieb 2019, 258). The current one dates from 2009. A regional transport plan (*Regionalverkehrsplan*, 2001, updated in 2010 and 2018) as well as a landscape plan (*Landschaftsrahmenplan*) is elaborated in complementarity to the regional plan. In addition to those formal plans, an informal development strategy (*Leitbild für den Wirtschafts- und Wissenschaftsstandort Region Stuttgart*) has been elaborated by a broad range of actors including municipalities, counties, universities, companies, churches, etc. under coordination of the economic development agency (WRS) and approved by the regional assembly in 2012.

Within the 25 years since its creation, the governance arrangement of today's regional authority *Verband Region Stuttgart* has persisted without fundamental transformation. New projects, networks and topics such as wind energy and digital infrastructure (high-speed internet connections) emerged and were integrated into the existing governance arrangement. Additionally, the challenges have changed in character due to a good economic situation and demographic change. Now, a shortage of skilled

workforce and affordable housing are considered pressing problems. At the same time, most municipalities in the region provide less building land than needed or do not activate plots foreseen for settlement development in regional and local plans for various reasons (Hemberger and Kiwitt 2018, 37). Whereas restrictive regional planning tools are well established, the German planning law has limited tools for pro-active settlement planning. The VRS is seeking to adapt by expanding soft activities such as information and advice, financial incentives and networking (Hemberger and Kiwitt 2018, 38–39).

Debates about extending the competencies of the regional authority have focussed on competencies of the counties, in particular regarding public transport. Due to the resistance of the counties, only a minor shift has taken place. Since 2015, the responsibility for regional express busses and park-and-ride services as well as a regional traffic control centre has been committed to the VRS, but not the competence for the local bus systems that are still in the competence of the counties (Prieps 2019, 258). The dispute has been settled by the federal state government with the agreement *ÖPNV-Pakt 2025* signed by the federal state, the VRS, the counties and the city of Stuttgart (Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 116). The agreement fixes competencies, quality standards and the repartition of revenues. The head office of VRS has abandoned ambitions to expand its formal functions afterwards. A shift of functions from the municipal level is not debated, as the intermediary county level or the cooperation of neighbouring municipalities would be considered as a solution first. The state government is not willing to devolve more competencies either. The institutional arrangement of the VRS has remained unique in Baden-Württemberg, as the federal state has not expanded the model to other regions.

4.3.1.2 *Verband Region Stuttgart in the multilevel system*

Baden-Württemberg is a federal state with a multilayer system that has remained mostly unchanged for decades despite long-lasting debates about the high number of layers (Wahl 1998).

The *Verband Region Stuttgart* represents a city-regional level that is situated between the governmental levels of the state government and the counties. The federal state, the VRS, the counties and the municipalities all have a directly elected assembly or council. In addition to that, deconcentrated government offices of the regions of the state government (*Regierungspräsidium*) and different forms of joint administration at the municipal level exist such as single-purpose associations or voluntary cooperation (see Table 4.4). This means that the number of administrative levels varies between six, in the case of small municipalities, and four, in the case of county-exempt cities such as Stuttgart.¹³ The most influential levels of territorial government are the federal state government with legislative power and the cities with substantial rights of self-government. The capacity of

Table 4.4 Layers of government

<i>Level</i>	<i>Number of institutions in Baden-Württemberg</i>	<i>Directly elected assembly</i>	<i>Name of institution</i>
Land (federal state)	1	yes	Land Baden-Württemberg
Regierungspräsidium (government office of the region)	4	no	Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart
Regionalverband (regional planning authority)	12	only in case of Region Stuttgart	Verband Region Stuttgart
Landkreis (county) and Kreisfreie Stadt (county-exempt city)	35 9	yes yes	Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart
Gemeinde (municipality)	1.100	yes	

self-government varies depending on the size of the municipalities; municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants partially rely on the counties. With regard to the spatial planning system, the federal state, the regions and the municipalities are the three levels with statutory planning functions (see Table 4.6). The Stuttgart Region is not relevant in all public policies due to its narrow profile, e.g. not covering health care, education or social services and should therefore not be seen as a full-fledged level of administration, i.e. it is not a county (Wahl 1998, 210). This is all the more true for the other regional planning associations (*Regionalverbände*) in Baden-Württemberg as their functions are limited to regional planning and landscape planning.

The counties have a combined role of local self-government and multi-purpose state administration (see 4.1). They are responsible for some services such as waste disposal and public transport (busses) and act at the same time as lower state authority with supervisory functions over the municipalities, e.g. concerning environmental protection, emission control and in case of small municipalities even building permission. Five counties are constituting members of the VRS. They have nevertheless limited significance in the daily work of the administration of the VRS. The contact is by far less frequent than with the municipalities because they are responsible for different policy fields. Collaboration is necessary when environmental issues in the regional plan are at stake or when the adaptation of timetables between busses and light rail needs to be done. Rivalries about the distribution of competences, in particular for public transport, had led to a chilly relationship at the beginning of the 2010s, but the relationship has improved since the issue has been settled. In the field of regional business development, the development agency (*Wirtschaftsförderung Region Stuttgart*, WRS) has managed to establish close contact and information flow via a model of shared staff: the responsible persons for business development in each county (*Kreiswirtschaftsförderer*) are employed by the WRS but have their main workplace within the county administration. In addition, WRS, counties and municipalities have launched a cooperation for broadband network expansion (organised as Gigabit Region Stuttgart limited liability firm).

Regierungspräsidien are lower state administrations responsible for nature conservation, environmental policies and road construction and have to approve the preparatory land use plans of the cities. The role of the *Regierungspräsidien* in everyday planning business is low because preparatory land use plans are only renewed every 15 years at best. They share key positions about land consumption, air pollution and large retail with VRS and can therefore potentially be supportive for the region.

The municipalities are the main partners of the VRS and the key level of implementation of policies. This is particularly true for the planning departments of cities. The planners in the head office of VRS are in frequent contact with the municipal planning departments, both via bilateral exchange about municipal planning processes and regular network meetings with the heads of planning offices of the cities. Due to a large number of

municipalities (179), the collaboration is less intense with the small ones. The VRS uses a mix of regulatory tools (binding regional plan), incentives (co-funding), persuasion (information events), advice, and provides services in the field of public transport.

The federal state has a high influence on the city-region both via legislation and financing. Planning and financing of large infrastructure projects such as the trade fair, the airport or the railway project Stuttgart 21 depend on the federal state. Institutional reforms such as the territorial reforms of the 1970s concerning the enlargement of municipalities and counties, the creation of VRS in 1994 and the decision about additional competences in 2015 were enacted by the federal state. The state plan LEP defines general aims for spatial development with binding character for the region (Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Arbeit und Tourismus Baden-Württemberg 2002). The LEP 2002 had introduced the concept of a *Europäische Metropolregion Stuttgart* beyond the perimeter of the planning region (see 4.3.2 and 4.3.3). During the current legislative period (2016–2021) neither institutional reforms nor renewal of the state plan are scheduled. Instead, the federal state seeks to influence decision-making of the region in the devolved field of regional transport via financial incentives, namely concerning the frequency and pricing of light rail trains.

4.3.1.3 *Decision-making and leadership*

The governance structure of the VRS separates the political and executive power in a system of dual leadership. The assembly is presided over by a chairperson, whereas the administration is headed by a regional director. Both are elected by the regional assembly. The regional director is appointed for an eight-year term of office, thus longer than the assembly and its president. The president chairs the committees, prepares the agenda and is the director's supervisor. Throughout the history of VRS, the role of president has been interpreted differently. In the period from 1994 to 2008, the founding director Bernd Steinacher was very influential, whereas the changing presidents had mainly representative functions and the role of chairperson of the meetings (Prieps 2019, 257). Afterwards, the president Thomas Bopp (re-elected in 2019 for the third time despite a change of majority in the assembly) became the key personality for agenda setting and future projects of the region. In 2013, he took both positions of regional director and president for an interim period (Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 154).

The regional assembly meets five to six times a year. The transparency of the decision-making process is generated by opening the meetings to the public and reporting of local media. Its three committees deal with economy and administration, regional planning as well as transport and meet more often, especially transport as well planning with monthly meetings. The Christian Democrats (CDU) had the majority of seats since the assembly's foundation up to 2014, but were narrowly defeated by the Greens in

2019. This result is in line with the political majority in the state government (minister-president from the Green party since 2011) and the city of Stuttgart (mayor from the Green party since 2013). The regional assembly has between 80 and 96 members (i.e. fewer than municipalities; 2014-2019: 87 members, since May 2019: 88) and is directly elected for five years. The regional assembly's work is organised along party-political lines in fractions (Fricke 2020, 158). A minimum of 5% of votes is necessary to secure a seat and send any candidate from the party lists to the assembly. The six electoral districts correspond to the counties and the city of Stuttgart (represented with 18 seats). The election is held simultaneously with the European, county and municipal elections. It is noteworthy that the voter turnout is higher than for the municipal elections with 52,6% as historically lowest result in 2014 (Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 107) and 65.5% in 2019. These good voter turn out show that the region is seen as a relevant institution by the citizens and give a strong legitimacy to the region. Still, interviewees argue that the topics where the region is competent are not suitable for election campaigns and that the multilevel system is too complex for the ordinary citizen to understand who is responsible for what. Thus, the direct election does not guarantee an identification with the city-region (Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 212). However, Walter-Rogg (2018, 141) argues that the opportunity to vote for the regional assembly seems to have a positive impact on the citizen's attachment to the region because of the unexpected empirical findings that older people who had the opportunity to vote for several times feel more attached to the Stuttgart Region than younger people.

The directly elected regional assembly is unanimously regarded as effective by interviewees and in the literature (Zimmermann 2014, 188; Benz 2003, 509; Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 108-109; Frank and Marsden 2016, 253), i.e. able to take a region-wide perspective and orient strategic decisions to it. It is seen by the municipalities as necessary counterpart to the networked forms of governance such as the public-private regional development agency (WRS), ensuring input legitimacy and democratic control (Zimmermann 2014, 195). The quality of the debates in terms of content and commitment is considered high as well (see also Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 109). The VRS is forced to be responsive to local interests and work towards regional consensus (Basten 2011, 281), but takes its decisions independently of special interests according to the majority principle based on parliamentary groups (Benz 2003, 511). Instead of government-opposition thinking, directly elected regional assemblies tend to be consensus-oriented; this mechanism can also be observed in the Stuttgart Region (Zimmermann 2014, 196; Kübler 2012). Local politicians can hold more than one mandate, meaning that some regional councillors have a double function as mayors, municipal or county councillors, members of the German federal parliament or the federal state parliament. In the current period 2019-2024, 16 mayors and five former mayors are regional councillors. Many of them are members of the parliament group of "Freie Wähler" (independent voters) which

explicitly acts as stakeholders of municipal interests as a whole, but not necessarily of their individual municipality. Interviewees argue that mayors are valuable members as long as their share is limited and does not dominate the assembly, because most of them have much political expertise and professional competence.

The mayor of Stuttgart Fritz Kuhn (2013–2020) is part of the regional assembly and acts as vice-president. According to Stuttgart's municipal administration, this double position is an important link that ensures the alignment of strategic decisions between Stuttgart and the Region. At the same time, Kuhn sees its role in cautiously strengthening regional cooperation rather than being the figurehead of the Region. He could have run for the presidency after the Green Party won the regional elections in 2019, but deliberately refrained from it because he anticipated that the double mandate of being mayor of Stuttgart and President of the assembly of VRS would provoke conflicts and create harm in the spheres of metropolitics (Kuhn in Durchdenwald and Schwarz 2019). In fact, at the beginning of the 2000s there have been leadership conflicts between Stuttgart's mayor Schuster (1997–2013) and the regional director Steinacher as both claimed to represent the metropolitan region (Klinkenberg 2010, 394–396; Zimmermann and Heinelt 2012, 106; see 4.3.3).

4.3.1.4 *Functions*

The functions of the VRS have been either devolved from the federal state or upscaled from the counties. In addition to the compulsory tasks determined by state law,¹⁴ the VRS can render voluntary tasks in case that a majority of two-thirds of the assembly votes for this. This has been the case for the trade fair, the coordination and organisation of congresses, cultural events and big sport events as well as an external representation of the region and the co-funding of projects related to the implementation of the landscape park.

With regard to production functions, the VRS is competent in the following policies:

- Regional business development (via agency WRS, partly owned by the VRS);
- Tourism and regional marketing (via agency Regio Stuttgart Marketing und Tourismus GmbH);
- Building and management of new trade fair complex (via agencies Projektgesellschaft Neue Messe GmbH & Co. Kg and Projektgesellschaft neue Messe Verwaltungs-GmbH; since 1998);
- Coordination and organisation of congresses, cultural events and big sport events with regional relevance, e.g. application to host the Olympic games in 2012 or IBA 2027 (via agencies for application; associations SportRegion Stuttgart e.V. as well as KulturRegion Stuttgart e.V.);

- The external representation of the region (own office in Brussels since 2002, together with WRS) and participation in international networks (e.g. Metrex, EMTA for transport).

Regarding social reproduction functions, the VRS is competent in the following policies:

- Statutory Regional Planning;
- Regional public transport (responsibility for regional light railway since 1996 and express busses, park & ride as well as a regional traffic control centre since 2015);
- Landscape planning (*Landschaftsrahmenplan*);
- Planning and implementation of regional landscape parks (since 2006);
- Identification of potential sites for wind energy (as part of the regional plan);
- Waste management of mineral waste and toxic soils (delegated to agency AVL in the county Ludwigsburg).

Although enhancing the economic competitiveness of the region at European and international level was the main motivation justifying the creation of the VRS (Zimmermann 2011, 195; Heeg 2003, 163; Fricke 2020, 160; Frank and Marsden 2016, 253), all functions related to competitiveness have been outsourced to autonomous agencies. This means that the Verband Region Stuttgart is shareholder together with other public and private partners such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (see Table 4.5). Its regional assembly takes strategic decisions in those policy fields, but the operational activities are not carried out within the administration of the VRS itself.

Regional planning, landscape planning and regional transport planning as well as the provision of regional light rail transit are the core tasks of the region. The regional-level coordination of both land use planning and transport creates good conditions to foster more sustainable urban settlement patterns (Frank and Marsden 2016, 243). Land use planning and urban development projects have remained in the responsibility of the municipalities, but the aims formulated in the regional plan as well as the spatial extent of green areas depicted in the plan are binding for local land use planning. This means that the region has regulative power concerning urban development. Those formal instruments are used more stringently than in other planning regions in Baden-Württemberg, in particular regarding retail, green spaces, density and transport-oriented development along rail stations and enforced by court decision, if necessary (Prieps 2019, 260; Benz 2003, 506).

In terms of implementation, the VRS has more options than the other regional planning authorities in Baden-Württemberg but is largely reliant on the municipalities, counties and the federal state (in case of large infrastructure projects such as the trade fair or the central train station of Stuttgart). The only exclusive responsibility concerns the regional light railway,

Table 4.5 Shareholdings of Stuttgart Region

<i>Name of limited liability company (GmbH)</i>	<i>Founding year</i>	<i>Share in %</i>	<i>Other shareholders</i>	<i>Employees in 2017 (annual average)</i>	<i>Field of action</i>	<i>Timespan</i>
<i>Direct shareholdings of Verband Region Stuttgart</i>						
Wirtschaftsförderung Region Stuttgart GmbH (WRS)	1995	51	Municipalities, bank of the federal state, chambers of commerce, industry and crafts, RKW, trade union of the metal industry, farmers' association	58	Economic development	Permanent task
Regio Stuttgart Marketing- und Tourismus GmbH (RSMT)	1994	32.4	Municipalities, Stuttgart Marketing GmbH (owned by city of Stuttgart), chamber of industry and commerce	3	Tourism and regional marketing	Permanent task
IBA 2027 StadtRegion Stuttgart GmbH (IBA 2027)	2017	25.1 (direct) + 19.9 (WRS)	City of Stuttgart, chamber of architects, university	1	Urban development and architecture, showcase projects	Temporal task
Verkehrs- und Tarifverbund Stuttgart GmbH (VVS)	1977	20	Railway company, bus companies, tram company, counties	83	Public transport	Permanent task
Projektgellschaft Neue Messe Verwaltungs-GmbH (ProNM GmbH) and ProNM KG	1998	10	Federal state, city of Stuttgart	0	Fair	Permanent task
Baden-Württemberg-Tarif GmbH (BW Tarif)	2017	5	Transport companies	*	Public transport	Permanent task
Remstal Gartenschau 2019 GmbH (RGS 2019)	2015	4.8	Counties, municipalities, society for the promotion of regional garden shows	7	Gardening exhibition	Temporal task

Indirect shareholdings of Verband Region Stuttgart via Wirtschaftsförderung Region Stuttgart GmbH

BioRegio STERN Management GmbH (BioRegio)	2001	37.5	Regional planning association Neckar-Alb, cities (Tübingen, Reutlingen, Stuttgart, Esslingen)	5	Cluster	Permanent task
Film- und Medienfestival gGmbH (FMF)	2000	30.4	City of Stuttgart, film academy, city of Ludwigsburg	9	Film, Events	Permanent task
Gigabit Region Stuttgart GmbH (GRS)	2019	<i>n.a.</i>	Counties, municipalities	*	Broadband internet	Temporal task

* First employees after 2017

including the contracting, and express busses. Close coordination with the counties and the city of Stuttgart is still needed as they are responsible for local public transport.

The VRS supports the municipalities with small funding programmes for inter-municipal industrial parks and brownfields of regional relevance (since 1997, see Benz 2003, 50) and projects in areas designated as regional landscape park. The landscape park is composed of sub-regions with detailed implementation plans and combines measures of landscape protection (e.g. river renaturation) and recreation (e.g. bicycle path connections) and aims to enhance the quality of life in the region (Frank and Marsden 2016, 261; Basten 2011, 284). Since 2016, an action program for housing has been launched (Hemberger and Kiwitt 2018, 37). VRS has extended the co-financing for green spaces in new housing areas with the aim to make dense, affordable housing forms more attractive for municipalities. Attempts to play a more active role in the provision of housing by supporting municipal land management are seen as unnecessary by the medium-sized cities with large professional planning departments, whereas the city of Stuttgart is in favour of it as it has an interest in more building activity outside its own territory to solve the problem of housing shortage. Small municipalities can benefit from information offers, e.g. from good examples meeting the density requirements of the regional plan; however they argue that it is not enough to support the administration, because the council and the citizens have to be convinced in order to raise the acceptance for other building typologies than single-family houses and terraced houses.

In addition to that, the VRS has become the representative of the city-region with regard to external relations at the national and European level by means of lobbying, networking and participation in EU funded projects (Hunds 2011). Stuttgart has been the first German region to establish an office in Brussels and is very active in the Network of European metropolitan regions and areas (METREX) (Zimmermann 2011, 202). This is still the case despite leadership changes: the current director of VRS Dr. Nicola Schelling is president of METREX, and Stuttgart hosted a METREX conference about “Modern infrastructures for growing metropolitan regions” in autumn 2019. Stuttgart’s European activities are exceptional compared to other German metropolitan regions (Fricke 2020, 37).

4.3.1.5 Administration, development agencies and additional networks to include private actors

The administrative core of the regional organisation is formed by a head office (*Geschäftsstelle*) with about 70 employees consisting of planners and technical staff. The small size is seen as a positive characteristic by representatives of the regional assembly (VRS 2004). According to the interviewees from the municipalities, the head office has built up a good reputation as a competent and committed partner. Its resources and possibilities for

action are markedly higher than in the 11 other planning regions in Baden-Württemberg; with the exception of the Rhine-Neckar region.¹⁵

According to the budget plan of the Stuttgart Region, the budget for 2020 amounts to 442.4 M€, of which the lion's share of 410.9 M€ is dedicated to public transport (light rail operation, transport association, new vehicles, investments, rail project Stuttgart 21, etc.). The other budget positions are economic development (12.3 M€), personnel (6.1 M€), debts (4.9 M€), administration and IT (4.3 M€), planning (3.1 M€) as well as culture and sports (0.8 M€). Main revenue sources are fees for public transport, allocations from the federal state and contributions paid by the counties and the 179 municipalities. The contribution for public transport is only paid by the members of the traffic association, i.e. Stuttgart and the four counties adjacent to it, not by the county of Göppingen. The region cannot levy taxes of its own and is therefore financially dependent from other territorial authorities. Voluntary activities and additional investments have to be financed by acquisition of funding or by the municipalities, who are also the beneficiaries of co-funding programs. The region has the means to kick off projects and initiatives via small amounts for studies, events and organisational support. It can also ensure a joint financial effort of the municipalities in case of large projects with regional relevance such as the trade fair. The municipal contribution to the budget is voted by the regional assembly and has to cover everything nobody else is paying for. It amounts to about 23.4 M€ in 2020 (thereof 1.5 M€ City of Stuttgart) and has increased between 2016 and 2019 after several stable years. The share per municipality depends on their tax income. The budget of the City of Stuttgart amounts to €4.1 billion for 2020 according to the budget plan. Thus, the city's contribution to the region's budget only represents a minor share of the expenditures.

The head office is seeking to mobilise the potentials of the region by supporting self-organisation and can be seen as central node in a network of cooperation (Zimmermann 2011, 203; Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 139). Operational tasks are carried out in public-private cooperation and via development agencies connected to the core organisation (Benz 2003, 508). These agencies function independently, but are controlled at a distance by the regional assembly (strategy, core projects, budget) and by the regional director (Benz 2003, 507–511). The most important one is the economic development agency *Wirtschaftsförderung Region Stuttgart GmbH* (WRS) established in 1995. It focuses on the promotion of industry and technology networks and started cluster policies such as the regional network *MedienInitiative Region Stuttgart* already in the 1990s. The WRS regularly reports to the committee of the regional assembly. In addition, the regional director of the VRS is part of its advisory board. In terms of administration and budget, the head office of VRS and the WRS are separately organised, though being in the same building. They coordinate their actions and exchange information via regular meetings. Most of their tasks and fields of action are clearly separated. Intersections exist concerning mobility as well

as locations for industry and commercial use. The office in Brussels is a joint activity. Just like VRS, the WRS is shareholder of companies together with other public and private partners, meaning that the VRS as mother organisation is indirect shareholder in these cases. In 2017, the VRS was direct or indirect shareholder of 11 companies and supported two associations financially in a substantive way, *KulturRegion Stuttgart e.V.* and *SportRegion Stuttgart e.V.* In addition to that, the VRS and WRS are members of about 50 associations or networks (VRS 2018). In most of the cases, the region is not holding the majority of the limited liability companies (see Table 4.5); partners are especially the city of Stuttgart, other municipalities, counties, the federal state Baden-Württemberg, chambers, trade unions, transport companies and Stuttgart University. Which municipalities are involved depends on their interest in the topic and is different for each company.

Today, economic actors are mainly involved via the chambers of commerce and industry representing their interests. None of the large companies is a stakeholder of the WRS nor are CEOs standing for the regional parliament. Individual companies might contact the VRS if they feel affected by changes in the regional plan, but do not play a leading role in defining regional strategies anymore. This has been different in the 1990s when leading personalities of the business community have been influential in supporting regional reforms and launched a public debate about development perspectives of the region with stakeholders from culture, media, politics, social affairs, economy and science under the umbrella of the association *Forum Region Stuttgart* (Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 132–134; Zimmermann 2011, 199; Benz 2003, 508). The Forum existed for about 20 years, but was dissolved in 2015 due to the lack of a clear task, active members and financial contributions. Its mission has been fulfilled as the VRS is able to launch projects of regional importance and takes care of economic development and marketing via its agency WRS. In addition, the economic difficulties that hit the region in the 1990s could be overcome.

4.3.1.6 *Key projects: trade fair, Stuttgart 21, IBA 2027, Gigabit Region*

Stuttgart's large projects with regional importance have been either infrastructure projects or events, rather than a new city quarter or large-scale urban development area. The infrastructure projects depend on political and financial support from the state and the federal government (Basten 2011, 282). Current new housing areas seldom exceed 50–100 units and are spread over the city-region. This is caused by the polycentric structure of the city-region with a range of urban centres with a size of 40,000 to 95,000 inhabitants as well as the lack of available space in the core city due to topographic reasons, a strict political decision against outward extension and few remaining conversion areas. The new railway station (Stuttgart 21)

and the former German headquarter of IBM (Eiermann Campus) are the largest conversion areas under development.

One of the key projects of the founding years was the relocation of the trade fair in the southern part of the region next to the airport. This large infrastructure project was one of the triggers for a more integrated form of metro governance (Blatter 2008, 149; Basten 2011, 284), because it could not be planned and financed by one municipality alone. The regional assembly voted for a financial contribution of the region in 1997 (Prieps 2019, 257). The VRS was responsible for the planning process and is still a shareholder of the company which manages the trade fair. The exact site of the new building was fixed in the regional plan and enforced by court decision; this was the first time the VRS actually used the legal instrument of planning obligation (*Planungsgebot*) (Prieps 2019, 260). The VRS was also in charge of mediating between the affected municipalities (Heeg 2003, 172). The new fair was inaugurated in 2007. The area next to the airport and trade fair is still a hotspot of urban development and will experience even more development pressure in the future because an additional train station will be built there, connecting it both via long distance and regional express trains. Land use conflicts are high in this area called *Filder* because it has very fertile soils, which still produce good yields despite climate change and drought.

The second key infrastructure project Stuttgart 21 concerns the transformation of Stuttgart's central railway station from an end station to a subterranean through station as well as a quicker connection to the city of Ulm located about 80 km southeast. This connection is part of a European high speed magistrale from Paris to Bratislava. This large-scale project involves the national government, the state government, German Railway (*Deutsche Bahn*) and the city of Stuttgart as partners (Basten 2011, 283). It clears an 85 hectares inner-city area from railway use and enables its redevelopment into a dense mixed-use quarter with about 7,000 housing units. The project name Stuttgart 21 has become a synonym for citizen protest against megaprojects. Reasons for heated protest from environmental activists and civil society groups were the cost explosion, limited gain of travelling time compared to alternative solutions, expected environmental damage and the cutting down of old trees in a part of the palace park.¹⁶

Regarding events, the VRS supported an application for the Olympic Games 2012. The candidature was prepared at the regional level in the form of a public-private partnership (Benz 2003, 509). However, Stuttgart's application did not pass the national selection process.

Another large project regarding an event is the international building exhibition (IBA) *StadtRegion Stuttgart 2027*. The specifically German format of an international building exhibition creates a laboratory situation for a limited period of time of typically ten years, has a thematic focus adapted to a local problematic and aims to give innovative answers to contemporary questions of urban development by building high-quality showcase projects

(Niemann et al. 2011, 314). After a preparatory phase, the IBA was officially launched in 2017 and is organised by a development agency owned by the city of Stuttgart, the VRS and WRS as well as the chamber of architects and Stuttgart University. The process was initiated by the economic development agency of the Stuttgart Region (WRS), where the idea was born in search for a mobilising project for the whole region. The WRS had a key role in the preparatory phase as it engaged local stakeholders and took the risk to finance and organise a platform for a regional process of deliberation. Furthermore, one of its staff members became first director of the IBA agency. The IBA StadtRegion Stuttgart has four thematic priorities, addressing architectonic quality, functional mix, new technologies and the regional dimension (“Region ist Stadt und Stadt ist Region”) (WRS 2016, 9). It is composed of many individual projects spread all over the region with high engagement of the middle-sized cities around Stuttgart. Contrary to other IBAs such as IBA Emscher Park, the federal state only gives minor financial support, meaning that municipalities have to finance the showcase projects themselves or apply for other sources of co-funding such as EU-funds. The IBA process triggers a competition for innovative ideas between the municipalities and is a stimulus for starting projects even if they might not be ready until 2027 or not part of the official IBA-exhibition. Even though the big picture of the IBA is still blurry due to the thematic diversity, the process is inclusive taking all interested actors on board. In that sense it can be said that the initial idea of a large project that brings the region together and gives a positive impetus after years of controversies around Stuttgart 21 is working.

Regarding infrastructure, the region is currently involved in the construction of a high-performance broadband network via glass fibre cable and 5G. This is seen as precondition for digitalisation and future competitiveness. The Regional Assembly has decided to appoint the WRS with the task to launch a joint tender in order to reach a common standard and equal framework conditions for all municipalities in the region. The WRS and the counties have joined forces. Each county has established a single-purpose association¹⁷ together with all interested municipalities. The task of the single-purpose associations is to prioritise areas within the county and to support the municipalities with planning data, advice and help regarding applications for funding. In addition, the *Gigabit Region Stuttgart GmbH* (GRS) created in 2019 coordinates the processes and has concluded a contract with the telecommunication firm German Telekom regarding the broadband expansion in May 2019. High priority is set on the connection of business parks and industrial zones: according to the aims agreed on by the region and the Telekom, all of them shall be connected to glass fibre cable until 2025. 90% of the private households shall be connected up to 2030. The step-by-step expansion is fixed in yearly plans in close coordination between Telekom, GRS, the single-purpose associations and the city of Stuttgart.

4.3.2 *Spatial relations within the metropolitan region of Stuttgart*

The institutional perimeter of the Stuttgart Region is the dominant spatial definition for the city-region (Fricke 2020, 158). There is a surprising spatial congruence of the various regionalisations, particularly concerning economic actors. The chamber districts correspond to the territory of the VRS and even the labour union IG Metall has adapted to this by appointing a regional spokesperson. The term “Stuttgart Region” is seen as unambiguous and linked to a distinct territory and organisation; it is therefore also used for regional marketing. In contrast, the term “metropolitan region” is fuzzy and contested in its spatial outline and potential institutionalisation and therefore not used by local actors.

4.3.2.1 *Institutional perimeters: Stuttgart Region in the multilevel system*

The spatial dimension of the Stuttgart Region is based on county boundaries. Its territory is composed of the county-exempt city of Stuttgart and the additional 178 municipalities of the five counties Böblingen, Esslingen, Göppingen, Ludwigsburg and Rems-Murr-Kreis. These county and municipality boundaries have been a result of territorial reforms in the 1970s. Despite the mergers, the number of municipalities is still high and about two-thirds of the municipalities have less than 10,000 inhabitants. The city of Stuttgart itself has not been enlarged at that time in a deliberate decision of the federal state not to strengthen Stuttgart (Pribs 2019, 255). Four out of five counties of Stuttgart Region border the city of Stuttgart, but also extend far into the hinterland (see Figure 4.8).

Stuttgart Region is one of 12 planning regions in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg. It does not transcend administrative borders, either of the federal state or of its government office of the region (Regierungspräsidium Stuttgart) (see Figure 4.9). This spatial delimitation has been fixed by federal legislation (*Regionalverbandsgesetz* from July 1971) and has not been altered since. Neither an extension nor reduction are likely to happen in the future either. Some municipal councils of rural municipalities on the edge of the region flirt with an exit with the argument to save costs and get rid of restrictive regulations of the regional plan, but are not pursuing this as a serious option. Leaving Stuttgart Region would only be possible if a municipality changes the county it belongs to with the consent of the federal state; this is seen as an entirely hypothetical scenario by local actors. Rather than changing the boundaries, the functional fit of the cooperation area is attained by variable geometries beyond and within the boundaries if needed (see 4.3.3).

The perimeter of the Stuttgart Region also corresponds to one regional plan. It is the middle layer in the hierarchical system of planning documents between the federal LEP and the local land use plans (see Table 4.6). The preparatory land use plans partly constitutes another level of inter-municipal

Figure 4.9 Stuttgart in the multilevel system of Baden-Württemberg 2021 Concept:
P. Feiertag Cartography: F. Gela

cooperation. In particular, the smaller municipalities within the Stuttgart Region have an inter-municipal FNP. In total, the Stuttgart Region is covered by 79 FNP. One of the larger examples of an inter-municipal FNP is the *Planungsverband unteres Remstal* (PUR) with five municipalities, whereas others only cover two municipalities (e.g. *Verwaltungsgemeinschaft Welzheim/Kaisersbach*). The German planning law has also introduced the

Table 4.6 Layers of planning documents

<i>Planning Document</i>	<i>Year of approval</i>	<i>Responsible Institution</i>	<i>Area covered</i>
Landesentwicklungsplan (LEP)	2002	Land Baden-Württemberg	Federal State
Regionalplan Region Stuttgart	2010	Verband Region Stuttgart	Region (with 179 municipalities)
Flächennutzungsplan (FNP)	2001	Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart	City of Stuttgart
Bebauungspläne (B-Plan)	about 60 modifications from 1960s to 2020	Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart	Partial areas of the municipality
About 3,000			

option of a regional FNP (see section 4.2 Frankfurt) but this is not in use in Stuttgart, because as land use planning is a municipal task it would have been necessary to directly involve the municipalities in decision-making, e.g. via a second chamber composed of mayors. The regional planners in Stuttgart argue that a regional FNP would not bring a considerable gain in control compared to a consistently applied regional plan. They see instead a risk to create a weaker instrument, because the mayors would most likely be less inclined to pass a restrictive regulation limiting their own development possibilities than the current regional assembly.

4.3.2.2 Morphological and functional definitions

Stuttgart Region covers a vast, heterogeneous area that is much larger than the continuously built-up space of the region. It includes rural areas, particularly in the northeast of the region. The continuously built-up space expands beyond the administrative borders of the city of Stuttgart. Due to its location in a basin surrounded by hilly terrain with forests, the settlement extension is limited in the west and also to a limited degree in the south. Continuity exists along the transport axes of rail, roads and rivers, e.g. in the south east along the river Neckar. These interrelations and green cuts are taken up by the regional plan in order to structure the regional space.

The delimitation of German regional plans is supposed to follow a functional logic by reflecting the areas of interdependence of the urban nodes with high centrality (Priebis 2019, 255). According to the regional planners themselves, the territory of the region does include the functional area of Stuttgart. Commuter flows decrease beyond the border. Boundary problems have existed in the past as some municipalities outside the region have benefitted from less restrictive planning rules in neighbouring regions and have been growing more, but this is not the case anymore. Although the perimeter was established in the 1970s and has not changed since then, the Stuttgart Region is still large enough in functional terms. The light rail train under the responsibility of VRS covers large parts of the region except the county Göppingen (connected by regional train) and less densely populated areas such as the eastern part of the county Rems-Murr. An extension beyond the region is under discussion and has already been the subject of feasibility studies, but has not been decided yet. A considerable part of the budget of the VRS is dedicated to investments into the light rail network. In 2019, the VRS decided to buy new trains to enable a switch to 15-minute intervals (which is an investment of about 420 M€).

Intense connections to the surrounding urban nodes do exist, in particular with Tübingen, but also Heilbronn. Bosch, one of the manufacturing global companies and major employers in the region, has its headquarter in a small town near Heilbronn. The cities of Tübingen/Reutlingen, Pforzheim and Heilbronn (see Figure 4.9) have their own area of functional interdependence,

though overlapping with Stuttgart. Accordingly, the LEP 2002 displays them as part of a continuous agglomeration (*Verdichtungsraum*). *Verdichtungsräume* are defined as large areas of municipalities with settlement density well above average (minimum 120% of federal state average) and intense internal commuter interdependences (75% of all commuters). The delimitation of spatial categories in the LEP is however not purely based on statistical indicators. In order to avoid patchworks, planning contexts and spatial proximity have been taken into account and local actors have been heard before the final definition (Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Arbeit und Tourismus Baden-Württemberg 2002, B8).

4.3.2.3 *The evolving spatial definition of the metropolitan region*

Stuttgart is one of the 11 city-regions labelled as a “European metropolitan region” by the Standing Conference of Federal and State Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning (MKRO) (see 4.1). As the the Verband Region Stuttgart had already been created, a discussion (if not dispute) started whether the metropolitan region would be identical with the Stuttgart Region or not. The cartographic representation produced at the national level (see Figure 4.3, section 4.1) is schematic and leaves the spatial delimitation mostly to the local level. The metro regions are depicted as hexagons. However, some of the larger cities are included in the map, suggesting that the cities of Heilbronn, Tübingen and Reutlingen would be part of the metro region, but not Pforzheim and Karlsruhe. The state plan LEP BW 2002 picks up this definition by specifying that the European metropolitan region includes the agglomerations Stuttgart, Heilbronn and Reutlingen/Tübingen (Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Arbeit und Tourismus Baden-Württemberg 2002). This means that the federal state had the position that the metro region should be interpreted larger than the planning regions and based on a functional definition as network of urban nodes, not on existing administrative boundaries. Unlike the national spatial vision, the LEP is a binding plan that cannot be ignored by the lower planning levels. It sets specific objectives for each spatial category. In the case of the *Europäische Metropolregion Stuttgart* as well as the *Verdichtungsraum* Karlsruhe/Pforzheim, these are “development tasks” (*Entwicklungsaufgaben*) such as a better integration into national and international transport, energy and communication networks.

The federal definition has been picked up and reinterpreted from the bottom-up perspective of regional actors (VRS et al. 2003). The outline of the metro region was soon extended. The regions Nordschwarzwald and Ostwürttemberg joined the informal cooperation of planning regions discussing how to translate the stipulations of the LEP into their regional plans. The five regions (see Figure 4.9) have agreed upon the interpretation that the LEP roughly fixes a minimum extension but leaves the exact shape by purpose vague and thereby avoids to oblige or exclude any municipality

(Europäische Metropolregion Stuttgart 2008, 4). They highlight the fuzziness of the spatial delimitation as well as the voluntary and network character of cooperation within the European metropolitan region.

The planning regions were unwilling to draw an internal boundary between urban spaces that would belong to the metro region and rural parts that would be excluded (Klinkenberg 2010, 394). They therefore opted for a wider cooperation space formed by the entire regions Neckar-Alb, Nordschwarzwald, Heilbronn-Franken, Ostwürttemberg und Stuttgart (Europäische Metropolregion Stuttgart 2008, 5). However, their own representation used as a logo for the European metropolitan region (see Figure 4.10) shows that it has remained a juxtaposition of the former planning regions. It was in the end not possible to spatially redefine and institutionalise the metropolitan region on the basis of functional criteria. The federal requirement to create a larger cooperation space was reinterpreted by the regional associations and adapted to their existing borders. The resulting potential soft cooperation space is heterogeneous concerning population density, but also with regard to the composition of the population in terms of level of education and of non-German residents (Pütz 2016, 552).

4.3.2.4 *Sub-regional spaces and inter-municipal cooperation:*

Kommunaler Arbeitskreis Fildern (KAF)

Due to the large size of the Stuttgart Region and the existence of many small municipalities, a wide range of inter-municipal collaborations below the VRS exists. Apart from the counties, there is no systematic subdivision in subspaces covering the entire region. Inter-municipal cooperation takes place in weakly institutionalised working structures, mostly created for a single purpose. Some of them have a decades-long history even older than the region itself. Their continuity depends very much on personal relations of local politicians and mayors. Those small municipalities who have managed to keep their independence during territorial reforms have fought for it

Figure 4.10 Imaginary of the metropolitan region © Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart and VRS 2019

and tend to have a strong local identity. The decision to fulfil tasks together with other neighbouring municipalities is mainly motivated by financial constraints or a lack of know-how or has served as counter-argument against amalgamation. These small-scale inter-municipal structures have not become obsolete by the establishment of a strong city-regional level of governance because of the functional profile of the Stuttgart region (see 4.3.1). Service provision for the citizens as well as local land use planning and urban development continue to be municipal tasks covered by their right of local self-government.

Beyond pragmatic reasons, some inter-municipal activities have a more strategic dimension and are based on the idea of a shared territory related to the landscape. One of them is *Grüne Nachbarschaft* north of Stuttgart around the city of Ludwigsburg. The cooperation has been initiated by a landscape architect in the 1990s. Its activities consist of inter-municipal landscape planning and the implementation of over 100 projects for ecological landscape design, water body renaturation, local recreation as well as environmental education. One of the six member municipalities resigned in 2019 after 23 years of membership despite a positive assessment by the administration and the mayor as well as many implemented projects. The decision was made by the municipal council over the course of the budgetary discussions. This example shows that this kind of voluntary inter-municipal cooperation depends on the commitment of individuals and how volatile it can be.

The most institutionalised example is the Kommunaler Arbeitskreis Fildern (KAF) in the Filder area south of Stuttgart, a plain with very fertile soils. The KAF has been founded in 1967 and includes the municipalities of Filderstadt, Leinfelden-Echterdingen, Ostfildern, Denkendorf, Neuhausen and Steinenbronn as well as some quarters of the cities Stuttgart and Esslingen. It has a semi-formal structure based on a statute, a financial contribution of the member municipalities, a rotating chair, a board of mayors for decision-making and a purely advisory assembly with representatives of the municipal councils. The main topics are landscape protection, a network of bicycle path, flood prevention and noise protection from the airport Stuttgart located in that area. The original common interest behind the association was to join forces in defence of a planned airport expansion. Recently key principles for settlement development have become a topic because the area is confronted with high development pressure due to the trade fair and a new train station next to the airport (see 4.3.1). As a joint basis for discussion, KAF and VRS have commissioned a well-known architectural firm to carry out a study ("Filderstudie", presented in autumn 2018) assessing the additional demand triggered by the station and make propositions for the future development. The outcome has been debated, but it is up to each municipal council to draw conclusions and eventually take binding decisions. Some municipalities are in favour of a joint land use plan, but not all of them, meaning that the KAF will not be transformed into a planning association.

4.3.3 *Coordination of public policies beyond the perimeter of the Verband Region Stuttgart*

It could be shown that the perimeter of the Stuttgart Region is widely used as a spatial reference for public policies. It is not fuzzy. Regional actors perceive it as suitable for functions such as economic development and regional planning. The Stuttgart Region is a hard space with an inside-outside divide based on the logic of joint financing within the region. Topic-specific soft spaces within and beyond the perimeter of the region do exist, but there is no comprehensive strategy for a larger metropolitan area. In many of them, the VRS is a key actor who has initiated and enabled them due to its capacities, e.g. via preparatory studies, application for funding or by bringing different actors together.

4.3.3.1 *Networks with variable geometries*

The governance model of the VRS with a small core for strategic decisions combined with more flexible networks and semi-public limited liability companies for operational tasks enables the Verband Region Stuttgart to expand cooperation within those networks beyond the boundaries of the Stuttgart Region itself. Despite this potential flexibility, institutions expanding beyond the region are rare due to an asymmetry of competences and resources between the VRS and the neighbouring regional associations as well as issues of co-financing. The VRS and its economic development agency WRS are shareholders of several limited liability companies with partners beyond the region: the biotechnology and medical technology cluster BioRegion Stern, the regional marketing agency Regio Stuttgart and a temporal consortium for an inter-municipal gardening exhibition in the valley of the river Rems.

- **BioRegion STERN Management GmbH:** BioRegion STERN is a biotechnology and medical technology cluster promoted together with the neighbouring Region Neckar-Alb (Tübingen). Its origin goes back as early as 2001 to a successful application in a competition of the Federal Ministry of Research (Benz 2003, 509; Prieb 2019, 257). Shareholders are the regional planning association Neckar-Alb as well as the cities Tübingen, Reutlingen, Stuttgart and Esslingen (see Table 4.5). The long-standing cluster operates completely autonomously; shareholders receive an annual report, but are not involved in the day-to-day business.
- **Regio Stuttgart Marketing- und Tourismus GmbH:** Tourism and city marketing activities of the region are organised together with the city of Stuttgart and include towns outside the region. Interested municipalities are organised in the association Regio Stuttgart Marketing- und Tourismus e.V. which holds the same share as VRS and city of

Stuttgart (each 32.4%). The number of municipalities has gradually grown to 43 and is open for new members. From the tourism perspective, Stuttgart is interpreted as a larger area or network of places of interest. The tourism marketing presents both the core city, attractions in the region and beyond such as castles or outlet centres. This cooperation functions well due to common interests (Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 130).

- **Remstal Gartenschau:** The inter-municipal gardening exhibition along the valley of the river Rems with 80 km from the source to the mouth took place between May and October 2019. The federal state had given its approval in 2010. Gardening exhibitions nominated by the federal level or the states are common practice in Germany since the 1950s, but usually only one single municipality is entitled to apply. An inter-municipal cooperation is therefore a novelty (Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 115) and would not have come about without the support of the VRS in the application and conception phase. The VRS has provided support in terms of content (idea and expertise), finance (co-financing of projects as part of its landscape park programme) and organisation (bringing the actors from different counties together). The partnership involves 16 municipalities and three counties as well as the VRS and private partners from the professional field of gardening and landscaping (organised in a society for the promotion of regional garden shows, *Förderungsgesellschaft für die BW-Landesgartenschauen mbH*). One of the counties, Ostalbkreis, and five municipalities are not part of the Stuttgart Region. Each partner holds equal shares of the limited liability company responsible for running the gardening exhibition.

These examples established at different times with different members and topics show the logic of variable geometry. It is possible to involve partners from outside the region in concrete projects with a clear common interest that justifies the choice of partners. Partners mainly are cities on the edge of the region as well as neighbouring counties or regional associations as umbrella for smaller municipalities or co-financer. The organisation model as joint limited liability company allows for shared financing and a clear description of tasks and responsibilities. However, those examples have an exceptional character, whereas the large majority of activities of WRS and VRS as well their network of companies and associations operate within the area of the Stuttgart Region.

Small-scale inter-municipal partnerships across the border of the region also exist without involvement of the Stuttgart Region. These concern municipalities on the edge of the region. One example is the single-purpose association for drinking water supply *Zweckverband Wasserversorgung Menzlesmühle* formed by six municipalities.

4.3.3.2 *Europäische Metropolregion Stuttgart as additional layer of governance?*

The concept of *Europäische Metropolregion* was meant to create a new mental geography (Blotevogel and Schmitt 2006, 61). The spatial definition of a wider metropolitan region beyond the Stuttgart Region at a national and federal level (see 4.3.2) raised the question of the appropriate form of governance for this new cooperation space and of the role of the VRS within it.

Stuttgart was labelled as *Europäische Metropolregion* in 1995 (see 4.1), shortly after creation of the VRS (see 4.3.1). The existing Verband Region Stuttgart saw itself as a legitimate institution to represent the metropolitan region and became its representative in the national network of metro regions IKM. This interpretation was challenged by the mayor of Stuttgart at the time, Wolfgang Schuster. The establishment of the European Metropolitan Region was accompanied by leadership conflicts to the extent that some cities and counties saw an opportunity here to pursue a municipally dominated form of regionalisation alongside the Verband Region Stuttgart in order not to further strengthen it (Zimmermann and Heinelt 2012, 106; Blatter 2008, 159). Both started attempts to put the *Europäische Metropolregion* into practice. On one hand, the regional associations met and elaborated a joint strategy paper including potential fields of action (VRS et al. 2003, 9–10) as well as a regional development concept as basis for their regional plans (Europäische Metropolregion Stuttgart 2008; Zimmermann 2011, 204). On the other hand, the Mayor of Stuttgart invited from July 2005 on representatives of the larger cities to the so-called Steering Committee “Schuster-Runde” (Fricke 2020, 164). Some cities within Stuttgart Region (Esslingen, Ludwigsburg, Sindelfingen) did not join the committee, because they did not wish to weaken the VRS. The informal network met quarterly and set up thematic working groups on “tourism and marketing”, “science and education”, “business and innovation” and “Neckar as a connecting link”. The purpose was to develop concrete project proposals, but the network was unable to act because it lacked competences for key projects with regional relevance such as the trade fair or Stuttgart 21 (see 4.3.1) and was unable to solve distribution conflicts concerning costs (Klinkenberg 2010, 394–397).

Leadership conflicts between the mayor of Stuttgart and the director of the Stuttgart Region were settled in 2007 by the newly elected president of VRS Thomas Bopp. The result of the compromise is a coordinative committee involving both parties; it is hosted by the VRS and chaired by the mayor of Stuttgart. However, the involved actors had a low interest in the new model from the beginning and voluntary cooperation reached its limits (Klinkenberg 2010, 396–398; Zimmermann 2011, 204; Zimmermann and Heinelt 2012, 106). The committee still exists today, but has not met regularly for several years (Beuttler-Bohn 2017, 98). Interviewees state that a joint ticket for regional transport called “Metropolticket” as its

only concrete output. It was introduced in January 2012 and involves nine transport associations (see Figure 4.11). The savings for the users are not huge,¹⁸ but it contributes to a metro-regional identity, because travellers from Tübingen or Esslingen to Heilbronn, for example, now feel that they are travelling “in the metropolitan region”. Yet, the area of validity is not entirely identical with the spatial dimension defined as metro region (see Figure 4.9): the north of the region Heilbronn-Franken is not included and it stretches more to the south beyond the border of the region Neckar-Alb. The current mayor of Stuttgart, Kuhn, was not pushing the cooperation in the early years of his tenure, but has relaunched it in 2019 by initiating a

Figure 4.11 Area of validity of the Metropolticket © Verkehrsministerium Baden-Württemberg

regional conference concerning mobility which took place in January 2019 under the label of *Europäische Metropolregion Stuttgart*. Yearly metropolitan conferences as forums for discussions are planned for the future.

All in all, in terms of functions, territory and governance, the *Europäische Metropolregion* has remained vague and fuzzy. The concept was not able to challenge the Stuttgart Region as the key player for the coordination of public policies. The struggle about the appropriate form of governance for the European metro region has, however, tied up political forces of the Stuttgart Region for several years and therefore rather hampered its institutional development (Blatter 2008, 159). Single-topic cooperation beyond the core of Stuttgart Region exists on a case-by-case basis, though not necessarily under the label of the metropolitan region (see above). None of the existing activities exactly covers the territory of the five regions defined as cooperation space (see Figure 4.8). The area is considered as being too heterogeneous and too big to specify common interests and projects (Interviews; see also Priebs 2019, 262). Another argument put forward against the European metropolitan region as an additional layer is that the multilevel system is already complex and that there are not enough topics left for yet another level between a strong federal state and a strong Stuttgart Region. A range of networks do already exist *at the scale of the federal state Baden-Württemberg* such as a working group of the 12 regional planning associations (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Regionalverbände AGRV*) or a network of planners as part of the Association of German Cities (*Deutscher Städtetag*). These are not the forums to discuss metro-regional issues, but the professional exchange and personal contacts make it easier to address the relevant actors if necessary.

4.4 Interpretation and conclusion: the steady relevance of city-regions

From a general point of view, not much has changed in the way the governance of city-regions is handled in Germany. Local government and regional policies are largely in the hands of the states and even in the states city-regional governance is decentralised and context-specific, voluntary rather than imperative (Heinelt and Zimmermann 2016). The state governments intervene from time to time (Stuttgart in the 1990s and 2015, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main in the early 2000s and 2018) but as the case of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main demonstrates this is rather a definition of procedures and frameworks but not necessarily a clear functional prescription. In the case of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, despite the statutory planning functions, local governments have to fill the institutional voids that are defined in the law for so-called regional key tasks. In the case of Stuttgart, the state government intervened regarding the distribution of functions between the counties and the VRS.

On the other hand, Germany has a long tradition and rich experience with inter-municipal cooperation, in particular in city-regions. Inter-municipal

associations (*Planungs- und Regionalverbände*) are quite common but differ in strength and with regard to the functions. In many city-regions, they are an implementation instrument for the more effective and cost-efficient provision of public services of general interest but in some cases (such as Stuttgart), the regional associations are stronger in terms of organisational autonomy and combine different functions. These very flexible systems are usually under control of the member municipalities. The inter-municipal associations are financially as well as politically dependent. Direct election such as in Stuttgart Region is a rare exception and even in that case, the financial contribution for any additional tasks depends on the municipalities. German city-regions may have own revenues in terms of fees for service provision, but no own taxes. The core cities do have a crucial role for decision-making within the city-regions; however, the mayors of the core city are not the heads of the city-regional associations.

Economisation of city-regional governance has happened but most of the associations are responsible for reproduction functions and planning. Historically they have been created to solve coordination problems of large agglomerations such as congestion, sprawl, environmental problems and inefficient service provision. Joint external representation and international marketing of the city-region have gained importance, but the big cities and their mayors continue to be relevant players in that regard. Transport is a task that is usually organised separately (*Verkehrsverbünde*) with Stuttgart being an exception. Counties and county-exempt cities are still main actors, being responsible for the bulk of public policies. Inter-municipal cooperation is widely spread, both in form of single- and multi-purpose associations, but mostly for smaller areas than the entire city-region.

A specific German phenomenon is the emergence of multi-scaled arrangements (e.g. Köln/Bonn) and larger scale cooperation areas (European metropolitan regions in Germany). This means that larger soft cooperation spaces have been added to persisting regional associations. Both have been identical only in a few regions such as Rhine-Neckar. The approach is an effort of a joint strategy for metropolitan regions by the ministers for spatial planning. This is an invitation to regional actors to find solutions, partly picked up by specific aims for those areas in state plans (LEP). But it does not constitute a specific institutional model.

Consolidation pressures do exist but city-regions are not the hotspots of state-modernisation or territorial and functional reforms. Nevertheless, reforms such as in the Ruhr may happen. The introduction of the direct election in the Ruhr indicates a return to the metro model. However, there is hardly any nationwide trend visible.

4.4.1 Comparison of Stuttgart and Frankfurt/Rhine-Main

Stuttgart and Frankfurt/Rhine-Main represent the two poles in a wide spectrum of city-regional governance. In both city-regions, regional planning

authorities are in a way the organisational core of a broader governance arrangement, but the planning authority Region Stuttgart is stronger in terms of functions (mobility) and legitimacy. Frankfurt displays the principle of variegated cooperation (different formats and actor constellations) and the municipalities still hesitate to hand over more functions. Nevertheless, over the last years trust in the planning authority has risen and the authority became a partner of more and more networks and initiatives. Both are by and large seen as satisfactory governance solutions by local actors. Thus, they rather represent effective metropolitan governance among German city-regions whereas some other regions have remained even more fragmented than Frankfurt/Rhine-Main with a weaker degree of integration and coordinated action.

In terms of institutional ideas, Stuttgart is closer to the metropolitan reform model. It is a multi-purpose organisation with directly elected assembly and there is also a high degree of territorial coherence for most of the functions, though with low financial autonomy. It is also important to point out that it has a very lean organisational core, combined with semi-autonomous agencies. The planning authority Frankfurt/Rhine-Main is different in this regard. Opportunistic cooperation is an appropriate description. The law has been amended and so-called regional key functions have been added but the planning authority is more a moderator and shares regional policy with many other organisations. Over the last decade, the planning authority established different working relationships with these initiatives.

Also, in terms of spatial relations, the two regions differ. Frankfurt/Rhine-Main is a large polycentric area that crosses the borders of three federal states. The territory of the planning region has been adapted in 2001 (75 instead of 43) and in 2021 (five new municipalities) and cuts across county boundaries (see Figure 4.6). Stuttgart region is even larger in terms of surface and population (see Table 4.1). However, its territory fits into the hierarchy of territorial authorities in the sense that it cuts neither across county boundaries nor across state boundaries and is one of 12 regional planning regions covering the state of Baden-Württemberg. Stuttgart is by far the biggest city in the city-region, but is surrounded by self-confident medium-sized cities. The number of municipalities in the region is much larger than in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main as municipalities in Baden-Württemberg are on average smaller. The spatial delimitation both of counties and planning regions was set by the state in the 1970s and never altered since. Stuttgart region has become a common spatial reference for local actors. The rigidity is not seen as problematic, first because it is perceived as pertinent for regional planning by the regional planners themselves and second, because the organisational model allows to form subspaces or integrate external actors for specific topics and projects if necessary. Varying cooperation spaces are, however, the exception in Stuttgart region whereas they are the norm in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main due to the principle of variegated cooperation. In Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, it is a question for open debate for each

regional task if the planning region is the suitable area and format to take care of it.

With regard to the second layer of European metropolitan region in Germany, both are similar with 14,753 km² (Frankfurt/Rhine-Main) and 15,425 km² (Stuttgart). However, this spatial configuration is more meaningful in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main because it facilitates cooperation across the borders of the federal states. Even though it is a very weak, voluntary mechanism, the delimitation of the EMR Stuttgart is bound to pre-existing boundaries of counties and regional planning associations. This has prevented the creation of a meaningful space of action, because the EMR Stuttgart formed by five planning regions (see Figure 4.9) is too heterogeneous and has trouble formulating common interests and priorities. The marketing activities of the economic development agency WRS clearly focus on Stuttgart Region and not on the EMR, because the region is seen as a known brand and less ambiguous in terms of space and institution.

In terms of functions, there are some similarities between the two regions. In both, spatial planning (the regional plan in case of Stuttgart and the regional land use plan in case of Frankfurt) and landscape planning, regional landscape parks, economic development and marketing, external representation, digitisation, wind energy and large cultural or sports events are regional tasks. In Stuttgart, the portfolio also includes regional public transport, tourism and the trade fare. In Frankfurt, culture is a more prominent task with three complementary initiatives at the city-regional scale. The German city-regions are more open for economic development purposes and this applies for Stuttgart in particular. In Stuttgart, however, economic development and marketing are main tasks of a regional development agency (WRS), not of the VRS itself, but both are closely interrelated and steered by the regional council. In Frankfurt, economic development is less concentrated in one agency but accomplished by a mix of operational agencies and lobby organisations.

In both cases, we find continuous and flexible adaptations of existing legal frameworks and institutions. Adaptations in the case of Stuttgart Region have been minor, mainly affecting a few additional competences and topics as well as projects-based initiatives (IBA). But overall, the institutional arrangement has been very stable since the creation of the VRS in 1994. Over the last decades, the Frankfurt region was more in a flux, including spatial adjustments.

Notes

- 1 Most eastern federal states reduced the number of counties in the middle of the 1990s (Heinelt and Egner 2011, 110).
- 2 MORO “Überregionale Partnerschaften in grenzüberschreitende Verflechtungsräumen” 2008 with Lake Constance (see Harrison and Growe 2014, 36) and MORO IMeG 2011–2013 with four project areas.

- 3 Do not exist in Schleswig-Holstein, Saarland, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Lower Saxony (abolished in 2004) as well as in the three city-states.
- 4 “Die frühe Selbstbezeichnung als Metropolregion, die erfolgreiche Etablierung der Metropolregion als ‘Marke’ sowie die klare Ausrichtung auf große Leitprojekte und eine gemeinsame Olympia-Bewerbung sind klare Indikatoren für eine solche Governance-Form.”
- 5 The Forum brings together ten chambers of commerce from Southern Hesse, the region of Mainz and Worms in Rhineland-Palatinate and the region of Aschaffenburg in Bavaria.
- 6 The full title of the law of 19.12.2000 (in force since 2001) is: *Gesetz zur Stärkung der kommunalen Zusammenarbeit im Ballungsraum Frankfurt/Rhein-Main*, in short: *Ballungsraumgesetz*.
- 7 The increase by five municipalities happened only in April 2021.
- 8 <https://strategieforum-frankfurtrheinmain.de>.
- 9 Darüber hinaus hat er die Mitwirkungsbefugnis an der Wahrnehmung der Ballungsraumaufgaben nach § 1 MetropolG sowie die Möglichkeit, sich an regionalbedeutsamen Angelegenheiten zu beteiligen (§ 8 MetropolG), erhalten.
- 10 The strategy was adapted in 2020-21; projects supported by the funds cover now a broader spectrum.
- 11 This economic development agency comprises 203 municipalities, 12 counties, five chambers of commerce, two chambers of craft, the Association of Hesse Enterprises (*Vereinigung der hessischen Unternehmerverbände*), seven research centres, Fraport (the company owning Frankfurt airport) and some other infrastructure companies in the region ([http://www. region-frankfurt-rheinmain.de/](http://www.region-frankfurt-rheinmain.de/)).
- 12 At the outset, the main aim was limited to “attracting investments and inform about available industrial real estate and office space in the region” (Hoyler et al. 2006, 130).
- 13 Baden-Württemberg has in total nine county exempt cities, namely Baden-Baden, Freiburg im Breisgau, Heidelberg, Heilbronn, Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Pforzheim, Stuttgart and Ulm. With the exception of Baden-Baden, all of them have more than 100,000 inhabitants.
- 14 Gesetz über die Errichtung des Verbands Region Stuttgart vom 7. Februar 1994.
- 15 Regional planning authorities usually have about five to ten employees and their financial resources are strictly limited to their regional planning tasks.
- 16 The protest coalition organised weekly demonstrations with several thousands of participants starting in 2006, which escalated in September 2010 between police and protestors, when the north wing of the old station was torn down. Pictures of violence against protestants caught nationwide attention. Despite the vehement protests, a majority of citizens voted for the project in a state-wide referendum held in November 2011 and obliged the Green party to continue with the megaproject notwithstanding their own opposition (Nagel and Satoh 2019).
- 17 Zweckverband Breitbandausbau Landkreis Böblingen, Zweckverband Breitbandversorgung Landkreis Esslingen, Zweckverband Gigabit Landkreis Göppingen, Zweckverband Kreisbreitband Ludwigsburg, Zweckverband Breitbandausbau Rems-Murr.
- 18 A day ticket for the metropolitan region costs 21€ compared to 24€ for regional transport in the entire state Baden-Württemberg.

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