5 Cross-country comparison

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After the presentation of six city-regional case studies and the internal comparison of the two cases per country in Chapters 2 to 4, we draw conclusions about the drivers of reforms and the results in terms of institutions, functions and spatial relationships by making a cross-country comparison. This includes national policy frameworks in a cross-country perspective as well as a comparison of the six case studies.

National frameworks and administrative cultures continue to matter for metropolitan governance due to different state structures (federal, regionalised, unitary), socio-economic development paths and country-specific discourses on state modernisation and spatial development policies. Besides the relevance of national frameworks, the empirical evidence shows regional differences within nation states as well as similarities across country boundaries, e.g. regarding the issue of the direct election of the metropolitan council. The fact that European city-regions are well connected to each other via institutionalised networks, personal contacts and shared experiences contributes to these cross-national similarities. However, despite this travelling of ideas and shared challenges of European city-regions, there are only weak signs of homogenisation of city-regional governance across the three countries and six case study regions.

5.1 Institutions

The selected case studies all have an institutionalised city-regional authority but only in Italy are these institutions mentioned in the constitution, because they substituted for an existing jurisdiction. This substitution also happened in Lyon as the *métropole* gained the status of a *département*. The three other metropolitan institutions are additional levels added to the multi-level system without replacing the second tier of local government.

In Germany, the term “region” is used in a variety of ways and it is common to call city-regional institutions “region”, whereas the French *régions* and Italian *regione* are higher level governments and more comparable to the German state governments. Thus, “region” in the German terminology refers to much smaller entities (city-regions or metropolitan regions) than

in the European understanding (Fricke 2020a, 155; Wahl 1998, 210). In contrast to France and Italy, regions exist in formal terms only as statutory planning regions for regional planning (see Figure 4.5) and as government offices of the regions (*Regierungsbezirke*), i.e. regional branches of the state governments (often also referred to also as “districts”) (Zimmermann 2017, 254). The term “region” is also used for informal formats of cooperation such as the agglomeration concept Cologne/Bonn producing a spatial image of the region or within the funding programme REGIONALE in North-Rhine Westphalia (Reimer 2012). The terms “città metropolitana” and “métropole” are more clear in the sense that they refer to a distinct institutional form framed by national laws. However, the French term “métropole” existed before these laws and is linked to specific connotations and imaginations of a city, and is not only used to signify the legal institution. To increase the ambiguity further, some municipal groupings without the legal status of a *métropole* use it as a name (e.g. CU Angers Loire Métropole or even CA Châteauroux Métropole) to underpin the relevance of the respective city-region.

Compared to the history of the modern nation states, metropolitan authorities are relatively recent phenomena, in particular when compared to the second tier of local government in France and Italy. Their *raison d'être* depends much on their performance and the need for city-regional solutions. In France, the *métropoles* have gradually evolved and are now a crucial institution for the provision of many public services. Thus, it is difficult to imagine that their reason for existing will be questioned again, or that they will be abolished and their functions redistributed to other levels of the state. It is more likely that more tasks from municipalities and *départements* will be assigned to them and the question is rather to what extent the partly criticised power concentration will continue and how horizontal and multi-layered cooperation will be institutionalised in the future.

The two German cases, Stuttgart region and Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region, have stabilised and have gained a good reputation among municipalities and counties as useful service providers and moderators. Because of the performance of the current arrangements that are able to deal at least with some of the city-regional issues, both regional authorities are not likely to vanish. In the future, it may happen that they extend their role as core institutions and/or moderators at the city-regional level slightly, if the state governments or local actors assign additional tasks. However, municipalities and counties defend their constitutional right of local self-government and give the subsidiarity principle and proximity to the citizens as reasons. Thus, in both cases, the regional authorities have to prove that the city-region is the more appropriate level for problem-solving. In Italy, the CM are quite young compared to the other metropolitan authorities in Europe and are still building their reputation, mainly via strategic planning instruments. Performances differ and for future development, it will be decisive how they fill the niche between the cities and the regions.

The question of whether city-regions increased in relevance as institutional sites of problem-solving or service provision can be answered positively for all the six case studies but there is certainly variation. They have some autonomy vis-à-vis higher levels of government as well as vis-à-vis local authorities, and partly meet the criteria of adequate financial (and human) resources and significant powers to intervene in metropolitan affairs (Demazière and Sykes 2020b, 199). Financial autonomy is highest in the case of the French *métropoles* with a share of direct tax income (see Table 5.1). Political legitimacy by direct election has been established only in Stuttgart Region (since 1994) and the *Métropole de Lyon* (since 2020). Both are exceptions in their national contexts and became possible due to a window of opportunity. With regard to leadership, three out of six presidents of metropolitan authorities are mayors of the core city (in Italy prescribed by national law). The reason for this double position is on one hand to synchronise the policy of the core city and the metropolitan authority and on the other hand to have a powerful leader who is able to defend the interests of the city-region, e.g. in negotiations with higher levels. In Italy, this is also a measure to save expenditure as the position of the head of the second tier (former province) no longer exists. In France, being mayor of a large city used to be the foundation of many national political careers (see 2.2.1). In Germany, the argument to avoid the coupling of the position as president of a regional authority and mayor is that it would harm the role as neutral moderator within the region by accentuating the dominance of the core city. In the case of the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region, the current director of the planning authority is a former mayor of a medium-sized town adjacent to Frankfurt/ Main.

Regarding budget and staff, Table 5.1 shows striking contrasts. As the city-regional authorities have different sources of income (including temporary funding) and assets, these global numbers have to be interpreted with caution to avoid misunderstandings and can only be compared in a differentiated way by looking in detail into the budgets and staff schemes. The lion's share of the budget of Stuttgart region for example is dedicated to public transport (90%, including the purchase of new light rail trains, see 4.3.1); after subtracting this budget position, the difference between the budgets of Stuttgart and Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region appears less significant. Still, the figures give an impression of the strength and performance of the city-regional authorities and the rough indication of whether a hundred (or less) or several thousand employees work for an organisation gives a clue to the functional relevance of a city-regional institution. Some explanations are related to the distribution of functions (see 5.2). The huge discrepancy points to the role of the institution, meaning if it is mainly strategic and coordinative and therefore less cost-intensive or also operational and managerial. This difference determines the budget and influences what kind of staff are needed to fulfil these functions. To give an example, the seven *pôles de proximité* of Nantes Métropole have about 200 employees each

Table 5.1 Metropolitan authorities in the six city-regional case studies

	<i>Date of creation</i>	<i>Direct election</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Staff</i>
Bologna Città Metropolitana di Bologna	2015	no	Mayor of Bologna (by law)	Ca. 240 M € (2019)	Ca. 400 employees
Firenze Città Metropolitana di Firenze	2015	no	Mayor of Firenze (by law)	Ca. 200 M € (2019)	388 employees
Nantes: Nantes Métropole	2001 CU 2015 métropole	no	Elected by council; mayor of Nantes	1.31 Billion € (2019)	Ca. 7,000 employees in joint administration of the métropole and City of Nantes
Lyon: Métropole de Lyon	1969 CU 2015 métropole	yes	Elected by council	3.48 Billion € (2020)	Ca. 8,700 employees
Frankfurt/Main: Regionalverband FrankfurtRheinMain	2001 Planungsverband 2011 Regionalverband	no	Elected by council	Ca 15 M € ⁱ (in average)	Ca. 115 employees
Stuttgart: Verband Region Stuttgart	1994	yes	Elected by council; shared leadership of president and director of administration	442.4 M € (2020)	Ca. 70 employees

ⁱ <https://www.region-frankfurt.de/Über-uns/> 31 May 2021.

Figures taken from budget reports and websites. See also for Italy: Corte dei Conti 2020

and deal e.g. with the maintenance of municipal streets, and include the construction teams that repair potholes (see 2.2.1). The provinces and *città metropolitane* in Italy had to make a significant contribution to the fiscal consolidation of the Italian public sector in 2015, 2016 and 2017 and this hampered the start the of *città metropolitane* as strategic planning agencies (Corte dei Conti 2020).

The human resources also point to the position in the multilayer system. The CMs are former provinces and kept part of their staff along with the tasks (provincial streets, schools and planning in particular). French *métropoles* have taken on staff from the municipalities or even merged both administrations in the case of Nantes. The administration of Lyon is ever larger, because it includes a substantial number of employees transferred from the *Département Rhône* (see 2.3.1). In Stuttgart region and the region Frankfurt/Rhein-Main, this kind of transfer has not taken place. Rather than partly replacing counties and municipalities, these regional associations fulfil additional strategic tasks with the aim of increasing coordination of public policies and public-private initiatives. Both organisations are in principle planning authorities, a public policy that is less cost-intensive compared to social housing, urban regeneration, public transport or maintenance of school buildings. The balance between county-exempt cities and regional authorities in Germany in terms of functions, territory and finances is completely different than that between French core cities and *métropoles*: as an example, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region has less than 1% of the budget and staff of the city of Frankfurt/Main, whereas the budget of the city of Lyon is less than one-quarter that of the *métropole* and it has slightly less staff (Demazière et al. 2022). In order to give a more balanced picture of the weakness of German regional authorities in terms of staff and budget (see Table 5.1) we need to take into consideration that German county-exempt cities (such as Frankfurt, Stuttgart) are bigger in terms of territory (due to annexations that happened decades ago) than their Italian and French counterparts. Hence, the French *métropoles* are in a way a functional equivalent of German county-exempt cities.

These numbers also point to different ways to organise the functions. Stuttgart region can be seen as prototype of a lean organisation with the core task of regional planning. Many other tasks, including economic development or tourism, are organised in limited liability companies (GmbH) and the regional authority is a significant shareholder. The directly elected regional assembly supervises these partnerships and takes strategic decisions, but they operate autonomously at arm's length distance and also have their own budget (see 4.3.1). In Bologna, the administrations of the CM and the core city collaborate closely (joined offices), although not as closely as in Nantes, where mergers took place. This is primarily done for reasons of cost-efficiency. This phenomenon of close administrative ties between the regional authority and the core city is not observable in Germany, where the two bodies keep a distance.

Looking at the evolution of city-regional policies in the six city-regional cases and three countries, we rather see context-specific institutional solutions how to organise metropolitan governance than convergence towards a unified model. Recent changes in France are not path-breaking changes but show a pattern of management of adaptations. This applies also to Italy although the introduction of the *città metropolitana* changed much in terms of legitimacy and territorial political representation of the second tier of local government. France shows a sequence of adaptations and complementary measures with regard to the creation of new city-regions, their size and functional portfolio. In Germany, we see a decentralised and non-uniform way of dealing with problems of metropolitan development. The governance arrangements that emerged in different city-regions at different moments in time are specific to the local context, but are also influenced by the respective Zeitgeist.

5.2 Functions

The repartition of functions in the multi-level system differs among the federal state of Germany, the regionalised state of Italy and the unitary state of France. The German city-regions Stuttgart and Frankfurt/Rhine-Main have a rather narrow functional profile compared to the responsibilities of the local governments and the *Länder* and therefore cannot be regarded as representing a full-fledged level of public administration. This is different in Lyon and Nantes, where the *métropoles* have broader tasks. French *métropoles* are as powerful as *régions* and have gained problem-solving capacities at the expense of *départements* and municipalities in the last decade. The Italian CM Bologna and Florence are somehow in an intermediate position between a hollowed-out province and a city-regional agency for strategic planning. Compared to the former province, expectations are high with regard to strategic coordination of socio-economic development. Note that in France, the definition of functions and roles for the *métropole* was negotiated by the municipalities, the existing CU and the *départements*. In Italy the functional profile of the CM was rather decided top down by the regional governments.

In many policy fields, the city-regional institutions in all three countries do not have exclusive functions, but share them with other levels, in particular with the local governments. Therefore, close coordination is needed. The German regions represent a specific case as they use a range of collaborative arrangements with public and private actors and this makes them appear larger than they are.

Across our six cases, there are some policy fields addressed by all city-regions. All regions are meant to coordinate the spatial development through different kinds of strategic and statutory spatial plans. The CMs Firenze and Bologna are responsible for the *Piano Strategico Metropolitano*, the *Piano Territoriale Metropolitano* and a city-regional mobility plan. The

métropoles Lyon and Nantes have established the inter-municipal land use plan PLUi and have approved the strategic SCoT. Stuttgart Region has the responsibility for the statutory regional plan and Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region for a regional land use plan (*regionaler FNP*), the latter replacing the regional plan and municipal preparatory land use plans. Both authorities are also responsible for landscape plans. In contrast to the French *métropoles* and Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region, local land use planning has remained a municipal task in Stuttgart and the Italian cases. However, in both city-regions, Florence and Bologna, inter-municipal land use plans are getting more and more relevant. Inter-municipal land use planning is possible according to national law in Germany as well, but rarely takes place for more than two or three municipalities. All six city-regions accomplish mobility planning (though to different degrees with the mobility concept of Frankfurt/Rhein-Main being the document with the lowest binding quality). Stuttgart region is also responsible for intermodal mobility and regional trains (S-Bahn), whereas in France this is a task accomplished by the *région*. In the Italian city-regions, mobility is a pressing issue but the task is shared among the CM, the regions, the municipalities and transport providers. Compared to the former province, the sustainable mobility concept has gained more weight and this finds repercussions in national regulations that make city-regional sustainable mobility plans (SUMP) more or less obligatory. This is not the case in the German city-regions. The case of Bologna demonstrates how the combination of strategic planning, sustainable mobility policy and national funding dominates the agenda.

All city-regions plan or manage some infrastructure of city-regional importance, e.g. the trade fair in the case of Stuttgart region and, as a more recent phenomenon, they are in charge of the expansion of digital infrastructure, broadband access in particular (Frankfurt, Stuttgart). The French *métropoles* and German regional authorities also carry out functions related to competitiveness, such as tourism and city-regional marketing as well as economic development. In Italy, coordination of socio-economic development is the core task as defined by the law but remains vague in operational terms. The Métropole de Lyon and Stuttgart Region are particularly active regarding external representation and marketing, including a European liaison office in Brussels. The planning authority Frankfurt/Rhein-Main has a liaison office in Brussels which is still part of the planning authority but serves the whole metropolitan region. Bologna participated in a high number of European projects (URBACT, ESPON, Partnerships of the EU Urban Agenda).

Along with strategic planning and functions related to competitiveness, the city-regional level is also relevant for reproduction functions. French *métropoles* provide a broad range of services of general interest including electricity, heating networks, gas, waste management, water distribution and wastewater treatment, cemeteries and crematoria, slaughterhouses and wholesale markets, fire brigade and charging devices for electric vehicles.

These services are usually not implemented at the city-regional level in Germany but are the responsibilities of the county-exempt cities and counties or delivered by inter-municipal single-purpose associations for a few neighbouring municipalities. This difference can be explained by the small size of French municipalities. In Italy, the picture is more mixed and eventually the general hollowing out of the provincial level is more relevant in this regard. The purpose of the CM, according to the law, is one of strategic planning and coordination of territorial development and not one of provision of technical infrastructure and services for water or energy supply. Still, the CM are responsible for provincial streets (and some regional streets) and secondary schools.

No or very limited functions related to social policy, education and health are carried out by the studied CM, regional authorities in Germany or Nantes Métropole. The Métropole de Lyon is an exception in this regard, also compared to all other French *métropoles*, because its status as a *département* includes various functions related to social policy as well as for the secondary schools for grades 6–9 (*collèges*). In all cases, culture and sports are only targeted when related to festivalisation, i.e. large events as well as sites of regional or even national importance (stadiums). To name a few examples, Stuttgart Region applied to host the Olympic Games 2012 (without success) and Nantes Métropole is responsible for the football stadium (one of the arenas for the world championship 1998) and the opera house. These activities contribute in a way to city-regional competitiveness, whereas infrastructure for local neighbourhoods, such as sports fields, are built and maintained by the municipalities in all six cases. Cooperation in cultural policies is a specific development in the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main area and is much more pronounced than in the other city-regions.

A difference between Germany on the one side and France and Italy on the other is the openness to a combination of different forms of city-regional cooperation in different sectors. There is not just one organisation, but a mix of different organisational forms and in the case of Frankfurt these sector-specific organisational forms also refer to different spatial scales. That is to say, place-based and sectoral principles compete in Frankfurt more strongly than in the other regions.

In our six case study regions, we can observe that more functions have been shifted to the city-regional level and that the fields of activity have become broader. This is most pronounced in France. The shift of responsibilities from municipalities to the inter-municipal level is a decades-long process that has not ended yet. More recently, some (Nantes) or all (Lyon) functions of the *départements* have been shifted to *métropoles* as well, further increasing the relevance of this level of the state. In Bologna and Florence, the CM have gained strategic planning functions. However, the CM have also lost substantial functions, in particular environmental planning. In Stuttgart, the repartition of functions between counties and region was an issue at the beginning of 2010. As an outcome, Stuttgart Region has gained additional

functions regarding public transport (express busses). However, the counties as such were not put into question and in contrast to the French *départements* or the Italian provinces it is unlikely that this will happen in the near future. The regional assembly of Stuttgart Region has also adopted an action programme for housing, without having formal responsibility in the field. Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region adopted additional tasks in 2018 including an energy concept and a digitalisation strategy for the region.

The shift of functions to the city-regional level can take place in a top-down manner by national or in the case of the federal state Germany by state law, or in a bottom-up manner by voluntary transfer of member municipalities. In case of the two Italian city-regions Bologna and Florence, all responsibilities have been defined by regional law, within the framework of a national law. In the French city-regions Nantes and Lyon, the bundle of functions is the result of a combination of the minimum requirements for all *métropoles* defined by the national law and additional responsibilities transferred by member municipalities. The same principle of a mix of top-down and bottom-up definition of tasks also applies for Stuttgart region. However, there is no national framework law, but instead a federal law of the state Baden-Württemberg regarding the creation of Stuttgart region. In the case of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, the state sets tasks that have to be addressed regionally, either by the planning authority or another voluntary arrangement. This represents the most flexible approach, as local actors negotiate about the most suitable arrangements regarding institutional form and spatial dimensions.

We can observe a heterogeneity of functions within the city-regions in one country, meaning that functions can be adapted to local needs. The diversity is most pronounced in Germany due to a lack of a national framework for all German city-regions. But also in the unitary state France, there are variations between the functions of the *métropoles*, even more than between the *città metropolitane* in the regionalised state of Italy. This can be explained by the long trajectory of inter-municipal groupings in France before the transformation into *métropoles* took place, which was strongly shaped by the local context. In Italy on the other hand, CM are transformed provinces with a defined set of uniform functions defined by national law. The regions, however, have the legal responsibility to add functions and establish a variety of institutional relationships with the new entity. In Nantes, the administration of the *métropole* is becoming more and more interwoven with the administration of the City of Nantes. In addition to the formal responsibilities, the *métropole* and interested municipalities conclude individual arrangements for the pooling of municipal tasks. This means that some heterogeneity can also arise within the city-region. The latter happens to a limited degree also in Bologna where CM and core city collaborate through joined offices.

Overall, we can trace ongoing debates and constant adaptations of the distribution of functions in the multi-level systems. In Germany, this is

particularly true for the balance between national level and state governments. In France, territorial reforms have touched all levels of the state and have aimed to reduce overlapping responsibilities. In Italy, the long-envisioned creation of metropolitan cities was made possible as a result of the fiscal crisis and this has had an influence on the reform agenda. At the same time, we would say that even in France and Italy, city-regions are not at the centre of debates on state modernisation, but with regard to their functions we can nevertheless observe an increase in the relevance of city-regions as institutional sites of problem-solving in France. Despite institutional differences, some functions are carried out at the city-regional level in all six cases, including regional planning. The question of whether the respective *métropole*, CM or regional authority is the appropriate level for problem-solving, or either too small due to functional interrelations or too large due to reasons of subsidiarity and proximity also greatly relates to their spatial dimensions.

5.3 Ideas

City-regions are considered as relevant sites for innovation and economic growth in the urban age, and are crucial for the global competitiveness of national economies (Rodríguez-Pose 2009). This way of thinking is visible in the rhetoric of policy documents in the three European countries Germany, France and Italy, and is used as justification for metropolitan policies. However, the competitiveness of city-regions has not been the key driver for territorial reforms in any of the three countries. Territorial reforms were justified by an improvement in the multi-level system of public policy-making and a shift to the intermediary level. Regarding the rhetoric of the reform, key words were *simplification*, *efficiency* and *effectiveness* in the public sector as well as *decentralisation* and *regionalisation*.

The idea of competitiveness has been most prominently mobilised in the German discourse around “European metropolitan regions in Germany”. This joined initiative of the federal states was meant to compensate for the lack of a global city such as London or Paris, and highlights the polycentric character of the German urban system. The label was used for networking and international marketing, but did not result in any territorial or functional reform that would have attributed more formal responsibilities, tax share, direct representation or the like to those metropolitan regions. In addition, the rhetoric of highlighting the metropolitan regions provoked resistance from rural areas and towns and the national spatial vision from 2006 attempted to reconcile both principles of competitiveness and equal living conditions with the concepts of urban–rural partnerships and large-scale communities of responsibility (Fricke 2020b, 173). Since the mid-2010s, the national attention to metropolitan regions in reports on spatial development, model projects and applied research founded by the ministry (*Ressortforschung*) has become lower. None of the federal states

has strengthened their metropolitan regions considerably but in the case of Frankfurt/Rhein-Main the initiative facilitated a continuous dialogue among four federal state governments and a range of local actors.

In Italy and France, territorial reforms did take place, but the competitiveness of city-regions was not the key driver behind them. In Italy, reforms were mostly driven by austerity measures (Longo and Mobilio 2016; Bolgherini and Lippi 2016). The creation of the CM, however, also opened the door for sustainable transport policy (SUMP) and urban regeneration (in particular in Bologna) but this differs from region to region. In general, we can say that there is still a lack of territorial coherence (see below).

In France, the main idea was to make the complex multi-level system more efficient, which is a long-standing theme for French governments (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014). City-regions and their position in the multi-level system have not been the main concern in the state modernisation process. However, the creation of *métropoles* along with the enlargement of *régions* symbolises neoliberal, growth-oriented thinking in the eyes of critical voices. There is a growing criticism of metropolitan systems illustrated by titles such as “les métropoles barbares” (Faburel 2018). Faburel criticises both the French territorial reforms aiming to create larger competitive regions as well as urban development policies based on the touristification of city centres through the “guggenheimisation” of cultural facilities and the festivalisation of public spaces as neoliberal strategies leading to social and environmental damage (Faburel 2020). Others see a causal link to the yellow vest movement due to the feeling of the withdrawal of the state from peripheral or rural territories (Bourdin and Torre 2020). The criticism does not go into detail regarding the reform of inter-municipal groupings and the creation of stronger groupings of municipalities (CC or CA) in less urbanised areas. Just as in Germany, the current national policy focuses much more on small and medium-sized cities in decline and the proximity of public services (Demaizière and Sykes 2020a). However, in France, metropolitan cities are criticised for being a symbol of power concentration and for producing leftover territories, underlining conflicts and opposing the categories of space to each other rather than emphasising their functional interrelation and interdependence as part of a networked space.

Democracy and citizen participation had a weak influence in the debates in all three countries. In Italy, the fact the mayor of the core city is automatically the political and administrative head of the CM has raised concerns about legitimacy and territorial representation. The direct election of the council of the CM has been considered in the national law but as the necessary legislative steps are pending the realisation is not very likely. At least the statutes of the largest three CM (Rome, Milan, Naples) indicate that the direct election of the council would be introduced once the national law allows this. A direct election of the metropolitan assembly was introduced in Lyon, one of the six city-regional case studies. This strengthens the democratic legitimacy of the Métropole de Lyon. Having said this, we need to

point out that it was a by-product of the change of status, taking the overall responsibilities of the *département* in its territory and therefore having a directly elected representation like all *départements*. Thus, the driver was the aspiration of the mayor of Lyon of that time to strengthen Lyon in line with the idea of competitiveness. Some French scholars such as Demazière (2018) favour expanding the direct election to other French *métropoles*, arguing that broadening the functions of the *métropole* has further increased the democratic deficit. In Stuttgart, the direct election of the regional assembly was an essential element of the reform in 1994, strengthening the implementation power of the regional planning authority. The principle of territorial representation is much stronger in France and in Germany than in Italy.

5.4 Spatial relationships

Functional urban regions have become a category for spatial observation, both in academia as well as national and European statistics. Statistical definitions of urban regions seek to grasp functional interrelations and the settlement pattern. The spatial delimitation results from a statistical rule and is reviewed from time to time. It is necessarily dynamic and the functional descriptions of urban regions have become ever larger. In France, there is a nationwide statistical definition of functional urban areas defined by commuter relations (*aire urbaine*) and urban agglomeration (*unité urbaine*) based on settlement patterns. In Germany, the federal institute BBSR has established different kinds of functional regional definitions for purposes of spatial observation such as large city-regions (*Großstadtregionen*), urban rural regions (*Stadt-Land-Regionen*) based on commuter patterns and accessibility as well as labour market regions and housing market regions. The state plans combine statistical definitions (such as density) and other considerations to define agglomerations (*Verdichtungsräume*). These are target areas of specific aims and planning principles (see 4.3.2 for Baden-Württemberg). In Italy, the notion of *aree vaste* (wider areas) is used to describe larger cooperation areas for public policies that would reach beyond the boundaries of the CM. In addition, the *Atlas of Post-Metropolitan Territories* produced by nine universities used squares of 100 x 100 km to create regional profiles of Italy's largest cities and to provide an alternative view on contemporary urban patterns as polynucleated, networked city-regions (Balducci et al. 2017).

The spatial delimitation of city-regions is multi-faceted and ambiguous in all three countries. The six city-regions under study in this book all have to face the mismatch between jurisdictional boundaries and functional urban regions that are much more relational, polycentric and fluid. The relational spatial dimension of city-regions did not play any role in the territorial reforms in either Italy or France.

In contrast to functional descriptions, the institutional boundaries have been remarkably stable in our case study regions. From our six case

study regions, the Métropole de Lyon has the narrowest spatial delimitation as compared to its area of influence. Thus, a balancing of interests between urban and rural areas cannot be solved within the strong institution Métropole de Lyon but has to be negotiated in voluntary agreements between the *métropole* and much smaller municipal groupings within the wider metropolitan area. In the Italian CM Firenze and Bologna, the boundaries are inherited from the former provinces and have not been altered at all. In France, the boundaries of *métropoles* are flexible in theory as they can be defined and expanded at the local level. In practice, they have been very stable in the cases of both Lyon and Nantes. In Lyon, minor extension of the municipal grouping took place: four small municipalities have joined since 1964. In the case of Nantes, the territory has been stable since the creation of the CU in 2001. The same applies for Stuttgart region. Its perimeter has not been altered since 1971. Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region shows more flexibility and tendencies to expand. First, the catchment area of the planning authority is much wider than its predecessor UVF (it has increased from 43 to 80 municipalities since 2001), even if this geographic extension went hand in hand with less powers. Second, accession is possible for municipalities that share a border with the planning region. This took place for the first time in 2021, when five municipalities joined the region.

The concept of flexible geographies of cooperation has been followed in the Frankfurt/Rhine-Main region very strongly since the beginning of the 2000s due to the preferences of the state government. The desire for flexible geographies, i.e. juxtaposition of larger and smaller scales and a preference for sectoral rather than place-based approaches is also shared among municipalities and the private sector. Today, the region shows a pragmatic approach of metropolitan governance with voluntary collaboration in different constellations and formats, depending on the task. This contrasts with the approach of the French territorial reform, aiming to regroup single-purpose associations within municipal groupings with a broad portfolio of tasks with the argument of simplicity. Task-specific voluntary cooperation beyond the *métropole* does exist, but is weakly institutionalised. In Nantes, local actors have established the metropolitan region of Nantes-Saint Nazaire as a second scale for strategic decisions and joint action. In Stuttgart, the regional planning authority has a central role and most city-regional tasks are addressed within the same space of action. However, the region uses an organisation model as a joint limited liability company for many tasks and this allows the involvement of both private partners as well as municipalities and counties outside the region, e.g. for touristic marketing.

There is a greater offer of flexible instruments for territorial cooperation in Germany and in France, and these follow the idea of multi-scaled arrangements. Still, the *métropole* in France is certainly the institutional core with significant legal power and financial resources. In France, the government preferred the *métropole* as a hard institution from the beginning in order to consolidate local governments, but due to resistance of the local

actors the French government also offered softer forms city-regional collaboration. As the latter was not very successful, the central government made the *métropole* obligatory.

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