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REGIONAL CO-OPERATION AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

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BETWEEN COMPETITIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY - METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE COOPERATION IN MEGA-URBAN REGIONS? EXPERIENCES FROM THE GERMAN DEBATE

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The following article analyzes German experiences in metropolitan governance. It aims at conveying a better understanding of what can be seen as attempts for formal and informal types of cooperation at the regional level in a market economy characterized by strong elements of state influence and federalism. The results will be generalized and can serve as hints at the prospects and limits of inter-municipal cooperation in China, especially the Pearl River Delta¹. A closer look at the German situation may be of interest since it is a relatively "strong state" when compared to other market economies such as the USA. However, the economic growth rates and the development dynamics in China being much higher than in Germany nowadays create different challenges for spatial planning at the regional level. Whereas German planners strive for (but yet do not quite arrive at) a serious reduction of greenfield development in a very densely built-up territory, the situation in Chinese growth regions is still more characterized by the need for spatial growth and the development of greenfields.

The article starts with an overview of regional cooperation in some Western countries and thereby tries to contextualize the German experience. Then it briefly reviews the history of regional cooperation in the 20th century. Good and less successful examples are presented. A certain emphasis is laid upon the emerging framework of "regional governance" and its results. Towards the end of the discussion, recent concepts such as the "Metropolitan Regions" will be discussed. Throughout the article, the focus will always be on metropolitan areas and the cooperation of public and private bodies within them, less on the more general idea of regional planning and development in entire provinces or peripheral areas.

1. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION IN EUROPE AND IN GERMANY

Regional planning in Europe is very diverse (Fürst/Knieling 2002). Its organization depends on historic traditions and the role of the political system in the nation states. It seems useful to distinguish the states according to their degree of centralization on the one hand and according to their degree of state-led intervention into the economy on the other. While the European states still differ significantly in those respects, one can observe a slight trend towards more decentralization in many centralized states throughout the last few decades and a trend towards more liberalism in statist states (although some of the liberal states have also seen more statist periods in the last few decades).

Traditionally centralized states such as France developed a very limited system of autonomous regional planning, organize the promotion of regional development nationally and have struggled for more regionalization for decades not initiated but catalyzed by the European Union (EU) that is based organizationally on strong regions as receivers of European funds. On the contrary, more decentralized states such as Germany have a very weak direct national influence

1. The comparative view is focussed to the situation in the Pearl River Delta as the authors are currently conducting a research project on the topic: "Border-drawing and spatial differentiation of urban governance modes in the Pearl River Delta – with special regard to informal development and self-organization" funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) within a larger research programme on "Megacities – Megachallenge: Informal Dynamics of Global Change" of the German Research Foundation (DFG).

upon the system of regional or even municipal land-use planning and the promotion of regional development but influence it indirectly by spending a huge amount of funds for the road or rail infrastructures that are national or shared responsibilities of nation and states. Countries with strong traditions of state-led interventions into the economy (especially, but not only, socialist states) try to direct regional development by heavily subsidizing private or public key development projects in peripheral regions. Besides the centralized planning systems in socialist states before 1990, one might consider France and, to a certain degree, Germany as this kind of interventionist state. The United Kingdom has followed a more liberalist strategy in much of the era since around 1980 by supporting investment in economically strong areas such as South Eastern England indirectly. Deindustrialization processes in Northern England, however, were considered as a problem to be solved by – not very successful – competitive efforts of municipalities and regions to attract inward investment by private companies.

Comparatively seen, Germany is a federal nation state with a weak system of planning and development at the national level, strong regional planning systems in some highly-populated states and a well-established yet weak system of regional planning throughout the rest of the country. The strong position of the municipalities leads to a high degree of autonomy that has lately been undermined by the fiscal crisis reigning in many of them. The competition between the municipalities in a capitalist market economy leads to some regulatory influence on regional development. However, economic trends have a strong influence on the spatial structure and modify it continuously. This is on the one hand supported by the high standard of road and rail infrastructures that allow for quick access to the centres even from the periphery and on the other hand curbed by environmentally motivated resistance against key infrastructure projects such as airports or power plants in ecologically sensitive areas. The settlement pattern in Germany is characterized by a mix of relatively dense housing estates and somewhat sprawling single-family housing districts with completely differing physical patterns and densities.

The situation reflects the mixed results achieved by the interplay of an interventionist state with strong influence on housing production in the middle of the 20th century but a traditionally strong rhetoric and policy of household-based housing provision effective in parallel. In a way, it also reflects the central European political compromise that keeps up strong and heavily subsidized systems of public transportation while at the same time providing a continuously improved and expanded system of motorways especially in metro areas. Despite the general trend towards a development of larger and functionally separated residential and commercial patches in the periphery that has not been stopped yet, there are strong signs of re-urbanization and a renaissance of inner cities.

Thus, the variety of models for working and living in the centre vs. the periphery, dense vs. sprawling, car-dependent vs. transit-dependent has exploded and brought about a complex peri-urban landscape that questions the political commitment towards the promotion of sustainable and energy-efficient development (Sieverts 1996). When compared to less interventionist states such as the USA or Australia, however, one has to admit that the German metro areas still possess a relatively compact overall structure in which public transit plays an important role (Brake et al. 2001). Still, the sheer physical growth of the cities stretched the urbanized territory to their edges and created the need for inter-municipal coordination and cooperation to face the new challenges of the post-industrial western societies such as the preservation of open space in a highly urbanized landscape, the funding of infrastructure in an aging and shrinking population, the restructuring of derelict areas left over from the industrial age, the upgrading of older suburbs and the joint marketing of metro areas in an increasing inter-regional competition for new investment and jobs. All these challenges require more than just formal procedures of statutory planning at the regional level.

It seems no coincidence that in times of change from a fordist welfare economy to a more globalized “post-fordist” that is sometimes called “knowledge-based society” and characterized by flexible specialization in both manufacturing and employment relationships, diverse patterns of demand and lifestyles, a relatively high amount of time for cultural, educational and leisure activities and therefore a specialized demand for the respective services, there is a perceived insecurity for what concerns long-term allocation of land uses and resources which makes comprehensive top-down planning at the regional and local levels seem difficult. An answer to those and other trends has been found in the so-called “communicative turn” in planning and urban and regional policy making which prioritizes more informal coordination mechanisms over formal planning routines. It aims at, among others, a more flexible approach towards decision making taking in account the changed landscape of interdependently acting stakeholders and the high degree of uncertainty about how to deal with structural changes and quickly changing conditions for development. We will come back to discussing the consequences after a brief introduction into the history of regional planning in Germany.

2. A SHORT HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL PLANNING IN GERMANY

2.1 The Legacy of Regional Planning in Germany

Regional planning has had a long tradition in Germany. Its origin dated back to an era in which two key developments came together: first, enormous population growth in the last quarter of the 19th and the first quarter of the 20th century due to the dynamic development in the mining and manufacturing sectors, and second, the turn from a more liberalist state (Prussia) to an interventionist state (Weimar) after World War I. The hope for a regulating effort by the state that deals with the spatial effects of the decades of uncontrolled growth gave birth to a variety of reforms one of which was the invention of a so-called "Ruhr Coal Mining District Housing Association" (Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk, SVR) in the Ruhr area in 1920, the first legally supported regional planning organization in Europe. It was responsible for the spatial development in the largest and most important German industrial region and dealt mainly with an orderly organization of spatial development in a quickly urbanizing industrial landscape by providing key infrastructure and trying to protect important green corridors. Since it was established in a decentralized, poly-nuclear agglomeration, it lay the founding stone for a tradition of regional coordination among a number of autonomous municipalities with the aid of state funds that prepared the ground for what became a role model for regional governance more than 50 years later.

During the Nazi era, regional planning was abused for the redevelopment of an entire annexed state, Poland, for a German "people without space". To allow for a spreading out of Germanized settlements, the local population was displaced and many of them killed. The methodology of regional planning had been professionalized, but it was severely discredited after World War II, when the sad consequences of its abuse were fully understood.

This and other political conclusions drawn from the Nazi terror led to West Germany being decentralized into a federal state, whereas East Germany became a socialist state. Regional planning was uncoupled from economic planning in West Germany and became a relatively weak part of statutory planning at the state and inter-municipal levels limited more or less to the aspects of land-use planning. In East Germany, however, the socialist system meant a very close integration of land-use planning even at the regional and national levels into the central planning system mainly determined by economic decisions.

To understand how the German system deals with regional planning in metropolitan areas, it is worth looking at the West German situation before the reunification. Metro areas did not develop very dynamically in East Germany, and the current situation since the reunification can be understood as a continuation of the one in former West Germany. Before explaining how the system works by looking at some examples, one has to look at the general conditions in which it operates. Driven by the increasing car mobility and fordist mass prosperity, West German metro areas witnessed enormous spatial growth in the second half of the 20th century. Waves of single-family home production on the one hand and retail and commercial suburbanization on the other followed a national policy of promoting home ownership and upgrading the road infrastructure and thereby allowing for increasing commuter distances to be accepted. German cities, like many other western cities, faced the danger of uncontrolled sprawl, the loss of environmentally important green open space, increasing commuter traffic, suburban shopping malls competing unfavourably with lively downtowns and fiscal crises in core cities of metro areas due to their loss of tax payers moving to surrounding communities.

Well-organized metropolitan planning seemed to be the key to smarter growth, but the competition between core areas and suburban municipalities made any voluntary coordination of the mutual activities difficult. One main reason for this is the German organization of land use planning: every municipality has the constitutional right to define the land use distribution in its territory. The fact that it has to obey the regulations of the respective regional plan offers only limited restrictions for growth-oriented municipalities and therefore competition at the regional level is paramount in the long run. Regional plans themselves are subject to lobbying by municipalities, and there is only relative control over individual projects of regional importance via the regional plans so that the land use allocation foreseen by regional plans erodes step by step throughout the years.

2.2 Regional Planning in Metro Areas

However, there are quite a few success stories in regional planning in Germany. To understand why this is so, one has to look at the policies in which metro areas can achieve successful coordination, at the organization of regional planning in metro areas and at the incentives for the municipalities. Metropolitan areas in capitalist economies are characterized by inter-municipal competition that can hardly be overcome by organized cooperation. However, there are several policy

fields that require cooperation that is useful for all municipalities in a metro region. Traditionally, those are policies that deal with public goods – i.e. provide goods and services that will not be provided by private companies due to a lack of incentives to do so. This concerns some “hard” and “soft” location factors and aspects of basic infrastructure.

While the supply of space for development in growing regions, probably the most important hard location factor, is usually a field in which competition dominates, this situation changes in times of saturation or even restructuring. If metro areas face a lack of land for development after a period of growth, coordination is required to keep up the supply and to identify suitable land. Although metro areas could use land use planning at the regional level to coordinate their supply of land for development before they run into this situation, competition is often stronger. When metro areas run into economic crises or when they need restructuring of brownfields as they are “built out”, they often cannot overcome their situation in competitive settings. They are sometimes supported by upgrading programs launched by state governments (see below).

The construction of airports and the road network is one of the traditional fields of regional land use planning in Germany. However, conflicts arise between airport expansion projects and motorway projects on the one hand and political forces that argue in favour of the quality of living of the affected local population and in favour of a stronger care for the needs of environmental protection. Usually, these conflicts are not resolved by the regional planning process alone but by complicated mediation on a project-by-project basis. This is a consequence of the planning system: Important road infrastructure projects and airport facilities are financed and planned by the nation and the states, that is above the regional level.

However, there is another important field for cooperation in metro areas: commuter train systems. Usually, metro areas are defined by the range of strong commuter links between core cities and their periphery. In Germany, metro areas consist of several autonomous municipalities although the situation is not as fragmented as in some American metro areas. When it comes to providing the necessary transportation infrastructure for commuters, traditionally car traffic is considered to be insufficient – and still is despite the high degree of motorization in central Europe. Commuter trains provide an environmentally sustainable complementary means of transportation although they are not free of criticism. They can only be funded by a complicated system of tax redistribution between nation, state and metro areas. As they cross municipal boundaries, they are operated by regional bodies such as special purpose associations or regional planning associations.

Besides that, soft location factors, quality of life aspects and the protection of the environment are being taken care of at the regional level. However, cultural and educational infrastructures are rather a matter of competition than coordination in metro areas. Suburban growth often tends to lead to sprawl. Therefore, city regions are affected environmentally. One key issue of cooperation in metro areas is waste disposal and waste water treatment. While there is a long tradition of special purpose associations to deal with that, the preservation of green infrastructure is sometimes reduced to directing developmental activities away from state and national parks that are preserved independently from regional planning. The idea of integrating parks into an environmentally relevant system of areas free from development is more ambitious and an important challenge for contemporary regional planning in metro areas. Since it requires the concentration of development in priority areas, it becomes an unwelcome constraint for developmental activities by municipalities in their competition for growth.

2.3 The Organization of Regional Planning in Metro Areas

As mentioned above, many of the more managerial aspects of regional planning in metro areas are organized by special purpose associations with a very limited scope of action. Even when there is no powerful system of regional land use coordination, basic infrastructures are most often efficiently managed by them, in some cases with key financial support by national or state funds. However, when it comes to commuter train systems, the special purpose associations reach the limit of their effectiveness in poly-nuclear regions such as the Ruhr area that has striven for a better integration of the numerous yet inefficient local and regional trains. More successful metro areas integrate their land use planning and infrastructure management systems into one comprehensive regional planning association or other more sophisticated models of formalized cooperation such as regional associations or regional authorities (Danielzyk 1999, Network of Metropolitan Regions 2003, Prieb 1999). The former is often considered as the ideal form of intra-regional co-operation in city regions. The association to which the municipalities are members performs a number of planning and implementation tasks for the entire region. The latter covers all relevant regional tasks. Municipalities remain legally independent, but the regional powers are combined to a certain extent.

One good example could be found in the Rhine-Main region, where the regional planning association Umlandverband Frankfurt (UVF) was responsible for preparatory land-use planning, normally in the hands of the municipalities, in a vast territory around the German banking capital of Frankfurt which comprised 43 members and 1.5 million inhabitants. The UVF started its activities in 1975. The preparation of the most extensive land-use plan of the Federal Republic of West Germany can be regarded as the best result of this multi-purpose regional association. The very detailed plan was elaborated by interacting with approximately 200 representatives of public interest and negotiating with many municipalities with divergent interests. In the West German planning community, this output gave the UVF widespread prestige. Furthermore, the UVF gained reputation in the research of the regional climate and the application of these findings in regional planning, e.g. keeping open spaces to create fresh air channels.

In the late 1980s there was a shift from conventional multi-purpose associations to a set of more flexible, single-purpose associations which were regarded as more efficient. The UVF lost more and more importance and got undermined by legal disputes among its members. In 2000, a legislative reform in the state of Hesse (Ballungsraumgesetz) led to the final breakup of the UVF and its replacement by a new association, the – much weaker – Planungsverband Frankfurt. It was founded in 2001 and its competencies were reduced to mere planning activities (Hoyler, Freytag, Mager 2006: 128f.). For the first time in Germany, the two levels of regional planning and land-use were integrated. To coordinate inter-municipal cooperation, a Council of the Region was established alongside the Planungsverband. Soon however, a rivalling voluntary regional cooperation and other more sectoral inter-municipal organisations were formed such as the *Metropolitana* Frankfurt/RheinMain – a non-profit organisation aimed at strengthening the feeling of regional identity and improving the regional image created by regional chambers of commerce and big enterprises (Salet et al. 2003: 132ff.).

The search for a more appropriate organizational structure to promote the region reflects the long-standing criticism UVF had always faced. It shows that it is hard to organize integrative regional cooperation against the individual interests of politically influential stakeholders in the long run. The organization loses its legitimacy and support when it can be blamed for seemingly inflexible and complicated formal regional planning – a regulatory instrument municipalities dislike especially in competitive metropolitan settings characterized by expensive and very limited land resources. The case of the Regional Park is very instructive in this respect: The strategy of connecting larger patches of green open space in a sprawling region by a number of individual projects with different profiles that were to offer a diverse network of preserves, spaces for recreation and important elements of a cultural landscape that supported the identification of the locals with their region was invented in the late 1980s by the UVF and built upon a system of regional green ribbons free from urban development. The UVF tried to improve its image as a restrictive planning body by offering a more positive vision of regional development ready for implementation. With the replacement of the UVF by the Planungsverband, the Regional Park project lost much of its political backing. Now the regional bodies have to negotiate with every single municipality to get support for the project that had had the backing of the regional parliament abolished with the UVF. The Planungsverband has neither the financial means nor the organizational powers for the implementation of the park which got stuck in the early 2000s (Gailing 2005: 127-162).

The Hanover metropolitan region is organized as a regional authority. It has a long tradition in spatial planning and may serve as good practice example for metropolitan governance. Regional cooperation has been institutionalized in the Greater Hannover Association, already founded in 1962/63, a multi-purpose association consisting of the city of Hannover and the surrounding county with 20 municipalities, representing altogether about 1.1 million inhabitants (Fürst & Rudolph 2003: 145ff.; in Salet 2003 et al.). Although we cannot discuss the case of Hanover in depth here, one has to admit that its success is based on the mono-nuclear nature of the region that is clearly dominated by the city of Hanover itself and the limitation of the regional authority to the city and its neighbouring county. The sprawling region of Frankfurt, however, is characterized by very strong neighbouring municipalities and a strong trend towards the formation of autonomous edge cities. Therefore, the strong competitive forces may explain the legitimacy crises of regional planning around Frankfurt to a certain extent.

The two examples sketched here show that regional cooperation faces a number of obstacles but can contribute to a better coordination of joint interests in a metropolitan region. It depends on the importance of competing interests especially between the core city and its neighbours if the most pressing needs of cooperative arrangements are institutionalized. The “hard” nature of formal organizations and their instruments of coordinated policy-making are often seen as limits to growth by the stakeholders of a metropolitan region. If those organizations are not able to develop and communicate a positive vision of projects they develop that are in the interest of all the competing cities, they face crises of their legitimacy.

3. THE CONCEPT OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND ITS EFFECTS

3.1 The Notion of Regional Governance

Several distinct but nevertheless interacting political tendencies of the late 20th century led to a shift in understanding of political processes away from "government" and to "governance". Government denotes decision-making that lies with the state and its institutions. The state has the legal power and the means to define the aims of development and to implement them. This understanding conceives the addressees of political decisions as periphery of the decision-making process. The state itself consists of the influential actors that have a say. Coordination between them is often carried out by means of stable channels of communication in hierarchies.

However, in the last decades we can observe a gradual erosion of the preconditions of traditional etatist models of policy-making. Nation and local states got "weaker" due to a lack of resources and/or a political shift towards more entrepreneurial or civil society-based understandings of solving societal problems. The effects can be noticed in less hierarchical contexts such as administratively fragmented regions. Western states show some important features that support a paradigm shift. Economic crises in times of structural change bring about a need to think about privatization of public services or closer cooperation between the state and private companies. A reduction in service quality of the traditional "welfare state" that can "no longer afford" taking care of a broad array of needs of the population "from the cradle to the grave" leads to the idea of transferring issues of public policy making to the hands of the civil society and of promoting more self-organization. The concept of "government" is no longer appropriate to explain those changed modes of interaction.

The policy field of regional development is a good example for those changes. Despite the constitutional organization of the state into tiers such as the nation, states and municipalities, the constitutional guarantee of municipal autonomy forbids far-reaching top-down influence by the higher tiers onto the independent decisions of the municipalities if the latter dispose of the necessary resources to implement their political goals. Regional development consists of a delicate balance of individual decisions that mutually depend on each other in ways defined by the regulatory framework of regional planning. Policy goals formulated by higher tiers have to be thoroughly considered in decision making processes at the lower ones. The power of higher tiers to intervene is restricted to a limited set of issues of regional importance and to the infrastructural decisions in the hands of the nation and the states.

Therefore, the promotion of economic development in stagnating regions or the direction of spatial development to priority areas can be undermined by a continuous practice of decisions at the municipal level contradicting the objectives at the regional level. This can happen in several cases: (a) if the scope of every single decision is small; (b) if the municipalities do good lobby work for their interests at the state and regional levels of decision making; (c) if private companies offer jobs; or, (d) if municipalities just neglect the potential power of cooperative marketing of their regions and pooling their resources to do so. In this environment, attempts for innovation at the regional level abound. They try to develop other forms of cooperative policy making than the traditional and land-use based regional planning. They are characterized by a loose coupling of regional actors in networks instead of hierarchies, the complementary pooling of different types of resources that different types of actors have access to, the mobilization of those resources for a number of strategic projects with a clear focus on implementation, the innovative culture of mutual exchange in discussion forums, and the temporary establishment of special purpose associations with a clear focus on innovative and integrative project based regional development. Those are some of the key features of the new understanding of policy making – "regional governance" (Fürst/Knieling 2002).

3.2 Regional Governance, Economic Restructuring and Spatial Development

A good example for regional development in poly-nuclear metropolitan areas in Germany is the so-called International Building Exhibition (IBA) Emscher Park. It can be considered as one of the most important organizational innovations in regional planning in Germany after World War II. When confronted with a series of economic crises related to a downturn of mining and steel industries in the Ruhr area already mentioned above, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia established a special purpose organization for a limited time to deal mainly with the environmental regeneration and spatial restructuring of a strip of land stretching from Duisburg in the west to Dortmund in the east, located around the Emscher valley, one of the most environmentally degraded rivers in the entire state forming the Northern part of the Ruhr mining area (for the following, see especially Kilper 1999, Müller/Herrmann 1999, Müller/Schmals 1993).

It had been heavily transformed by more than a century of intensely urbanized industrial use and seriously needed upgrading that the municipalities and the regional planning bodies had not been able to achieve previously. One can identify at least three major reasons for the failure of the traditional planning system before the establishment of the IBA. First, the local governments suffered from a fiscal crisis as a consequence of the economic downturn and were therefore unable to accomplish ambitious development projects exceeding the managerial minimum standard of urban development. Second, the accumulated problems required concerted efforts of restructuring that could not be handled on a day-to-day basis. Polluted brownfield areas in the hands of huge private and public companies neither interested in upgrading nor selling them abounded in the Emscher area. Attractive parks and green open space were lacking. Future-oriented high tech and service industries preferred more attractive locations in Southern Germany and did not invest in the region. This made it difficult to compensate for the loss of low-skill jobs in a blue-collar-dominated regional economy. Third, the growth-oriented model of urban and regional development from the fordist area that provided infrastructure and land in the hope for private investment proved no longer feasible and fresh ideas for change were not at hand in the existing local and regional planning and development bodies: for instance, the area already had the closest net of freeways in Europe, but this had not been sufficient to keep the region attractive for an on-going economic restructuring.

Therefore, the state felt the strong need for a strategy that was to improve the soft location factors in the area significantly and dealt with the enormous task of environmental clean-up. For this purpose, the IBA Emscher Park was established for a term of ten years in 1989 as a wholly owned subsidiary of the state under civil law and with limited liability to promote urban development, social, cultural and environmental measures and to support economic restructuring in an old industrial region. A total of almost 40 people were employed. They were led by Karl Ganser, a charismatic geographer and planning professional who had a background in the ministerial bureaucracy of North Rhine-Westphalia and as strategic planner in Munich during the times of Hans-Jochen Vogel, a legendary mayor who became famous for leading the city into a prosperous future by completely modernizing its infrastructure in preparation of the 1972 Olympics. The IBA was supported by a scientific consultation body of 18 specialists from different backgrounds.

During the time of its existence, the IBA made use of existing state funding combined with national and European monies from most different programs responsible for urban regeneration, business promotion and housing. The IBA organization was part of the informal network of the state government then dominated by the Social Democratic Party. It cooperated with local government authorities from 17 cities, private companies, and civil society associations and had a strong bias in favour of participatory planning. The IBA planners tried to stabilize the networks around IBA projects prioritized by the state government needed to guarantee their implementation. They supported project planners with the means of consultation and coordination among the great number of involved stakeholders. "Thus, the innovation strategy did not only rest on the conceptual creativity of urban designers, but also on the procedural creativity of moderators in the planning community that practised the combination of funding schemes, procedural routines and quality agreements and dealt with both organizing the interaction of committed and influential personalities and the mobilization of the public opinion." (Müller 2001: 4, translation Uwe Altrock).

One of the key approaches was the idea of "incrementalism with a perspective", a term coined by Karl Ganser before the background of an outright failure of 1970s attempts for comprehensive planning in a capitalist system that had got stuck in data collection and were hardly ever able to effectively influencing the political bargaining processes in urban and regional development (Ganser/Siebel/Sieverts 1993). To avoid the risk of mere arbitrary project-oriented development, Ganser tried to reconcile project orientation and long-term vision of development. Contrary to the traditional approaches to promote regional development, the IBA focused on an environmental, economic and social restructuring of the region and the clean-up of environmentally polluted sites in the hope to lay the ground for new economic activities.

The scope of the projects ranged from one national and two regional garden exhibitions each of which made a significant contribution to the restructuring of the urban landscape, planning for huge inter-municipal landscape parks and the regeneration of 350 km of open sewage channels to the construction of 17 new technology centers on abandoned industrial sites, museums, cultural facilities and the preservation and adaptive re-use of derelict industrial structures, and the rehabilitation and new development of neighbourhoods comprising development projects with 2,500 new and 3,000 existing apartments. Representatives from a wide range of stakeholders (state ministries, municipalities, interest groups, professional associations, private companies, trade unions etc.) accompanied the work of the IBA and around 120 IBA projects were finally realized. Each project had to fit into a defined set of strategic goals, but the IBA organization intentionally did without its own detailed statutory planning.

Figure 1 : One of the Projects in the Context of IBA: Light Installation – Landscape Park Duisburg-Nord



The IBA was the first international building exhibition at a regional scale. It contributed to revitalizing a lot of derelict brownfield sites and to creating a more positive image of an old industrialized area. The cleanup of the region dealt with more than just pollution: It strengthened a tradition of preserving industrial monuments significantly and integrated them into a newly interpreted “cultural landscape”. Its green belt projects completed an old idea of upgrading a vast territory at the regional scale. This could not be achieved by the older regional bodies and their ideas that dated back to the SVR in the 1920s and therefore required the special association that based its work on successful cooperation and communication besides the formal powers of planning. However, despite the innovative nature of the IBA and its organization as a special purpose association acting in a very complex way could not overcome the deep economic crisis the region had plunged into. Its projects made a significant contribution to laying the foundation for a post-industrial upturn yet to arrive (Müller/Schmals 1999, Kilper 1999).

4. METROPOLITAN REGIONS AND METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE IN GERMANY – A PATH TOWARDS COMPETITIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY?

As mentioned above, issue-specific cooperation between the most important German cities and their neighbouring municipalities has a long history through the formation of special-purpose associations and collaborative regional planning. However, the strong constitutional position of local governments has often obstructed the development of inclusive modes of metropolitan governance. Formal organisational reforms at the regional level in Germany have very high transaction costs and do not happen very often. Territorial reorganisations have changed from top-down approaches towards bottom-up initiatives of local and regional actors. External pressure stems from the need to become regionally competitive, to save costs by jointly producing regional common goods and to organize new regional tasks more efficiently. Evidently, all metropolitan regions have a tendency toward a mixture of “strong” and “weak” organisational structures. In general, there is an organizational core which has some resources and a minimum of decision-making power. It is typically supported by network-like structures of cooperation. (Fürst/Rudolph 2003: 159; in Salet 2003 et al.)

This trend has become stronger after the German reunification in 1990. It was accelerated by national and European debates about ways to ensure competitiveness in a globalizing economy, and a “gradual paradigm shift” emerged in strategic spatial planning. Central to the new framework was the assumption that major metropolitan regions, rather than individual cities or the national economy, operate as “engines for societal, economic, social and cultural development” (Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning 2005: 188; in: Hoyler/Freytag/Mager 2006: 125). According to this logic, so-called “metropolitan functions” such as innovative and creative potential, economic and political decision-making, small-meshed networks of product-oriented service providers, excellent traffic infrastructure, and high-level

cultural institutions were seen as essential for global competitiveness. These functions are therefore key objectives of regional development policies, unlike the older equity paradigm that demanded stronger policies of redistribution in favour of peripheral regions (Gatzweiler/Strubelt 2006). Furthermore, metropolitan regions were regarded as gateways for the local integration of international and global flows and nodal points where national and global financial and production powers intersect. The potential synergies resulting from the dense networks between cities on different scales were to be promoted to further enhance competitiveness. In this regard, a balance between cooperation and competition was seen as beneficial to the region. This view was first articulated prominently in two key policy documents by the Standing Conference of Federal and State Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning in the mid-1990s (Hoyler/Freytag/Mager 2006). In 1997, the Standing Conference officially designated the seven largest German urban agglomerations as "European Metropolitan Regions" (EMR) (Brenner 2000). In 2005, another four regions were awarded EMR status. In 2006, the focus on metropolitan regions was integrated into the new German national framework for spatial development (BMVBS 2006, Lutter 2006). It combines three different key visions one of which has a clear economic focus and is called "growth and innovation". It is based on the idea of supporting the metropolitan regions that are themselves nodal points for the peripheral regions surrounding them.

As a result of the historical development of Germany and its subdivision into federal states, the EMR spatial system features a polycentric pattern. Also, it shows a distinct functional division of labour: Berlin, for instance, serves as the seat of the national government and cultural metropolises, Hamburg as a city of commerce and international gateway due to its harbour, Munich as the headquarters of transnational corporations and as a cultural and technology centre, and Frankfurt as a centre of finance and international gateway due to its airport. This polycentric structure based on division of labour can be seen both as a strength and as a weakness: In terms of contributing to spatial equality across all parts of the nation state, it is certainly positive. In terms of the global competition between metropolises, it has a negative effect, as none of the German metropolitan regions can match the importance of global cities such as London or Paris (ARL 2007). It seems sensible, however, to maintain the complementarity of the various urban centres and to continue to encourage cities to develop and strengthen their individual economic profile, as a concentration of specific functions may allow the German metropolitan regions to compete with bigger global metropolises (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2 : Key Vision "Growth and Innovation" as part of the 2006 German national framework for spatial development

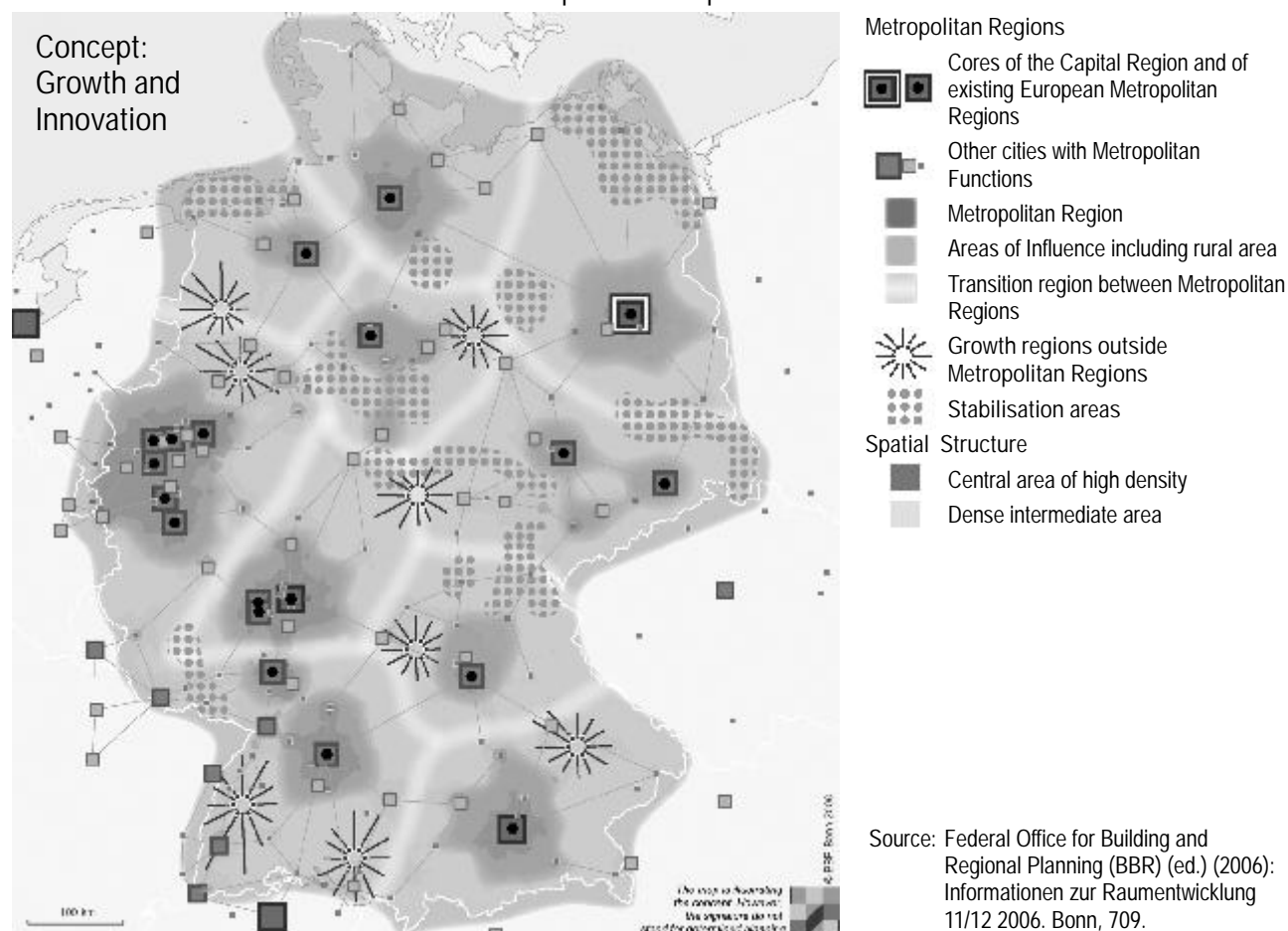
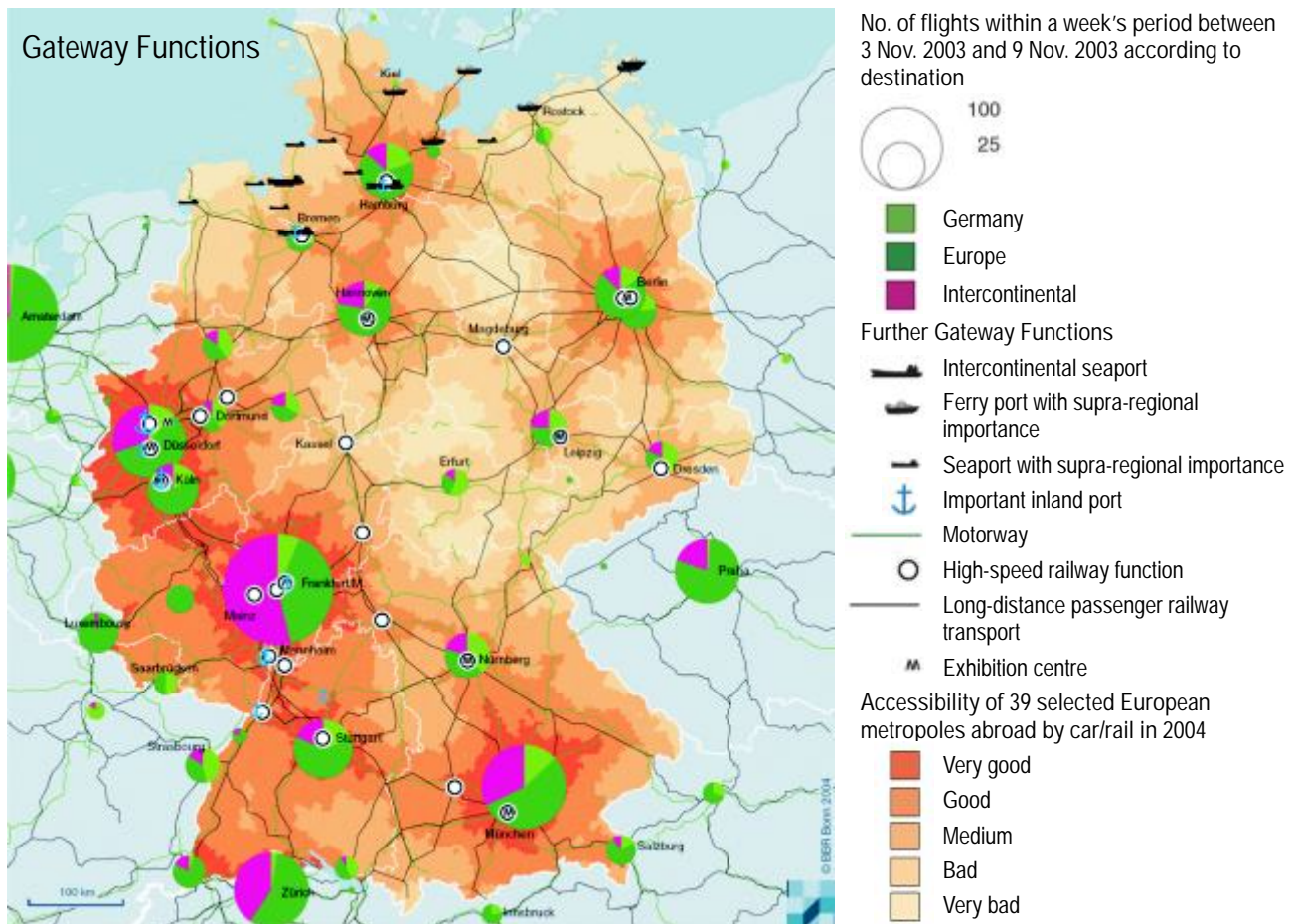


Figure 3 : Gateway Functions of the German Metropolises



Source: Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR) (ed.) (2005): Raumordnungsbericht 2005. Bonn: BBR, 183.

So far, comparative studies and benchmarking analyses have shown a high degree of variation in terms of the productive potential and the economic dynamics of the German metropolitan regions. Paradoxically, it has been shown that the local innovation capacities have not generally translated into higher population and employment growth (Blotevogel 2007). Only three or four of the metropolitan regions exhibit metropolitan functions of the first category (ARL 2007). The idea that each metropolitan region should concentrate on the development of a specific unique selling proposition has been contradicted by the real-world experience, where all cities followed similar aims, a phenomenon that can also be observed in the Pearl River Delta (PRD). The sheer size of metropolitan regions lends some rationality to this trend: Their enormous importance for the regional job market and the vulnerability of highly specialized regions in times of sector-related economic crises makes a wide-spread economic sector profile seem reasonable. A division of labour therefore usually concerns only a limited yet strategic set of key sectors, most often with a high degree of international orientation. Regional development policies almost never turn against investment in other sectors but concentrate their funds and other resources on a promotion of those strategic sectors.

Within a metropolitan region, governance was obstructed by weak institutionalization, a restricted range of responsibilities, lack of direct legitimization, and political dissent. Also, too often, competition between municipalities easily overrode cooperative aims (Blatter 2005; in: Hoyer/Freytag/Mager 2006: 128). The "soft" concept of metropolitan regions is not always able to avoid fierce competition for development in similar strategic sectors as has been the case recently when important media industries moved from Hamburg to Berlin. Up until now, the German metropolitan regions have not been "engines for societal, economic, social, and cultural development". This seems to indicate that for the time being, the concept of metropolitan regions is a rather normative one which is based on a desirable model, but has remained too weak to fully live up to its aims.

Nevertheless, it is worth exploring the positive results of the implementation of the concept and to ask what the advantages of promoting a system of metropolitan regions might be. One important aspect is that they are an exercise in regional branding and boosterism driven by an entrepreneurial discourse. More positive assessments see them as instances of "creative governance" (Kunzmann 2004), that is, as steps towards imaginatively rethinking regional, political, and administrative cooperation and to establish forums that initiate learning processes in this respect, although there is no guarantee that they can be institutionalized in a sustainable manner (Adam/Göddecke-Stellmann/Heidbrink 2005, Diller 2004, Diller/Knieling 2003). Summing up the German experience, the main achievement of the establishment of European metropolitan regions in Germany has only partly been an increased cooperation between the most important cities and their neighbouring municipalities, but the enhanced positioning of these regional entities as part of the global economy. Generally speaking, the incentives for competition within the metropolitan regions more often than not seem to be stronger for the stakeholders in the individual municipalities than any potential gains they expect from institutionalized cooperation ending up in binding agreements.

It is therefore advisable to be sceptical about the inherent mobilizing power of the concept of metropolitan regions (Altrock 2006, Blotevogel 2006, Heeg/Klagge/Oßenbrügge 2007). The concept may contribute to better coordination in times of socio-economic change and limited growth, which have a negative effect on the tax bases of municipalities, when formerly competing municipalities succeed in identifying unused potentials for optimizing their division of labour concerning expensive yet important elements of regional educational, research, cultural, and recreational infrastructure. Such an approach may allow for improved regional branding, especially when the individual cities in the region are too small to promote themselves via internationally visible campaigns. It may be helpful in establishing cluster-oriented strategies for business development. But it is certainly no panacea for overcoming deep-rooted and systematic incentive structures that work against altruistic collaboration among metropolitan regions.

When compared to traditional forms of regional planning or regional governance discussed above, it stands for an outward-oriented instrument to mobilize the cities in a region for concerted branding efforts. Other important tasks of regional cooperation may be better served by the other models. Preserving important corridors of open space requires a combination of other approaches, for example. Strong statutory planning can keep environmentally sensitive areas free from urban development (the UVF approach). Regional governance supported by special-purpose associations may define innovative land uses for regional parks (the IBA Emscher Park approach) that are stable enough to survive even in times of renewed development pressure. Business development always needs excellent infrastructure the provision of which may be out of reach for individual cities. Regional cooperation may be a way to create synergies here. The transition to a service-based economy and its need for soft location factors can be strongly supported by the IBA approach. Its innovative projects can contribute to an image change in old industrial regions and to the promotion of clusters in future-oriented economic sectors. The cleanup of derelict areas can even become a major element of redeveloping sites that are needed for new development when a region lacks available land resources.

5. METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE COOPERATION IN MEGA-URBAN REGIONS IN CHINA?

Globalization, decentralization, and privatization tendencies certainly provide the structural context for the evolution of metropolitan governance in the German as well as in the Chinese context. However, the experiences from the German debate indicate at first sight that the fundamentally different historical, institutional, and economic background in Europe makes it extremely difficult to transfer the concept of metropolitan governance to the situation in China. Besides, there are significant differences in terms of demographic and spatial dimensions between the Greater PRD² and Germany, which is characterized by declining population and much smaller metropolitan regions. Still, it may be interesting to take into account the lessons learned in the German context. This may help to lay the foundations for a scholarly debate about the prospects and limits of metropolitan governance. Besides, the latter may prove to be a useful concept for dealing with periods of stagnation or with situations where the economic, social, and ecological resources of a metropolitan region are overtaxed, making closer cooperation of regional stakeholders a crucial prerequisite for successful restructuring processes.

2. In our paper, we generally refer to the so-called Greater PRD. This region includes Hong Kong and Macao SARs which are governed under the One Country-Two Systems principle as well as the areas under the socialist planning system of Guangdong Province.

In the Western context, the shift from government to governance meant that decision-making was devolved from within government to a wider range of different organizations. In Europe, the evolution of metropolitan governance has occurred under fundamentally different parameters than has been the case for comparable processes in China. It was a gradually introduced process that started in the late 1980s against the background of global economic reorganization, the retreat of the welfare state, and the emergence of a strong civil society. The rise of meso-governments such as “the Regions of Europe” has gone hand in hand with the Europeanization of intergovernmental relationships. All those developments have led to a gradual retreat of hierarchical governance modes dominated by the state. Thus, the policy arena has become a “multi-actor and multilevel game” (Salet et al. 2003). This has increased the challenges to metropolitan governance and has made spatial policy coordination more and more complicated. However, a strong commitment of the state is still needed to enable social initiatives to take place in a fair way. One element of the restructuring of governance is the emerging tendency of metropolitan regions in Europe to become more concerned about their competitive position vis-à-vis other metropolitan regions.

In China, the situation is different. The overall transitional process can be characterized by a gradual and experimental approach to marketization under close supervision of the authoritarian central government (Pei 2005). The lack of independent organized interest groups considerably reduces the number of potential veto players in planning processes. Despite its remarkable economic growth over the past 30 years, China is still far from becoming a Western-style democratic country with a market economy in the near future. The intense competition demands continuous implementation of new ideas. Consequently, the dynamics of development are much higher, while the experimental policy means that the state institutions must remain in a constant state of flux in order to keep pace with the economic and societal development, which is increasingly asserting and differentiating itself.

Resistance to change has been much lower than in Western cities, since the civil society is still in its infancy. However, it seems to be building up gradually in view of the recent and frequent protest events in mainland China, especially concerning land development and labour affairs. To build up a harmonious society, local governments have to respond very carefully to these protests and social action. The idea of building up institutionalized arenas for a strategic interaction of different stakeholders and governmental bodies might serve as a tool in that respect. It may contribute to facilitating early exchange of ideas and needs in an increasingly complex development environment.

Highly dynamic simultaneous developments on a huge spatial and demographic scale threaten the governability of the Greater PRD, which has become a poly-centric mega-urban region in the course of transition. The municipalities have adapted to the competitive pressures after decentralization and fiscal reform and seized the opportunities offered by increased autonomy, regulatory power, and self-organization. They have become what can be termed “entrepreneurial cities” (Wu/Zhang 2007). The entrepreneurialism exhibited by public actors and promoted by the national government seems to be much stronger in China than in Europe and particularly in Germany. This has resulted in strong competition among the jurisdictional (sub-) units of the Greater PRD at all levels – a development that has recently been subject to harsh criticism, especially from the planning community. It is blamed for the implementation of overly large-scale projects and the production of excess and redundant infrastructure, with a waste of capital in the face of soft budget constraints. Many authors therefore argue for more integrated and more comprehensive governance and planning (Chan 2006, Zhang 2006). In the course of transition, the intensive *internal* competition between the municipalities of the Greater PRD has interfered with the rising *external* competition with other major economic regions of China, primarily Shanghai and its hinterland in the Yangtze Delta. As Hong Kong perceives its position to be threatened especially by Shanghai, planners demand that the Greater PRD be kept competitive by a stronger regional alliance. In this context, the complementary economic development strategies of the Greater PRD municipalities and the provincial strategy plans for the region are regarded as especially important.

Despite the efforts by some of the municipalities in the Greater PRD and the province of Guangdong, regional cooperation already seems to be significantly higher for instance in the Yangtze Delta. One catalyst for this tendency has probably been the decision to locate the EXPO 2010 in Shanghai. This decision gave rise to aspirations of participating in the economic impact of this mega-event and was the impetus for a regional cooperation agreement between 15 Yangtze Delta municipalities (Zhang 2006: 50). As a consequence, there has been particular improvement in the collaboration on infrastructure projects. Also, a regional division of labour regarding the IT industry has been deliberately implemented and promoted by the Shanghai municipality and Shanghai companies (Zhang 2006: 51): Shanghai became a technology supplier for the surrounding cities and concentrated on R&D and chip production, with Suzhou specializing in laptops,

Wuxi in telecommunication, Changzhou in PC parts, and Ningbo in cell phones. This regional cooperation and development of a high-tech cluster can certainly be regarded as a best-practice example, but even here, the pace of progress was apparently not as smooth as expected (Zhang 2006: 51). All in all, it still seems to be debatable whether the better regional division of labour is a result of deliberate regional effort or spontaneous mutual adjustment.

Furthermore, one has to be careful when trying to compare the situation in the Yangtze Delta with the situation in the Greater PRD: In the Yangtze Delta, the urban system is overwhelmingly dominated by the primacy of Shanghai, whereas the urban hierarchy is significantly flatter in the Greater PRD, with various important players such as Hong Kong, Shenzhen, or Guangzhou. The Greater PRD issue becomes even more complex due to the administrative structure and historical reasons. Hong Kong and Macao are not under the planning direction of Guangdong Province but under the One Country-Two Systems principle. So, in terms of administration, the Greater PRD is even more complicated because of Hong Kong and Macao.

From the authors' point of view, the municipalities in the Greater PRD are basically following the same aims and all want to become world-class cities. They are experiencing a take-off phase and want to climb up the value chain as soon as possible. Chan (2006) offers some insight into this intense competition with the example of how the Cyberport of Pokfulam was developed as part of Hong Kong's high-tech development strategy. The decision greatly annoyed the mayor of Shenzhen, as a cross-border high-tech zone between these cities had been prepared for a long time. However, Shenzhen and also Guangzhou had already established their own high-tech zones much earlier.

Considering the enormous economic and demographic growth in the PRD over the past 25 years, it may well be the case that what seems to be excess infrastructure now will be just enough to meet the demands of continuing rapid economic development in the years to come. At first sight, the degree of governability of the Greater PRD seems to be relatively high, at least compared to other mega-urban regions in Asia. It appears that local state capacities are able to compensate at least partially for a lack of higher-level capacities and thereby increase the governability of mega-urban region of the Greater PRD. Also, the timely intervention and mediation from the central Beijing government seems to be important. Without this, some cross-boundary infrastructure, e.g. Western Crossing and Customs Control, cannot be resolved between Shenzhen and Hong Kong. In polycentric mega-urban regions like the Greater PRD, fragmentation and competition may be regarded as beneficial because they facilitate dynamic and innovative development, and keep local agencies alert. From this point of view, metropolitan fragmentation and competition may only be problematic insofar as they become dysfunctional (Salet et al. 2003: 17).

6. CONCLUSION

In this context, "soft" approaches to governance could become a more and more valuable complement to the established models of regulating development by building on inter-municipal cooperation (Wu/Zhang 2007). It could be introduced in an experimental fashion on a project basis for the production of key infrastructure. A special-purpose association could be especially useful for the improvement of soft location factors that will increase in importance as the regional economy matures and is in need of adaptation and restructuring due to competition from the hinterland. The environmental degradation that can be observed throughout the Pearl River Delta in times of global climate change, the need to adapt to quickly increasing energy prices, the increasing number of outdated manufacturing sites and the apparent instability of low value-added manufacturing industries that heavily depend on migrant workers could serve as a set of motivations for establishing it. This association should deal exclusively with the upgrading and restructuring of sites, the implementation of resource-efficient technologies and spatial structures and the development of a high-class network of open space for environmental and recreational purposes. It could base its work on support by Central Government and province and cooperate closely with the municipalities in the region and other important stakeholders. Thus, it will be able to contribute to governability at the regional level by integrating a set of strategic projects into a complex vision that looks beyond mere growth-oriented urban development.

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