From places to flows? Planning for the new 'regional world' in Germany

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FROM PLACES TO FLOWS? PLANNING FOR THE NEW

'REGIONAL WORLD' IN GERMANY

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Abstract

Recent decades have been dominated by discourses describing a resurgence of regions. Yet despite its prominence the region remains a largely Delphian concept. In the period of new regionalist orthodoxy, for example, while it was recognised regions take various forms, the normative claim that we were living in a 'regional world' became narrowly focused on regions as subnational political units. Nevertheless, the emergence of city-regions, cross-border regions, and European Metropolitan Regions is leading some scholars to suggest the formation in this century of a brave new 'regional world'. With economic, social and political activity increasingly orchestrated through regional spaces that cross-cut the territorial map which prevailed through much of the twentieth century, the literature is adorned with accounts advancing the theoretical and policy rationale for relational approaches to regions and regionalism. Yet far less has been written on the struggle to construct these spaces politically, thereby neglecting questions of territory and territorial politics. With this in mind, our paper draws on the experience of Germany to consider the political struggle to overcome the contradictions, overlaps, and competing tendencies which result from new regional spaces appearing alongside, rather than replacing, existing forms of state scalar organisation. In particular, we observe how the Federal State is using the ambiguity of the regional concept to present territorial and relational approaches as complementary alternatives. The paper concludes by relating these findings to ongoing debates on how we as 'regional' researchers should approach the analysis of regions and regionalism, speculates on the degree to which they form progressive and effective spatial policies, and asks what lessons can be learnt about contemporary state spatiality more generally.

Key words: Regions, networks, territory, planning, European Metropolitan Regions, Germany

JEL codes: O18, R10, R58

FROM PLACES TO FLOWS? PLANNING FOR THE NEW 'REGIONAL WORLD' IN GERMANY

Introduction: Regional World(s)

Owing much to Michael Storper's highly prescient statements – first published in this journal – on the significance of the region to the organisation of economic and social life (Storper, 1995, 1997), the last two decades have been dominated by discourses describing a regional renaissance. Here leading proponents of what is labelled the 'new regionalism' went on to document how the collapse of Atlantic Fordism and onset of globalization led the region to challenge the nation-state as the 'natural economic zone' (Ohmae, 1995), alongside its primacy as the site/scale at which economic management is conducted, social welfare delivered, and political subjects identified by their national citizenship. This in part reflects belief among economic geographers, institutional economists, and economic sociologists that regions are focal points for knowledge creation, learning and innovation – capitalism's new *after*-Fordist economic form. Part also reflects belief across the social and political sciences that regions are important sites for fostering new postnational identities, increasing social cohesion, and encouraging new forms of social and political mobilisation in the era of globalization. And underpinning the socio-economic and socio-political rationale was evidence that in the early rounds of global restructuring a select group of regions were bucking the trend of national economic decline to emerge as competitive territories *par excellence*.

Captivating academics (interested in interpreting capitalism's new economic and spatial form) and policymakers (casting increasingly 'envious eyes' toward the regional zones of the Atlantic and European growth economies) alike, the new regionalist orthodoxy saw the region canonized in academic and political discourse as a functional space for economic planning and governance in the 1990s. Arguably this was most evident in Europe where propagated by the success of the highly acclaimed 'Four Motors of Europe' (Baden-Württemberg, Catalonia,

Lombardy, and Rhône-Alpes) the vision of a decentralised 'Europe of the Regions' signalled the degree to which policy elites were openly embracing new regionalist orthodoxy and – in their own national contexts – seeking to accelerate their region's path to increased wealth and democracy by establishing new regional institutional frameworks and supports (Keating, 1998). The upshot of all this was that for one key proponent of the new regionalism, Michael Storper, we were all to be seen living in a 'regional world' – where regions, not nation-states, are the fundamental units of economic and social life (Storper, 1995, 1997).

Nevertheless, despite largely unprecedented levels of intellectual and political energy being invested in the conviction that regions are increasingly central to modern life, critics of the new regionalism generally, and normative claims relating to the formation of the 'regional world' in particular, responded to the blind faith in which regions were being championed to expose a series of deep-rooted problems, contradictions, and challenges. Of paramount concern among critics has been the exposition of widespread conceptual amnesia when it comes to defining the region. Often assumed, rarely defined, it is hard to dispute how the region remains an 'object of mystery' (Harrison, 2006), an 'enigmatic concept' (MacLeod and Jones, 2007), and a 'complicated category' (Paasi, 2010) for those trying to engage with this most durable of constructs. Even in the work of the political scientist, Michael Keating, one of the most consistently insightful scholars on this aspect of the new regionalism, while it is acknowledged regions take various forms (e.g. administrative, cultural, economic, governmental, historical) his focus remains principally with regions as actual or potential subnational political units – be they administrative or governmental (Keating, 1998; Painter, 2008).

What is making this latter point increasingly important is the emergence of 'unusual' or 'non-standard' regions – so-called because they do not relate to any known administrative, territorial boundaries (Deas and Lord, 2006). In stark contrast to the period of new regionalist

orthodoxy, the latest rounds of global restructuring, alongside the European Commission's efforts to regularise land use planning regimes and remove international and interregional anomalies in the way economic development is regulated, are resulting in an ever expanding assemblage of new interregional, intercity and transnational collaborative initiatives in economic development and spatial planning[i]. Extending across Europe, the emergence and institutionalisation of city-regions, cross-border regions, European Metropolitan Regions, and polycentric mega city-regions sees the regional map of Europe no longer simply divided by the familiar NUTS II (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) administrative regions but recording the construction of new relationally-networked regional spaces (see Deas and Lord, 2006: 1852 *Figure 1*). Noting how many of these new regional spaces cross-cut the territorial map which prevailed through much of the twentieth century, in many ways what we are observing in this century amounts to a *new regionalism version 2.0* which is currently sweeping across Europe (cf. Keating, 1998).

Part of this new wave of region building reflects the trend which, for many, is seeing city-regions replace regions as *the* pivotal social formation in globalization (Scott, 2001). More substantively, it has to do with the fact that through most of the twentieth century national economies were described in regional terms to inform policy needs which were essentially territorial in nature – in Castells' (1996) thinking this was the economy as a 'space of places' – whereas in this century the emphasis is moving toward 'spaces of flows' approaches and the privileging of cities (as key nodes) in globalization. And finally, it is seen to support calls from a group of academics advocating a more radically 'relational' approach to the study of cities and regions (Allen and Cochrane, 2007; 2010; Amin, 2004). Of critical importance is how these authors see our increasingly mobile and globally interconnected modern world, the accompanying spatial grammar of flow, and the emergence of 'unusual' regions as calling into question the usefulness of

representing regions as "territorially *fixed* in any essential sense" (Allen and Cochrane, 2007: 1163 original emphasis).

All of which can be seen to suggest that as we enter deeper into globalization what we are witnessing is the emergence of a new relationally-constituted 'regional world' (cf. Storper, 1997), where capital accumulation and governance is "about exercising nodal power and aligning networks in one's own interest, rather than about exercising territorial power … [for] there is no definable territory to rule over" (Amin, 2004, p.36). But at the same time it prompts the need to ask searching questions over the degree to which the production of these 'non-standard' regional spaces is serving to replace territorially-bounded regions as part of some zero-sum game or either/or logic (see Harrison, 2010, 2012; Hudson, 2007; Jonas, 2011; Jones and MacLeod, 2010; MacLeod and Jones, 2007; Morgan, 2007)[ii]. For despite a rich and varied literature documenting transition from 'spaces of places' to 'spaces of flows' (Castells, 1996), 'regions' to 'city-regions' (Scott, 2001), and 'territorially-embedded' to 'relational and unbounded' conceptions of regions (Amin, 2004), all too often what is missing in these accounts is how emerging social formations are constructed politically (Jonas and Ward, 2007; Harrison, 2010, 2012; Paasi, 2010). We argue this latter point is vital to our conceptions of regions because as we are usefully reminded by Brenner (2009: 134) in his 'in retrospect' and 'in prospect' take on the wider discourse of state rescaling,

> "the rescaling of state power never entails the creation of a 'blank slate' on which new scalar arrangements can be established, but occurs through a conflictual 'layering' process in which emergent rescaling strategies collide with, and only partially rework inherited landscapes of state scalar organization."

What thinking like this leads to is an understanding that how one interprets the emergence of these new regional spaces, in particular the way they complement, overlap, compete, or contradict with existing sociospatial configurations is crucial not just for helping us as 'regional' researchers better

understand how we should interpret regions and approach the analysis of regional spaces, but the degree to which these new configurations produce progressive and effective spatial policies (Jones and Paasi, 2012). With this in mind, our paper examines recent endeavours to construct a new spatial map of Germany according to the need to think state space relationally, emphasise 'spaces of flows' approaches, and privilege the role of cities (as key nodes) in globalization.

Following a brief introduction to arguments suggesting the emergence of distinct regional world(s), our paper assesses the respective merits of the transition claims discussed above. It does so by drawing on the experience of Germany, where the championing of European Metropolitan Regions during the 1990s served to reinforce the already strikingly uneven spatial development of Germany, and ran counter to the longstanding principled commitment of the federal state to promote balanced economic growth and territorial equilibrium in all economic and social policy. Nonetheless, in 2006 the Federal State took the unprecedented step of producing a new spatial map amounting to a trans-region and relationally-networked embryonic national spatial plan based on interacting, but hierarchically differentiated, metropolitan regions. Set against this, our paper considers the challenge to overcome some of the many contradictions, overlaps, and competing tendencies posed by relationally-networked regional spaces appearing alongside, rather than replacing, existing forms of territorially-embedded state scalar organisation. Our aim is to demonstrate how the Federal State is using the ambiguity of the regional concept as its key political tool in presenting 'territorial embedded' and 'relational and unbound' regional spaces as complementary alternatives and the basis for more progressive and effective spatial policies. The final section relates these findings to ongoing debates on how we as 'regional' researchers should best approach the analysis of regions, speculates on the degree to which they do form progressive and effective spatial policies, and asks what lessons can be learnt about contemporary state spatiality more generally.

Regional World(s)

In what sense a 'regional world'?

With the nation-state seen to be under threat following the collapse of the Fordist-Keynesian institutional compromise and onset of globalization accounts pertaining to a 'new regionalism' in economic development and territorial representation catapulted the region to the forefront of late twentieth century political-economy. Drawing heavily on Porterian notions of competitiveness and lucid accounts of how select regions were 'winning' in the *after*-Fordist period, the rise of the regional state was so pronounced many believed we were now living in a 'regional world' (Storper, 1997). Nevertheless, despite the centrality of regions to accounts of contemporary state spatiality, critics of the 'regional world' thesis quickly realised the declining power of the nation-state vis-à-vis the emerging power structures of regions was an argument whose empirical referents were limited.

Raising doubts as to the very foundations upon which normative claims of a 'regional world' were built, one of the most forthright accusations concerns the failure of new regionalists to recognise the rise of the regional state is not necessarily or purposively at the expense of the national state, but more accurately, sees national state institutions operating in an increasingly complex multiscalar institutional hierarchy – where state power is used to orchestrate, rather than intervene in, socio-economic and socio-political matters. Bold claims announcing the death of the nation-state have therefore proved premature at best, unsubstantiated at worst (Ohmae, 1995). Moreover, it became clear to authors including Gordon MacLeod and Martin Jones how new regionalists disregard for the changing role of the state was manifesting itself in a related tendency: that of concealing fundamental questions over how regions are constructed politically (MacLeod and Jones, 2001). A line of argument which went a long way to exposing widespread conceptual amnesia when it came to defining what proponents meant by 'the region', it was, nevertheless,

John Lovering's (1999: 390) metaphor suggesting how the "policy tail is wagging the analytical dog" which was to prove the most hard-hitting exposé of them all. For more than any other, Lovering was to successfully capture the academic limelight from the architects of the new regionalism, and in so doing, turn the lights down – though not quite out – on the 'regional world' thesis.

Accompanying suggestions the new regionalism is nothing more than an amalgam of 'all things good' in regional economies today, successful only in enabling proponents to tell an 'attractive and persuasive story' in support of regions, Lovering's pointed metaphor shed light on how advocates and followers of the new regionalism were guilty of pushing a dangerously misleading, ultimately self-perpetuating argument: that is, the zeal of academics, political leaders, and practitioners to promote regions as *the* crucible for business and community empowerment captures the imagination and leads to the construction of new forms of regional governance; this is used as further empirical evidence of regions acting as autonomous political and economic spaces; reaffirms and generates regional favour; elevates the region to an even stronger position of orthodoxy; which in turn fuels another round of policy intervention; and so the regional orthodoxy emerges unabated. For Lovering, the 'new regionalism' serves up a self congratulatory and self gratifying purpose for its architects and proponents. In effect, it fails to provide the rigour required to substantiate the normative claims which underpin the 'regional world' thesis.

Nevertheless, while oft cited, it is noticeable how Lovering's accusations attracted little response from the very authors to whom his attack was clearly directed. Rather it has been left to others to contemplate the future for regions, regional studies, and regional geographers (see for example, MacLeod, 2001; MacLeod and Jones, 2001; Regional Studies, 2007).

In what sense a new 'regional world'?

Looking back at the first decade of this century a new era of regional studies has emerged based on two notable and related developments. The first, a theoretical development, centres on advances made by a group of geographers, mainly based in the United Kingdom, advocating a more radically relational approach to the study of cities and regions (Allen and Cochrane, 2007, 2010; Allen et al., 1998; Amin, 2004). Challenging the avowedly territorial and scalar approach adopted by both advocates and critics of the new regionalism, for these authors emerging sociospatial formations are not necessarily territorial-scalar but constituted through the spatiality of flow, juxtaposition, porosity, and connectivity. Points which are serving to disturb notions of regions as bounded territories, from this alternative perspective interpreting regions as spaces of movement and circulation (of goods, technologies, knowledge, people, finance and information) reveals "not an 'area', but a complex and unbounded lattice of articulations" (Allen et al., 1998: 65). The second, a policy development, sees city-regions emerge to assume prominence as the *in vogue* spatial scale among policy elites (Scott, 2001). Here, and accompanying theoretical claims city-regions are replacing regions as *the* pivotal social formation in globalization, a new city-regional orthodoxy has been sweeping all before it in recognition that alongside the re-emergence of regions there has been the resurgence of another spatial form – the city.

While many prophesised how advances in technology and communication would induce an era of global deconcentration and a diminishing role for cities in globalization, the propensity of socioeconomic activity to coalesce in dense clusters is doing much to confirm that alongside a select group of regions, a distinctive group of cities, that is, metropolitan clusters of socioeconomic activity, are forging ahead as important staging/command posts in the new global economy. What has been derived from this is if global economic integration is one defining feature of globalization then the other is undoubtedly urbanisation. Evidenced in the first instance by more than 50% of world population living in cities for the first time (UNFPA, 2007), while it is true to say cities are

back, it is not as we know it. For sure, rapid urbanisation now sees the functional economies of most large cities extend far beyond their traditional boundaries to capture physically separate yet functionally networked cities and towns in the surrounding hinterland. The upshot of this is accelerated urbanisation has been so vivacious that despite a resurgence of cities in globalization it can be argued the city – as traditionally conceived – is becoming an increasingly outdated and conceptually redundant entity. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the concept of 'the city' no longer adequately reflects the underlying structure of how socioeconomic activity is organised at the urban scale.

For many this new urban spatiality is best captured by the concept of the city-region. At its most basic, a city-region comprises two distinct but interrelated elements: the city, which possesses some specified set of functions or economic activity, and the region, a surrounding territory which is exclusive to that city (Parr, 2005). Not a new concept, what makes the city-region concept important today is the attention being directed toward so-called *global* 'city-regions' (Scott, 2001). An extension of the logic which saw global cities defined by their external linkages during the 1990s, the global city-region discourse recognises that as we enter deeper into globalization processes of global economic integration and accelerated urbanisation are making it necessary to consider the *external* and *internal* linkages of metropolitan areas. More than this, the identification of city-regions as places where globalization appears to be crystallising out on the ground, alongside related claims of how they perform as 'motors', 'engines' and 'locomotives' of the national economies in which they are located (Scott and Storper, 2003), is making it hard to ignore how city-regions are being championing as strategic platforms within international circuits of capital accumulation. Dripping with the same economic boosterism that accompanied regions a decade or so earlier, city-regions are perhaps not surprisingly being showcased as a new scale of urban organisation at the beginning of this century. Alongside this, claims city-regions are

'increasingly central' to modern life is providing credence to those suggesting 'new city-regionalism' amounts to a new phase in capitalist territorial development (Scott, 2001).

For policy elites in particular, the identification of city-regions as pivotal social formations is fuelling their demand for more networked forms of urban and regional governance. Driven by the knowledge that the unrelenting expansion in size, scope, and number of metropolitan areas makes traditional planning and policy strategies 'increasingly inadequate' (Scott, 2001), city-regions are fast emerging as an important space for spatial planning as well as economic governance. It is already noted, for instance, how spatial planning is increasingly being conducted outside the formal system of practices of subnational 'planning' (local and regional) within what are termed 'soft spaces' (Haughton et al., 2010). So-called because of their 'fuzzy boundaries' and sometimes fuzzy scales of policy and governance arrangements, the construction of 'soft spaces', that is, planning on a city-region scale, is indicative of attempts to overcome the fundamental problem of seeking to contain growth in formal structures of territorial governance. Offered up as a necessary component for enabling city-regions to capitalise on their various roles as incubators of knowledge, learning, democracy and economic growth, it is perhaps not surprising to note institutional capacity building at the city-region scale is now recognised to be an officially institutionalised task across North America and Europe, but large swathes of Pacific Asia and Latin America also (Herrschel, 2011; Vogel et al., 2010; Xu and Yeh, 2010).

Connecting back to the discussion above, what is important in the context of this paper is with this rich policy context as evidence relationalists have been doing much to advance their claim "the governance of regions, and its spatiality, now works through a looser, more negotiable, set of political arrangements that take their shape from networks of relations that stretch across and beyond regional boundaries" (Allen and Cochrane, 2007: 1163). Yet while we can agree there is undeniable logic to the relational argument that contemporary expressions of territory are being

materially and experientially transformed by an untold myriad of trans-territorial flows and networks, whether this signifies transition to what many perceive to be a new relationally-constituted 'regional world', where notions of regions as 'relational and unbound' replace territorially perspectives, remains hotly contested (Harrison, 2012; Jones and Paasi, 2012; Varró and Lagendijk, 2012).

Towards a new 'regional world'?

As just seen, city-regions and the relational viewpoint are being offered up as a solution to misgivings about the representation of territory-scale in the new regionalism. Yet in doing this there has been a worrying tendency to (1) present city-regions as agents of wealth creation (Jonas and Ward, 2007), and (2) assume city-regions and the language of network and flow accompanying them as *the* essential features of contemporary sociospatiality. The latter point is particularly pertinent in light of current debate, for it is guilty of 'one-dimensionalism', that is, the long-standing tendency of ontologically privileging a single dimension of sociospatial theory (e.g. networks) at the expense of other forms of sociospatial relations (e.g. territory, place, scale) (Jessop et al., 2008).

Suffice to say the literature on regions and city-regions has been at the forefront of this debate. Many observers already note, for example, how city-regions are emerging alongside, rather than replacing, existing forms of more territorially-articulated sociospatial organisation (Brenner, 2009; Harrison, 2010a/b; Jones and MacLeod, 2007). Following on from this, claims city-regions are 'increasingly free' from regulatory supervision on the part of nation-states are seen to overstate the ease with which they are free to override politico-administrative boundaries (Harrison, 2007). It is this and other observations which have been leading some commentators to suggest it is both/and, rather than either/or, conceptions of territorial and relational perspectives on regions and regionalism which are required (Hudson, 2007; Jonas, 2011; Morgan, 2007). At another level, while

it was some time ago that Swyngedouw's (1997) pioneering work on the 'politics of scale' recognised the need to understand and theorise the process of rescaling, advocates of city-regions often overlook this when assuming a smooth transition from one spatial strategy – regions – to another – city-regions (Harrison, 2007). This was noted very early on by Ward and Jonas (2004: 2134) when suggesting:

> "The trend – geographically uneven as it is – towards competitive city-regionalism is best understood as representing an on-going, dynamic, and conflict-ridden politics of and in space (which, in turn, is 'scaled' in a variety of ways) rather than a smooth switch to a postnational era of capitalist territoriality."

One of the issues here is that like its predecessor 'the region', the city-region is itself a Delphian concept. For analytical purposes, we can identify three main perspectives on the conception of city-regions in the academic and policy literature. Derived straight from the global city-region discourse, the first is what we understand to be the *agglomeration* perspective. This imagines city-regions to be "dense polarised masses of capital, labour, and social life that are bound up in intricate ways in intensifying and far-flung extra-national relationships. As such, they represent an outgrowth of large metropolitan areas – or contiguous sets of metropolitan areas – together with surrounding hinterlands of variable extent which may themselves be sites of scattered urban settlements" (Scott, 2001: 814). A second, more politically-oriented definition rooted in the traditions of political science and public policy, is what we term the *scale* perspective. This presents city-regions as "a strategic and political level of administration and policy-making, extending beyond the administrative boundaries of single urban local government authorities to include urban and/or semi-urban hinterlands" (Tewdwr-Jones and McNeill, 2000: 131). The third is a spatially networked *hub and spokes* perspective identifying the city-region as "a functionally inter-related geographical

area comprising a central, or core city, as part of a network of urban centres and rural hinterlands. A little bit like the hub (city) and the spokes (surrounding urban/rural areas) on a bicycle wheel" (UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005: 1).

Adopting the language of Allen et al (1998) what we take from this is that there is no city-region out there waiting to be discovered. How city-regions (as both a discursive frame and space for action) are actively (re)produced, how they become visible spaces for political action, how they are various defined, delimited and designated, and most crucial of all, by whom and for whom they are being constructed, are therefore critical questions which need to be at the heart of analysis into city-region development. Nevertheless as Jonas (2011) has recently surmised, you would be hard pushed to suggest questions around the 'politics of city-regionalism' have been anything other than secondary to discourses of globalization, competition and economic development in the literature to date (Jonas and Ward, 2007). This is worrying. For albeit some of the more critical scholarship on city-region development has justifiably paid more than just lip service to the role of the state and territorial politics, there is a general assumption from those advocating relational approaches to contemporary regional development that given the capacity – in their mind – for spaces of flows to break free from regulatory supervision on the part of the state, these new regional spaces are coming to be more competitive/resilient than the nation-state and its extant internal territorial structures. It is then a short leap to assertions that these new regional spaces proffer more progressive and effective spatial policies. Set against a belief that policies of territorial redistribution are both parochial and antediluvian, because despite many stated intentions they have failed to address the problem of spatial inequality and spatial concentration of power, advocates of a relational and unbound conception of regions perceive a radical re-imagination of regional space which not only better reflects the 'real' economic geography (and by implication does not seek to contain growth within territorial structures of

governance) in an era of connectivity and flow, but is seen as a to challenge the entrenched spatial concentration of power and present the case for a dispersal of power (Amin et al., 2003). We are, in essence, in a position where relational perspectives may be seen to present new forms of regionalism as 'bottom up' and progressive, casting this against what they perceive to be the reactionary and regressive 'top-down' territorial politics of the state. It is these assumptions this paper seeks to unpack.

Following a brief introduction to the rise and fall of regional planning in Germany, the next section outlines three definitive stages in the transition toward articulating the German space economy as a relational space of flows and constructing a new spatial mapping of relationally-networked (city) regional spaces. In particular, our approach focuses on how these new regional spaces are being constructed politically to suggest we cannot wish away territory, the territorial perspective, or territorial approaches to regions and regionalism.

Putting theory into practice: German planning philosophy

The rise and fall of regional planning in the twentieth century

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the legal body of spatial planning had its roots in local zoning plans, emerging in response to economic and population growth within large cities and the need to regulate land use in Germany's rapidly developing industrial growth regions. Under the NS-regime of the 1930s spatial planning briefly became nationalised, but after the Second World War the federal system was introduced and responsibility for spatial planning was for the most part delegated to the *Länder*. The primary aim of regional planning was reconstruction and focused principally, though not exclusively, on housing and transportation. Only in the late 1950s did the central state begin once more to engage extensively in spatial planning.

The first federal law on spatial planning (*Bundersraumordnungsgesetz*, 1965; hereafter ROG) was established in 1965. Since then the duty of federal law sees the federal level outline the principles (*Grundsätze*) of regional spatial planning and the *Länder* concretize these principles into plans affecting specific places. Rooted in the assumptions of central place theory (Christaller, 1933), the basic aim of the ROG was to enable/ensure balanced economic growth and territorial equilibrium across Germany. As sites of high employment and population growth, and the primary source of capital accumulation, planners interpreted the spatial principle underpinning the ROG to mean further accumulation of resources in Germany's major cities should be avoided, with the spatial targets being the 'lagging regions' of the rural and border zones. As Brenner (1997: 283) usefully notes, "it was here, in the internal periphery of the nation-state that the problem of underdevelopment took root in West German Fordism, embodied above all in the 'urban-rural opposition'" and the decision by the central state to intervene and direct its resources to these rural zones. Here the goal of equalised living conditions is to be achieved by financial equalization (*Länderfinanzausgleich*), a classic tool of post-war spatial Keynesianism which sees the federal government compensate underdeveloped *Länder* with supplementary federal grants[iii].

The first attempt to make visible the principles of spatial planning came at the height of the 1970s 'planning euphoria' (*Planungseuphorie*) with the adoption of the 1972 Federal Spatial Planning Program (*Bundersraumordnungsprogramm*; hereafter BROP). However, the intensification of the early stages of globalization, the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, the tailing off of the long postwar economic boom, and contrary to the aims of the ROG an increase in spatial disparities at the federal level during the 1970s ensured the BROP was out of date, almost redundant, at the point of publication. If this was not bad enough, the BROP was based on the 1960s idea of comprehensive planning and attempted to secure a spatial fix for capitalism at the national scale. Published in an era when the nation-state was already being fragmented as cities and regions

attempted to secure their competitive advantage, the BROP highlighted what many were coming to realise were major weaknesses in the armoury of planners. Albeit never insignificant, the knock-on effect was that for the next two decades spatial planning on the federal level became less popular and less significant among policy elites, only to return in 1992 with the Federal State's promotion of the European Metropolitan Region concept.

Stage 1: European Metropolitan Regions and the regionalisation of spatial planning

If spatial planning at the federal level was largely absent during the 1980s, it experienced a somewhat remarkable resurgence in the 1990s. In part this can be explained by the challenges posed by reunification, European integration, and the intensification of globalization, all of which were producing new functional geographies. Part is also the recognition that although the goal of federal policy is no longer to promote balanced economic growth within a nation-state-centred planning system, the task of positioning major cities and regions within European and global circuits of capital accumulation requires a renewed focus on spatial planning[iv]. Akin to what was happening in other countries at this time, spatial planning in Germany responded to these challenges by emphasising the importance of a select number of 'metropolitan regions' due to their competitiveness (both nationally and internationally) and role as economic drivers of the national economy.

This emergent focus on metropolitan regions was first evident in the policy documents produced by the Standing Conference of Ministries Responsible for Spatial Planning (*Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung*; hereafter MKRO). Directed to develop spatial strategies for a reunified German territory, the MKRO adopted 'Guidelines for Spatial Planning' (*Raumordnungspolitischer Orientierungsrahmen*) which in an extension of the existing system of central places identified the strategic importance of large metropolitan clusters of agglomeration

(BmBau, 1993). What is interesting to note here in the German example is how its status as a state with a polycentric urban system was used by the Federal State to argue that promoting the strategic importance of 'metropolitan regions' was necessary given spatially concentrated economies grow faster in globalization, but this could actually help meet the longstanding and principled pursuit of spatial equivalence in Germany:

> "The previously strong economic regions and centres are in a time of growing global competition and growing site competitions in their functional ability to safeguard and develop. As a "service provider space" they contribute significantly to the potential, and funding for a spatial balance in Germany."
>
> (BmBau, 1993, 6)

Published in 1995, the follow-up 'Federal Action Plan' went even further. It identified six agglomerations (Berlin/Brandenburg, Hamburg, Munich, Rhine-Main, Rhine-Ruhr and Stuttgart) of 'superior' strategic importance, with a seventh (Halle/Leipzig-Sachsendreieck) identified and subsequently added to the list two years later. These areas were to be known as 'European Metropolitan Regions' (BmBau, 1995).

Bristling with economic boosterism lifted straight from the new regionalist lexicon, these regions were lauded as "spatial and functional locations whose eminent functions, by international standards, extend well beyond national borders. They are engines of social, economical, and cultural development and as such are designed to help maintain Germany's and Europe's efficiency and competitive strengths" (BmBau, 1995: 27). Yet identification as a European Metropolitan Region in and of itself does not offer any financial or legislative powers – it is merely a label. Many did believe European Metropolitan Region status would lead eventually to more direct subsidies (Blotevogel and Schmitt, 2006) and the perceived value of being identified as part of this 'new elite' ensured a further four agglomerations (Bremen-Oldenburg, Hanover-Braunschweig-Göttingen-Wolfsburg, Nuremberg, and Rhine-Neckar) were motivated to aspire to be admitted to this new

politically constructed top hierarchy within the German urban system. Each was successful in this endeavour, 'joining the club' in 2005 as one of Germany's great hopes for innovation and growth.

Today, the number of metropolitan regions totals eleven. The eleven incorporate 57.98 million inhabitants (68.3% of the population) but within this exhibit incredible spatial and scalar flexibility. Spatially, metropolitan regions cover populations ranging from 11.47 million in Rhine-Ruhr to 2.36 million in Rhine-Neckar (IKM/BBR, 2008). Moreover, and indicative of the ambiguity of the city-region concept, their titles identify five metropolitan regions as monocentric (Berlin/Brandenburg, Hamburg, Munich, Nuremberg, Stuttgart); one as bi-polar (Bremen-Oldenburg); two formed around multiple cities (Hanover-Braunschweig-Göttingen-Wolfsburg, Halle/Leipzig-Sachsendreieck – since renamed Mitteldeutschland); while three, interestingly denoted by the name of a river not cities, are polycentric (Rhine-Ruhr, Rhine-Main, Rhine-Neckar).

Chosen and identified by the federal state, the first six European Metropolitan Regions were selected principally because of their functional economic strength. These were the six most important cities on a global scale, each of them assuming various national tasks and forming important clusters in key areas of business activity, human capital, information and technology exchange, cultural experience and political engagement. Swept along by the gathering rhetoric surrounding the 'global city' concept, it was in this spirit that these six metropolitan regions reflected what Germany saw as their emerging, aspiring, or potential global cities. The concept of 'European Metropolitan Region' emerging as it did at this time was itself indicative of the Federal State recognising that although Germany did not have its own global city – in the same way the UK had London and France had Paris - it does have a number of cities which are well positioned within European circuits of capital (see Keil, 2010 for further revealing insights in the case of Frankfurt).

The potential seventh metropolitan region, Mitteldeutschland, came to fruition for purely political purposes. Identified as two separate agglomerations in 1992, it had been envisaged Leipzig

and Dresden would act as individual growth poles. This failed to materialise and in 1995, to ensure at least one East German agglomeration, they were amalgamated to form the basis of a new metropolitan region – albeit one with less economic functions than the initial six and only weak institutional structures. Of the remaining four, Bremen-Oldenburg, Hanover-Braunschweig-Göttingen-Wolfsburg and Nuremberg were identified in the original 1992 guidelines and so perhaps not surprising they eventually acquired European Metropolitan Region status. The final region of Rhine-Neckar is somewhat more surprising as it was the only agglomeration not included in the original 1992 guidelines. So why, you might ask, was it included?

Uniquely spread across three *Länder* – Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Hesse – Rhine-Neckar is included, in part, because it is the seventh largest economy in Germany. But part also has to do with the area being largely identical to the core of the historic Palatinate territory which dates back to the sixteenth century, but was subsequently divided when the *Länder* were established after the Second World War. Explaining first why strong socio-cultural links exist despite being split across three *Länder*, a large part of the explanation for the inclusion of Rhine-Neckar is therefore to do with its long tradition of institution-building. In 1951, the cities of Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, Heidelberg, and Viernheim alongside the districts of Ludwigshafen and Heidelberg founded the 'Municipal Association of Rhein-Neckar' (*Kommunalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft Rhein-Neckar*) to jointly plan for transport (including port operation), the supply of gas, water and power, spatial planning, industrial and housing development, prisons and culture. This was followed in 1969 by the signing of the first treaty between the *Länder* and the formation of the Regional Planning Association (*Raumordnungsverband Rhein-Neckar*). In 1989, the Regional Planning Association then formed the first public-private partnership of its type in Germany by joining with the Chamber of Commerce to co-ordinate economic development and spatial planning – indicative of what Amin and Thrift (1995) later termed 'new institutionalism'. This was driven by a view

among key stakeholders that the area needed to focus on what its specific strengths and abilities were given its close proximity to the much vaunted automobile-led regional economy around Stuttgart (Baden-Württemberg)[v]. The major breakthrough for Rhine-Neckar came in 2003 when the then Deputy Chairman of BASF[vi], Eggert Voscherau, launched 'Initiative for the Future of the Rhine-Neckar-Triangle' (*Initiative Zukunft Rhein-Neckar-Dreieck*). Supporting cross-border regional planning this initiative rubber-stamped Rhine-Neckar's ascendancy to be officially appointed as Germany's eleventh European Metropolitan Region in 2005.

With so much intellectual and political energy being invested in support of European Metropolitan Regions, their ascendancy to become the dominant discourse in Germany's urban and regional political-economy was clear for all to see. Yet the fact these metropolitan regions are not politico-administrative bodies was serving to ensure their function remained one of 'framing' a new discourse – around the need to maintain and develop the metropolitan functions of a select number of urban agglomerations – rather than enabling them to act on this. In effect, this newly constructed hierarchy of metropolitan areas provides urban and regional stakeholders with a platform to campaign and put pressure on state, national, and European institutions to recognise their superior strategic importance within spatial development policies[vii] (Blotevogel and Schmitt, 2006). Nevertheless, with the metropolitan region discourse emerging to challenge the former dominant idea of a 'regional world' based on regions as actual or potential subnational political units – an idea fast losing its academic and political appeal – the next stages in the development of this discourse were posing a number of political headaches for its architects. Not least of their problems is how to manage the many contradictions, overlaps, and competing tendencies resulting from European Metropolitan Regions appearing alongside, rather than replacing, existing forms of state scalar organisation.

Stage 2: Redrawing the boundaries of the German space economy – constructing a new spatial map

Since the Guidelines for Spatial Planning were adopted in 1992 new social challenges, changes in spatial development and land use, and the increasing importance of a European dimension to spatial development predicated the need for a new set of guidelines. First, and like many countries, Germany faced a number of new social challenges at this time. These included: (1) an overall increase of 10% in the number of households between 1991-2003; (2) a growing number of small households with only one or two people; (3) an increase in the overall age of the population; (4) younger generations making up a continuously falling share of the population; (5) increasing regional disparities between East and West German states; (6) increased European integration; and (7) an increasing internationalisation of the population. Meanwhile second and somewhat related, the changes in spatial development and land use reflected growing differences at the interregional scale. At one level, the metropolitanization of the European urban system and the identification of this new urban hierarchy saw Germany's most important agglomerations significantly expand their functional role and economic spheres of influence during the 1990s. In contrast, while some relatively peripheral areas were able to recognise their endogenous opportunities and harness them in ways consistent with new regionalist ideology, the prospects for more poorly developed regions and some old industrialised agglomerations remained bleak having failed to identify much in the way of growth potential. Nervous that their new 'discursive frame' for the regional level was doing little to alleviate already strikingly uneven spatial development in Germany, the Federal State found themselves under increasing pressure to safeguard the precondition for equality of opportunities and necessitated the need for 'spatially adapted' approaches to action. Finally third, Germany's geographical position at the heart of Europe, alongside its long-term desire to be a central player in orchestrating and shaping spatial development policy at a European level, its plan to draw up a Territorial Agenda for the territory of the EU during the 2007 German Presidency of

the Council, and opportunities presented by EU enlargement and relations with its neighbours all served to emphasise the European dimension of spatial development policy at this time (BMBVS/BBR, 2006).

Whilst undoubtedly central to urban and regional political-economy, the open question was whether European Metropolitan Regions would remain at the heart of any new guidelines. For in the absence of conclusive evidence one way or the other, advocates highlight how these large agglomerations remain as pivotal sociospatial formations in contemporary globalization and are key to economic and social revitalization (Schmitt 2009), while critics remain ambivalent, arguing how a focus on metropolitan regions can only lead to increases in interregional disparities and therefore run counter to the longstanding aim of equalised living conditions in Germany (Bröcker 2009). Perhaps unsurprisingly this reaction was split most clearly between urban and rural areas. Indicative of the former was Manfred Sinz, Assistant Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development who viewed metropolitan regions to be a huge success story:

> "The concept of metropolitan regions is a spatial planning policy success story. Rarely before has a policy managed to successfully advance only by a strategic vision, without additional funding or new regional planning instruments and initiatives."
>
> (Sinz, 2005, 1)

In stark contrast, rural elites argue the prominence of metropolitan regions is not only damaging in its own right, but is signalling a broader paradigm shift towards a neoliberal strategy and rising inequality (see Köppen 2006: 293ff) – a discussion point which received much exposure after the Federal President Horst Köhler questioned the provision of equalized living conditions following a study by Dohnanyi and Most (2004) into the effect of subsidies provided for East Germany.

Following a two-year technical and political discussion process, 30 June 2006 saw the Federal Government and federal state ministers responsible for spatial planning (*Landesplanung*) publish and adopt the 'Concepts and Strategies for Spatial Development in Germany' (*Leitbilder und*

Handlungsstrategien für die Raumentwickung in Deutschland, hereafter *Leitbilder*). A joint development strategy for the cities and regions of Germany, the key rationale for the new guidelines was a belief that "it will not be possible to meet the growing challenges without closer cooperation between the regions and without urban-rural partnerships" (Tiefensee and Pfister, quoted in BMBVS/BBR, 2006: foreword). Emphasising the importance of networking, and drawing strong emotive ties to the language adopted in state spatial strategies through much of the twentieth century, the aim of the *Leitbilder* is to "meet the objective of achieving a convergence of living standards", and which, crucially, will "relate to all types of area – from rural-peripheral areas to metropolitan areas" (*ibid.*: 5).

Central to achieving the aim and objectives of the new guidelines is the concept of 'growth and innovation'. In the first instance, the *Leitbilder* identifies three main types of area: (1) *European Metropolitan Regions*, the same eleven which emerged from the 1992 guidelines; (2) *dynamic growth areas outside metropolitan regions*, those dynamic growth clusters, cities and locational areas outside the immediate metropolitan spheres of influence, but which are exhibiting signs of independent, sustainable profiles based on endogenous growth; and (3) *areas with need for stabilization*, that is, rural and old industrial areas which are often peripheral locations, located close to borders, and fall in-between areas of growth. To be sure, these three categorisations conform very neatly – conceptually at least – with the divergence in spatial development and land use, alongside observed differences at the interregional scale, which in large part predicated the need for a new set of spatial planning guidelines in the first place. More than this, however, what we now have is a German space economy that is no longer simply being discussed in relational terms, but the spatial map of the economy now being represented and defined as a web of relational connectivity and networked 'space of flows' (Figure 1) – developments which could

amount to a trans-region and relationally-networked embryonic national spatial plan for Germany based on interacting, but hierarchically differentiated, city-regions.

*** Insert Figure 1 here ***

To this extent, a number of important observations can be made. First and most obvious is how the territorial boundaries of the politico-administrative *Länder* are nowhere to be seen. What we see instead is an idealised structure of more networked forms of regional cooperation and collaboration on a regional level. Identified as 'large scale areas of responsibility', each area is shown to comprise an existing metropolitan region, and a wider 'area of influence'. Of particular note is how the boundary lines remain ambiguous and neither do they correspond to any known administrative or functional boundary. Second, while the 1992/1995 guidelines were spatially selective in prioritising metropolitan regions of superior strategic importance, those areas which were clearly at the fringes or fell in-between or outside the scope of this policy discourse before 2006 are now all included as either an *area of influence*, *growth region outside metropolitan regions*, or *stabilisation area*. In a move which might appear at first glance to be more progressive given its move toward spatial inclusivity, it is important not to forget the clear evidence of hierarchical differentiation at play here. Third, we see each of the three different 'city-region' models deployed in the same map: *agglomeration* to identify existing metropolitan regions and their core; *scale* to present this idealised structure of more networked forms of regional cooperation and collaboration at a federal level; and interestingly, *hub and spokes* to connect metropolitan regions to other cities with metropolitan functions in the first instance, but also identify growth areas outside metropolitan regions.

What we can take from this is that the city-region concept is being bent to fit particular needs and to serve a specific political purpose – the need to balance their promotion of metropolitan regions with managing uneven spatial development. But what we can also identify is

how the chaotic nature of the city-region concept is becoming a necessary tool in the armoury of policy elites. In effect, each model of city-region development is used here to manage the contradictions and competing tendencies resulting from attempting to construct a new spatial map of city-regions. In the first instance, the city-region as 'agglomeration' reinforces and re-emphasises the functional economic role of metropolitan regions as being of superior strategic importance. This is entirely consistent with the position adopted since 1992 and the strong economic-inspired rationale for city-regions proposed by Allen Scott and his followers. In contrast, city-region as *scale* is mobilised here for the first time. Recognising the need to go beyond the spatially selective discursive frame of metropolitan regions which dominated the period 1992-2006, policy elites began the process of making their city-region policy spatial inclusive by identifying 'areas of influence' which are inclusive of the rural areas located beyond the metropolitan region but are to varying degrees functionally connected. When put like this, the city-region as agglomeration is clearly not conducive to defining these regional spaces. Neither is it much use if you are looking to construct a territorially inclusive spatial map of city-regions. It is for this reason city-region as 'scale' is so useful because with its emphasis on a 'strategic or political level' it opens the way for policy elites to construct city-region policies that enable all different types of area to feel included.

Where the city-region as 'agglomeration' and 'scale' are weak is both partition space to produce a mosaic of regional spaces. Nervous of how this will be interpreted as the state reinforcing uneven spatial development by encouraging place-based competition, the city-region as 'hub and spokes' fulfils an important role in alleviating some of the concern. Emphasising the formation of a multi-nodal inter-urban network based on interacting and functionally interconnected metropolitan cores, a 'hub and spokes' perspective on city-region development is used by policy elites to visually capture and emphasise the importance of cooperation, collaboration, and exchange both within and between metropolitan areas. As an addition, we can

also observe how in this context 'hub and spokes' is being reconfigured to show 'growth regions outside metropolitan regions', that is, places which have some functional role in national circuits of capital but because they lack a larger core (a hub, or in the German context a 'central place' of high importance) find themselves marginalised from international circuits of capital – what we might understand to be a 'spokes without hub' imagination for development in the most peripheral, often rural, areas which would otherwise be excluded from this policy due to their lack of an urban core.

Albeit the boundaries of the *Länder* are noticeably absent from this map, the fourth point to note is that one line of political and administrative importance remains – the German national border. What this suggests is although the Federal State are accepting of the need to think beyond the narrow confines of territorially bound politico-administrative units *within* the national context, albeit there is some suggestion of spillover into neighbouring countries in the spatial map, there is an unwillingness at this point to consider such practices when it involves collaboration with areas *beyond* the national border. What we take from this is that, on one level, it might suggest Scott's (2001) notion of city-regions tending more and more to override purely political boundaries is certainly true in the case of subnational political boundaries but not national borders. This would make Germany different to other contexts, such as England, where analysis shows city-regions appearing unable even to escape the constraints of subnational political boundaries (Harrison, 2010a). But this would overlook one important point, that is, metropolitan regions and their derivatives are a 'discursive frame' in Germany with power not actually being ceded from the federal level. It should be noted that although some metropolitan regions do have planning competencies, these competencies do not result from being labeled a metropolitan region. In metropolitan regions where the new regional space is coterminous with one or more *Länder* conjoined (for example, Berlin-Brandenburg is coterminous with two *Länder*) the planning competencies of the Länder can also be employed to the area of the metropolitan region.

Alternatively in areas where the metropolitan region is not coterminous with the *Länder* the example of Rhine-Neckar reveals how planning competencies can be achieved when a legally binding metropolitan plan is enabled by a state treaty between the Länder over which the metropolitan region stretches:

> "According to Article 3 of the state treaty signed by the federal states of Baden-Württemberg, Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate dated July 26, 2005, the preparation, forward projection and amendment of a standardised regional plan for the Rhine-Neckar region is one of the core tasks of the Rhine-Neckar Regional Association. In particular, the state development programmes and plans of the three federal states are to be taken into consideration. The plan is an expression of the political will of the entire region and the basis for its spatial development."
>
> (MRN, 2005)

Nonetheless, it remains hard to escape the conclusion that claims city-regions are increasingly free from regulatory supervision on the part of national states appears wishful thinking in this context (cf. Scott, 2001). On a more practical note, it presented the concepts of 'European Metropolitan Region' and 'cross-border region' as mutually exclusive in the German policy discourse. Nevertheless, there have not been moves of late to incorporate cross-border regions into debates over European Metropolitan Regions, in what we might usefully understand to be a third stage in transition towards a relational viewpoint on the German space economy (Megerle, 2009; MKRO, 2009).

Stage 3: What chance cross-border metropolitan regions?

Critics argue the focus on metropolitan functions *within* Germany is leading the Federal Government to underestimate the strength, and underplay the importance, of border regions (Köhler, 2009). In particular, they highlight how some growth regions outside metropolitan regions might be considered metropolitan regions were they judged on their functional ties with proximate

urban areas beyond the German national border. While there is some indication of this in *Figure 1* this is merely indicative of *some* cross-border linkages and in many ways presents a similar picture to that presented in other national contexts (see Harrison, 2010a). Nevertheless, the criticism and the Federal State's desire to strengthen integration and cohesion between Germany and its European neighbours is leading policy elites to focus on improving the European Metropolitan Region concept by: (1) expanding the ten 'areas of influence' identified in the *Leitbilder* into a cooperation framework which frames these constructs as socio-political 'large scale areas of responsibility' (*Großräumige Verantwortungsgemeinschaften*); and (2) accepting the increased significance and role 'trans-border interconnected metropolitan regions' (*Grenzüberschreitende Verflechtungsräume*) play in driving the German national economy (MRKO, 2009). With direct responsibility for spatial planning resting with the *Länder*, the only opportunity for the federal state to pursue this was through their capacity to influence spatial planning discourses by setting the agenda through model projects – à la the European Union. In this way, metropolitan regions or cooperation's were encouraged to bid to the federal state to become model regions. For this they would receive funding to develop and implement strategies and frameworks to develop the European Metropolitan Region concept, thus becoming laboratories in and through which they and the federal state could evaluate their potential to be 'large scale areas of responsibility' or 'trans-border interconnected metropolitan regions'.

To this end, it was announced in 2007 that there were to be seven model regions for 'large scale areas of responsibility'. The first six were based around the metropolitan areas of Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig-Dresden, Nuremberg, Frankfurt-Mannheim, and Stuttgart, with the seventh based on the area around Lake Constance. In the case of the former, each was a metropolitan region located *within* Germany. Between them they also covered the whole gamut of spatial organisation and challenges facing metropolitan areas: Berlin, Hamburg and Stuttgart being monocentric; Leipzig-

Dresden having twin cores; Frankfurt-Mannheim being polycentric comprising large core cities; and Nuremberg, polycentric but comprised of multiple small and medium-sized satellites towns and cities. The selection of Lake Constance as the seventh model region was more revealing, for it is a cross-border region comprising parts of Germany, Lichtenstein, Austria and Switzerland. The only model region not located exclusively within Germany, it is also a rural area centred on a natural feature – the lake – rather than a city or metropolitan area. So why was Lake Constance included as a model region?

During the original bidding process more than sixty regions came forward, a large number of which were border regions. In advancing their claims border regions were universal in accusing the Federal State of spatial selectivity in the period 1992-2006. The six model regions initially identified did little to alleviate this accusation. To be sure, it went a long way to undermining efforts post-2006 to include all areas in the metropolitan region discourse. Lake Constance's inclusion can be seen as an acknowledgement that the European Metropolitan Region discourse needs to be open to different types of region.

No longer just paying lip-service to the importance of regions located beyond metropolitan areas, the Federal State launched a second 'model' initiative with an explicit focus on cross-border regions, their potential to contribute to 'growth and innovation', and capacity to strengthen integration and cohesion between Germany and its neighbours. Four model regions were identified: The Lake Region (*Europäischer Verflechtungsraum Bodensee*), *Euregio Mass-Rhein*, Greater Region (*Großregion SaarLorLux+*) and Upper Rhine Region (*Oberrheinregion*) (BBR, 2009). While clearly not *city*-regional – they all lack identifiable cores – all four areas do exhibit some functional ties. The Lake Region is a rural area with a heavy dependence on tourism and its inclusion is perhaps not surprising given the inclusion of Lake Constance as the seventh model region for 'large scale areas of responsibility'. In contrast, Euregio Mass-Rhein is a high-density

region which includes parts of Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. With a long-standing history of cross-border cooperation, its inclusion is linked to an announcement on 18 September 2007 when the European Commission approved the Operational Programme INTERREG IV-A 'Euregio Maas-Rhein' for Community assistance totalling €144.8m, 50% coming directly from the European Regional Development Fund under the European territorial cooperation objective. The Greater Region is included, in part, because despite being located in the EU 'blue banana' – a discontinuous urban corridor of industry and services, deemed to hold an economically advantageous position – the area comprises urban industrial areas which have struggled to adjust to economic change and large rural areas. Part also has to do with the fact that although the region is functionally connected, as the hub for transport in Europe, it remains politically fragmented (seen most clearly in the failure to agree a name for the Greater Region, or to give its full title, the Greater Region of Luxembourg, Lorraine, Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate and Wallonia). The final area, the Upper Rhine Region, is particularly noteworthy in providing an example of what we might see as being an 'unusual solution' to problems created by formal territorial boundaries.

Unusual region, unusual solution?

Located at the German-French-Swiss border the Upper Rhine Region covers 21,000km^2 and has a population of 5.9million. Based around five core cities Karlsruhe (G), Freiburg (G), Strasbourg (F), Mulhouse (F) and Basel (S), but divided by the River Rhine and language, the region and its people are united by historical ties to Alemannic culture and tradition. The importance attached to the Upper Rhine Region in understanding the potential of cross-border metropolitan regions to open the way to progressive and effective spatial policies is threefold. First, the area of Germany comprising the Upper Rhine Region would fail any test for ascending to metropolitan region status. Only when the German, French and Swiss areas are seen as one region do the functional qualities

which are key to metropolitan regions become clear. Second, the region has a long history of cross-border collaboration. In institutional terms collaboration dates back to the end of the Second World War, while the 1975 signing of an intergovernmental agreement (the Bonn Agreement) marked a milestone in cross-border cooperation when two regional committees – the Bipartite Regional Commission and Tripartite Regional Commission – were established for northern and southern Upper Rhine Region respectively. On 21 November 1991, a successor organization known as the 'Upper Rhine Conference' combined the northern and southern committees. What this demonstrates is cross-border institutional co-operation is being driven from the bottom up, not top down. Finally, third, the benefits of cross-border cooperation even become more obvious, we argue, when we observe how some unusual solutions are possible in 'unusual' regions. Here we put forward the case of EuroAirport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg as an exemplar.

Governed by the international convention of 1949, EuroAirport is operated by France and Switzerland. Prior to this, the first airport of Basel – predecessor to today's international EuroAirport – opened in 1920 in the municipality of Birsfelden. It quickly became apparent, however, that this site was unsuitable as the location did not offer the potential for expansion, and in the 1930s plans for a joint Swiss-French airport started. In 1946 it was agreed a new airport would be built at Blotzheim, 4 kilometers north of Basel. France was to provide the land, the Swiss the construction costs. To avoid the Swiss having to pass through French border controls, a unique sealed link road (*Zollfreistrasse*) connects Basel to the departure terminal. Indeed, prior to Switzerland joining the Schengen Treaty in March 2009, the airport building was split in two. Today the airport continues to operate with an agreement whereby the three countries have access to the airport without customs or border restrictions, and a board comprising eight members from each country. What this clearly demonstrates is inherited forms of state spatial organization do not always have to be a preventative barrier for progressive and successful trans-regional policies.

Concluding comments

This paper set out to explore recent endeavours to construct a new spatial mapping of the German space economy according to the need to think state/space relationally, emphasise 'spaces of flows', and privilege the role of cities therein. The broad context for this is that while it is now some time since Storper's (1995) highly prescient statements about the significance of the region to the organization of economic and social life originally featured in this journal, the intervening period has seen accounts purporting the emergence of a distinctly *new* 'regional world' underpinned by a relational ontology of flow, network and connectivity. This is clearly reflected in the discourse of metropolitan regions and new spatial mappings which have emerged in Germany over the same period. But despite bearing all the hallmarks of what many believe to represent the brave new world of relational and unbound regions/regionalism, our research reaffirms how these new regional configurations are not serving to replace inherited landscapes of territorially-embedded state scalar organisation but emerge alongside, in Germany's case the Länder, to form distinct 'regional worlds' (Jones and Paasi, 2012). Derived from this, what our research also reveals about the emerging new regional or city-regional world is the challenge of presenting 'territorially embedded' and 'relational and unbound' conceptions of regions as complementary alternatives from both a discursive and spatial perspective. In offering some brief concluding comments we focus on one particular aspect of this challenge which we believe can further deepen our understanding of the emerging new regional world and provide an outlook on where further investigation is required.

At the heart of our analysis has been the recognition that different constructions of the city-region concept are being captured and employed in different ways, in different places, and at different times to respond to the challenges posed by the emerging new regional world. Unlike the

'regional world' vision of a decentralised Europe of the Regions comprising tessellated NUTS II administrative regions, the new regional world showcased in the *Leitbilder* is one not reduced to a single uniform spatial representation but one requiring multiple spatial representations of a single concept – the city-region. For sure the starting point was to construct new regional spaces according to a single representation, that of city-regions as dense agglomerations, in accordance with the growing new city-regionalist orthodoxy and the pressure on policy elites to make Germany's major urban regions attractive to transnational capital within a horizontal urban system lacking an a priori global city. But over time new representations of the city-region concept were constructed in the face of the challenge to overcome the many contradictions resulting from these new regional spaces emerging alongside the Länder.

In many ways what makes Germany such a pertinent example to showcase the challenge of presenting 'relational and unbound' and 'territorially embedded' conceptions of regions as complementary alternatives is the major contradiction which exists in reunified Germany between the longstanding principled commitment to promote equalised living conditions (a goal to be achieved through financial equalization between *Länder*) while at the same time promoting the superior strategic importance of eleven European Metropolitan Regions. Against this backdrop, growing disquiet from those areas excluded by, or on the fringes of, this new spatial mapping of regional space placed increasing pressure on Federal Government and federal state ministers responsible for spatial planning. Their response, to capture the scale model (ensuring territorial inclusivity of all areas) and the hub and spokes model (integrating areas previously isolated from the brave new regional world of flow, network and relational connectivity), is revealing in that it presupposes city-regions taking various forms can be configured together across space in a coherent way. What we distil from this is future investigation of the emerging new regional world needs not only account for the extent to which 'relational and unbound' and 'territorial embedded'

conceptions of regions are complementary, contradictory, overlapping or competing in any given

space-time, but we would argue, these different conceptions of city regions also.

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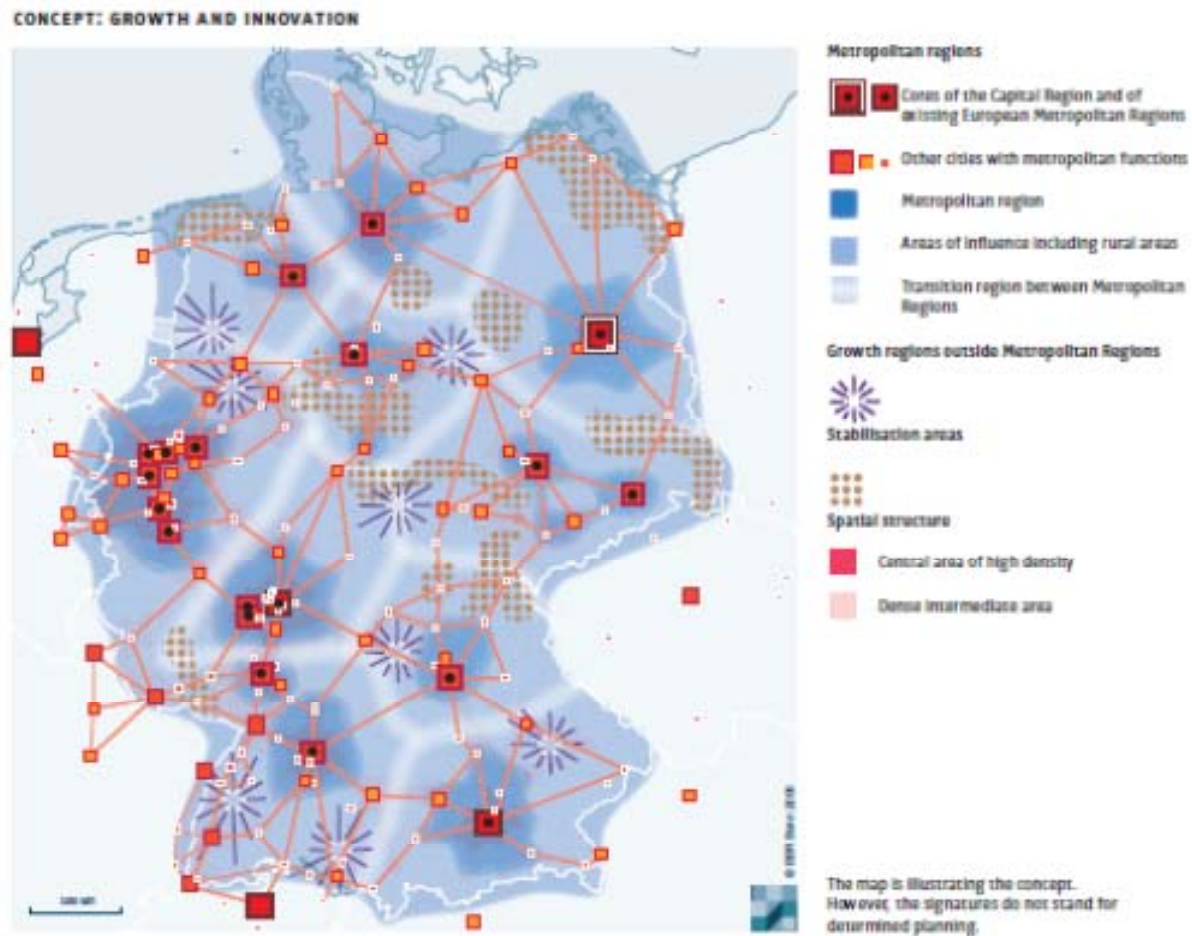Jones M, Paasi A (2012) Regional World(s). *Regional Studies*

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Figure 1. Concept: Growth and Innovation (BMBVS/BBR, 2006: 13)

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[i] Deas and Lord (2006) identify 146 such regions in their analysis, though this figure is likely to be much higher today.

[ii] A similar debate is currently taking place around cities (see McCann and Ward, 2010).

[iii] Post-unification the donor-recipient dynamic radically altered with Saxony, Berlin, Saxon-Anhalt, Brandenberg, Thuringia and Mecklenbuurg-Vorpommern the major recipients of financial equalisation.

[iv] This is not to say promoting balanced economic growth is no longer an official aim of the federal state, it is. More it is saying this discourse which had been dominant through much of the twentieth century was overshadowed in the 1990s by the perceived economic necessity for positioning Germany's major cities and regions within European and global circuits of capital accumulation.

[v] In many ways unique to Rhine-Neckar in the German context, it is nevertheless consistent with events in another region known well to one of the authors – North West England. With local attempts to break the spiral of (economic) decline exhausted, a coalition of instrumental actors came together in recognition that adopting an insular and

parochial outlook was a major hindrance to economic recovery. This saw the establishment of a North West Business Leadership Team in 1990, followed in 1992 by the creation of the Northwest Regional Association – a regionally representative body charged with formulating a strategic framework for enabling the region's economic recovery (Burch and Holliday, 1993).

[vi] BASF is a German chemical company. It is the largest chemical company in the world and has its main headquarters in Ludwigshafen, Rhine-Neckar.

[vii] This was symptomatic of a broader trend across Europe. In England, for instance, the Core Cities Group (http://www.corecities.com) formed in 1995 to similarly represent and increase the profile of England's eight leading regional cities. In Germany, it took until 2001 for the Initiative of Metropolitan Regions in Germany (Initiativkreises Europäische Metropolregionen in Deutschland) to be formed (http://www.deutsche-metropolregionen.org).