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Research Report

Metropolitan Regions - Innovation, Competition, Capacity for Action

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No. 71

Metropolitan Regions – Innovation, Competition, Capacity for Action



IRS *Institute for
Regional Development
and Structural Planning*

Hanover 2007





Position Paper from the ARL

No. 71

Metropolitan Regions – Innovation, Competition, Capacity for Action

Findings of the Joint Working Group

Academy for Spatial Research and Planning (ARL, Hanover)

German Institute of Urban Affairs (difu, Berlin)

Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development, Building and Construction of the
Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia (ILS NRW, Dortmund)

Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning (IRS, Erkner)

Hanover 2007

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Metropolitan Regions – Innovation, Competition, Capacity for Action

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1 Spatial development and metropolitan regions

- *Globalisation and spatial changes*: For some time now changes to cities and states have been observable which are closely related to the latest phase of globalisation, which has been in evidence since the mid-1970s. Cities (as well as states) play a key role here: not only do they represent the critical locations at which economic and social change unfolds, but they are also important “actors” behind these changes.

From the spatial perspective, change is manifested most particularly in the facts that

- potential for economic development and capacities for innovation develop particularly in metropolises and/or in metropolitan regions,
- the national hierarchy of cities and the spatial division of labour within the economy is overlaid by a global division of labour, with the consequence that new hierarchies of urban centres emerge on a global scale,
- as a result of these related trends, new disparities between regions emerge, or existing disparities are amplified,
- calls are heard for new institutional structures (“metropolitan governance”).

These four manifestations will be explored at greater depth below.

The metropolitanisation of potential for economic development and capacities for innovation

- *Spatial concentration of economic activities*: Research-intensive industries and knowledge-based services are becoming increasingly concentrated in metropolitan areas. Above all in such areas, innovative companies find opportunities to establish contacts and access information, and to reduce risks. These areas also offer access to specialised resources and employees, as well as to specific routines, traditions, values and other local institutions.
- *Metropolitan regions as complex locations*: Metropolitan regions are characterised by a high degree of economic, social and cultural complexity. On the one hand, they represent places to live and to do business which are marked by multiple functional interconnections and linkages, and by production systems shaped by a division of

labour. On the other hand, they form the nodes of overlapping and interlocking trade and production networks, finance flows, as well as political, cultural and social networks.

Global division of labour and hierarchies of urban regions

- *New division of labour among cities:* City or metropolitan regions form part of a newly emerging international system based on a division of labour for competition on a global scale. Such changes as the spatial decentralisation of production or international connections affecting finance flows and within the knowledge-intensive services sector give rise to new forms of concentration. This leads, on the one hand, to the emergence of a vertically ranked hierarchy of globalised city-regions; at the same time, the relationship between spatial decentralisation and territorial concentration alters the position of peripheral locations in the newly emerging spatial structure.
- *Metropolitan regions as polycentric spaces:* Through their catchment areas, metropolitan regions link together a number of distinct localities to form one multi-faceted, polycentric spatial pattern. In morphological terms, two structures can be identified:
 - Metropolitan regions with one dominant urban core and a number of smaller, neighbouring municipal centres (London/South East England, Paris/Ile de France)
 - Metropolitan regions comprising several cities in close proximity to each other (within daily commuting distance), containing larger centres with no significant differences in terms of population size and economic significance (Rhine-Ruhr, Randstad Holland).

It is important to recognise these two distinct morphological patterns as they can be expected to exert an influence on the social, economic and political relations which exist within the metropolitan regions.

New spatial disparities

- *Co-occurrence of growth and shrinkage:* The changes described above bring the relationship between centres and their peripheries into even sharper relief. An already unbalanced spatial development is reinforced and a situation emerges where regions characterised by growth, stagnation and shrinkage exist alongside each other. Highly-skilled employment, high-value infrastructure, investment, etc. become increasingly concentrated in the larger metropolitan regions. At the same time, these regions specialise with regard to the global and European division of labour and forge links with other dynamic metropolitan regions. By contrast, the links between metropolitan regions and their immediate hinterlands and surrounding areas – as well as to other regions with structural weaknesses – may well decline, resulting in these areas becoming disconnected from economic development.

Metropolitan regions and institutional changes

- *Institutional changes:* It is not solely the role of metropolitan areas as the hubs of economic development that is affected by changes in spatial patterns, but also the level of institutional action within the state hierarchy. State powers are not only being devolved to the European and trans-national levels, but also to newly constituted tiers of metropolitan-regional governance. The increase in the importance of

regions is now raising new demands with regard to the organisational structures to serve metropolitan regions (“metropolitan governance”).

2 Defining “metropolitan regions”

- *“Metropolitan region” is not a clearly defined concept:* In Germany, and indeed throughout Europe, the term “metropolitan region” is used to describe areas characterised by a concentration of population and of economic, political and cultural activities. It is important to maintain a fundamental distinction between metropolitan regions in an analytical sense (also referred to as “metropolitan spaces”), and metropolitan regions in a normative sense. As social spaces, metropolitan regions are characterised by the following four dimensions:
 - In analytical terms, metropolitan regions are defined as an accumulation of metropolitan facilities.
 - In terms of actors and actions, metropolitan regions constitute a space for exchange on the part of key regional stakeholders on joint regional objectives, strategies and projects, as well as on the necessary organisational structures.
 - In the context of spatial development, metropolitan regions are seen as a normative guiding vision intended to contribute to supporting innovation and economic growth.
 - With regard to the symbolic dimension of urban and regional development, metropolitan regions are the bearers of signs which convey associations of the metropolis and of urbanity.
- *Metropolitan regions as a sub-set of city regions/regions of cities:* Metropolitan regions or spaces do not represent a new spatial category which is amenable to precise definition. They are rather a sub-set of “city regions” or “regions of cities”, which have recently come to occupy a special position in the wake of the changes outlined above.

Excursus: Metropolitan regions – Global Cities – World Cities

All cities (or city regions) are undergoing globalisation. However, they adopt different positions within the global system of cities. Whereas the demographic tradition in research on cities has been to concentrate on population size and density in megacities, the functional tradition has focused on the role of world cities, global cities or metropolitan regions within the world economy. With the goal of comparing cities and city regions on the basis of the scope they have to exert economic and geopolitical influence, and on this basis establishing a hierarchy, the focus has been on

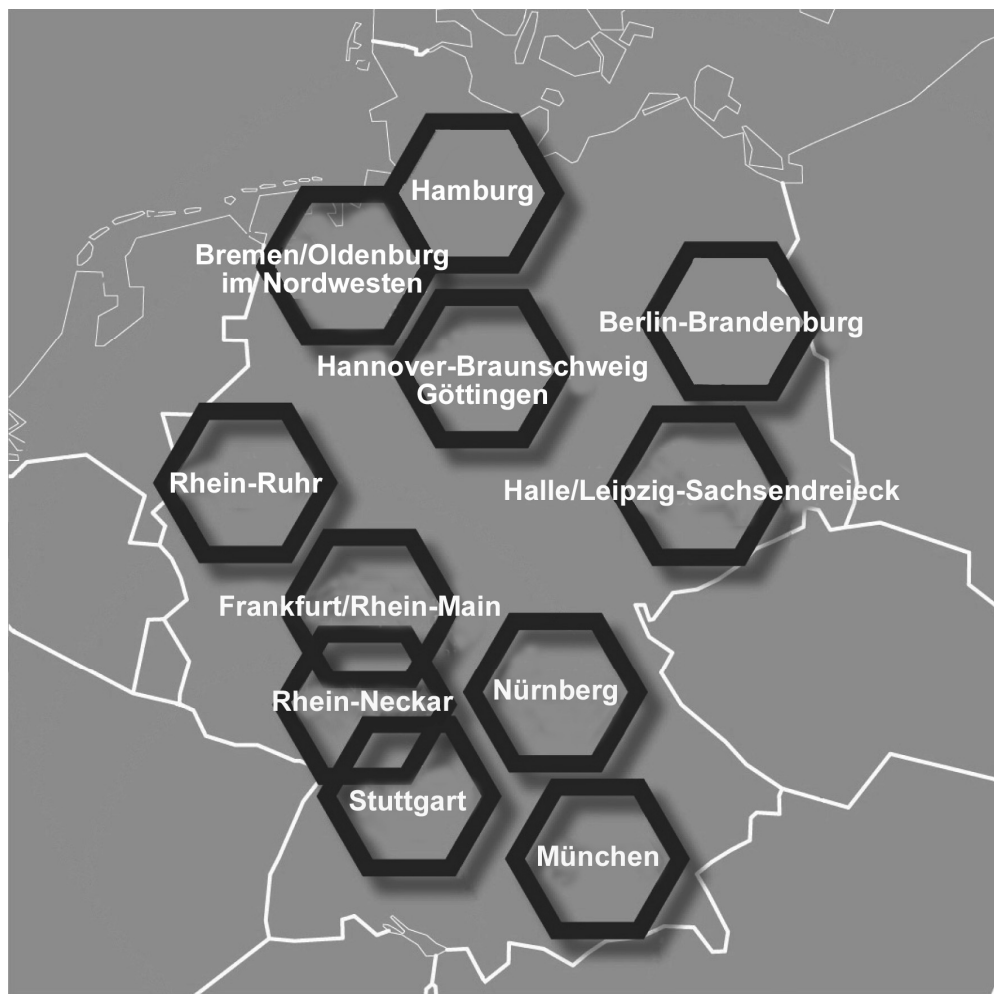
- identifying world cities as the controlling centres of the global flow of capital,
- describing metropolitan regions on the basis of an array of metropolitan functions, and
- global cities or global city-regions as control centres and centres for the creation and marketing of business-centred, knowledge-intensive services, and
- drawing on the linkages between knowledge-intensive services as an indicator for the analysis of the position a city holds within the world-city network.

■ Metropolitan Regions

- *In the analytical sense, metropolitan regions or spaces, as high-density locations, take on hub functions within the global network of goods, capital, information and migration flows. They form a hinge between this global network and locally embedded economic and social activities. For the purposes of demarcating these regions from other area types, spatial planning has hitherto referred to three functions which characterise the contributions which metropolitan regions make in the context of globalisation. These are:*
 - *the innovation and competition function,*
 - *the decision-making and control function, and*
 - *the gateway function.*

To these functions should be added the *symbol function*. Metropolitan regions are centres of symbolic production, which may be represented by their symbol function. The symbol function focuses not so much on culture and media industries, but rather on the creation and dissemination of signs, models, fashions and other norms and values. Metropolitan regions shape patterns of perception by dint of the fact that fashions and lifestyle trends are created (or discourses set in motion) by actors based within the metropolitan region.

Fig. 1: Metropolitan regions in Germany (2006)



Source: Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning 2006

- *Metropolitan regions as a normative objective:* In European countries metropolitan regions are increasingly being defined as normative objectives within spatial-development policy. This is intended to stimulate self-organisation at the regional level with the goal of strengthening international competitiveness at the national level, as well as contributing to national growth and enhancing the international image of the country concerned.
- In Germany it was in the 1995 Action Framework for Spatial Planning Policy that metropolitan regions were first designated. The main concern here was to reinforce both the internal process of unification in Germany and the process of European union. Since then the Standing Conference of state ministers with responsibility for spatial planning has recognised the following metropolitan regions: Berlin-Brandenburg, Bremen-Oldenburg in the north-west, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, Hamburg, Hanover-Brunswick-Göttingen, Munich, Nuremberg, Rhine-Neckar, Rhine-Ruhr, the Saxony Triangle and Stuttgart. This acknowledges the fact that in Germany – and unlike the situation in countries with a more mono-centric system of cities – metropolitan functions are distributed among a number of metropolitan regions. However, this gives little recognition to the division of metropolitan functions which has emerged between the metropolitan regions, and in particular between Berlin-Brandenburg, Hamburg, Rhine-Ruhr, Rhine-Main, Stuttgart and Munich.

3 The Performance of metropolitan regions

Preliminary remarks on the efficiency of metropolitan regions

- *Aspects of performance :* As metropolitan regions gain in importance as an analytical and normative category, particular attention has to be paid to the issue of how successful they are. In this context, performance has two aspects: current performance, and perspectives for development, i.e. development potentials and the ability to exploit them. Given their global connectedness and the way in which they manifest the four metropolitan functions, the nature of metropolitan regions is such that any analysis of their performance has to be undertaken in terms of these two aspects.
- *Challenges of sustainable development:* Here metropolitan regions face the same challenges as cities and city regions in general. The core task for any city and region is to achieve sustainable development, while maintaining a balance between the concomitant economic, social and ecological objectives. As they undertake activities to promote efficiency at the metropolitan level, metropolitan regions must strive to ensure that they maintain the balance which is critical for sustainable development. This applies equally in the case of metropolitan regions with an international outlook: here too social cohesion and ecological stability are key qualities for sustainable development.
- *Limits to performance:* To some extent, metropolitan regions come up against the same limits to efficiency as major cities and city regions in general. Their scope for action – and thus also development perspectives – are curtailed by demographic changes, the segregation within the population, and, to some extent, by dramatic squeezes on budgets.
- *Involvement in global networks:* Robust data on the magnitude of cross-border flows of goods, capital, information and people is both scarce and scattered – in contrast to the wealth of information on metropolitan functions. From theoretical discussions it is, however, possible to conclude that metropolitan regions can be ad-

judged to be all the more efficient, the more tightly and successfully they are bound up in global networks.

Metropolitan functions and performance

- *Consolidating strengths in metropolitan functions:* In the context of involvement in international networks, the four functions – decision-making and control function; innovation and competition function; gateway function; symbol function – are key domains for metropolitan regions in preserving and developing their performance.
- *Decision-making and control function:* As far as the decision-making and control function of metropolitan regions is concerned, the main focus is to ensure the presence of those centres which can steer international activity in business and politics. In the global competition between economic locations, these centres endow the region with influence and provide the necessary networks. Decisions taken in the past and specific conditions affecting business locations have given rise to the current distribution of decision-making and control functions. Given the importance attached to physical proximity, self-reinforcing processes can be expected to be launched when the number of control centres in a metropolitan region reaches a certain critical mass.
- *Innovation and competition function:* The situation is similar with regard to the innovation and competition function. The greater the importance which comes to be attached to the knowledge economy, the greater is the competitive edge enjoyed by metropolitan regions – and which they will seek to exploit – as preferred locations to serve customers both nationally and globally. Increasing efficiency means, among other things, enhancing the appeal of locations to knowledge bearers, knowledge producers and to creative individuals. Especially in the knowledge sector, it is important not to underestimate the risk of a “brain drain” and the loss of highly qualified workers.
- *Gateway function:* The gateway function is by far the most important one when it comes to binding metropolitan regions into international and global flows; this makes this function a particularly critical aspect of efficiency. This function is concerned with the efficiency of various types of infrastructure (primarily with transport nodes), but also with the ability of a metropolitan region to function as a “gateway to the world” with regard to the exchange of, and access to, services, information, knowledge, ideas and opinions. Metropolitan regions are the main entry and exit points for migration; they are thus places where the most diverse cultures and life-styles come into contact with each other. Just how productive this contact is, and how productively it can be harnessed for the region’s development, is one further important indicator of the efficiency of metropolitan regions.
- *Symbol function:* In the final analysis, the efficiency of metropolitan regions is also measured by the extent to which they manage to be the sources of sign and symbol production. This function is concerned less with the trend towards essentially interchangeable festivals and event architecture, but rather with a credible and unmistakable sense of uniqueness and magnetism on the international stage. This flourishes in specific milieus shaped, on the one hand, by the nodal function of metropolitan regions in global networks, but also by the specific traditions, experiences and resources brought to bear by regional actors. In the international competition among business locations, these metropolitan images (“spatial brands”) are all the stronger, the more they are based in equal measure on economic, socio-cultural, spatial/phy-

sical and historical components, and the more they are “lived” and borne by people in the region (creative individuals, “ambassadors”, etc.).

- *Symbolic content of the metropolitan region as a promise:* The symbolic content of the concept of the metropolitan regions harbours two aspects which are capable of posing a threat to performance. Firstly, the promise of “metropolitan quality” can turn out to be something of a (negative) “mortgage” if a number of the metropolitan regions in Germany are hardly able to keep this promise. In this case, both the spatial category “metropolitan region” itself as well as individual, less successful regions could then lose credibility among their most important addressees, namely those who make decisions on business locations and highly qualified, internationally mobile professionals. Secondly, this concept contains the promise of both metropolitan quality *and* regionality, which means that the qualities of the core city need to be productively combined with those of the surrounding area. Based on the current state of knowledge, this has to date been successful only to a limited extent. This risk here is that people are particularly aware of the metropolis, but that the concept of a metropolitan region is seen as having little credibility.

Specific framework conditions for metropolitan regions

- *Framework conditions and their influence on performance:* There are some framework conditions which are of special significance for the efficiency of metropolitan regions. Compared with urban regions in a more general sense, these conditions are either particularly important with regard to metropolitan regions, or equally they may manifest themselves in a very specific way. Three of these will be discussed below: strategic control, or more generally the development of metropolitan governance; conditions supporting a location as a place to do business; and segregation effects.
- *Requirements of metropolitan governance:* Since metropolitan regions are characterised, on the one hand, by their high degree of international linkages, but also by diversity and disparities within the region, the requirements with regard to their capacity for self-government are particularly high. It is vital to think about democratically legitimated and functionally effective structures and forms of organisation (organisation design and processes), and equally about information and management systems to support the delivery of tasks. It is also essential to create greater problem awareness for joint action at the level of the metropolitan region involving actors from the political sphere, from business (both locally and internationally oriented), and from civil society. With regard to its external representation, the challenge for metropolitan regions is to perform competently and with commitment in global networks.
- *Strategic orientation of metropolitan governance:* In the case of broadly based measures associated with regional marketing, internal control, aiming at a strategy which bestows advantages on as many actors as possible (“win/win”), is relatively unproblematic. However, in the case of, for example, more concrete infrastructure projects, the objective of creating a stronger external profile is more likely to lead to a heightening of inner-regional conflicts over distribution since highly visible flagship projects automatically imply an unequal spatial distribution of costs and burdens. At the same time, growth-oriented policy fields and measures geared to enhancing the international profile are in competition with more internally focused policy areas concerned more with social-spatial issues and maintaining the existing

provision. Reaching an understanding on this matter is one particular challenge for “metropolitan governance”.

- *Creative class and tolerance*: Openness to the world is a key prerequisite for the development of strong metropolitan regions. Particularly for the international class of creative individuals, for highly qualified professionals and the international business class – the so-called “nomads” of the information society –, but also for less qualified migrants, diversity and tolerance are key factors affecting the appeal of a region as a place to live and to do business in. Only when they are present is it possible to exploit the potential provided by the diversity of life-styles, knowledge, nationalities and cultures. To these should be added those other “soft locational factors” such as the quality of educational and scientific facilities, housing and quality of life, the life/work (or family/work) balance, as well as scope for cultural, leisure and recreational pursuits.
- *Migration and segregation*: As important as the international migration of both highly- and less highly-skilled workers is for the efficiency of metropolitan regions, it is vital that there should be a critical discussion of the effects associated with migration. This is particularly important in the case of those migrants whose qualifications are not recognised or put to use, and in the case of irregular immigration. The formation of ethnic colonies can pose serious risks if they have no real stake in society and in the economy. Spatial, social and economic segregation within the population can lead to the creation of parallel societies, which in turn diminishes both the efficiency and quality of life in metropolitan regions.

Division of labour

- *Division of labour among metropolitan regions*: Germany’s metropolitan regions are capable only to a very limited extent of competing with the world’s major metropolitan regions. One reason for this is to be found in the very different ways in which systems of cities have developed. Centralised systems – such as those found in Great Britain and in France – contrast with the decentralised system of cities in Germany. In Germany there is good reason to persist with the current division of labour among major cities or metropolitan regions, i. e. division with competition. This is the only way of ensuring that metropolitan regions concentrate on specific functions and are thus able to compete with major metropolises on a global scale. This calls for increased effort to be put into establishing distinct profiles and both for national competition among metropolitan regions and for strategic alliances and co-operation.

Measuring performance

- *Need for Data*: As has already been alluded to, there is very little solid scientific data available on the performance of metropolitan regions. To a limited extent it is possible to measure the current state of metropolises and metropolitan regions against a fairly rough benchmark with regard to the degree to which the metropolitan functions are discharged (not including the symbol function). This reveals that at most three or four metropolitan regions in Germany make it into the top category. As far as international links are concerned (not only transport links), data is scarce and comes from quite diverse sources, often referring to different points in time, based on different spatial units, and in most cases with only partial coverage. Similarly, data on subjective impressions on the part of “target groups” and also assess-

ments of the qualities of metropolitan regions as business locations are at best patchy.

- *Comparative studies and benchmarks:* On consulting the most recent studies and benchmarks which take account of data on economic efficiency and dynamism, it becomes apparent that today's metropolitan regions encompass the entire spectrum from pioneer to laggard regions. This demonstrates that we are dealing initially with a normative concept, i.e. with programmatic statements on a desired future. They are at any rate not yet the "engines of social, economic, social and cultural development" (following the definition of the Standing Conference of state ministers with responsibility for spatial planning). Equally, approaches adopted in economic theory provide no basis for deriving any patterns capable of accounting for a more positive development on the part of metropolitan regions compared with other city regions. Since not all metropolitan regions are growth areas, and not all growth areas are metropolitan regions, it remains necessary to identify empirically the critical factors affecting the efficiency of metropolitan regions.

4 Recommendations

... for stakeholders in municipal and regional politics

- *Promoting metropolitan functions:* The four metropolitan functions – decision-making and control function; innovation and competition function; gateway function; symbol function – are currently regarded by scholars as the critical variables. For the performance of each metropolitan region, it is therefore one important requirement that they should reinforce these functions. However, this should not be at the cost of neglecting ecological and social aspects of urban and regional development: all three dimensions of sustainability must be strengthened in equal measure. This is implicit in demands for social cohesion and for enhanced quality of life. One key and necessary condition for this is to revive and broaden the discussion on cities as social spaces (and not just as business locations).
- *Co-operation between core cities and their hinterlands:* The concept of metropolitan regions provides the core cities and their hinterlands with the opportunity to look again at the relationship between them. The surrounding municipalities in particular should recognise that the core cities hold the key to shaping the way the entire region is viewed internationally. Metropolitan regions can also contribute to enhancing the status attached to the cultural diversity found in cities in the minds of those who live in the surrounding areas. However, the metropolitan regions should also acknowledge the important contribution made by the surrounding area to both the attractiveness and the performance of metropolitan regions, and thus recognise the neighbouring municipalities as equal partners. The surrounding areas, for example, perform both a counterweight and a protective function, or they provide opportunities for tourism, leisure and relaxation. At the same time, however, the rural sections of metropolitan regions should pursue their endogenous development building on their particular strengths.
- *Participation in networks:* Metropolitan regions can enhance their efficiency by playing their part in international networks, or by further developing these contacts. Networks include both cross-border relations with neighbouring metropolitan regions, and supra-regional networks of metropolitan regions, e. g. within Europe or globally. Metropolitan regions should make use of inward migration as a resource for greater networking, and in the context of integration policy they should strive to achieve the qualities of diversity and tolerance.

- *Recognising the specific characteristics of metropolitan regions:* Strategies and activities in metropolitan regions need to be based on an individual view of the particular region concerned. Academic research does not provide a basis for making universal recommendations for action as all action has to proceed from an analysis of the specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified in the region.

... for stakeholders at the federal level of spatial planning

- *Sustainable metropolitan regions:* Metropolitan regions complement the concepts and instruments of spatial planning in the area of development functions. However, employing this concept should not call into question the existing instruments to secure balanced development and provision (comprehensive, federal-level spatial planning). The development of metropolitan regions should take its orientation from the vision and component objectives of sustainable development. A spatial-development policy for metropolitan regions with a predominantly economic orientation, based on the metropolitan function introduced above, would fail to take sufficient account of the complexity of spatial development.
- *Strengthening metropolitan functions:* Metropolitan functions are particularly important for the performance – and hence also the competitiveness – of German metropolitan regions. Federal policy should recognise these metropolitan functions in state plans and measures and thus contribute to enhancing the performance of metropolitan regions. In the context of strengthening these metropolitan functions, the policy areas which are most relevant are transport policy, technology and innovation policy, science policy, integration policies and the various fields of the knowledge economy.
- *Supplementing metropolitan functions:* Up to now metropolitan regions have been associated with delivery of decision-making and control functions, innovation and competition functions and gateway functions. Metropolitan regions are, however, also centres for the production of symbols, which can be represented by the symbol function. The symbol function refers to the creation and dissemination of signs, models and fashions, as well as norms and values.
- *Creating a competitive framework:* Spatial-development policy should define a competitive framework for competition between metropolitan regions and in this way promote the creation of distinct profiles, the division of labour, and strategic networking among metropolitan regions. This would make it possible to promote the specific strengths of regions, and it would be a point of reference for strategy and investment decisions, including those taken at the federal and European levels. This would appear necessary to enable Germany's metropolitan regions to assert themselves in international competition and to develop the corresponding locational qualities.
- *Support for metropolitan regions:* There should be federal support for activities which have the effect of strengthening the internal efficiency of metropolitan regions and removing impediments to development. This does not require the creation of a new category of development support, but rather the co-ordination of infrastructure investment and of assistance programmes in the various policy areas affected. Given the decentralised system of cities in place in Germany, state measures should in particular be directed towards helping the weaker metropolitan regions to catch up.

- *Strategies for spatial development throughout Germany:* The concept of metropolitan regions, and the reorganisation of the global and national system of cities associated with globalisation, confronts comprehensive, federal-level spatial-planning policy with the question as to the type of sustainable spatial structure it should strive to bring about. This is particularly evident in the intertwining nature of discussions on metropolitan regions and the guiding concept for public policy in Germany of securing equivalent living conditions throughout the national territory. From the scientific point of view, there is no particular reason for linking metropolitan regions and the objectives associated with balanced development. In the guidance on *Visions and Strategies for Action in Spatial Development*, reference is made in connection with approaches to action to metropolitan networks and to regional “associations of responsibility”. It also states that attention should be given to growth regions located far away from major cities, which should pursue their own strategies independently of the concept of metropolitan regions. In the case of medium-sized towns or cities and rural areas which do not (or cannot) expect to gain any advantage from co-operation and have little potential for endogenous growth, the vision of balanced development throughout the national territory remains important. Thus, Germany’s polycentric spatial structure calls for a variety of strategies which take account of the specific needs of each region. These must be based on the notions of spatial equity as negotiated by society at large.

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