

Transformation in cities and regions: current themes in Germany and France - three significant points of discussion

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TRANSFORMATION IN CITIES AND REGIONS: CURRENT THEMES IN GERMANY AND FRANCE – THREE SIGNIFICANT POINTS OF DISCUSSION

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Abstract

This chapter concentrates on institutional differences in France and Germany. The stability of the German institutional setting contrasts with the series of institutional reforms that have stretched over decades or even half a century in France. While in Germany transformation has taken the form of successive adaptations, in France the diverse reforms have been hotly debated and sometimes even contested. Often the metropolises and regions form the focus of such discussions in France. These contrasts between stability and change can also be seen in both spatial planning systems and the position of the highest level of territorial authority (*régions* in France and *Länder* in Germany). Starting from the national policy guidelines in both countries, the authors describe different territorial units, their areas of responsibility and their manifold planning instruments. They also address processes of democratisation, participation and metropolisation, the role of the European Union and various crises as drivers of the development of both systems.

Keywords

Policy guidelines – territorial units – planning instruments – drivers of change – role of EU

1 Why did we choose the given structure?

If, as set out in the Preface, the German-French cooperation for this book project concentrates on the situation and development of cities and municipalities and on aspects of the urban system in the two countries, then this is because:

- > Cities and towns are subject to far-reaching processes of transformation,
- > Urban-rural relations are changing,

- > The development of cities and urban regions is also most significant for cross-border spatial development,
- > The potentials of urban areas are being reassessed in the context of differentiated demographic processes, changing lifestyles, digitalisation and new forms of mobility,
- > It is important to re-evaluate and seek approaches to sustainable development in the light of current challenges (climate change, the conservation of natural resources, pandemics, etc.).

In both countries, there is great pressure to change and adapt towards new forms of urbanity and to conceive new strategic approaches for the management of development in cities and urban regions. With limited public finances and the need for economic efficiency, the focus is not only on the conservation and further development of urban infrastructures but also increasingly on the competitiveness and innovative capacity of urban structures. Of course, not all types of urban areas are equally affected by these issues: a distinction must be made between metropolises and metropolitan regions on the one hand and small and medium-sized towns on the other hand, viewed in both cases in the context of the national urban systems. The book aims to do justice to this objective.

Although all those involved in this collective endeavour had ambitious goals, it proved impossible to address all the topics relevant to the spatial development of urban and rural areas. A decision was therefore made to concentrate on a number of important topical themes which are undoubtedly relevant in both countries in different ways and could be significant for a comparison. The focus is thus on issues related to metropolises, small and medium-sized towns and particularly current issues of urbanity, sustainability, Smart Cities, transport and mobility, and the role of cross-border urban development, the latter being a topic that especially affects the German-French border regions. The following chapters are conceived in these terms. They not only take a scientific and theoretical approach but also consider the practical planning perspective and methodological aspects of the topic at hand. Three factors should be emphasised here:

- 1 The urban systems and their processes of transformation are embedded in different institutional parameters as Germany and France have very different institutional systems: one federal, the other unitary. Against this background, the current challenges also promote discussion about adaptabilities, about forward-looking administrative structures and services, and about the future orientation and role of urban development policies in both countries. The comparison allows the advantages and limitations of the two models to be reassessed at a time of considerable change, especially in France.
- 2 The urban systems of both countries are subject to rapid change. However, the processes of transformation are occurring in different national urban systems. They are each characterised by their own development paths and historical

constants. In the context of these different models (the strong primacy of Paris within France, the more balanced network of cities in Germany), a comparison allows an analysis of the reaction of both systems to change. On the one hand, there is dynamic metropolitan development, and, on the other hand, small and medium-sized towns are following a great range of development paths that vary between stagnation and growth.

- 3 Cities and urban regions in both countries are confronted by new challenges, whether in relation to sustainable development, technological innovations in urban development (Smart Cities), issues related to transport or cross-border development. The comparison allows us to understand how these new challenges are addressed on both sides of the Rhine.

The book is structured around these three points of discussion, although the various chapters aim to provide answers to questions that arise through a comparison of experience in the two countries.

2 Differences in the institutional systems

In contrast to the German federal system which is founded on the *Grundgesetz* (GG – Basic Law) that was adopted after the Second World War, France has adhered to the model of a centralised unitary state. Although the country has not been spared radical change, it has remained stable for more than two centuries. Nonetheless, in the Fifth Republic attempts are being made to advance a still incomplete process of decentralisation. Although the administration is perceived as somewhat rigid, this reveals a certain will to change under the terms of Presidents Sarkozy, Hollande and Macron (Demazière/Sykes 2021).

The stability of the German institutional setting contrasts with the sequence of institutional reforms that have stretched over decades or even half a century in France. The primary consequence of these transformations has been the establishment of local and regional territorial authorities and administrations to implement all the reforms. Since the 2000s the pace of reform has even increased. While in Germany transformation has taken the form of successive adaptations, in France the diverse reforms have been hotly debated and sometimes even contested. The mantra used to justify reform in France often refers to simplification, but in light of the proliferation of administrative levels it seems doubtful that this has been achieved. In particular, the financing modalities remain as complex as ever.

A striving for simplification is not the only motivation for the reforms and changes put forward by the two countries. Factors like economic efficiency, austerity and competitiveness are also often cited and linked to issues like diminished reaction capabilities, flexibility and a lack of innovative ability. In the wake of their administrative reorganisation, the metropolises and regions are the focus of such discussions in France. Size is viewed as the equivalent of power, although it is often overlooked that the power of an organisation is expressed primarily through its efficiency and not

through its size. The French *régions* (regions) envy the German *Länder* (federal states) because despite the latest reform, which increased their size, the *régions* still suffer from a lack of finance and competences and thus cannot match the power of the German federal states.

These differences can also be seen in the spatial planning systems of the two countries and the position of the higher level of territorial authority (*régions* in France and *Länder* in Germany). As the above discussion suggests, the historical roots of France's spatial planning system mean that the central state plays a key role. From a planning perspective, the decentralisation reforms of recent decades have led to a moderate redistribution of spatial development competences and to the introduction of new planning instruments. The *régions* and sub-regional, intermunicipal cooperations have undoubtedly profited from this (see for a summary Grabski-Kieron et al. 2013). However, understandings of the state and planning continue to be based on the role of an active and regulative state. Spatial planning as *aménagement du territoire* has its modern roots in the time after the Second World War and is basically understood as the planning and coordination of state activities that have a spatial impact. In this sense there is no clear division between cross-cutting spatial planning and specialist sectoral planning, in contrast to German planning law which distinguishes fundamentally between these two. French spatial planning follows the basic idea of *cohésion nationale* (national cohesion) and social solidarity, which is linked to the fundamental aim of equal opportunities. This is manifested in the public service mandate of the state, which is the basis of legitimation for sovereign state planning tasks (Milstein 2016). Spatial planning thus primarily focuses on security of supply and on maintaining it within functional spatial development despite changing parameters.

This understanding is fundamentally different from the guiding principle of German spatial planning, namely the creation of equivalent living conditions. The focus here is rather on balancing land-use interests and the basic idea of a facilitating state (ARL 2020). Even though France constitutionally adopted the principle of subsidiarity in 2003, the federal organisation of spatial planning in Germany means that this principle is more 'firmly' historically anchored and understood. In addition to the principle of subsidiarity, German spatial planning is also based on a second important principle, the *Gegenstromprinzip* (principle of countervailing influence), which is unknown to French spatial planning. This ensures that decisions about the preparation or amendment of plans are always based on mutual feedbacks between the levels.

In Germany, higher-ranking spatial planning is a mandatory task for the German federation and the federal states. In line with the internal administrative structures of the federal states, the planning hierarchy continues through the levels of intermediary state authorities (e.g. districts) to the municipal level. The German federation regulates the structure and functions of the German spatial planning system with the *Raumordnungsgesetz* (ROG – Spatial Planning Act). For several years the law has allowed the German federation to produce its own legally binding federal spatial plan, but to date the German federation has only made use of this option in the form of a *Bundesraumordnungsplan Hochwasser* (Federal Spatial Plan for Flooding) (BMI 2021). It is rather the case that since the 1970s the primary instruments that lay down

the principles or directions of overall spatial development in Germany have been non-binding documents containing guiding principles and objectives. These are produced by the German federation and the federal states together, in line with the principle of countervailing influence.

Since the 1990s these documents have taken the form of *Leitbilder der Raumordnung* (Guiding Principles of Spatial Planning) (MKRO, most recently 2016). They are regularly updated and adapted to changing parameters and problems (e.g. climate change, services of general interest). They thus frequently address the further development of the urban and metropolitan system. In the federal system, the German federation leaves it to the federal states to transfer these guiding principles into legally binding plans. They are incorporated into the development plans of the federal states and the regional plans for sub-areas of the federal states (regional administrative units that vary according to the administrative structure of the federal states) and implemented in federal state and regional planning through the planning legislation of the federal states. They also fundamentally reflect the obligation to subsidiarity.

Cities and municipalities are not defined as formal parts of the legal system of German spatial planning. They have self-administration rights and planning sovereignty. The *Baugesetzbuch* (BauGB – Federal Building Code) gives them their own legal planning basis. However, the aforementioned principles ensure that they are legally bound to higher-ranking administrative and planning levels in the hierarchy. This means, for instance, that the process of preparing a regional plan involves extensive negotiations between the region, federal state planning authorities, municipalities and others. All these levels can put forward their concerns in the plan preparation process.

In contrast to Germany, French spatial planning exercises influence less through formal legal plans and more through public legal contracts between the state and territorial authorities, in particular between the state and the *régions* (*contrats de plan État-région* – State-Region Plan Contracts). Agreements on objectives and transfers of finance are core elements of these governing instruments. Linked to this is a decided project orientation that gives French spatial planning a much stronger focus on implementation than the German system (Milstein 2016).

French spatial planning does not do completely without planning documents. However, they have a non-binding character and primarily provide guidance. The *régions* have *Schémas régionaux d'aménagement, de développement durable et d'égalité des territoires* (SRADDET – Regional Scheme for Planning, Sustainable Development and Territorial Equality). There are also various strategic and in some cases binding planning instruments for the metropolitan regions (especially *Schéma de cohérence territoriale*, SCoT – Scheme for Territorial Coherence). Such instruments are manifestations of intraregional cooperation and address the growing context of the urban region and its surroundings (see Demazière et al. 2022). The local level below that of the metropolises also has its own planning instruments. At the heart of the planning of small and medium-sized towns is the *Plan local d'urbanisme* (PLU – Local Urban Plan) which regulates land use and protected open-space structures and is similar in content to the *Flächennutzungsplan* (Land-use Plan) in Germany. The PLU may not

contradict the higher-ranking regional development plans and is of central importance for the municipal development of small and medium-sized towns and for intermunicipal associations in rural areas.

The transformation of planning culture that has been seen in planning in many Western democratic social systems since the 1990s has also changed planning in France and Germany, although with different intensities and speeds. Formal legal instruments and planning methods are increasingly being supplemented by cooperative approaches to planning processes where a central role is played by stakeholders, citizen participation and informal cooperative elements.

The democratisation that has been seen in the course of the transformation of planning culture began in both countries with the mobilisation of citizens. This unfolded on the level of the neighbourhood or city, ignited by environmental concerns or critical large-scale technological projects. In Stuttgart a few years ago, a civic movement seriously impeded an urban development project based around the railway station. In Nantes another collective managed to halt an airport project. At the end of the 1990s, innovative citizen groups in Freiburg/Breisgau played a significant role in the prominent urban conversion project *Vauban*, which was implemented using what were then innovative urban design techniques.

Looking back in time, this history of mobilisation in France can be viewed as a significant reason for the reforms of the institutional system: more democracy, i.e. increased participation. With the advance of reforms, new mechanisms of local democracy emerged and the local political actors themselves, especially the most innovative of them, gave the movement its own distinctive character. Over time, this 'movement' has changed planning processes in France. Thus, for example, today the aforementioned SRADDET are drawn up in broad processes of consultation with private and public stakeholders in the *régions*. However, 'governance', which describes this transformation of the governing of the social system, was introduced into German spatial planning earlier and more vigorously than in France.

In light of both countries being embedded in the European Union, it seems fair to ask what role the European project should play in the future development of this dynamic transformation. Indeed, this may be seen as a key issue for two of the countries that founded the EU. With its urban and territorial policy agenda, Europe is a stakeholder in the transformation and simultaneously provides a matrix that demands new ways of thinking and novel approaches. For example, for almost 20 years URBACT has supported reflection about urban change; INTERREG funds initiatives on cross-border cooperation; and the EFRE measures allow the *régions* and *Länder* to position themselves as interlocutors and project sponsors with the EU.

One issue concerns how these systems will develop in the future, for instance in France in the wake of the latest territorial reforms (amalgamation of *régions*, creation of metropolises: see Paris/Gustedt 2022). Will the *régions* use the options provided by intermunicipal entities to link up and reorganise (see Paris/Gustedt 2022)? In the COVID-19 pandemic, the central state has again relied on local actors and the decentralised levels of the state such as the prefects, departments and *régions*. Is this

an indication of a reorientation of public policy in favour of cities and municipalities? Will the city continue to play an important role with direct interventions like *Action cœur de ville* (City Centre Action) (see Grabski-Kieron/Boutet 2022 and Dehne et al. 2022) or with some form of remote government using calls for projects? In light of the new challenges, how should the options for urban development interventions by the German federation and federal states be evaluated? Are there ‘optimal’ or even ‘transferable’ modes of intervention that can be used elsewhere?

Despite all their differences, it should not be overlooked that urban development in the two countries must be viewed in the wider context of European spatial development and of a new territorial agenda for the European area. This leads to questions concerning the extent to which national spatial planning policies effectively contribute towards coherence in European spatial development and support the role of both countries in the ‘European house’. The challenges outlined reveal how important it is for the future to use differentiated observation to identify options for strategic development in cities and urban regions in both countries, and to use these findings to provide coordinated policy advice, thus supporting European development.

3 Transforming urban systems

In both countries the process of metropolisation has strengthened the position of the higher order centres of the central place systems in the last three decades. The development of the large metropolises has primarily followed the logic of large-scale urban development projects – from the *Hafencity* in Hamburg to the *Euroméditerranée* in Marseille. Such projects have often been implemented through private-public cooperation and have successfully strengthened the attractiveness and high-value functions of the cities involved. The establishment of fast and efficient transport links between the cities (TGV, ICE) and the extension of local public transport in the wider urban regions have helped to consolidate these structures and to further develop the functional areas of the metropolitan regions. At the same time, the process of metropolisation has been linked to spatial segregation. Neighbourhoods characterised by considerable social problems have developed on the periphery of the metropolitan areas, threatening the social equilibrium of ‘urban coexistence’. For decades, the implementation of public policy has led to very varied results, especially in France. Here it is possible to identify a trend whereby the metropolitan movement is shifting away from the historical model of ‘*Paris et le désert français*’ (‘Paris and the French desert’) (Gravier 1947), making space for a vision of a metropolitan France with a Parisian heart and supplementary metropolises (Veltz 2019) such as Lyon, Marseille and Lille. The emergence of these metropolises in cultural and economic terms has often relied on ‘great mayors’ and presidents of intermunicipal bodies who are political characters on a national scale, sometimes ex-prime ministers (Lyon, Lille, Bordeaux), reflecting the significance of the national on the local level in France.

In contrast, Germany has been faced with the challenge of reintegrating Berlin into the polycentric system of dispersed metropolises in the federal states, completing the system of metropolises and metropolitan regions in Germany (see Demazière et al. 2022). The spatial category of ‘metropolitan region’ has been the subject of discourses

on spatial planning since the 1990s. It emerged from a changing understanding of spatial development that focuses on innovation and competition and was first anchored in the new Guiding Principles for Spatial Planning of 2006 (guiding principle: Innovation and Growth) (MKRO 2006). This triggered critical debate, e.g. about the neglect of rural areas, but also led to scrutiny of previous municipal policy and paved the way towards more actor-oriented concepts of municipal and regional development. Other guiding principles built upon such aspects in later years and consolidated the system of metropolitan areas in Germany (for a summary see Aring/Sinz 2006).

These metropolitan developments were accompanied by numerous institutional transformations (see Demazière et al. 2022), from the ‘hardest’ (a series of reforms strengthening intermunicipality in France which led to the creation of metropolis status in 2010/2014) to the ‘softest’ (like the metropolitan regions in Germany, formed in 1995, or the metropolitan poles in France, from 2010/2014). The French metropolises are more or less equivalent to the 15 German large cities (see Demazière et al. 2022) or even the around 20 cities with over 300,000 inhabitants (BBSR 2018). The French metropolises are characterised by intermunicipal structures (with the exception of Lyon). The large German cities are unitary municipalities with very varied forms of governance.

In France the intermunicipal structures are very complex (with the exception of Lyon). In contrast, urban and thus metropolitan development in Germany is based on the status of cities and municipalities, which the Basic Law defines as sovereign self-administrative bodies with planning authority. Since the 1990s, however, with increasing problems in cities and their environs and changing understandings of planning (governance), diverse institutional forms of municipal and regional management (intermunicipal cooperation, regional associations, special-purpose associations) have emerged. Such innovations have not directly changed the self-administrative status of the municipalities, they rather cooperate with and supplement it (see Priebs 2019).

Below the level of the metropolises and the large cities, the medium-sized towns and cities in France and Germany (with 20,000 to 100,000 inhabitants in Germany but, for the sake of comparison, in France up to 200,000 inhabitants) present great challenges to spatial planning in both countries. The same is true of small towns in France and Germany (under 20,000 inhabitants). Comparisons of these types of towns are hindered by methodological difficulties that arise from the different definitional approaches used in the two countries (see Grabski-Kieron/Boutet 2022 and Dehne et al. 2022). The categories in Germany are more standardised; in France the boundaries between the different categories (intermunicipality, agglomeration, urban region) are less clear-cut.

Nonetheless, the challenges are similar in both countries. There is a great range of different developments among these types of towns and cities. On the one hand, continued metropolisation raises the urgent question of how to avoid the decline of these small and medium-sized towns, which form the capillary network of the national territories. On the other hand, in recent years the medium-sized towns in particular have been among the winners of demographic development and have gained sig-

nificance as commercial locations. This leads to research questions ranging from the decline of retail in town centres, to commercial attractiveness and demographic development, to the future role played by such settlements in regional development. All these topics deserve to be treated with a great degree of differentiation.

In fact, the development logic of the central place system is linked to another, namely that of regional development. Even today, when spatial development in the whole of Germany is considered, there is a significant contrast between the development of the 'old' federal states (those situated in the former Federal Republic before German reunification) and that of the 'new' federal states (in the territory of the ex-German Democratic Republic in the East), which is a considerable challenge for spatial planning. In comparison to the federal states of the former German Republic (West), the new federal states of East Germany continue to display weaker socio-economic development, and this despite the major investment efforts that have been made, also with European support. This contrast in development is reflected in demographic trends with shrinking towns and cities and indeed whole areas that require specific urban planning and regional policy answers. It must, however, be noted that the shrinking is extending into more and more regions that had previously experienced extended phases of growth. A simple east-west division is no longer as significant as ten or 20 years ago, as revealed by the continuous spatial monitoring by the BBSR (2021a) and the latest report on spatial development (BBSR 2021b) (see also: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2021).

In France, the crisis-ridden industrial regions were also the subject of specific, so-called 'conversion' policies. This was particularly the case at the time of the Fordism crisis from about the mid-1970s to the end of the 1990s. A number of industrial areas continue to give cause for concern or are even still dependent on subsidies. State finance is highly concentrated in these conversion regions, especially in Lothringen and in the north of France. Despite certain structural weaknesses (labour force qualifications), economic adaptation and revitalisation based on new concepts has been successful, at least in part. These achievements are currently under threat once more thanks to worldwide challenges (climate change, COVID-19). This is true, for instance, of places where the automotive industry plays a significant role. As in France, in the same period in West Germany structural change and the conversion of large old industrial regions were prominent issues. Among the most well-known are the Ruhr area and the cross-border region *Eurodistrict Saar-Moselle*, both of which profited from the restructuring programmes of the German federation and the federal states. Particularly innovative responses (e.g. *IBA Emscher Park* in the Ruhr) and coherent cross-border developments were initiated in these areas. Nonetheless, social problems are increasingly common, especially in the crisis and conversion areas of today.

Overall this means that, whether in France or in Germany, in the crisis or conversion districts, in the small and medium-sized towns or cities in decline, in the disadvantaged agglomerations with their great social and political issues: social problems are accumulating everywhere. The decline is perceived by the population and is accompanied by frustration about current standards of living. Not least, this is fertile ground for populist parties. Looking beyond spatial planning, the question here is one that concerns the future of European democracy.

4 Cities and regions in both countries face new challenges

In contrast to previous decades, sustainable urban development in both countries is facing the increased urgency of climate change, transforming mobility, digitalisation and many other accelerating trends. Cities in the two countries must tackle the challenge of integrating sustainability and, especially, climate mitigation and adaptation into urban development and planning. This is being undertaken in different ways in line with the different institutional systems and understandings of planning.

In France new provisional regulations connected to the topic of global warming have been put on the agendas of the cities. France remains true to a very top-down model whereby change is driven by the central state in the form of national legislation or government decisions which are then implemented in the territories. A good example of this method was the 2010 *Grenelle de l'environnement* (Grenelle Environment Forum), which took the form of a debate between experts and national political actors, much of which was broadcast by the media and led to the drafting of a law that served as a basis for decisions in the field of sustainable development. The format was repeated at a citizens' climate convention in June 2020, resulting in 146 proposals for the climate. In this case, the experts surrendered their places to members of the public. Those involved drew lots for the right to participate and, before submitting their proposals, improved their expertise through consultation with experts over several months in Paris.

In Germany the movement has much more of a grassroots character. In many places, local civil society initiatives are drivers of climate mitigation and other environmental protection concerns, introducing such issues to urban development policies. Since the 1970s, local civil society initiatives have become an accepted part of life in urban areas. The participatory process is further advanced and is endowed with greater powers than in France, where it is more restricted by law even if the options for public debate have increased in recent years (neighbourhood councils, development councils on the level of the agglomeration, etc.).

In Germany, the culture of environmental protection is undoubtedly older and more developed. As early as the 1960s, fundamentals related to environmental protection were incorporated in the *Bundesbaugesetz* (BBauG – Federal Building Act, 1960) and the *Raumordnungsgesetz* (ROG – Spatial Planning Act, 1962). The breakthrough came, however, with the *Bundesnaturschutzgesetz* (BNatSchG – Federal Nature Conservation Act, 1976) and other sectoral legislation passed in the 1970s. Additional pressure was brought to bear by protests, particularly against nuclear power (at a time when in France the state technocracy established this form of energy with almost no discussion). From the late 1970s, wider society became increasingly aware of issues related to air and water quality. In many cities this led to the establishment of departments of the environment. The success of the political party *Die Grünen* (The Greens) was largely based on this environmental movement, which emerged primarily in municipal contexts such as in Freiburg im Breisgau. In contrast in France, the party *Les Verts* (The Greens), whose name was directly inspired by the neighbours across the Rhine, was formed primarily by a national political apparatus. For a long time, local successes remained very rare, although those that emerged were emblematic (e.g.

Loos-en-Gohelle, in the old mining district of Pas-de-Calais). It was not until the recent local elections in 2020 that *Les Verts* were able to win positions of responsibility in a significant number of larger and medium-sized cities and municipalities in France. In Germany, *Die Grünen* are also represented in the executives of the federal states (currently in 11 of 16). The federal states are also actively involved in sustainable development through the planning, supervision or financing of certain policies (e.g. upgrading the energy performance of buildings).

In addition to the question of climate change, future-oriented mobility is another topic that has gained importance in recent years thanks to the goals related to carbon-free mobility in cities and municipalities. Transport is fundamental to daily life and private motorised transport is still the first choice of transport mode. Beyond the problems of climate, the social costs of fine particulate pollution, noise pollution, congestion and accident-related mortality are becoming ever more prominent in debates about private motorised transport. This topic demands attention in both countries because the importance of the automotive industry, especially in Germany, means economic and political consequences are unavoidable, as 'Dieselgate' recently illustrated.

Today, policies on both sides of the Rhine, with certain differences, have declared sustainable mobility to be a priority goal: the booming local public transport in France and the success of car-sharing in German cities are two pertinent examples. Pressure from the European Union, which has tightened the standards for the introduction of electro-mobility, encouraged relevant public policy in both countries to be significantly strengthened. This has led to criticism of a related issue, the problems linked to the production and recycling of the necessary batteries. There is no doubt that we are seeing in-depth restructuring of European production in the automotive industry, with consequent effects on employment and the labour markets. The turnaround has already begun: in July 2020 Mercedes announced the sale of the SMART factory in Hambach (Mosel), even though this plant is one of the symbols of the 'successful' industrial transformation of Lothringen.

One risk that comes with this ecological transformation to carbon-free mobility is that a considerable proportion of the population may be 'left behind'. This would result in a lack of broad acceptance of the new forms of mobility and an accompanying lack of competence in dealing with them. The social, economic and cultural aspects of mobility also vary with the different sizes of towns and cities. On the one hand, the number of households without a car is growing in the large metropolises; on the other hand, a car is often indispensable for households or even for each adult in a household in small and medium-sized towns and their rural surroundings. In France, this divergence between the regions was one of the driving forces behind the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) movement in 2019.

One answer is undoubtedly investment in small regional railway lines, something that has suffered particularly in France due to the priority given to the TGV in the last half century (see Guihéry/Jarass 2022). In Germany, the abandonment and demolition of regional and local lines in the once extremely dense rail network have been characteristic of the recent ICE decades and have also been much criticised, especially in recent years. In some cases, lines that were still in existence have been reactivated.

In France, there are serious structural weaknesses connected to rail transport, as clearly revealed by a comparison between the two countries, no matter whether in relation to performance, productivity, quality of service or cost for the taxpayer. The situation in France is catastrophic and much exacerbated by corporatist behaviour which has blocked all developments for many years. In contrast to Germany, competition between the railway companies is in its infancy on the other side of the Rhine, despite European Union directives that stipulate that the relevant authorities (in this case the French *régions*) should implement this competition policy.

German and French cities are also facing new technological challenges. One such challenge arises from digitalisation, which is linked to a comprehensive internet evolution, and future-oriented forms of urbanity, e.g. the smart city. But this also affects the simultaneous 'intelligent' transformation of rural areas. The digital revolution has indeed changed ways of life and systems of production throughout the world. It can be assumed that its influence on urban planning and planning methods will further increase. The practice of land-use planning will not be unaffected by these changes. The smart city is a new paradigm of contemporary urban development (see Douay/Lamker 2022). We should always be aware that there are also risks associated with these challenges and that, for various reasons, the effects are not only positive, even if it is impossible to address all aspects here.

Towns and cities in both countries are at the heart of these movements and processes of change; undoubtedly with a very 'European' specificity and sensibility that contrasts with what is occurring in Asia. Issues concerning the protection of privacy and the safeguarding of our democratic model have been taken up by the public and politicians alike. Indeed, two approaches can be distinguished here. On the one hand is a cyber-optimistic approach that sees the possibility of digital technologies leading towards a more open society in the service of direct democracy where the public can freely participate. On the other hand, the cyber-pessimistic approach sees the internet as the tool of a new technological elite that serves the interests of the hardest form of capitalism and furthermore hinders the participation of those without the necessary cognitive and technological capital.

The former group do not see the digital transformation as being dependent on the ecological transformation because the former provides the latter with the technical solutions necessary to tackle climate change. In contrast, the pessimistic group believe that an uncontrolled internet leads to the waste of considerable resources and energy, especially due to the servers and the use of rare-earth elements. They view digitalisation as running counter to the goals of the fight against climate change and are thus very critical of the introduction of 5G-telecommunications to enable the networking of even more devices, including vehicles of the future, for so-called 'intelligent' mobility. The debate is ongoing in both countries.

From the perspective of spatial planning the question arises as to how regions and cities tackle this topic, especially in relation to catering for future infrastructure needs (e.g. provision of fibre-optic cable). With regard to remote working and communications, the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly revealed the importance of good

internet access for all areas, not only for the metropolises. Internet use has exploded in the face of the pandemic and will undoubtedly remain at a much higher level than it was just a few months earlier. Network investment has thus become an advantageous factor in competition between regions and cities.

The challenges posed by the joint development of the cross-border areas of France and Germany (see Peyrony/Sielker/Perrin 2022) are of a very different nature, although a not insignificant role is played by the specifics of the European situation in relation to perceptions of digital technologies. In many regions of the world, borders are difficult to cross or are locations of geopolitical tension. Sometimes they mark strong prosperity gradients (Mexico-USA) or unsurmountable democracy gradients (North and South Korea). However, borders appear not only as 'hard' impenetrable boundaries; they can also be a field of cooperation between neighbouring countries, regions, cities and partner towns. This has been the case in Europe for about 30 years, ever since the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986, which led to the opening of the single market in 1993.

This is one of the significant elements of European integration, a continent that in the last century was ravaged by two world wars, fuelled not least by the historical rivalries between Germany and France. Since Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, the German-French friendship has been at the heart of the historical process of building the European Union. This is an uncontroversial point, but it is also that which motivates the writing of this book by researchers from both countries. This publication developed from the wish to better understand the contribution made by each entity to the European construction, and to capture the differences, peculiarities and convergences between these two nations that now find themselves on the same path.

The cross-border question, which closes the considerations of this book (see Peyrony/Sielker/Perrin 2022), is thus of particularly symbolic significance, as confirmed by the German-French treaty of cooperation and integration recently signed in Aachen. The German-French border is one of the most active in developing cross-border cooperation in Europe, and one of the first to introduce a new framework for cooperation. From the perspective of planning, it provides an example of the growing coexistence of 'soft' forms of governance and planning and the use of legal and administrative instruments or 'hard' forms of governance to overcome concrete barriers. Cross-border or territorial structures of cooperation display more or less formalised or institutionalised structures. In contrast, the authorities involved in them are rooted in national structures and constrained by strict administrative boundaries and a clearly defined legal status. Territorial cooperation is thus largely based on interaction between formal and more informal organisations. The cross-border planning and interaction spaces vary their structures on the regional and municipal level according to joint perceptions of the problem and task at hand, in line with regional governance approaches. Language barriers and different understandings and cultures of planning must be overcome. The creation of administrative bodies like the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) does not mean that these organisations are intended to replace the EU nation states or their subordinate entities

or authorities. The Treaty of Aachen (Auswärtiges Amt 2019) allows both countries to equip the territorial authorities of the border area and cross-border institutions like the *Eurodistrict* with appropriate competences, dedicated resources and accelerated procedures to enable them to overcome barriers to cross-border projects.

Against the background of growing Euroscepticism, cross-border cooperation between France and Germany can play an important role in promoting the potential of the border areas and their contribution to European integration.

The Treaty of Aachen (ibid) recognises the cross-border cooperation and supports it with a binational committee, thus providing important inspiration to the European Commission in terms of cross-border mechanisms. The question arises as to how the nation states can work towards more institutional flexibility on the local scale in order to facilitate cooperation in the service of those living in the border areas. A positive sign of the ability of the nation states to adapt their structures to suit local conditions is the founding of the European Collectivity of Alsace (*Collectivité européenne d'Alsace/Europäische Gemeinschaft Elsass*) on 1 January 2021. This has been achieved by amalgamating the departments Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin, which remain state administrative districts while the new organisation has new and specific powers in the field of cross-border cooperation.

Consideration of the territories and the global challenges facing them opens up a whole range of highly relevant questions. What forms of sustainable development are conceivable in the face of global warming and climate change? How can the smart city be developed so as to serve the public and not work against them? Turning to the European level, what new forms of mobility are desirable in Europe? How can we facilitate cross-border cooperation? And finally, how capable of adaptation are the nation states – in this case Germany and France and their local and regional administrative units? What answers can they offer, do they have new visions and strategies to propose, ones that perhaps break with the past and, in light of the urgency, also exhaust all possible legal options to secure new developments? Such questions highlight the relevance of critically considering spatial development in both countries. This is particularly pertinent in the wake of Brexit. France and Germany are now the driving forces of European integration, and the differences, convergences and innovations discussed in the book can provide inspiration for the rest of Europe. There is also a need to tackle another pending challenge together: Europe must regain its acknowledged place in the global geopolitical debate by promoting the democratic values, protection of the planet, cultural development and solidarity that make it unique on the global scale.

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