

## Why is Voluntary Co-operation Condemned to Failure? Reflections on the Polish and German Background

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**ABSTRACT** This paper investigates the mechanisms that hamper voluntary co-operative arrangements in metropolitan areas. The study on such arrangements in Poland and Germany reveals that the problems related to the self-interests of the metropolitan actors impede stable and effective performance of these initiatives in both national contexts. The analysis has led to the detection of the vicious circle mechanism that is responsible for underperformance. Its main elements are the lack of appropriate competence and compellability, free-riding among partners, and metropolitan-wide leadership issues. The identified constraints lead to the dilemma between the non-hierarchical co-operative networks and the need for co-ordination mechanisms that are strong enough to enforce long-term non-egoistic actions. The main finding casts doubts on the non-coercive co-operation treated as a plausible and effective mode of governance in metropolitan regions.

**KEYWORDS:** • voluntary co-operation • metropolitan areas • Germany • Poland

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## 1 Introduction

The metropolitan discourse offers plenty of solutions to provide the metropolitan areas with appropriate governing structures. One of them is the voluntary co-operation, mentioned in many points of the debate, as a way to overcome the metropolitan ills (Basolo 2003). Both old and new regionalisms, yet based on different premises (Savitch & Vogel 2000; Brenner 2002; Kantor 2008), have fostered metropolitan-wide collaboration. The need for co-operation is urgent in the functionally bounded, politically and administratively fragmented areas (see, e.g., Kübler & Schwab 2007). Nonetheless, voluntary co-operation is often considered problematic (see, e.g., Basolo 2003; Kantor 2006 and 2008). Many drawbacks make it difficult to launch and sustain such co-operation. There are statements that successful voluntary co-operation is always fostered by strong incentives which make the voluntary character deceiving (Swianiewicz 2002, Basolo 2003). An appealing example is the French system in which refraining from co-operation would mean no access to a set of supportive mechanisms for a city-region (Négrier 2005). But the empirical evidence for the problems related to non-coercive metropolitan co-operation is more compelling than that. As Basolo (2003) states, it is crucial to investigate the mechanisms hindering common action and causing underperformance. Thus, the ways of escaping the unfortunate preconditions can be found.

This paper aims at addressing this challenge. Leaning on the empirical argument, I assert that voluntary co-operation *sensu stricto* is very probable to cause dissatisfaction and thereby leading to suboptimal results. When following the theoretical debate, I do not focus on performance evaluation (which itself poses a complex issue), but I rather try to distinguish the factors responsible for the failure of voluntary co-operation. The empirical study is based on the research carried out in the two metropolitan regions that function on the voluntary premises. I briefly present the existing arrangements and their evaluation by the regional actors. Then I investigate the reasons for the assessment. The selection of the two very distinct cases for the comparative study (Frankfurt and Wrocław regions) allows for interesting comparative remarks regarding the universal versus place-specific character of the metropolitan governance and its constraints. In the concluding part, I draw attention to the fact that the identified constraints of the voluntary metropolitan co-operation correspond to those described in relation to multi-level governance. The concept, elaborated and most frequently applied to the European Union studies, may be used with interesting results for analysing metropolitan areas.

## 2 Theoretical Argument

Voluntary co-operation is present in many points of the metropolitan discourse. Strongly connected to the public choice perspective (see, e.g., Ostrom et al. 1961),

it is sometimes distinguished as a separate kind of metropolitan arrangement (e.g., Savitch & Vogel 2000). Co-operation is also fostered by the governance concept that views it as a sign of self-organisation and steering capacities within a region (Savitch & Vogel 2000; Salet et al. 2003). Proponents of governance believe that the premises of the new regionalism will provide mobilisation for the co-operation that has not been provided by the old regionalism. The vision of economic development and stronger competitiveness will act as a strong natural incentive for metropolitan actors to collaborate (Kantor 2006). The rescaling concept (see, e.g., Brenner 2002), supporting the flexible and often instable metropolitan arrangements, speaks rather against creating metropolitan regional institutions and in favour of looser forms of “co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration” (Brenner 2002: 9; Savitch & Vogel 2009). In this context, metropolitan arrangements can be treated as a loosely coupled system. The concept, developed by Orton and Weick (1990), offers the possibility of capturing the nature of the metropolitan scene by drawing attention to the two constitutive elements of it: the interconnection between the actors who simultaneously preserve a high degree of independence. This feature is actually responsible for the metropolitan problem – it creates a need for co-ordination between the interrelated, yet autonomous units. It also brings us closer to the concept of multi-level governance, elaborated in the 1990s for EU research (George 2004). The main distinctive characteristic of the multi-level system is exactly the fragmentation of resources between many interconnected, though autonomous actors, which forces permanent tensions between striving for a common consensus and protecting particular interests (Knodt 2005: 36-37). As we can see from the above argumentation, the use of the multi-level governance concept for metropolitan areas is fully justified with regard to the mere inner functioning of a region. In fact, multi-level governance is applied in EU studies and it usually overlooks the external (i.e., non-EU) interconnections (Knodt 2005, George 2004). Focusing on the inner functioning of the metropolitan areas, we can adopt this limited approach. Extending the considered relations beyond the core system is possible with regard to metropolises and the EU (Knodt 2005; George 2004: 124-125). However, the focus on inter-metropolitan mechanisms seems justified because “the main form of inter-territorial political conflicts that has emerged in global city-regions such as Frankfurt/Rhine-Main is *intra-regional*” (Brenner 1998: 25).

The conclusion that voluntary co-operation is connected to the loose forms of metropolitan arrangements seems to be not correct. In fact, it is also present in the metropolitan reform tradition. Proponents of the governance approach assert that loose co-operation, based on the premises of the new regionalism, is naturally inter-connected with complex organisational forms of a governmental character (Parks, Oakerson 1989). Former co-operation or the mere dialogue can help win support for metropolitan reform. If the introduction of the harder governance mode ends up in failure, voluntary co-operation usually remains in use as a soft mode.

Despite its strong presence in the theoretical debate, empirical evidence reveals many problems related to voluntary co-operation (Basolo 2003, Kantor 2006). The failure of the old regionalism to develop what Basolo (2003: 449) calls “comprehensive regionalism” is widely recognised in the literature (Stephens & Wikstrom 2000; Kantor 2006: 801), usually noticing that there are only few examples of a successful regional reform (Kübler & Schwab 2007; Kantor 2006). Critical remarks also appear regarding the new regionalism by asserting that the economic stimulus for the new regionalism is not as effective in fostering co-operation as assumed (Friskén, Norris 2001; Kantor 2008).

Actually, most of the problems, constraining non-coercive collaboration, can be explained in light of collective action. Launching co-operation requires a positive balance between costs and benefits for partners. Moreover, a natural tendency to minimize one’s expenses and maximize gains fosters free-riding which hampers activity of an initiative. The bigger the group (or the looser the regulations within it) the more likely is such a behaviour. And when there are certain conditions, which (as we shall see) are not very improbable, they may lead to the decline of the joint initiative. Moreover, the same general tendency to consider one’s own interests first hampers co-operation in difficult zero-sum game situations.

Considering the free rider phenomenon, it becomes clear that even the most obvious benefits from co-operation do not suffice to ensure long-term mobilisation of partners. The tendency will always be to minimize one’s input which triggers the need for sanction capacities. In fact, their absence is the main constraint of the efficiency of voluntary initiatives, but it is also simultaneously their constitutive element! Providing a mechanism that obliges the members to obey the common rules would mean introducing imperative elements, which might be seen as a negation of voluntary premises. The only solution seems to be an introduction of a set of obligations or even an organisation at the metropolitan level (coordinating area-wide activities and having the competences to do so effectively), which would be agreed upon voluntarily. Even if their creation implies some losses for the participating actors, such solutions do exist (e.g., in Rhine-Neckar or Hanover as German examples<sup>1</sup>), which brings about the question of the preconditions for success.

A number of problems arise for the co-operative arrangements that have no such firm regulations. Firstly, they have an instable character (see, e.g., Feiock 2004), which primarily stems from the lack of an imperative element. As the members of a voluntary arrangement can always leave it (Fürst 1994, Norris 2001), the group of decision-makers may not be exact with those who supervise its implementation. As a result, the responsibility is vague and the agents are not willing to join an uncertain project. Secondly, the problem of the smallest common denominator emerges (see: Heinelt 2008). The voluntary arrangements that offer many veto positions are permanently dependent on the resources and on the will of all

members (which again brings us to the dilemma of the multi-level governance in the EU where consensus-oriented interplay of all actors is a condition for effective governance, see: Kohler-Koch 1999, Knodt 2005: 37). The element that is the weakest or the least eager to co-operate may create the upper limit of the common action. Withdrawal (i.e., destabilisation of a group) would be the most extreme result of such a behaviour, but constraints on the ability to act may also come from the limited participation.

Another difficulty comes from the fact that the co-operating partners remain nested in their own institutions (Weick 1976: 3, Heinel 2008: 140). The autonomy of all the actors means that their representatives in a metropolitan institution remain bounded by their local rules. Particular interests are hard to forget if the electoral yard of a representative remains local. This provokes a situation once called “a two-level game” (Putnam 1988) which has turned into a multi-level one in the realm of governance (Benz 2004: 130).

Considering all the debated constraints, it is somehow surprising that voluntary co-operation is quite frequently met in practice (apart from its effectiveness or success). Various city regions adopt it as a way of dealing with metropolitan fragmentation, often with the assumption of its temporary character. Although their specific features differ a lot depending on the local context, co-operative mechanisms remain universal. They are frequently investigated issues in the metropolitan discourse (Salet et al. 2003; Heinel & Kübler 2005; Norris et al. 2007; Ludwig et al. 2008).

### **3 Case Studies: Non-Coercive Metropolitan Arrangements**

The empirical part comprises the studies carried out in the metropolitan areas of Frankfurt and Wrocław. Taking into account the differences in both case studies (i.e., different historical backgrounds of cooperation, different levels of economic development and different patterns of welfare within the areas), one can nevertheless notice some similarities stemming from the universal character of the co-operation mechanisms. The research design allows for (1) revealing how different the voluntary agreements can be in detail, as well as for (2) drawing more general conclusions about the constraints of voluntary metropolitan agreements.

#### **3.1 Variation in Forms of the Metropolitan Non-Coercive Arrangements**

##### **3.1.1 Frankfurt Region – a Tangled Web of Regional Initiatives**

In Germany, the formal situation of metropolitan areas differs across the federal states because they are responsible for setting the legal framework for the respective city regions. In the course of the long tradition of metropolitan co-

operation in most regions, metropolitan arrangements, planning associations, or even metropolitan regions have been established (see, e.g., Ludwig et al. 2008).

In the Hessian metropolitan region of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main, a very specific metropolitan arrangement has developed. In 2000, the Federal State of Hesse abolished the former UVF, the planning association (being established in 1975, it had the metropolitan government features in terms of wide responsibilities and direct democratic legitimacy), and introduced a law that (in an ambivalent way) urged the counties and the county- exempt municipalities to develop co-operative regional solutions for emerging problems without strict organisational guidelines. The framework provided for the establishment of two organisations: the Regional Council and the Planning Association. The Council gathers the mayors of the biggest cities and the municipalities of the region as well as county presidents. It is supposed to be responsible for co-ordinating the co-operative initiatives that emerge in the region, and for launching the missing ones. However, it has merely advisory functions and due to the limited competences, it is openly called a “coffee circle” (Bördlein 2000: 543). The Planning Association, mainly responsible for spatial planning, is, in fact, a single-purpose body. The reform of the metropolitan governance arrangements was intensely and controversially discussed in the 1990s (see, e.g., Faust 1998). However, it has never been completed, and since 2001, it has found itself in a deadlock. In the creeping activity of the Hesse government, the private sector has become very vibrant. Since the 1990s, a number of initiatives and projects have covered the region with a tangled web of co-operative arrangements that have neither a common denominator nor coordinative possibilities. Most of them aim at promoting the region’s image in the international competition. While the Planning Association also undertakes these tasks, the civil society sector remains silent (Freund 2003). The business sector not only establishes its own undertakings (e.g., Economy Initiative), but also endeavours to be active in the public ones, often playing the roles of stimulator, financial supporter, expert or advisor. An understanding for the common regional welfare (proven by those initiatives) mixes with particular interests of metropolitan actors and results in a multiplicity of undertakings (i.e., creating numerous power positions). As there is no officially accepted pattern, the actors seem to find it difficult to decide on particular means to achieve their aims. Consequently, the initiatives emerge, modify, co-operate, sometimes compete with each other, merge or vanish creating a very instable scene of metropolitan initiatives. These constant changes correspond to the dynamic aspect of rescaling (see: Brenner 2002), but they also deprive the region’s structure of stability, inevitable for effective networking and policy-making.

### **3.1.2 Wroclaw Region – Hay Fever**

The Polish institutional setting does not provide the scope for special metropolitan arrangements. Metropolitan reform has been the topic of the ongoing debate for a

few years. Already during the administrative reform in 1999, the negligence of the metropolitan question was seen as a mistake in the new legislative framework (Izdebski & Kulesza 2004). The debate on the optimal solution remains open. Its intensity fluctuates and the metropolitan areas (under the present legal framework) may either start merely informal co-operation or establish formal municipal associations (which usually are neither metropolitan-wide nor multi-purpose).

The first metropolitan-wide, multipurpose initiative in Poland was launched in the Wrocław region. In 1999, Wrocław along with 6 neighbouring counties and their municipalities established an informal arrangement of a loose structure, i.e., the Committee of the Strategic Plan of Wrocław Agglomeration. The initiative aimed at fostering metropolitan co-operation so as to provide for coherent land use planning and, in general, for strengthening the position of the metropolis in the newly created region at that time. The agglomeration wanted to avoid being neglected or over-voted by the remaining part of the new big region. Thus, the gathering of the Wrocław and its suburbs was meant to ensure the relevant power of the city region in the regional parliament.

When thinking of the informal reasons for setting up such a voluntary initiative, one encounters a few traces. Firstly, in 1997, the whole area was threatened by flooding, which proved interdependence among regional jurisdictions by showing the need for collective action. Secondly, the jurisdictions already hoped to gain access to EU subsidies, and according to a widespread belief, joint projects would be easier to be accepted for funding. Thirdly, as suburban mayors assert, the city of Wrocław wanted to keep control over the investments, which began to be made outside the city boundaries at the end of the 1990s. Supporting the last thesis, the main leader and initiator of the metropolitan co-operation was the core city. Even though formal leadership was never established, the suburban partners naturally saw Wrocław as such, always waiting for its initiatives, and acting as totally passive Committee members. To explain such an attitude, one has to consider the fact that suburbanisation is still creeping in Poland: decentralisation usually involves a residential function, whereas economic ones most frequently remain in the core city. Many suburban municipalities still have preserved their traditional rural character that is reflected in welfare patterns (Polish core cities are as a rule still much more affluent than their neighbours, see: Swianiewicz & Klimska 2005), which influences the power relations within metropolitan areas.

The Committee operated smoothly for six years. Then the initiative faded. Convergence of this occurrence with the year of local elections provoked speculations based on the local particularism. The Committee members openly asserted that focusing on local elections contributed severely to terminating the metropolitan meetings. Everyone, including the informal leader Wrocław, concentrated on winning their electorate. Since the Committee had never been made known to the public, successes in this field (if any) would have no value as a

pre-electoral announcement. Negligence of the public involvement and the lack of direct legitimacy worked against the Committee.

In contrast to Frankfurt, the Wrocław metropolitan scene is almost totally free from the non-governmental actors (the only sign of emerging governance in terms of the participants is the involvement of the local academic centre whose employees offer their expertise to the Committee). It corresponds to the general feature of the Polish regimes: the co-operation between the public and business sector is very scarce (see: Swianiewicz et al. 2004) and the NGO sector is generally not very vibrant (Herbst 2008).

Apparently, in both study regions, very different arrangements have developed on the basis of voluntary co-operation. With its loose and dynamic structure of many tangled co-operative networks of public and private actors, Frankfurt/Rhine-Main goes along with the governance line. "Yet government persists" (Borraz & John 2004: 112), which is marked by legal regulation supporting voluntary premises of regional management, as well as by the two institutions established by law and gathering jurisdictions. Wrocław, on the other hand, has tried to follow the metropolitan reform tradition by establishing (in the absence of strong non-governmental actors) informal but jurisdiction-based structures. The question is how these two different strategies of voluntary co-operation are assessed.

### **3.2 Assessment of the Status Quo**

Despite the relatively big differences between the two cases, the assessment of the existing arrangement is similar in its negative overtone. As mentioned in the introduction, the performance evaluation is treated in a simplistic way, based mainly on the opinions of the regional actors (politicians, businessmen, journalists), and academics.

#### **3.2.1 The Frankfurt Region – Local Obstacles to Global Competitiveness**

In Frankfurt, the strong criticism towards the legal framework, established in 2001, is uttered both by academics (Freund 2003; Bördlein 2000; Langhagen-Rohrbach 2004) and politicians of the region (see, e.g., the utterances of the Mayor of Frankfurt: FR 05.05.2004; FR 18.02.2008; FAZ 20.02.2008; the opinion of the head of the Frankfurt Airport Company: FR 08.02.2008, FAZ 13.01.2009). Vague rules of voluntary co-operation do not lead to achieving metropolitan-wide coherence, allowing for parallel functioning of multiple initiatives, which increase the region fragmentation. A widespread opinion (e.g., FAZ 23.02.2008) says that Frankfurt/Rhine-Main stays behind those metropolitan areas that have already responded to the organisational challenge and established metropolitan jurisdictions (e.g., FR 2.03.2004, interview B). "The psychology of wanting to change and show growth can be at work" (Savitch & Vogel 2000: 163).

Metropolitan elites seem to consider the lack of metropolitan-wide arrangements in Rhine-Main as a failure vis-à-vis those regions where co-ordination has been achieved. And it seems that there is more to this feeling of losing than the mere intuition and the pressure to compete with other metropolises also in terms of the structural coherence. The statistical data shows „that Rhine-Main Region stays behind the other European metropolitan regions” (Langhagen-Rohrbach 2004: 60). This brings us to another common belief that the economic crisis would push Rhine-Main towards the metropolitan reform (e.g., Hoyer et al. 2006). In general, it is asserted that the relatively affluent economic situation of the region deprives it from a potential stimulus for strengthening the co-operation. Meanwhile, soft measures are being taken to cope with occurring difficulties, but the flourishing of various initiatives is not accompanied by any area-wide political co-ordination (see, e.g., FAZ 13.01.2009; FAZ 18.12.2008). The number of initiatives is sometimes explained by the fact that under the lack of the fixed widely accepted patterns of solving metropolitan problems, it is difficult to decide on specific means to achieve common objectives (see Gehring 2000, ability of collective problem solving). In the case of Frankfurt, the capacity to make binding decisions seems low (‘Frankfurt - region where a lot is discussed and where it is not possible to reach agreement on a common vision’, FR 2.03.2004, translation ML). Also, a more critical opinion appears to assert that the new initiatives are established because the old ones failed to achieve their goals (interview B). Moreover, the abundance of initiatives are seen as a sign of a variety of interests and fragmented leadership (interview B). This fragmentation is considered as one of the obstacles to regional cohesion but it is difficult to eliminate, because it assures the multiplicity of power positions in the region..

Evans et al. (2005; see also: Axelrod 2004) speak about the institutional capacity as a positive ability of the society that proves its flexibility, openness and partnership attitude. Looking at the blossoming of various initiatives in the Frankfurt region, one may say that the skills are overdeveloped. What is missing is the ability to integrate all these institutions and to ensure a true co-ordination element. Academics have assessed various initiatives, undertaken and faded in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main over recent years, as “an example of frequently innovative, but not always co-ordinated regional initiatives in Rhine Main” (Langhagen-Rohrbach & Fischer 2005: 79). With its wide catchment area, the Council of the Region should play a role of the co-ordination body, but has no adequate competences for “coercive” actions and remains powerless (Bördlein 2000; Blatter 2006). Other organisations and initiatives greatly overlap and contribute to an increase in the institutional fragmentation of the region. For the last few years there has been a trend that is rather towards sector-oriented co-operation than a general binding approach (Schaffer, Scheck 2006).

The general negative assessment of local politicians has been softened by the psychological rationalisation scheme. The membership fee, paid in most

initiatives, plays an important role in their evaluation. After an institution has decided to participate in an initiative, it pays for the membership. So, its evaluation of the initiative cannot be too harsh. After all, they joined on a voluntary basis! A much different situation is in the legally established bodies. The Council of the Region is strongly criticised as an organisation, which has been forcefully imposed on the jurisdictions by the federal government. The lack of the possibility to autonomously decide to participate takes its revenge in an austere assessment.

The pressure towards metropolitan reform is also visible in a plenitude of reform proposals that are being developed, discussed and rejected. Not only are the metropolitan actors without consent regarding the reform details, but also the federal (i.e., lawgiving) authorities usually speak in favour of the less developed northern part of Hesse. The empowerment of the already strong central part has never gone along with their main interests. Nonetheless, recently (2009), the critics of the status quo have forced the federal government to admit the drawbacks of the legal system created in 2001. It follows the declaration of change in the legal framework prior to 2011 (FAZ 29.05.2009).

### **3.2.2 The Wrocław Region – Discouraging Lack of Effects**

When discussing the assessment of the status quo in Wrocław, we should keep in mind that the Wrocław constellation is less complex than that of Frankfurt. The lack of business actors and the passive behaviour of suburban municipalities build quite a simple picture of regional power relations. The suburban authorities see the core city as a leader who has failed to perform its role in the long run. The disappearance of the Wrocław Committee, the clearest sign of its failure, was commented by the suburban mayors that it was the consequence of the lack of Wrocław's joint meeting invitations. But there is more to the assessment of the Committee than the cease of its functioning.

Whereas in Frankfurt there were at least some undertakings successful and praised, the main argument against the Committee in Wrocław was that it had brought no concrete results. In some cases, the reason lay in the lack of adequate competence to make binding decisions. Informal metropolitan associations could only discuss and foster some solutions, but their realisations usually stayed beyond their power. When analysing the Committee activity reports, one has the impression that no one expected more. Among the good things of co-operative endeavours there were talks that were listed (Protocol of 15.06.2005) and not the results themselves. In fact, even those talks were related only to the domains of a positive sum game. On the other hand, the aspirations of the group seemed to be much higher at the very beginning (Broszkiewicz et al. 2001). Later on, it turned out that the bottom-up initiative, left without any support from above, was condemned to underperformance. As a consequence, the members became

discouraged and sceptical towards investing their time in the mere talks. The silent fading of the Wrocław Committee was possible because it had never been equipped with any legal status. Moreover, free riding of suburban municipalities was easier because the membership implied neither any obligations, nor even paying a membership fee. Non-payment of membership fee had also one more implication for the assessment. Unlike the situation in Frankfurt, in Wrocław there was no pressure to justify one's expenses covered to participate in an undertaking. As a result, the participants could criticise the Committee without causing incoherence in their feelings.

The passive behaviour of most members of the Wrocław Association also seems to be a question of mentality. Small rural municipalities, invited by Wrocław to take part in a prominent "metropolitan" group, saw themselves as unequal partners of the big city. Many utterances such as "Wrocław had its interest in establishing the Committee" (interviews A) showed that despite Wrocław's attempts to create a partnership atmosphere, most of its neighbours remained suspicious. Moreover, many municipalities from the second suburban ring do not identify themselves with the metropolis (interviews A), which adds up to their passive and awaiting attitude.

When describing the Wrocław Committee, one has to take into account its loose inner structure (no official leader, no board), resulting in blurred responsibilities and in very unclearly distributed tasks. What was competitively undertaken by many actors in the Frankfurt region was usually left undone in Wrocław. The lack of the specified structure can be to a certain extent explained by the indicated efforts of Wrocław to ensure the partnership among the members. Moreover, after the first few years of tremendous enthusiasm, Wrocław mayors lost their interest in the Committee. Actually, the Wrocław attitude has never been beyond reproach. From the very beginning, the Committee meetings were attended by one of the vice-mayors. The highest-ranking person of the core city (i.e. the mayor) never appeared! By contrast, from the side of suburban municipalities, meetings were usually honoured by the presence of the respective mayors.

The lack of actual effects of co-operation within the Wrocław Committee did not prevent its members from expressing some positive opinions. In fact, a strong duality of the evaluation can be noticed. Regardless of the crude assessment of the Committee performance, the interviewees praised its soft effects such as providing a regional "dialogue forum". Many interviewees admitted that thanks to the Committee meetings, they had a chance to get to know their neighbours. Moreover, some interviewees asserted that in this context, the Committee had fulfilled its task, i.e., it had shown jurisdictions some options for co-operation. In fact, since 2000, the number of formal municipal associations in the city region has increased significantly. It is difficult to say authoritatively whether or not it is

the result of the Committee's functioning. Nonetheless, the members tended to explain it that way.

A careful reader will certainly notice the gap between the Frankfurt and Wrocław story in terms of literature references. The difference stems from the fact that in Wrocław, the metropolitan arrangement has never been made a crucial regional subject. Even more so, the Committee remained almost completely hidden – there were no press releases, no reports were available to the public. It remained unknown to the citizens of the member municipalities (this was shown by the survey carried out among the inhabitants in autumn of 2006) and also to a few representatives of local authorities! In January 2007, a long article was published (Rzp. 11.01.2007) describing the Agency for Development of Wrocław Agglomeration (ARAW), created in the beginning of 2006 to provide investors with broad information on the regional offer. The article presents the ARAW as a bud of the metropolitan organisation. The existence of such a bud in the form of the Committee was totally overlooked (or forgotten), and the Committee's attempts to develop a metropolitan organisation failed silently.

### 3.3 What Determines Metropolitan Underperformance

The reproaches presented against the two metropolitan arrangements by the regional politicians and academics can be summarised in a few points, and, as we shall see, they are closely connected to the factors responsible for the identified underperformance. As presented in Table 1, the main points of criticism are very similar (if not the same).

**Table 1:** Problems related to the functioning of metropolitan arrangements in Frankfurt and Wrocław

Frankfurt	Wrocław
<p style="text-align: center;">Unsatisfactory results (some undertakings praised <i>versus</i> no effects at all) Democratic deficit Local glasses (particularism prevails) Tense relations between the core city and its surroundings (<i>Speckgürtel versus</i> small rural municipalities) Withdrawals (lack of stability, fragile responsibility) or free-riding (passive attitude) Blurred responsibility (no clear task division)</p>	
<p>No metro-wide coordination (no decisive power centre) Problems in deciding on the means to reach common goals → plenitude of initiatives Inner metropolitan competitiveness ... weakens the international competitiveness of the fragmented region</p>	<p>Mobilisation problems, free-riding of suburban municipalities the Committee shutdown</p>

In both cases, the lack of decisive powers of the arrangements (so, in fact, on their voluntary character) is being strongly criticised. The question of the lack of competences relates to unclear task division and responsibility problems, which leads to the suboptimal work division. As a consequence, co-operation is accused of bringing poor results. The lack of adequate competence also touches on the potential leaders who have no legal right to impose their will on other partners. The core city is in a tricky position. On the one hand, it is expected to take a leading position in the metropolitan scene (“Frankfurt should give the region the image, Petra Roth should give it a face”, interview B; FR 18.02.2008, FAZ 20.02.2008). But on the other hand, though, it is often accused of dominance and arrogance. And, interestingly enough, it is like that in both polycentric and monocentric city regions.

Regarding the democratic dimension, it seems that the metropolitan arrangement is treated only as a tool helpful for local authorities to deal with the problems that exceed local boundaries. The democratic aspect appears in the theoretical debate, especially in Germany (e.g., Bördlein 2000), but the local politicians tend to overlook this point (interviews A and B). Such an attitude was clear in both regions – the governmental actors did not see the need for citizens to engage in the metropolitan initiative. This is particularly negative because “political systems need the diffuse support of their members in order to be able carry out and implement authoritative decisions that might otherwise meet resistance” (Risse 2001: 198). So, the lack of citizen participation in the metropolitan initiatives deprives the authorities of an important stimulus for co-operation. Consequently, the feelings of common interest and belonging are not well developed by elites, and a particular approach prevails (interviews A and B). However, when considering the large number of common initiatives in the region, it seems that the awareness of common interests is higher in Frankfurt than in Wrocław.

Whereas the democratic aspect is frequently neglected by metropolitan actors, a large number of participants is often mentioned as one of the reasons for failure of the regional initiatives, which corresponds to the well-known argument on collective action (Olson 1965; Basolo 2003; Post 2004: 74-75; Feiock 2004). It is argued that the larger the group the harder it is to undertake institutional collective action. In the case of the Wrocław Committee and some Frankfurt initiatives, a multiplicity of actors not only poses logistic problems, but also makes common agreement more difficult to reach within a differentiated group. Moreover, the larger the group, the more difficult is its mobilisation because free-riding is easier to practise.

Obviously due to the different nature of both metropolitan settings, we can notice some specific features of both arrangements and their assessments which are emphasized in the sections below.

### **3.3.1 The Frankfurt Region – Vibrant, although Competing Actors**

In Frankfurt, the lack of decisive powers of the arrangement (so, in fact, of its voluntary character) is strongly criticised for leading to the underperformance of the region. Although some undertakings do bring results (which place Frankfurt in opposition to Wrocław), and they are praised, the metropolitan actors talk generally about the “region without teeth” (FR 3.12.2008), thereby complaining about too much debate and too few convincing effects. A significant difference with regard to Wrocław is the direction of criticism. One of the core arguments against the present legal framework is that it deprives the Frankfurt region of a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other global cities. Due to the inner competitiveness, its international position has been weakened. The absence of an imperative limits not only the action possibilities, but also the sanctions in case of withdrawal. The stable character of the metropolitan network is then put into question. One can notice that most of the Rhine-Main situation problems come from the network features: lack of co-ordination (a hierarchy element), overlapping of initiatives, no sanction capacity, low stability, insufficient competences, etc. The common opinion of the network researchers seems to be highly relevant: a network helps overcome some problems of the hierarchical steering, but it simultaneously causes new ones (e.g., Falker 2001). Indeed, in Frankfurt, loose networks cause both of them: (1) threat to the system stability, (2) opportunity for innovative and flexible solutions (ibidem).

The fragmentation of city regions also contributes to the lack of a metropolitan identity among the elite and citizens. The lack of such an identity among the inhabitants of Frankfurt/Rhine-Main is a widely recognized and complained about phenomenon (Bördlein 2000). Yet, it is not being mentioned in the discussion that the creation of an institution that responds to everyday activities could foster the development of such an identity.

### **3.3.2 Wrocław Region – Passiveness of the Regional Actors**

The lack of competences in the Polish metropolis does lead to the situation where no particular effects of “co-operation” can be seen, and so, the partners have become discouraged. In the case of Frankfurt, withdrawals have frequently been reported. In Wrocław, they are hidden in a form of free riding. Most Committee members have remained silent and passive actors.

The position of Wrocław as an engine and initiator of the metropolitan co-operation is problematic. The interviewees, connected with Wrocław, underlined that the city could support some supramunicipal undertakings, but had no power to conduct them. Moreover, its authorities are not willing to get involved in the projects that are out of their control and could end in a hard to explain failure. Such explanations were given to excuse the fact that after a few years of solitude

stimulation of the Committee by Wrocław, the core city stopped its efforts, which clearly contributed to shutting down the institution.

The democratic dimension of the metropolitan discourse (in both practical and academic contexts) is even more neglected in Wrocław than in Frankfurt. The Committee has never bothered to present itself to citizens. As a result, this supramunicipal activity was overseen during the pre-electoral campaigns, thereby giving space to local particularism. Moreover, the total failure to provide citizens with the information on the metropolitan initiative was not even reported as a problematic issue.

### **3.3.3 A Mechanism for Determining Underperformance**

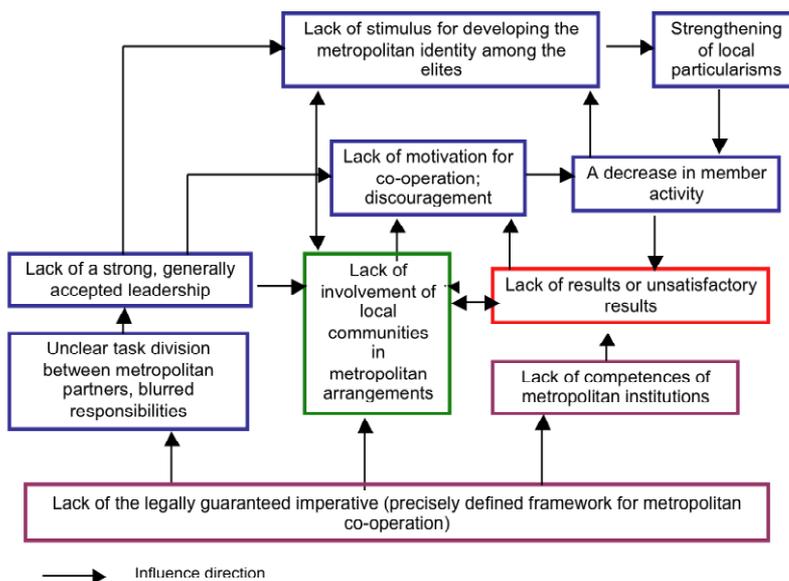
All those problems create the mechanism of a vicious circle (Figure 1) with the three main argumentative lines. First, it is the question of initiative competences, and therefore of the outcomes. In both regions, the results of the co-operation are not satisfactory, even though one notices small differences. The lack of the concrete effects acted as a factor demobilizing further involvement in the Wrocław Committee. As a result, the Committee faded away. In Rhine-Main, it seems that the multiplicity of initiatives has preserved the region from such a fate. However, some people are still complaining about a “powerless region” (FAZ 23.02.2008). They are disquieting, provoking the question of the steering capacities of the fragmented governing centreless system (compare: Orton, Weick 1990).

The second group of factors, influencing co-operation, is related to regional leadership. In both cases, a special role is assigned to the core cities (interviews A and B), but due to the lack of formally defined competences, they cannot play it in an open and decisive way. In the absence of a widely accepted metropolitan leader, the common action mobilisation diminishes (see, e.g., Post 2004: 79). Metropolitan leaders could also strengthen metropolitan identity by “giving a face to the region” (interviews B). Lack of leadership may also be related to the broader issue of the already mentioned lack of co-ordination. They both contribute to counterproductivity and/or discouragement within city regions deprived of a mechanism of political cohesion.

The third argumentative line in the vicious circle refers to the metropolitan identity and behaviour driven by particularism of the partners. The differences between the two regions that have been studied seem to be minimal. In general, we may talk about the lack of stimulus for developing the metropolitan identity. In both regions, the metropolitan arrangements have no direct legitimacy. So, the electoral stimulus remains at local level, and as such, it strengthens local parochial interests. Metropolitan inhabitants usually do not know (much) about the supramunicipal initiatives. Local authorities assume that these are of no interest to

ordinary people, and so, they make no efforts to bring them closer to the citizens. As a result, the authorities do not feel obliged to perform successfully in the metropolitan scene. The results will not be turned either into a merit or into a failure. The relation is then bilateral: lack of citizen participation diminishes incentives to perform better. But on the other hand, in case of underperformance, there is no need to talk it up.

**Figure 1:** A mechanism for determining underperformance of the non-coercive metropolitan arrangements



It is crucial to note that the basis of the vicious circle has been created due to the lack of an appropriate legal framework<sup>4</sup>. In the case of Wrocław, it hampered the common action effects and the member activity. In Frankfurt, it led to the lack of metropolitan-wide co-ordination and to non-decisions which contributed to a negative evaluation of the status quo. A legally defined framework for the metropolitan arrangement would ensure clear division of tasks (so, more chance for leadership and effectiveness), adequate competences (again, concrete results more probable), and could provide room for the direct legitimacy (which could increase the citizens involved in the metropolitan affairs). Orfield (1997) finds the state's legal intervention helpful in mobilizing institutional collective action. One could think that providing the adequate legal frames would be the most obvious way to stop the vicious mechanism. But would it be the easiest way to achieve the

objective? When looking at the numerous stories of metropolitan reform failures, one might doubt this (Kantor 2008; Lefevre 1998). As always, the details hide problems. In the case of a legal framework for metropolitan arrangements, a degree of imperative and the way of introducing it remain a crucial, yet open question.

#### **4 Conclusion**

The analysis of the two cases has shown how different structures can develop in metropolitan areas on the premises of voluntary co-operation. The two selected city regions follow distinct paths (loose networks of various initiatives versus one co-ordinating government institution), and both of them have provoked discontent and criticism. The reasons for underperformance, which build the mechanism of a vicious circle, point out the problems related to the mobilisation and engagement (connected to the self-identification with metropolitan affairs), widely accepted leadership and citizen participation. The reasons for failure draw up the mechanisms for voluntary co-operation (exit option, lack of sanction capacities, free riding, difficulties with co-ordination and development of consequent politics). The fact that voluntary arrangements imply preservation of the existing administrative tiers has strong implications. Rooted in the local autonomous systems, metropolitan actors will always look at the common affairs through their local glasses (interview B), which hampers negotiations considering zero-sum games. The (at least) two-level game is then inevitable. The possibility of withdrawal appears, threatening the stability of the co-operative network. The tendency to minimize one's costs may lead to free-riding unless the initiative defines clearly the obligations of its members (minimum obligation is a membership fee in many Frankfurt institutions). All these instances support the main argument of the paper: in spite of being fostered in many theoretical approaches, non-coercive co-operation is not likely to function well because the mechanisms of collective action work against it. Voluntary co-operation is then condemned to failure because its constraints are difficult to remove by preserving the voluntary character.

It is, however, interesting to observe how these universal mechanisms evolve depending on the local context. Limited competences of the bottom-up initiatives result in the severe discontent (Frankfurt), and in a less vibrant and co-operative environment, they may end up with discouragement and with ceasing the common activity (Wrocław). The lack of legally defined forms of co-operation led to the abundance of various more or less stable initiatives (Frankfurt), and to the governmental attempt that failed because of the absence of external support (Wrocław). Different features of the local society and of the business sector's attitude resulted in very different activity patterns in both cases. Nonetheless, even here we can find some similarities such as the deadlock situation in powerless institutions: Regional Council and Wrocław Committee. Also, the tricky position

of the core city remains similar (despite all the tint differences), adding up to the problems with the metropolitan-wide leadership. But above all and quite surprisingly, the general assessment of the status quo is negative in both regions. Crucial performance constraints (the lack of adequate competences and hindered capacity to mobilize partners for the sake of common interests in the long term) cannot be eliminated without introducing some legal regulations, i.e., without resigning from voluntary premises of everyday initiatives (as in the case of the mentioned success stories of some German metropolises). The conclusion drawn from the vicious circle may seem a paradox. Voluntary co-operation needs imperative; horizontal networks need hierarchical elements (e.g., a legal framework or other type of co-ordination). It can be asserted that they can be preserved at the very beginning, when deciding on the legal framework. By means of it, the acceptance of the reform is more likely to be achieved by helping to develop identification with the new structure (as in the German metropolises mentioned before). The successful arrangements stemming from voluntary undertakings draw attention to the performance determinants, but they also show that failure analysis can contribute to developing a more favourable local context.

Despite the general negative assessment of the voluntary arrangements in both regions that have been studied, it has to be stressed that such co-operation is still better than the do-nothing option (Goldsmith 2005). Soft effects, such as possibilities of regional discussions and the resulting improvement in the regional relations, are difficult to overestimate, especially if one considers that building stable co-operative networks leans on mutual interrelations, information exchange and partnership. All these things are hard to achieve without a decent dialogue. The research has shown that despite the annoyance over the lack of concrete results, the metropolitan actors do appreciate the soft effects. Moreover, the role of the forum for dialogue was appreciated not only in Wrocław where it was the only achievement and where such a forum, apart from the Committee, had never existed before, but also in Frankfurt where the expectations towards the metropolitan arrangement were much higher.

In the theoretical perspective, the presented empirical evidence draws attention to the close link between the metropolitics and multi-level governance concept. All the problems with the voluntary arrangements in metropolitan areas (autonomy of partners, two-level game, dilemma between co-operation and co-ordination) correspond to the dilemmas of a multi-level governance system. This perspective is hardly used in metropolitan governance studies. Some brief remarks are presented by Heinelt (2008), Benz (2004) and Salet et al. (2003). Nonetheless, in relation to metropolitan areas, the concepts of governance and rescaling are prevailing. In fact, multi-level governance corresponds to the rescaling approach, i.e., the metropolitan area becomes an additional level of communication and action (in addition to the existing tiers); engagement in global networks creates the

next one. “Multi-actor and multi-level game” (Hooghe & Marks 2001) have become the dominant features of metropolitics.

Analysing metropolitan arrangements in light of the multi-level governance seems to offer an inspiring potential for explaining the mechanisms of functioning of the metropolitan scene<sup>3</sup>. As already stated, there are cases where voluntary co-operation leads to positive results (usually in a form of more specified regulations). The question of the preconditions for success or failure corresponds to the debate on constraints and on the new possibilities offered by the loosely coupled multi-level systems (see, e.g., Heinelt 2008: 131-133). In addition to the problems related to the smallest common denominator, veto positions, instability of the loose arrangements and lack of compelling powers and sanction capacities, the possibilities of widening the action space of the actors and of their mobilisation towards common goals are being discussed (ibidem: 131, 140). The mixture of these conditions certainly holds interesting perspectives for studies of metropolitan governance mechanisms.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Yet, in both cases, the losses were minimal.

<sup>2</sup> Kantor (2008) has recently presented an approach by asserting that co-operation is neither the only nor the first-choice option to ensure coherent functioning and development of the metropolitan regions. He suggests a better solution, i.e., co-ordination based on the existing “modes of intergovernmental regulations” (ibidem: 114). Whereas this could be one more possibility to break the vicious circle, the Frankfurt case has shown that fragmented co-ordination of single domains raises criticism and is difficult to turn into complex metropolitan-wide co-ordination.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noticing that the use of multi-level governance approach in the EU studies has also had the aim of analysing the decision-making mechanism in the EU, which distinguishes it from the previous schools of neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism focused on explaining the reasons for European integration (George 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Kantor (2008) has recently presented an approach by asserting that co-operation is neither the only nor the first-choice option to ensure coherent functioning and development of the metropolitan regions. He suggests a better solution, i.e., co-ordination based on the existing “modes of intergovernmental regulations” (ibidem: 114). Whereas this could be one more possibility to break the vicious circle, the Frankfurt case has shown that fragmented co-ordination of single domains raises criticism and is difficult to turn into complex metropolitan-wide co-ordination.

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