

Governing Suburbia through regionalized land-use planning? Experiences from the Greater Frankfurt region

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the case of peripheral settlement growth in the Greater Frankfurt (Main) region within current debates on global suburbanization. Within Germany's sophisticated spatial planning regime, Greater Frankfurt's system of regionalized land-use planning marks an ambitious initiative to contain urban sprawl. Nonetheless, expansive peripheral settlement growth, and socio-spatial polarization remain distinct characteristics of the booming region. Analyzing state regulation vis-à-vis dynamics of capitalist urbanization and private authoritarianism, we decipher the complex governance arrangements producing this, at first sight, contradictory simultaneity. We uncover the rationales of local growth politics of autonomous municipalities and the region's multiplied institutional fragmentation that undermine planning ambitions to contain suburban growth. We conclude by critically assessing the political economies of suburbanization in Greater Frankfurt and point to prospects for regional reform.

1. Introduction

No other city region in Germany has been shaped more extensively by suburbanization than the Greater Frankfurt (Main) region.¹ Located in the Frankfurt Rhine–Main Metropolitan Region that currently has around 5.75 million inhabitants, Frankfurt is the region's largest city. It has 747,000 residents and is surrounded by various other urban centers and a large network of medium-sized cities and small towns (Regionalverband, 2019, 2018).

Sassen (1997, p. 64) ranks Frankfurt alongside major cities such as Paris, Amsterdam, and London as a European economic powerhouse and a hub in the global economy. Speculations about how Europe's second largest financial center will “capitalize” on Brexit are further nurturing expectations for the city's economic growth. However, a closer look at this allegedly global city reveals a polycentric city region in which urban centers and suburbs form a continuum—an “in-between city” (Sieverts, 1998). Frankfurt's skyline as a key icon of the region's global economic power hence strikingly belies the actual division of labor and diversified economic specialization of Greater Frankfurt, which draws its global status from economic activities in the region's suburbanization-fed urban network. A strong economic specialization is accompanied by a tendency toward weighty intra-regional differences

and segregation, in which the extremely high tax revenues and purchasing power of some municipalities contrast with the structural deficits, indebtedness, and economic restructuring of others.

Greater Frankfurt's globally integrated landscape of socio-spatial organization, combining heavy suburbanization and strong competition among municipalities with its regional division of labor, seems to fit well into Keil's (2017) depiction of the “suburban planet.” Two characteristics of German suburban governance, however, make the Frankfurt case locally distinct, meriting further exploration. First, the German state is pursuing a stringent and ambitious spatial planning agenda to promote compact urban growth and to ensure socio-spatial coherence and equal access to basic services across all spatial subunits. Second, the Greater Frankfurt region is unique in Germany in that since 2003 its municipalities have been forced by the Hessian state government to regionalize their land-use planning. As a result, municipal land-use planning was upscaled to the Frankfurt Rhine–Main Regional Authority (Regionalverband FrankfurtRheinMain)

This paper explores this contradictory simultaneity characterizing suburban development and governance in the Greater Frankfurt region in which, on the one hand, a sophisticated system of spatial planning promotes compact urban growth and spatial cohesion in Germany's most suburbanized region, whereas on the other hand, the

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¹ When using this term (or subsequently also “Greater Frankfurt” or “Greater Frankfurt region”), we refer to the urban region around Frankfurt as the politically defined core territory of the Regional Authority Frankfurt–RhineMain (see Fig. 2).

economically highly productive region is shaped by ongoing peripheral growth, regional processes of de-concentration, and a striking socio-spatial polarization (Monstadt et al., 2012; Hoyler et al., 2006; Kunzmann and Lang, 1994). How can we explain these suburbanization patterns against the backdrop of Germany's strong system of spatial planning in general and Frankfurt's system of regionalized land-use planning in particular? And how do place-based local coalitions mediate the ongoing suburbanization within the regulatory and wider politico-economic context of the Frankfurt Rhine-Main region?

Conceptually, we build on Hamel and Keil's (2015, p. 5) argument that in an era of a globalizing neoliberal capitalism there is clearly a universal nature to the process of suburbanization in different places across the globe. However, whether suburban development results from a set of universal rules and practices in the social production of space remains unclear (as is evident from the great variety of explanatory efforts in urban research). Instead, this process is not indifferent to local specificities but is articulated in *diverging* forms (Ekers et al., 2012; Clapson and Hutchison, 2010). Analyzing suburbanization thus requires paying attention to the varied, place-based institutional arrangements, agents, and relations through which it is managed and which together form the mechanisms of suburban governance (Ekers et al., 2012). Hence, in order to elucidate Greater Frankfurt's suburban governance arrangement, this article draws on three modalities of suburban governance—state, capital accumulation, and authoritarian private governance (ibid.)—as analytical categories of inquiry.

In this paper, we start out from the contradictory simultaneity in Greater Frankfurt: state spatial planning focused on compact development vis-à-vis expansive suburbanization. To explain these seemingly incompatible patterns, we discuss the modalities of suburban governance in the region. Empirically, we put Greater Frankfurt's regionalized land-use planning center stage and thus first introduce into the spatial planning system, before stepwise disentangling how the state, capitalist accumulation, and private authoritarianism shape suburban governance and land use. We conclude by critically assessing and explaining the political economies of suburbanization in Greater Frankfurt and point to prospects for regional reform.

The qualitative empirical case study was conducted in two steps: in the first, we build on material from a public “Rhine–Main metropolitan forum”, held between 2010 and 2012. This includes fifteen academic lectures on various aspects of regional governance in this metropolitan region, each commented on by selected local experts and discussed in the forum (Monstadt et al., 2012). In the second step, we assessed secondary empirical literature, grey documents, websites, official city and state documents, statistics, and newspaper articles. This was complemented with a series of twelve semi-structured interviews with planning officials from the cities of Frankfurt, Kronberg, Offenbach, Bad Vilbel, Dreieich, Eschborn, Kelsterbach, Hanau, and the FrankfurtRhineMain Regional Authority, as well as from the responsible lower state spatial planning authority of South Hesse (see list of interviews below). Those municipalities were selected because they represent the regional division of labor and cover the entire range of striking differences in municipal economic power and greatly varying types of suburbanization. The interviews focused on local planning practices and the ways (sub)urban development patterns are shaped by planning ambitions of regionalized land-use planning and the development interests of municipalities or the private sector as well as by stakeholder-based associations and special-purpose organizations. Using the three modalities of suburban governance as a heuristic device, a qualitative content analysis of the interview transcripts served to identify and condense the institutional, political, and economic dynamics that shape suburbanization in the region.

2. Studying regional patterns of global suburbanization

Today, suburbanization as the “combination of non-central population and economic growth with urban spatial extension” (Ekers et al., 2012, p. 407) manifests in manifold ways around the globe. Hence, the

Western “edgeless city” (Lang and Knox, 2009) is nothing more than one suburban form among others. These include “suburban economic decentralization” in Nairobi (Mabin et al., 2013), “gateway cities” in Accra and Mumbai (Grant and Nijman, 2002), and Chinese-style peripheral urban development (Wu, 2013)—all of which together constitute a global suburban reality.

It is in the suburbs, Keil (2017) argues, that urban transformations occur most evidently, and where fragments of peripheral urban growth are assembled together in a multiplicity of locally specific forms. What we see in twenty-first-century metropolitan regions is a continuous suburban expansion that is steadily changing form and function, where boundaries between urbanization and suburbanization are blurring and where “margins become centres; centres become frontiers; regions become cities” (Roy, 2009, p. 827).

Urban regions as terrains of integrated urban and economic policy have been at the fore in international debates on regional and urban development since the 1990s (Keating, 1998). It is argued that a “new regionalism” could enable the political and functional integration of city regions: it could overcome the competitive disadvantages of jurisdictional fragmentation in a globalized economy (ibid., p. 81). Entrepreneurial public management approaches and competition across local jurisdictions achieved entry into the organization of governments simultaneously. Brenner (2004) depicts the rise of the city region as part of a wider capitalist state spatial restructuring which is not only socio-spatially uneven but has also triggered a profound reorganization of state spatial planning regimes in favor of capitalist urban development.

It seems that “suburbanization has certainly taken the form of a global process” (Hamel and Keil, 2015, p. 20). This claim, however, can neither veil the specificities of suburbanization as a historical-geographical process and the land uses that materialize differently in local places, nor can it dismiss elements of convergence in the ways suburbs are constructed, financed, planned, used, and lived in across the globe (ibid.). A comprehensive study of suburbs in a globalized economy thus demands taking universal and diverging forms of suburbanization and suburban governance equally into account. In order to grasp the local constellations of actors that together shape suburbanization processes and to expose their relations of power, Ekers et al. (2012, p. 408) suggest utilizing governance as a “heuristic device.” Drawing on a large body of political economic and governance studies on suburbanization, they offer “three modalities of suburban governance” (ibid., p. 411)—state, capital accumulation, and authoritarian private governance—as analytical lenses through which the mediating processes of global suburbanization into diverse local contexts (and vice versa) can be discerned.

To begin with the first modality, the study of the *state's role* in the political economy of urban growth has undergone a fundamental shift toward what Swyngedouw (2005) calls “governance-beyond-the-state.” While the claim of a general “shift from government to governance” (e.g., Rhodes, 1996) has been critically reviewed (e.g., Koch, 2013; Goetz, 2008), the role of the state in territorial governance has undisputedly changed. Governance studies depict exogenous pressures that put existing government schemes under strain and result in a steady negotiation in policymaking between state authorities from various policy levels and domains, private enterprises, special-purpose organizations, and citizens (Rhodes, 1996, p. 666). Undeniably, the state remains a crucial actor when it comes to mediating between different interest groups and both enabling and regulating capitalist urbanization. Yet, suburbanization frequently engenders a “misalignment between political institutions and the rapid growth of decentralized development” (Ekers et al., 2012, p. 409). Thereby, local and regional governments act as players in place-based growth coalitions that catalyze suburban growth and give rise to regulatory asymmetries (Molotch, 1976). To address such misalignments and asymmetries, to renegotiate peripheral growth, and to contain urban sprawl, government reforms have in many cases initiated an upscaling of regulatory

and planning activities from the local to the regional or metropolitan level, or from general-purpose authorities to task-specific (frequently public-private) jurisdictions and agencies (Koch, 2013).

Capital accumulation constitutes a second modality of suburban governance, by affecting the geographical and social makeup of development on the urban periphery and shaping the allocation of resources, housing density, infrastructure, and zoning (Ekers et al., 2012, p. 413). The influence of the development of industry, infrastructure companies, industrial and technology firms, and, increasingly, also finance and service industries on the development of suburban landscapes is central to understanding the role of capital in suburbanization processes. Making use of lower land rent and prices on suburban peripheries as well as the lower costs of greenfield compared to brownfield development, capital drives suburban spatial forms to maximize return on investments. Moreover, jurisdictional fragmentation and competition within urban regions often result in lower property and corporate taxes, lower regulatory standards, or financial support that can be utilized to attract companies out of city centers (ibid.).

Envisaging city regions as more than solely economic spaces, Jonas and Ward (2007, p. 171) argue that politics in a broader sense play a “constitutive role” in the formation of city regions. The third modality, *authoritarian private forms of governance* fits into this perspective. Such governance is achieved through non-governmental organizations, public-private partnerships, the creation of special-purpose agencies acting at arm’s length from governments, homeowners’ associations, and various stakeholder-based associations that impinge on suburban space-making (Ekers et al., 2012). Despite political decision-making in pluralist liberal democracies remaining profoundly entrenched in state structures, such organized private interest groups are increasingly wielding authority over political decisions (Swyngedouw, 2005).

To summarize: worldwide, suburbanization processes are currently subject to, as well as drivers of, fundamental transformations of urban societies. Since the 1990s, regional economic policies and an upscaling of local land-use planning to the regional level have strengthened the regional-metropolitan level as a terrain of government action. Despite this formalization of the region, heavy suburbanization dynamics continue to give rise to socio-spatial asymmetries between the costs and benefits of peripheral urban growth. Given this, we ask how place-based local constellations of state, capital-oriented, and authoritarian forms of suburban governance mediate patterns of suburbanization in the Greater Frankfurt region. How does the interplay of these three modalities explain the divergence between planning goals and actual development in Greater Frankfurt? In our analysis, we place particular emphasis on the state as a modality of suburban governance in its relation to the two other modalities by investigating how peripheral (sub) urban growth can expand hugely despite the comprehensive system of state planning in Germany described below.

3. Suburbanization and spatial planning in Germany

In postwar Germany, we observe an array of ideological discourses about state organization that range from entrenched forms of Fordist welfarism to the competition-oriented models of state organization that have emerged since the 1990s. This shift in statehood has been paralleled by profound spatial transformations on the outskirts of major German cities. German spatial planning policies loom large in anchoring shifts in statehood and suburban materialities.

3.1. Suburbanization patterns

German debates on suburbanization begin with city-suburb interrelations that have fundamentally changed since the country’s postwar boom. During the 1960s and 1970s, a continuously expanding market economy embedded in Fordist-style capitalism set the stage for rapid single-family home suburbanization (Brake, 2001, p. 16). Inherited settlement cores became amalgamated, which blurred urban-rural

divisions both spatially and administratively (Müller and Rohr-Zänker, 2001, p. 36). Over the next decade, retail development—previously considered a distinctively urban function—spread across German suburbs (Brake, 2001, p. 16).

Since the early 1990s, retail suburbanization has become further consolidated, with service businesses settling at the urban fringe (Keil and Ronneberger, 1994). This overlapped with the second significant increase in residential suburbanization that had been sparked by Germany’s political unification (Burdack and Hesse, 2007, p. 83). In post-socialist Eastern Germany, the political objective of the “animated city center” failed; heavy suburbanization had been catalyzed by the growing autonomy of municipalities and the fairly inexperienced planning bureaucracy (cf. Franz, 2000; Nuissl and Rink, 2005). In Western Germany, regional urbanization spawned what Thomas Sieverts (1998) called “in-between cities”: expanding city regions that saw their settlement cores become both increasingly conglomerated and interconnected.

Despite these major transformations, suburbanization in Germany has never substantially challenged the functional role of the urban core as it has in North America (Brake, 2001, p. 21; Hesse and Siedentop, 2018). Recent re-urbanization dynamics mark a “relative centralization” (Brake and Herfert, 2012, p. 412) without, however, radically reframing the inherited functional interrelations in city regions or reversing the ongoing trend of decreasing average settlement densities across Germany (BBSR, 2011, p. 7). While current discourses in urban research and planning practice mostly focus on processes of re-urbanization and the gentrification of inner-city areas, processes of residential and economic de-concentration continue to exist and thrive (Hesse and Siedentop, 2018). The current juxtaposition of re-urbanization and suburbanization in German city regions seems to be bringing about an increasing functional and spatial differentiation that traditional city-suburb models fail to explain adequately (ibid.). Political economies of state planning are struggling to keep up with these shifts in suburban materialities.

3.2. The spatial planning system

The German state has a long history of regulating spatial development on a variety of levels, ranging from the national to the local. This state interventionism rests on the foundation of a liberal democratic ideology. However, just as the post-war welfare state in Germany is depicted as a democratic ideal, Hirsch (1995, p. 82) describes this “*Modell Deutschland*” as a prototype for a state-orchestrated organization of capitalism. Nonetheless, this is embedded in a welfarist and elaborate organized spatial planning system, which aspires to achieve socio-spatial coherence and equal access to basic services across all spatial subunits.

Germany’s planning system is based on clearly distinct levels of comprehensive spatial planning to integrate and to coordinate spatially relevant sectoral policies and plans² (see Fig. 1); each level has its own legal foundation, organizational structures, and substantive focus. National spatial planning defines the legal framework for spatial planning at both the *Länder* (state) and municipal level, monitors national spatial development, fosters spatial research and experimental planning practices, and coordinates the general principles and visions of spatial planning with the *Länder* through the Standing Conference of Federal Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning—a body coordinating the national and *Länder* governments.

However, in Germany’s federal system, the main institutional resources and operational tasks in spatial planning rest with the *Länder* and the municipalities. The Federal Spatial Planning Act (*Raum-*

² This includes the spatially relevant sectoral policies (*sektorale Fachplanungen*) such as transport planning, agriculture, environmental protection, economic policies, or water and energy management.



Fig. 1. The organization of spatial planning in Germany.

ordnungsgesetz) and the Federal Building Code (*Baugesetzbuch*) delegate key responsibilities for spatial planning and regulatory control over urban development and land use to the *Länder* governments, regional planning bodies, and local governments. They each devise spatial plans whose preparation is to be coordinated with sectoral policies (*sektorale Fachplanungen*) and predefined “public interest groups” (*Träger öffentlicher Belange*) such as business associations, utility companies, fire services, etc. Similarly to what occurs in the case of sectoral policies, the representatives of these public interest groups can be powerful lobby groups, partially backed up by considerable financial resources and political lobby groups (e.g., energy industry, transport sector, environmental organizations). Most of the *Länder* organize spatial planning at two levels—state and regional—through their own comprehensive plans and guided by the “system of central places”, ensuring relevant services are accessible to all population groups and there is efficient spatial division of labor. Because of its mandatory character, and despite the varying institutional forms of German city regions, this “system of central places” has proved to be very effective in steering regional urbanization across Germany (Schmidt et al., 2018). Complementarily, the principle of “decentralized concentration” seeks to concentrate spatial development in central places and along major settlement axes. This is fleshed out in more detail through regional planning by the lower planning authorities of the *Länder*, which thus directly impinge on municipal land-use plans.³

While the regional planning is mostly state-directed (*Länder*), German constitutional law defines municipalities as autonomous bodies, granting them far-reaching autonomy in spatial planning as well as a territorial monopoly over property and business tax, and a share in income taxes. In line with the “principle of subsidiarity,”⁴ municipalities fulfil major public functions within their territories independently and thereby provide a critical counterbalance to the *Länder*. Municipalities exercise their constitutional right to planning by preparing a two-tier system of land-use plans. The (preparatory) land-use plan covers the territory of the entire municipality and outlines all types of land use. The plans build the mandatory basis for the legally binding and detailed zoning plans for settlement areas that regulate the amount and type of building activity. The zoning plan is the only plan which gives landowners the right to development (construction or alteration of land use). Nonetheless, local interests in generating business taxes impinge heavily on local political decisions about the deployment of these planning tools. With municipalities seeking to boost tax

revenues by attracting investment in urban development, planning goals to contain peripheral growth can be considerably undermined (Scherf, 2010, p. 383).

The inter-scalar coordination of integrated spatial planning is guided by the “mutual feedback principle”: superior planning authorities amend their goals with regard to spatial-functional imperatives that are articulated on subordinated scales which, in turn, participate in the planning process at higher levels. The fundamental legal principle thus combines top-down and bottom-up approaches.

3.3. Containing urban sprawl? Shifts in spatial planning

An important milestone in national spatial planning policies to contain urban sprawl is the quantitative goal for land use defined in the national government’s sustainability plan in 2002: to reduce the rate of greenfield development to one quarter of the average annual land use between 1993 and 1996 and thus not exceed 30 ha per day (Jehling et al., 2018). More recently, the national climate mitigation plan has even argued for a net-zero target by 2050 and thus a shift toward “circular” land management by avoiding greenfield development and by revitalizing brownfields (Bundesregierung, 2016). Since the adoption of the “30 ha target,” several reforms of the Federal Building Code have encouraged redevelopment of brownfields and infill development by relaxing regulatory requirements for municipal planning at these sites and by additional obligations for municipalities to state reasons for greenfield development (Jehling et al., 2018). In addition, the “regional land-use plan” was introduced in 1998 to encourage urban regions to contain suburban growth by better coordinating municipal land-use planning. However, most recent reforms of the building code in 2017 targeting Germany’s urban housing crisis have in fact liberalized the regulatory requirements for residential greenfield development for an interim period. Moreover, the 30 ha target has not been translated into mandatory requirements for the *Länder*, and the *Länder* have only partially adopted specific policy targets to contain urban growth and to reduce greenfield development.

The repercussions of the 30 ha target and the containment of suburban growth can thus be observed most strongly at the interface of the municipal and regional scales, where city–suburb boundaries have been ruptured in multiple ways since the postwar period. Regions have seen their authority increasing due to concessions in authority from the *Länder* and to the new forms of regional collaboration that followed legislative reforms (Blotevogel et al., 2014, p. 103).

Initial cooperative regional planning to manage urban growth dates back to the early twentieth century, but more radical changes for German administrative structures became effective in the 1960s. At that time, the so-called “metropolitan reform tradition” (Zimmermann and Heinelt, 2012, p. 21) appeared as a response to expanding suburbanization. Political boundaries within German metropolitan regions were redrawn to counterbalance the suburbanization-fed shifts in city–suburb tax bases that had caused imbalances in the regional organization and financing of public service provision. Knieling and Blatter

³ Albeit its very similar terminology, regional planning (*Regionalplanung*) must be distinguished from regional land-use planning (*regionale Flächennutzungsplanung*). Regional plans are adopted by the lower spatial planning authorities of the *Länder* (in the case of Greater Frankfurt by the *Regierungspräsidium Darmstadt*, responsible for the region of South Hesse), while regional land-use plans are developed through intermunicipal collaboration (in the case of Greater Frankfurt by the Frankfurt Rhine–Main Regional Authority).

⁴ According to this principle, social and political issues should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution.

(2009, p. 229) ascribe a self-referential perspective to these reforms, which focus almost exclusively on intra-metropolitan planning and are limited to the public sector.

In the 1980s, a “gradual paradigm shift” became visible in strategic spatial planning, giving regional competitiveness higher priorities than earlier spatial cohesion goals (Blotevogel and Schmitt, 2005). In the 1990s, more flexible forms of regional governance were increasingly adopted as promising means to address the challenges of sustainable land use where existing government structures had failed (Fürst, 2001, p. 375). The self-referential perspective gave way to an outwardly oriented striving for stronger collaboration with private stakeholders and for interregional competitiveness in Germany’s new “European metropolitan regions” (Zimmermann and Heinelt, 2012). Governance in more “flexible political geographies” (ibid., p. 21) was—and still is—believed to stimulate a complementary bundling of regional functions and interests to strengthen the global competitiveness of city regions across territorial boundaries and to balance local parochialism.

Nonetheless, the German spatial planning system “suffered from [a] discrepancy between high aspirations and low resources” (Blotevogel et al., 2014, p. 100). This occurred especially against the backdrop of growing exigencies and externalities of regional economic competition. However, this is not to say that the German spatial planning system has entirely relinquished its regulating power in the (re)production of space. Legally binding planning regulations and unambiguous scalar responsibilities still constitute a landscape of strict regulation. Given this, it is fruitful to assess regionalization in German spatial planning and its effects on suburbanization by looking more closely at the discrepancy between a powerful state and ambitious planning policies on the one hand and, on the other hand, the *de facto* strong influence of capital accumulation and private forms of governance on suburban development.

4. Suburbanization and spatial planning in the Greater Frankfurt region

The Greater Frankfurt region, where the Frankfurt Rhine–Main Regional Authority coordinates regional land-use planning (see Fig. 2), has an overall population of 2.36 million inhabitants and includes seventy-five municipalities, with the City of Frankfurt as its biggest urban node. It forms the functional—and globally most integrated—heart of the larger Frankfurt Rhine–Main Metropolitan Region, which has 5.75 million inhabitants and stretches over the *Länder* Hesse, Rhineland Palatinate, and Bavaria. The Greater Frankfurt region and the metropolitan region have both witnessed demographic growth (Greater Frankfurt: +10% between 2011 and 2017) and are predicted to grow further over the coming decades (Regionalverband, 2018, 2019, p. 9).

Economically, Greater Frankfurt is one of the most productive German regions, generating a GDP that amounted to €130,000 million in 2015 (Regionalverband, 2018, p. 24). This economic strength is based on inherited economic clusters such as transport and logistics, finance, biotechnology, media, and materials technology, the headquarters of numerous foreign automobile, pharmaceutical, and chemical companies, and their strong functional complementarity. For example, Frankfurt’s status as Germany’s transportation hub for aviation, railways, highways, and shipping, as its financial capital for banking and the stock exchange, and as a principal location for global knowledge economies and business support services (e.g., law firms, accounting firms, and consultancies) is highly complementary and results from its long tradition as a trade fair city. Speculations about Brexit engender scenarios of substantial growth of the Greater Frankfurt region’s finance and consultancy sectors.

This globally integrated economic division of labor is organized in a highly interconnected urban network: the Greater Frankfurt region, which includes a network of urban centers (Frankfurt, Offenbach, and Hanau), medium-sized cities (Rüsselsheim, Bad Homburg, Aschaffenburg), and small towns. It is surrounded by major urban

centers that host key governmental functions, such as the *Länder* capitals of Wiesbaden and Mainz, and Darmstadt as the capital of the regional district of South Hesse. Since the 1970s, transport networks that originally followed radial routes outward from Frankfurt have gained increasing importance as tangential connections linking specialized businesses and dense housing throughout the region (cf. Mettke, 2015, p. 209).

Within the Greater Frankfurt region, suburbanization has profoundly reshaped settlement structures toward new (sub)urban forms—an “urbanized landscape” or a “landscaped city” (Sieverts, 1998). This blurring of urban and village boundaries has brought forth an economically highly productive landscape, whose interconnectedness in form and function has consistently penetrated into the region’s political realm.

4.1. Shifting political constitutions of the region and the regionalization of land-use planning

Illuminating the Greater Frankfurt region’s political (re)organization and its spatial planning system—the state as a modality of suburban governance—will clarify the entanglements that are at play in this nexus of social forces and material realities. From early visions of regional urban network in the mid-1920s onward, the Greater Frankfurt region has undergone fundamental transformations.

In the postwar period, mass motorization and rapid suburbanization turned Frankfurt inside out. Spatial mismatches in the organization of governance led to the emergence of the idea of a regional city (*Regionalstadt*), a radical centralization of government, tax collection, and public service provision authority on a regional scale. In 1975, debates on spatial mismatches cumulated in the foundation of an attenuated form of the regional city, the *Umlandverband*, that would give municipalities fiscal authority. Nonetheless, a regional council was to be elected by direct vote and priority was given to the equal distribution of regional costs and benefits among local governments. In the 1990s, municipal interests and the much-criticized organizational inefficiencies of the *Umlandverband* led to its political breakdown (Zimmermann, 2012, p. 330). By 2000, the welfarist *Umlandverband* had given way to the Frankfurt Planning Association (*Planungsverband Frankfurt*). As the explanatory text of its draft law highlights, this entailed a significant shift toward a competition-oriented regionalism:

The Rhine–Main region has a particularly competitive relationship with other European regions. Hence, the position of the European economic center Frankfurt am Main and its surrounding municipalities in European and international competition should be enhanced without abandoning the existing, advantageous polycentric structure of the region (Hessischer Landtag, 2000, p. 1, our translation).

A new regional council was established, composed of municipally elected representatives. Whereas the *Umlandverband* was assigned a variety of tasks in the provision of public services, the new legislation emphasized the role of voluntary private, public-private and inter-municipal associations, special-purpose organizations, and partnerships. The tasks delegated to such special-purpose organizations include the provision of waste, water, sanitation, and transportation services, business and locational development and marketing, the promotion of culture, and the development of a regional greenbelt—all of which operate within different purpose-specific cooperative arrangements with variable membership and only partly overlapping (task-specific) jurisdictions (Monstadt et al., 2012; Hoyer et al., 2006). In 2011, a third groundbreaking re-institutionalization of the region as an *inter-municipal* authority was enacted by metropolitan legislation to reinvigorate “indispensable” regional cooperation (Hessische Staatsregierung, 2010, p. 1). The Frankfurt Rhine–Main Regional Authority in its current form (*Regionalverband FrankfurtRheinMain*) was given the authority to prepare, coordinate, and oversee regionalized land-use planning within Greater Frankfurt and thus to spatially integrate the municipal land-use planning of its seventy-five member cities and



Fig. 2. Frankfurt Rhine-Main Metropolitan Region and the Greater Frankfurt Region.

municipal districts. The Regional Authority, together with its newly founded executive committee, prepare a regionalized land use plan and draft resolutions. These are then discussed and approved in the Regional Authority's chamber. This chamber consists of seventy-five delegates drawn from all member municipalities of the Greater Frankfurt region, who negotiate their local interests at the regional level⁵.

Apart from six cities in the Ruhr region, Greater Frankfurt is the only German region to use a legislative reform in spatial planning that allows for regionalized land-use planning. The aim of this reform was to reconcile regional spatial planning goals of functionally integrated and spatially confined urban development with municipal autonomy in the interest of a strategic development of the Greater Frankfurt region (Interview 10, 2014). Drawing on the "system of central places," the plan aspires to channel future development into compact growth patterns within central places and along designated growth corridors (Regionalverband, 2010). This most recent regionalization of planning in Greater Frankfurt shows striking similarities with North American

"smart growth" paradigms by proposing more compact and less car-reliant urban forms and by confining new developments to the urbanized perimeter of the metropolitan region and satellite communities rather than greenfield sites (Filion et al., 2016). Characteristically, such smart growth policies take market rationales, growth, and consumption for granted (Krueger and Gibbs, 2008).

4.2. Fragmented pockets of suburbanization in the Greater Frankfurt Region

The Greater Frankfurt region includes a variety of different forms of suburban production and reproduction that are being reshaped today by a juxtaposition of expansive suburbanization and peripheral densification, rendering Frankfurt's urban fringe a "prototypical region" of German suburbanization (Interview 12, 2014, see Fig. 3). Between 2005 and 2017, the region's settlement area increased by 6.6% on average per annum, while the north-eastern settlement areas and south-western areas surrounding the airport grew significantly more (Regionalverband, 2019).

Regional population growth is exerting pressure on Greater Frankfurt's housing market. The region's expected housing demand between 2006 and 2030 will be 184,000 new housing units, equivalent to a 17% increase of the housing stock (Regionalverband, 2016a, p. 4). In fact, even the expanding development of settlements is not expected to meet this demand, triggering rising land prices in suburban peripheries (Interview 4, 2014). This pressure has increased in the face of the anticipated impacts of Brexit on Frankfurt and the designation of

⁵ Apart from this negotiation among the member municipalities, the regionalized land-use plan partially overlaps with the statutory regional plan and thus needs to be negotiated with the statutory regional planning authority of South Hesse and its Regional Assembly. This adds another layer of complexity in decision-making since the majorities of the ruling political parties in the Regional Authority's chamber and the Regional Assembly often differ—making decision-making vulnerable to party politics.

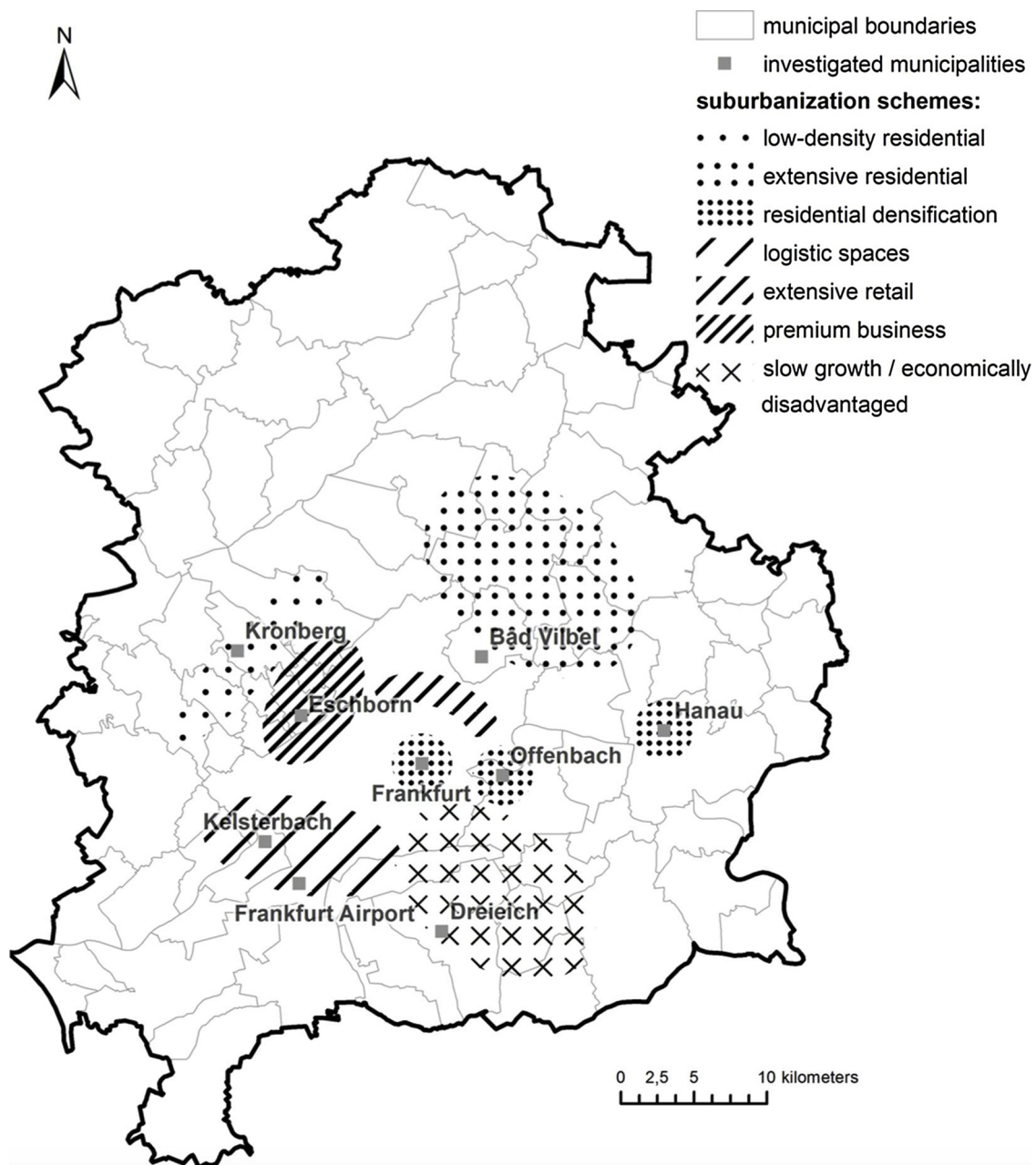


Fig. 3. Current patterns of suburbanization in the Greater Frankfurt region. Our own illustration, based on qualitative data from interviews and quantitative data from the Regional Authority (see [Regionalverband 2018, 2019](#)).

settlement restriction areas (*Siedlungsbeschränkungsgebiete*)⁶ due to serious aircraft noise nuisance in Frankfurt's south. The city of Frankfurt's overstretched housing market, which is strongly shaped by market-driven transformation of brownfield areas into areas with high-quality apartments, is creating additional pressure on the region. Exclusive condominium enclaves are mostly tailored to the specific demands of middle- and (increasingly) upper-income groups. Instead of a re-urbanization, the "return" of these groups to the inner city can also be interpreted as "inner-city suburbanism", with the neighborhoods concerned displaying social and physical characteristics that have until now been firmly associated with suburban living ([Frank, 2018](#)). Higher

⁶ *Siedlungsbeschränkungsgebiete* restrict residential development within a delineated area of high aircraft noise emissions in the south of Frankfurt ([Regionalverband, 2010](#)).

income groups mostly concentrate in Frankfurt's city center and west of Frankfurt, where land prices are higher ([Regionalverband, 2016b](#), pp. 28, 83). The "cumulative effects" of this exclusive re-urbanization and the housing stress on the region are pushing lower- and middle-income households toward the periphery ([Interview 6, 2014](#)). Extensive peripheral settlement is particularly expected northeast of Frankfurt, where projected public transit expansion and little aircraft noise still offer favorable residential conditions (*ibid.*, see [Fig. 3](#)), and residential growth is also occurring far beyond the airport, to the southern end of the Greater Frankfurt region ([Regionalverband, 2018](#), p. 9).

Nevertheless, post-suburban densification has also reached the urban fringe, which is in line both with regional planning goals and recent reforms in federal building law that have strongly incentivized and deregulated inner-city redevelopment (and, paradoxically, for an interim phase, also greenfield development). These dynamics are materializing as a redevelopment of post-industrial areas, such as in

Offenbach, or the revitalization of military brownfields, or public-private redevelopments of inner cities, such as in Hanau (Interview 8, 2014). Ultimately, however, planning regulations to contain growth remain a “normative credo”, as a municipal planner has interpreted it (Interview 1, 2014). Where densification is taking place, it is mostly being driven by market logics.

Less development is occurring in smaller cities in the southern residential settlement restriction area and in the northwest (see Fig. 3). Municipalities south and southeast of Frankfurt face more hurdles to development strategies and are growing slowly due to their smaller reserves of designated building land, planning restrictions, and limited funds for investments in infrastructure (Interview 4, 2014). Reservations about densification in the northwestern settlement strip along the Taunus mountains—which contains some of Germany’s wealthiest municipalities in terms of their average household income—primarily stem from local slow-growth aspirations rather than from regional regulations. According to a local planning official in one of those municipalities, those low-density suburban communities traditionally lobby for local planning restrictions in order to protect their late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century villa suburbanization (Interview 1, 2014; see Fig. 3).

Through adaptive re-use of former industrial locations or brownfields as well as new waterfront developments located in the city core, the city of Frankfurt is trying to attract major financial and service industries and thus gain competitive advantage over several suburban “business parks” (Jansen et al., 2017, p. 264). Nonetheless, the latter are flourishing. By bypassing the city of Frankfurt land-use planning authority through specific airport-related regulations, the “Gateway Gardens” office park has been developed since the 2000s in direct proximity to the airport by Fraport, the operator of Frankfurt International Airport. This “airport city” hosts several large logistics companies, business consultancies, hotels, and retail, and competes with downtown locations (Knippenberger, 2012). Traditionally, the region’s suburban business parks such as in Eschborn, which emerged in the early 1970s, offered favorable development conditions such as cheap land, proximity to Frankfurt, and connections to major regional transport networks. Most importantly, the low municipal business taxes, which in Eschborn are nearly half of Frankfurt’s rate (Jansen et al., 2017, p. 264), serve as a major lever of local economic development. Today, municipalities are retrofitting existing buildings, diversifying land use, introducing more flexible zoning to further attract businesses, and enhancing rapid transport connections to the airport and the city of Frankfurt (ibid., Interview 5, 2014). Such premium suburban business spaces are concentrated in the northwestern and western outskirts of Frankfurt in close proximity to the airport and high-speed railway connections (see Fig. 3).

Locally disadvantaged—but for the region, functionally indispensable—counterparts to these premium suburban spaces are located south and southwest of Frankfurt (see Fig. 3). Here, real estate activities of the airport operator Fraport AG loom large in creating airport-related, extensive landscapes of logistics (City of Kelsterbach, 2015), while the regionally enacted residential settlement restrictions prohibit diversification through residential land use (Interview 11, 2014). This leaves the affected municipalities with negative externalities, such as high expenditure on road maintenance and low tax rates per square meter. Likewise, unfavorable transport connections and the late expansion of the regional commuter train system in the east of Frankfurt have resulted in persistent disadvantages for local business parks (Interview 2, 2014). One of the major examples is the City of Offenbach. Due to high poverty rates among its residents and the large numbers of refugees it accommodates, this city has high social expenditures and acts under budgetary surveillance by the state of Hesse. Accordingly, local planning officials highlight the limitations in the city’s capacity to implement economic growth policies (Interview 4, 2014). The purchasing power per inhabitant of municipalities west of Frankfurt—among them the wealthiest communities in the country—is

almost double that of Offenbach or Dietzenbach in the southeastern part of the region (Regionalverband, 2019)⁷.

Peripheral retail development illustrates Greater Frankfurt’s characteristic interplay between regional agreements and local interests that amplifies the unequal regional division of labor. The city of Bad Vilbel is a case in point. Driven by local tax interests and prospects of local job creation, the municipality was determined to attract a furniture megastore that would violate regulations of Greater Frankfurt’s regional retail development concept (see Regionalverband, 2010, p. 44). Recently, after the Regional Authority and its chamber fiercely opposed the project, the furniture company withdrew its building application. Yet the long-term future of the project remains unclear, with planning officials of Bad Vilbel’s planning authority still articulating an interest in its realization (Interview 9, 2018). Local growth aspirations in retail development thus structurally oppose and—depending on the political will of municipalities to cater to business interests and economic self-interests—threaten Greater Frankfurt’s “political consensus on retail development” (Interview 6, 2014); local tax incentives clearly continue to encourage expansive suburban retail projects.

5. The political economy of suburbanization in Greater Frankfurt

Greater Frankfurt’s integrated land-use plan clearly targets the confinement of settlement growth and prioritizes inner-city development. Although densification is undeniably occurring in the region, the planning goals remain largely unattained. Over the last sixty years, population growth and the increase in settlement space have become significantly decoupled—settlement development has outpaced population by a factor of 1.7 (Interview 10, 2014). Despite ambitious planning goals, recent regional suburban settlement development has not only materialized beyond defined growth corridors through peripheral growth but is taking place unevenly (see Fig. 3). This is thwarting regional smart growth policies and is accompanied by uneven patterns in the regional allocation of costs and benefits of suburban growth.

At odds with spatial planning objectives, and yet continually reproduced, regional forms of suburbanization and the underlying governance processes call for further clarification. It is important to emphasize that the social and spatial constellation of the region is not so much a haphazard result of coincidences but is rather the result of deliberate action by competing interests. In the following sections, we argue that tracing the interplay of suburban governance modalities of state, capital, and authoritarian private governance discloses the underlying processes of suburbanization and—specific to the Frankfurt case—the crucial role of municipalities as mediators between these modalities of suburbanization. We explain how the institutional landscape of state governance (5.1) interacts with and gives considerable leeway to local development interests (5.2) and thereby eventually undermines planning goals.

5.1. Multiplied fragmentation in the state’s regulatory landscape

The upscaling of municipal land-use planning to the Greater Frankfurt region is at the forefront of regional governance initiatives in Germany. Technically, its settlement confinement objectives are consistently substantiated by coherent spatial data, through regular meetings of municipal representatives, and by a region-wide harmonization of planning procedures, making intermunicipal land-use planning a pivotal instrument for a coherent regulation of settlement development (Interview 10, 2014).

⁷ For a more detailed overview of the socio-spatial inequalities in the Greater Frankfurt region, the Regional Authority provides an excellent online statistical tool that provides geographical data on the considerable differences among the different municipalities in terms of the purchasing power and educational level of their residents, municipal debts, unemployment rates, social infrastructures, etc. (Regionalverband, 2019).

Beyond its technicalities, regionalized land-use planning features as a terrain for political negotiation. While, at first glance, the regional land-use plan embodies a univocal consensus on land development in the region, land development is negotiated and decided along political lines of power between municipalities and the (municipally constituted) executive committee and chamber of the Regional Authority, before being integrated into the regional plan developed by the lower state authority of South Hesse and its regional assembly. Thus, in practice, the power geometries that govern settlement development are driven far more by municipal interests and are more complex than they appear on paper. This complexity results from the influence of various local political representatives that sought to maximize their local self-interests before the regional land-use plan was adopted in 2011. This led to an “exponentiated fragmentation” (Interview 6, 2014) of the political region, resulting in intra-state limits to the regulation of suburbanization and directly affecting the amount of designated building land in the region.

Prior to the regionalization of land-use planning, municipalities sought flexible—and therefore overly generous—designations of building land in order to remain competitive in attracting investments. As a consequence, regional land-use planning is failing to contain suburbanization because of the inflated regional amount of designated building land reserves stemming from various municipalities’ earlier land-use and zoning plans—designations which, still today, allow for “all possible development pathways” (Regionalverband, 2010, p. 43). While the regional land-use plan now strives to confine such ambitions by negotiating municipal land-use interests at a regional level, German zoning codes remain effective once they have been enacted.

Another consequence of the regionalization of land-use planning is seen in the unleashing of “centrifugal forces” in local planning (Interview 6, 2014). Elected politicians often hold sway over planning decisions and pave the way for political and market-led decisions on land use that undermine the envisaged long-term planning goals of Greater Frankfurt. Regionally contested, expansive retail projects, as in the case of Bad Vilbel, and more generally politically motivated zoning amendments to attract businesses and (middle or upper middle class) residents provide evidence for this. Additionally, the rise of urban development contracts makes the local state more receptive to business organizations, the influence of local elites, or personal ties (Interview 8, 2014).

Finally, the mandate of regional land-use planning and the governance capacity of the Regional Authority are partially neutralized by the institutionally fragmented and geographically overlapping authorities within the state and those of special-purpose organizations acting at arm’s length from local and regional governments. This “exponentiated fragmentation” (Interview 6, 2014) of the political region is resulting in intra-state limits to regulate suburbanization. On the one hand, the Regional Authority, now responsible for land-use planning, does not solely have to negotiate and to coordinate land use with its seventy-five member municipalities but is embedded in a highly complex institutional architecture of spatial planning with overlapping institutional and spatial jurisdiction. The metropolitan region, the region of South Hesse, and the state of Hesse all have specific visions and partially competing interests in regional development. On the other hand, regional land use is strongly shaped by a plethora of special-purpose organizations—cooperative arrangements between municipalities and with the private sector, with variable membership and only partly overlapping geographies (Hoyler et al., 2006, p. 129). These include five different business development and regional marketing initiatives alone: the regional initiative of the chambers of commerce (IHK Forum Rhein-Main) and PERFORM—FrankfurtRhineMain Region of the Future and three public-private agencies: the Frankfurt Rhine–Main Economic Development Board (Wirtschaftsförderung Region Frankfurt RheinMain e.V.), the FrankfurtRhineMain Business Initiative, and FrankfurtRhineMain International Marketing of the Region. Opposed to those business interests, a RhineMain Regional Park agency is

promoting a regional greenbelt around Frankfurt to contain (sub)urban growth. These multiple, partially overlapping jurisdictions within and beyond the state do not solely create coordination problems and competition within the state but also create openings for the self-serving interests of various stakeholders.

As a whole, the governance of suburbanization in Greater Frankfurt conveys a picture of the region that tends to reflect a “summation of individual municipalities” (Interview 6, 2014) rather than their integration and coordination at a regional level. A comprehensive up-scaling of regulatory capacities from the local to the regional level could only be achieved in part or, as one municipal planner stated, is “formally but not factually existent” (Interview 6, 2014).

5.2. Local politics of place: how capital and private governance impinge on suburbanization

The German tax regime, allocating municipalities a monopoly over property and business tax and a share of income taxes, strongly incentivizes municipal governments to promote economic growth and to attract investors. As a consequence, local politicians and planners have strong tax incentives to court potential future investment. They do so by generously designating land for industrial or commercial purposes, which can considerably undermine spatial planning goals (Interview 12, 2014). Rather than being imposed by an external, abstract market power, these local policy rationales are thus rooted in institutional principles of the German state and its relationships to capital and private governance that matter in local land-use policies.

Municipalities adopt market-based approaches to land governance in practice when tailoring their activities to the needs of private investors (*capital*): for instance, by requesting exemptions from retail space limits, providing land for residential use on green-fields—particularly for the most lucrative taxpayers (Interview 3, 2014)—or by offering low business taxes to attract investors, thus achieving locational advantages. While the Greater Frankfurt region’s wealthy municipalities have the financial and institutional capacities to do so, disadvantaged municipalities lack such opportunities. Inherited regional asymmetries such as transport connections (link to airport and suburban railway system), economic structures (Hanau and Offenbach as post-industrial cities, logistic landscapes around the airport) or simply the reputation of certain locations (Frankfurt’s west as a vibrant business location) play an important role in this respect. Moreover, major local taxpayers and local businesspeople have political leeway in locational decision-making and (re)negotiate local decisions on matters such as land use, tax rates, infrastructural investment, and tariffs. For instance, Fraport AG acts as a powerful agent of suburbanization around Frankfurt’s airport and paves the way for logistic landscapes where state regulations allow no residential development (Interview 3, 2014) as well as new retail spaces beyond the designated areas (Knippenberger, 2012). By contrast, politically savvy homeowners act as slow-growth advocates in Frankfurt’s western suburbs and oppose densification, to preserve their exclusive residential community (Interview 1, 2014).

Private authoritarian governance comes into play, for example, through personal ties between politicians, private interest groups, and professional lobbyists, but also through the formal participatory rights of the so-called “groups of public interest” in spatial planning (e.g., economic chambers and business associations, public or public-private utility companies, and a plethora of semi-public special-purpose organizations). Greater Frankfurt’s existing forms of private interest governance have ambivalent impacts on suburban land use. On the one hand, special-purpose organizations like the regional greenbelt initiative and the regional public transportation association along with civil society groups against aircraft noise or for nature and environmental conservation lobby for stronger land-use regulations. On the other hand, the powerful agencies, chambers, and initiatives for business development and marketing (cf. section 5.1) promote diversity and

functional urban specialization in Greater Frankfurt as positive assets rather than as barriers to regional development, linking economic competitiveness to the region's polycentric urban structure (Hoyler et al., 2006). Instead of a rigid regional regulation of peripheral growth, they favor a more decentralized municipal regulation of land use that allows for competition between municipalities and the spatial differentiation of the region.

Whereas on the one hand, both the regional land-use plan and the regional plan aim at channeling regional growth, concentrating retail in central locations, developing a regional greenbelt, and using synergies between regional economic development and sustainable land policies, on the other hand, “opposing” political-economic incentive structures (Interview 6, 2014) *de facto* place responsibility for regional cooperation in the hands of the politically autonomous municipalities. Genuine regional thinking and planning practices are thus impeded or even sanctioned. Negative externalities of local economic development are pinned on those local governments that have a weaker stance in regional negotiations, or weaker locational conditions. For the others, “regional collaboration allows for cherry-picking” (Interview 3, 2014). While some municipalities recourse to established networks of bilateral municipal and public-private cooperation to attract investment in premium business and living spaces at the peripheries, cities such as Offenbach bear the burden (low tax income and high social expenditure) while providing cheap labor and affordable housing for the region. However, it is precisely this interlacing of functionally marginalized and privileged municipalities and the strong spatial division between productive and reproductive functions that keeps Greater Frankfurt economically booming. Housing dynamics, as described above, illustrate this: the wider region is increasingly being activated as an accommodating space for lower- and middle-income groups (particularly families) that are being pushed out of the city of Frankfurt, where premium housing development serves the upper- and upper middle-income groups. This economically highly productive, but at the same time socio-spatially fragmented nature of Greater Frankfurt marks a continuation of the region's inherited polycentricism. Here, we can discern neither a form of suburbanization that is thoroughly market-driven nor one that bypasses state institutions. Amendments to local land use remain a matter of regionalized planning, albeit this is strongly influenced by growth coalitions of the local state with private interest governance and capital.

6. Conclusion

More than twenty years ago, Thomas Sieverts (1998) wrote his seminal work on the “in-between city.” This co-evolving process of regional urbanization paired with selective densification toward an “urbanized landscape” or a “landscaped city” (ibid.) does not fit into conventional categories of the urban, suburban, or rural and has provoked a controversial debate in planning practice and research.

As we have demonstrated, this process is persistent in Greater Frankfurt. Germany's cohesion-oriented spatial planning system has not remained unaffected by these dynamics but has been adjusted by bringing into focus the region as an urban political and spatial planning scale. The regionalized planning scheme in Greater Frankfurt is at the forefront of these shifts and a pioneer in German metropolitan planning. By upscaling local land-use planning to the Frankfurt Rhine-Main Regional Authority and by closely integrating local land-use planning with regional planning, it seeks to increase its capacity to foster more compact urban forms, to confine development along designated growth corridors, to prioritize brownfield development, and to concentrate retail and other services in central places and along major settlement corridors. However, Greater Frankfurt's 2011 regional land-use plan and the region's development aspirations illustrate contemporary contradictions of German metropolitan development and its regulation: driven by local growth politics, previous suburbanization that takes shape as peripheral growth beyond designated corridors and central

places and on greenfield sites is continuing, despite Greater Frankfurt's elaborate spatial planning schemes.

The specific interplay of Ekers et al. (2012) three modalities of suburban governance—the state, capital, and private authoritarian interests—explain this contradictory simultaneity, as they are materializing in the Greater Frankfurt region. Based on this framework we argue that *local* politics of place are partially neutralizing *regionalized* land-use regulations that formally promote and uphold ambitions of settlement confinement and spatial cohesion. This is not to argue that the regionalization of land-use planning has been wholly ineffective: sprawl has been reduced; the designated areas for greenfield development has been slightly decoupled from demographic growth by comparison with earlier decades, and in recent years, retail development has become more spatially concentrated (Regionalverband, 2019). Our argument is, however, that the planning reforms have fallen short of earlier expectations for five major reasons: First, regional *competitiveness* has been a *key policy priority* during recent decades, promoting the region as major European economic hub for higher service industries and logistics. As a result, a socio-spatially fragmented and functionally polarized suburban landscape has been consolidated that breaks with cohesion-oriented formal planning paradigms (Interview 6, 2014) and marks a shift toward spatial planning that promotes regional competitiveness. Vast logistic landscapes and increasingly peripheral low-density housing on the one hand and premium re-urbanization and flourishing business parks on the other hand are maximizing the spatial efficiency of capitalist production and reproduction. However, they come at the expense of competing planning goals such as socio-spatial cohesion, as well as the development of a regional greenbelt, nature conservation, more sustainable modes of transportation, and the cost-efficient provision of infrastructure services. Second, and closely related to those policy priorities that promote intermunicipal competition as a way to strengthen the economic competitiveness of the region, municipalities are seeking to enlarge their tax bases through growth coalitions. German *fiscal structures* alongside a plethora of *parastatal and intermediary organizations for business development* are strongly incentivizing such municipal politics of place, which either circumvent regional collaboration or use it strategically. Third, the *intermunicipal design* of the Greater Frankfurt planning system hardly outweighs the local growth coalitions and tax incentives. Rather, it accommodates a market rationale within the state, undermining genuine planning goals of regional land use and cohesion. Fourth, the mandate of regional land-use planning is being partially neutralized both by *institutionally fragmented and geographically overlapping authorities* within the state and those of special-purpose organizations acting at arm's length from local and regional governments. The delegation of key responsibilities of smarter growth policies to special-purpose organizations (e.g., business development, regional greenbelt, infrastructure services) in particular is complicating a comprehensive regional land-use strategy. Finally, the *vast amount of designated building land reserves* in Greater Frankfurt inherited from various municipalities' earlier land-use and zoning plans is impeding the containment of growth.

The state is thus acting as a dynamic terrain of political struggle: on the one hand, an institutionalized system of smart growth and spatial cohesion policies is deeply entrenched and legally secured within the state; on the other hand, entrepreneurial investment policies, business associations, and special-purpose organizations together with the German municipal tax system are triggering locational competition, polycentricism, and decentralized growth. Both are being enacted in practices of zoning, defining growth corridors, negotiating locations for retail, or municipal lobbying at a regional level, channeling private funds into local development projects. Rather than a result of abstract market forces and a lack of state action, suburbanization is proceeding relentlessly through such practices of collective action.

In order to recalibrate the interplay of Frankfurt's modalities of suburban governance, it seems that the key priority is not so much the reformulation of formal planning instruments and institutions. Long-

standing claims to temporally limit the legal validity of building land designations and to legally strengthen and enforce regional plans and regional land-use plans (e.g., Hübler and Kaether, 1996) undeniably continue to be valid. Equally important are regional reforms that allocate more powerful institutional and financial resources to higher planning authorities (ibid.) and review the outsourcing of public tasks to special-purpose organizations. However, the question is more how to politically renegotiate the priorities of environmental sustainability and socio-spatial cohesion goals in spatial planning along with municipal and regional growth policies. Here, the Frankfurt case suggests that ideas of intermunicipal competition as a mechanism for efficiently allocating resources and spatial functions need to be assessed more critically. Given the persistent incentive structures entrenched in the German tax code that tend to thwart spatial cohesion and regional thinking, the regionalization of land-use planning can be effective only if complemented by reallocating the costs and benefits of local growth. Practicable suggestions such as the reform of municipal fiscal equalization schemes to economically incentivize efficient land use, or the introduction of tradable planning permits for urban land-use control have long been on the agenda (e.g., ibid., Henger and Bizer, 2010). Such claims can be interpreted as a case for regional policies to revisit welfarist traditions in spatial governance, in order to balance economic competitiveness with sustainable suburban land use and socio-spatial cohesion.

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