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Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

## TARGETED ANALYSIS //

# METRO

The role and future perspectives of Cohesion Policy in the planning of Metropolitan Areas and Cities

Final report // December 2021

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## TARGETED ANALYSIS //

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Final report // December 2021



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# Abbreviations

AMB	Barcelona Metropolitan Area
ANCI	National Association of Italian Municipalities
BCR	Brussels Capital Region
BMA	Brno Metropolitan Area
CF	Cohesion Fund
CLLD	Community led local development
CMT0	Metropolitan City of Turin
CMFi	Metropolitan City of Florence
EC	European Commission
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
EGTC	European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESPON	European Territorial Observatory Network
EU	European Union
FUA	Functional Urban Area
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
IB	Intermediate Body
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JRC	Joint Research Centre
LMA	Lisbon Metropolitan Area
MAG	Metropolitan Area of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot
MC	Metropolitan City
MdL	Lyon Metropolitan Area
NOP	National Operational Programme
PQ	Policy Question
RMA	Riga Metropolitan Area
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
ROP	Regional Operational Programme
SCM	Steering Committee meeting
TA	Targeted Analysis
ToR	Terms of Reference

# Executive summary

## Context

The METRO project focuses on European metropolitan areas, their governance and the role they play in the European Union (EU) cohesion policy framework. These issues are of particular relevance, as metropolitan areas have progressively joined cities as catalysts and drivers of global development, as a consequence of complex processes of socioeconomic reorganisation and rescaling. These processes are heterogeneous and context-dependent, making metropolitan matters and challenges hard to define and address from a univocal perspective. At the same time, they put traditional spatial governance models into crisis, with existing territorial units that are challenged by phenomena hardly manageable within their fixed administrative boundaries. As a consequence, a growing number of institutional experimentations have emerged in European countries and regions, aiming to address the metropolitan dimension. These episodes of metropolitan governance are highly heterogeneous in their scope and institutionalisation, ranging from informal inter-municipal cooperation that varies through time and in relation to the issues at stake to more institutionalised structures that take on the responsibility to manage metropolitan development.

The importance of metropolisation processes has been also recognised by EU institutions. This is not a surprise if one considers that metropolitan areas are presently responsible for the production of almost 70% of the total EU GDP. Acknowledging the fact that to leave this process ungoverned could pose serious threats to social, economic and territorial cohesion, through time the EU cohesion policy has been progressively adapted to cater to the needs of metropolitan areas. New instruments were introduced to ensure greater flexibility in tailoring funding allocations to territorial needs. In particular, the Integrated Territorial Investments were used to favour the development and implementation of integrated metropolitan development strategies. However, to adopt suitable metropolitan governance and multi-scalar institutional arrangements that can exploit at its best these opportunities remains a challenge, and metropolitan areas often lack the tools, jurisdiction and funding that would allow them to embrace their role to a full extent.

Following the request set by a group of stakeholders active in the development of nine European metropolitan areas – Metropolitan City of Turin, Barcelona Metropolitan Area, Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Brno Municipality, Metropolitan Area of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, Municipality of Florence, *Métropole de Lyon*, Brussels-Capital Region and Municipality of Riga – and supported by the pan-European associations Eurocities and Metropolis, the METRO Targeted Analysis provides answers to the following policy questions:

**PQ1** | What role do metropolitan areas play in the development, management and implementation of the cohesion policy?

**PQ2** | What is the added value of the cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies?

**PQ3** | What role does the cohesion policy play in consolidating metropolitan governance and cooperation?

These questions were answered through five main actions:

- The development of a **conceptual and methodological framework** to analyse, compare and assess the engagement of metropolitan areas within the cohesion policy and the added value of the latter in metropolitan policies and the enhancement of metropolitan governance and cooperation.
- The development of nine 'thick' case study analysis concerning the metropolitan contexts under investigation, following a framework that consents their comparability and assessment while at the same time allowing to accommodate the peculiar nuances that characterise each of them.
- The comparison and assessment of the nine metropolitan case studies in relation to their actual engagement within the EU cohesion policy and to the added value that the EU cohesion policy generates in each of them.
- The development of a realistic set of evidence-based policy messages in relation to the three policy questions that drove the analysis, addressing the activities of metropolitan, national/regional and EU levels actors.
- The translation of the findings of the analysis into three separate but complementary policy briefs that aim and the diffusion of the identified policy messages to stakeholders that have not been directly involved in the METRO project.

## Key findings

The extensive and heterogeneous findings of the research can be summarised according to five dimensions.

A first set of considerations concerns the **high heterogeneity that characterises the metropolitan phenomenon and its governance in the European continent**. The nine analysed contexts profoundly differ one from another, in terms of the size of their FUA, and the socio-economic dynamics that they encompass. At the same time, they feature very different models of metropolitan governance, cooperation and instruments. This variety ranges from fully-fledged metropolitan authorities provided with their own budget and responsible for the development of strategic and sectoral planning documents to metropolitan institutions that, despite not being recognised within the respective national administrative structures, have progressively consolidate through the management of relevant policies, up to contexts in which metropolitan cooperation is still informal and/or constrained by institutional factors.

The **metropolitan areas under investigation played a rather limited in the programming, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy** in the 2014-20 programming period. In particular, the lack of involvement in the programming activity may depend on either their late institutionalisation in the respective national contexts, to their exceptionality within the latter, or simply because of their lack of any formal status. In this concern, a higher engagement and influence has been identified in relation to some contexts in the development of the programming period 2021-27. When it comes to the management and implementation phases, the role played by metropolitan areas is highly differential, mostly as a consequence of the differential architecture that characterises the EU cohesion policy in each country and the programmes and instruments that are employed. Whereas all metropolitan areas under investigation have benefited from the implementation of the EU cohesion policy as beneficiaries of selected projects and activities, in some cases they also played a management role as intermediate bodies. The main and most interesting arrangement through which this has happened is represented by the adoption of ITI dedicated to integrated metropolitan development. However, other arrangements concerning the devolution of management competences in relation to either specific priorities or a dedicated share of resources also produced interesting results.

Also **the added value that the EU cohesion policy may produce in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policy** is highly varied. Despite this variety, however, in all metropolitan areas under investigation practical evidence of this added value and good practices that generated the latter have been identified. Overall, the results of the project suggest that the magnitude of funds received by each territory (hence the criteria through which the EU distribute its resources) and their weight in relation to the budget of metropolitan and local authorities contributes to influencing the EU cohesion policy metropolitan added value, but is not the only relevant variable. As important is the actual institutionalisation of the metropolitan governance in a given context, as well as the devolution of the management of EU cohesion policy resources to metropolitan institutions. Finally, in all cases a high level of coherence between the metropolitan development goals and EU cohesion policy priorities has been detected. However, the mechanisms enhancing this coherence vary from place to place, ranging from circular dynamics of mutual influence to purely top-down influence, up to bottom up reaction to top-down stimuli.

The project results also show that **the EU cohesion policy contributes to the consolidation of metropolitan governance structure and cooperation**. Through its cohesion policy, the EU has favoured in a more or less direct way the emergence of a momentum towards the introduction of metropolitan institutions in various contexts, in particular through the introduction of the ITI but also through the messages it had through time delivered through its policy guidance documents. At the same, where more or less institutionalised forms of metropolitan cooperation already existed, the EU cohesion policy has contributed to their consolidation. Moreover, when looking to the different cases, various metropolitan institutions have used the EU cohesion policy agreements, programmes and projects to further engage with their metropolitan authorities as well as with the business communities and social actors active on their territories, aiming at supporting their action and orient them towards a metropolitan perspective.

Finally, whereas metropolitan areas appear well positioned to react to COVID-19 pandemic and to contribute to planning its aftermath, due to the crucial role they could play in the promotion and coordination of inter-municipal strategies and actions and the support that they can provide to municipalities in the development and implementation of projects, the collected evidence reports a limited added value of the EU cohesion policy to this end. In the majority of cases, the reaction to the pandemic has been coordinated at the higher levels, and metropolitan authorities in most cases contributed to *ad hoc* reactive and containment measures. Similarly, the programming of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and of the related National Recovery and Resilience Plans does not seem to detach to the presented evidence to any relevant extent.

## Policy messages

Building on the project's main findings, various policy messages were distilled, aiming at enhancing the metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy and a stronger engagement of metropolitan actors within the latter. Whereas they may prove useful to the activities of pan-European organisations advocating in favour of a stronger metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy, these messages also address metropolitan, national/regional and EU actors differentially.

More in detail, when aiming at strengthening their role within the EU cohesion policy and enhance the added value that the latter may have in metropolitan policy and governance, **metropolitan actors** should:

- (Prioritise and capitalize) **Identify thematic priorities and actions for which the metropolitan level generates a higher impact** and use them to claim additional involvement in the EU cohesion policy *vis-a-vis* regional, national and EU authorities through concrete proposals.
- (Join forces) **Network with other metropolitan areas at the national and EU level to exchange knowledge, organise lobbying and promote actions** towards further recognition of the metropolitan dimension in the EU cohesion policy and within national policy frameworks.
- (Think strategically) **Establish an overarching metropolitan strategy matching the EU cohesion policy and other national and regional policy instruments**, to facilitate the channelling of resources on concrete metropolitan actions.
- (Integrate sectors and soften boundaries) Use existing frameworks and instruments (OPs, ITI and *ad hoc* agreements) to **integrate sectoral actions into integrated projects with a metropolitan-wide impact and act through variable geographies** (FUA, urban-rural relations, remote rural areas etc.) to tackle territorial heterogeneity and misfits.
- (Collaborate and work together) **Proactively collaborate with national and regional governments and work with local public and private actors in the outline of project proposals and their implementation**, in turn fostering metropolitan cooperation and the co-definition of projects with a true metropolitan impact.

At the same time, in order to valorise metropolitan areas and the role they can play in the promotion of integrated territorial development, **national and regional authorities** are recommended to:

- (Involve and devolve) **Involve metropolitan institutions in the design of EU cohesion policy National and Regional Operational Programmes** and other instruments (e.g. RRF), to enrich them with a metropolitan dimension; **devolve part of the management of the EU cohesion policy to metropolitan institutions** in relation to specific OP priorities or through dedicated instruments.
- (Consolidate multilevel governance) **Use the EU cohesion policy as a way to structure a coherent multilevel governance framework** that ensures the effective coordination of the EU, national, regional, metropolitan and local planning and policies and recognise **the metropolitan level as a relevant nexus between national, regional and local authorities**.
- (promote local metro-thinking) Include incentives in National and Regional Operational Programmes aiming at **encouraging local administrations and local stakeholders to think and act with a metropolitan perspective in mind**, to reduce the fragmentation of the EU cohesion policy impact and enhance its metropolitan added value.
- (Institutionalise) **Enhance the metropolitan dimension not only within the EU cohesion policy frame**, exploring alternative pathways to support autonomous metropolitan development plans and actions and, where necessary, to further institutionalise metropolitan authorities.

Finally, in order to enhance the metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy, the following policy guidance is addressed to **EU-level actors**:

- (Acknowledge) **Define the boundaries of a specific EU metropolitan development discourse and policy** in parallel to that on sustainable urban development, explicitly **acknowledging the metropolitan scale as the most suitable to efficiently tackle functional urban challenges and to facilitate local authorities' cooperation and their participation in the EU cohesion policy**.
- (Monitoring and Reward) **Monitor the implementation of the European code of conduct on partnership** in the Member States and **predispose rewards to incentivise the establishment of**

- inter-institutional partnerships involving metropolitan areas** in the cohesion policy, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Green Deal, the use of ITI and other types of agreements.
- (Strengthen and experimental) **Strengthen and further articulate** EU cohesion policy instruments dedicated to metropolitan development and **include dedicated actions in the new European instruments** (e.g. the RRF, the European Green Deal), effectively turning metropolitan authorities into **an experimental ground to tackle functional challenges**
  - (Empower and simplify) **Predispose resources dedicated to strengthen the institutional capacity of metropolitan actors** (e.g. the Technical Support Instrument), in order to allow them to play an active role in supporting local actors' engagement with the EU cohesion policy. At the same time, **streamline managerial burdens and simplify the logics and mechanisms behind the various EU funds** to favour their integration within territorial development strategies and actions.
  - (Enhance knowledge) **Enhance knowledge by engaging with EU networks with a metropolitan focus in the definition of the EU cohesion policy** priorities and regulations and in the **establishment of a European Metropolitan Observatory** aimed at collecting knowledge on metropolitan institutions and governance.

# Foreword

## Rewind: an investigation on metropolitan areas coming at a timely moment

In early 2019, the Metropolitan City of Turin contacted us informing us about their intention to put together a consortium of metropolises and researchers to work on and investigate further the relationship between metropolitan Areas and cohesion policy. We were genuinely excited, but not particularly surprised.

As network organisations working to build evidence and gather momentum around the growing relevance of metropolitan areas governance both in Europe and globally, we know very well how this phenomenon is intertwined and dependent on investment frameworks, multi-level governance models, as well as policy priorities.

This ESPON Targeted Analysis came at a very fundamental moment for EU cohesion policy, which was transitioning from the 2014-2020 programming period towards a new one. This provided an important opportunity to look back for lessons learnt but also to look forward and develop recommendations to improve the relationship between cohesion policy and metropolitan areas and its authorities.

We could not have anticipated COVID-19, which provided another layer of relevance to this work on metropolitan areas governance, but also brought new challenges in delivering this joint work. Luckily, we could count on a group of metropolitan areas lead by the Metropolitan city of Turin (Barcelona Metropolitan Area, Brussels-Capital Region, Brno Municipality, Municipality of Florence, Metropolitan Area of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Métropole de Lyon and the Municipality of Riga), a group of researchers coordinated by the Politecnico di Torino, and the stellar ESPON EGTC, who provided outstanding support and kept a strong momentum during the most challenging times.

The ESPON METRO project brings new evidence on how EU cohesion policy strengthened metropolitan cooperation, and the benefits that come with a stronger involvement of metropolitan areas in the preparation and implementation of cohesion funds. It tells an important story of how in the past programming period, the EU promoted innovative tools to implement EU funds locally, such as in the case of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs). In some cases, this directly contributed to the establishment of new institutional and cooperation frameworks at metropolitan level. Yet, there is still much that can be made in order to consolidate the metropolitan perspective.

## United in diversity: detailed cases analysis and common recommendations

The added value of the ESPON Targeted Analyses is the possibility to have a very diverse range of stakeholders. As there is no one-size-fits-all model to governing large metropolitan spaces and a variety of models exist in Europe - and even further around the world - the approach promoted by ESPON Targeted Analyses was particularly relevant for our group of stakeholders.

Metropolitan areas are very diverse due to their different administrative, territorial and political arrangements, and this is reflected well in the group of ESPON METRO stakeholders. Under the coordination of the Metropolitan City of Turin as lead stakeholder, we were able to put together a strong team of metropolises that represented this metropolitan diversity very well, and who had the objective to assess the role and future perspectives of cohesion policy in the planning of metropolitan areas and cities.

The governance model of those metropolitan territories varies greatly, some of which are institutionalised and are established as metropolitan areas, official authorities in the multi-level governance (Barcelona Metropolitan Area), others act as in a softer and more voluntary framework (Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot) with different layers of cooperation opportunities. At the same time, the territories represented by these metropolitan areas differ significantly, with some which are mostly urbanised and in which the official metropolitan areas only represent a fraction of the functional area (Brussels) and others that go beyond functional areas to include both very urbanized areas and even remote rural areas, such as in the case of Turin and Brno.

In addition, these territories differ also very much in regards to their model of political representation, with some of them in which the president of the metropolitan area is directly elected by citizens (Lyon) and others in which it is directly appointed or even some in which the president is automatically represented by the

mayor of the main city, or others in which he/she represents smaller municipalities. No matter what model they follow, all the metropolitan areas of this research have still a long way for future development.

All in all, this diversity reflected well the metropolitan reality in Europe, allowing the ESPON Targeted Analysis to develop insightful policy recommendations that can be applied to different context. This gives our network organisations an important role to reach out beyond the partners and among our members and wider policy community.

The policy recommendations that you will find in the next chapter stress the importance of cooperation and encourage policy makers for a more ambitious recognition of the metropolitan dimension in their strategies for the socio-economic, environmental and territorial development at both regional, national and EU level.

High-quality data will be crucial in this context, especially considering the need to gather data on urban living trends based on a metropolitan perspective to compare objective data on metropolitan realities. This is important in Europe, but also around the world, and should foster initiatives like the one Metropolis is undertaking through its metropolitan Observatory.

## **A building block for wider relevance and research on metropolitan areas**

Clearly, the results of the Targeted Analysis strongly resonate with Eurocities and Metropolis strategic objectives to strengthen the governance of metropolitan territories.

ESPON METRO equips the metropolises and networks as ours with evidence on why the metropolitan scale is the most suitable scale to efficiently tackle functional urban challenges, and keep up with the ambition to further involve metropolitan authorities in the next programming period 2021-2027 to mainstream metropolitan cooperation. At the same time, it provides evidence to raise the relevance of metropolitan areas to 'build forward better' in the post-COVID-19 recovery debates.

Worldwide, the metropolitan dimension in governance is starting to gain momentum, and European actors recognize, at least partially, the crucial role metropolitan areas can have in delivering better public policies and services for all. For more than a decade, those actors have been an important driver for the stronger recognition of metropolitan areas governance across the continent. Carrying on this work and further building on it will be decisive in reaching the goals established by several EU strategies.

When looking at key EU political priorities, Farm to Fork strategy, the New Urban Mobility framework, or even the new EU Industrial Strategy, to us it is clear that to deliver on the European Green Deal the various legislations need to better target and recognise metropolitan areas. Cohesion policy remains the main investment tool at EU level to bring these strategies jointly forward locally, but cities are looking positively at other EU initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus and the Horizon Europe Mission on Climate Neutral and Smart Cities. Simultaneously, what happens in Europe in terms of recognition and inclusion of metropolitan areas in development strategies will also have an important impact at the global level too, as this debate is also happening in other parts of the world.

In the context of the pandemic, metropolitan areas have become much more aware and vocal about the importance of good urban planning for compact, healthy and liveable metropolises. It is not surprising that metropolitan areas cooperation is now seen with growing interest by leaders and policy makers, a crucial level of EU multi-level governance and an enabler that can help us grow stronger in the face of new crises for a territorially balanced and green recovery.

From our perspective, we also see ESPON METRO as the building block of a broader strand of focus and research on metropolitan areas. We see now many territories in which metropolitan areas research could be further developed, particularly by looking at integrated territorial investments across Europe. For instance, we see an important opportunity to gather insights on how metropolitan cooperation is already institutionalising in new growing sectors and what are the scenarios for the future. This is particularly crucial in the context of the green and digital transformation Europe is undertaking. There is a need for the metropolitan context to take the front stage in the efforts for a circular economy and for a balanced territorial development between urban and rural areas.

To bring forward new research strands and foster the metropolitanisation debate it will be important to increase cooperation between all actors, including all levels of government, but also academia and researchers that have a key role providing data and scientific evidence for a solid debate. In this effort, the various

actors active locally at metropolitan level should be involved to bring in their perspective and valuable practical insights on metropolitan realities. In other words, the political legitimacy of the metropolitan project will depend on an open, inclusive and evidence-based debate, which is exactly what the ESPON METRO study strived for.

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# 1 Introduction, objectives and policy questions

The METRO project aims at (i) exploring how the EU cohesion policy goals can be integrated in the planning and implementation of policies at metropolitan scale, by investigating governance solutions that connect strategic metropolitan planning to the EU cohesion policy funds and instruments at the regional, national and EU level; (ii) understanding how the EU cohesion policy can help achieving socio-economic and territorial goals at metropolitan scale, by developing area-based approaches and integrated territorial strategies; (iii) analysing how the EU cohesion policy can foster better cooperation and governance dynamics at the metropolitan level.

In order to reach these aims, the research activity has been pivoted around three main policy questions:

**PQ1** | What role do metropolitan areas play in the development, management and implementation of the cohesion policy?

**PQ2** | What is the added value of the cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies?

**PQ3** | What role does the cohesion policy play in consolidating metropolitan governance and cooperation?

These questions were answered through the analysis of the metropolitan contexts in which the nine stakeholders involved in the projects are active: Metropolitan City of Turin (CMT0), Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB), Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA), Brno Metropolitan Area (BMA), Metropolitan Area of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot (MAG), Metropolitan City of Florence (CMFi), *Métropole de Lyon* (MdL), Brussels-Capital Region (BCR), Riga Metropolitan Area (RMA). The main focus has been on the stakeholders' roles, institutional contexts, capabilities and perspectives in the framework of the EU cohesion policy, also in relation to their respective national and regional contexts. Moreover, the project explored the role that metropolitan areas and the EU cohesion policy played in relation to the COVID-19 emergency.

The presented results are based on experiences and practices identifiable in the nine territories and have been developed in connection with the stakeholders, to allow to deliver realistic sets of evidence-based policy recommendations. Furthermore, the project improves general understanding on how European metropolitan areas can contribute to achieving cohesion policy objectives through their policies. Finally, it provides meaningful advice on how cohesion policy should take the metropolitan dimension into account during the programming period 2021-27.

## 1.1 Structure of the main report

The Main report is structured in 5 sections.

**Section 1 – Introduction** | It summarises the main aim of the project and the policy questions that have been driving the research. It also details the contents of the report to the benefit of the reader.

**Section 2 – Scope, conceptual framework and methodology** | It details the thematic scope of the project, introducing the multiple levels of complexity that concerns the governance of the metropolitan dimension, and the way metropolitan areas have been engaged in the EU cohesion policy thought time. It presents that conceptual framework that has underpinned the analysis and the methodological steps that have been pursued by the research team.

**Section 3 – Main findings** | It constitutes the core of the report and summarises its results. More in detail, it first compares the nine metropolitan contexts under investigation in relation to their territorial, institutional and governance characteristics. Then it provides a comparative assessment of the cases studies concerning the three policy questions that have been driving the analysis, respectively focusing on (i) the role that metropolitan areas play in the development, management and implementation of the cohesion policy; (ii) the added value of the cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies and (iii) the role that the EU cohesion policy plays in consolidating metropolitan governance and cooperation. Finally, it discusses the role that metropolitan areas have played in reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Section 4 – Policy messages** | It distils a list of policy messages that aims at further enhancing of the metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy and a stronger engagement of metropolitan actors within the latter, and address them to different stakeholders' groups: metropolitan actors, national and regional policy-makers and EU-level policy-makers.

**Section 5 – Directions for future research** | It sketches out a number of avenues for future research that have been opened by the analysis, in relation to metropolitan governance and the role that the EU cohesion policy plays and could potentially play in the planning of metropolitan areas.

## 1.2 Annexes

The main report is accompanied by 11 scientific annexes, that provide additional information related to the content presented in the final report, and by three policy briefs that draw on the project results.

**Annex I – Conceptual framework and methodology** | It details the conceptual framework that underpinned the analysis and the structure of the research. It presents the different methodological steps that have been pursued and the various components that have oriented the activities of the various research teams in the collection of data and information concerning the nine case studies under investigation and in their analysis and assessment. It presents the engagement strategy of the project in detail and the iterative methodology that has been applied to produce, test and validate the project's policy messages.

**Annex II – The role of Metropolitan areas within the EU cohesion policy** | It presents and discusses extensively, in a comparative manner the evidence collected in the nine case studies (see Annexes III to XI). More in detail, the document synthesises and compares the information collected by the various research teams through the application of the project's analytical protocol and as a consequence of their continuous interaction with the respective stakeholders.

**Annexes III to XI – Case Study Reports** | These reports present the evidence collected in relation to the nine cases studies under investigation more in detail, following a common template that allows for cross-cutting comparisons among them. They also include policy messages that are specifically tailored on each of the nine contexts and on the peculiar knowledge and policy needs of the nine stakeholders. In addition, each case study report is introduced by a political message from the stakeholder authority and accompanied by a recto/verso factsheet that summarise the key characteristics, findings and policy messages.

**Policy Brief 1 – The role of metropolitan area in the EU cohesion policy** | It discusses the engagement of metropolitan areas in the programming, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy, the instruments that are adopted in different places and the governance mechanisms that have been put in place to ensure the development of virtuous synergies between the EU cohesion policy and metropolitan policies.

**Policy Brief 2 - The added value of the EU cohesion policy in planning and implementation of metropolitan policies** | It reflects upon the existing coherence and the mutual influence between EU and metropolitan goals and priorities, the magnitude of resources and their geographical and thematic distribution and the institutional conditions that may contribute to enhance the added value of the EU cohesion policy on the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies.

**Policy Brief 3 - The role of the EU cohesion policy in supporting metropolitan governance structures and cooperation practices** | It focuses on the influence exerted by the EU on the emergence and consolidation of metropolitan governance, and discusses the way the EU cohesion policy can be used in metropolitan areas to reduce local fragmentation and engage local municipalities, private actors and the civil society in the development of strategies and projects with a metropolitan dimension.

## 2 Scope, conceptual framework and methodology

The role of metropolitan areas as catalysts and drivers of global development has grown through time, as a consequence of complex processes of socioeconomic reorganisation and rescaling. These processes are heterogeneous and context-dependent, making metropolitan matters and challenges hard to define and address from a univocal perspective. They put traditional spatial governance and planning models into crisis, with existing territorial units that are increasingly challenged by phenomena that are hardly manageable within their fixed administrative boundaries. The metropolitan conundrum has also gained attention in the agenda of EU institutions, acknowledging the fact that to leave this process ungoverned could pose serious threats to social, economic and territorial cohesion. Despite the efforts dedicated to adapt the EU cohesion policy and its tools to the needs of metropolitan areas, however, to setup suitable multi-scalar institutional arrangements aimed at metropolitan development and governance remains a challenge.

The scope of the METRO project lies exactly at the interface between the evolution of metropolitan development and governance in Europe and the way the EU cohesion policy has progressively taken it on board in its logics, instruments and procedures. This section builds on a review of previous studies, as well as on relevant policy documents (such as the just adopted Territorial Agenda 2030 and the New Leipzig Charter on Sustainable Cities – respectively EC 2020a and EC 2020b), to sketch out more precisely the boundaries within which the project research has been developed (§2.1, §2.2), the conceptual framework underpinning the latter (§2.3) and the methodological steps that have been pursued by the research team (§2.4).

### 2.1 Governing the metropolitan dimension

The METRO project focuses on European metropolitan areas, their governance and the role they play in the EU cohesion policy framework. These issues are of particular relevance, as metropolitan areas are responsible for the production of almost 70% of the EU GDP (EUROSTAT, 2016). However, metropolitan matters and challenges remains hard to address, also due to the complex relations among the centres, the suburban areas and the large peripheries that characterise metropolitan territories, and the different shape that these relations have in the different European countries and regions (Healey, 2010; Ahrend et al., 2014; Salet et al., 2015; ESPON-POLYCE, 2013; ESPON SPIMA, 2017).

As a consequence of this complexity, no univocal definition of the metropolitan dimension has been agreed upon so far. At the same time, various methodologies to define functional urban territories in a consistent way have been developed through time, conceptualizing them as characterised by densely inhabited urban cores and less-populated municipalities whose labour market is highly integrated with the cores (OECD 2012, 2013; Fadic et al. 2019; Dijkstra et al., 2019). Following this line of investigation, the OECD, in collaboration with the European Commission and Eurostat, has started to reflect on possible methodologies that would have allowed to define functional urban areas as functional economic places in a consistent way across countries, using population density and travel-to-work flows as key variables (OECD 2012, 2013). Since then, a number of theoretical and methodological conceptualisation followed suit, as for instance the work from Fadic et al. (2019) that classifies small regions on the basis of metropolitan population, density and remoteness, and the Eurostat methodological manual on territorial typologies (Eurostat, 2019). Most recently, a joint EU-OECD expert team has finalised a definition of functional urban areas (Dijkstra et al., 2019), that has been adopted and endorsed within the NUTS classification<sup>1</sup> and applied throughout Europe.

More in detail, according to the EU-OECD methodology, the definition of Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) is composed of a number of different steps (Dijkstra et al., 2019): (i) First of all, a population grid<sup>2</sup> makes it

<sup>1</sup> Further details are available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Territorial\\_typologies\\_manual\\_-\\_metropolitan\\_regions](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Territorial_typologies_manual_-_metropolitan_regions)

<sup>2</sup> As argued by Dijkstra et al., 2019, the EU-OECD FUA definition 'people-based', as it only uses density and size of population and the daily mobility of the latter as opposed to built-up area. This choice is motivated by the fact that built-up area per capita varies between cities of different sizes, between developed and less developed countries and tends to

possible to define 'urban centres' independently from administrative or statistical boundaries, as a cluster of contiguous cells of high density and with more than 50,000 inhabitants. (i) Subsequently, each 'dense urban centre' is adapted to the closest local units to define a city. (iii) Finally, commuting flows are used to identify which of the 'dense urban centre' surrounding, less densely populated local units were part of the city's labour market, but also characterised by flows towards to access education, health, culture, etc.

FUAs are a powerful tool to compare socio-economic and spatial trends, as they are better suited than administrative areas to capture agglomeration economies. At the same time, they can guide national and local governments when they plan infrastructure, transportation, housing, schools, and spaces for culture and recreation, in so doing supporting virtuous changes in the way policies are planned and implemented by providing the right scale to address issues that affect both the city and its surrounding commuting zone. As a matter of fact, since almost three decades, metropolitan areas in Europe have been both the scope of and the reason for institutional experimentation, with public authorities across Europe that have progressively engaged in the development of strategic visions and plans that tackle challenges that present a clear metropolitan dimension (i.e. housing, mobility, urban planning, employment, economic development, culture etc.), as a way to guide the integration of different spatial developments and engage public and private actors at different scales, beyond the core city alone (Kübler & Heinelt 2002, Albrechts, 2003, Healey, 2010, Albrechts et al., 2017, Malý J., 2018). Whereas these metropolitan activities often occur via informal inter-municipal cooperation, that varies through time and in relation to the issues at stake, a number of governance structures have been institutionalised from the bottom-up, aiming at strategic planning and policy coordination across local governments. At the same time, in some countries, formal administrative bodies have been established top-down and provided with the responsibility to manage and promote the development of metropolitan territories. Overall, various 'forms' and 'models' of metropolitan governance have been identified, that differ greatly in relation to their level of institutionalisation, the distribution of powers, competences and resources, their internal structure and the actors involved (Tomàs, 2016, Zimmermann et al, 2020). As part of a study on metropolitan indicators commissioned by Metropolis, the London School of Economics developed a metropolitan coordination indicator assessing the number of sectors under some formal arrangement of metropolitan coordination and the coverage of that institutional arrangement, in score from 0 to 5, with 0 meaning 'no coordination at all' and 5 meaning that there is metropolitan government/supra municipal structure.<sup>3</sup> As shown by the heterogeneity of results, the exact nature of the cooperation is often unique, and different arrangements may also depend on the different spatial governance and planning systems that characterise the European continent (ESPON COMPASS, 2018, Nadin & Stead, 2008, Berisha et al., 2021).

Additional complexity emerges when comparing the institutional arrangement in place to the metropolitan functional dimension, as traditional governance and planning practices struggle to deal with phenomena that go beyond existing administrative jurisdictions (ESPON SPIMA, 2017; Albrechts et al., 2017). In this concern, recent studies have highlighted the interpretative and administrative difficulties in adapting traditional planning practices to urbanisation trends that go beyond the jurisdictions of a single administrative authority, and the emergence of 'soft spaces with fuzzy boundaries' for planning and policy approaches that are more liquid and process-oriented (Allmendinger et al., 2015; Salet et al., 2015; Zimmermann et al., 2020).

Whereas metropolitan institutional structures and governance practices often remain geared towards core-centric urban models, putting outer areas in a dependent position, some studies have recently argued that fragmented metropolitan governance structures have lower levels of productivity than those featuring legally established metropolitan governance bodies (EP, 2019)<sup>4</sup>. To tackle these issues, the key challenge seems to find the right problem 'owner' or 'owners', that is/are able to address the metropolitan conundrum at the right scale and with the relevant tool(s) in order to grasp the changing metropolitan landscape, challenges

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grow over time. This approach to FUA is linked to the 'degree of urbanisation' (Eurostat, 2018). Both use the identical city definition, but the degree of urbanisation classifies the remaining local units into towns & suburbs, and rural areas. Both definitions are included in the amended European NUTS regulation (REGULATION (EU) 2017/2391).

<sup>3</sup> Some of the ESPON METRO areas were covered by the study, achieving the following scores: Barcelona and Turin: 5; Brussels and Lisbon: 4, i.e. there is a multipurpose/strategic mechanism for formal cooperation and all jurisdictions participate on it; Grand Lyon: 3, i.e. there is a multipurpose/strategic mechanism for formal cooperation but not all jurisdictions participate on it. The complete results are available at: <https://indicators.metropolis.org/>

<sup>4</sup> This governance conundrum often prevents politicians from adequately tackling problems like spatial fragmentation, uneven development, differences in quality of life, social disparities etc. (Janssen-Jansen & Hutton, 2011).

and dynamics (ESPON SPIMA, 2017). That is to say that the functional, political and representational relations within a given metropolitan area need to be understood in their institutional context before taking action (Salet et al., 2015). This is fully in line with the arguments brought forward by the recently published Handbook on Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (JRC, 2020), highlighting that needs, challenges and opportunities for development must be matched with the appropriate spatial scale and territorial context. Overall, whereas this would contribute to overcoming fragmentation and inefficient actions caused by administrative boundaries, and ensuring more coordinated action between territories, better insight is needed in the onset of a new political and governance landscape with complex interdependencies between multiple actors at different governmental scales (Faludi 2015, 2018).

## 2.2 The metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy

The importance of metropolitan areas is also recognised to a certain extent by EU institutions, as it is witnessed by their increasing relevance within EU spatial development strategies and guidance document, as well as by the growing share of funds dedicated to urban development goals that has characterised the recent EU cohesion policy programming periods, recognising urban and metropolitan areas as key components for social and economic development and, at the same time, places of social unrest and environmental concerns (Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2016, Cotella, 2019; Medeiros, 2019).

As a consequence of the growing academic and political debate on how to address the functional needs of metropolitan areas in a sustainable, integrated manner, metropolitan areas have progressively entered the EU cohesion policy discourse and started to receive attention by EU funding programmes and tools. More in detail, whereas a report published by the European Commission in 2011 under the title 'Cities of Tomorrow' had already argued the importance of a metropolitan administrative reorganisation for the relaunch of the economy after the 2008 crisis (CEC, 2011), the centrality of metropolitan areas has been recently reaffirmed in the renewed Leipzig Charter on Sustainable Cities (DE Presidency, 2020a) and in the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 (DE Presidency, 2020b). The messages of these two documents are indeed complementary, and altogether pointing towards a stronger role for metropolitan governance: the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 advocates place-based territorial development and multilevel policy coordination as overarching principles for all places and policy sectors, while the New Leipzig Charter provides guidance for applying these principles in cities, urban areas and their functional regions. More in general, metropolitan areas are recognised to potentially play a role in several other aspects of the European development, as for instance in relation to supporting and bringing forward urban-rural partnership as advocated by the recent EC Communication on the long term vision for rural areas (EC, 2021). Arguments in favour of a growing role for metropolitan areas in territorial development have multiplied in the last months, also has a consequence to the important role that effective metropolitan governance models and mechanisms could play in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Metropolis, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2020; EWRC, 2020).

In parallel to the progressive consolidation of the metropolitan dimension within the EU discourse focusing on sustainable urban development, European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) have been progressively adapted to cater to their diverse needs. For instance, in the programming period 2014-20, at least 5% of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) allocation was dedicated to sustainable urban development strategies, through projects related to urban mobility, regeneration of deprived communities, research and innovation capacity, climate change, digitalisation and entrepreneurship. On its hand, the European Social Fund (ESF) co-finances employment-related projects and investments targeting workers, young people and unemployed at a metropolitan scale, and additional support to metropolitan development policies can be drawn from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), in those areas that in one way or another benefit from them. Importantly, new instruments were introduced to ensure greater flexibility in tailoring ESIF allocations to territorial needs. Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) were used to favour the development and implementation of integrated metropolitan development strategies, addressing the challenges of given areas from priority axes of one or more ESIF programmes. At the same time, Community-Led Local Developments (CLLD) were employed to mobilise local communities and organisations to contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 Strategy goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, according to an approach that builds on the experience of the previous Community Initiative LEADER and is pivoted on the active role of Local Action Groups (LAGs). The Commission 2021-27 long-term EU budget and Next Generation EU, agreed on November the 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, further strengthens the urban dimension of cohesion policy, earmarking the 8% of the ERDF allocation for investments in sustainable urban development. Additionally, the new configuration in five policy objectives should allow a simplified management of the ESIF and their integrated use through ITI and CLLD. This

further attempt towards integration is intended to allow more freedom at all administrative levels, and to stimulate the definition of integrated territorial development strategies that respond to the peculiar local needs.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the new European Urban Initiative should foster city-to-city cooperation, innovation and capacity-building across all the thematic priorities of the EU Urban Agenda (Fioretti et al., 2020).

Despite the described efforts, however, to adopt suitable metropolitan governance and multi-scalar institutional arrangements that can exploit these opportunities remain a challenge. Many metropolitan areas still lack the tools, jurisdiction and funding that would allow them to embrace their role to a full extent. Despite their importance for the development of Europe, they do not yet play a primary role neither in the design of the national strategies and operational programmes, nor in the decision to use new instruments such as ITI and CLLD, which stays within the responsibility of the national and/or regional level. This situation is further worsened by the fact that the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the main operative arm through which the Next Generation EU programme is promoting transformative economic, environmental and social recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, is mostly managed at the central level in the member states, in partial contradiction to the partnership principle and, most importantly, to the fact that, across Europe, large urban and metropolitan areas have been the ones hit hardest by the pandemic (EMA, 2020).

When looked at from an institutional perspective (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, Borzel, 2020), this situation reflects the multilevel governance tensions resulting from the different interests and priorities of the various government levels, the variable power relations that characterise each member states government and administrative structures interact with and engages with the EU cohesion policy framework and, in turn, the influence that the EU (directly or indirectly) exerts on these structures and the changes it produces. The result of this multiple institutional relations and influences is highly heterogeneous and varies from country to country, highlighting the need of a better and more coherent coordination among all territorial levels. Similarly, if they have to play an active role in facing global challenges as the promotion of alternative development trajectories in the COVID-19 aftermath of the mitigation of climate change, a further recognition and delimitation of the engagement of metropolitan areas and cities within the scope of the EU cohesion policy is also required.

## 2.3 The METRO conceptual framework

Neither the role that metropolitan areas play within the EU cohesion policy framework, nor the implications of the latter for the integrated development of metropolitan territories have been explored yet to a reasonable extent. This knowledge gap derives from the high heterogeneity that characterise a field of inquiry: (i) on the one hand, it encompasses a highly heterogeneous landscape of national territorial and institutional systems, each characterised by its peculiar urbanisation patterns and by its own take on how to govern metropolitan phenomena; (ii) on the other hand, it concerns the EU cohesion policy, that has evolved through time to incorporate a metropolitan dimension and aims to provide an added value to the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies, but that has to do so in a way that takes into account the mentioned territorial and institutional differences.

The METRO research team addressed these multiple complexities through a conceptual framework that aims at characterising in detail the different institutional fields encompassed by the research work, as well as the various interrelations between them (Figure 2.1). Its development builds on previous research works (ESPON FOCI, 2010, ESPON POLYCE, 2012, ESPON TANGO, 2014, ESPON TOWN, 2014; ESPON ET2050, 2014, ESPON SPIMA, 2017, ESPON ACTAREA, 2017, ESPON COMPASS, 2018) as well as on various literature contributions in the field of European integration and Europeanisation (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Cotella and Janin Rivolin, 2015; Faludi 2018) and metropolitan governance (Ahrend et al. 2014; McCann, 2015; Pierre, 2016; Medeiros, 2019; Zimmermann et al., 2020; Demaziere et al., 2020; Zimmermann and Fedeli, 2021).

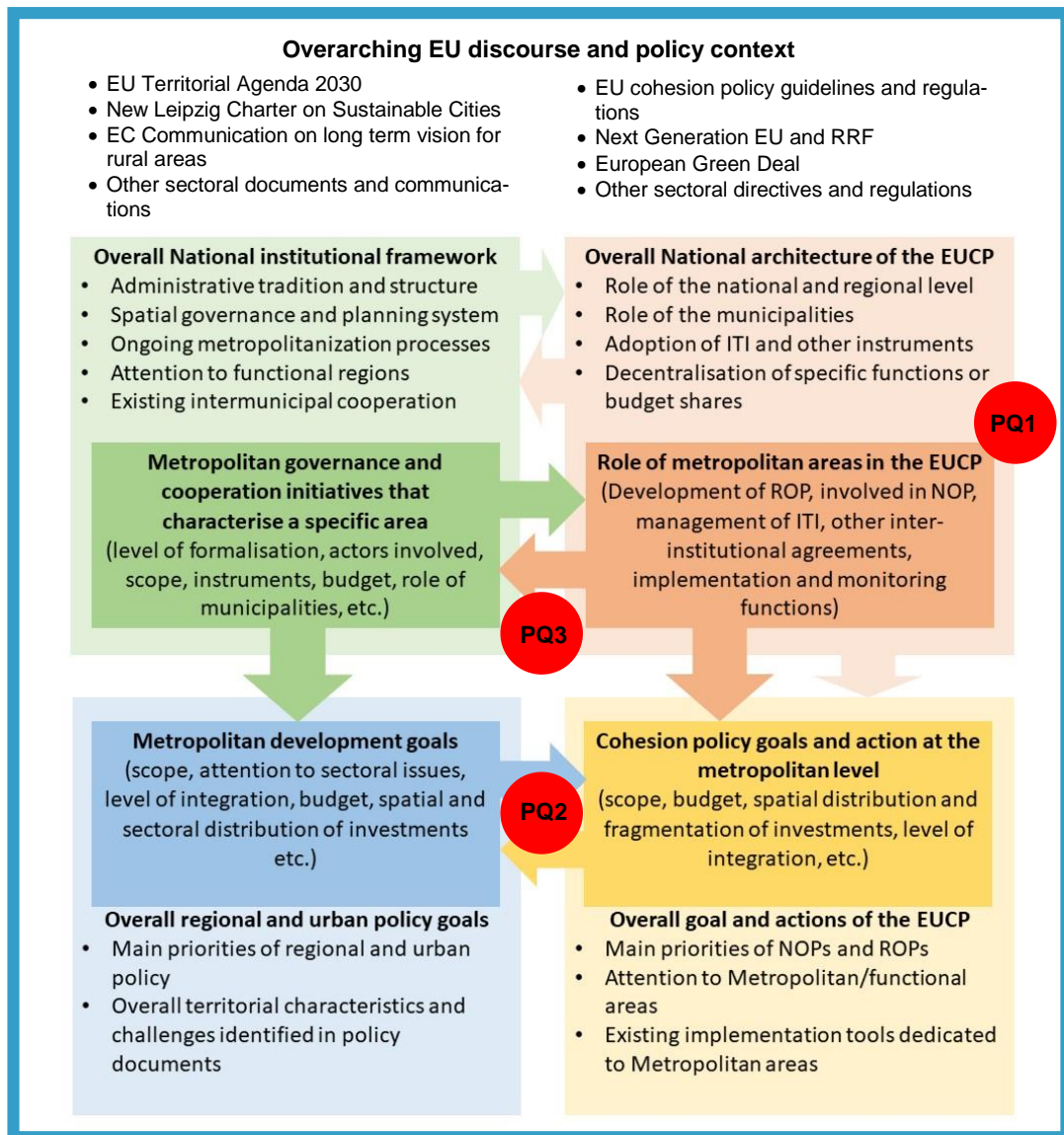
First of all (green quadrant in the figure), the composed framework shows how the level of institutionalisation, scope and character of metropolitan governance and cooperation activities within a given national/regional context are strongly dependent on the overall institutional framework of the country/region within which they

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<sup>5</sup> Particularly relevant in this concern is Policy Objective 5 A Europe closer to citizens and its two thematic objectives: (i) fostering integrated social, economic, cultural and environmental development and security in urban areas and (ii) fostering integrated social, economic, cultural and environmental local development and security, including rural, coastal areas.

exist. In particular, the country and regional administrative tradition and structure play a relevant role here, together with the spatial governance and planning system, any ongoing attempt towards metropolisation, as well as the attention to functional regions in policy-making and the attitude towards inter-municipal cooperation. Furthermore, the overall institutional framework of a country also influences the peculiar architecture of the EU cohesion policy and, more in particular, the role of the national and regional levels, the role of municipalities, the decision to adopt or not technical implementation tools, the decentralisation of specific competences and budget shares etc. In turn (orange quadrant in the figure), and together with the actual characteristics of metropolitan governance in a given area, the national architecture of the EU cohesion policy determines the actual role played by metropolitan areas in relation to their engagement in the development, management and implementation of programmes and tools and through other possible inter-institutional agreements.

**Figure 2.1**  
The METRO conceptual framework



Source: authors' own elaboration

When moving to the bottom section of the framework, metropolitan territorial development goals are framed within regional and urban territorial policy framework and on the territorial characteristics and challenges

identified therein (blue quadrant in the figure). The process of framing depends on the level of institutionalisation, the characteristics and the scope of metropolitan governance, on the available budget etc. At the same time, the goals and action of the EU cohesion policy within a given metropolitan context are strongly intertwined with the overall goals and actions of the EU cohesion policy in the country, and in particular with the priorities detailed in the National and Regional Operational Programmes (NOPs and ROPs) and other implementation tools (yellow quadrant in the figure). In this light, they are directly dependent on the national cohesion policy architecture, as well as on the specific role played by metropolitan areas.

Having developed a conceptual framework to address the multiple complexities and interactions that characterises the engagement of metropolitan areas within the EU cohesion policy and, viceversa, the impact of the EU cohesion policy on metropolitan governance and policies, it is possible to position on this framework the three main policy questions that characterise the project, in so doing identifying the relations that will be explored in order to provide meaningful answer to them. More in details:

- **Policy Question 1** (What role do metropolitan areas play in the development, management and implementation of the cohesion policy?) concerns the relations that characterise the orange quadrant, and in particular the role that metropolitan areas play within the EU cohesion policy, to be read within the overall national and regional architecture of the latter.
- **Policy Question 2** (What is the added value of the cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies?) concerns the reciprocal influences between the blue and yellow quadrants, and more in detail the mutual influences that occurs in the development of metropolitan policies and EU cohesion policy programmes and instruments.
- **Policy Question 3** (What role does the cohesion policy play in consolidating metropolitan governance and cooperation?) concerns the influence exerted by the orange quadrant on the blue one, i.e. the way in which the peculiar modes and mechanisms through which metropolitan areas are engaged within the planning, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy can contribute to a further strengthening of their position within the national and regional institutional frameworks, as well as to support metropolitan actors in the engaging with and supporting metropolitan authorities in developing and participating to strategies and actions that are truly metropolitan in their nature.

## 2.4 Three methodological steps

The project's conceptual framework translates in three subsequent but strongly interrelated methodological steps, whose application throughout the project's lifetime allowed the research team to analyse, compare and assess the specific experiences and challenges that the stakeholders' metropolitan areas face in engaging with the EU cohesion policy and in employing the latter to achieve metropolitan goals (Figure 2.2).

The **first step** concerned the **data collection and analysis**, and has been further detailed into three inter-related activities, altogether allowing for the production of nine comprehensive, comparable case studies on the role of metropolitan areas in the EU cohesion policy and, vice versa, the added value of the cohesion policy in metropolitan governance and policies.

The first activity (action 1.a) focused on the identification of the territorial, institutional and policy arrangements that characterise the nine areas, in relation to the overall institutional arrangement of the countries where they are located, as well as of relevant policies and instruments. In doing so, particular attention has been dedicated to exploring the coherence between metropolitan functional relations and the institutional and governance framework. In this concern, a twofold terminology has been adopted in the project:

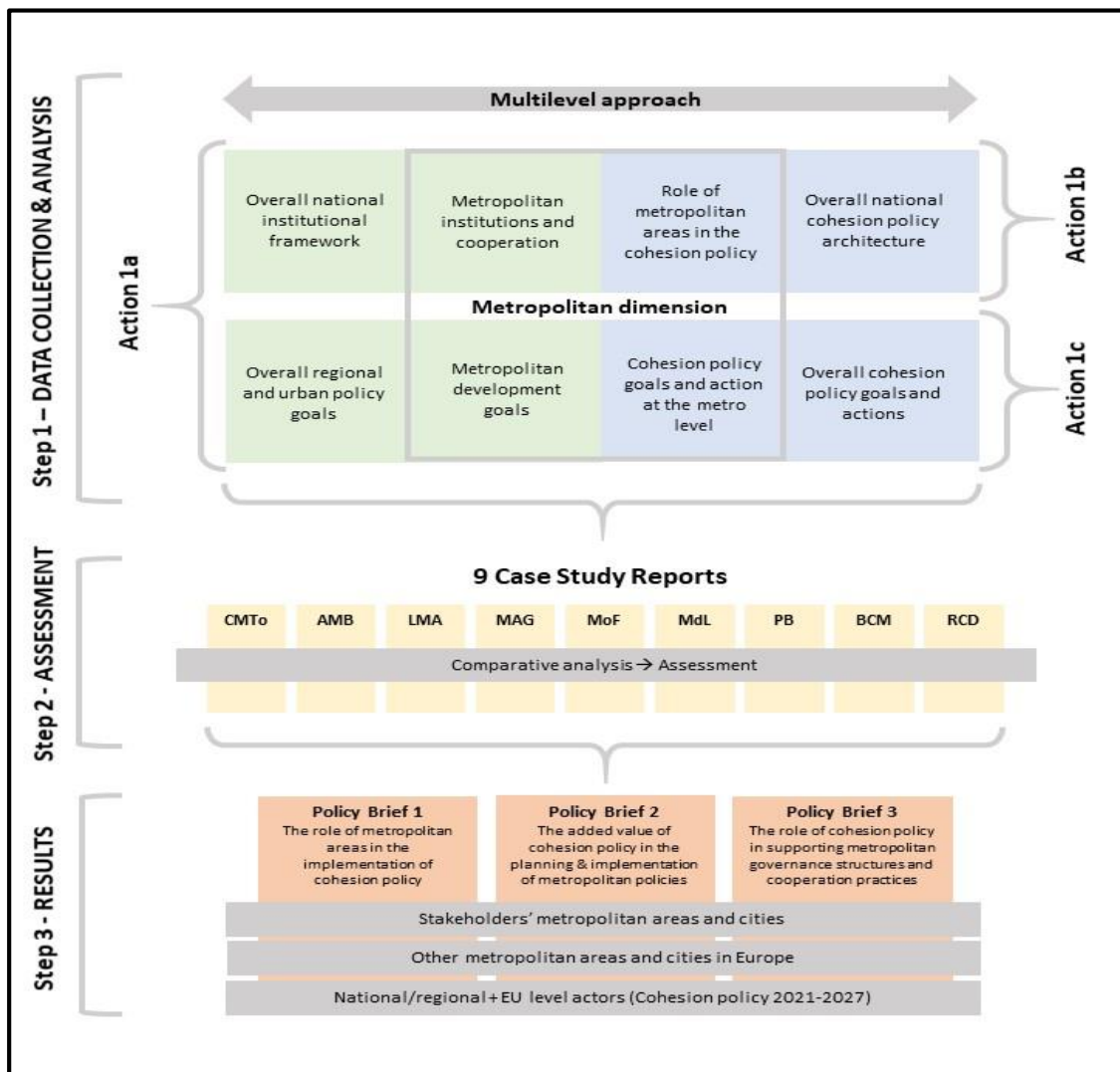
- With the wording 'metropolitan areas', the project refers to the more or less institutionalised supralocal governance bodies that are located in the nine territorial contexts under scrutiny.
- With metropolitan functional area (or metropolitan FUA), it indicates the functional area delimited around the nine core cities that are located in the nine contexts, through the application of the EU-OECD methodology (Dijkstra et al., 2019).

The second activity (action 1.b) explored, from a multilevel governance perspective, the models and mechanisms through which the metropolitan areas under scrutiny engage with the EU cohesion policy. In so doing, it examined in detail the role played by metropolitan actors in the programming, management and

implementation of the EU cohesion policy. The analysis of each country’s overall cohesion policy governance framework has been particularly relevant here, to understand the EU-national-regional-metropolitan nexus.

The third activity (action 1.c) analysed how metropolitan institutional arrangements integrate the EU cohesion policy objectives in their strategies and policies. It quantitative and qualitative explore the geographical and thematic distribution of the EU cohesion policy in the metropolitan areas, to then reflect on the added value of the latter in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies. This activity also investigates whether or not the implementation of the EU cohesion policy is enhancing metropolitan governance and cooperation, and triggering partnerships and joint visioning. The analysis dedicated also attention to how the EU cohesion policy has been uses to react to the COVID-19 pandemic, surveying examples of this activity.

**Figure 2.2**  
**ESPON METRO methodological steps**



Source: authors' own elaboration

The results of these three activities have been compiled in the nine case study reports delivered together with this report (Annexes III to XI). These reports were produced on the basis of a common template that has been provided in advance to all research teams, in order to enhance comparability. The data and information analysed in the case study reports were collected through the implementation of a number of analytical components, altogether constituting the project’s methodology. The most relevant of these components is the *METRO analytical protocol* consisting of over 100 questions and sub-questions, organized under the three activities mentioned above. The analytical protocol constituted the main source for the preparation of

the semi-structured interviews that each team conducted with the key actors identified together with their respective stakeholders in the first stage of the project. At the same time, it provided guidance for the systematisation of the information collected through the desk-analysis of policy documents and other relevant materials. Moreover, the application of the analytical protocol is complemented by three other components:

- *Quantitative data collection.* Selected quantitative data have been collected, in order to allow for a comparison of the metropolitan areas as well as between each institutional metropolitan area and the respective EU-OECD FUA.
- *cohesion policy programmes' analysis.* The most relevant EU cohesion policy programmes and instruments that produce a direct or indirect impact on the territories of the metropolitan areas under investigation were identified and analysed in relation to their priorities, resources and functioning.
- *Social network analysis.* A roster questionnaire has been compiled with the help of the interviewees, aiming at identifying and visualizing the variable geography of the metropolitan actors' network within and outside the EU cohesion policy.

The **second step** concerns the **comparative assessment** of the nine metropolitan cases. The information collected through the analytical phase are here brought together and compared also in the light of relevant literature, to assess the role that the nine metropolitan areas (and actors therein) play in the multi-level governance of the EU cohesion policy, with particular reference to its programming, management and implementation, and to the added value generated by the EU cohesion policy in the achievement of metropolitan goals and the activation and consolidation of metropolitan governance structures and cooperation.

The comparative assessment adopts a quali-quantitative approach that brings together the analysis of quantitative data – e.g. the magnitude of ESIF delivered through the EU cohesion policy – and qualitative information – e.g. the institutional characteristics of the metropolitan areas, the governance models characterising the EU cohesion policy, the level of alignment of goals and strategies formulated at different scales etc.

On this basis, the research team assessed the engagement of the metropolitan areas and cities within the framework of the EU cohesion policy development, management and implementation, the relevance and functioning of the specific instruments and mechanisms put in place in each context, as well as the added value of the implementation of the EU cohesion policy therein in the achievement of metropolitan development strategies and goals and in the promotion of metropolitan cooperation and its long-term consolidation. The assessment adopted a multi-level perspective, considering the level of autonomy and the scope of action of each metropolitan area. Through this activity, it was possible to identify good practices and critical elements across the nine areas, that have informed the development of the project's policy implications.

The **third step** drew on the comparative assessment to produce realistic, evidence-based policy recommendations on how the metropolitan areas and cities at stake, as well as other metropolitan areas in Europe may use the EU cohesion policy to achieve integrated territorial development objectives. At the same time, it advised on how the cohesion policy 2021-27 can foster the integration of metropolitan agendas with the regional and national priorities and contribute to the further recognition of metropolitan authorities in cohesion policy setting and management. Importantly, the produced policy messages were tailored as much as possible on the needs of the stakeholders engaged in the project, so that they may prove helpful in the negotiation concerning the development of the 2021-27 EU cohesion policy programmes and instrument.

More in detail, the comparative assessment allowed to identify an open list of policy messages, whose relevance was discussed with the project stakeholders through a Delphi methodology composed by three consequential phases: (i) open discussion of the policy messages; (ii) closed discussion of the revised policy messages; (iii) weight assessment of the final policy messages. This activity resulted in the development of:

- Nine sets of policy recommendations, targeting the METRO stakeholders active in the nine metropolitan areas under investigation;
- 40 policy messages differentially addressed to (i) European metropolitan areas and cities, (ii) national and regional government and (iii) EU level actors.

At the same time, these policy messages are also intended in support to the activity of the pan-European organisations involved in the project, that may use them to advocate for a stronger links between cohesion policy and strategic planning at metropolitan level as well as in favour of a stronger metropolitan dimension of cohesion policy and a better involvement of cities and metropolitan areas in the programming, management and implementation of the cohesion policy 2021-27.

### 3 Main findings

The nine metropolitan contexts under investigation are located in eight different EU countries: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Spain. These contexts are highly heterogeneous, in relation to the territorial characteristics of the metropolitan areas and of their respective FUAs<sup>6</sup> (Table 3.1). Moreover, the actual correspondence between the FUAs and the territories that are interested by the action of the nine metropolitan areas varies from case to case (Figure 3.1, Map 3.1).

**Table 3.1**  
Size, population, density and number of municipalities in the METRO areas

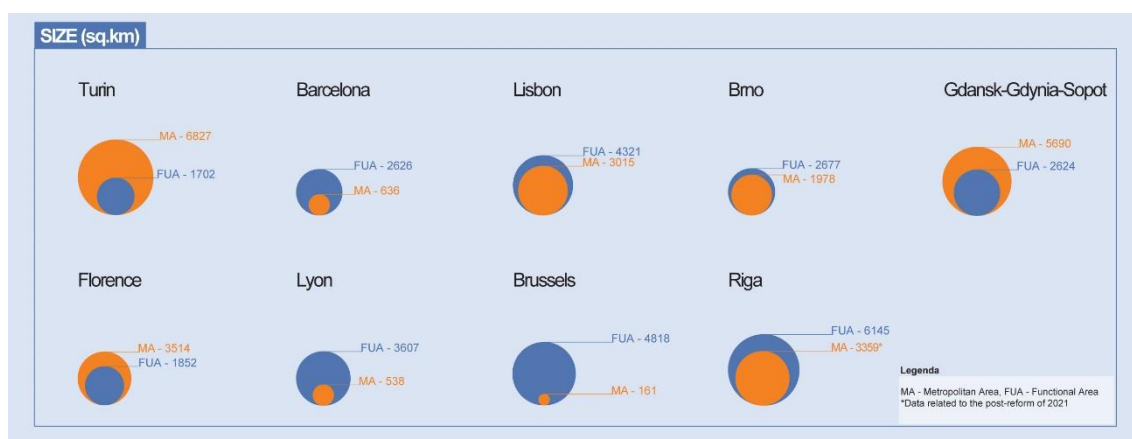
Metropolitan area – Acronym (Country)	Size (sq.km)		Population (x1000)		Density (inh./sq.km)		Municipalities	
	MA	FUA	MA	FUA	MA	FUA	MA	FUA
Metropolitan city of Turin – CMT0 (IT)	6827	1702	2231	1760	327	1034	312	88
Barcelona Metropolitan Area – AMB (ES)	636	2626	3291	4985	5176	1899	36	135
Lisbon Metropolitan Area – LMA (PT)	3015	4321	2863	2976	950	689	18	24
Brno Metropolitan Area – BMA (CZ)	1978	2677	700	734	354	274	184	272
Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area – MAG (PL)	5690	2624	1555	1170	273	446	51	24
Metropolitan City of Florence – CMFi (IT)	3514	1852	995	807	280	436	41	27
Lyon Metropolitan Area – MdL (FR)	538	3607	1390	2100	2596	582	59	326
Brussels Capital Region – BCR (BE)	161	4818	1200	2659	7241	552	19	137
Riga Metropolitan Area – RMA (LV)	3359*	6145	870*	932	259*	152	9*	12**

MA = Metropolitan Area; FUA = Functional Urban Area

\* New Riga Planning Region; \*\*Municipalities (LAU2 units) after the July 2021 municipal reform

Source: authors' elaboration on EU-OECD data, Eurostat and census data, 2019

**Figure 3.1**  
Territorial extension of the Metropolitan areas vis-à-vis the respective FUAs

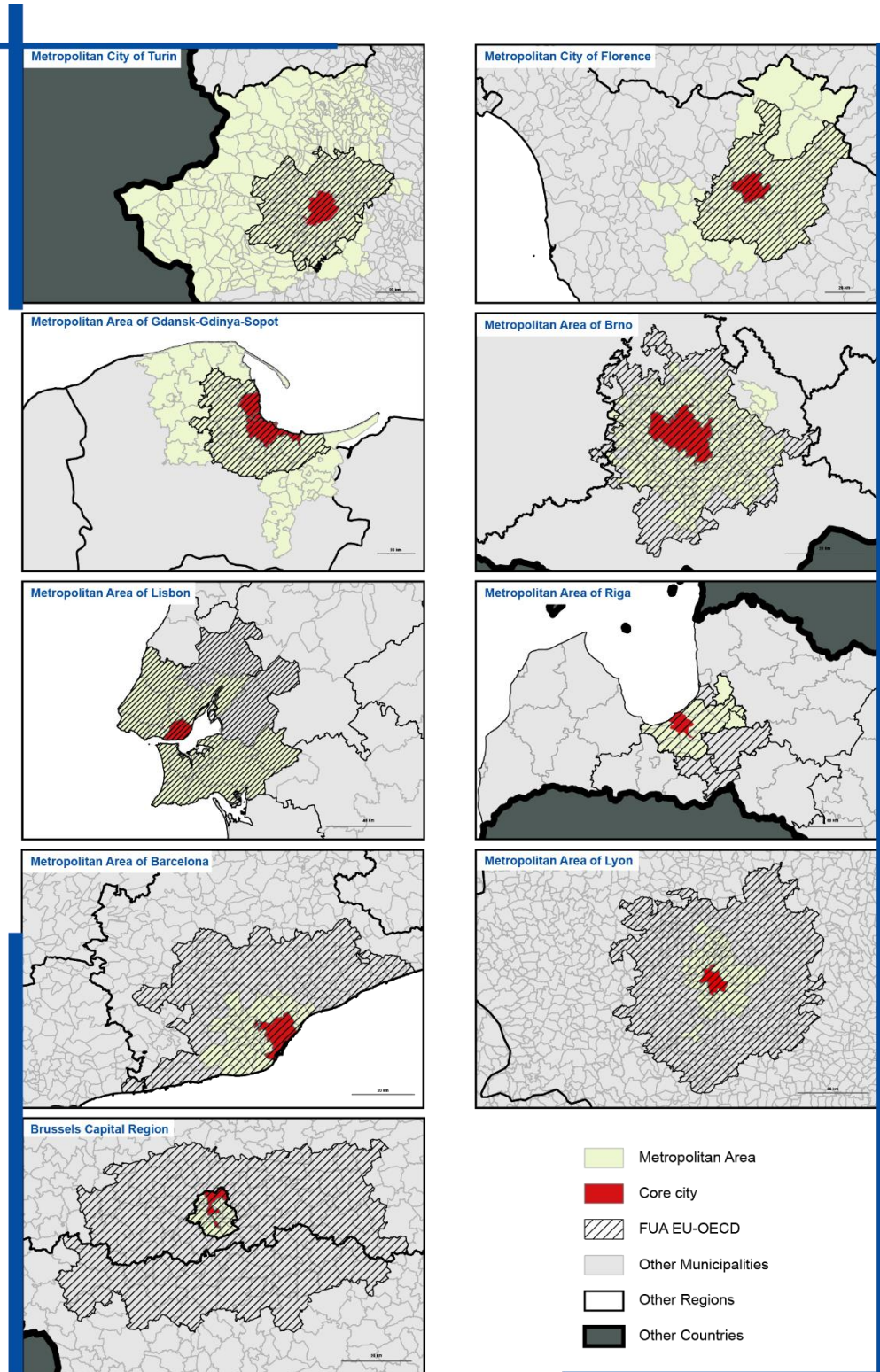


Source: authors' own elaboration. EU-OECD delimitation of FUAs

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the use of the EU-OECD FUA (Dijkstra et al., 2019) raises a number of challenges in relation to some of the analysed territories, as discussed in the case studies reports (Annexes III to XI).

**Map 3.1**

**Metropolitan cooperation and EU-OECD FUAs in the METRO case studies**



Source: authors' own elaboration. EU-OECD delimitation of FUAs

More in detail, the Metropolitan City of Turin concerns 312 municipalities over a diverse territory that extends much wider than the functional relations pivoted on the capital. Also the Metropolitan City of Florence and the Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area are larger than their FUAs, including both urban poles and small rural municipalities, but here the discrepancy is smaller. In the case of Lisbon, the FUA exceeds the metropolitan area, including six additional municipalities located north-east of the latter. The Riga metropolitan area is smaller than the FUA, which intersects and extends it towards south-east. This lack of correspondence is even larger in the cases of Barcelona and Lyon metropolitan areas: Barcelona FUA includes 99 municipalities in addition to the 36 composing the metropolitan institution, while in Lyon the metropolitan institution is eight times smaller in size than the FUA. Brussels-Capital Region shows the largest discrepancy, as the Brussels FUA concerns a much larger territory that extends in the Flanders and Wallonia regions. Only the territory covered by the Brno metropolitan area overlaps to a large extent with the Brno FUA.

When comparing the nine FUAs, their population size range from 730,000 inhabitants in Brno to around 5,000,000 in Barcelona, and the territorial extension from the 1,702 km<sup>2</sup> of Turin to the 6,133 km<sup>2</sup> of Riga. Also the population density varies significantly, from 152 inhabitants per square kilometres in Riga to 1899 in Barcelona. If one excludes Lisbon and Barcelona, in all the other cases more the 45% of the FUA's population lives in the core city<sup>7</sup>. The highest value is in Riga, which hosts 67% of the population, while Brno, Lyon and Turin range around 50%, then Brussels and Florence with 45 and 47% respectively, Barcelona with 32% and Lisbon with around 17%. The nine areas show rather marked difference also in relation to their economic structures<sup>8</sup>. The FUAs of Lyon and of the three capital cities of Brussels, Lisbon and Riga are characterized by a low share of manufacturing (lower than 15%), and this is especially true for Brussels. Brussels and Lyon are specialized in highly qualified and remunerated market services, such as finance, similarly to numerous north-western EU cities. In the Riga's and Lisbon's FUA, the leading group of sectors of economic activity is trade, transport, hotels, and restaurants. However, while in Riga there are not significant differences between the core and rest of the FUA, the employment structure shows a clear difference between the Lisbon core city and its FUA. The former is more specialized in service activities, namely public administration (linked to its role as capital city), education and health services, and in advanced producer services such as information and communication, finance, insurance and real estate activities. This typical core city economic structure contrasts with the rest of the FUA, that is characterized by a larger concentration of manufacturing, construction, retail, transport, and hospitality activities. In contrast, the FUAs pivoted around the cities of Florence, Turin, Gdansk and Brno keep a rather large industrial base, with values around 20%, while Barcelona lays in the middle, with 17% of industry and 26% of finance and business services in the total added value. However, there are different situations: in the Barcelona, Florence and Turin FUAs the most relevant sector is represented by highly qualified services (around 30% in Florence and Turin, 26% in Barcelona), followed by trade, transport, hotels and restaurants, and manufacturing is not the most relevant sector. Conversely, in the case of the Brno FUA manufacturing represents the most relevant sector, with the highest value among the nine metropolitan areas (around 22%), while services account for less than 20% of the total GDP. In the case of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, the two sectors feature almost the same share, around 19% for manufacturing and 18% for finance and business services.

After this brief territorial introduction to the nine cases, the following subsections explore and compare the nine cases in relation to their institutional and governance context (§3.1), to then shift the focus on the three main components of the METRO analysis: the role that metropolitan authorities play in the EU cohesion policy (§3.2), the added value of the EU cohesion policy on the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies (§3.3) and the role of the EU cohesion in supporting metropolitan governance and cooperation (§3.4). Finally, the metropolitan areas reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic are accounted for (§4.5).

### 3.1 Institutional context and metropolitan governance

Whereas some of the stakeholders' metropolitan areas are characterised by long-standing formal institutions, or by institutions that have been formalised after a first phase of informal collaboration, others are just at the beginning of their history of metropolitan cooperation (Table 3.2; Figure 3.2). Moreover, among these

<sup>7</sup> In the case of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area, the core is considered as composed by the three cities.

<sup>8</sup> Since comparable economic data on the GDP were not available for all the metropolitan areas under scrutiny, NUTS3 Eurostat metropolitan regions were used as proxies.

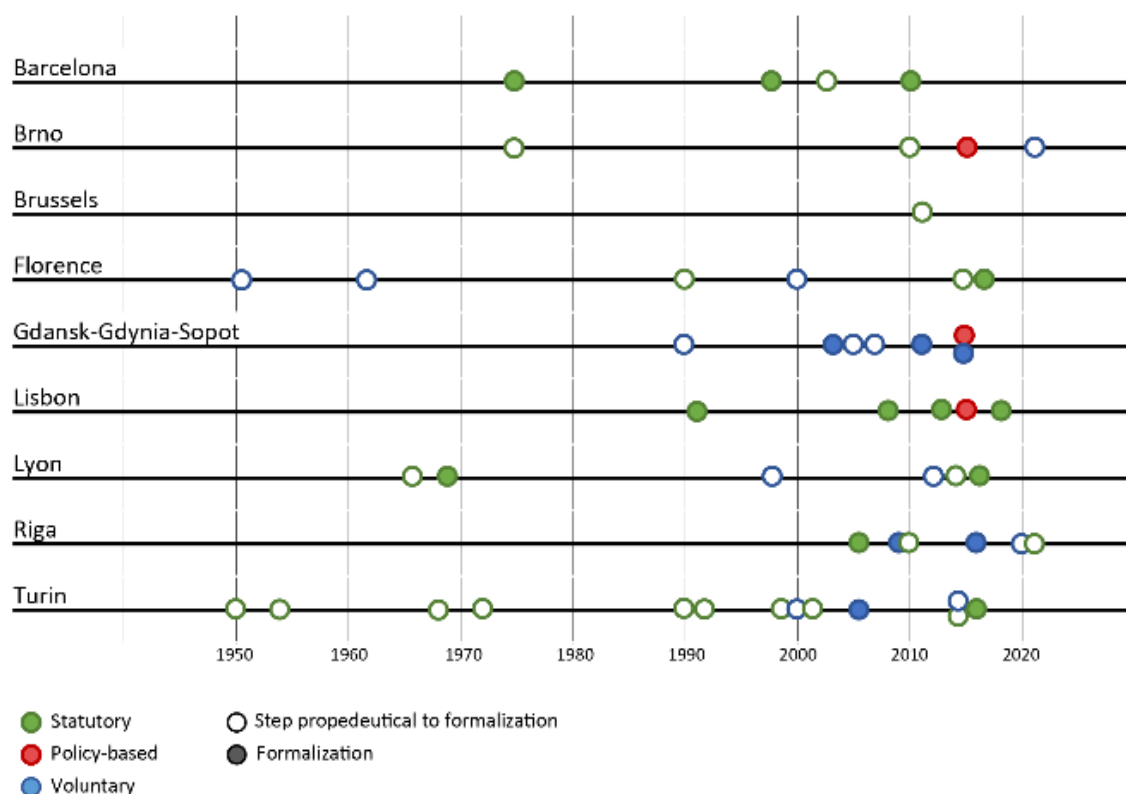
clusters of formal, informal and semi-formal metropolitan entities, a variety of structures, mechanisms and tools for metropolitan governance have been detected, that in turn are strongly dependent from the national and regional institutional frameworks within which the metropolitan areas under scrutiny operate.

**Table 3.2**  
**Status and origin of metropolitan cooperation in the METRO areas**

Metropolitan area	Status	Origin	Initiation
Metropolitan City of Turin	Formal (metro unit)	Institutional	Top-down
Barcelona Metropolitan Area	Formal (metro unit)	Institutional	Top-down
Lisbon Metropolitan Area	Formal (metro unit)	Institutional	Top-down
Brno Metropolitan Area	Semi-formal (ITI)	Policy-based	Mixed
Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area	Formal (ITI)	Policy-based	Bottom-up
Metropolitan City of Florence	Formal (metro unit)	Institutional	Top-down
Lyon Metropolitan Area	Formal (metro unit)	Institutional	Bottom-up
Brussels Capital Region	Formal (regional unit)	Institutional	Top-down
Riga Metropolitan Area	Informal (in transition)	Voluntary → Institutional	Bottom-up

Source: authors' own elaboration

**Figure 3.2**  
**Evolution of metropolitan governance in the METRO areas**



Source: Authors' elaboration

More in detail, most of the metropolitan areas are formally acknowledged in their countries' administrative framework (Barcelona, Brussels, Florence, Lisbon, Lyon, Turin). However, also among them significant differences exist, in terms of history, competences and governance models. The Metropolitan Cities of Turin and Florence are regulated by the same national law<sup>9</sup>, which reformed local authorities and established Metropolitan Cities as second level institutions. Both Turin and Florence feature a long history of metropolitan cooperation, that dates back to the second half of last century and features a mix of voluntary and statutory initiatives. While in Florence the first attempts of metropolitan cooperation were based on bottom-up voluntary initiatives, in Turin they occurred as top-down inspired initiatives based on national and regional decrees and plans. Although institutionally similar, the two metropolitan cities feature rather different governance environments, as a consequence of geographical, political and organizational variables. The metropolitan city of Turin concerns a very fragmented environment, where the power and competences are distributed among different (public and private) bodies, over a wide and very diverse territory composed of 312 municipalities, from the dense urban agglomeration surrounding the capital city to the remote rural and mountain municipalities that extend up to the border with France. Differently, the metropolitan city of Florence embraces only 42 municipalities and features a population that barely exceeds a million inhabitants.

Also Barcelona and Lisbon metropolitan areas are formally recognised administrative units. However, they have a rather exceptional nature, that result from the peculiar paths of institutionalisation. The Metropolitan Area of Barcelona comprises the city of Barcelona and 35 surrounding municipalities, and is the only formal metropolitan government in the Spanish context, constituted by the Catalan Parliament in 2010<sup>10</sup> after a rather long history of metropolitan cooperation. As the Italian metropolitan cities, it is a second level institution featuring a Metropolitan Council composed by the mayors and councillors elected locally. Lisbon Metropolitan Area has been formally established in 1991, and recently framed within a new legal configuration that instituted 21 inter-municipal communities and the two metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Oporto<sup>11</sup>, after decades of statutory and policy-based efforts in this direction. It is ruled by the Metropolitan Council, composed by the mayors of its 18 municipalities, the Metropolitan Executive Committee, featuring members elected in the municipalities' assemblies, and the Strategic Council for Metropolitan Development, representing public and private institutions and organizations. The reform intended to deepen administrative decentralization in Portugal, in line with the principles of subsidiarity. However, in the case of Lisbon, the coexistence on the same area with a regional authority that is a *de facto* central government outpost and is in charge of the programming and management of the EU cohesion policy raises a number of questions in relation to the distribution of regional policy/planning and EU cohesion policy competences. The *Métropole de Lyon* is the result of a bottom-up governance process that has been acknowledged in 2014 through a national law instituting metropolitan governments for large cities, as the last step of an inter-municipal integration process pursued by local and national public actors for more than five decades. The three largest French cities (Paris, Marseille and Lyon) are now characterized by their own metropolitan arrangements, positioned at the interface between the State and local authorities. However, while in the case of Paris and Marseille these institutions were created top-down, *Métropole de Lyon* has been instituted through an agreement between the Mayor of Lyon and the President of the Rhône General Council. This tailor-made status is unique in France, and *Métropole de Lyon* is the only metropolitan body to be a fully-fledged local authority, featuring a Metropolitan Council directly elected by the citizens.

On the other hand, Brno and Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan areas are not formally recognised within their countries' administrative structures, and their role is strongly linked to the management of EU cohesion policy instruments. In the Czech Republic, metropolitan cooperation is pursued only since 2014, as a consequence of the introduction of ITIs and, without the latter, the metropolitan dimension would have remained latent. Despite the top-down nature of the input, the individual metropolitan areas were allowed to decide whether to undertake or not metropolitan governance and what objectives to attach to it. Within this context, Brno Metropolitan Area was formed in 2014 as a policy-based cooperation aggregating 167 municipalities (184 in the programming period 2021-27) that range from a dense urban core to small industrial towns and

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<sup>9</sup> Law 7 April 2014, n. 56: "Disposizioni sulle città metropolitane, sulle province, sulle unioni e fusioni di comuni".

<sup>10</sup> Regional Law 31/2010.

<sup>11</sup> National Law 12 September 2013, n. 75.

rural areas.<sup>12</sup> In March 2020, the ITI Steering Committee approved the establishment of a horizontal working group to address cross-cutting metropolitan issues and to stimulate further institutionalization beyond the scope of the ITI. The Metropolitan Area of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot Association was legally established in 2011 as a voluntary agreement between 25 local and county governments (now 58), as a result of a process started in the 1990s. The association combined two previously established cooperation networks, respectively pivoted around Gdansk and Gdynia, as a response to the growing needs of coordination beyond local administrative boundaries. Also in this case, the EU cohesion policy contributed to the consolidation of this cooperation through the introduction of an ITI and, since 2015, the MAG Association acts as Intermediate Body for the Pomorskie ROP, responsible for the ITI implementation. The Association mainly works through the meetings of committees that discuss different themes of mutual interest, e.g. joint purchase of goods and services or the preparation of development plans covering several local authorities. These committees also facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practice among local governments.

Finally, metropolitan governance in the Riga area is still informal and only began with the decision, in 2018, to develop an Action Plan for the Development of the Riga Metropolitan Area. However, municipalities have been engaging in cooperation activities since some time, the most notable example being the establishment of the Riga Planning Region in 2006, as a derived public entity joining 30 municipalities<sup>13</sup>. The Riga Planning Region is responsible for regional development planning, coordination, co-operation of local governments and other public administration institutions and networking among planning specialists. At the same time, it is also one of the main initiators and coordinators of cooperation activities in the Riga Metropolitan Area. Conversely from Riga, Brussels Capital Region is characterized is fully institutionalised since the Belgian federalization process occurred in the 1990s. The country features three regional governments (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) that are competent in domains such as territorial and economic development, and three communities (Flemish, French and German), that are responsible for culture-related issues. Among the three regions, the Brussels's one is specific because of its bilingual status and its urban configuration. However, Brussels FUA is much larger than the 19 municipalities include in the BCR, and its extension to Flanders and Wallonia hamper any form of metropolitan cooperation<sup>14</sup>.

### 3.1.1 Metropolitan policy and planning instruments

All metropolitan areas explored in the project produce some sort of policy or planning instrument. These instruments are however highly heterogeneous in terms of scope, nature and function (Table 3.2). The level of competences and the number of policy and planning instruments seem to directly depend on the level of institutionalisation of metropolitan governance in each context. More in detail, Barcelona, Florence, Lyon and Turin are characterised by a similar scope of competences and instruments, dealing with spatial development, transport and mobility, waste management, climate and energy. The Barcelona Metropolitan Area also develops plans aimed at internationalisation and international cooperation. The competences of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area were reinforced in 2018, when the latter has also become the metropolitan transports authority. Although in Brno and in Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan areas the activity of the policy-based cooperation is mostly centred around the ITI they are responsible for, MAG is also responsible for the development of a number of other plans and strategies concerning metropolitan development, transport and mobility spatial development, etc. In Brussels, despite the virtual absence of metropolitan governance, the strategy adopted by the Brussels-Capital Region in 2018 concerning its territorial development could be used as a basis upon which to conceive and further stimulate metropolitan cooperation activities that exceed BCR boundaries and involve municipalities located in the neighbouring regions of Flanders and Wallonia. Moreover, a number of instruments exists, that have been developed in the framework of the existing cooperation initiatives (see section 3.1). Finally, Riga Metropolitan Area hasn't been formally instituted yet, and

<sup>12</sup> Informal cooperation in the area of Brno however date back to the end of the 1990s, an exception in the Czech context.

<sup>13</sup> As a result of a recent administrative reform, the number of municipalities in Latvia decreased from 119 to 43, and the planning regions were re-perimetered. The number of municipalities of the Riga Planning Region decreased from 30 to 9, and so did its territorial scope.

<sup>14</sup> In 2011, the institution of a "metropolitan community" was planned, aiming at building consensus concerning trans-regional development matters, but no agreement between the three regions has been reached in this direction so far.

the Action Plan for the Development of the Metropolitan Area produced by the Riga Planning Region represents the only document that has been developed until now.

When looking more closely at strategic planning initiatives, most of the metropolitan areas have approved strategy concerning the future development goals and trajectories of their territory and the way they position within the broader regional, national and supranational frameworks. Examples of such documents are the Strategic Metropolitan Plan in Florence and Turin (that are statutory document clearly prescribed by the law instituting Metropolitan Cities), the Lisbon Regional Strategy 2030, the Territorial Coherence Plan (SCoT, which has a spatial and strategic relevance) in Lyon. Importantly, in the Brno and Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area an important role is played by the strategies for the development of the ITI, whereas in the framework of the latter the ITI strategy is also accompanied by a separate 2030 Strategy that further detail the metropolitan development goals. Beside detailing the main goals and priorities for metropolitan development, these strategic documents also serve as a catalyst of horizontal and vertical coordination between different planning instruments and levels.

**Table 3.3**  
**Policy and planning instruments developed in the METRO areas**

Metropolitan area	Main instruments
Metropolitan City of Turin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strategic Metropolitan Plan;</li> <li>▪ Metropolitan General and Coordination Spatial Plan; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Metrop. Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Metropolitan Agenda for Sustainable Development</li> </ul>
Barcelona Metropolitan Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Metropolitan Action Plan</li> <li>▪ Metropolitan Urban Master Plan</li> <li>▪ Metropolitan Urban Mobility Plan</li> <li>▪ Metropolitan Programme for Prevention and Management of Resources&amp;Waste <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Climate and Energy Plan</li> <li>▪ Internationalisation Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ International Cooperation Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Action plan for sustainable food 2020-2023</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Metropolitan plan to support municipal social policies 2020-2023</li> </ul>
Lisbon Metropolitan Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lisbon Regional Strategy 2030 (with CCDR LVT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Management of ROP and NOP measures (ITI)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Metropolitan Sustainable Urban Mobility Action Plan</li> <li>▪ Metropolitan Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change (PMAAC AML) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fare Reduction Support Programme in Public Transport (PART)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Brno Metropolitan Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Integrated Development Strategy of the BMA for the Application of the ITI</li> </ul>
Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strategy 2030 (general) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ITI Strategy 2020</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Transport and mobility strategy 2030 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Low emission Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Spatial development plan 2030</li> </ul>
Metropolitan City of Florence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strategic Metropolitan Plan;</li> <li>▪ Metropolitan General and Coordination Spatial Plan; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Metropolitan Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Lyon Metropolitan Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local Plan for Urbanism and Housing (PLU-H)</li> <li>▪ Territorial Coherence Plan (SCoT – spatial and strategic relevance) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Territorial Climate Air and Energy Plan (PCAET)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Brussels Capital Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regional Sustainable Development Plan (PRDD) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good Move Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ TOP Noordrand strategy</li> </ul>
Riga Metropolitan Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Action Plan for the Development of the Riga Metropolitan Area</li> </ul>

Source: authors' elaboration

### 3.1.1 Metropolitan development goals

Metropolitan development goals and lines of action have been analysed on the basis of the development and planning instruments produced by or involving the metropolitan areas under scrutiny. In turn, these goals appear largely related to the goals expressed by the main instruments produced at the national, regional and local levels, as a consequence of the activation of formal or informal mechanisms of coordination and other processes of inter-institutional cooperation and participation. Independently from the level of institutionalisation of metropolitan cooperation, a number of goals (such as sustainable economic, social and environmental development, mobility, education, territorial cohesion, etc.) are common to all the areas under examination. Although to a different extent, in all the analysed cases, metropolitan development goals are linked more or less explicitly with the objectives of the EU cohesion policy and with those of the OPs and other instruments produced at the national and regional levels. In the case of the most recent documents, this is true also in relation to the objectives of the Next Generation EU programming instruments (see for example the Metropolitan Strategic Plan 2021-2023 of the Metropolitan City of Turin). The correspondence of metropolitan and EU cohesion policy goals is particularly evident in relation to policy-based metropolitan areas. In the case of Brno, the metropolitan development goals are directly related to the EU cohesion policy, since metropolitan cooperation is a direct consequence of the management of the ITI. At the same time, despite also being characterised by a policy-based cooperation pivoted on the ITI, the Gdansk-Gdynia Sopot Metropolitan Area has also produced a document that explicitly details the metropolitan development goals, the Metropolitan Development Strategy 2030, whose scope is somehow broader than the one of the ITI. In the cases of Barcelona and Turin, metropolitan development goals are also expressly linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the Metropolitan City of Florence is currently developing a strategy aiming at positioning metropolitan development within a multilevel programmatic framework at the global, European, national and regional levels.

### 3.1.2 Metropolitan financing and budgeting

Except for the financial resources provided through the cohesion policy framework, the existence (and extent) of a metropolitan budget depends on the level of institutionalisation of each metropolitan area and of the competences it is provided with. Institutionalized metropolitan areas such as Barcelona, Florence, Lisbon, Lyon and Turin, are all provided with a budget. The Barcelona Metropolitan Area, which has competences in core policies such as public transport, waste and water management and planning, and other competences such as social and economic development and housing, is mainly funded by transfers from municipalities. It is also entitled to levy taxes and, to a lesser extent, receive financial decentralisation from the regional government. The budget for *Métropole de Lyon* support competences concerning transport, social assistance, culture, education, international relations, green space and economic development; it is mainly composed of tax revenues from business and households and transfers from the central level. In Lisbon, around half of the regular budget of the Metropolitan Area – that has competences in strategic and spatial planning; environment; economic development; social policies; mobility/transport; services, infrastructures and communication – comes from the central administration and the other half from municipal contributions. However, Lisbon Metropolitan Area's budget increased substantially after the integration of transports and mobility competences in 2018, thanks to transfers from the national government. In Florence and Turin, as in all Italian Metropolitan Cities, the budget comes from the taxation inherited from former provinces, and is used to pursue competences including strategic and spatial planning, services provision, infrastructures and communication, mobility and road network, economic, social and sustainable development.

Although it may be assumed that the magnitude of the metropolitan budget should be proportional to the competences that are assigned to the various metropolitan institutions, this is only partially confirmed by the METRO case studies. In particular, the issue of financial autonomy and of the inadequacy of the metropolitan budget to perform the competences and responsibilities they are in charge with, has been raised in the case of Barcelona, Florence, Lisbon and Turin, also as a consequence of the implementation through time of spending review measures. Brussels-Capital Region and the Metropolitan Area of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot are here a partial exception. On the one hand, Brussels-Capital Region is characterised by a rather large budget, but the latter can hardly be dedicated to the promotion of metropolitan cooperation due to the lack of competence on territories located in the neighbouring regions. On the other hand, despite not being institutionalised in the Polish administrative framework, MAG features a budget composed by fees provided by its members and uses it to support its institutional functioning and to initiate projects dealing with socio-

economic development and long-term planning, integrated urban planning, public policies integration and the coordination of selected public services, sustainable mobility, energy and environment and culture.

### 3.1.3 The role of social groups and the business community

Social groups and the business community are generally involved in metropolitan development and governance, although to a different extent in the nine metropolitan areas under investigation. In the contexts of Barcelona and Lisbon metropolitan areas, their involvement is rather limited to consultation, without much room for action and voice in decisional processes. In particular, in Lisbon, the involvement of social groups and the business community in metropolitan governance is fairly modest, and their participation is limited to consultancy, without decision-making powers or real power to influence policy, strategies and programmes. In Barcelona, citizen participation and the incorporation of non-institutional actors in decision-making processes is rather weak, still at the initial stage of a true “architecture” of participation. Nevertheless, in recent years, diverse experiences have been developed in order to grant a higher participation of civic and private agents, in particular in the elaboration of plans and programmes. Also in Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, the role and participation of social groups and the business community is still rather limited, although a number of steps forward can be noticed in recent years.

Brussels, Florence, Lyon, Riga and Turin show a greater involvement of social groups and of the business community in metropolitan activities. In particular, in Brussels, despite the absence of any institution responsible for metropolitan governance, several forms of cooperation exist involving civil society or business actors, through collaborative initiatives including civil society and the business community based on thematic areas related to metropolitan development. In the case of the Metropolitan City of Florence, also due to the long history of participation and collaboration that characterise the Tuscany region, many decision-making processes are accompanied by participatory processes in which the third sector and the business community are involved and play a relevant role. The same goes for the Metropolitan City of Turin, especially for what concerns the process that recently led to the approval of the Strategic Metropolitan Plan and that has been accompanied by a thorough participation process finalised to the involvement of the different segments of the private sector and of the civil society. In Lyon, the civil society is part of the governance structure, and business actors traditionally have a strong influence on metropolitan development. In Riga, although the Metropolitan Area has not been formalised yet, social groups and the business community are involved in public discussions in various occasions in the planning processes of the Riga Planning Region and in the Pieriga partnership. In the context of Brno, social groups and the business community are involved in metropolitan cooperation mostly through the ITI management and implementation mechanisms.

## 3.2 The role of metropolitan areas in the governance of the EU cohesion policy

Though the evidence collected in the METRO case studies it is possible to pinpoint the various models and mechanisms through which the EU cohesion policy is developed, managed and implemented in the European metropolitan areas. This concerns the involvement of metropolitan actors in the design and programming of the architecture of the EU cohesion (§3.2.1); the role they play in its management and implementation and the instruments that have been put in (§3.2.2); the practices favouring the involvement of private actors and civil society organisations in the EU cohesion policy programmes and instruments (§3.2.3) and the formal/informal mechanisms aiming at coordinating metropolitan territorial and sectoral tools and priorities with the tools and priorities put in place to manage and implement the EU cohesion policy (§3.2.4).

### 3.2.1 The institutional architecture of the EU cohesion policy: what room for metropolitan areas?

European governance is frequently described as multi-level, marked by a tangle of relationships (Marks and Hooghe, 2001). The nine case studies explored in the project confirm this argument, revealing that the governance of European cohesion policy concerns a large number of actors at various territorial levels, whose configurations and mechanisms of interaction varies from country to country. In the eight member states hosting the metropolitan areas under investigation, the Partnership Agreement is generally developed in parallel to the Operational Programmes (OPs). In turn, the OPs are defined by different national level institutions (NOPs, typically developed by various ministries) or regional level agencies (ROPs, typically developed by elected regional authorities) and negotiated with the European Commission. However, from country to country, the connection between the two processes may vary. In most of the analysed member states

(Czech Republic, France, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Spain), the partnership agreement takes precedence over the development of the OPs, which are then required to comply with it. In Belgium, the partnership agreement is based on contributions from the three autonomous regions. The list of OPs is attached to the partnership agreement and specifies the respective financial allocations by fund, by year and by region.

Importantly, in the legislative framework underpinning the 2014-20 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programming period, the so-called partnership principle has been further strengthened: in accordance with EU Regulation N. 2013/1303 and Delegated Regulation N. 2014/240, all Member States should include programme managing authorities and other socio-economic actors in the development of the Partnership Agreement. Moreover, the EU Regulation N. 2013/1303 (art.15) urges the Member States to involve city representatives in the elaboration of the Partnership Agreement. However, "the involvement has no specification and can range from a rather informative character to personal involvement of city representatives in the Partnership Agreement process" and in practice, each Member State involves certain categories of actors to a larger or shorter extent (Hamza et al., 2014: 51).

In Belgium, each regional government organised consultations. In the case of Brussels Capital Region, the consultation process enabled the involvement of different spheres of society at the various stages of the process of preparing the Brussels contribution to the partnership agreement (launch, diagnosis, strategy, approval), helping to develop the final architecture of the OPs. In France, the 2014-20 Partnership Agreement was prepared by DATAR, the coordinating authority for structural and investment funds. Two bodies were instituted, including the State, local authorities, social partners, and economic actors and civil society: (i) the so-called National Partnership, bringing together more than 350 national organisations representing various networks and (ii) the National Forum for the Preparation of the Partnership Agreement, a more focused forum for debate bringing together 70 "network head" organisations, also members of the national partnership, which were consulted on successive versions of the Partnership Agreement. The consultation of the national partnership was organised in three phases, with its members that were invited to react to a consultation document and to participate to 17 seminars, altogether bringing together over 600 participants. The largest influence on the process was exerted by the Association of French Regions.<sup>15</sup>

In Italy, the co-construction of the Partnership Agreement has been quite extensive, following the process detailed in a framework document produced in 2012 by the Ministry of Territorial Cohesion. Public consultation on the first proposal occurred with various public institutions, associations, representatives of civil society. The general orientations of the agreement were then discussed in several "thematic tables" that gathered mainly public actors (governmental departments, regional and local authorities and the organisations that represent them at the national level). This process was completed by the hearing of economic and social partners and a number of bilateral meetings with major national organisations.

In the Czech Republic, the development of the EU cohesion policy documents has been led by the Ministry of Regional Development. The development of the 2014-20 partnership agreement involved a broad public consultation, and round tables were organized with various public actors (representatives of national ministries, regions, cities and municipalities<sup>16</sup>), professionals and academics. Afterwards the National Standing Conference (NSC) was instituted, aiming at facilitating the interaction between national ministries, regions, cities, municipalities holders of ITI (metropolitan areas), associations and other institutions. In Latvia, the Ministry of Finance consulted with social, non-governmental and regional partners, thus ensuring compliance with the partnership principle. In order to ensure a comprehensive involvement of partners and the public, the Ministry also organized thematic discussions on the investments planned in the operational program, in cooperation with the ministries that took charge of the NOP. In Portugal, a preliminary version of the Partnership Agreement has been prepared by the government and discussed with the main representative institutions: the Assembly of the Republic, the Economic and Social Council and the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities. At the same time, an expert committee was set up to monitor the whole process and to discuss the strategic options that were put on the table. A public consultation was held to disseminate and discuss the assumptions of the preliminary agreement, that led to the collection of 145 contributions from a plethora of social and economic subjects.

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<sup>15</sup> Large cities were represented by three networks (*Association des communautés de France, Association des communautés urbaines de France, Association des maires des Grandes Villes de France*).

<sup>16</sup> As metropolitan areas are not legally established local governments, they were not directly involved in the negotiations.

In Poland, the national authorities have encouraged the active participation of regional authorities in strictly regulated consultations. The Polish Partnership Agreement was subject to consultation and discussion within the framework of the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-13 and then, starting from 2012, in the framework of the so-called Partnership Agreement 2014-20 Coordination Committee. The involvement of the regional authorities supported them, as Managing Authorities of the future ROPs, in the launch of the programs' implementation phase. In Spain, the main actors involved in the development of the Partnership Agreement were the national government and the regional governments. The draft version of the Partnership Agreement made available for public consultation emphasized the role of cities in contributing to the Europe 2020 objectives in Spain, and various local authorities, their associations and other social and economic agents participated. In the elaboration of the Multiregional OP, local governments were represented only through the Spanish Association of municipalities and provinces. In the elaboration of the Catalan ROP, the regional government setup an association with local authorities and other public authorities, social and economic agents and representatives of the civil society. Importantly, while the municipality of Barcelona took part, the Barcelona Metropolitan Area authority was only involved informally.

Overall, the involvement of metropolitan actors in the definition of the EU cohesion policy 2014-20 remains largely limited (with the notable exception is the Brussels-Capital Region, that however played a strong role but in relation to programmes that concern a territory that is much smaller than the actual Brussels FUA). To explain this scarce involvement, three reasons are identifiable on the basis of the project's case studies:

- **Temporality.** A number of metropolitan institutions did not exist or had just been set up when the internal discussions within each nation were conducted. In Portugal, the Lisbon Metropolitan Area was consolidated in 2013 as part of a more general administrative reform. In Italy, the activity of the Metropolitan Cities started in January 2015, and the same stands true for *Métropole de Lyon*. Whereas in both France and Italy, metropolitan areas were created also with the perspective to allow the main urban centres of the two countries to better position at the European level, this did not result in a privileged access to the EU cohesion policy (see also Demazière, 2021). In Italy, the importance of Metropolitan Cities has been to some extent acknowledged with the introduction of the NOP METRO 2014-20. However, the role of metropolitan authorities in the programme is not fully fledged.
- **Exceptionality.** A second reason concerns the exceptionality of metropolitan institutions in certain national administrative frameworks, which may have led to their marginalization in the development of the EU European cohesion policy, while ordinary local authorities participate often with a strong voice. The Metropolitan Area of Barcelona is a good example, being the only metropolitan body fully established in the Spanish context. This may be true also in the case of Portugal, where Lisbon and Porto are the only two existing metropolitan authorities, and in Poland, where the process of metropolization until now depended on bottom-up dynamics characterised by differential speed.
- **Lack of status.** A third reason corresponds to cases where no (or nearly) metropolitan institution existed at the time of the EU cohesion policy definition and programming. In some of these cases, the EU cohesion policy have triggered processes of metropolisation from the top-down. Among the project's case studies, the metropolitan areas of Brno, Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot and Riga fit this category. The Brno Metropolitan Area was delimited as a precondition for the adoption of a dedicated ITI, with the municipality of Brno that acted as the holder for the latter<sup>17</sup>. The introduction of the ITIs also contributed to speed up the metropolisation dynamics that had characterised the Polish context since some time. In the case of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, it favoured the merge of two partial metropolitan associations existing in the region and the overcoming of the existing metropolitan governance duality. In Latvia, whereas the Riga Planning Region existed since 2006, ensuring cooperation between local governments and other state administrative institutions, the introduction of a urban ITI pivoted on Riga and Jurmala and, more in general, the need to experiment new mechanisms to manage and implement the EU cohesion policy, stimulated the development of the Action Plan for the Development of the Riga Metropolitan Area, that has been recently approved.

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the ITI area has been delimited on the basis of the functional relations identified through a thorough analysis, in so doing avoiding the troubles that a misfit between the functional and institutional dimensions may generate.

When looking beyond the peculiarities of the METRO case studies, a number of structural reasons for the lack of involvement of metropolitan actors in the EU cohesion policy design should be invoked. Most of the time, city authorities are consulted in the development of Partnership Agreements or OPs, but it is hard to see to what extent they are able to exert any relevant influence. Despite the call for a multilevel, multiactor partnership made by the European Commission, the development of the cohesion policy seems to have continued to follow a rather top-down path, that saw national and sometime regional governments playing the pivotal role.

As metropolitan areas are the places in Europe where the main socioeconomic and territorial dynamics concentrate, their inclusion in the process could certainly bring new ideas and proposals that are complementary to those put forward by the other subnational authorities (regions, provinces, municipalities, ...). However, the process behind the definition of the EU cohesion policy 2021-27 does not seem to differ much in this concern from the previous one, despite the higher institutionalisation of metropolitan areas in various countries around Europe. In several cases, the interests of metropolitan areas in the development of the partnership agreements at the national level are represented *indirectly* by national associations or alliances of subnational governments, that play an important role in the EU cohesion policy consultation process. For instance, in Italy, the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) has represented local authorities (including Metropolitan Cities) in all ESIF related consultations. A similar situation occurs in Spain, with the association of municipalities and provinces (FEMP), and in Poland, with the Association of Polish Cities that participates in the work of the Joint Committee of the Central Government and Local Governments. In other cases, as for instance in France, the large number of bodies representing subnational governments that are involved in the elaboration of the Partnership Agreement ends up diluting the influence of the organizations that represents large cities and metropolitan areas (Demazière and Sykes; 2021). Overall, cases like the Netherlands, where large cities formally participate in the making of the Partnership Agreement (Gloersen and Corbineau, 2019) and are then entitled of the management of large share of ESIF continue to be an exception in Europe (see also Fernández de Losada and Calvete Moreno, 2016).

The picture is more heterogeneous when examined at the regional scale, especially in federal and regionalised states. In such cases, ROPs are developed by regional level bodies with input from a variety of partners, including metropolitan governments where they exist. However, the engagement of metropolitan areas is still less formal than the one of the main municipalities as testified by the case of the definition of the Catalan ROP, that saw the formal, active engagement of Barcelona municipality and only an informal involvement of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area. The complex interplay between the metropolitan and the regional governments is also well illustrated by the Italian cases. Despite its institutional role and geographical relevance as an intermediate level between the Regions and their municipalities, the Metropolitan Cities play a rather limited role in the programming, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy, mostly as a project beneficiary.

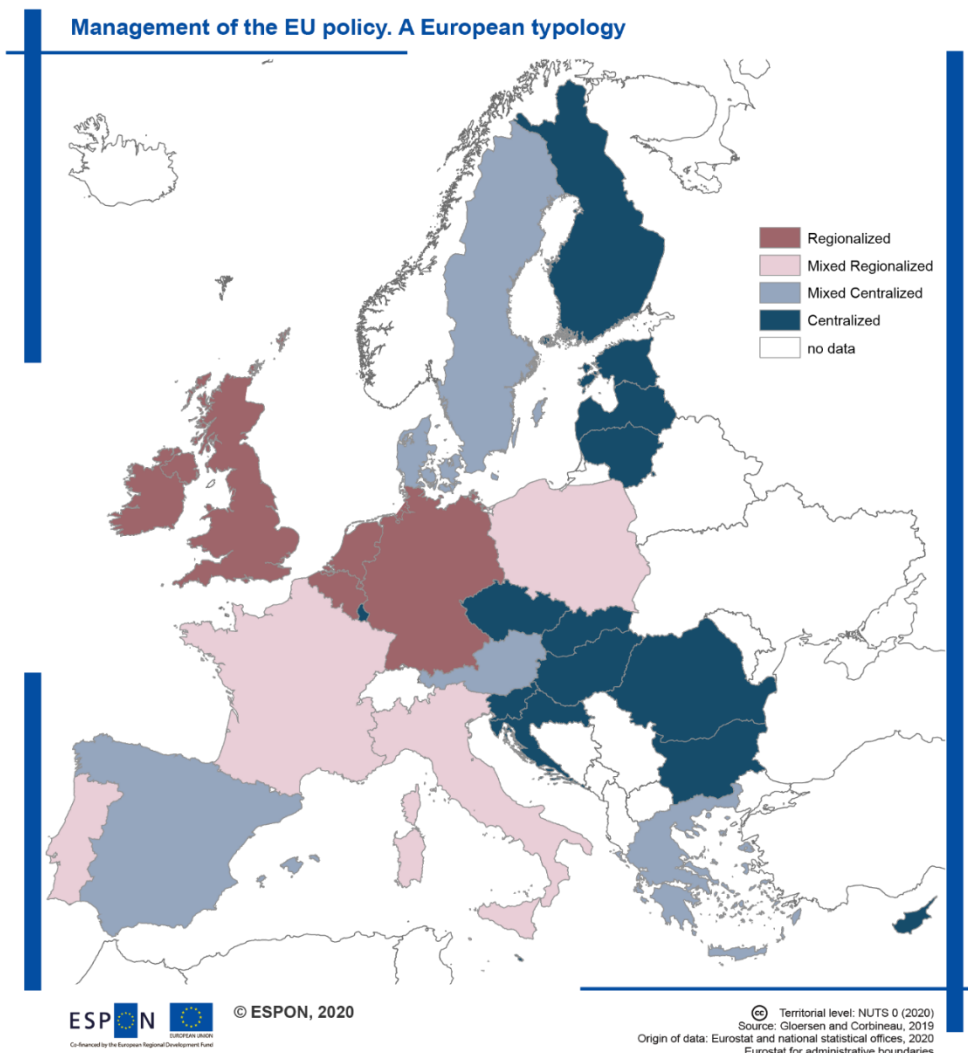
At best, we can see that the priorities and actions proposed by metropolitan authorities encounter a higher consideration in the development of the 2021-27 OPs. In the case of Lisbon, for example, despite the fact that the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and the Lisbon Regional Coordination and Development Commission are independent entities characterised by distinct mandates, they have started a fruitful collaboration in the preparation of the Lisbon Strategy 2030, that in turn will inform the 2021-27 ROP. Also, the *Métropole de Lyon* has managed to exert a “soft influence” on the contents that will be included in the ROP prepared by Region Auvergne-Rhône Alpes, contributing to the consolidation of the two main strategic orientations of the ROP (smarter Europe and greener Europe) and in the recalibration of their budget, in a way that reflects better the metropolitan priorities. In Latvia, the Riga Planning Region, with the respective metropolitan authority still in the making, was directly involved in the Consultative Programming Program of the cohesion policy Objective “European Territorial Cooperation” Program 2021-27, and in a working group chaired by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development. However, examples in the opposite direction also exist. For instance, in the Czech Republic, the Prague Growth Pole OP which existed in the 2014-20 programming period, will be suppressed in the period 2021-27.

### **3.2.2 The management of the EU cohesion policy: metropolitan institutions as intermediate bodies or beneficiaries**

The governance of the management and implementation of European funds varies according to the countries considered. Four main types can be distinguished on the basis of recent studies (Map 3.2) (ESPON, 2017; Gløersen and Corbineau, 2019):

- "regionalized" governance, where OPs are managed and implemented by regional bodies, with limited national coordination (**Belgium**, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, United Kingdom);
- "mixed regionalized" governance, where OPs are managed and implemented by regional bodies, relying however on a strong national coordination (**France, Italy, Poland** and **Portugal** - where however regions represent outposts of the national government);
- "mixed centralized" governance, where OPs are managed or implemented by national authorities, or where only NOPs exist, whose implementation is however delegated to regional intermediary bodies (Austria, Denmark, Greece, **Spain**<sup>18</sup>, Sweden);
- "centralized" governance, where only NOPs managed and implemented mainly by national authorities exist (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, **Czech Republic**, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, **Latvia**, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

**Map 3.2**  
Management of the EU policy. A European typology



Source: authors' elaboration based on Gloersen and Corbineau (2019) and own research.

<sup>18</sup> The Spanish context lies somewhere in between the mixed centralised and mixed regionalised types, with the region of Catalonia and all Autonomous Communities that are provided with their own ROP.

The METRO case studies appear to fit this typology rather well. In Belgium, for instance Brussels-Capital Region develops and manages an autonomous ERDF ROP, that however concerns a limited territory if compared to the extension of Brussels FUA, hence depriving it from a clear metropolitan dimension.

France, Italy, Poland and Portugal are characterised by a “mixed regionalized” ESIF governance, and the same may be true for Spain when considering the exceptional context of Catalonia. In France, regions are the main authorities managing the whole amount of ERDF and 35% of the ESF. As a consequence of an agreement between the Ministry for Urban Affairs and the Association of Regions, earmarking 10% of the ERDF to urban areas and their priority districts, the Rhône-Alpes region decided to devote € 39 million to the use of ITIs, and *Métropole de Lyon* was entrusted as Intermediate Body for an amount of € 8 million. Moreover, *Métropole de Lyon* plays also the role of intermediary body for the related ESF NOP, receiving a grant of € 25.5 million for the period 2017-2020.

In Italy, the cohesion policy is implemented through 75 NOPs and ROPs. Among the NOPs, the most interesting in the framework of the METRO project are the NOP Metropolitan Cities and the NOP “Governance and Institutional Capacity”. The National Agency for Territorial Cohesion is responsible for managing and implementing the NOP Metropolitan Cities, that however identifies the 14 capital municipalities of the Italian metropolitan cities as intermediate bodies that locally manage the program. Within this framework, the actual engagement of the metropolitan authorities varies from context to context and depends on the peculiar local governance and cooperation dynamics, as the differences between the cases of Turin and Florence seem highlight. When it comes to the NOP Governance and Institutional Capacity, the Metropolitan Cities have not been involved by the National Association of Italian Municipalities in the *Metropoli Strategiche* initiative, which contributed to strengthening their institutional capacity. In addition, 39 ROPs (either specific for ESF or ERDF, or encompassing both funds) are managed by the Italian Regions, with metropolitan cities that may be nominated intermediate bodies for specific priorities (as it occurred in the cases of Florence and Torino in relation to the respective ESF ROPs).

In Poland, the EU cohesion policy implementation is broken down into two main levels, with EU funding being distributed both by the Ministry and by 16 ROPs managed by regional Marshal offices. The Metropolitan Area of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot (MAG) territory has been appointed as intermediate body of a dedicated ITI. At the same time, it acted as beneficiary in various project financed through the ROP and various NOPs. In Portugal, the EU cohesion policy follows a rather hierarchical architecture, that links the national level and the NUTS2 regional bodies hierarchically. The programming period 2014-20 brought a number of inputs favouring decentralization, most notably the introduction of the ITIs. One of them is managed by the Lisbon Metropolitan Area as intermediate body, that is responsible to define its priorities, to implement the strategy and to approve investments and projects. In the context of Barcelona, an agreement was signed in 2017 between the Catalan government and the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, granting the latter with the management of €30 million from the Catalan ERDF ROP to be used to promote metropolitan projects with a total cost of €72 million. Despite the importance of this milestone for the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, one should note that the agreement is limited to only 35 of the 36 municipalities that compose the metropolitan area, since the municipality of Barcelona signed its own agreement with the regional government. As a consequence, metropolitan municipalities can benefit from the EU cohesion policy in four different ways: (1) ERDF from the Urban Axis of the NOP (Sustainable urban development and low carbon projects); (2) ERDF funds from the ROP through the Catalonia-Barcelona Metropolitan Area agreement; (3) ERDF directly from EC initiative (e.g. Urban Innovative Actions and URBACT); and (4) ERDF and ESF funds from the Catalan ROPs.

Finally, the Czech Republic and Latvia are characterised by a rather centralized EU cohesion policy governance. In the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Regional Development that leads the development of the EU cohesion policy and other ministries that act as managing authorities of the NOPs. The latter are produced at the national level, with the exception of OP Prague Growth Pole 2014-20. Importantly in relation to the scope of the METRO project, the 2014-20 Strategy for Regional Development of the country opted to address regional development through functional urban areas, in so doing contributing to the adoption of metropolitan ITIs as the one focusing on the Brno Metropolitan Area. On the other hand, in the Latvian context, the central government, acting as the managing authority, signed a delegation agreement for ITIs with the nine main municipalities of the country, recognising them the role of intermediate bodies. Based on criteria defined by the national ministries, each of these municipalities has been required to draft a development programme including a list of potential projects. Under this framework, the planning regions (including the Riga Planning Region) have had a relatively small impact on the distribution of investments.

Table 3.4 displays the heterogeneity that characterises the involvement of metropolitan areas in the cohesion policy, demonstrating how different national governments interpreted the EU requirements differentially.

**Table 3.4**  
**The role of metropolitan areas in the 2014-20 EU cohesion policy OPs**

Metro area	Managing Authority	Intermediate Body	Beneficiary
Barcelona	No	No	Yes. ERDF ROP
Brno	No	Yes (ITI – OPs IROP, OPTAK)	Yes (ITI from NOP ERDF, CF, ESF)
Brussels	Yes (BCR)	No	Regions
Florence	No	Yes, but formally only until 2015 (ROP ESF-Employment)	Yes (ROP ESF- Employment)
Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot	No	ROP (ITI)	ROP, NOPs (Infrastructure and Environment: public transport, energy, energy efficiency, the transmission of heat, heating systems)
Lisbon	No	Yes (ROP ITI)	Yes Lisbon ROP and NOPs (Competitiveness and Internationalization, Social Inclusion and Employment, Efficiency in the Use of Resources).
Lyon	No	Yes (NOP ESF, ERDF ITI)	Yes (NOP ESF, ERDF ITI)
Riga	No	There are no ROPs in Latvia	Yes (NOP)
Turin	No	Yes (ROP ESF Education and Welfare; Productive Activities)	Yes

Source: authors' own elaboration.

If one excludes Brussels-Capital Region, in all other cases the role of metropolitan actors is limited to that of intermediate body or beneficiaries of funds, that are programmed and managed by other authorities at the national and regional levels. However, not all contexts are the same kettle of fish. In some cases, as for instance in the metropolitan areas of Barcelona, Lisbon or Lyon, the metropolitan cooperation practices that were already in place contributed to structure the EU cohesion policy architecture and ultimately to the devolution of a rather relevant amounts of resources to metropolitan management. In the case of Italy, on the other hand, the Metropolitan Cities of Florence and Turin did not benefit from the same treatment and have to come to terms with the availability of scarce or no resource to manage.

On the other hand, in the Central and Eastern European countries involved in the METRO study, the introduction of the ITIs has contributed to stand in for the lack of metropolitan administrative units, providing at the same time precious momentum to the debate on the establishment of the latter. As a matter of fact, the introduction of ITI constitutes the most relevant innovation emerging from the analysis, as they were used for the implementation of integrated metropolitan development strategies. As shown in Map 3.3, in the programming period 2014-20 ITIs have been used by as many as 20 Member States over 28. According to the regulation that instituted them, ITIs allow to develop integrated strategies and actions in very diversified settings (deprived neighbourhoods, cities and urban areas, city-regions and metropolitan areas, geographical areas sharing similar characteristics, rural areas, cross-border areas, etc.).

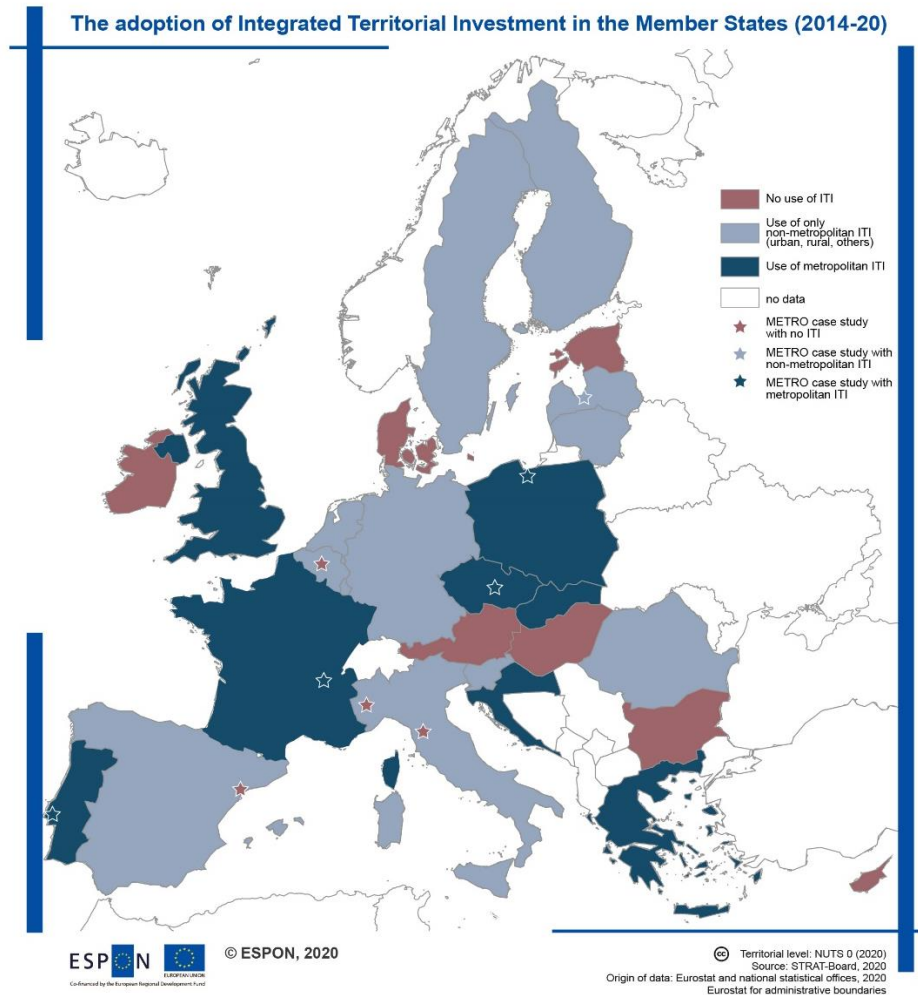
When it comes to their relevance to the METRO project, ITIs can be classified in relation to their spatial scope and, more importantly, to whether or not the concern a metropolitan/functional urban area:

- In several Member States, ITIs target **deprived urban neighbourhoods** which are confronted with specific common challenges as identified following selected socio-economic criteria. In the Netherlands, this type of ITI has been adopted in relation to the country's largest conurbations, while in France, the size of the target municipalities varies from region to region.
- In some countries, ITIs were developed at the **city level**. For instance, in Lithuania, the five largest cities above 100,000 inhabitants have each been provided with an ITI. Similarly, In the Latvian context ITIs were developed for the 9 main cities of the country.

- In other national contexts, the adopted ITIs address development dynamics at the level of **functional urban areas**. This type of ITI is the most relevant for the METRO project, and the most relevant examples were put in place in Poland, the Czech Republic, Croatia, France and Portugal.

### Map 3.3

#### The adoption of Integrated Territorial Investment in the Member States (2014-20)



Source: authors' elaboration on data from <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/where>

Of the 9 metropolitan areas analysed in the context of the METRO project, ITIs have been adopted in five cases: Brno, Gdansk, Lisbon, Lyon and Riga. In the case of Brno, where no metropolitan institution existed, the ITI area has been tailored almost exactly on the boundaries of the functional urban region. In the context of the Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area, despite the MAG association boundaries exceeds those of the FUA, the ITI has been shaped accordingly. In Lisbon, it deals with an institutional NUTS3 region that is marginally smaller than the metropolitan area, so the ITI denotes a high functional level content. In the Riga context, the national government has opted to pivot the ITIs on the main metropolitan areas on the country. In the French context, a different approach is followed, as it is exemplified by the case in the case of *Métropole de Lyon* that was provided with an ITI targeting the deprived neighbourhoods included in its perimeter. The small amount of ERDF resources allocated (€ 8 million) raises however questions in relation to the impact of the adopted integrated approach. The situation is different in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area ITI, where the amount of resources is higher and the thematic scope is wider and includes the transition to a low carbon economy, environmental protection and energy efficiency, actions to fight social integration, poverty and discrimination.

When it comes to the role that metropolitan actors play in the implementation of the ITIs, in all cases the official responsibility remains in the hands of the Managing Authority of the OPs (at the national or regional level). However, according to the EU regulations, these authorities are allowed to designate intermediate bodies, including local authorities, regional development bodies or non-governmental organisations, to carry out some or all of the management and implementation tasks. In this light, the form and degree of the ITI management delegation may vary, as a consequence of the administrative arrangements of the Member State or region. The Metropolitan Area of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot is the intermediate body responsible for the implementation of the respective ITI programme, managing a high quantity of resources that allowed for the implementation of 190 projects. Overall, in Poland the ITI was selected as the core instrument to promote metropolitan policies and to support the territorial development of the urban areas hosting over three hundred thousand inhabitants. Metropolitan areas were empowered to programme (within preselected objectives) their own integrated strategies, and to manage their implementation. However, the strategies required the approval from the Ministry of Regional Development, providing some sort of top-down control to the whole process. A similar situation concerned the case of Brno where the responsible authority, while strongly advocating for moving metropolitan cooperation behind the simple implementation of the ITI had to programme, manage and implement its ITI envelope following the guidelines included in the various NOPs.

Building on the METRO case studies, it is also possible to highlight a number of pitfalls that has characterised the implementation of metropolitan ITIs in the programming period 2014-20. Even in those cases where their introduction played a positive role in the consolidation of metropolitan governance and cooperation some limits emerge in relation to the fact that the ITI perimeter did not always match the one of the functional urban region. In some other cases, the organisation implementing the ITI encountered problems of legitimacy *vis-à-vis* other actors or of accountability. Moreover, the ITI structure and regulations set a number of constraints in terms of the scope of the objectives and demonstrated a scarce flexibility in the implementation, due to its strict set of indicators and financial plan. An additional limitation concerns the administrative cumbersome-ness of the instruments. On the other hand, from all cases emerges that the main asset of the ITI model concerns the possibilities it offers in combining funding linked to different thematic objectives.

Leaving aside the analysis of the ITI and its adoption in the metropolitan areas investigated by the METRO project, other arrangements for the implementation of the EU cohesion policy are noticeable elsewhere. The case of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area is here emblematic, as it gained an incremental recognition throughout the programming period despite having played only a limited, informal role during the elaboration of the ROP. When it comes to the new programming period 2021-27, the introduction of an ITI could indeed represent a good option for the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, as it could contribute to support integrated actions in urban areas and offer the possibility to combine funding linked to different thematic objectives, including the combination of funding from other ESF and ERDF OPs. Also in the case of the Brussels-Capital Region, that currently fully manages its own ERDF ROP however on a territory that is around 30 times smaller than the actual Brussels FUA, to explore the feasibility of an interregional ITI could be a good path to pursue. Finally, a particular mention may be made of the case of Italy, that has been the only European country to dedicate a NOP to metropolitan cities. This initiative is interesting since it mixes resources from the ERDF the ESF and devotes a budget of 40 million euros for each city located in the more developed and in transition regions, and 90 million euros for each city in the less developed regions, in relation to two main strategic drivers (Smart City and social innovation). If we set aside the fact that the projects are implemented by the core municipality, this instrument could serve as an inspiration for the development of some sort of Metropolitan OP or ITI, that may be adopted throughout Europe to support integrated metropolitan development.

### 3.2.3 The role of metropolitan private actors and the civil society

The METRO case studies provided interesting information also in relation to the involvement of private actors and of civil society actors in the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy, an issue that lies at the centre of the EU governance agenda since more than two decades (CEC 2001). The EU defines those actors very broadly, namely social partners, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders, and their involvement is regulated by the prescriptions of the Article 5 of the EU Regulation N. 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council. The involvement of various types of actors in the policy and implementation process can serve very different purposes, related to the quality and clarity of the outputs but also to the desired characteristics of the planning process such as its fairness, openness, social justice (e.g. Morf et al. 2019; Lalenis 2016). In the development and implementation of the cohesion policy at the metropolitan level, the role that the private sector and civil society representatives could play can in principle takes various forms, ranging from the engagement in the elaboration of the regulative strategic documents deciding on the

key arrangements for the EU cohesion policy at the EU and national level, to the engagement in the elaboration of strategic documents framing the scope of the EU cohesion policy in a given metro area or of the programmes and instruments deputed to the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy. It may also concern the participation in EU cohesion policy implementation and monitoring in a given metro area, the preparation and implementation of projects or the monitoring the results.

The analysis shows that, despite the EU guidelines and regulations, the actual involvement of the business actors and the civil society on European policy matters widely varies. The participation of the private and social actors in the various processes of consultation that accompany the drafting of the EU cohesion policy documents is a legal obligation that should be fulfilled by national authorities of the member states and, as introduced in §3.1, it took place in all the analysed cases. On the other hand, there is scarce evidence of the involvement of metropolitan private and social actors in the analysed cases in this process. The Metropolitan Cities of Turin and Florence are perhaps partial exceptions in this concern, as metropolitan social groups and actors from the business community have been to some extent involved in the implementation of some OPs priorities, of the local development strategies of the National Strategy for Inner Areas, and in Rural Development Plan initiatives that adopt the CLLD-Leader approach and are carried out by Local Action Groups. Also in the case of Brno Metropolitan Area, the civil society participated in the programming and implementation of the social cohesion thematic objective. However, a general lack of mechanism and/or regulation at the national and regional levels, aimed at the involvement of metropolitan business and civil society actors in the programming and implementation of the EU cohesion policy seems to persist.<sup>19</sup>

The situation concerning the monitoring of the OPs that, in one way or another, concern metropolitan cooperation and development is slightly brighter. For instance, in the Pomorskie ROP, the supporting members of MAG share a seat together with two other business associations actively collaborating and involved in the MAG activities. A similar situation occurs in the context of Barcelona Metropolitan Area where the ROP Monitoring Committee includes representatives of the economic and social partners (regional unions and business representatives) of the region. In the Lisbon case, the involvement of social groups and the business communities has been until now fairly limited to the ITI monitoring committee. Also in the cases of Turin and Florence, representatives of metropolitan social groups and the business community are included in the monitoring committee of the ROPs. According to a number of interviewees, in some programmes the role of these actors is significant. In particular, in the Turin ROP ESF social players are engaged extensively and in the governance of the Rural Development Plan farmers' associations have a rather strong influence. However, this broad involvement does not have a relevant metropolitan flavour.

The most frequent form of involvement of private and civic actors is their participation in the ESIF funded projects, in turn leading to their further engagement with metropolitan governance and allowing them to gain deeper understanding of metropolitan challenges and needs. For instance, in Lyon, a variety of businesses and NGOs have been actively involved in the EU cohesion policy at the implementation level, and a number of NGOs specialized in vocational training, digital activities or urban agriculture have benefitted from ERDF or ESF support. A similar situation characterised the Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot context, where the project run by metropolitan authorities "Support for Social Economy" provided substantive and financial support to social economy entities and linked very diverse third sector actors. In Florence, the EU cohesion policy contributed to strengthen collaboration in the tourism sector actors, in so doing favouring innovative solutions. Various stakeholders actively participated also in the debate on the future of the metropolitan area in the post-pandemic phase (that led to the development of the strategic plan "Rinascere Firenze"). Also in the case of Turin third sector actors were involved in the implementation of various Programmes as beneficiaries (NOP Metro, ESF and ERDF ROPs, RDP and Interreg ALCOTRA). Overall, despite the constraints linked to the financial reporting and controls, access to ESIF is perceived very positively by the concerned businesses and civil society actors, and through time various organisations have been strengthening their business models in order to be able to get increase the benefits of their participation to the EU cohesion policy.

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<sup>19</sup> A change in this trend is detected in MAG, where the association of universities was involved as associated partner, possibly leading to a stronger metropolitan role of universities and related actors in the 2021-27 programming phase.

### 3.2.4 Coordinating metropolitan governance with the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy

The coordination of the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy with the very heterogeneous metropolitan governance and cooperation activities occur according to very different models and mechanisms, often depending on the different institutional configuration that characterise each context. However, despite the high heterogeneity detected, three main situations can be analytically distinguished: (i) formal changes and adjustments that take place within metropolitan structures and mechanisms; (ii) formal changes and adjustments that concern the EU cohesion policy architecture and procedures; (iii) episodes of soft, informal coordination and fine-tuning, that do not involve institutional changes.

A higher coordination between the EU cohesion policy and metropolitan priorities and policies can be achieved by metropolitan authorities undertaking internal institutional adjustments or adopting dedicated policy measures. In the Metropolitan city of Turin, for instance, the recently approved Metropolitan Strategic Plan identifies the possible interactions and synergies with the tools and policies that are already in place in the metropolitan area, as well as with the main objectives that characterise the EU cohesion policy 2021-27 programming period and the Next Generation Europe framework. Moreover, in 2019 the Metropolitan City also established a European and International Projects and Programmes specialized unit, responsible for the promotion and coordination of projects funded with supranational resources, in so doing ensuring a higher consistency between these projects and the Metropolitan fundamental functions and explicitly positioning the Metropolitan City strategies with respect to EU programming. The Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area, is considering to establish a permanent team devoted to monitor the evolving socio-economic trends and to develop a forward-looking policy for the development of the area, also beyond the implementation of ITI projects. Also the Brno Metropolitan Area is working on the further development of metropolitan governance based on its own metropolitan agenda beyond the EU cohesion policy, in order to progressively decouple metropolitan development from the ITI instrument. Such an Agenda is also supposed to provide solid ground for metropolitan area to be proactive *vis-à-vis* the programming of the EU cohesion policy 2021-27. In the case of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, the main mechanisms deputed to the coordination and fine-tuning between metropolitan and EU cohesion policy priorities and actions is represented by the Technical Monitoring Committee managing the Catalan ERDF ROP resources. A key issue in this concern has been the equilibration of the number of representatives of the Generalitat and of the AMB, in turn providing metropolitan authorities with a higher margin of influence on the implementation of the Catalan ERDF.

At the same time, the required coordination between metropolitan and EU cohesion policy priorities and actions may be achieved through an adjustment of the boundaries of the latter in a way that solves the partial weaknesses that its general framework encounters when it is applied in the specific national and regional contexts. An example in this concern is represented by the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, where the metropolitan authority is exploring innovative mechanisms to favour the inclusion of metropolitan actors into the cohesion policy processes. In the case of the Métropole de Lyon, a number of challenges have been detected, related to the absence of explicit mechanisms devoted to the integration of metropolitan decision-makers in the programming of the EU cohesion policy. Similar issues are raised in the context of MAG. Whereas this lack of formal involvement in the programming activity can result in a serious limitation of the influence that metropolitan authorities exert in the programming phase, some of the analysed case studies show how it can be at least partially offset through soft, informal mechanisms. For instance, through its regular discussions with the regional branch of the national government and the regional council Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, the representatives of the *Métropole de Lyon* have been able to raise a number of specific issues of metropolitan relevance, eventually managing to achieve their upload on the EU cohesion policy agenda, and a similar result has been achieved by the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (see §4.2). Whereas these episodes of soft-coordination may result in a fine-tuning of the priorities of authorities active at the different territorial level, they may also end up influencing the actual EU cohesion policy financial allocation<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> A good example in this concern is the case of *Métropole de Lyon*, that managed to obtain the allocation of €14 million to brownfields regeneration in the 2014-20 ROP, and then used part of those resources to act upon a contaminated industrial site that lies among its responsibilities (the so-called Chemical Valley – Vallée de la Chimie).

### 3.3 The added value of the EU cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies

Whereas the EU cohesion policy concerns every region in the EU, the distribution of funds reflects the level of development of each member state and region, contributing to differentiate the impact. At the same time, the added value of the EU cohesion policy to the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies is also determined by a variety of other factors, among which the country and regional administrative organization and culture and the devolution of power and responsibilities therein, the spatial governance and planning tradition that characterise each context, etc. (Cotella & Dabrowski, 2021).

Drawing on the nine case studies under investigation, this section focuses on the influence that the EU cohesion policy priorities and instruments have on the definition of goals and objectives of the different metropolitan areas, namely addressing the themes and priorities underlying the EU cohesion policy programmes and instruments having an impact on metropolitan areas (§3.3.1). Then the EU cohesion policy funding architecture is analysed more in detail, devoting particular attention to how the magnitude of ESIF compares to the budget of each metropolitan areas, to the intra-metropolitan geographical distribution of funding and to their thematic focus (§3.3.2). The third sub-section showcases successful experiences and points out lessons learned from the implementation of the EU cohesion policy at metropolitan level (§3.3.3). Finally, the section ends with an attempt to synthesise the provided evidence, reflecting on the added value that the EU cohesion policy may have in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies in different types of metropolitan areas (§3.3.4).

#### 3.3.1 Goals and priorities of the EU cohesion policy programmes and instruments and coherence with metropolitan priorities and policies

To accurately identify the EU cohesion policy instruments that exert some sort of influence over metropolitan development and governance is a rather problematic task. In fact, whereas ITIs managed by metropolitan areas explicitly address metropolitan development dynamics, other agreements and instruments exist, allowing for the EU cohesion policy to deliver a more or less direct impact over metropolitan policies (dedicated NOPs, specific axes of the NOPs and ROPs and other European programmes aimed at European Territorial Cooperation, Rural Development, exchange of knowledge and good practices, etc.) (Table 3.5)<sup>21</sup>. The overall landscape is somewhat heterogeneous depending the diversity that characterises the national and regional administrative approaches to the EU cohesion policy, spatial development governance and planning, and other institutional features already highlighted in the sections above. At the same time, it is possible to identify three main recurring features:

- If one excludes Latvia, where only NOPs exists, ROPs stands out as the main Cohesion policy programmes that have an impact at the metropolitan level;
- Also selected thematic NOPs play a role in the planning and implementation of metropolitan area development policies (except in Belgium, where only ROPs exists).
- Despite the different financial allocation, ITIs stimulate a more integrated approach the delivery of the EU cohesion policy, providing the latter with a more marked functional/territorial perspective, delegating management to the metropolitan/local level and allowing the combinations of funds.

Once the programmes and instruments that have a more or less direct impact on the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies in the contexts under investigation have been identified, it was possible to individuate and compare the various thematic objectives that substantiate them. More in detail, the EU cohesion policy programming period 2014-20 comprised 11 thematic objectives: research and innovation; information and communication technology; SMEs competitiveness; low carbon economy; climate change and risk prevention; environment and resource efficiency; transport and energy networks; employment and labour market; social inclusion; education and training; better public administration. The analysis reveals a

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<sup>21</sup> Through desk research and interviews with the stakeholders and other relevant metropolitan actors, the research has identified the EU cohesion policy instruments that (i) concern in one way or another the territory of the metropolitan area under investigation and (ii) in doing so may have a more or less direct impact on the planning and development of metropolitan policies.

stronger focus on the priorities of research and innovation, information and communication technology, SMEs' competitiveness, and low carbon economy, that emerge as key priorities for both developed and less developed regions. This demonstrates a strong emphasis on policies aimed at innovation, competitiveness, and decarbonization of the economy. Other thematic priorities across metropolitan areas concentrate in education and social inclusion, targeting deprived families and groups, as much as environment and resource efficiency. Climate change and risk prevention as well public administration modernization objectives do not present the same relevance. It is duly noted that the thematic transport and energy networks is associated to EU cohesion policy interventions in the Central and Eastern European metropolitan areas. Similarly, the priority of administrative modernization is restricted to a small number of metropolitan areas, namely Italian metropolitan cities and Brno. Overall, the thematic coverage of the EU cohesion policy instruments that may have an impact over the territories of the metropolitan areas under investigation shows a differential landscape that ranges from the extremely comprehensive figures in Brno, Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot and Turin to the more selective approach in the case of Barcelona.

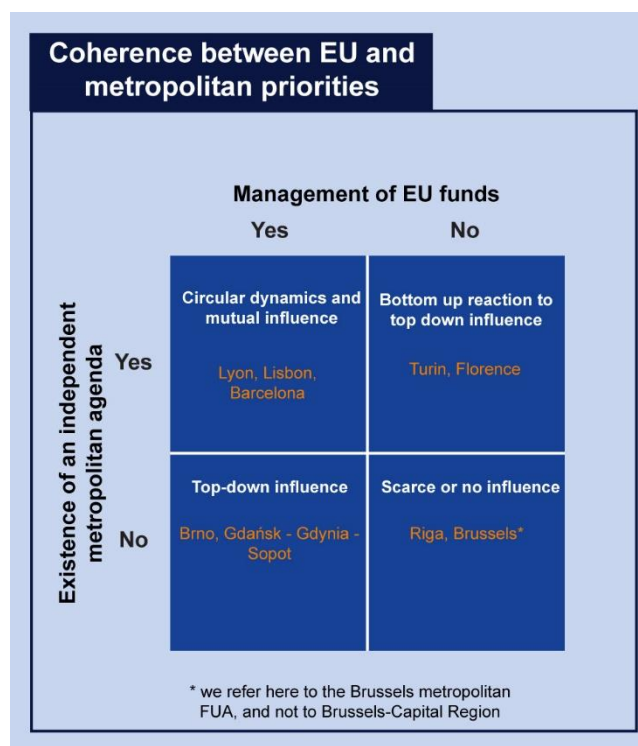
**Table 3.5**  
**EU cohesion policy programmes that were to a different extent relevant to the METRO case studies (2014-20)**

Metropolitan Areas	National/Thematic OPs	Regional OPs	ITIs	Other programmes
<b>Barcelona</b>	Spain Multiregional	Catalonia	---	INTERREG URBACT/ESPON
<b>Brno</b>	Education Employment Enterprise, Innovation, Competitiveness Research, Development, Education Environment Transport	Integrated Regional Operational Programme	ITI BMA	---
<b>Brussels</b>	---	Brussels-Capital Flanders Wallonia Wallonia-Brussels	---	---
<b>Florence</b>	Education Governance and Institutional Capacity Metropolitan Cities	Tuscany	---	Regional Rural Development Plan INTERREG SNAI
<b>Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot</b>	Infrastructure and Environment Smart Growth Digital Poland Knowledge Education Development	Pomorskie	ITI MAG	INTERREG URBACT
<b>Lisbon</b>	Competitiveness, Internationalisation Social Inclusion and Employment Sustainability and Resource Efficiency	Lisbon	ITI LMA	URBACT/ESPON
<b>Lyon</b>	Employment and Social Inclusion	Rhône-Alpes	ITI MdL	---
<b>Riga</b>	Growth and Employment	---	ITI Riga-Jurmala	INTERREG
<b>Turin</b>	Education Governance and Institutional Capacity Metropolitan Cities Social Inclusion	Piedmont	---	Regional Rural Development Plan INTERREG SNAI

Source: authors' own elaboration on [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/atlas/programmes](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes) and ESPON-METRO case-study reports

Whereas, the analysis shows that metropolitan areas have been recipient of a large majority of the 11 thematic priorities that underpinned the EU cohesion policy in the programming period 2014-20, the EU cohesion policy objectives appear to be coherent with the main goals of metropolitan cooperation (as discussed in §3.1 – innovation, SMEs support, circular economy, environmental protection, social inequalities and territorial disparities, education). However, the actual level of coherence and the drivers behind it are differential, and vary from context to context. When it comes to the concrete examples of the processes detected in the metropolitan areas under investigation, they occur through four distinct forms, that have been compiled in a preliminary typology of the mechanisms that concur to enhance coherence between EU and metropolitan priorities (Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3**  
**Coherence between EU cohesion policy and metropolitan goals and priorities**



Source: authors' elaboration

**Circular dynamics and mutual influence.** The first type is characterised by both top-down and bottom-up logics of Europeanisation, that circularly contribute to enhance the coherence between the European and the metropolitan dimension. This model concerns metropolitan areas that are characterised by their own development agenda and priorities, while at the same time are entrusted with the management of a more or less relevant amount of EU cohesion policy resources. This is the case of the Metropolitan Areas of Barcelona, Lisbon and Lyon where, on the one hand, the metropolitan development strategies and policies have been influenced by the EU cohesion priorities while, on the other hand, the metropolitan authorities may successfully attempt to upload specific priorities at the regional and national levels in order to then subsequently benefit from the deriving actions.

**Top-down influence.** Then there is a second type of areas, that are mostly subject to top-down influences, that contribute to the development of metropolitan development strategies and policies that are shaped on the priorities of the EU cohesion policy. This case concerns those metropolitan areas that, due to their scarce institutionalisation, were not characterised by a consolidated metropolitan agenda, and were then entrusted with the development and management of a dedicated EU cohesion policy strategy. This is the case of the Metropolitan Areas of Brno and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot that, when awarded the ITI, tailored its strategy over the EU cohesion policy priorities. Interestingly, these cases are subject to evolution through time, with the engagement within the EU cohesion policy that provide momentum towards further institutionalisation and

the development of independent territorial development agendas aiming at grasping the peculiarity of their territorial contexts (as it is the case MAG 2030 strategy and similar activities currently ongoing in Brno).

**Bottom-up reaction to top-down influence.** A third case concerns those metropolitan areas that are sufficiently institutionalised to develop their own development strategies and policies, but neither possess an adequate level of financial resources to implement them nor are entrusted with the management of a relevant share of the EU cohesion policy. In these contexts, well exemplified by the Metropolitan cities of Turin and Florence, the autonomous definition of metropolitan priorities and goals is influenced from the top-down through logics of economic conditionality. Here metropolitan authorities react from the bottom-up to the stimuli of the EU cohesion policy, shaping their own strategies and policies in a way that will then allow for maximising the channelling of ESIF over the identified actions (as it is well represented in the recently approved Metropolitan Strategic Plan of the Metropolitan City of Turin).

**Scarce or no influence.** Finally, there are contexts in which no metropolitan institution exists that is responsible for the development of any metropolitan strategy or policy and, at the same time, the national and/or regional bodies responsible for the programming and management of the EU cohesion policy decide, either willingly or due to particular constraints, not to adopt any specific instrument with metropolitan scope. This case is well exemplified by two of the analysed cases, although for different reasons. On the one hand, the Brussels metropolitan area does not have any institution responsible for its development, and is concerned by EU cohesion policy programmes that are managed by the autonomous regional entities. The complex institutional framework and the low amount of resources that Belgian regions receive if compared to local and regional budgets, make the transaction costs of the cooperation that would be required to establish a metropolitan development strategy funded within the framework of the EU cohesion policy rather high. On the other hand, in the context of the Riga Metropolitan Area, despite the absence of any institutional actor responsible for the promotion of metropolitan strategies and the decision of the central government to pivot the use of the ITI on the main cities of the country, the EU cohesion policy has contributed to fuel the debate on the institution of the Riga Metropolitan Area.

To conclude, the level of coherence between metropolitan development goals and EU cohesion policy is maximised in those cases where metropolitan governance and cooperation exists almost exclusively as functional to the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy (as for instance in the metropolitan areas of Brno and Riga or, to a lesser extent, of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot), or where no direct management exists and the metropolitan authorities are conditioned to adapt their territorial agenda and policies in a way that then allow to maximise the channelling of EU resources on the include priorities and actions (as in the case of the Italian Metropolitan Cities). However, this is not necessarily an asset, as it may mean that the metropolitan priorities have been tailored over those defined in the EU cohesion policy framework without reflecting on their actual fit with the domestic context.

### 3.3.2 EU cohesion policy magnitude, geographical and thematic distribution

Assessing the importance of the EU cohesion policy in the metropolitan areas across Europe in quantitative terms proved to be a difficult task. The encountered difficulties reside in the highly differential institutional and spatial characteristics of metropolitan areas as well as in the arbitrary choices that had to be made in order to make the results of the analysis as comparable as possible.<sup>22</sup> In order to overcome this drawback, we adopted a quali-quantitative analysis, building on the data available in relation to each case and proposing a qualitative comparison based on the collected information, also taking into account the peculiar characteristics of the contexts under examination. This approach has been followed to discuss of the magnitude of ESIF in the different metropolitan areas and their geographical and thematic distribution.

From the case studies' analysis, it emerges that most metropolitan areas located in Western European countries can rely on rather low amount of ESIF. In order to provide account of this evidence, table 3.6 visualises the magnitude of European funds that interest the nine case studies, distinguishing between the resources that are managed by institutionalized metropolitan area and the whole amount of money, which is invested in the space of the metropolitan area. The mentioned lower values are particularly true in relation

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<sup>22</sup> More in detail, the main concerns emerged when considering the identification of spatial focus of the identified EU cohesion policy instruments, whereas only the ITI and the special management arrangement in place in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area have a dedicated metropolitan focus.

to the cases of the *Métropole de Lyon* and of Brussels-Capital Region. These areas are among the two wealthiest areas in Europe, and here the ESIF share that lands on the ground represents less than the 0,5 % of the public expenses, when compared to the budgets of Brussels-Capital Region and of the *Métropole de Lyon*. Such assessment is largely overestimated given that municipal budgets are not included. Moreover, in the case of Brussels, the municipalities belonging to the Brussels FUA, but located in the Flanders and Wallonia regions, are excluded from the calculation.

**Table 3.6**  
**Magnitude of ESIF managed by institutional metropolitan areas in comparison to the total amount of resources invested in the metropolitan territories**

		ESIF managed by institutional metropolitan area	
		+	-
ESIF invested in the metropolitan territory	+	Brno, Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot,	Riga
	-	Barcelona, Lisbon**	Brussels*, Lyon, Turin, Florence

\* No institutional metropolitan area exists in the case of Brussels FUA

\*\* Lisbon has an intermediate position on both axes.

Source: authors' elaboration

In the case of Italian metropolitan cities of Florence and Turin, the EU funds also appear limited. In both cases, we can distinguish between the whole funds that flow to the metropolitan area, for instance through actions funded by the ESF and ERDF ROPs, and the funds that are specifically managed by institutions located in the metropolitan areas as Intermediated Bodies, for instance the specific ROP ESF priorities managed by the metropolitan city of Turin or the NOP METRO resources managed by the cities of Florence and Turin. Nevertheless, in both cases, the share of ESIF delivered on the ground remains rather limited.

In the case of Barcelona, the Metropolitan Area manages €30 million of the Catalonia ROP, accounting for almost 16.5% of the investment budget of the Metropolitan Area (183 million for years 2018 to 2020). It also manages €0,54 million of the Sustainable Growth NOP, and participates in different projects of the European Territorial Cooperation Programmes. As a consequence, although limited in absolute terms, the importance of EU funds for the metropolitan institution is relevant, making this case different from the one of the Italian cities. However, when compared to the total public expenditure of local authorities this amount remains rather limited, and the same is true if one also considers that, in this particular case, the management of a higher share of ESIF is devolved from the region directly to the Municipality of Barcelona (around €40 million of the Catalonia ROP). The Lisbon Metropolitan Area shows a similar situation. However, in this case the amount of ESIF appears to be much higher in both absolute and relative terms: in a large ESIF share flew into the Lisbon metropolitan area during the 2014-20 period, from which €93.4 million through a dedicated ITI. Here the ROP represent between 5 and 10% of the relevant local public budgets, and, given the limited budget of the metropolitan area itself, the share of the ESIF delivered through the ITI contributes to increase it of nearly 41%. In this perspective, the case of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area occupies an intermediate case between the analysed Western and Eastern European metropolitan cities.

The three case studies focusing on Central and Eastern European metropolitan areas clearly emerge among the lot as a consequence of the higher level of ESIF that are delivered on their territories. In Riga metropolitan area, the total amount of ESIF delivered through different means and institutions in the 2014-20 programming period accounts for slightly less than € 440 million. This figure is much higher in absolute terms than, for example, the one that concerns the Brussels and Lyon cases, despite a much lower population. However, in the case study of Riga (in contrast to the two other metropolitan areas located in Central and Eastern European countries), no metropolitan cooperation has been setup yet to manage these resources: the management of the ESIF in the Riga metropolitan territory in the programming period 2014-20 occurred through two main means: a ITI focused on the cities of Riga and Jurmala and the NOP, hence making it difficult to assess their actual added value in the planning and implementation of truly metropolitan policies. A similar situation concerns the cases of Brno and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot. In the Czech Republic, the ESIF represent

around 10% of public expenditures and we may expect similar figures for the Brno Metropolitan Area; in the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area, the resources delivered through the EU cohesion policy account for around 9% of the public expenditures of all municipalities and counties included. Moreover, the quantity of resources is also highly relevant in absolute terms as well as in comparison to the amount of people living in the two areas. Finally, the most relevant issue in both cases has been the institution of dedicated ITIs, upon which the governance and development of otherwise limitedly institutionalised metropolitan areas.

An additional variable that influences the added value that the EU cohesion policy may produce in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies concerns the actual geographical distribution of the ESIF that are delivered within each metropolitan area.<sup>23</sup> In the case of Barcelona, we can distinguish between the total amount of ESIF delivered on the ground to all the municipalities that compose the metropolitan area and the resources specifically managed by the Barcelona Metropolitan Area institution. When looking at the latter, their geographical distribution appears balanced when compared to the distribution of population, and the episodes that counteract this tendency may be attributed to particular territorial features, i.e. the punctual localisation of infrastructure of metropolitan relevance or to the eligibility of selected groups of municipalities to the calls concerning the protection and valorisation of natural or cultural heritage. When looking at the total amount of ERDF and other ESIF delivered on the ground, however, the results are different. Larger municipalities show a higher capacity to attract EU cohesion policy resources from the various calls. According to the interviewees, this unbalance mostly depends on the unequal capacity to answer to complex calls, a process in which the lack of specialised administrative competency put small municipalities in a disadvantaged position. Also the Lisbon Metropolitan Area of Lisbon shows two different patterns when looking at the totality of ESIF flowing into the area or only to the resources that are managed from the metropolitan authority. In the first case, the territory of the Lisbon municipality benefits from the 32% of the total amount of funds landing on the metropolitan area, while hosting only around 17% of its population. In contrast, when considering the ITI, the funding per inhabitant is significantly higher in the most peripheral and less populated municipalities of the metropolitan area, suggesting the attempt of the metropolitan authority to counterbalance the concentration of funding on the capital city.

When it comes to the case of the Metropolitan Cities of Turin and Florence, a larger concentration of funds in the central municipalities is detected in comparison with the rest of the territory. Whereas this concentration is in both cases proportional to the higher concentration of the population in these centres, it also reflects the fact that the structural interventions promoted through the NOP METRO must land on the territory of the two municipalities managing the resources. Interestingly, in both cases a number of less populated, peripheral areas benefit from higher ESIF share if compared to their population. In the case of the Metropolitan City of Turin, that features a highly heterogeneous territory that extend up to the mountain region bordering France, this may be due to the resources delivered through European Territorial Cooperation programmes, an evidence that also testifies the attempt of the metropolitan authority to counteract the described unbalance in resources' distribution to the benefit of the smaller municipalities, through the creative combination of different programmes on a highly heterogeneous territory.

In contrast to most cases, Brno and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot are characterized by a concentration of resources on central municipalities in both absolute and relative terms. As far as the ITI is concerned, Brno municipality benefits from nearly 75% of investments while hosting half of the population. The imbalance is less accentuated in Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot where the three core municipalities receive 60% of the funds for 47% of the population. Conversely, the figures collected in relation to the Riga Metropolitan Area shows an unbalance in favour of the periphery, that benefits from slightly less than the 60% of the total ESIF delivered on the metropolitan territory, while hosting only around one third of its population. The main reason behind this evidence however does not seem related to a specific policy choice aimed at equilibrating the distribution of the resources in the area, rather to the high amount of funding delivered for the realisation of specific infrastructural investments. Finally, in the case of Brussels, the peculiar institutional configuration makes it impossible to assess correctly the geographical distribution of funds within the metropolitan area. The main reason for this is that most of the municipalities that compose its FUA depend on the Walloon and Flemish regions in relation to ESIF distribution.

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<sup>23</sup> Also in this case, a number of methodological challenges have influenced the analysis, as it was difficult to distinguish the total funds that flow into each metropolitan area from those employed in truly metropolitan policies and actions.

Overall, whereas it is difficult to identify a number of patterns from the collected evidence, they show that the unequal distribution of funding among municipalities constitutes a more or less relevant challenge in most of the metropolitan areas under investigation. Whereas often the higher share of resources landing on the main municipalities mirrors their prominence in terms of population, various case studies interviewees have also reported a prominence of the core cities in the definition of the metropolitan agendas and strategies, that is politically difficult to circumvent. At the same time, the use of competitive calls between local authorities often leads to imbalances that are not related to the real needs of the local populations but to the ability of local authorities to be competitive in answering the calls.

When it comes to the distribution of ESIF in relation to different thematic priorities, it is difficult to identify a clear pattern from the nine contexts under investigation. However, some similarities between the various cases under investigation do emerge. For example, in the three metropolitan areas located in Central and Eastern Europe, a large share of funds is oriented through the development of transport-related infrastructures, also as the consequence of the specific nature of the Cohesion Funds, for which infrastructures are essential. This is particularly true in the case of Brno, where mobility and transport benefit from 61% of the resources delivered through the ITI, and a similar figure is detected in the case of the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area. Also in the Riga Metropolitan Area the focus on transport infrastructure stands out, although less prominently if compared to the other two cases, accounting for around one third of the total amount of the ESIF flowing on its territory. Similarly, in the three areas it is possible to observe a relevant focus on economic and technological priorities: in the case of Riga, Research & Development (R&D) investments catalyse as much as the 22% of the ESIF landing on the territory; in the case of Brno interventions focusing on enhancing competitiveness accounts for the 14% of the total resources; in the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area, initiatives focusing on smart growth vehicle the 12% of the total ESIF managed through the ITI. Beside the highlighted similarities, the interventions related to social inclusion receive different considerations in the three contexts: they play a rather prominent role in the Brno Metropolitan Area (14% of the ITI envelope), while they benefit from a lower share of resources in the other two contexts.

To a certain extent, also the two Italian cases and the Barcelona metropolitan area show similar trends. In the Metropolitan City of Florence, interventions focusing on transport (25%) and R&D (27%) account for more than half of the total amount of resources landing on the area, while in the Metropolitan areas of Turin R&D represents by far the most funded thematic priority, financing interventions that benefit from the 30% of the ESIF employed in the metropolitan area. In all three metropolitan areas, social inclusion interventions account for rather limited share of the delivered EU funds. Whereas these figures concern the total amount of resources landing in the region, a consideration of the resources directly managed by the metropolitan institution provide a very different picture. For instance, the Barcelona Metropolitan Area invests nearly the total amount of the resources it manages in environmental intervention and in the promotion of a low carbon economy. Similarly, also the figures of the resources directly managed by the Metropolitan City of Turin differs from the above picture, due to the limited room for manoeuvre in the choice of the types of interventions to finance that is intrinsic in the devolution of management of the ROP thematic priorities.

When it comes to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, the thematic pattern is rather peculiar. On the one hand, the focus on R&D or business issues (through support to SME) is similar to the previous cases, both categories accounting for 50% of the whole. However, social-related issues (poverty, discrimination or education and training) as well as environmental-related issues (low-carbon economy, environmental protection and energy efficiency, worker's mobility) each account for around a quarter of the EU funds in the metropolitan area. Finally, the cases of Brussels and Lyon show divergent evolution patterns in the 2014-20 financing programme, when compared to the previous periods. In Brussels, there has been a partial shift from the focus on deprived neighbourhood (that however still accounts for the 15% of the total) to interventions related to enterprises and innovation, that now accounting for the 36% of the total ERDF allocated in the Brussels-Capital Region, as well as to interventions aiming at the promotion of a circular economy (23% of the total). In contrast, the case of Lyon shows a clear shift towards interventions oriented to the promotion of a higher social cohesion, while in the past a larger share of EU resources has been dedicated to the promotion of action focusing on business innovation and on the consolidation of the smart-city paradigm.

### 3.3.3 Good practices and lessons learned

When analysing the added value that the EU cohesion policy may play in the planning and development of metropolitan policies, it is also (if not more) important to explore the success stories that emerges in the various cases, to identify interesting good practices and the added value they produced, and to reflect on the role that the metropolitan areas have played in their implementation (Table 3.7).

**Table 3.7**  
**Selected good practices in the implementation of the EU cohesion policy in the METRO case study areas\***

	Name	Scope and main themes	Metropolitan Role	Added value
Turin	MiP Programme	Support of business creation and self-employment	Intermediate Body in the metropolitan area	Institutional capacity of CMTO and of its implementing bodies
	NOP Governance – “Metropoli Strategiche”	Development of competencies and institutional innovation in the Metropolitan Cities.	Involved by ANCI in the project	Improving coordination and cooperation among institutional actors
	Participation to ETC programmes	Various scope and fields	Beneficiary partner or lead partner	Consolidation of institutional capacity expertise and know-how over time
Barcelona	Extension of the metropolitan network of bike lanes	Extend and integrate the metropolitan network of bike lanes within the complex urban reality.	beneficiary	Integration of network system with environmental and social dimension
	Urban Innovative Actions	Five UIA projects focused on various issues	observer	Improving administrative capacity; Introducing new form of governance models
	URBACT programme	Mobility and urbanism, economic development, social and territorial cohesion, and sustainability	Lead partner / partner	Increasing institutional capacity
	Socio-environmental recovery of metropolitan river spaces	Natural and environmental configuration of the metropolitan area pursuing river spaces recovery	beneficiary	Improvements of environmental quality of the metropolitan area
Lisbon	Metropolitan Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change	Active cooperation in new policy domains such as Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency	Lead the initiative under the ITI	Improving coordination (horizontal and vertical) and cooperation among various actors
	Education targeting school abandonment	Reducing school abandonment - Education and training	Select interventions under the LMA IT	Improving cooperation among various actors
Brno	Transfer terminal in Zidlochovice	Modernisation and electrification of the of trainline	Integrating individual projects	Improving coordination (horizontal and vertical)
	Networks of cycle paths in Šlapanice	Activate a better connection of the hinterland to the core centre	Framing the actions of special purpose municipal associations	
	New district of Trnitá	Solve a series of problems related with the central bus station Zvonařka	Enabling, coordinating and integrating individual projects into one integrated project	
	Czech Cybersecurity Center	Provide Brno with an excellence cybersecurity structure		
Riga	Integrated development programmes of municipalities	Promoting climate change adaptation, supporting the shift to a low carbon economy	No role of the metropolitan institution, implemented by cities within the ITI	Increasing institutional capacity
	Interreg programmes	Several fields	Elaboration of the project application, participation in the projects	Increasing institutional capacity
Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot	TriPOLIS	Improve cooperation between business incubators and science and technology parks	Intermediate Body in the ROP ERDF, ROP ESF and NOPs and Managing authority of the ITI	Increase of the competitiveness and innovation of enterprises by ensuring better access of enterprises to the high-quality integrated offer of services.
	Metropolitan System of Social and Professional Activation	Support social groups affected by the risk of poverty		Increase of the level of social and professional activity of people and families affected by and at risk of poverty and social exclusion; development of the social economy
	Development of transport integration hubs together with access routes	Improve transport system		Creation of 24 transfer nodes in the MAG area, integrating various means of transport

	Name	Scope and main themes	Metropolitan Role	Added value
	Energy modernization of public utility and municipal residential buildings	The scope is to reduce energy consumption		Reduction of energy consumption in public buildings through thermal modernization
	OMGGS Metropolitan Bike System	Enable the use of public bicycles in 14 municipalities and combine them into an integrated network	MAG is a lead beneficiary / partner	Increasing territorial cooperation among municipalities.
Florence	Project financed by NOP Metro	Increase digitalization of metropolitan municipalities and creations of new digital services and development of a sustainable mobility and infomobility system, scalable at the metropolitan level	Involvement of CMFi through a memorandum of understanding	Definition of a space for co-design between the municipality and the metropolitan city Construction of a metropolitan digital infrastructure Implementation of replicable metropolitan projects
	NOP Governance	Accompany organisational changes, development of competencies and institutional innovation in the Metropolitan Cities.	Involved by ANCI in the Metropoli Strategiche Project	Increasing institutional capacity
	ITP-Piana Fiorentina (RDP fund)	Enhance the agricultural landscape and local supply chains, recovery of ecological corridors.	The CMFI has assumed the role of leader in the territorial agreement	Coordinating role of Metropolitan City strengthening also outside its institutional boundaries
	Horizon Replicate REPLICATE	Develop complex and integrated action to improve energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, ICT and IoT, resilience and security	Included among the pilot projects of the PSM and in the SUMP	The results at the local level were scaled to the metropolitan level (in particular on sensor systems for mobility)
Lyon	Metropolitan networking of digital players (public,private,NGOs)	Increase the networking of digital players in the metropolitan region.	Creation and animation of the network	Increasing coordination among institutional and not institutional actors
	Creation of Business-Employment Liaison Officers	Liaison officers establish relations with local companies and mobilise them	Link social integration and economic development	
	Super Demain	Facilitate access to educational resources and digital media	The Métropole selected and funded the project	Support to families and schools in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods
	Home Silk Road (UIA project)	Combine transitional urban planning, integration of vulnerable people and reception of migrants.	The Metropole of Lyon leads the project	Applying place-based approach in addressing social and urban issues

Authors own elaboration

\* No truly metropolitan project has been identified in the context of the Brussels FUA

When looking at the scope of the identified good practices, the landscape is highly varied. Thematic issues like transport, innovation, ICT, energy efficiency appear to stand at the top of the political agenda in most cases, followed by housing and climate change. In this respect, a number of successful projects have been implemented across cases (e.g. the comprehensive energy modernisation of public utilities buildings in the context of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot). While innovation has been considered as a cross cutting issue that involves several socio-economic aspects (e.g. the Horizon Project Replicate in Lyon, which promotes an integrated action aimed at improving energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, the development of ICT and the Internet of Things, urban resilience and security). A project that focuses on ICT has been also implemented by Florence, with the goal to increase the digitalization of metropolitan municipalities and the creations of new digital services and development of a sustainable mobility and info-mobility system, scalable at the metropolitan level (the project was financed by NOP Metro).

The improvement of mobility systems and metropolitan connections seems to be a priority for various metropolitan areas. The metropolitan area of Brno has dedicated its attention to implementing several projects like the transfer terminal in Zidlochovice which has contributed to reorganize the terminal increasing the efficiency of this railway connection in terms of speed and frequency and the networks of cycle paths in Šlapanice which has improved the connection of the hinterland with the core of the metropolitan area. Additional projects on mobility/transport have been implemented by Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot (see for instance the OMGGS Metropolitan Bike System) and Barcelona which have contributed to the extension of the metropolitan network of bike lines.

Also issues like education, SMEs and employment were often reputed strategic for metropolitan institutions. In this respect it is worth mentioning the examples of the Metropolitan System of Social and Professional Activation activated in Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, the Creation of Business-Employment Liaison Officers in Lyon

which primary scope was to establish relations with local companies and mobilise them on the issue of integration, and the Education Targeting School Abandonment initiative activated in Lisbon. Finally, a number of projects focus mainly on the activation of formal and informal cooperation among institutions, private actors and social groups. In this respect, the role played by the NOP Governance for Turin and Florence is important in accompanying organisational changes and the development of competencies in the metropolitan areas, as done in Lyon with the implementation of networking activities for digital players (public, private, NGO) at the metropolitan scale.

### 3.3.4 The added value of the cohesion policy for metropolitan areas in Europe. A tentative typology

As shown by the numerous good practices presented above, the EU cohesion policy potentially delivers an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies. The possibility to be directly involved in the EU cohesion policy mechanisms and to benefit from its resources is however differential, and may depend on a number of different variables. Building on the information collected in the METRO project, it is possible to reflect in a more structured manner on the conditions that may allow the EU cohesion policy to produce an added value on the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies.

This is done on the basis of a tentative typological classification of European metropolitan areas that is pivoted on three main variables: (i) the relative magnitude of funds delivered (ii) the level of institutionalization of metropolitan governance and cooperation and its coherence with functional phenomena and (ii) the devolution of the management of the EU cohesion policy resources to metropolitan institutions. A number of simple assumptions can be put forward in relation to these variables:

- In the presence of equivalent institutional conditions, the potential for the EU cohesion policy to have a metropolitan added value is likely proportional to the resources' magnitude;
- In the presence of a similar quantity of resources, the existence of a more or less institutionalised metropolitan governance framework entrusted with the management of (part of) these resources increases the chance of the EU cohesion policy to have a metropolitan added value;
- When comparing formally institutionalised metropolitan authorities that manage similar levels of EU cohesion policy resources, the potential to deliver an added value is proportional to the coherence between the administrative boundaries and the metropolitan functional phenomena.

Building on these assumptions, it is possible to identify an ideal condition in which the potential for the EU cohesion policy to produce an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies is maximised. This occurs in the presence of high levels of funding, that are managed by a formal metropolitan institution whose boundaries overlap perfectly with those of the metropolitan functional area. Starting from this ideal condition, it is then possible build a typology that is composed by all the other possible cases that differs from it in relation to one or more of the identified variable (Table 3.8). The 18 identified categories allow reflecting on the potential they entail for the EU cohesion policy to produce a metropolitan added value. More in detail, this potential appears inversely proportional to the transaction costs that are required to set up the necessary conditions to maximise the EU cohesion policy added value. At the same time, the higher the amount of resources available (hence its potential metropolitan added), the higher the transaction costs that each context may be ready to undertake to maximise their added value. When exploring what could be the causes of the mentioned transaction costs, from the collected evidence at least two three categories emerge, overall related to the realm of multilevel territorial governance. First of all, there may be costs related to the enhancement of vertical coordination between metropolitan institutions and the institutions that are responsible to manage the EU cohesion policy resources at the national, regional and local levels. Then, there are the costs related to enhance territorial coordination to overcome the incoherence between the boundaries of a metropolitan institution and those of the metropolitan functional phenomena. Finally, the benefits of a metropolitan approach to the spending of EU cohesion policy resources should be also assessed *vis-à-vis* the benefits that their sectoral, concentrated spending would generate.

**Table 3.8**  
**EU cohesion policy potential added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies. A tentative typology**

Resources		Institutionalisation + FUA coherence	management	Potential of the EU cohesion policy to produce an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies
High	High + FUA coherent	Y		High – allows to manage a high share of EU cohesion policy resources over a functional territory.
		N		Likely high – depends on the quality of vertical coordination (with central, regional, local levels). The high amount of resources makes the potential benefit higher than coordination costs.
	High + FUA incoherent	Y		Likely high – depends on the quality of territorial coordination efforts to overcome incoherence. The high amount of resources makes the potential benefit higher than coordination costs.
		N		Variable – depends on the quality of vertical and territorial coordination. Transaction costs are higher when the institutional area is much smaller than the FUA.
	Low	Y		High - Allows to manage a high share of resources over a functional territory. It also contribute to institutionalise metropolitan governance and cooperation ( <b>Brno and Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan areas</b> )
		N		Variable – Lack of an institution advocating a metropolitan dimension. Depends on the will of the other levels to think metropolitan. The high resources may make the benefit higher than the costs ( <b>Riga metropolitan area</b> )
Average	High + FUA coherent	Y		Likely High - allows to manage a medium share of EU cohesion policy resources over a functional territory. The metropolitan added valued may be hampered by excessive spending diffusion or sectoral concentration ( <b>Lisbon metropolitan area</b> )
		N		Variable – depends on the quality of vertical coordination (with central, regional, local levels).
	High + FUA incoherent	Y		Variable – depends on the quality of territorial coordination. Transaction costs are higher when the institutional area is much smaller than the FUA
		N		Variable – depends on the quality of vertical and territorial coordination. Transaction costs are higher when the institutional area is much smaller than the FUA.
	Low	Y		Likely high – Allows to manage an average share of resources over a functional territory. The metropolitan added valued may be hampered by excessive spending diffusion or sectoral concentration. However, it may contribute to institutionalise metropolitan governance.
		N		Likely low – Lack of an institution advocating a metropolitan dimension. Depends on the will of the other levels to think metropolitan. The average level of resources may make metropolitan benefits overshadowed by sectoral concentration
Low	High + FUA coherent	Y		Variable - allows to manage a medium share of EU resources over a functional territory. Metropolitan added valued may be hampered by excessive spending diffusion or sectoral concentration
		N		Variable – depends on the quality of vertical coordination (with central, regional, local levels) ( <b>Florence metropolitan area</b> )
	High + FUA incoherent	Y		Variable – depends on the quality of territorial coordination. Transaction costs are higher when the institutional area is much smaller than the FUA. ( <b>Barcelona metropolitan area, Lyon metropolitan area, Brussels-Capital Region</b> )
		N		Variable – depends on the quality of vertical and territorial coordination. Transaction costs are higher when the institutional area is much smaller than the FUA. ( <b>Turin metropolitan area</b> )
	Low	Y		Likely low – Allows to manage a low share of resources over a functional territory. The metropolitan added valued is likely hampered by excessive spending diffusion or sectoral concentration. It may contribute to institutionalise metropolitan governance. However, to set up ad hoc metropolitan mechanisms to manage minimal amount of resources is disputable.
		N		Low – Lack of an institution advocating a metropolitan dimension. Depends on the will of the other levels to think metropolitan. The low level of resources makes metropolitan benefits overshadowed by the benefits of sectoral concentration

Source: authors' elaboration

When it comes to the position that the nine case studies investigated in the METRO project occupy within the mentioned typology, the characteristics of the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot and Brno metropolitan areas potentially allows of a high metropolitan impact of the EU cohesion policy. The high magnitude of funds, and the fact that the decision has been made to allow the metropolitan management of the latter through a ITI, ensured the development of a metropolitan agenda that is to a large extent geographically tailored on the

functional metropolitan phenomena. Moreover, the decision to devolve the management of resources to the metropolitan level has triggered virtuous processes of metropolitan institutionalisation. Conversely, despite the high magnitude of funds, the potential to produce a meaningful added value is likely low in the context of the Riga metropolitan area. The central government has opted for the adoption of ITIs pivoted on the cities of Riga and Jurmala, and no metropolitan institution exists here to directly advocate in favour of a valorisation of the metropolitan dimension, hence the increase of the metropolitan added value of the EU cohesion policy will likely be achievable only through a change in the priorities and logics of the national stakeholders.

When it comes to the case of the Lisbon metropolitan area, the potential to generate added value through the cohesion policy is likely high, due to the fact that an institutional metropolitan authority is responsible for managing an average amount of resources over a territory more or less coherent with its FUA. This situation allows experimenting with metropolitan governance and coordination, and to look for synergies between the EU cohesion policy and other metropolitan instruments and policies. At the same time, the amount of resources does not make their excessive concentration on limited sectoral priorities a preferable alternative.

The two Italian metropolitan cities belong to categories for which the potential metropolitan added value that can be generated through the EU cohesion policy is variable. In the case of the Metropolitan City of Florence, that concerns a territory that is to a certain extent comparable to its functional dynamics, the added value generated through the EU cohesion policy depends on the quality of the governance and coordination relations that are in place between the metropolitan authority and the authorities responsible for the management of the EU cohesion policies programmes. The same stands true when the Metropolitan City of Turin is concerned. In this case, however, additional efforts are required in terms of territorial coordination, since the metropolitan authority is required to address with its strategies and policies more complex dynamics that concern a highly heterogeneous territory. Interestingly, despite the required additional effort, in this case a potential also emerges to deliver a larger impact, through the innovative, differential use of multiple EU cohesion policy instruments in relation to its different types of territories.

The potential to produce an added value is also variable in the cases of Barcelona and Lyon metropolitan areas, requiring efforts in terms of territorial coordination. In both cases the presence of metropolitan authorities deputed to manage a part of the EU cohesion policy resources constitutes an asset. However, the misfit between the territories concerned by these authorities and the actual metropolitan functional areas require large territorial coordination efforts. A similar situation concerns Brussels-Capital Region, a highly institutionalised authority that directly manages ERDF and ESF ROPs. However, it covers a much smaller area than the FUA, with the latter that extends in the neighbouring regions of Flanders and Wallonia. Under these conditions, to generate a metropolitan added value would require to put in place coordination mechanisms whose transaction costs are rather high. To overcome this impasse, a joint commitment of all three regional authorities is required, perhaps accompanied by the introduction of an innovative tool (e.g. an interregional ITI or a dedicated interregional operational programme), that could serve as a leverage to enhance cooperation.

As a conclusion, it is worth underlining that the proposed classification is based on the analysis of the nine case studies under investigation in the METRO project, and to the following attempt to generalise their results through an approach that is potentially useful to allow other European metropolitan areas to position themselves within a comprehensive framework. As such, some of the 18 categories that have been identified when combining the mentioned variables may include metropolitan areas that are rather different in relation to the quality of multilevel territorial governance and cooperation, with these differences that are crucial in orienting the 'variable' added value of the EU cohesion policy in positive or negative terms. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is worth mentioning that no EU metropolitan area is 'statically' located in one category. Whereas any shift in the magnitude of resources that a territory receive depends on logics that are hardly influenced by a single metropolitan area, through the introduction of specific institutional and governance mechanisms a context may move from one type to another (as for instance as a consequence of the decision to devolve part of the management of the EU cohesion policy resources to the metropolitan level, setting up a stronger metropolitan governance or ensuring a better correspondence between the latter and its FUA). The ambition of the proposed typological exercise is to allow stakeholders from the different metropolitan areas in Europe to recognise where they position among the identified categories, to then receive indications on what added value the EU cohesion policy can generate in their case, what are the variables determining it, and what are the actions they may want to pursue in order to improve their situation.

### 3.4 The impact of the EU cohesion policy on metropolitan governance and cooperation

While potentially producing an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policy, the EU cohesion policy also exerts impacts on metropolitan governance, stimulating institutional innovation and the introduction and consolidation of new cooperation mechanisms. The following text explore this aspect according to a number of key issues. It first adopts an outward look, exploring the role that the EU cohesion policy has played through time in favouring the emergence, consolidation and institutionalisation of metropolitan governance (§3.4.1). Then, the focus turns inwards, to explore how metropolitan authorities have been using the EU cohesion policy to further engage and cooperate with their municipalities, and to orient and coordinate their action towards a metropolitan perspective (§3.4.2). Finally, the third subsection reflects on how the EU cohesion policy and its instruments have been used as a leverage to stimulate the further engagement of the business community and societal actors (§3.4.3).

#### 3.4.1 The role of the EU cohesion policy in establishing and consolidating metropolitan governance

The influence that the EU cohesion policy has played in the establishment and consolidation of metropolitan governance varies from country to country, as a consequence of multiple variables: the countries' peculiar administrative traditions, the prior existence of supralocal administrative units and their level of formalisation, the relevance of the EU cohesion policy budget over the national, regional and local public budgets, the goodness to fit of the existing institutional configuration with EU requirements etc. The METRO case studies confirm this differential picture, as it encompasses cases in which no explicit link between the EU cohesion policy and the establishment of metropolitan governance is identifiable, cases in which the latter has emerged as a direct consequence of the former and cases where some sort of link between the two is possible, although difficult to demonstrate (Table 3.9)

More in detail, the EU cohesion policy exerted a direct influence in the consolidation of metropolitan governance in the cases of Brno Metropolitan Area and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area. This influence has been delivered as a consequence of the introduction of the ITIs, with the opportunity to manage EU funds that favoured the establishment of more or less formal intermunicipal cooperations and/or the consolidation and further institutionalisation of those that already existed on the territory. In the case of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area, intermunicipal cooperation existed since the end of the communist regime, with the introduction of the ITI that has contributed to provide them with additional momentum and to scale up existing initiatives. Also in the case of the Brno Metropolitan Area the consolidation of metropolitan governance and cooperation followed a similar path, although at present still characterised by a lower level of institutionalisation. The experience of Riga Metropolitan Areas is different, despite the use of ITIs in the Latvian context, in so doing remarking the relevant role played by national governance dynamics in filtering the possible influence that the EU cohesion policy may exert on metropolitan governance and cooperation.

An implicit role of the EU cohesion policy in the consolidation of metropolitan governance is also perceivable in the case of Lyon and of the Italian metropolitan cities of Turin and Florence, although harder to demonstrate. The institution of *Metropole de Lyon* in 2015 (and of other French Metropoles) may have benefited from the momentum triggered by the EU cohesion policy, as testified by the fact that the institution has then been appointed as Intermediate body for a ITI. In Italy, the Metropolitan Cities have been instituted through a national reform in 2014, following internal political and administrative reorganisation logics that are independent from the EU cohesion policy. However, also in this case, the fact that the law provided the newly instituted unit with strategic spatial planning competences and explicitly mentions their potential European role allows to think of an indirect influence.

For what concerns the remaining three metropolitan areas examined by the project, the cohesion policy does not seem to have played any relevant role in the establishment of metropolitan governance. The process that has led to set up the Lisbon Metropolitan areas in 2008 has been the incremental result of a traditional intermunicipal cooperation that has then been formalised by a central governance reform. The same is true for the Barcelona Metropolitan Areas, that has been instituted in 2011 through a law of the Catalan government. The case of Brussels-Capital Region is different from all the others. On the one hand, it is instituted as a fully autonomous region since the regionalisation reform that has characterised the Belgian context. On the other hand, no metropolitan institution exists that is responsible for the development of the extended Brussels FUA area, and the cooperation activities within the latter remains very limited.

Table 3.9

### The role of the EU cohesion policy in the establishment of metropolitan institutions and governance

Metropolitan Areas	Influence of the EUCP on the establishment of metropolitan governance			Comment
	Explicit role	Implicit role	No role	
Metropolitan City of Turin	-	X	-	Italian Metropolitan Cities were established in 2014 by a national law that followed peculiar national political dynamics. However, the law underlines their potential European role.
Metropolitan Area of Barcelona	-	-	X	Metropolitan form of cooperation started since 1974. AMB was then instituted in 2011 from a Law of the Catalan government, that has not been influenced by the EU cohesion policy.
Lisbon Metropolitan Area	-	-	X	The establishing of metropolitan area was the result of local communities' intra-institutional cooperation. The Lisbon Metropolitan Area was then institutionalised in 2008.
Brno Metropolitan Area	X	-	-	The metropolitan governance and cooperation established since 2014 under the impact of the EU cohesion policy and in particular by the use of the ITI instrument.
Riga Metropolitan Area	-	X	-	The Riga Metropolitan Area is still in under discussion, although soft cooperation initiatives in the area dates back to the mid-1990s. The EU cohesion policy influence this discussion.
Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area	X	-	-	Whereas more or less formal intermunicipal cooperation existed, the introduction of the ITI contribute to the consolidation of more explicit metropolitan governance.
Metropolitan City of Florence	-	X	-	Italian Metropolitan Cities were established in 2014 by a national law that followed peculiar national political dynamics. However, the law underlines their potential European role.
Lyon Metropolitan Area	-	X	-	Despite the long tradition of cooperation, Métropole de Lyon was legally established only in 2015. The EU cohesion policy may have implicitly provided momentum to the reform.
Brussels Metropolitan Area	-	-	X	Ongoing discussion on the institution of a Brussels Metropolitan Area did not produce relevant results yet, despite the possibility opened by a federal law in 2011 to create a Brussels metropolitan community.

Source: authors' elaboration

Whereas the EU cohesion may or may not played a role in the emergence of metropolitan institutions and governance, once they were in place it has contributed in most cases to the consolidation of existing forms of cooperation – for instance favouring the upgrade of formal and informal networks, supporting the formalisation of associations of local entities etc. – and the further institutionalisation – e.g. favouring their incremental recognitions. A number of examples exists in this concerns, as for instance the project *metropoli strategiche*, development within the framework of the Italian NOP Governance, that took advantage of the EU cohesion policy to allow the newborn Italian Metropolitan Cities to individuate common challenges and share knowledge and good practices on how to address them coherently. As a matter of fact, in the majority of cases where some sort of metropolitan cooperation already existed, the EU cohesion policy has been proactively used to consolidate it, favouring for example the elaboration of joint territorial strategies with a metropolitan focus or of projects with a metropolitan dimension. In this respect, the cases of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot and Brno metropolitan areas are particularly relevant, showing how the existing networks have benefited by the cohesion policy (and in particular from the adoption of a ITI) to further consolidate existing relations. The same it is true in the case of Riga, although to a different extent. Also in the case of Métropole de Lyon and of the Metropolitan Area of Lisbona and Barcelona, the EU cohesion policy has contributed to reinforce and consolidate the role of metropolitan institutions within the national multilevel governance framework. Overall, in the majority of the metropolitan areas under investigation, the collected evidence show that the EU cohesion policy played an important role in strengthening metropolitan governance, in some cases also leading to the introduction of governance models and institutions that did not exist before. This has

happened mainly by enhancing territorial cooperation among metropolitan municipalities as well as between metropolitan areas within the national and European context. Generally speaking, the lower metropolitan governance is institutionalised in given area, the likelier a devolution of the management of the EU resources will trigger metropolitan governance. However, it is not certain that this process will eventually lead to the effective institutionalization of a metropolitan authority, as the processes of metropolitan institutionalisation follow rather complex and tortuous paths that may end up in a blind due to political impasse.

### 3.4.2 How metropolitan areas use the EU cohesion policy to engage with their municipalities and support their actions

When using the EU cohesion policy in order to engage with their municipalities, the metropolitan areas face a number of challenges. In most cases, these challenges are related to the fact that metropolitan areas are mostly excluded from the decisional process concerning the definition of the programming instruments and are scarcely involved in the management of its resources. However, various examples exist of metropolitan authorities that have tried to use the EU cohesion policy to stimulate the engagement of local municipalities and to coordinate and support their action towards a metropolitan perspective. At least three different engagement and coordination mechanisms have been detected:

- Agreement-based – where metropolitan areas engage local communities about specific issues by adopting agreements and memoranda.
- Programme-based – where metropolitan areas involve local communities in implementing programmes, possibly of sectoral nature and often related to the ITI implementation;
- Project-based – where metropolitan areas coordinate and/or support local communities to prepare and/or implement EU cohesion policy projects.

At the same time, a plethora of other more or less formal institutions and mechanisms are in place in selected contexts, in one way or another taking advantage of the EU cohesion policy and its resources to promote intermunicipal actions in the case study territories.

Among the METRO case studies, it is possible to identify different formal agreements regulating the use of EU cohesion policy among the municipalities (or other local authorities) and eventual upper-level authorities. These agreements may be temporary or permanent, legally binding or not as well as might have a political or technical character. A first group of metropolitan areas has no formal agreements regulating the use of EU cohesion policy among municipalities. This is the case of the Metropolitan City of Turin, Lyon Metropolitan Area and the Brussels Metropolitan Area. However, in France, in the 2014-20 period, cities and groupings of municipalities had a reinforced role in the implementation of cohesion policy and they could be partially delegated of the management activities of the structural funds. They are responsible, at least, for the selection of operations financed under integrated urban development. In Belgium, Brussels Capital Region, Flemish Region and Walloon Region (and the linguistic autonomies for ESF) are the only actors to have a role in the programming, management and implementation of EU cohesion policy funds, allowing scarce room for intermunicipal and interregional coordination agreements.

The Metropolitan Area of Barcelona is characterised by two parallel agreements. The *Barcelona municipality* signed its own agreement *with the regional government*, and a parallel agreement between the regional government and the Barcelona Metropolitan Area exists, that applies to the remaining 35 municipalities. By the Agreement Generalitat-Barcelona City Council for the Implementation of the Catalan ERDF, the City Council of Barcelona is given specific treatment for its size & importance, not to distort the calls the other municipalities of Catalonia will be able to participate. This separation between the capital municipality and the others does not occur in Portugal, where the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA) acts as an intermediate management body entity, leads the Pact for Development and Territorial Cohesion and is responsible for the Integrated Territorial Investment in the metropolitan area, implementing the strategy, defining priorities, approving projects and investments. In the Brno Metropolitan Area (BMA), the city office is entrusted with a public contract with the managing authority to perform the function of intermediate body for the ITI vis-à-vis the municipalities of the metropolitan area, and this agreement allows it to engage them in metropolitan cooperation. By the same token, in the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area, the ITI Association established based on the agreement signed by the main metropolitan local governments become the seed for the larger metropolitan association of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot. The Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area is responsible for ITI implementation, being however larger than the ITI area. The implementation of ITI is very

positively valued by the local governments composing MAG. The agreements are signed between the ITI Associations and the Regional Board of the Pomorskie Voivodship (the Managing Authority of the ROP).

Also in the case of the Metropolitan City of Florence a Consortium Agreement has been signed, but of a more limited extent, and followed by a Territorial Agreement between the Metropolitan City (lead partner) and a number of direct (agricultural companies that require contributions) and indirect participants (Unifi, Municipalities, Farmers' Organizations, Land Reclamation Consortium). This agreement concerns the ITP Piana Fiorentina integrated territorial project, a multi-measure instrument financed through the Rural Development Plan and aiming at addressing specific environmental criticalities at the local level by promoting the maintenance and development of agricultural activities. Moreover, as part of the NOP Metro, managed by the Municipality of Florence as an Intermediate Body, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Metropolitan City for the dissemination and replicability of the projects towards a digital metropolitan Agenda and the sustainability of public services and urban mobility.

The use of programmes to favour the cooperation and coordination of local municipalities towards a metropolitan perspective has been identified in almost all case studies under scrutiny. The most comprehensive are the metropolitan ITI activated in the areas of Brno and Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, followed by those of Lisbon and Lyon. The role of the ITI in favouring the cooperation and coordination of metropolitan municipalities is particularly evident in the context of the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area. Prior to the 2014-20 programming period, two separate metropolitan cooperation platforms existed, with little co-operation ongoing between them. As a result of the introduction of ITI, the two metropolitan associations were merged into one Metropolitan Area Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot in order to cooperate in the management of the ITI, with metropolitan actors that now cooperate in the definition of the priorities to be financed under the ITI mechanism and in the selection of the most important projects. A similar situation is evinced in the Brno Metropolitan Area, where the Municipality of Brno that has used the ITI to further engage in metropolitan cooperation activities with the other municipalities and to jointly collaborate with them in the development of strategies and actions. When it comes to the Lyon case, a number of challenges are reported in relation to the decentralization of ESIF to French regions and the cumbersomeness of the administrative burden. These issues contribute to partially hamper the engagement of local municipalities in strategies and actions that are truly metropolitan in nature, with the ERDF credits that have been mostly used by Métropole de Lyon for its own projects as well as to the benefit of a limited number of stakeholders on the territory. In the case of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, metropolitan municipalities can receive funds from ERDF funds from the Urban Axis of the NOP (EDUSI, Low Carbon Economy Singular Projects) and in the framework of calls issued by the Catalan ERDF and ESF ROPs as well as within direct EC initiative (Interreg Programmes, UIA, URBACT). At the same time, they can benefit from the share of ERDF ROP funds that have been devolved to AMB through a special agreement with the regional government. This last option would be the most relevant to support local municipalities and orienting their action towards a metropolitan direction. However, the presence of multiple funding channels and the complexity connected to the application process limit its added value. Moreover, the fact that the city of Barcelona benefit from a separate agreement with the regional government, while on the one hand preserving local municipalities from the competition of the main municipality, it also limits the scope of AMB action due to the so-called 'donut effect'.

In the Riga Metropolitan Area, the ITI pivoted on the cities of Riga and Jurmala mostly allows for the promotion of urban development interventions on the territory of the capital city. However, through the multi-fund NOP the promotion of actions concerning (or serving) the territories of several municipalities has been possible. The Riga Planning Region had played a rather relevant role within this framework, identifying a number of regional-scale projects in its regional development planning documents, that were then evaluated and possibly approved at the ministerial level. When it comes to the Brussels FUA, it is potentially interested by the three ERDF ROPs. However, whereas Brussels-Capital Region may only use its ROP to engage with the 19 municipalities that compose its territory, and has no direct leverage on the remaining 118 municipalities located in Flanders and Wallonia. At the same time, the lack of a coordination between the regions in the use of the ROPs, also due to the low magnitude of resources they deliver if compared to regional and local public budgets, does not allow for any engagement of local municipalities from a metropolitan perspective.

When it comes to project-based cooperation among municipalities, within the analysed metropolitan areas EU funded projects have been used to coordinate and engage municipalities in various ways. In Turin, for instance, the Metropolitan City of Turin has made use of INTERREG – Alcotra Integrated Territorial Projects (PITER, PITEM) to co-participate with local unities in the same project proposal. The role of European Ter-

territorial Cooperation funded projects to stimulate intermunicipal cooperation was highlighted in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, where local authorities, especially the small and medium-size municipalities, tend to avoid calls from ERDF ROP and even NOP preferring direct calls from European Commission (mainly URBACT and UIA). The relevant role of these types of projects has been reported also in the case of the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot. Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area was also involved in some URBACT, INTERREG and Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund projects (relevant examples concerns the projects Liquid Energy, RiConnect and European Platform of Integrating Cities). Finally, in relation the Riga metropolitan area, intermunicipal cooperation has been promoted through projects dedicated to ensuring Cross-Border Cooperation.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that other governance bodies and mechanisms exist in the analysed contexts, that contribute to favour the joint action of municipalities. Whereas mostly focusing on selected territories and/or specific sectoral issues, somehow limiting the overall metropolitan value of the cooperation, these initiatives constitute interesting practices that the metropolitan authorities should learn how to interact with and coordinate, in so doing diversifying their action and experimenting innovative routes towards metropolitan development. The most relevant example in this concern is represented by the Local Action Groups (LAGs), that in selected contexts act as managers and beneficiaries of funds and contribute to stimulate the joint development of integrated territorial development strategies and actions. Importantly, the action of LAGs is mostly linked to the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) funded by the Rural Development Plan. Particularly relevant for the Italian context are the governance mechanisms set up through the so-called National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI), a multi-fund strategy financed with national and regional resources. However, the metropolitan cities do not play a relevant role in these initiatives: the CLLD is coordinated by the Region through their Rural Development Programmes and implemented by the LAGs, and the SNAI is managed in interaction with a dedicated Technical Committee, which is coordinated by the Department for the cohesion policy of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and in which the Metropolitan City is not involved. Also in the case of Lisbon, 10 LAGs have established protocols of functional articulation with the Lisbon Regional Operational Programme (ROP) 2014-20. Importantly, two of them have a declared inter-municipal aim and involve collaboration across more municipalities. These cooperation arrangements are not directly related to the main metropolitan institution, making the governance framework of the Lisbon metropolitan area more complex. Overall, the multiplication of bodies and mechanisms intervening in one way or another in metropolitan development, represent an important capital that metropolitan authorities should recognise and engage with, in order to be able to produce comprehensive and integrated territorial development strategies and actions that are receptive of the different territorial instances. However, these episodes, if not properly engaged with and coordinated, risk to increase metropolitan fragmentation instead of enhancing its coherence, in so doing contributing to hamper the development and implementation of comprehensive development strategies and plans.

### 3.4.3 How metropolitan areas use the EU cohesion policy to engage with business actors and social groups

An additional added value that the EU cohesion policy can bring to metropolitan area is the possibility to use its resources to further engage with business actors and social groups and integrate their instances within metropolitan policies and projects. Building on the examples gathered by in the project, it can be argued that metropolitan areas may engage with business and social actors, at various stages of the EU cohesion policy process. More in detail, business actors and social groups might be included in the elaboration of instruments and strategies that are directly or indirectly functional to the implementation of the EU cohesion policy or for the adoption of own strategic documents, as in the case of the Metropolitan Strategic Plan 2021-2023, '*Torino Metropoli Aumentata*', approved 2021 after an inclusive participatory process. This document is not directly linked to the EU cohesion policy, and it is produced as a consequence of the strategic planning competence attributed to Italian Metropolitan Cities by the law. However, it is explicitly related to the objectives of the 2021-27 programming period, in so doing contributing to collect and include the instances of the business community and social groups (but also of the different municipalities that compose the Metropolitan City) in a strategy that will count on the EU cohesion policy for its implementation. Also in the case of the Florence several decisions concerning the development of metropolitan instruments and strategies have been taken after a participatory process in which also the third sector and the business community were involved extensively. This case also represents a good example in relation to the implementation of the public-private partnerships, as the implementation of the NOP Metro shows how very different entities can talk to each other and work together. Moreover, in relation to both cases the involvement of social and business actors takes on various other forms, depending on the type of actor and instrument, and either

from the participation to monitoring committees to the participation to projects as beneficiaries. In the case of Barcelona, the participation of social groups and the business community in the EU cohesion policy occurred through formal committees, for the preparation phase of the OPs and in a more limited way in their monitoring. As a result, the programmes were able to better embody the needs of local communities and enhance the impact of the projects and actions in the territory. At the same time, AMB seems to suffer from a lack of institutionalization of participatory processes and just a few relevant social and economic actors have an actual metropolitan character. Similarly, in Lisbon, the involvement of social groups and the business community is fairly modest and mostly concerns consulting and monitoring committees.

In the case of Brno Metropolitan Area, the role of social groups and the business community was defined in accordance with the partnership approach of the EU cohesion policy, which invites relevant actors to participate in the discussion on the definition of strategic development aims within thematic objectives of ITI Strategy. However, actors like NGOs and business partners have been involved only in the implementation of the EU cohesion policy through projects. The ITI metropolitan institution surveyed all actors and stakeholders within the territory and identified a list of relevant actors for each thematic objective of metropolitan cooperation. The civil society participates in the programming and implementation of some social cohesion thematic objectives. At the same time, the BMA does not specifically seek partners from the business community for planning and implementation of the metropolitan strategy. Business and social actors may be also involved also in the activities of the governance bodies responsible of the management of the EU cohesion policy funding programmes as part of monitoring committees or management body. For example, in the Polish context the Monitoring Committee of each OP acts as an independent advisory and opinion-making body, appointed by the Managing Authority, and is composed of representatives of the national/regional government, local governments and organizations outside the administration (including representatives of the research sector, non-governmental organizations, social partners). However, the metropolitan structures have no statutory role in these committees and MAG business and social actors are not sufficiently involved in EU cohesion policy programming, management and implementation, in particular in the case of OPs. Moreover, in the opinion of the business representatives, the realisation of the ITI project is still mostly driven by the public sector, with private and social actors that are not fully aware of the role and specificity of the ITI programme and how it is related to metropolitan activity.

The case of the Riga Metropolitan Area displays an interesting case of wide and articulated participation. The preparation of the National Development Plan for the period of 2021-27 was accompanied by wide-scale public participation involving relevant sectoral, experts, researchers, NGOs, national-level public administration and local government officials, business community and politicians in all regions of Latvia. The Ministry of Finance invited citizens and non-governmental organizations to provide comments and proposals, thus participating in the EU policy planning process. Therefore, social groups and the business community have the opportunity to be involved in discussions about the EU cohesion policy, in particular regarding funding. As part of the public discussion, the Ministry of Finance also organized six thematic meetings, where the social and cooperation partners could remotely get acquainted with the draft operational program, listen to the ministries' positions, make suggestions for necessary clarifications or changes. These thematic meetings were attended by representatives of almost a hundred different organizations. To ensure optimal involvement of partners in various planning stages, after consultation with the European Commission, the Ministry of Finance plans repeated discussions on the NOP with social and cooperation partners in the format of monitoring committee/subcommittees, as well as regular information on current processes.

Finally, business actors and social groups are most active during the implementation of EU cohesion policy funded projects, with different roles. A particularly relevant example in this concern is the involvement of the Turin Metropolitan areas in the Interreg ALCOTRA cross-border cooperation programme that covers the Alpine territory between France and Italy and that since the 1990s has financed almost 600 projects accounting for about €550 million ESIF. Also in the case of *Métropole de Lyon* the engagement of business and social actors mostly concerns the participation in projects prepared and initiated by the *Métropole*, raising questions on their rather scarce involvement in the consultation or monitoring phases of the EU cohesion policy. Project-based, *ad hoc* engagement is reported also in the case of the Brussels-Metropolitan Area, also due to the lack of any form of metropolitan governance and cooperation. On the one hand, social groups and the business community were engaged to a larger or smaller extent in the process that led to the definition of the BCR ERDF ROP. On the other hand, they have been mostly engaged in the implementation of different bottom-up, localised projects, sometimes involving more than one municipality. Whereas these projects deliver on the territory only partial "quick-wins", the hope is of their gradual under an overall coordination, to eventually lead to the development of a metropolitan-wide strategy and to larger-scale projects.

### 3.5 Use of the EU cohesion policy to react to the COVID-19 emergency at the metropolitan level.

This last section presents and discusses the role that metropolitan areas have been playing in reacting to the COVID-19 emergency, and to what extent the EU cohesion policy represented an added value in this concern. Whereas metropolitan areas have been seriously impacted by the pandemic, at the same time the metropolitan level is the one that is potentially better positioned to react to it, and to play an active role in its aftermath. This is due to the crucial importance that metropolitan areas have in the promotion and coordination of intermunicipal strategies and actions, as well as for the support that they can provide to municipalities in the development and implementation of project proposals. However, the evidence collected in relation to the nine metropolitan areas under investigation confutes this hypothesis at least partially. In the majority of cases, reactive measures have mostly been developed at the national and regional levels, or in the framework of by the main municipalities, with a very limited involvement of metropolitan areas. Be that as it may, a number of positive exceptions exist, that are worth exploring (Table 3.10).

**Table 3.10**  
Metropolitan areas response to the COVID-19 emergency

Metropolitan Areas	Involvement				Nature of the action			Type of action			
	No	Scarce	Sectoral	Comprehensive	Reactive	Containment	Proactive	Regulations	Incentives	Strategies	Projects
Metropolitan City of Turin	X										
Metropolitan Area of Barcelona			X				X		X	X	X
Lisbon Metropolitan Area		X				X	X		X		X
Brno Metropolitan Area	X										
Riga Metropolitan Area	X										
Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area			X		X				X		X
Metropolitan City of Florence		X				X					X
Lyon Metropolitan Area			X			X			X		X
Brussels Metropolitan Area	X										

Source: authors' elaboration

When assessing the level of metropolitan involvement in the reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, it differs across the metropolitan areas under investigation. In particular, it is possible to differentiate between: (i) **no involvement** (metropolitan authorities did not play any role in the implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures); (ii) **scarce involvement** (metropolitan authorities played a limited role in addressing the emergency); (iii) **sectoral involvement** (metropolitan authorities have implemented some COVID-19 mitigation measures, mainly focusing on sectoral issues); (iii) **comprehensive involvement** (metropolitan authorities have reacted to the pandemic according to a comprehensive, metropolitan perspective).

Importantly, from the collected evidence, no case reports a comprehensive involvement of the metropolitan authority in the reaction to the pandemic. Apparently, metropolitan areas were often excluded from the “control room” when the pandemic emergency has been tackled. On the other hand, however, in a number of cases (i.e. Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, Lyon and Barcelona metropolitan areas) metropolitan authorities have been involved in the development of sectoral interventions addressing the pandemic emergency and its impacts. The Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area has undertaken several initiatives related to COVID-19, mainly of a “soft” nature, such as measures in support to the local tourism industry, cultural initiatives, social initiatives in support to local restaurants, and social inclusion measures. In addition, *Métropole de Lyon* has directly acted on COVID-19 related issues through a set of dedicated measures: in April 2020 it launched a €100 million emergency fund to support local businesses, to then adopt a series of actions supporting metropolitan health and social facilities, services dedicated to child protection and to fight against

poverty. The Barcelona Metropolitan Area has launched the most structured set of interventions to react to the COVID-19 pandemic, although also of a sectoral nature and detached from the EU cohesion policy framework. Two extraordinary investment programmes (i.e. PSA, ApropAMB) and a New Mobility Pact were approved, aimed at accelerating and promoting sustainable mobility and energy transition.

A number of initiatives, although of a less structured nature, have been put in place in the cases of the Metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Florence. In the Lisbon area, the pandemic emergency was tackled by the metropolitan authority and the regional government through the adjustment of certain priorities of the Lisbon ROP, namely those focusing on social inclusion, education and training, including school digitalisation and support to the acquisition of COVID-19 tests and Individual Protection Equipment. Here the pandemic crisis put under stress the metropolitan administration's capacity to deal with emergency global issues, at the same time highlighting a gap between the institutional competence of metropolitan administration and the expectations. In the case of Florence, the NOP Metro was used (on the city level) to face the pandemic through a strengthening of cycle mobility systems, interventions in the field of housing etc. However, due to the nature of the instrument, the implemented interventions are hard to read from a metropolitan dimension. Finally, in four out of nine METRO cases (Brno, Brussels, Riga, Turin), the metropolitan authorities did not play any substantial role in addressing the pandemic emergency in an integrated way.

Although in the majority of cases the metropolitan areas have had limited room for action, where this has been possible the measures undertaken are rather heterogeneous. More in detail, their nature can be (i) **reactive** (metropolitan authorities promote short-term measures aiming at giving an immediate response to the pandemic issue); (ii) **containment driven** (metropolitan authorities take strict decision in order to contain the pandemic by, for example, reallocating ordinary budget or EU funds (when possible) according to certain line of investments); (iii) **proactive** (metropolitan authorities support the implementation of long-term measures where decisions are taken based on a strategic view in order to overcome the pandemic impact).

In the metropolitan areas where the metropolitan authorities have somehow played a role in addressing the pandemic, only the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona seems to have adopted a proactive approach. Although of sectoral nature, the New Mobility Pact is aimed at influencing the mobility system of the AMB in the post-pandemic scenario. On the other hand, in the cases of Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Lyon Metropolitan Area and the Metropolitan City of Florence, a readjustment of funds has been made in the light of containing the pandemic emergency instead, as for instance strengthening soft mobility, or reinforcing health and social facilities. Finally, in the case of the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area the majority of initiatives have been reactive to the pandemic, trying to provide support to local businesses and tourist activities in a way that they could survive the pandemic emergency, instead of being driven by more long-term oriented strategies and priorities. Overall, the encountered heterogeneity of policy responses shows how articulated and challenging the COVID-19 pandemic has been for each territory. Perhaps as a consequence of their limited room for action due to the lack of competences, dedicated instruments and resources, the role that metropolitan areas could have played in addressing the pandemic has remained largely unexpressed until now. It will be interesting to see whether and how the situation will change with the implementation of the actions funded under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and included in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans that some of the METRO stakeholders have in one way or another contributed to substantiate.

Finally, the actions put in place in each of the analysed contexts to react to the COVID-19 pandemic differs also in relation to their type. It is possible to identify three categories of responses according to the diversity of instruments that they adopted to deal with the emergency: (i) **incentives** (metropolitan areas have activated as *hoc* incentives to support specific sectors or social categories); (ii) **strategies** (metropolitan areas have introduced medium and long term sectoral strategies aiming at reducing the impact of the pandemic as well as increasing the quality of life of their territories); (iii) **projects** (metropolitan areas have implemented specific *ad hoc* initiatives to limit or mitigate the impact of the pandemic).

On the one hand, no specific regulations have been developed and adopted by the analysed metropolitan areas to deal with the pandemic challenges. This reflects the fact that the majority of normative restrictions have been introduced by the national, regional and local authorities, due to the national distribution of responsibilities on health matters or the principle of subsidiarity. Among the five metropolitan areas that have been active in addressing the pandemic, all of them seem to have promoted incentive-based initiatives. Those initiatives mainly consist in the allocation of funds to support sectors and/or social groups particularly affected by the pandemic (for instance, in Lyon ESIF have been used for targeted interventions promoting social cohesion and employment). These incentive-based initiatives are seen as the way to alleviate contingent emergency problems instead of supporting post-pandemic reconstruction. Examples of proactive and

future oriented measures (i.e. long-term strategies) are very few across the METRO metropolitan areas. At this regard, is worth to mention the New Mobility Pact adopted by the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, which took the momentum to go beyond the emergency towards the definition of a post-pandemic scenario where mobility will definitely play a crucial role. Finally, almost everywhere there was a proliferation of *ad hoc* projects that help metropolitan areas to implement short-term initiatives aiming at softening the impact of the COVID-19. Usually those projects target specific issues and help communities.

### 3.5.1 Metropolitan areas engagement in the Recovery and Resilience Facility

When looking at the future role that metropolitan areas can play in the aftermath of the pandemic, the key instrument put in place by the EU is the so-called Recovery and Resilience Facility, allocating funds in line with the EU Member States National Recovery and Resilience Plans. The collected evidence shows that the involvement of the metropolitan authorities under investigation in the programming of the latter varies widely, due to the different approaches in programming and compiling the national recovery plans that have been followed in the various countries and the progresses that had been achieved at the time of the analysis.

When looking at the monitored processes, the Italian metropolitan cities seem to be well positioned, as they took part in the programming process through the provision of metropolitan-relevant input in the form of flagship projects. This occurred through their representation in the National Association of Italian Municipalities. More in detail, the Mayor of the Metropolitan City of Florence has activated a working group coordinated by the Florence City Manager which acts as an administrative collector of proposals from actors belonging to both the metropolitan city and the municipality of Florence. This working group, that builds on ongoing EU cohesion policy activities (as the NOP Metro actions and urban authority organization) has analysed the correspondence of the collected projects with the ministerial guidelines for project proposal and, on this basis, has delivered a detailed proposal to ANCI, together with the ones of all metropolitan cities. Also, the Metropolitan City of Turin has proposed 20 projects related to green transition, digital transition for the public administration, cohesion, sustainability, inclusion and mobility. The proposals have been also shared with the Regional government, that tried to integrate the proposals developed by its local institutions into the broader regional projects. In December 2020, Metropole de Lyon proposed 23 projects to the REACT-EU programme, concerning the thermal renovation of schools and social housing, the development of inclusive digital projects, and the purchase of personal protective equipment. In addition, five projects have been presented by the City of Lyon, concerning the development of a new vaccination centre and the thermal renovation of schools. The involvement of Barcelona Metropolitan Area has been also related to the presentation of preliminary projects to the regional and national governments endowed with the task of programming the recovery framework. The Latvian National Recovery and Resilience Plan devotes a large amount of resources to climate related objectives, and in particular to support sustainable mobility. The greening of the Riga Metropolitan Area transportation system is one of the actions that will be implemented through the plan, also thanks to the involvement of Riga city and a good number of neighbouring municipalities. Of metropolitan relevance is also the development of an integrated health care approach in university hospitals.

The remaining cases do not seem to have been involved yet in the programming of the Recovery and Resilience Facility to any relevant extent. In the case of Brno, the major cities that compose the metropolitan areas, settlement agglomerations and the holders of the ITI have gained since early 2021 some opportunities to comment upon the preparation of the National Recovery Plan from the position of urban and metropolitan development priorities. The Portuguese Recovery and Resilience Plan is seen as an opportunity to make heavier investments and change the paradigm in the transport and mobility domain in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, while it also includes priorities dedicated to the health sector, digital transition, and housing. This may partially compensate for the reduction of the funding of the Lisbon ROP. However, at the time of writing it is not clear what role the Lisbon Metropolitan Area will play in the development and implementation of the new actions. A similar situation concerns the Metropolitan Area of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, where are a number of expectations in relation to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan but the metropolitan influence in its programming has been so far limited. When it comes to the case of Brussels Metropolitan Area, each federal entity develops its own plan and is provided with its own budget, but their integration into actions with a true metropolitan dimension is not likely to occur.

## 4 Policy guidance and recommendations

Building on the ESPON METRO analysis, a number of policy messages are distilled, aiming at enhancing the metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy and a stronger engagement of metropolitan actors within the latter<sup>24</sup>. These messages are organised in three distinct sections, inspired by the policy questions that have been driving the research: (i) how to strengthen the role of metropolitan areas in the development, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy (§5.1); (ii) how to enhance synergies between the EU cohesion policy and metropolitan policies towards a greater added value (§5.2) and (iii) how to maximise the impact of the EU cohesion policy on metropolitan governance and cooperation (§5.3). For each of the three policy issues, a distinction has been operated in the target audience to which the various policy messages are addressed, distinguishing between (i) recommendations targeting European metropolitan areas (ii) recommendations aimed at informing the work of national and regional authorities and finally (iii) messages directed to EU-level actors that are responsible for setting the multilevel frame within which the EU Cohesion policy is programmed, managed and implemented. At the same time, the proposed policy messages aim to provide an added value to the activities of the two umbrella organizations involved in the ESPON METRO project – Eurocities and Metropolis – when advocating in favour of a stronger metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy.

### 4.1 Strengthen the role of metropolitan areas within the EU cohesion policy

The first policy issue investigated in the project concerns the actual functioning of the institutional architecture and governance mechanisms that characterize the EU cohesion policy, analysed in a multilevel perspective. This issue is relevant in one way or another for all the METRO stakeholders, as they explicitly highlighted the need to explore what room exists for enhancing the influence of metropolitan areas in the EU cohesion policy programming, management and implementation. On the one hand, institutionalized metropolitan authorities aim to be more directly and extensively acknowledged in the definition of the EU cohesion policy priorities, as well as in the management of selected thematic priorities. On the other hand, while metropolitan areas benefiting from the implementation of dedicated ITIs would like to raise attention on the importance and added value of this instruments and on how their governance and institutional status could be further consolidated, other stakeholders are interested in more information concerning ITI functioning and added value, upon which to ponder its undertaking.



#### Recommendations for metropolitan areas

(Prioritise) **Identify thematic priorities and actions for which the metropolitan level generates a higher impact.** Use available instruments and processes to motivate and claim a role accordingly and address regional, national and EU authorities through concrete proposals.

(Join forces) **Network actively with other metropolitan areas at the national and EU level to exchange knowledge and good practices** in order to better identify the “metropolitan identity”. **Jointly organise lobbying and promote actions** towards a further recognition of the metropolitan dimension in the EU cohesion policy and Recovery and Resilience Facility and, where necessary, also within national administrative and policy frameworks.

(Collaborate) **Establish proactive collaboration with all the municipalities within the metropolitan area, economic and social stakeholders and national and regional governments,** in so doing guaranteeing the co-definition of projects with a true metropolitan dimension that ensures larger impact.

<sup>24</sup> The methodological steps that were followed in the preparation of the policy messages included here is provided in Annex I. Their differential relevance for the different metropolitan contexts is discussed in Annex II.

(Capitalise) **Identify good practices in the engagement of the metropolitan areas in the concluded EU cohesion policy programming period and capitalise them**, working towards their strengthening and using them as a leverage to claim additional involvement.

(Empower) **Invest to consolidate institutional capacity by enlarging and upskilling human resources and re-engineering processes and procedures**, to facilitate the quest for and management of EU funds, further enhance metropolitan governance functioning and strengthen the case for a devolution of EU cohesion policy and other competences.



### Recommendations for national and regional institutions

(Acknowledge) **Acknowledge the crucial role that the metropolitan level can play** in dealing with socio-economic, environmental and territorial challenges.

(Involve) **Involve metropolitan institutions in the design of EU cohesion policy National and Regional Operational Programmes** as well as of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the European Green Deal, to enrich them with a metropolitan dimension.

(Devolve) **Devolve part of the management of the EU cohesion policy (and other EU funding programmes) to metropolitan institutions** in relation to those priorities for which the management at the metropolitan level provides higher impact.

(Consolidate multilevel governance) **Use the EU cohesion policy as a way to structure a coherent multilevel governance framework** that ensures the effective coordination of the EU, national, regional, metropolitan and local planning and policies. In doing so, generate a momentum towards the **institutionalisation of metropolitan areas as a key territorial setting for national and regional public policies** (and, where necessary, their legal recognition).



### Recommendations for EU-level actors

(Define) **Define the boundaries of a specific EU metropolitan development discourse and policy** in parallel to, but independently from the one focusing on sustainable urban development (e.g. through an official EC Communication, links to the implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and to the EC Communication on the long-term vision for Rural Areas).

(Recognise) **Officially acknowledge the role that metropolitan areas play in the socio-economic, environmental and territorial development of the EU** and, in turn, **explicitly recognise them in the EU cohesion policy governance** as a key level at which to catalyse the action of cities, suburban and rural areas in relation to selected issues with a metropolitan dimension.

(Enhance knowledge) **Enhance knowledge by engaging with EU networks with a metropolitan focus** (European Metropolitan Authorities, Eurocities, Metrex) **in the definition of the EU cohesion policy** priorities and regulations (and also in the Recovery and Resilience Facility and in the European Green Deal).

(Monitoring and Reward) **Monitor more closely the implementation of the European code of conduct on partnership** in the Member States when programming and managing the EU cohesion policy programmes. **Predispose rewards to incentivise the establishment of inter-institutional managing authorities involving metropolitan areas** in the cohesion policy, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Green Deal, the use of ITI and other types of agreements.

(Monitor) **Establish a European Metropolitan Policy Observatory**, with the support of European organisations with a metropolitan focus (European Metropolitan Authorities, Eurocities, Metrex) and in connection to the planned EU Rural Observatory, to develop and share evidence-based knowledge on metropolitan institutions and governance as well as data for all EU functional and institutional metropolitan areas.

## 4.2 Enhance the added value of the EU cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies

A second element of analysis concerns the potential for the EU cohesion policy to produce an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan strategies and policies and, vice versa, how the latter can contribute to achieve EU territorial development goals. All stakeholders have highlighted the need to establish and consolidate stronger synergies between metropolitan and EU priorities and instruments. Whereas European programmes have their own rationale, given the breath of their goals, to enhance formal coherence between European and metropolitan development strategies is rather straightforward. However, at a closer look, a number of challenges still exists for metropolitan areas and cities to meet their objectives through the EU cohesion policy, as the specific governance arrangements and mechanisms in place in the different context may or may not allow virtuous episodes of cross-fertilisation to occur.



### Recommendations for metropolitan areas

(Think strategically) **Establish an overarching, comprehensive metropolitan strategy together with all relevant stakeholders, matching the EU cohesion policy and other national and regional policy instruments and opportunities**, in order to facilitate the channeling of resources on concrete metropolitan actions. When possible, use it to upload pivotal metropolitan priorities on the regional, national and EU agendas.

(Integrate sectors) Use existing frameworks and instruments (Operational Programmes, but also ITI and *ad hoc* agreements) to **integrate sectoral actions anytime it is possible and propose integrated projects with a potentially metropolitan-wide, high impact**.

(Soften boundaries) Use the different available means to **act through variable geographies** (FUA, urban-rural relations, remote rural areas etc.) **defined by the issues at stake**. Tackle territorial misfits and heterogeneity through a multi-network approach and use partial 'quick-wins' to eventually reach a larger scale.

(Support and work together) **Support and co-work with local public bodies and private actors in the outline and preparation of project proposals and in their implementation**, in turn overcoming the negative impacts of fragmentation and ensuring a greater metropolitan added value.



### Recommendations for national and regional institutions

(National and regional Metro-thinking) **Involve metropolitan representatives when programming National and Regional Operational Programmes as well as other relevant programmes (as the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the European Green Deal), to strengthen their metropolitan dimension** and enhance their impact in terms of coherence and outcomes on the ground.

(Local Metro-thinking) Include incentives in National and Regional Operational Programmes aiming at **encouraging local administrations and local stakeholders to think and act with a metropolitan perspective in mind**, to reduce the fragmentation of the EU cohesion policy impact and enhance its metropolitan added value.

(Metropolitan nexus) **Identify the metropolitan level as a relevant nexus between national, regional and local authorities**. In the spirit of subsidiarity and in cooperation with regional authorities, the metropolitan institutions shall support local authorities in the preparation and implementation of actions with an expected metropolitan impact.

(Metropolitan instruments) **Introduce programmes and instruments managed at the metropolitan level** (as dedicated Operational Programmes, ITIs or other *ad hoc* agreements), to guarantee the allocation of funding **enhancing vertical** (between different territorial levels)

**and horizontal** (between sectors and funds) **coordination** in the definition of priorities and operational plans with a metropolitan dimension.

(Metropolitan balance) **provide Operational Programmes with actions plans and measures to enhance metropolitan cooperation and favour a balanced distribution of resources** that complies with metropolitan-wide priorities and policies.



### Recommendations for EU-level actors

(EU Metro-thinking) **Acknowledge the metropolitan scale as the most suitable scale to efficiently tackle functional urban challenge and facilitate supralocal cooperation.** On this basis, further strengthen the metropolitan dimension in the design, implementation, and management of the EU cohesion policy.

(Metropolitan instruments) **Provide metropolitan governments with dedicated programming instruments** (ITI, National Operational Programmes, Metropolitan Operational Programmes), deputed to address relevant metropolitan issues (e.g. socio-economic polarisation, smart economic transformation, mobility, social inclusion, climate change).

(Engagement catalyst) **Recognize the role that metropolitan areas can play as catalyst of engagement,** that support and stimulate **the participation of small and medium-sized municipalities** to the EU cohesion policy, so that also these entities benefit from EU funding and receive an added value in a true metropolitan perspective.

(Simplify) **Streamline managerial burdens and facilitate the access to Technical Assistance resources. Simplify the logics and mechanisms behind the various EU funds.** Favour their integration within territorial development strategies and actions, also strengthening those instruments that allow to do so (as ITI, CLLD).

## 4.3 Maximise the impact of the EU cohesion policy on metropolitan governance and cooperation

A third issue open for investigation concerns the added value that cohesion policy could provide in favouring the consolidation of metropolitan governance and in the development and articulation of cooperation practices. Obviously, in relation to this policy issue, less institutionalized metropolitan areas and cities are perceiving the highest value, and would like to exploit the opportunities offered by the EU cohesion policy to further consolidate the position of metropolitan institution within national and regional administrative hierarchies. However, also formal metropolitan authorities generally acknowledge the added-value that the EU cohesion policy could have in consolidating cooperation dynamics with the national and regional levels, with the various municipal authorities they include as well as with the business community and the social actors that are active within their boundaries. In this light, the provided policy messages address whether and under what conditions the EU cohesion policy may contribute to the consolidation of integrated metropolitan governance structures and stimulate further cooperation therein. Moreover, where functional dynamics are not matching the borders of metropolitan institutions, the use of EU funds may help stimulating institutional actors to cooperate according to area-based approaches.



### Recommendations for metropolitan areas

(Dialogue and leverage) **Intensify EU cohesion policy dialogue with local municipalities and all other relevant actors,** thus fostering multi-local cooperation and the articulation of a metropolitan policy agenda. **Use the EU cohesion policy and other means (the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Green Deal) as a leverage** to overcome the differential interests of basic territorial units and encourage them to join forces.

(Variable networking) **Valorise the role of the metropolitan institution,** using the opportunities offered by the different EU instruments (Operational Programmes, ITI, CLLD, the Recovery

and Resilience Facility) to adapting the scale of metropolitan governance to actual functional challenges (i.e. cooperating with neighbouring territorial units towards a broader perspective and acting within its own territory through variable geographies).

(Transparency and legitimacy) **Ensure transparency through the establishment of a clear decision-making framework** for the EU cohesion policy governance and resource allocation, in order to **legitimate the reciprocal representativeness of all institutions involved** (metropolitan institutions and all involved local governments).

(Link with policy forum) **Valorise existing metropolitan policy forums**, to engage with relevant public, private and third sector actors, as an added value to collect their inputs in relation to the EU cohesion policy consultation process, thus encouraging a place-based representation of local and metropolitan needs and priorities.

(Beyond the EUCP) **Seize the window of opportunity offered by the 2021-27 EU cohesion policy to further consolidate metropolitan governance** and planning as self-standing.



### Recommendations for national and regional institutions

(Devolve) **Devolve the management of specific Operational Programmes priorities or of a dedicated Metropolitan Operational Programme to metropolitan institutions.** This would ensure a better representation of territorial challenges and provide a leverage to involve municipalities and local stakeholders in the definition of metropolitan visions and priorities.

(Experiment) **Explore and experiment the use of ITIs in metropolitan areas**, to trigger and strengthen metropolitan cooperation and consolidate the metropolitan dimension as the key level to promote integrated sustainable urban development within the multilevel decision making process

(Institutionalise) **Enhance the metropolitan dimension not only within the EU cohesion policy frame**, exploring pathways to support autonomous metropolitan development plans and actions and, where necessary, to further institutionalise metropolitan authorities.



### Recommendations for EU-level actors

(Cooperation catalyst) **Recognise metropolitan areas as catalysts of cooperation within heterogeneous territories** and involve them in EU cohesion policy programming and management, in so doing improving the multilevel partnership among local, regional and national actors as well as economic and social stakeholders.

(Experimental ground) **Strengthen and further articulate** EU cohesion policy instruments dedicated to metropolitan development, **as an experimental ground to tackle functional challenges** through the development of overarching metropolitan visions and priorities and actions focusing on variable territories.

(Vanguard) **Include dedicated actions for metropolitan areas in the new European instruments** (e.g. the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Green Deal), so that metropolitan authorities can use them to enhance further cooperation within their territories. **Metropolitan areas** are the ideal level to react to the pandemic as well as to tackle climate change and other pressing challenges and **should be recognised as a vanguard in implementing** these instruments.

(Context sensitive) **Provide in the EU cohesion policy with a flexible framework that allows tasks and long-term actions to be tailored to the characteristics of any metropolitan area**, while at the same time stressing the need to act at a functional level.

(Empowerment) **Guarantee the diffuse employment of resources dedicated to strengthen the institutional capacity of metropolitan actors** (also within the Technical Support Instrument), to allow them to play an active role in supporting local actors' engagement with the EU cohesion policy framework, hence strengthening metropolitan governance and cooperation.

## 5 Recommendations for future research

The ESPON METRO Targeted Analysis delivered an interesting and timely overview on the engagement of metropolitan areas with the development, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy and, viceversa, on the added value that the EU cohesion policy can possibly deliver on the planning and implementation of metropolitan areas and on the consolidation of governance structures and cooperation mechanisms therein.

However, the achieved results also show some limits, due to the very nature of the project, and its defined scope and time-span. These limits are mostly linked to the way targeted analysis works and the fact that, while being an ideal research instrument to provide timely, realistic policy relevant inputs that are tailored on the specific knowledge and policy needs of the stakeholders suggesting the project theme and scope, offer less room for the development of sound, overarching pan-European knowledge.

Acknowledging the above, we conclude the document with the presentation of a number of possible avenues for future research that, when implemented in the form of future ESPON activities and/or in the framework of other research programmes, would contribute to broaden and deepen the knowledge and evidence collected through ESPON METRO, and to further discuss and elaborate on it.

A first strand of research that we suggest to pursue on the basis of the results of the METRO project concerns the study of the heterogeneous landscape of metropolitan territorial development dynamics in Europe, and of the institutional models and governance mechanisms that have emerged in the various European countries to manage and steer those dynamics. More in detail, we suggest to develop:

- Pan-European research on metropolitan territorial dynamics, and of the actual capacity of the EU-OECD-FUA methodology to understand and represent them correctly. The ESPON METRO case studies have highlighted that in some cases the EU-OECD FUA classification is not able to grasp the national and local nuances to a full extent. In this light, additional research effort is required to critically assess the actual fit of this methodology and of the resulting classification with the metropolitan phenomenon, in order to then explore its context-dependent refinement and adaptation.
- Pan-European research on the metropolitan governance model. Partially linked to the above issue, we suggest ESPON to finance an Applied Research project focusing on analysing, from a pan-European perspective, what institutional models and governance mechanisms have emerged through time in the different European countries to govern the metropolitan dimension, and to critically assess their potential and added value for coordinated and cohesive territorial development.

A second set of possible research avenues inspired by the insights collected through the ESPON METRO project regards the EU cohesion policy sphere, and the particular role that metropolitan areas play and may play within the latter. On the one hand, the collection of additional case studies and experiences on the ground is strongly encouraged:

- First of all, it would be important to extend the geographical scope of the METRO project through the development of additional case studies. Framed through the same conceptual framework and methodology that have underpinned the project, these 'spin-offs' would contribute to enlarge the evidence base of the METRO comparative analysis, test and validate its results as well as deepen additional aspects and nuances that emerge from the engagement of metropolitan areas in the EU cohesion policy (e.g. peculiar thematic focuses, governance models and mechanisms etc.).
- Specific Targeted Analyses should follow up from the METRO project, and explore the potential for the EU cohesion policy to support territorial development, planning and policies in metropolitan areas sharing peculiar characteristics. For instance, it would be interesting to explore the potential added value and synergies that can be generated when using the EU cohesion policy to jointly promote the development of two or more metropolitan areas located in the same (macro)region (an interesting first step in this concern is represented by the ESPON IMAGE project).
- Following a similar line of action, it is worth exploring the potential of the EU cohesion policy – and of European Territorial Cooperation in particular – to support the joint development of cross-border

functional metropolitan areas (e.g. Vienna-Bratislava, Strasbourg-Kehl, Lille and many others). In this research, particular attention should be also dedicated to the potential role that the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation framework could play as manager to specific metropolitan cross-border cooperation programmes. At the same time, the analysis should also scale-up its focus, and explore the opportunities that European Territorial Cooperation may offer to set up effective inter-metropolitan cooperation within transnational/macro-regional cooperation areas.

- A more in depth analysis should concern the role that the business actors and the civil society play in the definition of metropolitan policies, within and outside the EU cohesion policy framework. The focus in this case should swing from the actions that metropolitan institutions are undertaking to stimulate their engagement, to the actual perception that private businesses and civil society actors (also through their associations) have of metropolitan areas, and how/why they should consider acting at the metropolitan level and/or according to a metropolitan perspective an added value.

On the other hand, we also suggest to explore more in depth specific issues, both from a pan-European perspectives and through selected case studies:

- Given the particularly interesting role that the ITI is playing in the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy at the metropolitan level (as the METRO results suggest), it is important to launch a study to survey and critically analyse the application of ITI instruments on the European territory, and to reflect on the potentials and challenges of the different models of implementation (urban, rural, metropolitan, city networks, etc.).
- A dedicated pan-European study should concern the role that metropolitan actors will play in the management and implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the related National Recovery and Resilience Plans. This study should also enlarge its scope to the role that metropolitan areas play (and should play) within each country in those national and regional instruments that aim at the mitigation of pandemic emergencies and in their management, possibly suggesting a reinforcement of this role.
- When it comes to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, it is worth exploring its interaction with the EU cohesion policy also independently from the metropolitan dimension. In this light, we suggest to finance research activities analysing this interaction, and explicitly focusing on potential synergies and drawbacks (e.g. the possible competition that the existence of both funding channels may trigger, if not properly coordinated), as well as their combined added value when they land on the ground.
- Finally, the potential role of metropolitan areas in the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy should be explored more explicitly also in relation to the role that they can play in the framework of the new European Green Deal (e.g. in relation to ecosystem services, blue and green infrastructures, circular economy etc.). The analysis of in-depth case studies would here contribute to provide important knowledge upon which to base the future development of EU and domestic policy on the matter.

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