

METRO - The role and future perspectives of Cohesion Policy in the planning of Metropolitan Areas and Cities. Annex I: Conceptual framework and methodology

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METRO - The role and future perspectives of Cohesion Policy in the planning of Metropolitan Areas and Cities. Annex I: Conceptual framework and methodology / Cotella, G., Vitale Brovarone, E., Demazière, C., Zaucha, J., Vale, M., Van Hamme, G.. - ELETTRONICO. - (2021), pp. 1-48.

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2948062 since: 2021-12-31T15:07:14Z

*Publisher:*

ESPON

*Published*

DOI:

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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

Annex I // Conceptual framework and methodology

This Targeted Analysis is conducted within the framework of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme, partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States, the United Kingdom and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinions of members of the ESPON 2020 Monitoring Committee.

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ISBN: 978-2-919795-65-9

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Published in December 2021

Graphic design by BGRAPHIC, Denmark

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## TARGETED ANALYSIS //

# METRO

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

Annex I // Conceptual framework and methodology



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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
CMTo	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
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

# 1 Introduction

The scope of the ESPON METRO project is rather broad, as its research positions at the intersection of a number of fields, ranging from territorial governance and spatial planning, to public administration and policy analysis and European integration studies, up to regional development studies.

In order to explore the role that metropolitan areas play as catalysts and drivers of global development, as a consequence of complex processes of socioeconomic reorganisation and rescaling that have evolved through time, and with particular reference to the European Union (EU) cohesion policy, the METRO research team has framed its action and analysis within a composite and articulated conceptual and methodological framework. In particular, the latter has been shaped in order to allow the researchers engaged in the project to answer the three main policy questions animating the study:

**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?

The conceptual and methodological framework for the project has been developed during the first months of the research, building on the materials already included in the project proposal, that were further detailed and consolidated through:

- A thorough consideration of previous research works on similar matters as well as of the existing scientific literature in the field of metropolitan governance and European integration and Europeanisation.
- The interaction with the project's Steering Committee Members during the METRO kick-off meeting (October the 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020), the comments received in response to the Delivery n.1 and the outcomes of the Steering Committee Meeting n. 2 (November the 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020) and 3 (February the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021).

This Annex to the Final Report presents said conceptual framework and methodology more in detail.

After this brief introduction, the multiple levels of complexity that concerns the governance of the metropolitan dimension in the European Union are sketched out (§2). In particular, the section introduces the scope, the research needs and the objectives of the project (§2.1), to then frame the research context that encompasses them (§2.2) and lead back the threads that compose the latter to a coherent and articulated conceptual framework (§2.3).

After that, the document focuses on the Methodology that has been employed in the analysis (§3). It first presents the structure of the research that has been put together to fulfil the introduced research needs (§3.1) and sheds light on the importance that the engagement with the stakeholders that have commissioned the project had for the development of the research (§3.2). Then the various analytical components and methods that have been used in the analysis are discussed (§3.3), together with the steps that were followed to compare and assess the evidence and information collected in relation to the nine cases under investigation (§3.4). Finally, the methodology adopted to develop, test and validate the policy messages emerging from the study is presented, together with the logic and rationale of the three policy briefs that were composed drawing on the results of the project (§3.5).

## 2 Scope of the project and conceptual framework

This section presents the various conceptual threads that have been composed into the conceptual framework of the ESPON METRO project. It first introduces the scope of the project, together with the main research needs and objectives (§2.1). On this basis, it frames the context of the research (§2.2), dedicating particular attention to the functional dimension of metropolitan areas (§2.2.1), to challenges that emerge in the attempt to govern the latter (§2.2.2) and to the evolving attention that the EU cohesion policy has dedicated to the matter (§2.2.3). Finally, these various threads are brought together within a detailed conceptual framework that would allow to answer the policy questions upon which the project is founded (§2.3).

### 2.1 Scope, research needs and objectives

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 have progressively joined cities as catalysts and drivers of global development. The importance of metropolitanisation processes has been in part also recognised by EU institutions. 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.

The Terms of Reference of the ESPON METRO project acknowledge the above developments and, drawing on them, define the aims of the project as follows:

- understanding how Cohesion Policy goals can be integrated in the planning and implementation of policies at metropolitan and city scale, by investigating new governance solutions for Metropolitan Areas and Cities in the framework of post-2020 Cohesion Policy;
- understanding how Cohesion Policy can help achieve socio-economic and territorial goals at metropolitan and city scale and contribute to a generation of better cooperation and governance dynamics at metropolitan level;
- examining how Cohesion Policy can reduce territorial disparities within cities and metropolitan areas by developing area-based approaches and integrated territorial strategies;
- connecting strategic planning at city and metropolitan level to Cohesion Policy funds and instruments at regional, national and EU level;
- developing a comparative analysis on roles, institutional contexts, capabilities and perspectives of the nine (9) stakeholders in the framework of programming and implementing Cohesion Policy, taking into account (a) the national context and (b) the level of participation of urban and metropolitan bodies in programming and management of ESI Funds.

These aims have been grouped and translated into three overarching research objectives: (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 achieve these objectives, 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?

Following the project's specifications, these questions were to be answered through the analysis of the metropolitan contexts in which the nine stakeholders involved in the projects are active: Metropolitan City of Turin (CMTo), 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).

As a consequence, the analysis has been based on experiences and practices identifiable in the nine territories, and developed in close connection with the stakeholders that commissioned the research. The research focused 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 team was explicitly required to explore the role that metropolitan areas and the EU cohesion policy played in relation to the COVID-19 emergency.

One final, overarching requirement concerned the development of realistic sets of evidence-based policy recommendations focusing on how to achieve socio-economic, integrated territorial development objectives in connection with the EU cohesion policy, and on how to contribute to a larger extent to the development, management and implementation of the latter in the nine stakeholders' territories. Furthermore, the results of the project were required to contribute to the overall understanding on how metropolitan areas throughout Europe can contribute achieving cohesion policy objectives through their policies, by engaging with the participating stakeholders in knowledge transfer and outreach activities based on networks of knowledge exchange and advocacy, such as the EUROCITIES working groups on Metropolitan areas and Cohesion Policy and the European Metropolitan Authorities Initiative.

## 2.2 Framing the research context

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 encounter and increasing number of challenges when trying to deal with 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 introduce 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 phenomena in Europe, its heterogeneous and often experimental governance and the way the EU cohesion policy has progressively taken a metropolitan dimension on board in its logics, instruments and procedures. This section gives account of these three research strands on the basis of a review of previous studies, as well as of relevant policy documents (such as the recently adopted Territorial Agenda 2030 and the New Leipzig Charter on Sustainable Cities – respectively DE Presidency 2020a and DE Presidency 2020b). In so doing, it sketches out more precisely the boundaries within which the project research has been developed. Firstly, the functional dimension of metropolitan phenomena is introduced more in detail, dedicating particular attention to the various definitions that have been introduced through time and the methodologies that have been developed to frame metropolitan functional areas (§2.2.1). After that, the focus of the discussion shifts to the institutional aspects of metropolisation, and in particular to those incremental processes of institutional experimentation that have led through time to the emergence of a heterogeneous set of metropolitan governance practices in the European continents (§2.2.2). Finally, the way the EU has taken on board a metropolitan perspective in its cohesion policy is given account of (§2.2.3).

### 2.2.1 A functional approach to metropolitan areas

In the last 40 years, new types and configurations of urban forms have emerged in Europe and beyond, because of the continuous socioeconomic, environmental and, more in general, territorial transformations of cities and their surroundings. These multiple and heterogeneous transformations led to the progressive consolidation of different spatial relations between the core urban centres and their suburbs, that gained significance against the background of the growing urban archipelago of distinct economic and social spaces, constituted of multiple urban islands (Salet et al., 2015). They at the same time led to the development of

consolidation of so-called metropolitan areas, a concept that has been introduced to describe the new spatial dynamics that characterise territorial development. Overall, 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, and the conceptual delimitation of metropolitan phenomena and of their governance continue to inspire a large number of scientific contributions (Zimmermann et al., 2020; Demazière, 2021; Moreno-Monroy et al., 2021; Herrschel, 2021).

At the same time, various methodologies to define functional urban territories in a consistent way have been developed, conceptualizing them as characterised by densely inhabited urban cores and less-populated municipalities whose labour market is highly integrated with the cores (among others, see: OECD 2012, 2013; Fadic et al. 2019; Dijkstra et al., 2019). More in detail, the OECD defines a metropolitan area as a social, economic, geographical and political space defined by shape, size and nature and by the interactions between individuals and organizations (OECD, 2013). Metropolitan areas can present a monocentric or, more often, a polycentric structure of an urban agglomeration, the latter being determined by the existence or formation of historically distinct and administratively and politically independent urban areas, located in close proximity and that have the potential to be connected through urban infrastructure. The merging of cities into metropolitan areas results, therefore, either from a process of incorporation when dominant cities extend their sphere of influence over a larger territory by incorporating smaller cities, or from the fusion of smaller cities as a result of continuing upscaling of urban activities (Halbert et al., 2006; Hall & Pain, 2006).

To collect and compare information on the metropolitan characteristics and development trajectories of urban agglomerations can provide a better understanding of the dynamics of their spatial development (Brezzi et al. 2012). Issues such as economic structure and development, living conditions, infrastructure networks and others are particularly relevant to metropolitan development; however, the lack of a unified definition of metropolitan areas has through time proved a key challenge in comparing the economic and social performances of metropolitan areas. The challenges brought about by this sake of comparison are directly linked to the choice of the unit of analysis. Key considerations here concerns whether these units are defined on the basis of administrative boundaries, continuity of the built-up area or functional measures such as commuting patterns or other parameters) and to the size of components to be aggregated. Moreover, the accuracy of the definition depends on different variables, as the availability of socio-economic indicators in a certain national, regional and/or local context, hence their possible cross-contextual comparability.

Several methodologies for identifying metropolitan areas have been developed at the national and international level (Brezzi et al., 2012), and the demarcation of metropolitan phenomena and their actual comparability greatly depends on the approach used for their identification. Overall, three main approaches are prevalent in the literature for the definition, identification and characterisation of metropolitan phenomena (ESPON SPIMA, 2018):

- The administrative approach, that defines metropolitan areas on the basis of legal boundaries and of additional criteria such as population size or population density. Metropolitan areas identified using this approach can be easily used by public administrations in terms of governance issues since metropolises are contained within administrative boundaries.
- The morphological approach, that defines metropolitan areas based on the aggregation of continuous built-up areas that fit certain criteria of population density or the proportion of the municipalities covered by urban settlements. This approach provides a definition of metropolitan areas, which is better suited for environmental issues such as land-use change or greenhouse gas emission or housing development and transportation policies. Currently, GIS techniques based on aerial or satellite imagery are being used to identify metropolitan areas worldwide.
- The functional approach, that defines metropolitan areas on the basis of flows between a core area and its surrounding territories. Travel-to-work commuting flows represent the flow information generally used for this approach. Small administrative units, such as municipalities or census tracts, are the territories generally used to construct the core and the hinterland of metropolitan areas.

Drawing on the results of the ESPON SPIMA project, we also argue that the functional approach is the most useful when aiming at capturing the socio-economic dynamics and characteristics of a metropolitan area. The social and economic area of influence of metropolitan areas often does not fit within administrative

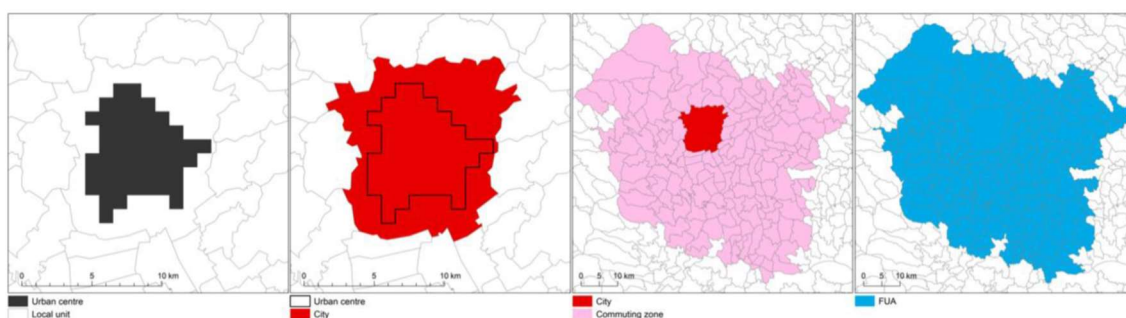
boundaries or continuous built-up areas, being either larger or smaller. The functional approach on the other hand has the advantage of capturing urban areas' interactions, and thus identifies self-contained socio-economic urban units. Additionally, the functional approach is capable of defining the extension of metropolitan areas over time while the administrative approach captures static urban forms. The functional definition of metropolitan areas proved to be effective in delineating both the densely inhabited urban cores and the hinterlands of the cities. This methodology can be extended to all countries for which commuting data from censuses or travel surveys are available. Wide application of this methodology can generate the basis for building new comparable indicators of urbanization trends and quality of life in cities. However, the crucial data inputs needed for extending the analysis are national matrices of origin-destination commuting data.

Following this line of investigation, the OECD, in collaboration with the European Commission and Eurostat, has since at least a decade 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). 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) (Figure 2.1):

1. First of all, a population grid makes it 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.
2. Subsequently, each 'dense urban centre' is adapted to the closest local units to define a city.
3. 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.

**Figure 2.1**  
The Urban centre, city, commuting zone and functional urban area of Graz, Austria



Source: Dijkstra et al., 2019, p. 5.

As argued by Dijkstra et al., 2019, the EU-OECD FUA definition is '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 grow over time. Moreover, this approach to FUA is linked to the 'degree

<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)

of urbanisation' (Eurostat, 2019). 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).

Due to its functional nature and recognition by European institution, the EU-OECD definition of FUA has been adopted by the ESPON METRO research team, to collect and compare data concerning the metropolitan functional territories that hosts the more or less institutionalised administrative cooperation frameworks under investigation.

### 2.2.2 Governing the metropolitan dimension

As mentioned extensively in the section above, 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, due to their inherent complexity, through time it has become evident that metropolitan areas require spatial policies and instruments that adequately address the degree of integration between a variety of urban functions and between the local authorities of the core cities and surrounding municipalities (OECD, 2013). As a consequence, 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, 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>2</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 and their path-dependent evolutionary patterns (ESPON COMPASS, 2018, Nadin & Stead, 2008, Berisha et al., 2021).

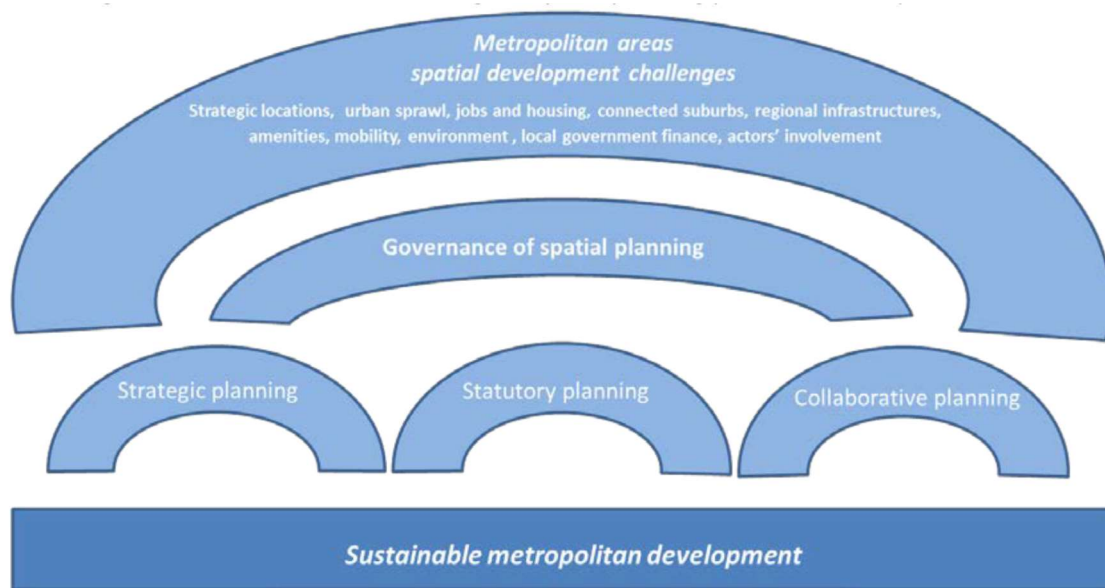
Also the ESPON SPIMA project have attempted to analyse and assess the role that more or less formalised metropolitan institutions may have in the territorial governance and spatial planning of their own territories (Figure 2.2). In doing so, the SPIMA research team built on the existing theoretical and empirical understandings of spatial planning processes in Europe, to define spatial planning "as a key policy mechanism for governing spatial development in the metropolitan areas, which is based on strategies and plans for sustainable distribution of land use functions and on cooperation between different governmental levels and policy sectors" (ESPON SPIMA, 2018, p.20). Based on this definition, the project distinguishes between the

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<sup>2</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/>

strategic spatial planning, statutory planning activities and coordination actions that are more governance-oriented. Strategic spatial planning refers to the preparation of long-term strategic plans that envision spatial development of the metropolitan area, while operational (statutory) planning refers to the procedural process based on regulatory spatial plans. Collaborative planning refers to the coordinating and multilevel governance of spatial planning that is based on collaboration between multiple actors and joint decision-making about metropolitan spatial development. Based on this understanding, the roles of the strategic, legal and collaborative governance aspects of spatial planning processes at the metropolitan level were assessed for each stakeholder areas.

**Figure 2.2**  
**The ESPON SPIMA framework to assess spatial governance and planning in metropolitan areas**



Source: ESPON SPIMA, 2018, p. 22.

Additional complexity emerges when comparing the institutional arrangements and the spatial planning instruments in place to the metropolitan functional dimension, as traditional governance and planning practices are challenged by phenomena that go beyond the existing administrative jurisdictions upon which they are pivoted (Albrechts et al., 2017). In this concern, recent studies have highlighted the interpretative and administrative difficulties in adapting traditional spatial 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). 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). 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 adequate instruments in order to grasp the changing metropolitan landscape, challenges and dynamics (ESPON SPIMA, 2018). 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 (Fioretti et al., 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).

### 2.2.3 The metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy

The importance of metropolitan areas is also at least partly recognised 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, 2020b) and in the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 (DE Presidency, 2020a). 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).

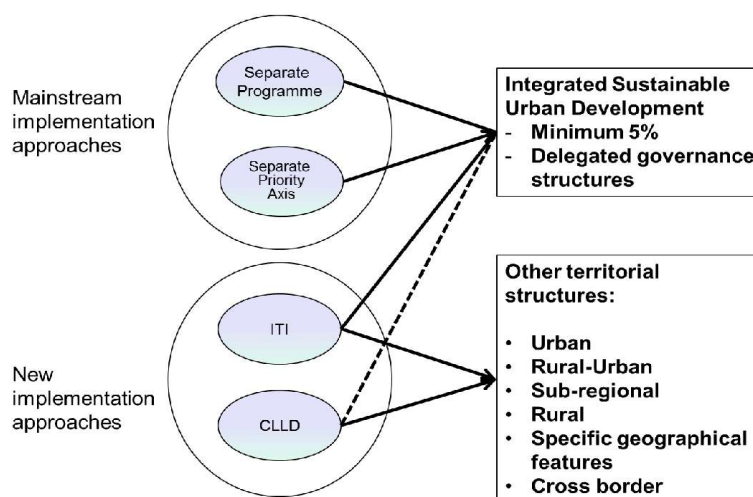
In parallel to the progressive consolidation of the metropolitan dimension within the EU discourse focusing on sustainable urban development, European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) have been progressively adapted to cater to their diverse needs. For instance, in the programming period 2014-20, 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 (Figure 2.3). 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>3</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).

**Figure 2.3**  
**Mechanisms for implementing territorial approaches in the EU cohesion policy 2014-2020**



Source: Van Der Zwet et al., 2014

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 various 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.

<sup>3</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.

## 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.

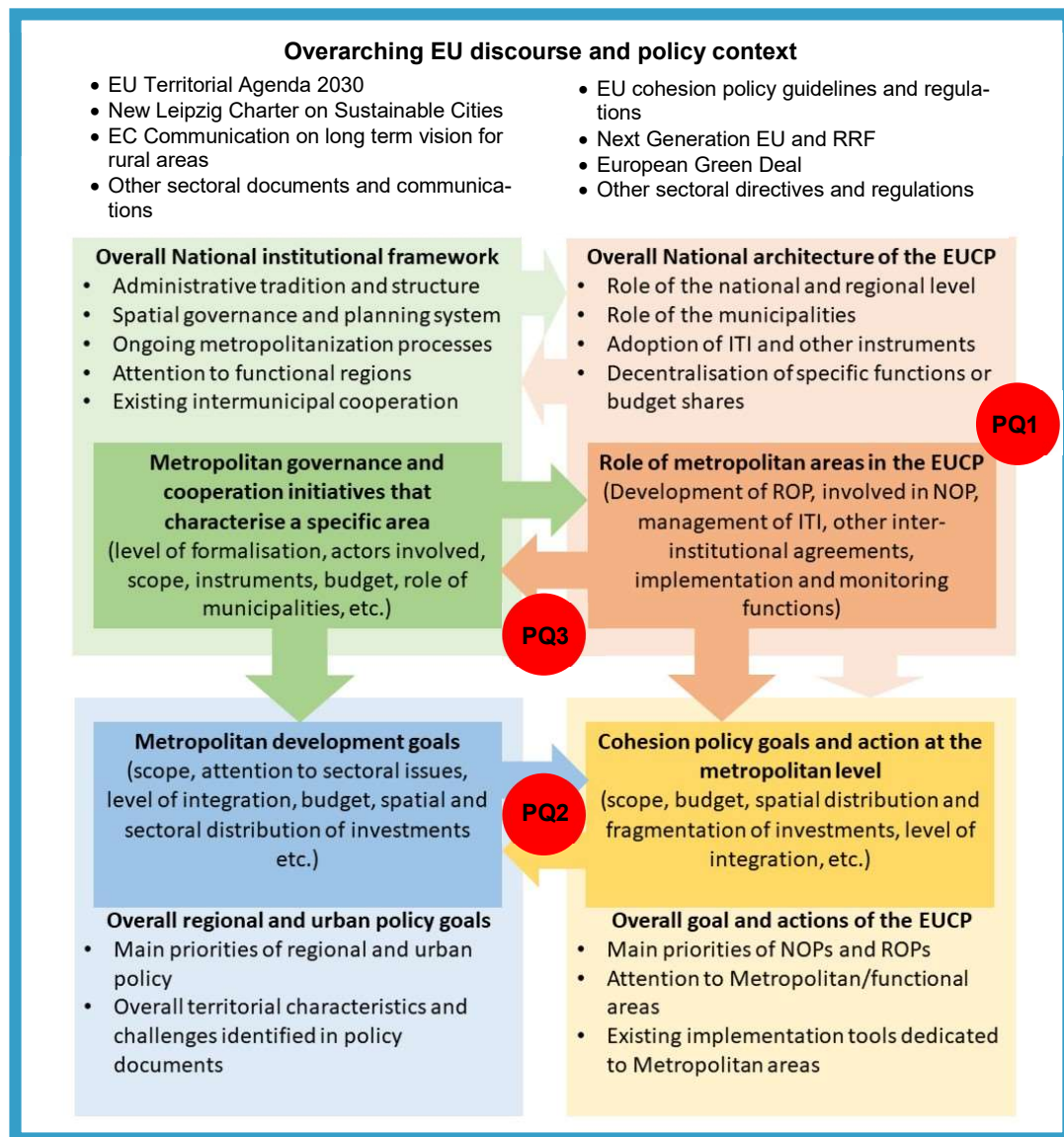
In order to address these multiple complexities, the METRO research has led the various threads of the discussion concerning the metropolitan dimension of territorial development and policy back to a coherent conceptual framework (Figure 2.4). This framework aims at characterising in detail the different institutional and territorial/functional elements encompassed by the research work, as well as the various interrelations between them, to be read in a multilevel governance framework (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Its development builds on previous research works (ESPON FOCI, 2010, ESPON POLYCE, 2012, ESPON TANGO, 2014, ESPON TOWN, 2014; ESPON ET2050, 2014, ESPON SPIMA, 2018, ESPON ACTAREA, 2017, ESPON COMPASS, 2018; ESPON ReSSI, 2018) as well as on various literature contributions in the field of European integration, multilevel governance and Europeanisation (Scharpf, 1997; Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Cotella and Janin Rivolin, 2015; Faludi 2018; Cotella, 2020; Benz, 2021) and metropolitan governance (Ahrend et al. 2014; McCann, 2015; Pierre, 2016; Medeiros, 2019; Zimmermann et al., 2020; Demazière, 2021; Zimmermann and Fedeli, 2021).

First of all (green quadrant in the figure), the composed framework shows how the level of institutionalisation and the 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 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.

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.

Overall, the developed a conceptual framework addresses 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. Through this framework, it is possible to position more precisely the three main policy questions that animate the ESPON METRO project and, in doing so, to identifying what elements and relations need to be explored in order to provide meaningful answer to these questions.

**Figure 2.4**  
The METRO conceptual framework



Source: authors' own elaboration

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 programming, management and implementation of 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 between the development of metropolitan policies and EU cohesion policy programmes and instruments and how it may be possible to develop synergies through these two activities in a way that maximise the added value of the EU cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies.

- **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.

## 3 Structure of the research and methodology

After having identified, through the introduced conceptual framework, the elements and relations that needed to be explored in order to answer to the project's requirements, this activity have to be translated into a sound and comprehensive methodology that would allow for the collection of the required information and evidence and for their analysis.

This section details the research steps that were carried out to meet the project objectives and to deliver the outcomes as defined in the METRO ToR. It first presents the structure of the research that have been put together to fulfil the introduced research needs, and the methodological steps that composed the latter (§3.1). Then, additional attention is dedicated to the articulated engagement activities that have driven the iterative interaction with the stakeholders that commissioned the project, and to the added value they produced at the different stages (§3.2). Then the various analytical components and methods that have been used in the analysis are introduced and discussed more in detail (§3.3), together with the steps that were followed to compare and assess the evidence and information collected in relation to the nine cases under investigation (§3.4). Finally, the methodology adopted to develop, test and validate the policy messages emerging from the study is presented, together with the logic and rationale of the three policy briefs that derived from the project (§3.5).

### 3.1 The structure of the project

The project's conceptual framework translates in three subsequent but strongly interrelated research 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 3.1).

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:

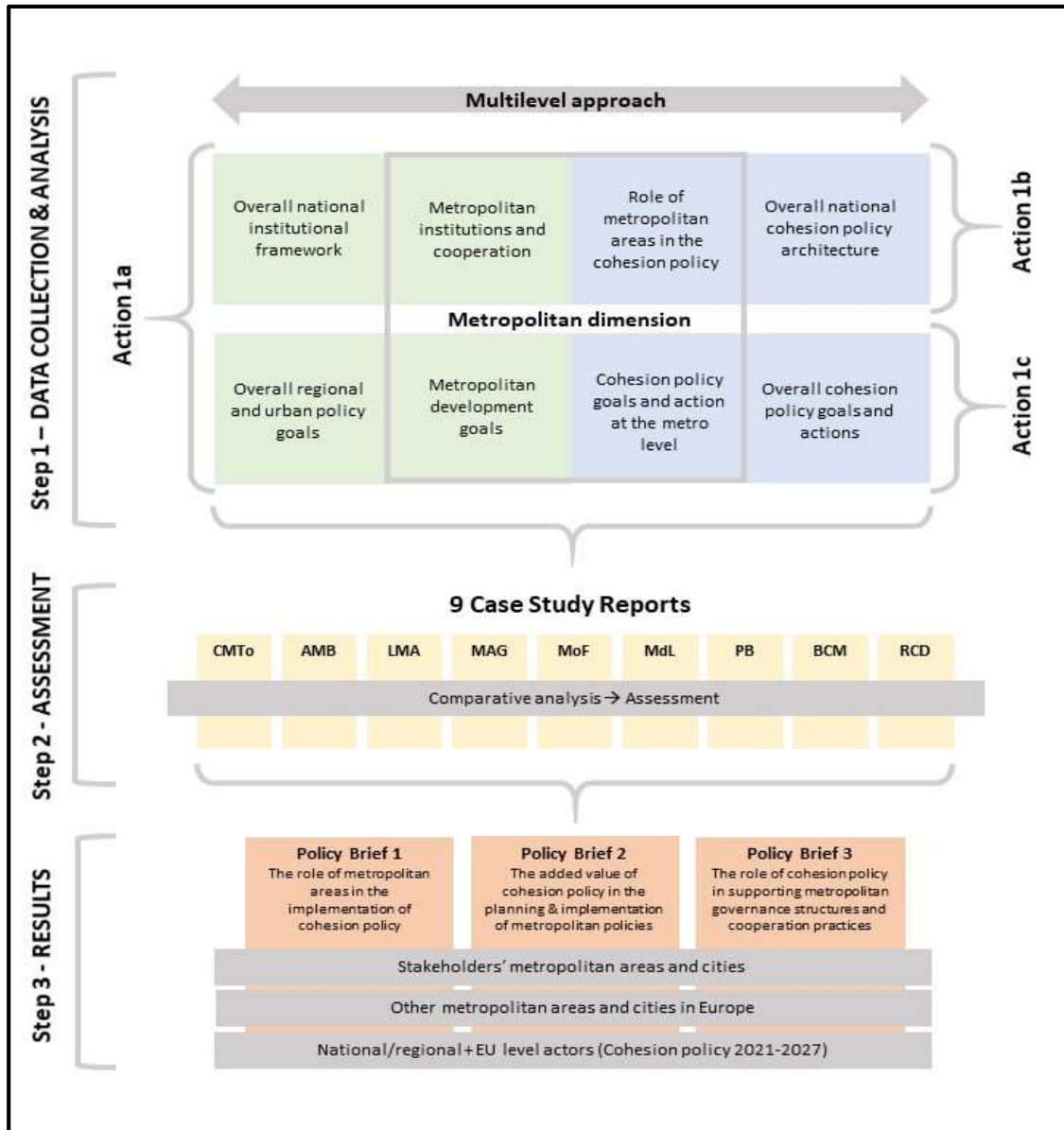
- With the wording 'metropolitan areas', the project refers to the more or less institutionalised supralocal governance bodies that are located in the nine territorial contexts under scrutiny. More in detail, this overall wording has been used to refer to: Metropolitan City of Turin (CMTo), Barcelona 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).
- With metropolitan functional area (or metropolitan FUA), the project 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 evidence of this activity on the ground.

**Figure 3.1**  
The structure of the ESPON METRO research



Source: authors' own elaboration

The results of these three activities have been compiled in the nine case study reports delivered together with this report<sup>4</sup>. 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 (See §3.3.5). The data and information

<sup>4</sup> All case study reports are available as Annexes to the main report (Annexes III to XI).

analysed in the case study reports were collected through the implementation of a number of analytical components, altogether constituting the project's methodology (§3.3). 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 (§3.3.1). 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 (§3.3.2).
- *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 (§3.3.3).
- *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 (§3.3.4).

The **second step** concerned the **comparative assessment** of the nine metropolitan cases (this step is presented more detail in §3.4). The information collected through the analytical phase were here brought together and compared (also in the light of the main evidence identified in the relevant literature concerning metropolitan governance in Europe), to assess the role that the nine metropolitan areas (and the various 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 adopted a quali-quantitative approach, that brought 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 performed 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 (this step is presented more in detail in §3.5). 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 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.

## 3.2 The engagement with the stakeholders

As with all ESPON Targeted Analysis, the research activities of the ESPON METRO project relied to a high extent on the continuous interaction with the stakeholders that have commissioned the latter. More in detail, the policy questions posed by the project were answered through the analysis of the metropolitan contexts in which the nine stakeholders involved in the projects are active, and drawing on experiences and practices identifiable in these contexts. In doing so, the collection of evidence and information occurred in close connection with the nine authorities that commissioned the research and under the constant supervision of the two pan-European organisation Eurocities and Metropolis.

For this two happen, the research team has been composed in a way that would have allowed the research to follow a “tandem approach” (§3.2.1), that was complemented by the interaction with the project’s Steering committee (§3.2.2). Altogether, the engagement with the project’s stakeholders and, more in general, with actors located within the nine case study area, was organised and driven by the project’s engagement plan (§3.2.3).

### 3.2.1 The tandem approach

Given the elevated number of case studies that the project had to encompass, and their heterogeneity in relation to the territorial and institutional characteristics at stake, the research consortium has been composed with in mind the implementation of a so-called “tandem-approach” to case study research (Chetty et al., 2014). More in detail, the consortium includes nine research teams that possess extensive background knowledge of the nine stakeholder metropolitan areas, their territorial dynamics and institutional features, as well as the role played by the EU cohesion policy therein. Importantly, the nine research partner are located within the nine metropolitan areas under investigation or in their proximity, featured extensive research experience with relevant regional, metropolitan and local authorities, policymakers and other stakeholders within the respective national contexts.

**Table 3.1**  
**The METRO tandem approach**

Research team partners	Location	Tandem stakeholders
Politecnico di Torino	Turin (IT)	Metropolitan city of Turin
Demazière	Tours (FR)	Metropole de Lyon
Instituto de Geografia e Ordenamento do Território	Lisbon (PT)	Lisbon Metropolitan Area
Institute for Development	Sopot (PL)	Metropolitan Area of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot
Université Libre de Bruxelles	Brussels (BE)	Perspective.brussels (Brussels-Capital Region)
University of Latvia	Riga (LV)	Riga City Council
Charles University	Prague (CZ)	Municipality of Brno
University of Florence	Florence (IT)	Municipality of Florence
Barcelona Institute of Regional and Metropolitan Studies	Barcelona (ES)	Barcelona Metropolitan Area

The choice of this approach has allowed for a close and direct contact between each research team and its respective stakeholder throughout the whole project's time-span, in turn favouring a more thorough understanding of the issues at stake and maximising the number of contacts with the key actors identified on the territory and of the direct observation of the ongoing policy processes.

Moreover, in order to ensure smooth communication with all the stakeholders participating to the project, and to guarantee that all data and documents provided by the various stakeholders could be useful to the research, the consortium has been composed in a way to possess native language skills in all languages of the project (Italian, French, Portuguese, Polish, Flemish, Latvian, Czech, Spanish). This is particularly important also in relation to the outreach activities that are taking place in the countries of the various stakeholders, and that involve a variable number of local stakeholders that are approached in their native language.

### 3.2.2 The Steering committee

Beside the “tandem” bilateral contacts between each research team and its respective stakeholder, the project Steering committee has been established in the occasion of the project's kick-off meeting, and lasted for the lifetime of the project Targeted Analysis (Table 3.2). The Steering Committee is composed by representatives of all stakeholder institutions involved in the project, by representatives of the ESPON EGTC, and by the unit coordinators of the consortium partners. Moreover, it included representatives from the umbrella organisation EUROCITIES and METROPOLIS.

The main goal of the METRO Steering committee has been to facilitate information and data flow between the research consortium, the stakeholders and the ESPON EGTC. In turn, it ensured that the outputs and results delivered by the project are relevant for the involved stakeholders. Throughout the project, the Steering committee followed the activities closely, and advised the implementation of the research. It delivered feedbacks on project deliveries and provided guidance on the direction that the research should have taken. Moreover, it contributed to the project as the stakeholders were required to provide documents and data in their possession, that were useful for the analysis. Finally, the steering committee also discussed and agreed upon dissemination activities, both during the project lifetime as well as after its conclusion<sup>5</sup>.

**Table 3.2**  
**The METRO schedule**

Event	Date
Kick-off meeting (SCM1)	09/10/2020
Inception Delivery (D1)	09/11/2020
Steering Committee Meeting 2 (SCM2)	16/11/2020
Steering Committee Meeting 3 (SCM3)	23/02/2021
Delivery 2 (D2)	10/04/2021
Steering Committee Meeting 4 (SCM4)	21/04/2021
Steering Committee Meeting 5 (SCM5)	07-08/07/2021
Delivery 3 (D3)	15/10/2021
Steering Committee Meeting 6 (SCM6)	26-27/10/2021

Source: authors' own elaboration

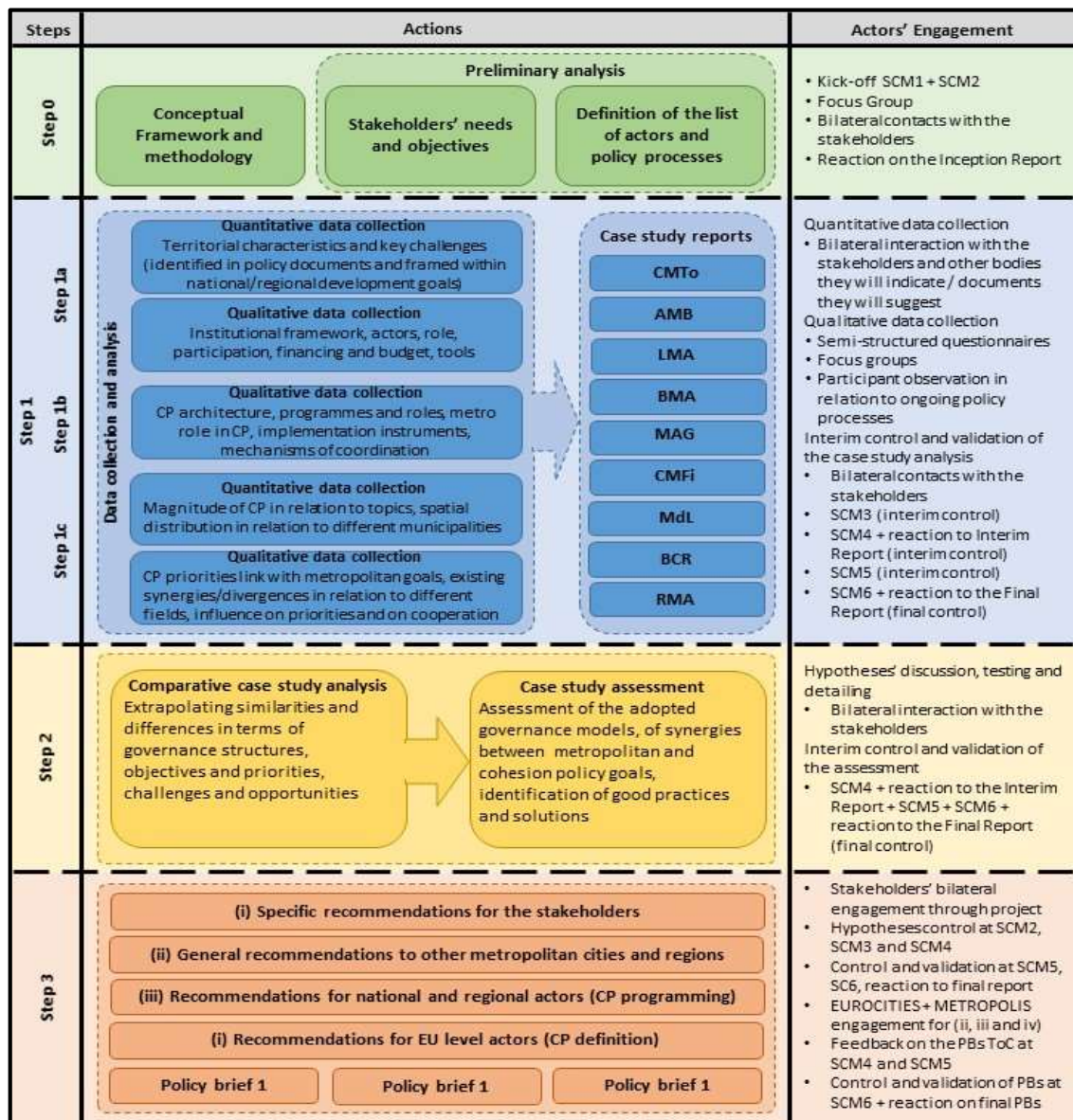
<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing, the ESPON METRO Steering committee is still actively engaged with the project's outreach activities, that will be implemented until March 2022.

The kick-off meeting was *de facto* the first Steering committee meeting. In that occasion, the latter was formally institute and a preliminary schedule of the future Steering committee was discussed and agreed upon. Altogether, beside the kick-off meeting, the project activities included 5 additional Steering committee meetings. Three of them (SCM2, SCM4 and SCM6) were held soon after each of the three project deliveries, so that all stakeholders had the chance to discuss the quality of the deliveries, to required changes, and to orient future activities. Two additional meetings were also organised (SCM3 and SCM5), to update the Steering committee on the interim steps and results of the research.

### 3.2.3 The engagement strategy

The tandem engagement and the activities of the Steering committee were organised and driven throughout the project lifetime by the METRO engagement strategy, a detailed participatory approach set up by the research team to engage with local stakeholders at the different stage of the project implementation (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2**  
The ESPON METRO engagement strategy



Source: authors' own elaboration.

More in particular, the **Step 0** of the engagement strategy started with the project's kick-meeting and ended with the delivery of the revised version of the Inception Delivery. This step led to the consolidation of the methodological framework for the project, and saw the engagement of the Steering Committee during its first meeting (SCM1), held at the project's Kick-off, the SCM2 that took place slightly after the delivery of the Inception Delivery, and the comments that will be produced in reaction to the latter. Moreover, this phase also included initial analytical work aimed at collecting contextual information and data in relation to the nine metropolitan areas, as well as at the definition of each stakeholder's objective and policy needs and at the identification of the main actors and policy processes to engage with throughout the analysis. This activity has been pursued through bilateral contacts between each research partner and its respective stakeholder, and its results were refined following the SCM2 discussion and the comments received on the Inception Delivery.

Following this initial phase, **Step 1** was dedicated to the collection and the analysis of a heterogeneous set of qualitative and quantitative data. In particular, as already detailed above:

- **Step 1a** (Territorial, institutional and policy characteristics) aimed at the collection of data concerning the main territorial characteristics and challenges as identified by the stakeholders, and of qualitative information concerning the metropolitan governance and cooperation therein, the distribution of competences, the actors involved, the instruments put in place and the goals they pursue.
- **Step 1b** (Cohesion policy governance) aimed at the collection of qualitative information concerning the metropolitan dimension of cohesion policy governance and implementation in the areas at stake, read within the national framework, the distribution of competences and the instruments and mechanisms adopted.
- **Step 1c** (Cohesion policy impact) aimed at the collection of quantitative data concerning the resources dedicated to the various objectives pursued through the EU cohesion policy, their spatial distribution, the magnitude of these resources also in comparison to local resources dedicated to territorial development. It also collected qualitative information concerning the coherence between the goals and actions pursued through EU programmes and instruments and metropolitan strategies and goals, and the role that the former plays in the definition of the latter and vice versa. Similarly, qualitative information was collected in relation to the impact that the EU cohesion policy plays in the promotion and consolidation of metropolitan governance and cooperation.

Quantitative data were collected by the research teams in close contact with the stakeholders. In particular, each research team interacted with its respective stakeholder to get access to relevant policy documents, reports from previous studies and specific data from the stakeholder area. At the same time, relevant data were retrieved from European and national databases. At the same time, qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured interviews with relevant actors in the stakeholder areas, following the list identified in Step 0. A detailed analytical protocol (composed of three sections respectively focusing on Steps 1a, 1b and 1c) was used to develop semi-structured interviews. In relation to each metropolitan context, the responsible research team, in agreement with its respective stakeholder, also considered the option of setting up one or more focus groups to engage different actors in a discussion around a number of specific topic, in order to grasp different views and perspectives. Finally, upon agreement with the stakeholders, the various research team participated as observers to the meetings and activities that characterised relevant policy processes overlapping with the lifetime of the METRO project.

The collected data and information were then analysed and compiled in nine comparable case study reports. This report will be subject to a number of control and validation steps, following the mentioned tandem approach. At the same time, the progresses of the case study analysis were discussed during the SCM3, the SCM4 and the comments received on the Interim Delivery, the SCM5 and finally during the SCM6 and the comments received on the Final Delivery.

**Step 2** concerned the comparative analysis of the case study reports and their assessment. In the framework of these activities, the various research teams engaged bilaterally with their respective stakeholders to discuss, test and further detail emerging hypotheses in relation to the assessment of the various context *vis-à-vis* the three main policy questions that animate the study: (i) what role metropolitan areas and cities play in the development, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy; (ii) what is the added value of the EU cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies; (iii) what is the role

that the EU cohesion policy plays in consolidating metropolitan governance and cooperation activities. Moreover, the METRO Steering Committee reacted to the results of this assessment *in itinere*, in the occasion of the SCM4, SCM5 and SCM6, and by reacting to the Interim and Final Deliveries.

**Step 3** concerned the production of realistic, evidence based recommendations to various groups of actors: (i) the nine stakeholders active in the metropolitan areas involved in the project; (ii) other metropolitan regions in Europe; (iii) national and regional actors responsible for the programming and management of the EU cohesion policy and (iv) EU level actors responsible for the definition of the cohesion policy framework. The stakeholders active in the nine metropolitan areas were engaged bilaterally in order to discuss, test and validate the recommendations directly directed to them in relation to their pertinence, relevance and viability. Moreover, in occasion of the SCM5 a focus group involving all the stakeholders and the ESPON EGTC was organised, in order to discuss and validate the recommendations also in relation to other metropolitan areas in Europe. At the same time, the focus group also focused on the discussion and validation of the recommendations targeting the national and regional actors responsible for framing the EU cohesion policy in the various contexts, as well as those actors that at the EU level are responsible for the definition of the overall EU cohesion policy framework. This focus group constitute the first step of a Delphi exercise that, through two additional steps, allowed for the validation and finalisation of the project's policy messages (§5).

### 3.3 The case study analytical components

In order to organise and facilitate the collection of evidence and information from the various research teams in relation to their respective case studies, and to make sure that this information and the way it was presented would have allowed comparability, a number of analytical components were developed, together with the guidelines for their implementations.

These components concern:

- The Analytical protocol upon which to collect information and develop the semi-structured interview protocol (§3.3.1);
- The Quantitative data collection protocol (§3.3.2);
- The Social network analysis (§3.3.3);
- The analysis of the EU Operational Programmes (§3.3.4);

In addition to these four components, a template for the case study reports was developed and applied to each case, to ensure coherence and comparability between them (§3.3.5).

#### 3.3.1 The analytical protocol and the interviews

The ESPON METRO analytical protocol detailed the qualitative information to be collected into three sections, that correspond to the three main steps that composed the case study analysis (1.1a – Territorial, institutional and policy framework; 1.1b – Cohesion policy governance; 1.1c – Cohesion policy impact). Each section included a number of questions and sub-questions, for which the research teams were required to develop relevant answers, in relation to the case study they were responsible for.

Throughout the project, each team developed the case study analysis by applying the various parts of the analytical protocol. More in particular, the information to answer the questions and sub-questions was collected through:

- (i) Desk research on existing literature, policy documents, informative materials and websites;
- (ii) Semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders and other actors identified together with them and then through snowballing;
- (iii) Participant observation within relevant, ongoing policy processes;
- (iv) (when relevant) Focus groups aiming at zooming in specific issues with the help of a variable selection of actors.

Importantly, the questions and sub-questions composing each section were not intended as a full questionnaire to be adopted for the interviews. Researchers were able to answer the majority of the questions of the protocol on the basis of their knowledge, literature and desk research. In this light, the analytical protocol was rather developed as a comprehensive source upon which each team should have then developed its

own *ad hoc* interview protocol, taking into account (i) the information that were already collected through desk research and that required testing and validation (ii) the role of each specific interviewee, (ii) the specific nuances of each case study metropolitan area, also in relation to the role they play within the EU cohesion policy.

Overall, each research team performed a total number of interviews ranging between 10 and 20, engaging those key actors that were defined together with the respective stakeholders. Importantly, through the interviews, the researchers explored those topics that could not be investigated on the basis of the desk research alone. To this end, a number of questions (highlighted in red below) were explicitly intended to collect information in relation to the challenges and the barriers posed by the existing governance configuration to effective metropolitan cooperation, the impressions of the interviewees on the synergies between metropolitan and cohesion policy, possible inputs from the interviewees on how to overcome the identified challenges and barriers etc.<sup>6</sup>

More in detail, the analytical protocol was articulated as follows.

## Analytical protocol

### 1.1 a | Territorial, institutional and policy framework

Key questions to answer:

- ***How is metropolitan governance and cooperation in the country (and in the case study area, if exceptional) organised? How did it consolidate through time? How does it position within the overall national institutional framework?***
- ***What are the main metropolitan development goals in the case study metro area and how do they position in relation to the goals of other levels' institutions (at the national, regional and municipal level)?***

Information to collect:

#### 1. The institutional framework for metropolitan governance and cooperation and its level of formalization (in relation to the national and regional institutional framework)

- 1.1. When did metropolitan governance begin? Please provide a brief historical account, also in relation to the evolution of the debate concerning metropolisation in the country and/or region.
- 1.2. How far is metropolitan governance institutionalised? What has been the rationale behind its introduction and institutionalisation? Is there any legal framework for it at the national and/or regional level?
- 1.3. Was the input to establish metropolitan governance generated top-down or bottom-up? Please explain.
- 1.4. How many municipalities are concerned by the cooperation? To what extent? How do they contribute to metropolitan governance? How does the geographical scope of the cooperation compare with the FUA (and with other possible functional areas e.g. Eurostat Metropolitan regions, planning regions etc.)?
- 1.5. What is the thematic scope of metropolitan governance, what are the main competences of metropolitan bodies (and how are they defined / in what document(s))?

#### 2. Other forms of cooperation and their relation with metropolitan governance

- 2.1. Are there other forms of inter-municipal cooperation within the case study metropolitan area?

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<sup>6</sup> Whereas the other questions were mostly about describing the actual state and context of metropolitan governance and cooperation, these questions aimed at collect the opinions, wishes and potential solutions to existing barriers and challenges.

- 2.2. If any, how do they relate to the metropolitan institution(s) / governance?
- 2.3. How many municipalities cooperates in the context of these cooperation, under what conditions, on what matter(s)?
- 2.4. What is their nature (informal Vs formal)? Are they voluntary, institutionalised, or policy based?
- 2.5. Are they provided with a specific budget? On what matter? From what source of funding?
3. The metropolitan development goals and instruments, within the framework of national and regional development goals
  - 3.1. What are the metropolitan development goals, how have they been defined and by whom? How are they made explicit / in what documents? (e.g. in politics, policies, planning, etc.)
  - 3.2. What are the most relevant metropolitan-level spatial development and planning instruments (including strategic plans, coordination instruments, incentives programmes, and other relevant sectoral tools)? Are they statutory or voluntary? Are they binding and for whom? Is it mandatory to develop them? What is their time-frame?
  - 3.3. Are there any instruments/processes/action specifically dedicated to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, or to react in its aftermath? Please describe them
  - 3.4. What are the actors leading/involved in the development and implementation of these instruments?
  - 3.5. What is the main scope of these instruments, and what are the main metropolitan development goals that they identify?
  - 3.6. Are these instruments successful in achieving metropolitan development goals? If yes, how? If not or only partially, why?
  - 3.7. Is there a coherence or a divergence between the metropolitan development goals (including the ones defined in the identified instruments) and the development goals defined by other bodies/instruments at the national and regional levels?
  - 3.8. Is there any mechanism or platform aiming at coordinating the development of national/regional and metropolitan goals, or at the consideration and inclusion of metropolitan goals into higher level instruments and goals?
  - 3.9. Is there a coherence or a divergence between the metropolitan development goals and the goals defined by the main municipality of the metropolitan area?
  - 3.10. Is there a coherence or a divergence between the metropolitan development goals and the goals defined by other municipalities of the metropolitan area?
  - 3.11. Is there any mechanism or platform aiming at coordinating the development of the goals of the main municipality, the other municipalities and the overall goals of the metropolitan body?
4. Metropolitan financing and budgeting
  - 4.1. Is there a metropolitan budget? What is its origin, how is it composed, how is it spent?
  - 4.2. How does the budget contribute to achieve metropolitan development goals and/or to implement the spatial development and planning instruments presented above?
  - 4.3. To what priorities/themes is the budget dedicated? (provide figures)
  - 4.4. Is there any specific budget dedicated to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and/or to react in its aftermath?
  - 4.5. Are there parts or sectors of the metropolitan area that are benefitting from more/less resources than others?
  - 4.6. Are there any other cooperation initiatives provided with a budget? From what source(s)?
5. The role and participation of social groups and business actors in metropolitan governance

- 5.1. How are different social groups and, more in general, the civil society, involved in metropolitan governance?
- 5.2. How are they involved in the development of metropolitan goals and instruments?
- 5.3. How are business actors involved in metropolitan governance?
- 5.4. How do they participate to, or influence the development of metropolitan goals and instruments?
- 5.5. Are social groups, actors from the business community and, more in general, the civil society, involved in the containment and reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 5.6. What is the general perception of the civil society in relation to the importance, role and functioning of the metropolitan governance in the area?
- 5.7. What is the general perception of the business community in relation to the importance, role and functioning of the metropolitan governance in the area?

#### 6. Participation to policy networks

- 6.1. What are the most relevant policy networks to which the metropolitan body participate?
- 6.2. What is the added value of participating to these network? What could be the added value in relation to the consolidation and further enhancement of metropolitan governance and cooperation?
- 6.3. Would it be necessary to join or establish other kinds of networking among metropolitan areas?

#### 7. Barriers and challenges for metropolitan governance and cooperation

##### **Referring to each of the points above explore:**

- 7.1. What are the main criticalities / barriers / challenges for metropolitan cooperation?
- 7.2. What are the causes of these criticalities / barriers / challenges? Are they created by internal or external factors?
- 7.3. How could they be addressed / overcome? What actors/levels could effectively act in this direction?

### 1.1 b | Cohesion policy governance

Key question to answer:

- ***What role do metropolitan areas and cities play in the development, management, and implementation of the EU cohesion policy (EUCP)?***

Information to collect:

1. The institutional architecture of the EUCP and the development of the EUCP documents in the country, with particular reference to metropolitan policies and to the role and competences of metropolitan public decision-makers (PDMs).
  - 1.1 Who are the main actors involved in the process of programming, managing, and implementing the EUCP at the different governance levels in your country (national, regional, municipal, other)? How do these main actors interact (top-down regulation, negotiation, etc.)?
  - 1.2 What role do the different territorial-administrative levels (national, regional, municipal) of your country play and what position do they hold in the process EUCP programming, managing and implementation?
  - 1.3 Are the metropolitan PDMs participating in the process of EUCP programming, managing and implementation (in what scope)? What are the changes (if any) regarding their participation, between the 2014-2020 period and the new one?
  - 1.4 What was the role of the metropolitan PDMs in the elaboration of key policy and programming documents at the various levels of governing/managing EUCP in a given country? What are the competences of the metropolitan PDMs in the implementation of the EUCP programmes?

- 1.5 What were the key solutions envisaged in these documents with regard to metropolitan PDMs involvement in implementation of the EUCP programmes? Please, differentiate the 2014-2020 period and the new one.
  - 1.6 What have been the main barriers and challenges perceived by the metropolitan PDMs with regard to their participation in programming, management and implementation of the EUCP?
  - 1.7 How do the metropolitan PDMs assess their role in programming, managing and implementation of the EUCP programmes?
  - 1.8 How do the metropolitan PDMs assess the governance and administrative culture of a particular country (and any relevant subnational level of government, like regions) – as the one supporting or hampering an inclusion of the metropolitan PDMs in the above-mentioned processes?
2. The Metropolitan areas technical approaches and instruments for the implementation of EUCP and their scope (ITI, CLLD, plans, programmes, projects, inter-institutional agreements);
    - 2.1 What are the key instruments and approaches used for the implementation of the EUCP in a given country? On what basis were such instruments and approaches selected?
    - 2.2 Of these instruments and approaches, what are the most relevant for metropolitan areas (and for the metropolitan context under analysis)?
    - 2.3 What has been the specific role of the metropolitan PDMs in the elaboration of these instruments/approaches, in their management and implementation?
    - 2.4 What type of organisational/institutional structure of metropolitan PDMs is considered to be best adjusted to implement of the above-mentioned instruments/approaches?
    - 2.5 How do the existing metropolitan organizational structures work when implementing the above-mentioned instruments/approaches (who is active, who has a lead, who has resources etc.)?
    - 2.6 How do the abovementioned instruments/approaches organize the interaction between the metropolitan PDMs, the municipal PDMs (both in the main municipalities and in the others) and PDMs at other territorial levels?
    - 2.7 What are the strong/weak points of the EUCP approaches/instruments and/or arrangements, based on the metropolitan PDMs' experience in implementing them?
    - 2.8 How do the metropolitan PDMs assess the effectiveness and efficiency of these approaches/instruments?
  3. The (mechanisms of) involvement of business operators and/or civil society in the development and implementation of these approaches/instruments.
    - 3.1 What were the key metropolitan business and civil society actors active in EUCP programming/implementation? Are they new to the metropolitan policies or was their involvement already well established?
    - 3.2 Are there any mechanism/roles/regulations to involve metropolitan business and civil society actors in the process of EUCP programming, management and implementation?
    - 3.3 What tangible results can be identified as for business and civil society actors' involvement in EUCP implementation at the metropolitan level? (in terms of processes, in terms of outputs)
    - 3.4 What have been strong/weak points of the existing arrangements for involvement of such actors (who is active, who has had a lead, who has contributed with resources etc.)?
    - 3.5 What is the point of view of private and civil society actors on how and when they were involved?
  4. The challenges met by metropolitan areas through usage of the EUCP approaches/instruments in strengthening their resilience in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (and, when relevant, other endogenous shocks).
    - 4.1 Have the metropolitan PDMs been engaged in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and in the preparation of the contingency plans and actions for such situation, and in planning for its aftermath (in

particular in relation to the use of the EUCP and to the programming, management and implementation of Next Generation EU)?

- 4.2 What have been the driving forces behind their involvement / non-involvement?
  - 4.3 What is (has been) the role of the metropolitan PDMs in elaboration of such contingency measures prepared by the other governance levels?
  - 4.4 What have been the main barriers and challenges for participation of the metropolitan PDMs in preparation of such contingency measures (if any)? What have been the main barriers and challenges related to the involvement of Metropolitan actors in the programming, management and implementation of the Next Generation EU programme?
  - 4.5 What are the key assets, instruments and capacities provided by the metropolitan PDMs to this purpose through the Next Generation EU programme and other EU initiatives (financial resources, knowledge, competences, institutional framework, social/relational capital etc.)?
  - 4.6 Who were the key metropolitan business and civil society actors active in the design and implementation of the contingency strategies/plans and what was the scope of their involvement?
  - 4.7 What are the strong/weak points related to the participation of the metropolitan PDMs in preparation of the aforesaid contingency measures?
  - 4.8 What is the assessment of the metropolitan PDMs' involvement in combating the adverse exogenous shocks (in terms of effectiveness and efficiency)?
5. In what way and to what extent should metropolitan governance be fine-tuned with EUCP programming, management and implementation, to bring the added value to both processes: metropolitan area development and reaching EUCP long-term goals?
- 5.1 What are the key mechanisms coordinating and integrating objectives, priorities, and targets of metropolitan areas with the programming, management and implementation of the EUCP goals in the country? What has been the role of the metropolitan PDMs in their elaboration?
  - 5.2 What have been strong/weak points of the above-mentioned mechanisms?
  - 5.3 How are the results (outcomes) of this integration perceived by the metropolitan PDMs? Which tendencies prevail (convergence or divergence between goals)?
  - 5.4 What are the key lessons learned and suggestions for changes in the future?
  - 5.5 Are any changes foreseen for the future programming period?
  - 5.6 To what extent should the EUCP be modified (enlarged, fine-tuned, made more flexible...) in order to help metropolitan areas to deal with the effects of the COVID-19?
6. Barriers to and challenges for the metropolitan engagement in the EUCP and Next Generation EU programming, management and implementation

**Referring to each of the points above explore:**

- 6.1 What are the main criticalities / barriers / challenges for the engagement of metropolitan actors within the programming, implementation and management of the EUCP?
- 6.2 What are the causes of these criticalities / barriers / challenges? Are they created by internal or external factors?
- 6.3 How could they be addressed / overcome? What actors/levels could effectively act in this direction?

**Step 1.1c - Cohesion policy impact**

Key question to answer:

- **What role does the EUCP and its funds play in metropolitan policies and governance?**
- **How are cohesion policy objectives integrated in metropolitan institutional arrangements, and how does the EUCP contribute to the achievement of metropolitan goals?**

- **How does the EUCP contribute to strengthen metropolitan governance and foster metropolitan cooperation?**

Information to collect:

1. Objectives of the EU cohesion policy in each area and the actions funded through the latter
  - 1.1 What are the main priorities of the EU cohesion policy in the metropolitan area?
  - 1.2 How are they aligned with the metropolitan area needs and strategies?
  - 1.3 Which sectors have received more investment of the EUCP in the metropolitan area?
  - 1.4 To what extent EUCP funding addresses the main problems of the metropolitan area?
  - 1.5 How is EUCP funding geographically spread in the metropolitan area?
  - 1.6 To what extent it shows a just spatial distribution?
2. Coherence with the territorial development goals defined in the metropolitan cooperation initiatives, spatial development, planning and sectoral tools
  - 2.1 How are EUCP initiatives aligned with spatial development and planning as well with sectoral planning in the metropolitan area?
  - 2.2 What strategies and actions are in place to ensure coherence across policies and instruments in the metropolitan area?
  - 2.3 Is there any platform aiming at coordinating/ensuring coherence between metropolitan goals/instruments/actions and EUCP goals/instruments/actions defined at the national and regional level?
  - 2.4 Is there any platform/mechanism aiming at coordinating/ensuring coherence between metropolitan goals/instruments/actions and EUCP goals/instruments/actions managed/implemented at the municipal level (by the main municipality or by other (groups of) municipalities)?
  - 2.5 Do these platforms/mechanisms produce positive results or not? Why? What are the main barriers to coordination? How could they be overcome?
3. Thematic priorities for metropolitan cooperation and EU/national/regional/local cohesion policy priorities in relation to different fields
  - 3.1 How the thematic priorities for metropolitan cooperation reflect/resonate EU and national cohesion policy priorities in relation to different fields (infrastructure, transportation, social inequalities and territorial disparities, economic development, education etc.)?
  - 3.2 How the thematic priorities for metropolitan cooperation reflect/resonate regional cohesion policy priorities in relation to different fields (infrastructure, transportation, social inequalities and territorial disparities, economic development, education etc.)?
  - 3.3 How the thematic priorities for metropolitan cooperation reflect/resonate municipal (i.e. of the main municipal area or of other (groups of) municipalities) cohesion policy priorities in relation to different fields (infrastructure, transportation, social inequalities and territorial disparities, economic development, education etc.)?
  - 3.4 What successful outcomes were achieved in relation to the coordination of metropolitan goals and priorities with the goals and priorities of EUCP at the other levels?
  - 3.5 Are there relevant integrated projects? Or significant inter-municipal projects in the metropolitan area?
4. EU cohesion policy role in supporting actions aimed at mitigating the implications of the COVID-19 emergency
  - 4.1 What role EU cohesion policy could have in supporting actions aimed at mitigating the implications of the COVID-19 emergency?
  - 4.2 What sectors and areas will the Next Generation EU programme, and in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility focus on? Does it have any metropolitan dimension?

4.3 Is there any platform/mechanisms to ensure that the Next Generation EU programme has a metropolitan dimension/is relevant at a metropolitan scale?

4.4 How could the relevance of the Next Generation EU programme be enhanced at the metropolitan level?

#### 5. EU cohesion policy and changing governance arrangements in metropolitan areas

5.1 What role has EU cohesion policy played through time in inducing changes in the governance arrangements in metropolitan areas?

5.2 Is the EUCP stimulating cooperation, partnerships and joint vision and strategy making at metropolitan level?

5.3 If there was no EUCP funding, what would be the governance structure of the metropolitan area? And what would metropolitan governance structure evolve if more policy competences and funding is devolved to metropolitan area bodies?

#### 6. Barriers to and challenges for the establishment of effective synergies

##### **Referring to each of the points above explore:**

6.1 What are the main criticalities / barriers / challenges for the establishment of effective synergies between metropolitan goals and the goals of the EUCP?

6.2 What are the causes of these criticalities / barriers / challenges? Are they created by internal or external factors?

6.3 How could they be addressed / overcome? What actors/levels could effectively act in this direction?

### 3.3.2 Quantitative data collection

Together with the (mostly) qualitative information collected through the analytical protocol introduced above and the research activities that derived from it (i.e. desk research, interviews, participant observation and focus groups), the research work also entailed an activity dedicated to the collection of quantitative data.

These data were employed to develop a preliminary comparison of the nine metropolitan contexts under investigation, in particular for what concerns the EU-OECD FUAs that are centered upon the metropolitan areas under investigation.

This activity followed two main steps:

- The actual availability of data in relation to the nine EU-OECD FUAs under investigation was explored, with the aid of central databases as Eurostat.
- As no comparable statistical data are available for the nine institutional metropolitan areas under investigation, a procedure has been developed to support the various research teams in collecting a number of basic indicators in relation to their own institutional metropolitan areas.

More in particular, to achieve a comparable territorial framework of the nine metropolitan areas, they were firstly defined homogeneously, according to two different methods:

- Institutional metropolitan area (i.e. concerning the geographical scope of action of the nine METRO stakeholders' institutions, despite their level of formalisation);
- Statistical metropolitan area, defined according to the EU-OECD methodology.

Moreover, a distinction was operated between the core of a certain metropolitan area (the central municipality, except for the Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area for which the three cities were considered as the core), and its suburbs (the remaining municipalities).

A number of indicators were proposed, to allow for the comparison of the 9 metropolitan areas, both intended as institutional metropolitan areas and FUAs. For each indicator, data was collected for the whole

metropolitan area, but also when possible for the core and suburbs, since the analysis of inequalities in development between core and peripheries were considered a useful subject of investigation.

Table 3.3 provides an overview of the available indicators on a base of centralized and homogeneous sources, mainly EU-OECD statistical atlas and Eurostat. As no international statistics exists to allow for a comparison of the institutional metropolitan area, each research team was then required to collect basic indicators for the metropolitan area they were responsible for.

**Table 3.3**  
**List of indicators and availability**

Thematics	Indicators	Functional Urban Area			Institutional Metropolitan Region		
		Core	Suburb	Total	Core	Suburb	Total
Institutional	Number of municipalities	v	v	v	v	v	v
	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	v	v	v	v	v	v
Demography	Population 2020	v	v	v	v	v	v
	Population 2010	v	v	v	v	v	v
	Population by age groups	v	v	v	v	v	v
	Population density	v	v	v	v	v	v
Employment	Activity rate	v	v	v	v*	v*	v*
	Economically active population, total	v	v	v	v*	v*	v*
	Persons employed	v	v	v	v*	v*	v*
	Persons unemployed, total	v	v	v	v*	v*	v*
	Unemployment rate	v	v	v	v*	v*	v*
	Employment per sector			v			
Economy**	GDP			v			
	GDP per sector			v			

\* data were not available for the less institutionalised metropolitan areas (Brno, Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, Riga); \*\* proxy NUTS3

Finally, a last data collection activity concerned the amount of EU funds delivered in the context of each metropolitan area. To assess the impact of EU funds in the metropolitan areas, the research team performed mostly a qualitative assessment of how such funds make a difference in influencing and in achieving metropolitan goals.

However, this activity started with a quantitative assessment of EU funds, concerning the amount of EU funds that flows into a specific metropolitan area. Overall, to assess the importance of the EU cohesion policy in the nine metropolitan areas 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 more or less arbitrary choices that had to be made in order to make the results of the analysis as comparable as possible. First of all, to choose to focus only on official metropolitan areas would have implied to exclude those metropolitan areas that are not provided with any formal institutional framework from the analysis. Additional concerns emerged when considering the identification of spatial focus of the EU cohesion policy instruments that have been identified as having an impact on metropolitan area. More in particular, only the ITI and few other special management arrangements have a dedicated metropolitan focus, meaning that in all other cases, to identify the actual portions of ROPs and NOPs that have been

effectively invested in actions contributing to the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies would have proved impossible due to the lack of these specific data.

At the same time, to assess the importance of the EU cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policy, its magnitude had to be compared to a reference value, and this could either concern the overall GDP of the area or its number of inhabitants, the overall budget of the metropolitan institutions, the specific budget dedicated by these institutions to public investments, or even to the total amount of public investments made by all public authorities included in the metropolitan area within the metropolitan area. As a consequence of the impossibility to develop and apply a standard quantitative methodology that would have provided sound, comparable results for all the METRO case studies, 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.

A second step aimed at quantifying the importance of the different thematic priorities in the EU funds, and whenever possible their importance compared to the overall budget of the metropolitan area for these priorities. Finally, EU funds were analysed quantitatively also in relation to their geographical distribution on the metropolitan area territory, comparing the resources landing on the core area and on the suburbs both in absolute and per capita terms.

### 3.3.3 Social network analysis

An additional analytical activity concerned the development of a social network analysis, through which to highlight, in relation to each metropolitan area, the actual overlapping between the metropolitan governance network and the EU cohesion policy governance network, in so doing potentially identifying potentials for cross-fertilisation and synergies

A so-called *roster questionnaire* was developed as a basis of this governance network analysis. The questionnaire serves as a tool for the compilation of a list of actors that play a role in territorial development in each metropolitan context within and/or outside the EU cohesion policy framework (i.e. the “nodes” of the network), and of the characterization of the relations linking each of these actors to each of the interviewed actors (i.e. the “links” of the network).

This activity was performed autonomously by each research team in relation to its case, in interaction with its respective stakeholder and the key actors they interviewed. Overall, it was organised in a number of steps:

- Each team, prepared a preliminary list of around 20 actors/institutions that play a relevant role in metropolitan governance, both within and outside the EU cohesion policy framework (include the actors that each team was going to interview).
- The list was refined with the help of each interviewee, asking to comment on any relevant actor/institution that was still missing. On the basis of this activity, a final list of actors/institutions was produced, representing the “nodes” of the governance network.
- Each interviewee was then asked to fill in a structured table (the roster questionnaire), indicating, for each of the listed institutions the level, nature and type of collaboration (the “links” of the network), on the basis of fixed categories. For each they were required to specify if this cooperation occurs in the realm of the EU cohesion policy, outside of it, or both.

Once the roster questionnaires were completed, they were elaborated centrally, in order to ensure the maximum comparability of their results across case-studies. To this end, the team decided to apply the following simplifications:

- No consideration of roster questionnaire answers from local authorities, except if they are the city that originated the metropolitan area, as it may have unbalanced / biased the comparative analysis across case studies;
- No consideration of the intensity of relations because it is difficult to ensure all organisations have a common criteria /understanding on different levels;
- No analysis of the intra-organization relations within each institution.

The questionnaires were processed through the UCINET software package (Borgatti *et al.*, 2002) to elaborate the matrices of dichotomous relationships between the actors. After that, the NetDraw module was used to draw the networks of relationships, following a number of steps:

- Dataset consolidation;
- Computation of binary symmetrical matrixes (UCINET);
- Elaboration of one network per case study (NetDraw);
- Networks include the type of relation (EUCP, non-EUCP), scale of intervention of actors (European, National, Regional, Metropolitan, Local), and the degree of each node (calculated according to the number and type of connections, where both EUCP and non-EUCP equals 3 points, only EUCP equals 2 points and only non-EUCP equals 1 point).

Overall, the activity allowed to produce comparable information and diagrams in relation to the metropolitan governance networks that characterise the areas at stake (also in relation to the role they play in the EU cohesion policy).

### 3.3.4 Identification and analysis of the EU Cohesion Policy instruments

To identify accurately what EU cohesion policy instruments exert some sort of influence over metropolitan development and governance is a rather problematic task. In fact, only the ITIs managed by metropolitan areas explicitly address metropolitan development dynamics and logics, and do so under the coordination of metropolitan institutions. At the same time, in all those metropolitan areas that do not manage any ITI (this being the case of 5 over 9 cases under scrutiny in the METRO project), other agreements and instruments exist, that allow for the EU cohesion policy to deliver a more or less direct impact over metropolitan policies. This heterogeneous set of instruments include specifically dedicated NOPs, axes of the NOPs and ROPs, and other European programmes aimed at European Territorial Cooperation, Rural Development, exchange of knowledge and good practices, or others.

In this light, the research has focused on the incremental identification, through desk research and interviews with metro stakeholders and other relevant actors in the metropolitan areas, of all those 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.

For each of the identified instrument, a number of information was collected, aiming to substantiate the actual role that the EU cohesion policy plays in at the metropolitan level:

- The different priority axes;
- The funds involved;
- The amount of resources dedicated to each priority;
- The geographical distribution of the resources between core municipality and the resto of the metropolitan area;
- The actual role of the metropolitan institution in the management and implementation of the instrument;
- The number of funded projects;
- Further details in relation to selected projects and initiatives that have been highlighted as good practices by the stakeholders and/or the interviewees.

### 3.3.5 The case study report structure

In addition to the four analytical components introduced above, the research consortium developed a common template aiming at facilitating the various teams in the organisation and presentation of the evidence and information concerning their case studies.

The main aim of this case study report structure has been to allow the comparative assessment of the information collected by the different research teams in relation to their own case studies. At the same time, the various teams were given flexibility in the implementation of this structure, in a way that would allow to accommodate the many territorial and institutional nuances that characterised the nine case studies under investigations.

Importantly, the introduction throughout the text of specific boxes dedicated to the challenges that were detected in relation to the different subjects allowed for a thorough mapping of the difficulties that, within each context, concern the coordination between the EU cohesion policy activity and the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies, that were then used as a source of inspiration for the definition of the recommendations and policy messages delivered in the section 6 of each case study report.

The structure of the case study report is presented in more detail in the box below.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE CASE STUDY REPORT**

### **Introduction**

### **Case study area contextualisation**

#### **Metropolitan governance structure and cooperation activities**

Institutional framework

Other forms of cooperation

Evolution of metropolitan cooperation

Metropolitan development goals

Coherence with national and regional goals

Coherence with municipal goals

Metropolitan development and planning instruments

Instruments in the framework of other cooperation initiatives

Instrument and initiatives related to COVID-19

Metropolitan financing and budgeting

Role of social groups and the business community in metropolitan governance

Participation to policy networks

#### **Cohesion policy governance**

EU cohesion policy institutional architecture and competences

The role of metropolitan actors

EU cohesion policy instruments at the metropolitan level

Involvement of social groups and the business community in the EU cohesion policy

The governance of EU cohesion policy in the COVID-19 emergency

Coordinating metropolitan governance and EU cohesion policy

#### **Cohesion policy impact**

EU cohesion policy objectives and actions

Funded measures: main sectors and spatial distribution

Coherence and synergies with metropolitan objectives and instruments

Alignment with the goals defined in metropolitan instruments

Thematic priorities

Funding magnitude

Outcomes

The impact of the EU cohesion policy in the COVID-19 emergency

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

#### **Main challenges and recommendations**

The role of Metropolitan Areas in the EU cohesion policy governance

Impact of the EU cohesion policy on (the achievement of) metropolitan goals

Impact of the EU cohesion policy on metropolitan governance and cooperation

### **References**

### 3.4 Comparison and assessment

The information collected in relation to each case study through the application of the analytical components detailed above and organised according to the case study report structure was then brought together, compared and assessed.

The performed comparison aimed at assessing, also drawing on existing literature, the role that the nine metropolitan areas (and the relevant 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 analysis has been taking into account both the quantitative data collected through the activity at §3.3.2 (e.g. the revenues of the metropolitan and local governments and their origins, the magnitude of EU resources and their geographical and thematic distribution etc.) and the qualitative information collected through the implementation of the project's analytical protocol (§3.3.1), like the national/regional recognition of metropolitan challenges and the level of alignment of goals and strategies formulated at different scales.

More in details, the results of the comparative assessment were organised with particular reference to:

- the institutional characteristics of the metropolitan areas at stake and of the goals of metropolitan cooperation initiatives, instruments and policies;
- the governance models characterising the programming, management and implementation of the cohesion policy, with particular attention to how they engage the metropolitan dimension;
- the impact and added value of the EU cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies;
- the role played by the EU cohesion policy in fostering metropolitan cooperation and supporting the consolidation of metropolitan governance.

A preliminary attempt to comparatively assess the results of the case studies was developed by the research team in the occasion of the interim delivery. The preliminary results achieved through this steps were used to drive the subsequent activities, with the research team that 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. This assessment adopted a multi-level perspective, considering the level of autonomy and the scope of action of each metropolitan area.

Moreover, through this activity, a number of good practices and critical elements were identified across the areas, that informed the project's general conclusions concerning the current challenges in managing metropolitan development and the policy implications at the metropolitan scale. More in detail, the assessment allowed to identify an open list of drivers, achievements, barriers and failures, whose relevance was discussed with the stakeholders in order to produce a picture of common and different factors favouring the participation of metropolitan areas to the EU cohesion policy, the mechanisms that produced a positive impact, the main barriers that hampered it and the key achievements.

The overall results of the comparative case studies' assessment are collected in Annex II.

### 3.5 The development of policy messages

The production of realistic, evidence-based policy recommendations drew extensively on the comparative assessment of the nine case studies reports. More in detail, the research team was asked to deliver:

- nine distinct sets of policy recommendations, addressing the nine metro stakeholders;
- recommendations targeting other European metropolitan areas and cities, together with the discussion on the conditions according to which they may be relevant and where;

- policy advice targeting national and regional authorities setting the frame for the EU cohesion policy – with particular attention to the countries where the stakeholders' territories are located – aiming at a further inclusion of metropolitan areas and cities;
- policy advice towards the strengthening of the metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy and the further engagement of metropolitan areas and cities in the development, management and implementation of the latter, targeting EU level policy-making as well as providing an added value to the activities of the umbrella organisations involved in the project.

The recommendations specifically dedicated to support the activity of the various stakeholders in their individual contexts were developed through the incremental tandem interaction of each research team with its own counterpart, until the delivered messages were tested and validated.

On the other hand, the development of the more general recommendations targeting metropolitan areas, national/regional actors and EU level actors followed a more articulated process, that saw the research team and the members of the project Steering committee interacting at various stage through a Delphi exercise (§3.5.1). Finally, the results of the project and the distilled policy messages were translated into three distinct but complementary policy briefs (§3.5.2).

### 3.5.1 The Delphi exercise

The Delphi method is a structured communication technique, that relies on a panel of experts to jointly consolidate a group's opinion by iterative convergence. It is based on the principle that forecasts from a structured group of individuals are more accurate than those from unstructured groups.

This method has been adopted by the METRO research team, in order to test and validate the soundness of the policy messages developed on the basis of the project's results.

More in detail, through this method, the project research team engaged with the METRO stakeholders at three different stages, with each round of Delphi that contributed to fine-tune and consolidate the messages to be delivered.

#### Round 0 – Collective assessment

The Round 0 of the Delphi exercise occurred in the occasion of the METRO Steering committee meeting 5. In prevision of this activity, the research team had produced three preliminary list of policy messages, addressing three main policy questions that drove the research activity and, within each policy question, explicitly targeted at (i) metropolitan actors; (ii) national/regional actors and (iii) EU level actors.

These policy messages, organised into nine sections, were presented to the members of the Steering Committee. For each of the nine sections, the concerned recommendations were discussed extensively with the aid of the Google Jamboard tool, that allowed for their real-time modifications and for visualising the various issues raised by the stakeholders. At the same time, the participants were required to highlight relevant issues that may have been left out by the research team.

Following this activity, the research team consolidated the list of recommendations, that now reflected more closely the collective vision of the Steering committee.

#### Round 1 – individual assessment

In order to guarantee that each stakeholder would feel comfortable to express their opinion on the policy messages more freely, a second round of the Delphi exercise was organised. Through this second round, each stakeholder was required to participate to an online Google Form survey – this time in isolation – and to assess each of the consolidated recommendations – again subdivided into nine sections and subsections.

More in detail, for each recommendation, a stakeholder was able to either confirming its validity as it was and to propose its rewording and motivate the reason behind it. Also in this case, the participants to the online survey were allowed to suggest additional recommendations in case some important elements were entirely missing in their opinion.

Following this second round, the final list of recommendations was consolidated by the research team.

#### Round 2 – Weighting and consolidation

A last round of Delphi was finally launched. In this occasion, each stakeholder was required to weight each of the 40 recommendations that had been identified on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 (i.e. not relevant, scarcely

relevant, moderately relevant, highly relevant), according to its relevance for their specific context, and to briefly motivate their answer.

This final step allowed, on the one hand, to confirm the validity of the 40 policy messages included in the final list and, on the other hand, to develop some preliminary considerations on the relevance of the different recommendations in relation to the various types of metropolitan areas and institutions in Europe.

### 3.5.1 The Policy briefs

Beside the production of differentiated sets of policy recommendations targeting decision and policy makers active in one way or another within the EU Cohesion policy framework at the various territorial level throughout Europe, the results of the METRO project were also organised and communicated through three distinct but complementary policy briefs, respectively focusing on:

- The role of metropolitan areas in the EU cohesion policy;
- The added value of the EU cohesion policy in planning and implementation of metropolitan policies;
- The added value of the EU cohesion policy in the consolidation of metropolitan governance.

The development of the documents was managed by the same teams that were responsible for the comparative assessment of the case studies, this ensuring a direct channelling of the most relevant results of the study. Moreover, the conception and drafting of the documents has been coordinated to avoid unnecessary overlapping, while at the same time presenting a high level of coherence in terms of messages, format and style.

The length of the documents was contained between 6.000 to 9.000 words (between 15 and 22 pages), to ensure that they catch the interest of policy makers and to maximise the uptake of the delivered messages. Following the examples of other policy briefs already developed in the context of other ESPON projects<sup>7</sup>, the METRO policy briefs are provided with a clear, user-friendly structure and make extensive use of practical examples deriving from the case studies, communicated also through maps infographics and other illustrations.

More in particular, the policy brief titled “The role of metropolitan areas in the EU cohesion policy” focuses on the role that metropolitan areas and cities play in the architecture of the cohesion policy, in relation to programming, management and implementation. It provides guidance on effective governance models and mechanisms that should be put in place to ensure a further engagement of metropolitan areas and cities within the Cohesion Policy in different territorial and institutional contexts and with a special focus on wider policy-creation and policy-setting role.

The policy brief titled “The added value of the EU cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies” focuses on good practices on the establishment of synergies between cohesion policy and metropolitan strategies and policies and, more in detail, on how the former may provide an added value to the achieving the objectives of the latter and vice versa. It explores the role that EU funds and instruments play in reducing territorial disparities within metropolitan areas and cities by developing area-based approaches and integrated territorial strategies.

The policy brief titled “The added value of the EU cohesion policy in the consolidation of metropolitan governance” focuses on the role that cohesion policy could play in enhancing better cooperation and governance dynamics at the metropolitan level across Europe, in relation to differential territorial and institutional characteristics. It includes examples of how to engage with local stakeholders, derived from the nine case studies under scrutiny, and provide practical advice on how the proposed policy recommendations may be implemented, where and under what conditions.

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<sup>7</sup> Available on the ESPON website at: [https://www.espon.eu/topics-policy?field\\_type\\_tid%5B%5D=550#list](https://www.espon.eu/topics-policy?field_type_tid%5B%5D=550#list).

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Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

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The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States, the United Kingdom and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

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ISBN: 978-2-919795-65-9