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METRO - The role and future perspectives of Cohesion Policy in the planning of Metropolitan Areas and Cities. Policy brief: The added value of the EU cohesion policy in the planning

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Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

POLICY BRIEF

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

This policy brief seeks to unpack the multiple added value of the European Union (EU) cohesion policy in metropolitan areas by exploring its priorities, funds and geographical distribution as well as the successful outcomes. Starting from the idea that the metropolitan scale is the most relevant to deal with those 'functional' issues that have a scope that exceeds the municipal boundaries (such as mobility, economic development, climate change etc.), this policy brief offers an overview of the added value of the EU cohesion policy on the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies in the 2014-20 programming period and elaborates a set of recommendations for policy and decision makers aiming at increasing this added value in the programming period 2021-27.

Based on the nine case studies explored in the ESPON METRO targeted analysis, which include the metropolitan areas of Barcelona, Brno, Brussels, Florence, Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, Lisbon, Lyon, Riga and Turin, this policy brief aims to support planners and policy officers in making well-informed decisions at EU, national and local level, when it comes to maximise the added value that the EU cohesion policy can provide to metropolitan development and policies. It does so by presenting possible ways of dealing with the complexity of the multiple impacts of cohesion policy and its metropolitan dimension.

## KEY POLICY MESSAGES

- **The EU cohesion policy objectives are coherent with the main goals of metropolitan cooperation**. This coherence is most evident in Central and Eastern European areas in which metropolitan governance has been largely implemented to managing the EU funds.
- **When the institutionalization of the metropolitan areas goes hand in hand with higher degree of the EU cohesion policy decentralization, it is possible to bolster the impact of the EU** cohesion policy **at the metropolitan level**. Through the implementation of projects and coordinating specific instruments, metropolitan institutions gain visibility and traction as relevant stakeholders in the metropolitan governance structure.
- **The added value of the EU cohesion policy on the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies is related to the amount of the EU funds that flow into an area and to their geographical distribution.** The use of transparent calls to select projects to be financed may result in a geographically unbalanced added value, that depends more on the actual capacity of the local authorities to answer to the calls than to the real needs, worsening pockets of disadvantage.
- **The EU funds may serve as a catalyst to foster cooperation at the metropolitan level**. The impact of the EU cohesion policy may be more relevant in some thematic areas or subjects. It also plays a very important role in the financing of the activities of metropolitan institutions with limited budget.
- **The added value of the EU cohesion policy is not necessarily similar among metropolitan areas but differs on the bases of four interrelated issues**: the magnitude of funds, the level of institutionalisation, the actual resources management by metropolitan authorities and the possibility of the latter to act on actual functional phenomena (i.e. the coherence of metropolitan areas with their functional urban areas).
- **The more the metropolitan areas are included in the EU cohesion policy process, the higher is its added value**. The added value is differential and includes both the organisational and political domain of administrative actions (i.e. increasing cooperation and coordination, increasing integration, enhancing capacity building etc.).
- **Metropolitan authorities have had limited role in the response to the pandemic.** The majority of decisions and initiatives were taken at the national, regional and local levels. The role of metropolitan authorities is limited to reactive and containment action with scarce forward-looking perspective.

# Introduction

It is undeniable that the EU cohesion policy has brought an added value for metropolitan areas across Europe. Although the level of added value might differ, metropolitan areas have benefited from the participation to the EU cohesion policy in various ways. In the majority of cases, metropolitan areas have ranked as beneficiaries of EU cohesion policy initiatives, while in others they have been devolved the management of specific Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) priorities or dedicated instruments. Although the EU cohesion policy has had some influence on metropolitan governance in the past, the 2014-20 programming period introduced a specific instrument: metropolitan areas have had the opportunity to be directly involved in the management of EU funds by implementing initiatives as for example in the case of the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). In practice, this has resulted in a great diversity in the way the EU cohesion policy impacts the planning and implementation of metropolitan policy and their governance, among others because instruments like the ITI are put in place in very diverse institutional configurations in relation to the existence of formally established metropolitan authorities or lack thereof. Such diversity spans from the management of metropolitan ITI instruments (as in the cases of Brno, Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, Lisbon or Lyon), urban ITI (as in Riga), to the direct involvement of the metropolitan institution in the institutional architecture of the EU cohesion policy (although limited to specific instruments and issues), up to no participation at all. Drawing on the diversity emerging from the nine experiences explored in the context of the ESPON METRO project, this policy brief presents and discusses a number of concrete examples, to then propose a set of policy recommendations on how to increase the added value that the EU cohesion policy can produce on the planning and implementation of metropolitan strategies and policies.

# 1 The metropolitan added value of the EU cohesion policy. Overview and main challenges

## 1.1 The EU cohesion policy in metropolitan areas

The EU cohesion policy covers every European region, although the funding magnitude varies across them and depends on the rules that regulate their eligibility to the various funds. However, the added value of the EU cohesion policy in metropolitan areas is related with but not limited to the received funding magnitude.

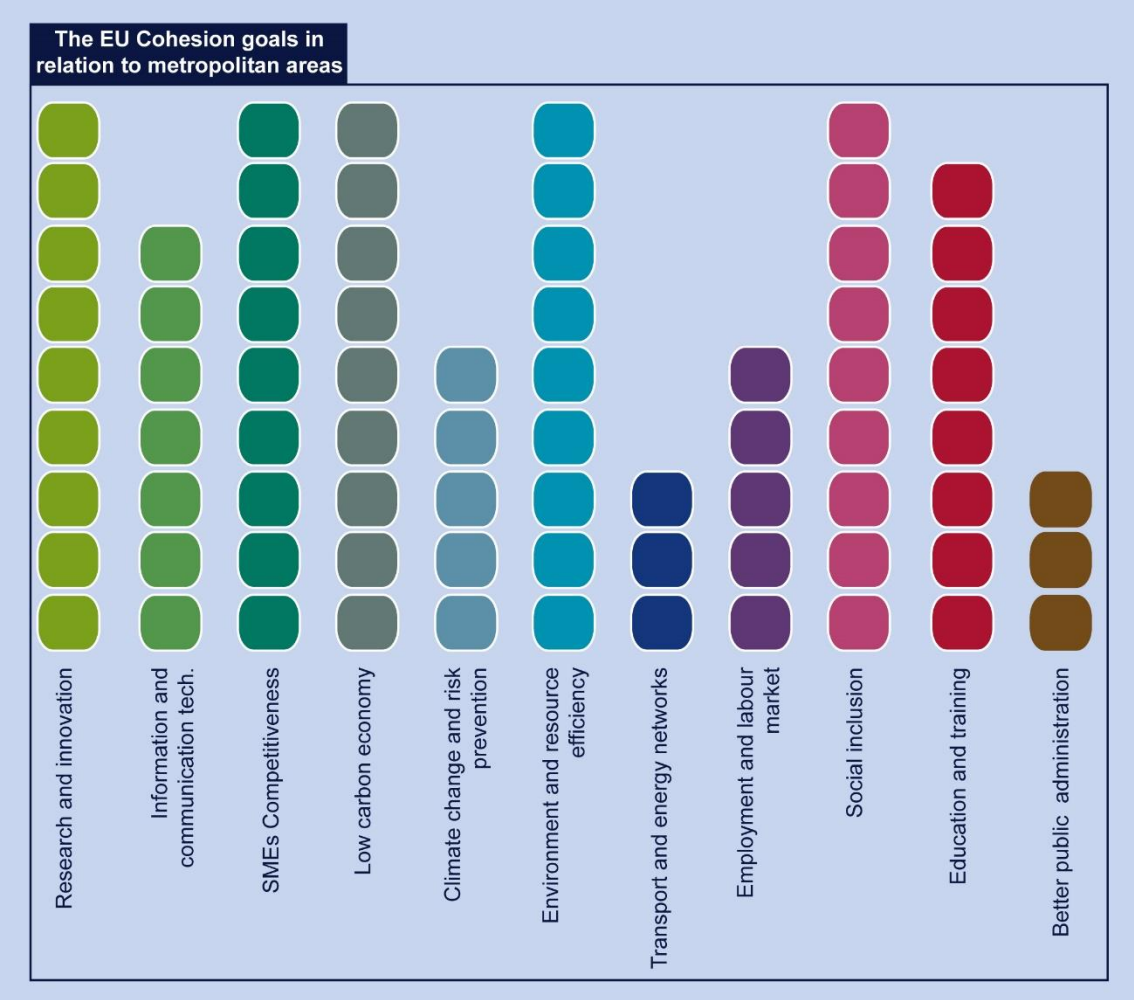
We identified three recurring features:

- Regional Operational Programmes are the cohesion policy programmes that have the most significant impact on metropolitan territories;
- Selected national/thematic OPs are also relevant for the development of metropolitan areas.
- Starting from the 2014-20 programming period, some metropolitan areas benefited from the management of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) (e.g Brno, Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, Lisbon, Lyon).

The Italian metropolitan cities of Florence and Turin, and the Barcelona metropolitan area (unique in its kind in Spain), are institutionalized metropolitan areas but are not managing any metropolitan ITI. The Barcelona Metropolitan Area however benefit from the devolution of the management of a dedicated ERDF envelope from the Catalan ERDF OP. The Metropolitan cities of Florence and Turin have some room for manoeuvre since they also act as intermediate bodies in the management of selected priorities of the respective ESF ROPs. The Brussels-Capital Region features a peculiar situation shared with only a handful of other cases in Europe (e.g. Wien and the German city-states). Belgium is a highly decentralised country, and regional operational programmes are the most relevant vehicles of EU cohesion policy delivery. However, the Brussels functional urban area exceeds the territory of the Brussels-Capital Region by large, and any metropolitan use of the EU cohesion policy would require important coordination efforts in the absence of a dedicated configuration.

The analysis of the adopted thematic objectives confirms the focus on research and innovation, ICT, SMEs' competitiveness, and low carbon economy, which are key priorities for developed regions as well less developed ones (Figure 1). Other thematic priorities across metropolitan areas concentrate in education and social inclusion, targeting deprived social groups, as well as environment and resource efficiency.

## Figure 1




Climate change and risk prevention as well public administration modernization objectives shows a lower recurrence. Also, the inclusion of employment and labour market thematic objective has a lower expression, reflecting the rather limited application of the ESF in some of the metropolitan areas of more developed regions. The thematic objective of transport and energy networks is associated to EU cohesion policy interventions mostly in the Eastern European metropolitan areas. Also the priority of administrative modernization is limited to a small number of metropolitan areas, namely both Italian metropolitan cities and Brno.

The thematic coverage of the EU cohesion policy instruments shows a wide spectrum among the metropolitan areas under scrutiny, ranging from extremely comprehensive in the Central and Eastern metropolitan areas (Brno, Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot and Riga) to more selective approaches, as in the case of Barcelona.

Overall, the analysed metropolitan areas produced are very diverse development strategies largely overlapping with the EU cohesion policy priorities, in so doing contributing to enhance its effectiveness on the ground, while at the same seeing their role in planning and development policies strengthened. Overall, metropolitan areas face complex social and economic problems (mobility, environmental transition, digitalization, job creation, economic development, housing, etc.) that cannot be tackled at the municipal level, and require coordination across local administrative boundaries. Due to their very nature as catalyst of intermunicipal cooperation, they are in a very good position to participate in the EU cohesion policy, implementing projects and in some cases, also coordinating specific instruments, hence improving the impact of EU funding. Metropolitan governance facilitates sectoral and local policies coordination, contributing to a more effective delivery of economic, social and territorial cohesion on the ground.

**HOT SPOT MESSAGES**

The EU cohesion policy objectives are coherent with the main goals of metropolitan development strategies. This coherence is higher in Central and Eastern European metropolitan areas in which metropolitan governance has been largely implemented through metropolitan ITIs.

## 1.2 Main challenges

The institutional dimension is still a relevant challenge for metropolitan areas. The involvement of metropolitan authorities in the EU cohesion policy occurs in various forms, which may favour or constrain the metropolitan development.

Integrated Territorial Investments are a prominent part of the EU cohesion policy in the 2014-20 period. Pooling some funds via metropolitan management and governance can bolster positive effects, instead of each entity investing in its own territory, according to its own criteria, in territories that are, after all, are fairly interconnected within functional urban area.

A major challenge for many metropolitan areas derives from core city prominence and agenda setting power that is politically difficult to circumvent. To overcome this challenge, it is important to dedicate coordination efforts to the joint definition of shared strategies and to strengthen horizontal and vertical cooperation dynamics among the stakeholders of the metropolitan area and between these stakeholders and the regional and national authorities responsible for the EU cohesion policy.

**HOT SPOT MESSAGES**

When the institutionalization of a metropolitan areas goes hand in hand with higher degree of the EU cohesion policy decentralization, through ITI or/and as Intermediate Bodies, it is possible to bolster the impact of the cohesion policy at the metropolitan level.

# 2 Coherence between EU and metropolitan priorities

Metropolitan areas have been recipients of a large majority of the 11 thematic priorities that underpinned the EU cohesion policy in the 2014-20 programming period, even if the resources delivered through the latter were not necessarily managed by the metropolitan institutions themselves. In turn, the EU cohesion policy objectives appear to be coherent with the main goals of metropolitan cooperation. The actual level of coherence and the drivers behind it are differential, and vary from context to context, mostly as a consequence of the different institutional nature of the metropolitan areas under investigation and the mechanisms through which they have engaged through time in the EU cohesion policy.

Overall, a number of mechanisms of influence exists, that contribute to enhance the coherence between the EU cohesion policy priorities and the goals and priorities underpinning metropolitan strategies and policies, ranging from economic conditionality to social learning, up to direct top-down influence. More in detail, four models of influence can be identified (Figure 2).

**Circular dynamics and mutual influence**. Characterised by both top-down and bottom-up logics of Europeanisation, that circularly contribute to enhance the coherence between the European and the metropolitan dimension. This model concerns metropolitan areas that are characterised by their own development agenda and priorities, while at the same time are entrusted with the management of a more or less relevant amount of EU cohesion policy resources. (e.g. in the case of Barcelona, Lisbon and Lyon, where the metropolitan authorities successfully attempted to upload specific priorities on the regional and national agendas).

**Top-down influence.** Areas, that are mostly subject to top-down influences, that contribute to the development of metropolitan development strategies and polices that are shaped on the priorities of the EU cohesion policy. This case concerns those metropolitan areas that, due to their scarce institutionalisation, were not characterised by a consolidated metropolitan agenda, and were then entrusted with the development and management of a dedicated EU cohesion policy strategy (e.g.

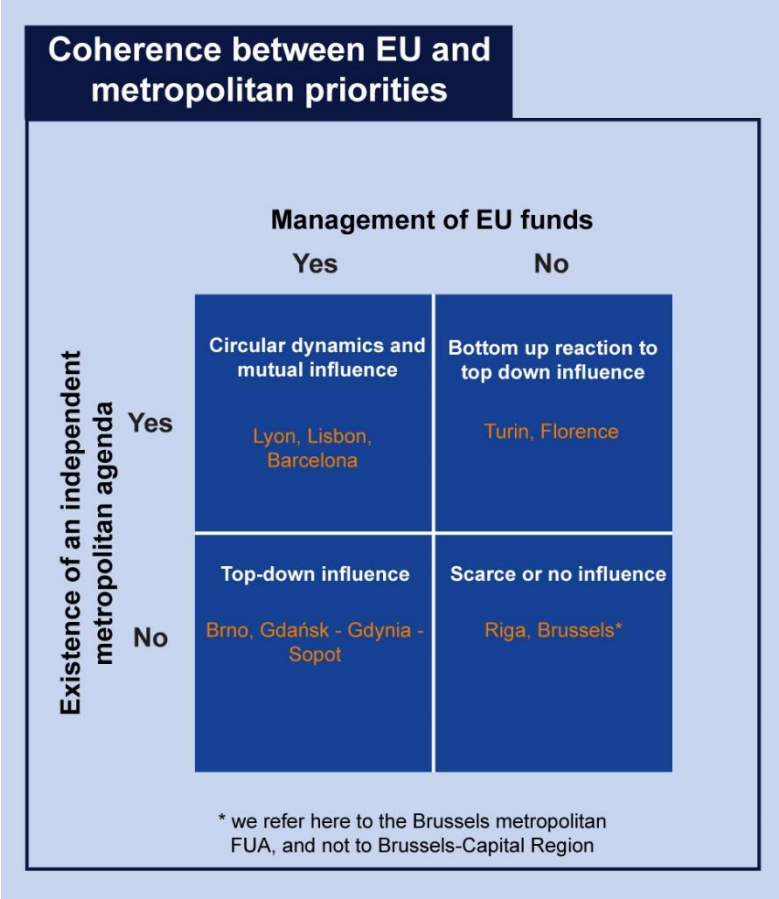
in the case of the Metropolitan Areas of Brno and Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot that, when awarded the ITI, tailored its strategy over the EU cohesion policy priorities, and have been attempting to reflect on their peculiar development challenges at a later stage. Box 1).

**Bottom-up reaction to top-down influence**. A third case concerns those metropolitan areas that are sufficiently institutionalised to develop their own development strategies and policies, but neither possess an adequate level of financial resources to implement them nor are entrusted with the management of a relevant share of the EU cohesion policy. (e.g. the cases of Florence ad Turin, where metropolitan authorities shaped their own strategies and policies in a way that will then allow for maximising the channelling of ESIF over the identified actions. See Box 2)

**Scarce or no influence**. Finally, there are contexts in which no metropolitan institution exists that is responsible for the development of any metropolitan strategy or policy and, at the same time, the national and/or regional bodies responsible for the programming and management of the EU cohesion policy decide, either willingly or due to particular constrains, not to adopt any specific instrument with metropolitan scope (e.g. in the case of Brussels metropolitan area, where the complex institutional framework and the low amount of delivered resources prevent the establishment of a metropolitan development strategy, or the case of Riga, where the absence of a dedicated institution prevented until now the development of a metropolitan agenda).

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

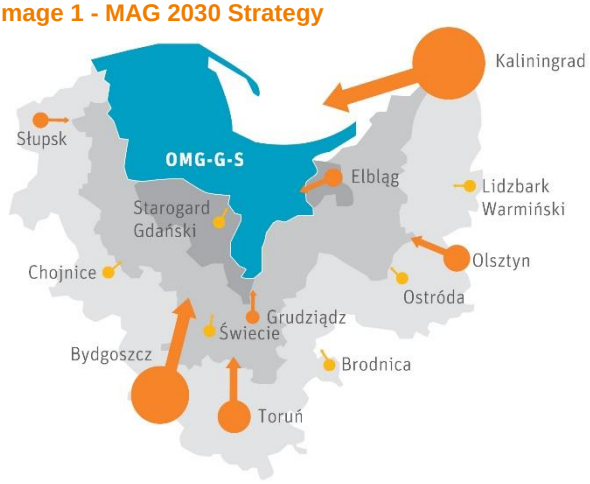
**Figure 2**



CASE STUDY

## Box 1_Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area Strategy (MAG 2030 Strategy)

**Image 1 - MAG 2030 Strategy**

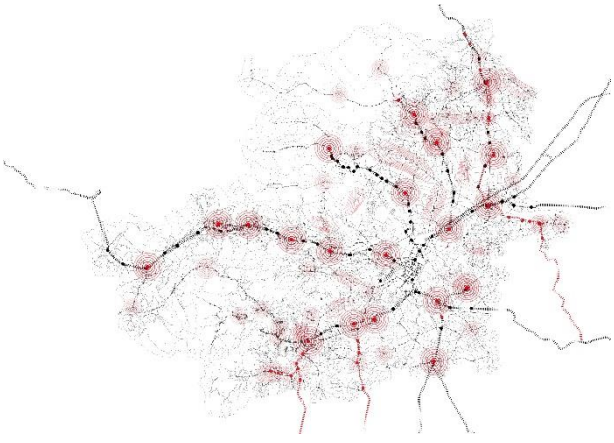



The MAG Strategy 2030 is a complex strategy including the MAG Spatial Development Plan 2030, the Transport and Mobility Strategy and the Low-Emission Economy Plan. The main conceptual assumption of the metropolitan strategy is to expand and complete local and sectoral development strategies for the area with goals, activities and projects, the effective and efficient implementation of which is possible only at the metropolitan area level. In addition to the strategy, the metropolitan area can count on the ITI instrument, which is currently the only funding instrument under the management of the MAG Association. The level of coherence between MAG Strategy 2030 and ITI programme goals and priorities is very high due to the local interest to create synergies between metropolitan instruments and the EU cohesion policy. However, the strategy goes beyond (by expanding) the EU cohesion policy provisions by highlighting some context-depended issues that need to be tackled at the metropolitan level.

CASE STUDY

## Box 2_Strategic Plan of the Metropolitan City of Turin

**Image 2 - Strategic Plan of Metropolitan City of Turin**



According to the law 56/14, metropolitan cities are responsible for the development of the metropolitan strategic plan – a guidance and programming document for the social, economic and environmental development of the metropolitan area - that is valid for three years and updated annually. In the case of the Metropolitan City of Turin, the Metropolitan Strategic Plan 2021-2023, *'Torino Metropoli Aumentata'* was adopted in 2021 after a participatory process (from September to December 2020) that involved several hundred people. The plan is divided into 6 priority axes, each axis comprises a sequence of strategies, and each strategy unfolds into a series of actions to be implemented. In total, the plan proposes 24 strategies and 111 actions. As regards the coherence with EU cohesion policy, the strategic plan is in close connection with the Next Generation EU objectives, the EU programming period 2021-27, and with those of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which are also of crucial importance for the future of the metropolitan city of Turin. Interestingly, despite having no role in managing EU cohesion policy, the metropolitan area has chosen to align its strategic plan to the EU cohesion policy and it did it on voluntary base.

# 3 Funds in metropolitan areas: magnitude, geographical distribution and priorities

The analysis of nine metropolitan areas across Europe has shown a great diversity in metropolitan cooperation and the way the EU cohesion policy may produce an added value. The magnitude of funds and the institutional configuration of the metropolitan areas are the main variables influencing the added value of the EU cohesion policy on the planning and implementation of metropolitan strategies and policies. **Hence, any policy recommendation should take into account the amount of EU funding that are available as well as the existing institutional conditions.**

## 3.1 Magnitude

The magnitude of funds has been identified as a main driver of the potential influence of the EU cohesion policy on metropolitan development and governance. This is however not as straightforward as it seems, because, in most of the cases, these funds are not managed by metropolitan institutions (also where their formally exists).

To assess the quantitative importance of the EU funds a distinction can be made between funds flowing into the metropolitan territory and those for which metropolitan institutions are entrusted with a management function. However, due to the fact that also institutionalized metropolitan areas may feature small budgets, compared to those of regions and municipalities, the EU funds may constitute a significant share of metropolitan budget, despite their limited amount (figure 3).

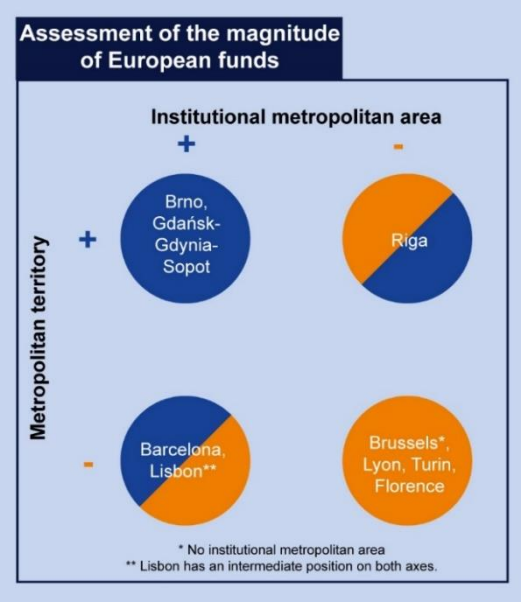
More in detail, from the ESPON METRO case studies it emerges that most metropolitan areas in located in Western European countries can rely on rather low relative amount of ESIF. This is particularly true in relation to the cases of the *Métropole de Lyon* and of Brussels-Capital Region, that are among the wealthiest areas in Europe, and are characterised by ESIF shares that lands on the ground that represent less than the 0,5 % of the public expenses, when compared to the budgets of Brussels-Capital Region and of the *Métropole de Lyon*.

In the case of Italian metropolitan cities of Florence and Turin, the EU funds also appear limited, both for what concerns the total amount of funds that flow to the metropolitan area (e.g. though actions funded by the ESF and ERDF ROPs), and the funds that are specifically managed by institutions located in the metropolitan areas (e.g. specific ROP ESF priorities or the NOP METRO).

In the case of case of Barcelona, the ERDF share managed by the Metropolitan Area, although limited in absolute terms, accounts for the 16.5% of the institution's investment budget, raising its relevance for the metropolitan area activities. The Lisbon Metropolitan Area shows a similar situation. However, in this case the amount of ESIF is higher in both absolute and relative terms, with the resources delivered through the ROP that represent between 5 and 10% of the relevant local public budgets, and the share of the ESIF delivered through the ITI that increases the budget of the metropolitan authority be over 40%

Finally, the Central and Eastern European cases emerge among the lot. In Riga metropolitan area, the total amount of ESIF delivered through different means is much higher in absolute terms than, for example, the one that concerns the Brussels and Lyon cases, despite a much lower population (however, no institution exists managing these resources from a metropolitan perspective). the cases of Brno and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot. In the Czech Republic, the ESIF represent around 10% of public expenditures and in the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area the resources delivered through the EU cohesion policy account for around 9% of the public expenditures of all municipalities and counties included.

**Figure 3**



## 3.2 Geographical distribution

The impact of EU funds becomes even more complex when the thematic and geographical distribution is considered. Indeed, for some areas or theme, EU funds may have a significant impact, even in cases where the global amount is limited.

Comparing the case studies according to the spatial distribution of EU funds on the ground, two main aspects emerge:

- In most cases, the core area – in general the central municipality – get the higher share of the EU funds. But when compared to the share of population of the metropolitan area, we may clearly distinguish between cities where funds are concentrated in the core (Barcelona, Brno), and those where a higher concentration exists in selected peripheral areas, as for instance in the cases of Riga and the two Italian metropolitan cities (see the example of the Florence Metropolitan Area in Box 3);
- in detail, the geographical distribution depends on many factors, such as the thematic priorities on which more emphasis is put (e.g. infrastructures, green areas, etc.), but also the ability of municipalities to attract funds because of their specific experience and knowledge in answering the OPs calls or specific agreements in place (as the special ERDF envelop directly managed by the municipality of Barcelona or the management of NOP METRO resources by central municipalities in the Italian Metropolitan Cities). This last consideration is highly relevant, since it may lead to geographical distribution which is not related to the objective needs of the territory, as defined by the public authority, hence reinforcing existing disequilibria and preventing the achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

## 3.3 Thematic distribution

The thematic distribution differs among the metropolitan areas analysed in the METRO project. Each metropolitan area has addressed a number of priorities in line with local needs and challenges. In the cases of Central and Eastern metropolitan areas, the accent is mostly put on infrastructures and innovation. This is particularly the case in Brno, where mobility and transport benefit from 61% of the ITI programme for 2014-20. A similar share is found in Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot. As far as Riga is concerned, the focus on transport infrastructure is less strong, with around one third of the total amount of EU funds that flow into the metropolitan area.

Although less evident, a similar trend is observed for the metropolitan cities of Florence and Turin. In Florence, transport (25%) and R&D (27%) account for more than half of the total, while in Turin R&D - by far the most relevant domain - accounts for 30% of the total.

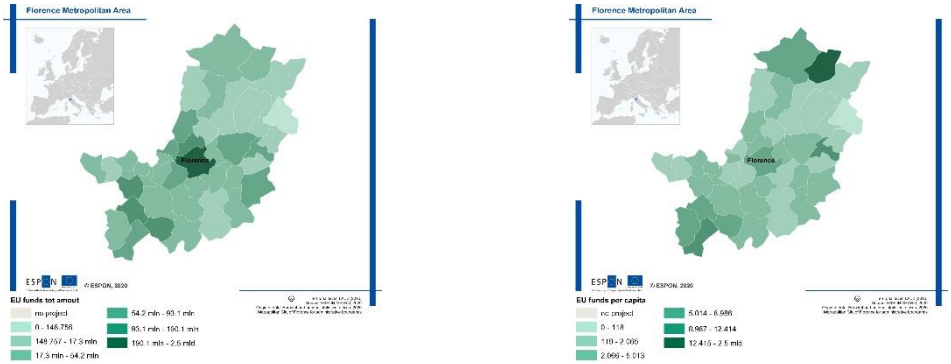
In Barcelona, instead, if we look at the whole amount of money distributed in the metropolitan area, the main focus concerns economic development. On the other hand, when examining the distribution of the resources directly managed by the metropolitan area, there are mostly dedicated to environmental-related aspects.

In Brussels and Lyon, where the total amount of EU funds is limited, EU funds are used to complement existing spending or, in some cases, as opportunities to invest in projects that would not have been financed otherwise. In particular, the Lyon case shows a prominence of social cohesion related investments, that also concern la large share of intervention implemented in the Brussels Capital Region.

Finally, Lisbon shows a peculiar thematic pattern in relation to the distribution of its funds (see box 4). On the one hand, the focus on R&D or business issues (through support to SMEs) is similar to the previous cases, accounting for 50% of the whole EU funding. On the other hand, social-related issues (poverty, discrimination or education and training) as well as environmental-related issues (low-carbon economy, environmental protection and energy efficiency, worker's mobility) each account for around a quarter of the EU funds in the metropolitan area.

CASE STUDY

## Box 3_The distribution of EU cohesion policy funds in the Metropolitan City of Florence, Italy

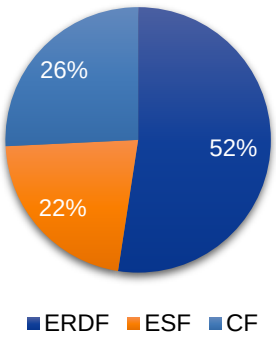



According to the data gathered, the core municipality (Florence) attracts most of EU funds in absolute values. This might depend by the fact that the core municipality is in charge of some EU cohesion policy programmes like the NOP METRO which is mostly targeted to capital cities. Another reason might be the spatial distribution of population, which see the core city as the most populated area. However, when considering the funds distributed per capita, the picture is rather different. Apart from some municipalities (generally the less populated) that have a high per capita ratio, in the rest of metropolitan municipalities the situation is more homogenous showing a more balanced distribution of funds.

CASE STUDY

## Box 4_Thematic distribution of EU funds in Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Portugal

The total EU funding distributed through the EU cohesion policy on the Lisbon metropolitan area reaches € 1,5 million. The largest share originates from the Lisbon Regional Operational Programme (ROP) (57%), trailed by the Sustainability and Efficiency in the Use of Resources NOP (24%). The remaining OPs have modest shares in the total investment in the metropolitan area. ERDF contributions amount to more than 50% of total EU funding in the Lisbon metropolitan area, and the remaining amount is divided into almost identical parts between the Cohesion Fund (26%) and the ESF (22%). Considering the Lisbon ROP and the Lisbon metropolitan area Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI), the approved funding amounts to € 810 million, which is mostly concentrated on three sectors: research, technological development and innovation, SMEs competitiveness and internationalization, and social domains (social cohesion, health, and education as well urban sustainable development). The ITI intervention totals € 93,4 million. It prioritizes social integration, fight to poverty and discrimination, and education. Environment is also a relevant sector of funding concentration. Conversely, there is no funding for business or innovation and technological development in the ITI.



# 4 Experiences and lessons in the field of EU cohesion policy

## 4.1 Successful stories

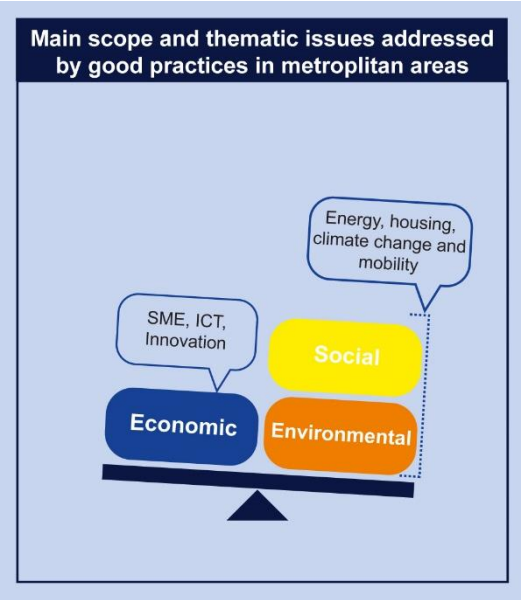
Since the first launch of the EU cohesion policy, territories have largely benefited from the EU funds and myriad of projects have been implemented throughout the continent. The projects' outcomes have been rather heterogeneous as well as the scope and thematic issues they addressed. Recently, also metropolitan areas have been benefitting from EU funds, being responsible of the implementation of a growing number of initiatives leading to a number of successful outcomes.

As the EU programming period 2014-20 has come to an end, it is interesting to reflect on some of the lesson learned and on the nature of the impacts that the good practices identified in the METRO research have produced at the metropolitan level, dedicating particular attention to the scope and the thematic issues addressed, the role that metropolitan area played in the process and the results achieved.

### 4.1.1 Main scope and thematic issues

Notwithstanding the diversity of projects and the contextual aspects that may have characterized each experience, some common trends are identifiable among the good practices highlighted in the METRO case studies. The majority of project are mainly concentrated into the social and environmental areas of interest whereas only in a few cases, the attention is more focused on the economic dimension (Figure 4). This may depend on a series of factors and territorial specificities that somehow influence the action of metropolitan areas, but also on the type and quantity of resources they have access to. An even more heterogeneous picture emerges when thematic issues are considered. In this light, thematic issues like innovation and energy efficiency are at the top of the political agenda, followed by housing, climate change and sustainable mobility, as for example in Brno with the implementation of the Networks of cycle paths in Šlapanice and the transfer terminal in Židlochovice (see Box 5).

**Figure 4**



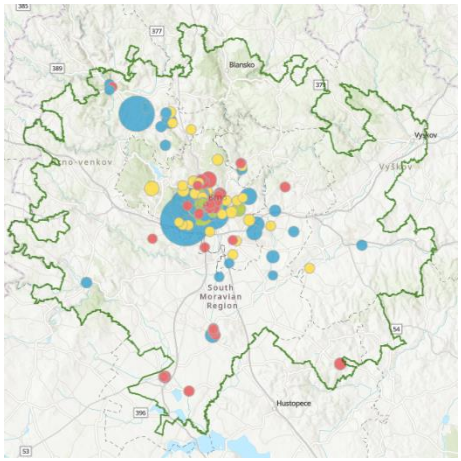

### 4.1.2 What role for metropolitan areas?

The role of metropolitan areas can vary according to the nature of the projects they implement, from participating as observers to acting as project coordinator. In some cases, metropolitan areas are only informed about the project implementation, with no direct involvement. In other cases, metropolitan areas can be observers however having no formal role and responsibility, but can gain knowledge and skills in the process. In some cases, as beneficiaries, metropolitan areas can take part to projects as partners with selected responsibilities. This happens often when it comes to the participation to actions funded through European Territorial Cooperation programmes, as the metropolitan city of Turin has done several times in the framework of the Interreg ALCOTRA programme (see Box 6). There are cases where metropolitan areas act as lead partner with a full organisation and operational role, as in the case of a Urbact III project, in which the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona has been involved. Finally, metropolitan areas can play a coordinating role when it comes to implementing ITI projects. In these cases, the role mostly concerns the coordination of local units in presenting integrated projects rather than being directly involved in the process of projects implementation, e.g. in the case of the Metropolitan Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change developed in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area.

CASE STUDY

## Box 5_Networks of cycle paths in Šlapanice and the transfer terminal in Židlochovice, Brno Metropolitan Area.

**Image 3 - Distribution of funding in the metropolitan area**



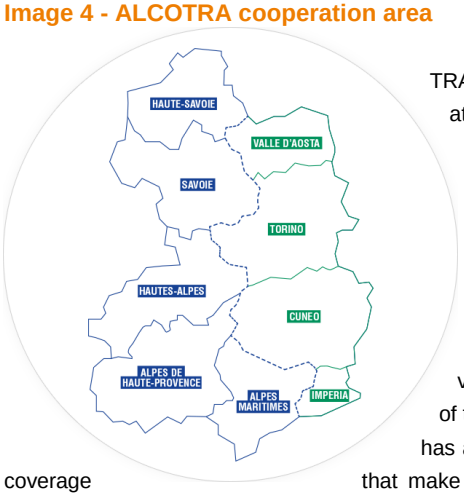

Brno Metroplitan Area is benefiting from EU funds and in particular from a dedicated ITI programme. Among the projects implemented so far, the networks of cycle paths in Šlapanice and the transfer terminal in Židlochovice are interesting cases to explore.

Concerning the networks of cycle paths in Šlapanice, more than 20 municipalities associated in the voluntary union of municipalities of Šlapanicko to increase mutual connectivity building new sections of cycle paths in the Šlapanice area. The completion of over 11 km of new cycle paths connects in a network several municipalities of Telnice, Sokolnice, Kobylnice, Ponětovice and Šlapanice with Brno neighbourhoods of Slatina and Černovická terasa including connections to the existing sections of the international path from Brno to Vienna. Furthermore, the enlargement of the network included the construction of connecting paths in Blažovice, Prace, Kurim, Lipůvka Slavkov u Brna and Hodějice. The transfer terminal in Židlochovice is an example of crucial transport infrastructure which is built in the suburban hinterland of Brno due to inhabitants' need to commute to the city of Brno. Thanks to the Cohesion Fund, the line between Hrušovany u Brna and Židlochovice has been modernized and electrified, increasing the efficiency of this railway connection in terms of speed and frequency. In parallel with the modernization of the railway line, a transfer terminal was constructed in Židlochovice as modern hub that links train, bus, private car, bicycle and pedestrian traffic. Since its success, similar projects will be in the focus of metropolitan cooperation also in the future to enhance mobility through efficient transport connection and commuting between the core city of Brno and towns and villages of the metropolitan area.

CASE STUDY

## Box 6_The Metropolitan City of Turin in Interreg ALCOTRA programme

**Image 4 - ALCOTRA cooperation area**




In the framework of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes, the most relevant for the Metropoltian City of Turin is Interreg ALCOTRA (Alpi Latine Cooperazione TRAnsfrontaliera), the cross-border cooperation programme that covers the Alpine territory between France and Italy, financed by the ERDF. Since 1990, the programme has financed almost 600 projects for about €550 million in EU grants. The territory of the Metropolitan City of Turin is fully eligible for participation in the programme. In 2014-20 programming period, many authorities have submitted project proposals and more than 71 projects with at least one partner belonging to the metropolitan territory have been financed for a total of € 32 million. In 16 of them, the Turin metropolitan area was involved as partner, being lead partner in 7 of them. This high performance of the metropolitan area and its municipalities in participating to ALCOTRA has at least two reasons. The first is related with its territorial proximity and coverage that make ALCOTRA the most reachable EU programme for the metropolitan actors. The second concerns the fact that the Metropolitan City of Turin is member of the monitoring committee ad actively included in the governance of the programme. Being involved as such makes the metropolitan area more conscious on the programming mechanisms as well as on the reference role it can play for local municipalities in the process of coordination.

### 4.1.3 The added value of good practices

In general terms, all METRO metropolitan areas have benefited from more or less relevant added value from interventions deriving from the EU cohesion policy. The added value brought by the implementation of projects under the EU cohesion policy differs across cases (Figure 5)

First of all, it is important to highlight that the implementation of EU funded projects has contributed to improve the coordination capacity of the authorities involved. This can be seen both in vertical terms – **increasing coordination** between administrative levels (central, regional, and local) – as well as horizontally among authorities within each level. An example in this concern resides in the *Metropoli Strategiche* project, financed by the Italian NOP Governance, which has brought together all metropolitan areas discussing issues related to institutional innovation, organizational change, and skills development for the full implementation of integrated policies on a metropolitan scale.

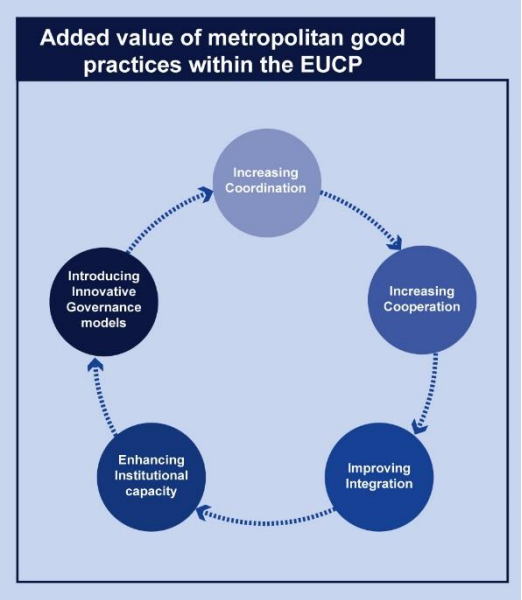
Also the **increasing cooperation** among societal actors and institutions is an important legacy of the EU cohesion policy. This is particularly important in cases where projects implementation require the participation of societal actors. This is the case of Barcelona, Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Lisbon, Lyon and Turin metropolitan areas, where the involvement of societal actors in projects is seen as an asset to further increase the impact of projects on their respective territories.

Another key factor that the implementation of project has brought seems to be the **improvement of integration** among sectoral policies. This is particularly visible in the cases of Brno and Riga where the management of a dedicated ITI allowed the metropolitan areas (the municipality in the case of Riga to integrate sectoral initiatives.

Importantly, the participation of EU funding projects has also allowed metropolitan areas to **enhance institutional capacities** (in technical and organizational terms) that in turn became a successful factor in projects implementation. This is particularly interesting as far as the participation to programmes with a network character is concerned is concerned. Indeed, in the case of Barcelona metropolitan area the implementation of URBACT III projects has enhanced the administrative capacity to deal with specific urban issues.

Finally, the management and implementation of EU projects has also introduced some forms of **innovative governance** mechanisms, that are usually promoted by EU programmes. These mechanisms benefited from a different levels of formalization, but what is interesting is that metropolitan areas used the experience gained from the projects to experiment with different models of governance and learned by doing so.

**Figure 5**




# 5 What metropolitan areas are better positioned to benefit from the EU cohesion policy added value (and why)?

As shown by the numerous good practices collected in the ESPON METRO case study, the EU cohesion policy potentially delivers an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies. The possibility to be directly involved in the EU cohesion policy mechanisms and to benefit from its resources is however differential, and may depend on a number of different variables. Building on the collected evidence, it is possible to reflect in a more structured man-

ner on the conditions that may allow the EU cohesion policy to produce an added value on the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies, and why is it so.

More in detail the potential for a metropolitan area to benefit from the EU cohesion policy added value seems to depend on three main variables: (i) the relative magnitude of funds delivered (ii) the level of institutionalization of metropolitan governance and cooperation and its coherence with functional phenomena and (ii) the devolution of the management of the EU cohesion policy resources to metropolitan institutions.

In relation to these three variable, a number of simple assumptions can be put forward:

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

Following these assumptions, the ideal condition in which the potential for the EU cohesion policy to produce an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies is higher in the presence of high levels of funding, that are managed (e.g. through a ITI) by a formal metropolitan institution whose boundaries overlap perfectly with those of the metropolitan functional area, and decreases as much as these situation differs from these ideal conditions (figure 6).

More in detail, the possible added value is still **high** also in the presence of a high magnitude of funds that are directly managed at the metropolitan level, despite the absence of a fully-fledged metropolitan authority (as in Brno and Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot). This situation allows to develop a metropolitan agenda that is to a large extent geographically tailored on the functional metropolitan phenomena, at the same time triggering virtuous processes of metropolitan institutionalisation.

Conversely, despite the high magnitude of funds, the potential to produce a meaningful added value is **likely low** were and no metropolitan institution exists to directly advocate in favour of a valorisation of the metropolitan dimension (e.g. Riga), and the metropolitan added value of the EU cohesion policy can only be increased through a change in the priorities and logics of the national and local stakeholders.

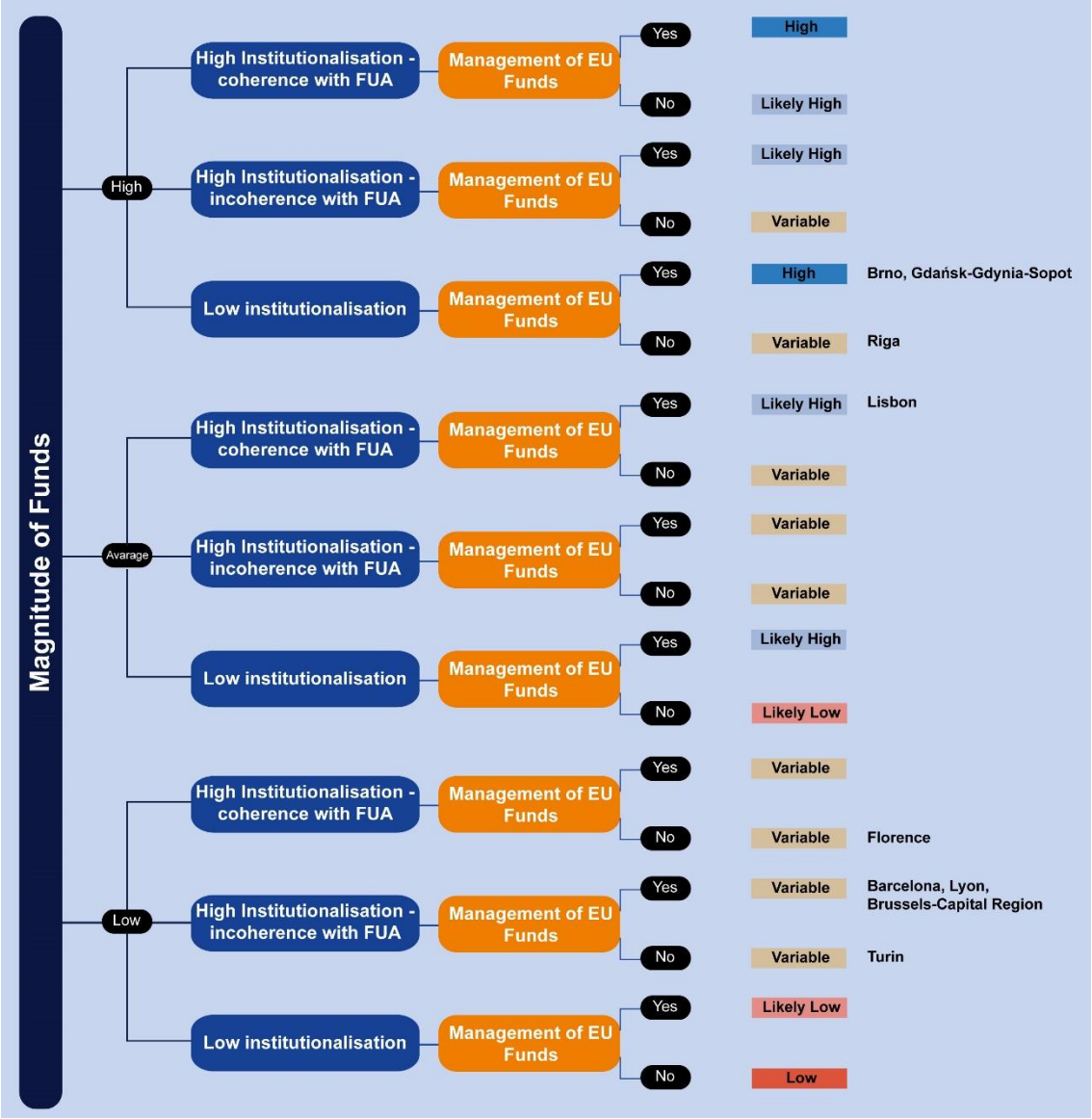
The potential to generate an added through the EU cohesion policy is also **likely high**, when an institutional metropolitan authority is responsible for managing an average amount of resources over a territory more or less coherent with its FUA. This situation allows experimenting with metropolitan governance and coordination, and to look for synergies between the EU cohesion policy and other metropolitan instruments and policies (e.g. in the case of Lisbon).

In most of the analysed metropolitan areas the potential to produce a **metropolitan added value varies as a consequence of specific local conditions and dedicated efforts**. For example, for metropolitan areas that concerns a territory that is to a certain extent comparable to its functional dynamics, but ESIF are not directly managed to a relevant extent (e.g. in the Metropolitan City of Florence), the added value that can be generated depends on the quality of the governance and coordination relations that are in place between the metropolitan authority and the authorities responsible for the management of the EU cohesion policies programmes. In case of a large misfits between the territory managed by the metropolitan institution and the actual FUA (e.g. in the case of Turin) additional efforts are required in terms of territorial coordination. Interestingly, in this case a potential also emerges to deliver a larger impact, through the innovative use of multiple instruments in relation to different types of territories. Also in the presence of resources that are directly managed but scarce in magnitude (e.g. in the cases of Lyon, Lisbon and Brussels) the potential impact is variable and depends on the ongoing territorial coordination efforts.

As a conclusion, it is worth underlining that goal of the proposed classification is potentially useful to allow metropolitan stakeholders to position themselves within a comprehensive framework and to gain useful insights on what added value the EU cohesion policy can generate in their case, what are the variables determining it, and what are the actions they may want to pursue in order to improve their situation.

## Figure 6

### The differential potential of the EU cohesion policy to produce an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies




Authors own elaboration

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

Although the pandemic is not concluded yet and citizens' life is still affected by restrictions and impediments, metropolitan areas should reflect on the role they played in tackling the emergency and how they have taken advantage of the EU cohesion policy when doing so. As far as the metropolitan involvement is concerned, the METRO case studies' reactions to the pandemic have been rather heterogeneous as well as the set of policy responses they have activated. Even when we look at the measures of adaptation, the panorama echoed a variety of tendencies across the metropolitan areas under investigation.

## 6.1 The level of Metropolitan involvement

Each metropolitan area has been impacted by the pandemic and suffered the consequences of the emergency. Despite the territorial implication of the pandemic and the diversity of consequences it brought in metropolitan areas, each context reacted differently according to the domestic institutional arrangement (see for examples Box 7). In addition, the use of EU cohesion funds as a response to the pandemic has been different from one context to another and generally rather low. Four different attitudes have been identified (see Figure 7).

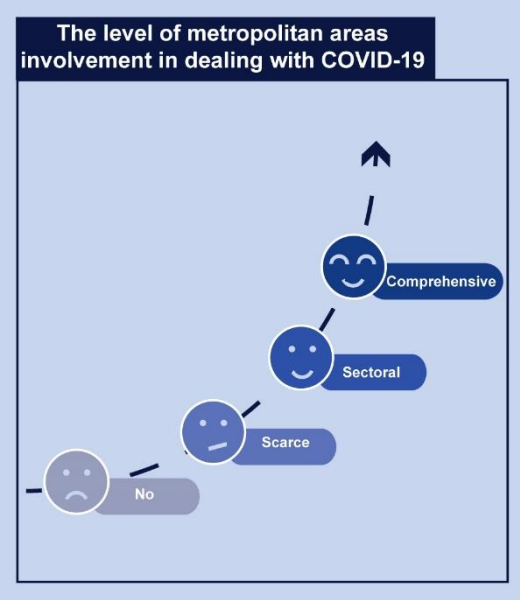
There are cases where there is **no involvement** of the metropolitan authorities in addressing the pandemic. Thus, metropolitan authorities have had no role in the implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures. This is particularly true for those contexts where, their institutional role notwithstanding, metropolitan **actors had not enough room for action** in facing the emergency.

In other cases, there has been a **scarce involvement** of the metropolitan authorities, which have had a very limited role in addressing the emergency. They did it by **readjusting some priorities or allocating limited EU resource** to the tackle the emergency. This is true for those cases where metropolitan areas have been somehow allowed to manage EU funds.

In other cases, there has been a **sectoral involvement** of the metropolitan authorities. Metropolitan authorities have had room for the implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures, mainly based on **sectoral issues and short-term, reactive logics**.

Finally, whereas in some cases in Europe there may have been a more **comprehensive involvement** of the metropolitan authorities, that had the opportunity (and the power) to implement metropolitan measures in addressing the emergency, no metropolitan area under scrutiny in the METRO project show this tendency.

**Figure 7**




## 6.2 Nature of policy responses

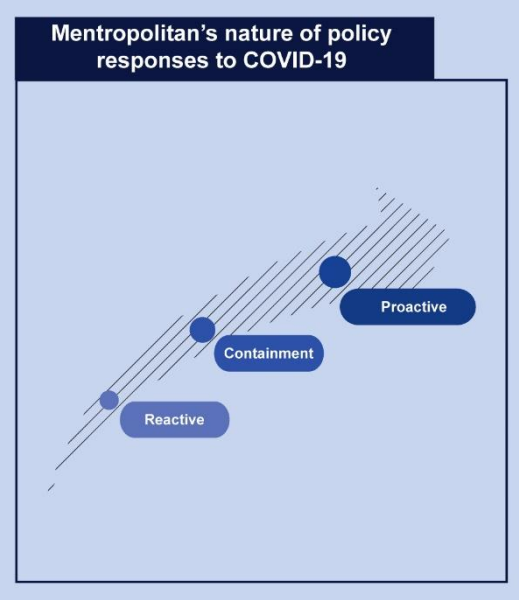
Territories are diverse across the EU as well as the policy responses that they gave to the pandemic (see Figure 8). The case of the pandemic has shown once again to what extent the territorial dimension matters in addressing complex and often unpredictable issues. Regarding the pandemic, the heterogeneity of metropolitan areas is reflected also concerning the policy responses they gave (see for examples Box 8). Although in the majority of cases, as said, the metropolitan areas have had limited room for action, where this has been possible the measures undertaken have been very diverse. Far for representing an exhaustive explanation, there are some convergent behaviours that have characterized the reaction of the METRO areas towards the pandemic. In some cases, responses have been **reactive**, with metropolitan authorities that promoted short-term measures where decisions are

taken under pressure and aiming at giving an **immediate response** to the pandemic.

In other cases, metropolitan areas have adopted a **containment driven** approach, with metropolitan authorities that have implemented ad hoc actions and projects to limit the spread of the pandemic on their territories, for instance temporarily reforming the public transport system and favouring soft mobility.

Finally, in other cases, measures have been **proactive driven**, with metropolitan authorities that supported the implementation of long-term measures where **decisions are taken according to a more strategic approach**, in order to produce an impact that will extend also to the aftermath of the pandemic. This actions have been implemented shifting investments shares from sectors less affected by the pandemic to sectors that will have more attention after COVID-19 like environment, online education, capacity building, sustainable transport etc.

**Figure 8**




## 6.3 Nature of the measures put in place to react to the pandemic

The nature of the measures applied to react to the pandemic varies across the analysed cases. According to the experiences gathered for the METRO case studies, it is possible to distinguish three categories of responses based on the diversity of instruments used to address the COVID-19 issue: incentives, projects and strategies.

In a number of cases, incentive-based initiatives have been implemented. Those initiatives mainly consist on allocating funds to support sectors and/or social groups particularly affected by the pandemic, as for instance in Lyon where cohesion funds have been used for targeted interventions on some problematic areas such as those related to social cohesion and unemployment. These incentive-based initiatives are seen as a way to alleviate contingent emergency problems.

At the same time, in various places there was a proliferation of *ad hoc* projects that helped metropolitan areas to implement short-term initiatives aiming at softening the impact of the COVID-19. Usually those projects target specific issues to help communities.

Examples of proactive and future-oriented measures (i.e. long-term strategies) are scarcer. in this respect, is worth to mention the New Mobility Pact adopted by the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, which exploited the momentum to go beyond the emergency towards the definition of a post-pandemic scenario where sustainable mobility will definitely play a crucial role.

Finally, it is interesting to notice that no metropolitan areas have approved specific regulative measures, hinting a lack of competence in this concern. With the main normative restrictions that have been introduced by the national, regional and local authorities.

**HOT SPOT MESSAGES**

### How metropolitan areas have reacted to the pandemic

**Incentives** – metropolitan areas activate specific incentives (by allocated ad hoc funds) to support specific sectors or social categories.

**Strategies** – metropolitan areas take the momentum for introducing medium and long term sectoral strategies aiming at reducing the impact of the pandemic as well as increasing the quality of life of its territories.

**Projects** – metropolitan areas implement specific and circumscribed initiative to limit/mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

CASE STUDY

## Box 7_What metropolitan areas did to tackle the pandemic: the case of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot (Poland), Lyon (France) and Barcelona (Spain)

The Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area has undertaken several initiatives related to COVID-19, mainly of soft nature, such as measures in support to the local tourism industry, cultural initiatives, social initiatives in support to local restaurants, and social inclusion measures. This has been done using EU cohesion policy resources available through the ITI.

The *Métropole de Lyon* is directly acting on COVID-19 related issues through a set of dedicated measures: in 2020 it launched a €100 million emergency fund to support local businesses, to then adopt a series of deliberations supporting metropolitan social and health establishments, services dedicated to child protection and strengthening the fight against poverty with dedicated funds.

In Barcelona metropolitan area, two new extraordinary investment programmes were passed (i.e. PSA, ApropAMB) and a pact was adopted (i.e. New Mobility Pact), aimed at accelerating and promoting sustainable mobility and energy transition and supporting municipal initiatives.

CASE STUDY

## Box 8_What kind of measures have been taken in the metropolitan areas to tackle the pandemic – examples across METRO cases

**REACTIVE DRIVEN** - in Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area the majority of initiatives have been supportive-oriented aiming at alleviating the impact of the pandemic to certain sectors of social categories.

**CONTAINMENT DRIVEN** - in Lyon Metropolitan Area the readjustment of funds and the reassembling of priorities is made in the light of containing the pandemic emergency.

**PROACTIVE DRIVEN** – in Lisbon Metropolitan area a school digitising programme has been introduced while the Barcelona Metropolitan Area has adopted the New Mobility Pact aiming to influence the mobility system of the metropolitan area in the post-pandemic scenario.

# 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

As suggested by the information presented in this Policy Brief, the added value of the EU cohesion policy in metropolitan policies is variable across the ESPON METRO cases. In some cases, the metropolitan areas are in the condition to make a full use of EU cohesion policy in the planning and implementation of their strategies and policies, while in others the added value is more limited as, due to a number of reasons (i.e. low funding magnitude, level of institutionalisation, coherence with FUA and capability to manage funds) that prevent metropolitan areas to benefit from the EU cohesion policy potential to a full extent.

Aiming at increasing the soundness of EU cohesion policy added value, a list of general recommendations is here brought forward, targeting actor active at different scales. It is important to underline that these recommendations are rather general in nation and should be adapted to the different geographical and institutional contexts when taken on board in relation to concrete cases. Decision and policy makers active at the various territorial levels can take inspiration from these policy messages when rethinking and adapting their institutional and governance mechanisms in a way that contribute to increase the added value that the EU cohesion policy may deliver to the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies and strategies.

## 7.1 Recommendations for the metropolitan level

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

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

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

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

## 7.2 Recommendations for the national and regional institutions

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

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

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

(Metropolitan instruments) **Introduce programmes and instruments managed at the metropolitan level** (as dedicated Operational Programmes, ITIs or other ad hoc agreements), to guarantee the allocation of funding **enhancing vertical** (between different territorial levels) **and horizontal** (between sectors and funds) **coordination** in the definition of priorities and operational plans with a metropolitan dimension.

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

## 7.3 Recommendations for EU-level actors

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

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

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

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

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ESPON EGTC
4 rue Erasme, L-1468 Luxembourg
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
Phone: +352 20 600 280
Email: info@espon.eu
www.espon.eu

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**Authors**
Giancarlo Cotella, Erblin Berisha, Elisabetta Vitale Brovarone, Politecnico di Torino (Italy)
Mario Vale, Instituto de Geografia e Ordenamento do Território - ULisboa (Portugal),
Gilles Van Hamme, Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium)

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