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Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

POLICY BRIEF

The role of metropolitan areas in the EU cohesion policy

This policy brief focuses on the role that metropolitan area plays, and may play, in the development, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy. The information it includes is drawn from the ESPON METRO project, and in particular from the 9 in-depth case studies that have been analysed through the project: Barcelona Metropolitan Area, Brno Metropolitan Area, Brussels-Capital Region, Metropolitan City of Florence, Metropolitan Area of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, Lisbon Metropolitan Area, *Métropole de Lyon*, Riga Metropolitan Area, Metropolitan City of Turin. More in detail, the provided information discusses the different levels of engagement of metropolitan areas around Europe with the different stages of the EU cohesion policy development, the various programmes and instruments that have been put in place in different contexts as well as the coordination mechanisms that, in different metropolitan areas, have been put in place to ensure a stronger coherence between metropolitan governance and policy and the EU cohesion policy. The document will also reflect on the engagement of the business actors and the civil society, as well as on the role that metropolitan areas are playing in the framework of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

KEY POLICY MESSAGES

- **Metropolitan authorities/institutions should be involved in the EU cohesion policy programming**. The EU cohesion policy architecture and actors' influence at the various subnational levels varies from country to country. In most cases, metropolitan decision-makers have not been directly involved in the national EU cohesion policy framework design. Since EU metropolitan areas concentrate economic, social or environmental opportunities that are significant at the regional, national & EU levels, the inclusion of metropolitan stakeholders in the national consultations is highly recommendable. They can bring ideas complementary to those stemming from other subnational authorities and provided an important added value in relation to a number of issues of supralocal level (housing, transport and mobility, economic development, management of environmental resources etc.).
- **Metropolitan institutions as intermediate bodies or beneficiaries of OPs.** The governance of the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy is more or less centralised in the different European countries, depending on the differential administrative traditions and configurations. In most cases, however, the role of metropolitan areas remains limited, at best acting as intermediate bodies for dedicated agreements or specific priorities, and in most cases only benefiting from the EU cohesion policy as beneficiaries of funds that are programmed and managed by national and/or regional authorities. A stronger multilevel perspective that further engages metropolitan areas is essential to tackle the multifaceted challenges of metropolitan development in relation to those places where the high majority of the EU population lives and works.
- **Setting up Metropolitan Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs).** ITIs aim to implement territorial strategies for example in urban functional areas. It allows the Member States to combine investments from several priority axes of one or more OPs for multi-dimensional and cross-sectoral intervention. Their use is however not compulsory. The collected evidence suggests that ITIs constitute a promising tool for the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy at the metropolitan level, and its adoption should be encouraged further, to promote cross-sectoral action and intermunicipal cooperation.
- **Involvement of private operators and/or civil society.** Metropolitan areas are usually fragmented in various local governments, thus requiring some form of dialogue and cooperation across the institutional perimeters. The inclusion of all the interests that constitute a given metropolitan entity through their daily activities and cooperation is extremely important for the success of metropolitan projects. Limitations with this regard might result in a lack of critical mass of efforts necessary for changing the existing status quo in which metropolitan areas play only a secondary role.

Introduction

This Policy Brief try to provide evidence-based answer to the policy question "What role do metropolitan areas and cities play in the development, management and implementation of the European Union (EU) Cohesion Policy?". In doing so, examples from the case studies that have been investigated in the research activity of the ESPON METRO project are presented, to further substantiate the proposed arguments. More in detail, the following issues are touched upon:

- the **different level of engagement** of metropolitan areas in the development, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy;
- the range of **EU cohesion policy related instruments** that can be used by or for the Metropolitan areas to implement development policies or projects, or that other decisional levels may use to develop joint initiatives within metropolitan areas;
- the model and mechanisms of **coordination of the private sector and civil society** in the development, programming and implementation of EU Cohesion Policies;
- the engagement of **metropolitan actions in the development of the Recovery and Resilience Facility** and related national instruments, and the role that they can play in their implementation.

At first, a typological classification of the EU countries in relation to their approach to the EU cohesion policy is proposed. Despite the encountered structural differences, the proposed classification shows rather evidently that the metropolitan areas have been until now lacking any relevant role with respect to EU cohesion policy. At the same time, however, metropolitan objectives do overlap to a relevant extent with those underpinning the EU cohesion policy, in so doing opening up room for coordination and synergies. Marked differences stand among countries and metropolitan areas as far as metropolitan modalities of engagement in using EU cohesion policy funds are concerned. For this reason, the Policy Brief illustrates the relationship between Partnership Agreement and Operational Programmes (and in particular, National and Regional Operational Programmes) and discusses the reasons why the involvement of metropolitan decision-makers in the development of the EU cohesion policy seem to have been limited. Then, the **involvement of metropolitan areas** in the definition of the EU cohesion policy 2021-27 is analyzed in terms of involvement in the development of the Partnership Agreements as well as representation of metropolitan interests in the making of both the NOPs and the ROPs.

Once defined the involvement of the metropolitan actors in the process, it is important to discuss the **arrangements and instruments** that have been adopted throughout Europe to manage the EU cohesion policy at the metropolitan level (e.g. the peculiar agreements characterizing the use of ERDF in Barcelona and ESF in Lyon, the ROPs directly managed by Brussels-Capital Region, the NOP Metro adopted in Italy and the various Integrated Territorial Investments adopted in the metropolitan areas of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, Brno, Lyon, Lisbon, Lyon and Riga.

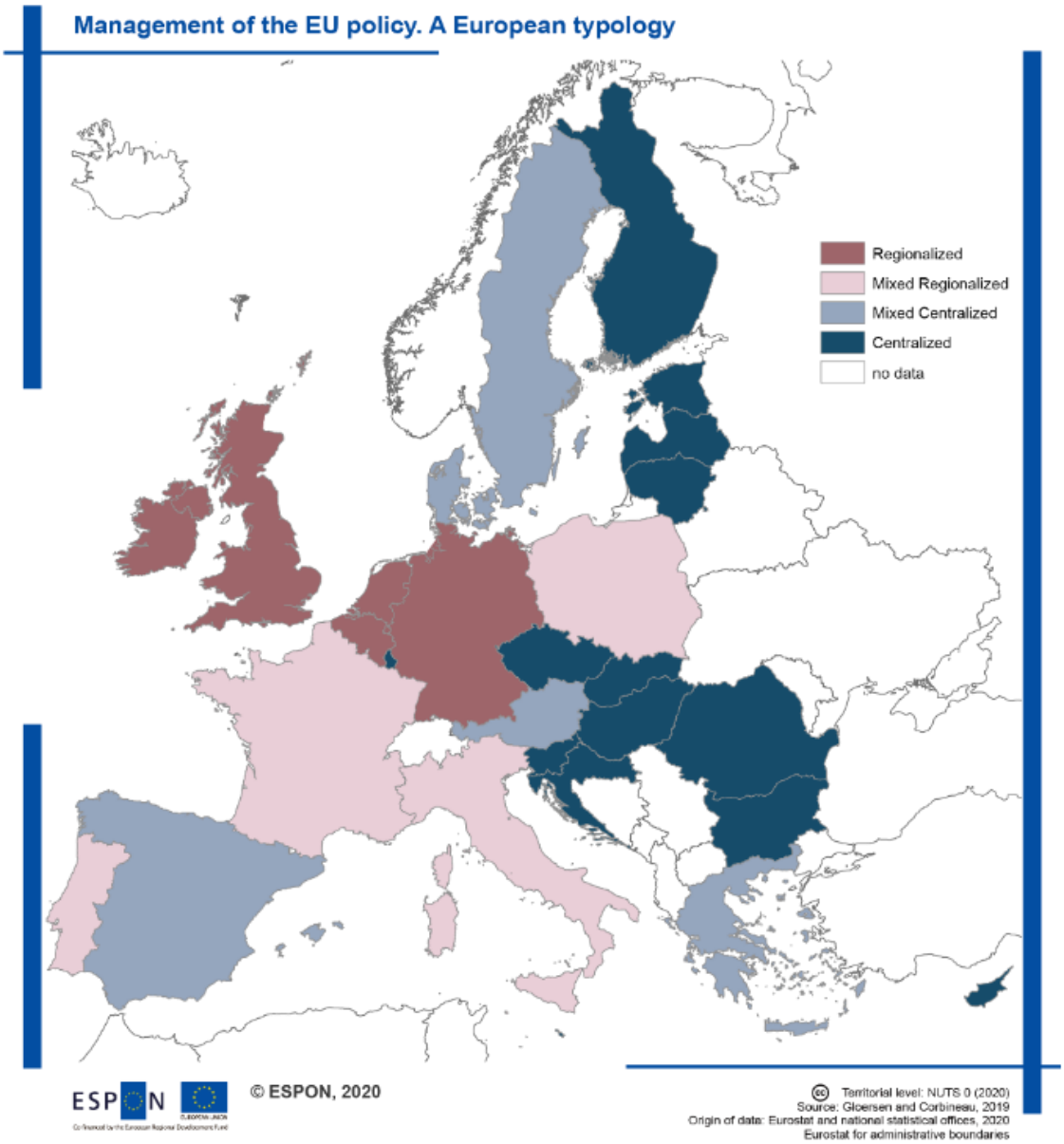
Finally, this policy brief provides an overview of the **modalities of engagement and coordination of the private sector and civil society** at the different stages of the EU cohesion policy. They can consist in the elaboration of the key outputs, such as regulative strategic documents, content-related strategic documents, documents for the implementation of the Operational Programmes, as well as in the participation of the EU cohesion policy execution and monitoring, preparation of projects financed by EU cohesion policy.

To conclude, a number of policy messages are brought forward, aiming at inspiring the activity of decision and policy-makers active throughout Europe at the metropolitan, national/regional and EU levels.

1 Metropolitan areas within the EU cohesion policy. Overview and main challenges

The **high heterogeneity** that characterises the involvement of the nine studied metropolitan areas in the EU cohesion policy, has demonstrated that different national governments have interpreted the EU requirements and opportunities differentially. Excluding Brussels-Capital Region, that has a regional status and acts as managing authority of the European Regional Development Fund, in all the other cases, metropolitan actors

Map 1



are at best intermediate bodies or beneficiaries of delivered financial resources. In fact, funds are programmed and managed by other authorities at the national and regional levels. However, not all contexts fit the same kettle of fish. In some cases, e.g. in the metropolitan areas of Barcelona, Lisbon or Lyon, the metropolitan governance structure and cooperation practices that were already in force before the establishment of the EU cohesion policy contributed to structuring the EU cohesion policy architecture and ultimately to the devolution of rather relevant amounts of resources to metropolitan management. In the case of Italy, on the other hand, the Metropolitan Cities of Florence and Turin did not benefit from the same conditions and they have to come to terms with the availability of a scarcer amount of resources to manage. Finally, the Central and Eastern European countries involved in the METRO project, benefited from the introduction of dedicated ITIs, that somehow made up for the lack of metropolitan administrative units.

Overall, when looking at the **governance of the management and implementation of EU funds**, it varies country by country More in detail, four governance models can be distinguished around Europe (Map 1):

- **regionalized governance**, where OPs are managed and implemented by regional bodies, with limited national coordination (**Belgium**, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom);
- **mixed regionalized governance**, where OPs are managed and implemented by regional bodies relying

however on strong national coordination (e.g. in **France, Italy and Poland**. But also in **Portugal,** where however regions represent outposts of the national government);

- **mixed centralized governance**, where OPs are managed or implemented by national authorities, or where only NOPs exist, whose implementation is delegated to regional intermediary bodies (Austria, Denmark, Greece and Sweden. Also **Spain** may be referred to this model, despite the exceptionality of some of its regions);
- **centralized governance**, where only NOPs managed and implemented mainly by national authorities (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, **Czech Republic**, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, **Latvia**, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

Against this variegated background, it is evident that the influences from different levels and arenas can follow various trajectories, but – independently from that – all the cases show that the current main challenge is **strengthening the role of metropolitan areas in the EU** cohesion policy **at the European, national and sub-national levels**. More in detail, with respect to the relationship between metropolitan areas and EU cohesion policy, the European Union is currently facing a range of **challenges**:

- defining the **strategic sectorial fields** for which metropolitan areas are more relevant and can produce an added value in the programming, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy and affirm their role in the spatial development of the continent;
- further consolidating the **metropolitan identity at the EU level**, also within the main EU guidance documents;
- determining the role that metropolitan areas can play in the EU **multilevel governance** framework;
- increase the role that metropolitan areas play in the development of the **EU cohesion policy and its management** (as well as in relation to other EU policies).

Of course, different national contexts may react differently in front of those challenges, but it is also true that a common thread can be pointed out. In fact, as it was possible to observe in the various cases **Metropolitan Development Goals** are most often consistent with **EU cohesion policy objectives**, **Operational Programmes**' goals as well as **other instruments produced at the national and regional levels**, including the ones from the **Next Generation EU**, (Figure 1).

Figure 1



This is evident where metropolitan areas are responsible for developing their own strategies, as for instance in the case of the Italian metropolitan cities or in Barcelona, Lyon and Lisbon. Other contexts show that the EU cohesion policy can have a strong and straightforward influence on the definition of the development goals of a metropolitan area and metropolitan cooperation. In the cases of Brno and Gdansk-Gdynia Sopot, this is a direct consequence of the use of the Integrated Territorial Investment tool and the fact that an ad hoc metropolitan institution was set up to implement it. Nevertheless, the Gdansk-Gdynia Sopot Metropolitan Area has also produced a document that explicitly details the metropolitan development goals, the Metropolitan Development Strategy 2030, whose scope is somehow broader than the one of the Integrated Territorial Investment.

These examples suggest that a larger room for coordination among the different territorial levels exists, that could contribute to consolidate metropolitan areas as important catalysts of European development.

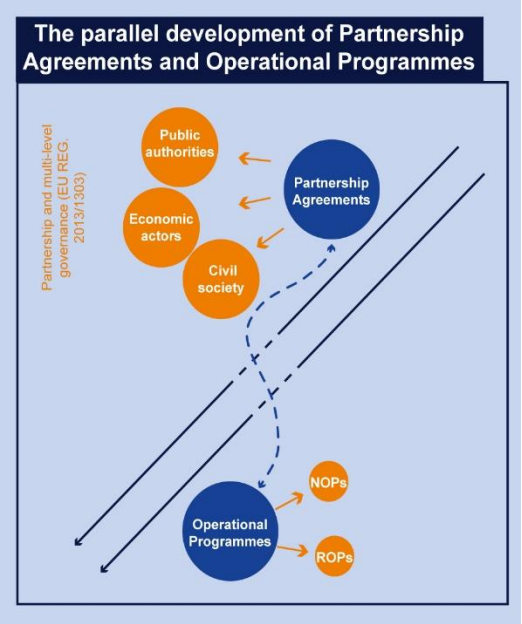
2 A differential engagement

The differential engagement of metropolitan areas in the development, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy must be observed on at least three different scales: **national** & **regional** and **metropolitan**. EU cohesion policy development, management and implementation at the **national & regional level** stem from the establishment of the "Partnership Agreement", that is the output of a complex process involving a large number of institutions and actors. The **Partnership Agreement** process is the main process leading to the definition of the EU cohesion policy programming in all countries, but it does not ensure the inclusion of metropolitan entities at all. In all member states, the development of the partnership agreement generally occurs **in parallel to the development of the Operational Programs** (OPs), that are developed by different national ministries (National OPs) or regional level agencies (Regional OPs), and negotiated with the European Commission (Figure 2).

However, from country to country, the connection between the two processes may vary. The partnership agreement often takes precedence over the development of the OPs, which are then required to comply with it. The leadership role played by national authorities in the process is clearly linked to the degree of decentralization that characterises each country. This influences the choices made in the definition of the EU cohesion policy responsibilities and priorities, which in turn translate into the configuration of the OPs and their thematic objectives (the process that led to the approval of the Italian Partnership Agreement is reported as an example in Box 1)

The code of conduct on partnership laid down in the **EU Regulation N. 2013/1303** urges the Member States to involve city representatives in the elaboration of the Partnership Agreement, together with a plethora of other relevant actors. However, according to a report for the European Parliament, "the involvement has no specification and can range from a rather informative character to personal involvement of city representatives in the Partnership Agreement process". In practice, **each Member State involves certain categories of actors to a larger or shorter extent** (E.g. France foresees a remarkable articulation of actors and meeting contexts, as reported in Box 2).

Figure 2



When it comes to the **involvement of metropolitan decision-makers in the development of the EU cohesion policy**, it seems to have been very limited in relation to the 2014-2020 programming period. The scarce involvement may depend onh three main reasons (Figure 3):

1. **Temporality**. The majority of the metropolitan institutions that are active nowadays, did not exists or had just been set up in the early 2010s, when the process of discussion and formulation of the 2014-20 partnership agreements and of the deriving OPs took place.

➢ In Italy, the Metropolitan Cities were formally instituted by the "Delrio law" (Law 56/2014), and they started their activity in January 2015. In France, the Métropole de Lyon was created by a similar law in 2014 and also came to force on January 2015. Whereas in both France and Italy, metropolitan areas were on the top of the agenda of national institutional reforms and were created with the perspective to allow the main urban centres of the two countries to better position at the European level, this did not result in privileged access to the EU cohesion policy.

CASE STUDY

Box 1_the Italian partnership agreement

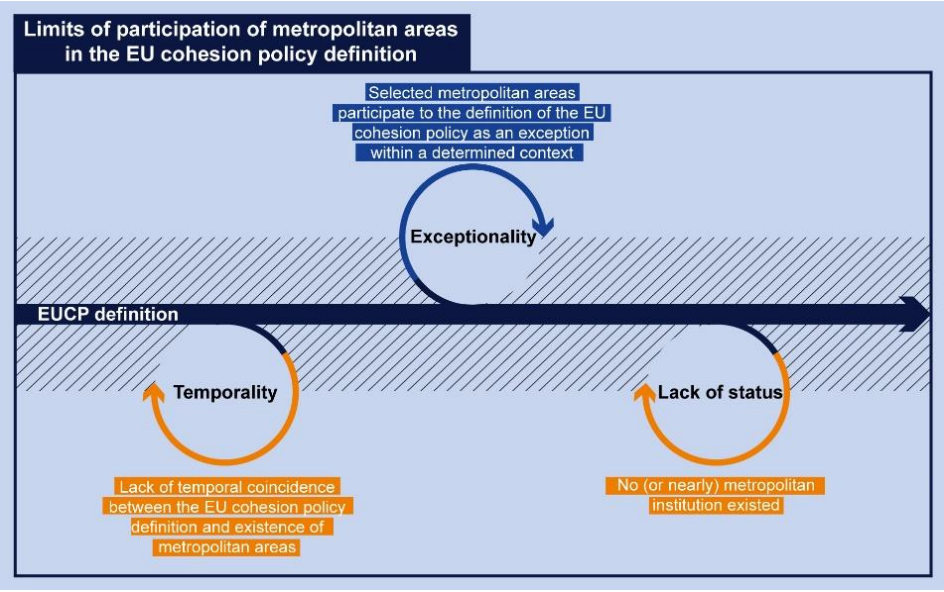
In Italy, the co-construction of the partnership agreement has been quite extensive. In 2012, the Minister of Territorial Cohesion presented a framework document, entitled Methods and Objectives for the Effective Use of Community Funds 2014-20, which defined the method for developing the partnership agreement. Public consultation on the first proposal occurred with various public institutions, associations, representatives of civil society, academics, experts and citizens. The general orientations of the agreement were then discussed in several "thematic tables" that gathered mainly public actors (governmental departments, regional and local authorities and the organisations that represent them at the national level). This process was completed by the hearing of economic and social partners and a number of bilateral meetings with major national organizations (trade unions, non-governmental organizations, large companies etc.).

CASE STUDY

Box 2_Actors' involvement in partnership agreement's development in France

France, as well as other countries, shows an important involvement of actors at different levels and contexts, being highly representative of the articulation that may characterise the participation in the partnership agreements. At the national level, public consultation occurs via the Internet. About fifty contributions from citizens, associations and local authorities were received. Then, there is a Consultation of the 'national partnership' made of public actors (governmental departments, Regions, other organisations of local authorities that represent them at the national level, major national organizations in the social, economic or environmental field). Around 100 written contributions were received. Thematic tables take place with members of the 'National partnership': public actors (governmental departments, Regions, other organisations of local authorities that represent them at the national level, major national organizations in the social, economic or environmental field). 17 thematic tables were organized, gathering 600 participants. Meetings of the National Forum for the Preparation of the Partnership Agreement (INPAP) to discuss and amend successive drafts of the Partnership Agreement: national ministries, organisations of subnational governments, major national organizations in the social, economic or environmental field.

Figure 3



2. **Exceptionality.** In a number of national administrative contexts, metropolitan institutions represent an exception. This may have contributed to marginalize

   them in the partnership agreement process and in the drafting of the OPs, where traditional local authorities participate often with a strong voice.

   - This situation concerns the Barcelona Metropolitan Area - the only metropolitan authority officially recognised in the Spanish context – as well as Brussels-Capital Region, that is both managing authority and active part in the negotiation process because of its status as Belgian federated entity.

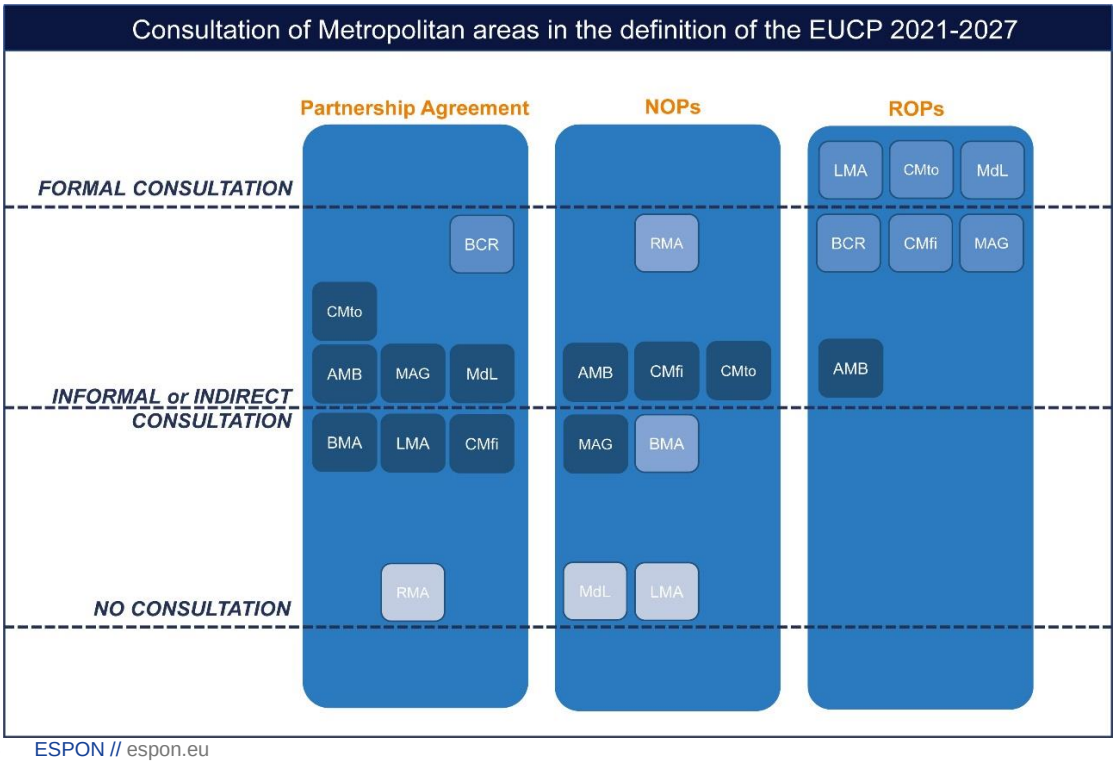
3. **Lack of administrative status.** There are contexts where no (or nearly no) metropolitan institution existed at the time of the definition and programming of the EU cohesion policy 2014-20. In these contexts, the EU cohesion policy may have triggered processes of metropolisation from the top-down, that partially echo the more or less successful attempts made during the 2000s in several Eastern European and Mediterranean countries to establish a regional tier of government.

   - Despite not being involved to any relevant extent in the development of the EU cohesion policy, the metropolitan areas of Brno, Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot and Riga have been interested by important institutional innovation processes as a consequence of the latter.

As metropolitan areas are the places where the main socioeconomic and territorial dynamics concentrate, their inclusion in the process could certainly bring new ideas and proposals that are complementary to those put forward by the other subnational authorities (regions, provinces, municipalities). However, when looking at the METRO case studies, the process behind the definition of the EU cohesion policy 2021-27 does not seem to differ much in this concern from the previous one, despite the higher institutionalisation of metropolitan areas in various countries around Europe (Figure 4). Metropolitan areas' interests in the development of the partnership agreements at the national level have been mainly represented indirectly, by national associations or alliances of subnational governments, that play an important role in the EU cohesion policy consultation process (e.g. ANCI, the National Association of Italian Municipalities). When examined at the regional scale, the picture is more heterogeneous. ROPs are developed by regional level bodies with input from a variety of partners, including metropolitan governments where they exist.

The influence of metropolitan authorities on the process remains however rather limited. At best, we can see that the priorities and actions proposed by metropolitan authorities encounter a higher consideration in the development of the 2021-27 OPs (see Box 3). However, examples in

Figure 4



the opposite direction also exist. For instance, in the Czech Republic, the operational programme Prague Growth Pole which existed in the 2014-20 programming period, will be suppressed in the EU cohesion policy 2021-27, and all OPs will be defined exclusively at the national level.

Overall, the METRO case studies show that progress in the engagement of metropolitan authorities with the definition of the EU cohesion policy from one generation of programming period to another is not necessarily proportional to their increasing institutionalisation. Whereas the latter may contribute to a higher influence (e.g. in the cases of the Lisbon and Lyon Metropolitan areas), this causal link may be easily overshadowed and even counteracted by national, regional or even local logics and governance dynamics (e.g. more or less explicit rivalry between regional and metropolitan authorities).

As a matter of fact, **the pressure on local governments to provide for regional coordination and planning through cooperation** appears lower in a country where a strong intermediate tier of government has the formal competencies, resources and the willingness to co-ordinate local policies or to establish regional plans.[1] Conversely, when no intermediate level exists between the municipalities and the national level (e.g. in England) or when this institutional level has few resources and competencies, the national government may consider the value of some form of coordination of public policies in city regions.[2]

CASE STUDY

Box 3_Differential metropolitan areas' influence on the development of the EU cohesion policy 2021-27

Despite their institutional role and geographical relevance as an intermediate level between the regional level and the municipalities, the Metropolitan Cities of Turin and Florence have a rather limited room for action in the programming, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy. They are consulted indirectly in the partnership agreement process and in the development of the NOPS, through the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI), formally consulted in the development of the respective ROPs, without having however the chance to exert a relevant influence on the process

On the other hand, In the case of Lisbon, despite the fact that the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and the Lisbon Regional Coordination and Development Commission (CCDR-LVT) are independent entities characterised by distinct mandates (the former emerging bottom from the local authorities and the latter originating from a top-down initiative of the state), they have started a fruitful collaboration in the preparation of the Lisbon Strategy 2030, that in turn will inform the 2021-27 ROP. Similarly, the *Métropole de Lyon* has managed to exert a "soft influence" on the contents that will be included in the ROP prepared by Region Auvergne-Rhône Alpes. In particular, it contributed to the consolidation of the two main strategic orientations of the ROP (smarter Europe and greener Europe) and in the recalibration of their budget, in a way that reflects the priorities of the new metropolitan green-left executive which was elected in June 2020. The *Métropole de Lyon* has also requested and obtained to manage a larger envelope on the greener Europe priority, in order to be able to directly act in the field of environmental issues and the integration of green mobility.

In Latvia, the Riga Planning Region, with the respective metropolitan authority still in the making, was directly involved in the Consultative Programming Program of the cohesion policy Objective "European Territorial Cooperation" Program 2021-27, and in a working group chaired by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development.

[1] Hulst R., van Montfort A. (2011) Institutional features of inter-municipal cooperation: cooperative arrangements and their national contexts, *Public Policy and Administration*, Vol. 27 (2), pp. 121-144.

[2] Demazière C. (2021) Exploring the creation of metropolitan government. A compared analysis of England, France and Italy, *European Planning Studies*, https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1923666

3 A multitude of instruments

The different arrangements put in place to implement the EU cohesion policy vary from country to country. These arrangements are rather diverse, reflecting the choices made by national and regional actors when designing the partnership agreements, the NOPs and the ROPs.

The most relevant innovation introduced in the 2014-20 programming period concerns the institution of the **Integrated Territorial Investments** (ITIs), as instruments **aiming at the implementation of integrated territorial development strategies in urban and functional areas**. ITIs allow the Member States to combine investments from several priority axes of one or more OPs in support of multi-dimensional and cross-sectoral interventions. Moreover, while not being a binding condition for its use, ITI allows the joint use of various funding sources, as ERDF and ESF, but also Cohesion Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and European Maritime and Fishery Fund, in the territories that are eligible for their support.

The adoption of ITIs is not obligatory, with Member States and regions that can decide autonomously whether to adopt the instrument or not. As a consequence, their differential implementation across Europe is intrinsic to the voluntary adoption that accompanies the ITI model. The regulatory framework of the ITI is insufficiently prescriptive to successfully challenge national and regional authorities that are unwilling to devolve budgets and responsibilities at the local level (Tosics, 2017).

In the programming period 2021-20 ITIs have been used by as many as 20 Member States over 28 (Map 2). According to the regulation that instituted them, ITIs allow to develop integrated strategies and actions in very diversified settings: deprived neighbourhoods, cities and urban areas, city-regions and metropolitan areas, geographical areas of a region isolated from each other but who share the same characteristics (e.g. a network of small and medium-sized towns), rural areas, cross-border areas, etc.

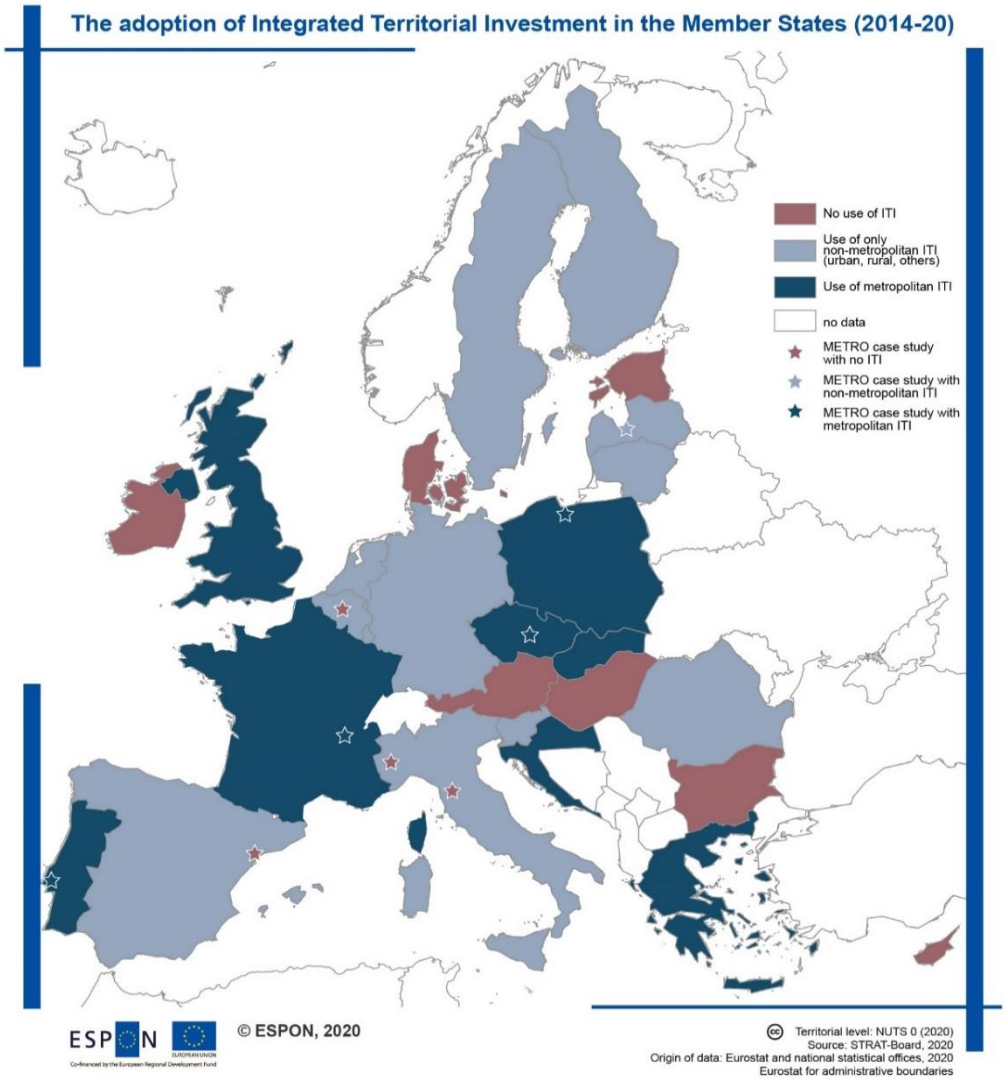
Of the nine metropolitan areas analysed in the context of the METRO project, ITIs have been adopted in five cases: Brno, Gdansk, Lisbon, Lyon and Riga. In the cases of Brno, where no metropolitan institution existed, the ITI area has been tailored almost exactly on the boundaries of the functional urban region. In the context of the Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area, despite the MAG association boundaries exceeds those of the FUA, the ITI has been shaped accordingly. In Lisbon, it deals with an institutional NUTS3 region that is marginally smaller than the metropolitan area, so the ITI denotes a high functional level content. In Lyon, it is mostly used to focus on deprived neighbourhoods. In the Riga context, the ITI focuses only on the area of the capital city, following the decision of the Latvian government to develop ITIs supporting the development of the main urban areas of the country.

When it comes to the role that metropolitan actors play in the implementation of the ITIs, in all cases **the official responsibility remains in the hands of the Managing Authority of the OPs (at the national or regional level).** However, according to the EU regulations, these authorities are allowed to designate intermediate bodies, including local authorities, regional development bodies or non-governmental organisations, to carry out some or all of the management and implementation tasks. In this light, **the form and degree of the ITI management delegation may vary, as a consequence of the administrative arrangements of the Member State or region**.

The Metropolitan Area of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot is the intermediate body responsible for the implementation of the respective ITI programme, as it is the case for all 24 regional capitals and regional and subregional centres interested by an ITI in the Polish context (Box 4). In so doing, the Association of Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area has been acting as intermediate body for the Pomorskie ROP, managing a high quantity of resources that allowed for the implementation of 190 projects. A similar situation concerned the case of Brno where the responsible authority, while strongly advocating for moving metropolitan cooperation behind the simple implementation of the ITI had to programme, manages and implements its ITI envelope following the guidelines included in the various NOPs. Thus, while the metropolitan decision-makers of Brno acquired new powers and responsibilities, they remained at the same time subjected to the control of the Ministry of Regional Development and of the NOPs managing authorities.

Finally, other arrangements for the implementation of the EU cohesion policy were setup elsewhere that constitute potential good practices (see Box 5).

Map 2



HOT SPOT MESSAGES

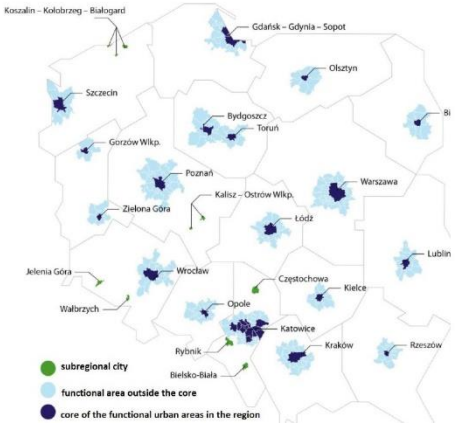
Pitfalls and weaknesses of the ITIs

- Even in those cases where their introduction played a positive role in the consolidation of metropolitan governance and cooperation some limits may emerge in relation to the fact that the ITI perimeter do not always match the one of the functional urban region.
- In some cases, the organisation responsible for managing and implementing the ITI may face problems of legitimacy vis-à-vis other actors in the metropolitan area, or in terms of accountability.
- The ITI structure and regulations set a number of constraints in terms of the scope of the objectives and demonstrated a scarce flexibility in the implementation, due to the strict set of indicators and financial plan. An additional limitation concerns the administrative cumbersomeness of the instruments.

CASE STUDY

Box 4_The use of ITI for integrated metropolitan development in Poland

In Poland, the ITI was selected as the core instrument to promote metropolitan policies and to support the territorial development of the urban areas hosting over three hundred thousand inhabitants, through integrated strategies aimed at sustainable urban development. The national framework which was designed for the ITI implementation in 2014-20 enabled cities to set up new arrangements (which may be called ITI metropolitan institutions). They were empowered to programme (within preselected objectives) their own integrated strategies, and to manage their implementation. However, the strategies required the approval from the Ministry of Regional Development, providing some sort of top-down control to the whole process.



CASE STUDY

Box 5_ Alternative metropolitan arrangements to manage the EU cohesion policy

In the case of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, despite having played only a limited, informal role during the elaboration of the Catalan ROP, the chapter of the latter concerning Integrated territorial development approach explicitly mentioned that the Barcelona Metropolitan Area would have had a prominent role due its regional relevance, competences and resources. As a consequence, an agreement between the Catalan regional government and the Metropolitan Area was signed in 2017 however limited to the 35 municipalities surrounding Barcelona municipality but excluding the latter (that signed its own agreement with the regional government, and acts as an intermediate body within the ERDF ROP).



In Italy, whereas neither the national level nor the regions have put in place any framework for the introduction of metropolitan ITI, a National Operational Programme dedicated to the development of metropolitan areas was introduced, as a unique example in Europe. This initiative is interesting since it aims to address the coordination of all the territorial and organizational challenges faced by Italian metropolitan areas on the basis of two main strategic drivers (Smart City and social innovation). The NOP METRO mixes resources from the ERDF the ESF and devotes a budget of 40 million euros for each city located in the more developed and in transition regions, and 90 million euros for each city in the less developed regions. This instrument could serve as an inspiration for the development of some sort of Metropolitan OP or ITI that may be then adopted in the different European contexts to support integrated metropolitan development.

4 Mechanisms of coordination and the involvement of business and social actors

The coordination of the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy with the very heterogeneous metropolitan governance and cooperation activities ongoing within the nine METRO case study areas occur according to very different models and mechanisms. More, in particular, the shape that these models and mechanisms take and the way they are applied depends on the different institutional configurations that characterise each metropolitan area. **Three main situations can be analytically distinguished** (Figure 5):

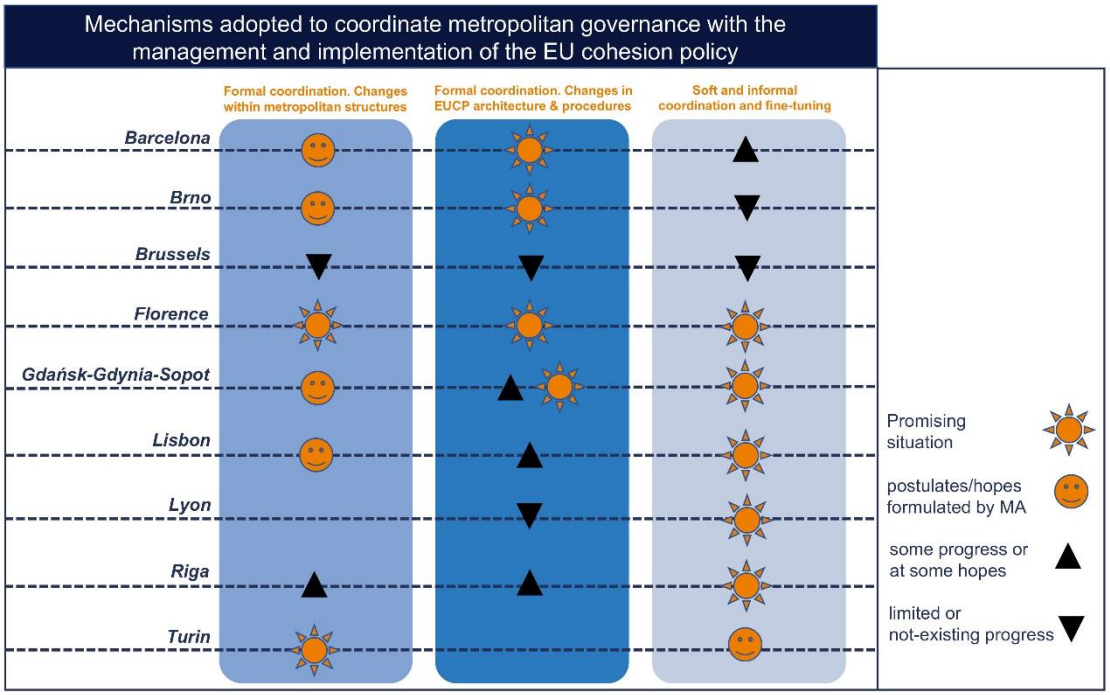
- **Formal changes and adjustments** that take place within **metropolitan level structures and mechanisms**;
- **Formal changes and adjustments** that concern the **EU cohesion policy architecture and procedures**;
- **Episodes of soft, informal coordination and fine-tuning**, that however do not involve formal institutional changes.

Examples of the first type concerns, for instance, the introduction of metropolitan strategies that try to identify the possible interactions and synergies with the main objectives that characterise the EU cohesion policy, or the introduction of dedicated unites aiming at the promotion and coordination of projects to be funded with supranational resources and at ensuring a higher consistency between these projects and the metropolitan action.

At the same time, the required coordination between metropolitan and EU cohesion policy priorities and actions may be achieved through an adjustment of the boundaries of the latter in a way that solves the partial weaknesses that its general framework encounters when it is applied in the specific national and regional contexts. An example in this concern is represented by the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, where the metropolitan authority is exploring innovative mechanisms to favour the inclusion of metropolitan actors into the cohesion policy processes.

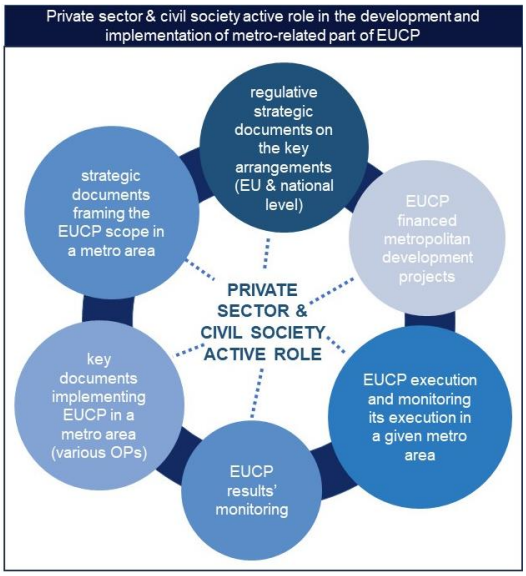
Finally, through formal mechanisms it may be possible to promote the upload of metropolitan goals and priorities on the EU cohesion policy programming. For instance, through its regular discussions with the regional branch of the national government and the regional council Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, the representatives of the *Métropole de Lyon* have been able to raise a number of specific issues of metropolitan relevance, eventually managing to achieve their upload on the EU cohesion policy agenda, and a similar result has been achieved by the Lisbon Metropolitan Area.

Figure 5



The **involvement of private actors and civil society** in various forms of governance of the management and implementation of EU funds varies among countries, despite the prescription of the put in place by the EU (Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council).

Figure 6



Concerning the development and implementation of the metropolitan related part of the EU cohesion policy, **the private sector and civil society may participate in** (Figure 6):

- The elaboration of the key **regulative strategic documents** deciding on the key arrangements for the EU cohesion policy at the EU and national level;
- The elaboration of key **content related strategic documents** framing the scope of EU cohesion policy in a metro area;
- The elaboration of key **documents implementing EU cohesion policy** in a given metro area (various OPs);
- The **execution and monitoring of the EU cohesion policy** in a given metro area;
- The **preparation and execution of the EU cohesion policy financed projects** important for the development of a given metro area;
- The monitoring of the **results of the EU cohesion policy in a given metro area**.

Two options prevail within the METRO case studies under investigation:

- General participation in **the consultation of the EU cohesion policy key documents** at the national level and in some cases, the involvement in the **performance monitoring of the funding sources** of the operational programmes.
- **Preparation and execution of the EU cohesion policy projects** or **participation in the projects prepared and initiated by the metropolitan authorities**.

The most frequent form of involvement of private and civic actors is their participation in the ESIF funded projects and, in various cases, this favoured their further engagement with metropolitan governance and cooperation and allowed them to gain deeper understanding of metropolitan challenges and needs. Episodes of this activity have been detected in all case study areas.

For instance, in Lyon, a variety of businesses and NGOs have been actively involved in the EU cohesion policy at the implementation level, and a number of NGOs specialized in vocational training, digital activities or urban agriculture have benefitted from ERDF or ESF support. A similar situation characterised the Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot context, where the project run by metropolitan authorities "Support for Social Economy" provided substantive and financial support to social economy entities and linked very diverse third sector actors (Box 6). In Florence, the EU cohesion policy contributed to strengthen the collaboration of the tourism sector actors. The platform and the related app "Feel Florence" has been developed as a co-created process, within the framework of a project involving both public and private partners, in so doing favouring innovative solutions. Various relevant stakeholders, such as social and trade associations, actively participated also in the debate on the future of the metropolitan area in the post-pandemic phase (that led to the development of the strategic plan "*Rinasce Firenze*").

CASE STUDY

Box 6_Engaging business actors and NGOs in metropolitan affairs in the Gdańsk-Gdynia–Sopot metropolitan area

Metropolitan cooperation on the Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area is led by local governments. At the same time, actors from the business sector appear to be the most enthusiastic about the ongoing metropolisation process. The reason behind their enthusiasm is that the Pomeranian business actors require a strong economic milieu supporting their visibility and offering agglomeration externalities. This message has influenced the attitude of metropolitan structures in the region towards a further opening to and engagement of civil society and business actors. For instance, key regional Universities were asked to form a partnership with the metropolitan association. As the result, the Daniel Fahrenheit Union of Universities in Gdańsk has become a new member supporting the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area. Thus, the union joined the group of a dozen or so institutions, foundations and universities that had already declared cooperation with the Metropolitan Area.

HOT SPOT MESSAGES

The benefits of participation in metropolitan areas

Properly designed and facilitated participation increases the ownership of the social process in which stakeholders participate. This is important, in particular, in relation to grass-root initiatives that pave the way for new legal or administrative arrangements and in those cases where firm legislative frames are lacking (such initiatives are usually based on the principles of the urgency of needs, common understanding of the desired solutions etc.).

Moreover, participation is essential for the territorial dialogue, necessary in the situation of fuzzy borders and flexible territorial arrangements. This is especially relevant for metropolitan areas since they are characterised by a high degree of institutional fragmentation and in search of effective forms of dialogue and cooperation across the institutional perimeters. Various other benefits of participation have been also identified in the literature such as sharing and developing the necessary knowledge, improving legitimacy, addressing value-based conflicts or fostering stakeholders' empowerment. However, in parallel, participation might raise questions in relation to conflict escalation, strengthening power asymmetries and favouring vested interests etc.

5 Involvement of metropolitan areas in the Recovery and Resilience Facility

When looking at the future role that metropolitan areas can play in European development, a key role should be played by their engagement in the **Recovery and Resilience Facility** (RRF), allocating Covid-relief funds in line with the EU Member States **National Recovery and Resilience Plans** (NRRP).

The involvement of the metropolitan authorities in the programming of the RRF latter **varies widely**, due to the different approaches in programming and compiling the NRRPs that have been followed in the various countries and the progress that had been achieved so far.

In most cases, metropolitan areas have presented projects to be included in the programming. For instance, the Italian metropolitan cities seem took part in the programming process, although indirectly through the provision of metropolitan-relevant input in the form of flagship projects. This occurred through their representation in ANCI (the National Association of Italian Municipalities) (Box 7). Similarly, the Metropole de Lyon has presented 23 projects to the REACT-EU programme, concerning the thermal renovation of schools and social housing, the development of inclusive digital projects, and the purchase of personal protective equipment. In addition, five projects have been presented by the City of Lyon, concerning the development of a new vaccination centre and the thermal renovation of schools. The involvement of Barcelona Metropolitan Area has been also related to the presentation of preliminary projects to the regional and national governments endowed with the task of programming the recovery framework.

Brussels-Capital Region has been involved in the negotiation and drafting of the Belgian National Recovery and Resilience Plan. Accordingly, it will directly manage around € 395 million to implement 14 investments and adopt 5 reforms. Some of these investments will concern sustainable mobility and are expected to produce an impact at the FUA level.

The Latvian National Recovery and Resilience Plan devotes a large amount of resources to climate related objectives, and in particular to support sustainable mobility. The greening of the Riga Metropolitan Area transportation system is one of the actions that will be implemented through the plan, also thanks to the involvement of Riga city and a good number of neighbouring municipalities. Of metropolitan relevance is also the development of an integrated health care approach in university hospitals.

On the other hand, other contexts show a more limited involvement. In the case of Brno, the major cities that compose the metropolitan areas, settlement agglomerations and the holders of the ITI have gained since early 2021 some opportunities to comment upon the preparation of the National Recovery Plan from the position of urban and metropolitan development priorities. A similar situation concerns the Metropolitan Area of Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, where are a number of expectations in relation to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan but the metropolitan influence in its programming has been so far limited.

Also in the case of Portugal, it is not clear yet what role the Lisbon Metropolitan Area will play in the development and implementation of the NRRP.

CASE STUDY

Box 7_National associations and alliances of subnational governments

In Italy, the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) is a relevant and exemplary actor who has been holding the interests of municipalities for more than a century, participating in any national debate that is relevant to local authorities, and represents local governments – including Metropolitan Cities, that are engaged in a dedicated group – in all ESIF related consultations.
ANCI represents municipal governments in the programming of the RRF. More in detail, the Mayor of the Metropolitan City of Florence has activated a working group coordinated by the Florence City Manager which acts as an administrative collector of proposals from actors belonging to both the metropolitan city and the municipality of Florence. This working group, that builds on ongoing EU cohesion policy activities (as the NOP Metro actions and urban authority organization) has analysed the correspondence of the collected projects with the ministerial guidelines for project proposal and, on this basis, has delivered a detailed proposal to ANCI, together with the ones of all metropolitan cities. Also, the Metropolitan City of Turin has proposed 20 projects related to green transition, digital transition for the public administration, cohesion, sustainability, inclusion and mobility. The proposals have been also shared with the Regional government, which tried to integrate the proposals developed by its local institutions into the broader regional projects.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

Since the metropolitan areas of Europe gather economic, social or environmental opportunities that are extremely significant at the regional, national & EU levels, a higher inclusion of metropolitan authorities/institutions, as well as of business and civil society actors in the development and management of the EU cohesion policy is an issue of crucial importance. Whereas a multilevel governance approach is essential to tackle the multifaceted challenges of metropolitan areas, the latter could play a crucial role as a pivotal nexus between the national and regional levels and the local municipalities, in so doing contributing a maximising the added value of the EU cohesion policy on the ground.

On the one hand, institutionalized metropolitan authorities should be more directly and extensively acknowledged in the definition of the EU cohesion policy priorities, as well as in the management of selected thematic priorities. On the other hand, also metropolitan areas that are not yet fully recognised within the respective administrative hierarchies could play an important role, benefiting from the implementation of dedicated metropolitan ITIs through which to further strengthen and consolidate their institutional status.

Overall, strengthening the role of metropolitan areas in the EU cohesion policy is an ambitious task to reach, that requires a variegated and articulated change in the behaviours of actors that deal with metropolitan areas. For this reason, a wide set of recommendations is proposed and addressed to three specific target groups.

6.1 Recommendations for the metropolitan level

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

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

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

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

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

6.2 Recommendations for the national and regional institutions

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

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

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

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

and regional public policies (and, where necessary, their legal recognition).

6.3 Recommendations for EU-level actors

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

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

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

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

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



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