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Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

POLICY BRIEF

The added value of the EU cohesion policy in the consolidation of metropolitan governance

The EU cohesion policy has had impacts on territorial development since its first introduction at the end of the 1980s. At the same time, it also played a more or less implicit role in the redefinition of domestic governance dynamics, at the national, regional and local level of implementation. While this impact has been recognised and explored in various researches and studies, the role that the EU cohesion policy had played in enhancing metropolitan governance and cooperation is a still relatively unexplored field. This policy brief focuses on the role of the EU cohesion policy in framing metropolitan governance as well as how metropolitan institutions have been using the EU cohesion policy as a means to engage with and coordinate the action of local municipalities, social groups and actors from the business community. It focuses on the impacts and outcomes that the EU cohesion policy has brought at the metropolitan level by exploring a multitude of interconnected issues. The aim is to highlight the heterogeneity of channels, local actions, reactions and adaptation measures that metropolitan bodies activated in order to benefit from the EU cohesion policy implementation, on the one side, and consolidate their role within the national, regional and local framework, on the other side. Pieces of evidence and the deriving policy messages are based on the nine case studies investigated in the framework of the ESPON METRO project, which concerned the metropolitan areas of Barcelona, Brno, Brussels, Florence, Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot, Lisbon, Lyon, Riga and Turin. The main aim is to support planners and policy officers in making well-informed decisions at the EU, national and local levels when it comes to programming and implementation of the EU cohesion policy in the 2021-27 programming period.

KEY POLICY MESSAGES

- **The EU cohesion policy may offer an important contribution to the consolidation of metropolitan governance and cooperation.** The consolidation of metropolitan governance depends on national and regional conditions, as well as on the nature of those cooperation mechanisms that are already in place in each metropolitan context.
- **Where formal metropolitan governance mechanisms and cooperation practices are already in place,** the management and implementation of the EU cohesion at the metropolitan level may develop in a more structured manner, while at the same time contributing to reinforce and consolidate these mechanisms and practices.
- **The Metropolitan areas employ the EU cohesion policy goals and priorities, funds and initiatives to improve its positioning vis-à-vis the national and regional levels, and to further consolidate its role as main reference authorities for the local municipalities they include.** They do it by territorialising EU policy goals and priorities, managing or participating in EU programmes and instruments, and implementing EU funded projects.
- **The metropolitan areas make use of EU cohesion policy to engage and coordinate municipalities, business actors and social groups.** They do so by involving, assisting and creating coalitions with local authorities in addressing specific issues with an explicit metropolitan dimension.
- **Importantly, a crucial role of metropolitan institutions concerns to support of local municipalities in their engagement with the EU cohesion policy,** through the preparation of projects proposal and the in their implementation phase.

Introduction

Although the EU cohesion policy has not entrusted metropolitan authorities with the role of managing authority (as in the case of the central and regional levels), it somehow influenced the reconfiguration of metropolitan governance. This happened, on the one side, using EU funds and programmes to facilitate cooperation mechanisms for the consolidation of metropolitan experiences and, on the other side, making use of EU cohesion policy to reinforce their role within the national, regional and local institutional and co-optation framework. This reinforcement has happened by territorialising EU cohesion policy objectives and principles, managing funds and implementing projects depending on the diverse local needs, challenges and institutional configuration. Moreover, in some cases, metropolitan areas have also taken the momentum to use the EU cohesion policy for a better, efficient and effective engagement with the municipalities that they include and the variegated community of social and business actors that are active in their territories. This has been possible thanks to various agreements and programmes or to the implementation of projects that have allowed metropolitan areas to assist, support and coalescing local authorities in responding to issues that have a more or less explicit metropolitan dimension. From such diversity of experiences among metropolitan areas, we intend to extract interesting practices and lessons from which policy and decision-makers can learn and be inspired.

1 Overview and main challenges

While potentially producing an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies, the EU cohesion policy also exerts impacts on metropolitan governance, stimulating institutional innovation and the introduction and consolidation of new cooperation mechanisms.

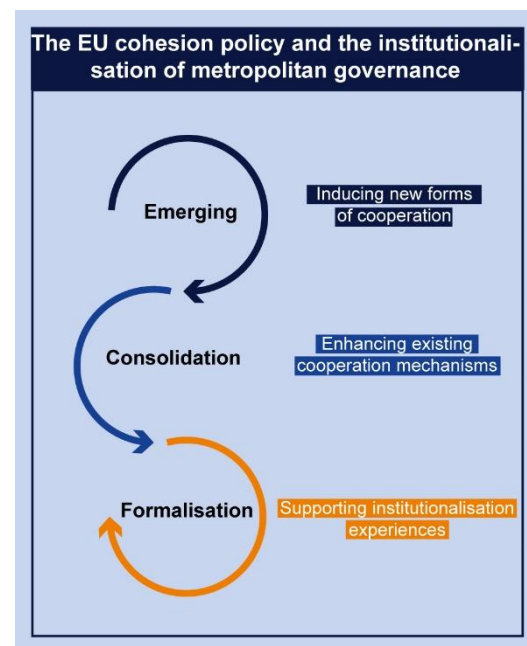
The influence that the EU cohesion policy has played in the emergence, consolidation and formalisation of metropolitan governance varies from country to country, as a consequence of multiple variables: the countries' peculiar administrative traditions and the patterns that through time have characterised their evolution, the prior existence of supralocal administrative units and

their level of formalisation, the relevance of the EU cohesion policy budget over the national, regional and local public budgets, how well the existing institutional configuration has adapted to EU requirements etc..

1.1 The EU cohesion policy and its role in framing metropolitan governance

The EU cohesion policy can influence metropolitan governance in various ways depending on the level of institutionalisation of metropolitan cooperation. It can act as a stimulus for the **emergence** of *ex novo* forms of metropolitan cooperation, promote the **consolidation** of existing governance and cooperation by upgrading formal and informal networks, or support the **formalisation** processes and legal recognition of existing cooperation arrangements (Figure 1).

Figure 1



The METRO case studies confirms that the influence of the EU cohesion policy on metropolitan governance and cooperation is highly differential, encompassing cases in which no explicit link between the EU cohesion policy and the consolidation of metropolitan governance is identifiable, cases in which the latter has emerged as a direct consequence of the former and cases where some sort of link between the two is possible, although difficult to demonstrate in absolute causal terms.

The EU cohesion policy has exerted a direct influence in the consolidation of metropolitan governance in the cases of Brno Metropolitan Area

and Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area, delivered through the introduction of the it is (Box 1). The opportunity to manage EU funds favoured the establishment of more or less formal inter-municipal cooperation and the consolidation and further institutionalisation of those that already existed on the territory. The experience of Riga is slightly different, despite the use of ITIs in the Latvian context, remarking the role played by national governance dynamics in filtering the possible influence that the EU cohesion policy may exert on metropolitan governance and cooperation. Here the ITIs have been pivoted on the main cities of the country, without foreseeing a metropolitan dimension. However, the EU cohesion policy contributed to fuel a discussion on the potential role of a Riga Metropolitan Area.

An implicit role of the EU cohesion policy in the consolidation of metropolitan governance can be noticed also in the case of Lyon and of the Italian metropolitan cities of Turin and Florence, although it is hard to establish direct causal relations. In France, the institution of the *Métropoles* may have benefited from the momentum triggered by the EU cohesion policy. In Italy, the Metropolitan Cities have been instituted through a national reform that followed internal political and administrative reorganisation logics. However, the law explicitly mentions the potential European role of metropolitan cities, allows to think of an indirect influence.

On the other hand, the EU cohesion policy does not seem to have played any relevant role in the establishment of metropolitan governance in Lisbon, Barcelona and Brussels. In the first two cases, metropolitan authorities have been the incremental result of a traditional intermunicipal cooperation that has then been formalised by a central or regional governance reform, while Brussels-Capital Region is instituted as a fully autonomous region since the Belgian regionalisation reform, but do not have much room for action on its functional territory, that extend largely in Flanders and Wallonia,

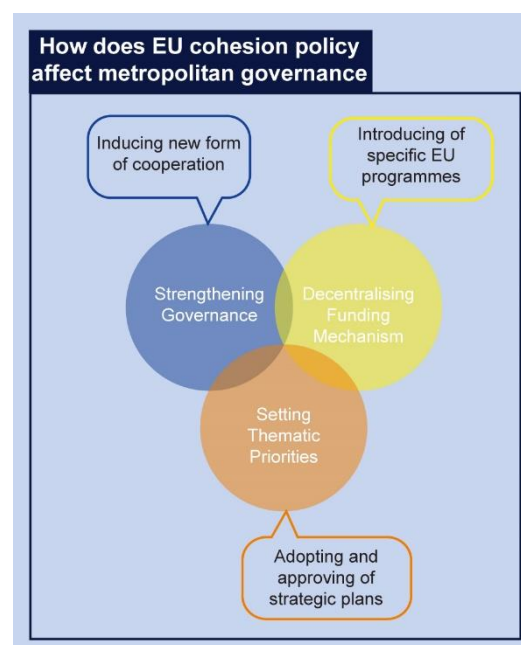
Importantly, whereas the EU cohesion policy had played or not a role in the emergence of metropolitan institutions and governance, it has in most cases favoured the consolidation of existing forms of cooperation (i.e. favouring the upgrade of formal and informal networks supporting the formalisation of associations of local entities etc.) and the further institutionalisation (Box 2).

1.2 Various directions of influence

When it comes to the main directions of the influence that the EU cohesion policy has delivered on metropolitan governance and cooperation in the different contexts under examination three main categories can be identified (Figure 2):

- **Triggering or strengthening metropolitan governance** (the EU cohesion policy contributes to the introduction of peculiar metropolitan governance institutions, or strengthening those in place);
- **Setting thematic priorities** (the EU cohesion policy influences the selection of thematic priorities that are included in metropolitan strategic documents);
- **Decentralising funding** (the EU cohesion policy favours the devolution of the management of ESIF from the national and regional authorities to the metropolitan and local levels).

Figure 2



Overall, in the majority of the metropolitan areas under investigation, the collected evidence show that the EU cohesion policy played an important role in strengthening metropolitan governance, in some cases also leading to the introduction of governance models and institutions that did not exist before. This has happened mainly by enhancing territorial cooperation among metropolitan municipalities as well as between metropolitan areas within the national and European context. Generally speaking, the lower metropolitan

governance is institutionalised in metropolitan areas, the more it is likely that the devolution of specific management functions in relation to the EU resources will trigger metropolitan governance.

Also in relation to the role that the EU cohesion policy has played in the definition of metropolitan thematic priorities, a rather relevant influence is detected. Most metropolitan development strategies directly relate to the EU cohesion policy (as the ITI strategies) or are inspired by the UE cohesion policy goals and priorities (as the Metropolitan Strategic Plans of the Italian Metropolitan Cities and the Integrated Urban Development Strategy in the case of Riga).

In a number of cases, the EU cohesion policy has stimulated the devolution of the management of EU funds towards the metropolitan level through dedicated ITI (in the cases of Brno, Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot, Lyon and Lisbon). In the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, this occurred through an *ad hoc* agreement between the regional government and the metropolitan institution. In the case of the Metropolitan cities of Florence and Turin, the introduction of the NOP METRO has devolved the management of funds to the central municipalities (however not necessarily leading to their use in a metropolitan perspective); similarly, the management of selected priorities of the ROP ESF has also been devolved to the metropolitan cities.

CASE STUDY

Box 1_The role of the ITI in the consolidation of the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan governance

The ITI in the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area has consolidated existing cooperation initiatives. Since the beginning of the 2014-20 period programme, the implementation of the ITI in Poland was positively seen and welcomed by the national level. The priority was to develop urban nodes, often represented by metropolitan agglomerations and functional areas around them. Accordingly, in the Polish Partnership Agreement for 2014-20 Regional capitals and their functional areas were listed among Areas of Strategic Intervention (ASI), identifying the EU cohesion policy priorities to be financed under the ITI framework. In the case of the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area, prior to this initiative, there were two separate metropolitan cooperation platforms dividing the functional urban area into two parts, united around Gdańsk and Gdynia, with little co-operation between them: Gdańsk OM and NORDA Association. As a result of the introduction of the ITI, the two metropolitan associations, were merged into one Metropolitan Area (MAG). Hence, the existing duality of the metropolitan governance was overcome to some extent thanks to the implementation of the ITI which became the unitary framework among different metropolitan interests.

CASE STUDY

Box 2_Metropoli Strategiche: a project to support Italian metropolitan cities

Financed in the framework of the Italian NOP Governance, the project *metropoli strategiche* (<https://metropolistrategiche.it/>) invested €3,6M to accompany organisational changes and the development of competencies related to institutional innovation in the Metropolitan Cities. The project is based on the direct, continuous and active involvement of the political and administrative structures of the Metropolitan Cities, on the contribution of the Coordination of Metropolitan Mayors set up within ANCI and on the integration of capacity building actions. The main objective of the project is to accompany the Metropolitan Cities in the process of institutional innovation, supporting them in organisational changes and in the development of the skills necessary for the full implementation of integrated policies on a metropolitan scale, in three specific areas: (i) Administrative simplification for economic development; (ii) Strategic metropolitan planning and (iii) Associated management of services and institutional and organisational reorganisation plans.



2 How metropolitan areas consolidate their role through the cohesion policy

Through time, metropolitan areas adopted EU cohesion policy's principles and logic and implemented it in various ways, and this contributed to consolidate their role within the regional and national governance frameworks (figure 3).

One way metropolitan areas can use the cohesion policy to consolidate their role is by **territorializing cohesion policy's objectives and principles**. Over time, metropolitan areas have adapted their strategic documents to the cohesion policy requirements and main indications, contributing to channelling EU mainstream (spatial, economic, social and environmental) concepts to local needs and priorities (e.g. the Metropolitan Cities of Turin and Florence did through their Metropolitan Strategic Plan).

Another way metropolitan areas can use the EU cohesion policy to consolidate their role is through the more or less direct **managing EU funds** (especially as intermediate body of it is, OPs priorities and dedicated funding envelopes). To do so, allowed the Lisbon Metropolitan Area to consolidate its role vis-à-vis the national and regional government. At the same time, the introduction of ITI allowed actors in the context of the Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot and Brno Metropolitan areas to start claiming a stronger role for metropolitan areas within their respective national institutional systems (Box 3). Thanks to the direct management of ERDF and ESF, Brussels-Capital Region has been able to address funds for investments on its 19 municipalities.

Metropolitan areas can also consolidate their role also by **implementing EU funded projects**, as beneficiaries and partners or lead partners of projects involving also other beneficiaries. In this concern, the Metropolitan City of Turin which

stands out for its significant participation in European Territorial Cooperation projects (especially in within the ALCOTRA programme). On its side, the Metropolitan City of Florence benefited from the resources of the Rural Development Plan in the implementation of the *PIT-Piana Fiorentina* project, which played a coordinating role within a consortium agreement between public and private actors (municipalities, business communities, small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises)

Figure 3



To conclude, one of the tangible consequences of the metropolitan involvement in EU cohesion policy is the upscaling of metropolitan leadership. Indeed, making use of the three mentioned means, metropolitan areas can reinforce their position as reference authorities for the local, regional and national levels as far as issues of metropolitan relevance are concerned. They do it by involving, assisting and coordinating local authorities in addressing specific issue, as well as proactively interacting with the higher level and reinforcing their position through this interaction.

CASE STUDY**Box 3_ Integrated Territorial Investment in Brno, Czech Republic**

The Metropolitan Area of Brno plays an important role in implementing the EU cohesion policy and in particular concerning the Integrated Territorial Investment instrument. The possibility of being involved in the management of the ITI – it is part of the Steering Committee and ITI manager office – increases the chance of the Metropolitan Area of Brno to becoming a reference actor in the metropolitan landscape. The main role of the ITI metropolitan institution is promoting the specific ITI envelope among the variety of actors and stakeholders who are the project applicants, and grant statements on compliance of individual projects with the integrated strategy, while the final project approval depends on the managing authority (or intermediate body) of each operational programme. In so doing, it plays a coordination role, with the logic of ITI implementation enhancing the territorial capacity to benefit from EU cohesion policy implementation. Besides the compliance to the ITI strategy, its role is further increasing since 2020, when it has been moving beyond the scope of the ITI instrument, towards more indigenously embedded metropolitan cooperation. This wider role of metropolitan coordination is for the planning period 2021-27 supported and stimulated by the top-down national government directives, specifically from the regional policy of Ministry for Regional Development, as well as by bottom-up interests and initiatives of the major and core cities (and their mayors) of metropolitan and urban areas, that are the holders of the ITI.

HOT SPOT MESSAGES**The importance of devolved management**

To entrust metropolitan authorities with management functions in the EU cohesion policy (through an ITI or selected OPs priorities) contribute to enhance their role within the national multilevel governance framework and to increase the added value of the EU cohesion policy on metropolitan planning and development

In the cases where metropolitan institutions were allowed to manage funds, the metropolitan impact of EU cohesion policy is higher and so is the capacity of metropolitan areas to focus on EU cohesion policy thematic priorities in their action.

3 How metropolitan areas use the EU cohesion policy to engage and coordinate with municipalities

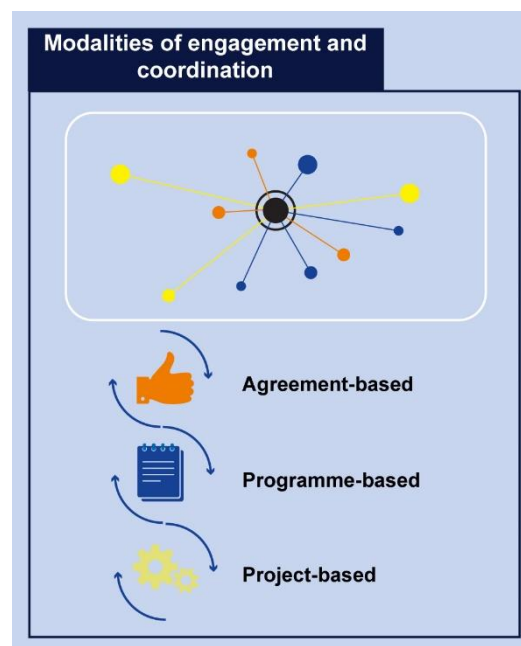
The use of the EU cohesion policy by metropolitan areas to engage and coordinate with their respective municipalities is a critical issue because the **inclusion in decisional processes of metropolitan areas regarding programming and/or implementing the EU cohesion policy is limited**. The level of engagement as well as its nature differ across the EU metropolitan areas. According to the data collected by the ESPON METRO targeted analysis, three different engagement and coordination modalities can be highlighted (Figure 4):

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

For instance, in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, a dedicated agreement allows the administrative authority to engage with 35 of its 36 municipalities when managing a dedicated share of the ERDF ROP resources. At the same time, the City Council of Barcelona is given specific treatment due to its size & importance, and not to distort the calls the other municipalities of Catalonia will be able to participate. This separation between the capital municipality and the others does not occur in Portugal, where the Lisbon Metropolitan Area acts as an intermediate management body entity, leads the Pact for Development and Territorial Cohesion and is responsible for the Integrated Territo-

rial Investment in the metropolitan area, implementing the strategy, defining priorities, approving projects and investments.

Figure 4



The role of the ITI in favouring the cooperation and coordination of metropolitan municipalities is particularly evident in the context of the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan area. Prior to the 2014-20 programming period, two separate metropolitan cooperation platforms existed, with little co-operation ongoing between them: Gdańsk OM and NOR-DA Association. As a result of the introduction of ITI, the two metropolitan associations were merged into the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot Metropolitan Area in order to cooperate in the management of the ITI, with metropolitan actors that now cooperate in the definition of the priorities to be financed under the ITI mechanism and in the selection of the most important projects. A similar situation is evinced in the Brno Metropolitan Area, where the Municipality of Brno that has used the ITI to further engage in metropolitan cooperation activities with the other municipalities and to jointly collaborate with them in the development of strategies and actions.

When it comes to project-based cooperation among municipalities, EU funded projects have been used to coordinate and engage municipalities in various ways. In Turin, for instance, the Metropolitan City has made use of Interreg AL-COTRA Integrated Territorial Projects (PITER, PITEM) to co-participate with local authorities in the same project proposal, in some cases as lead

partner. The role of ETC funded projects to stimulate inter-municipal cooperation was highlighted in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, where local authorities, especially the small and medium-sized municipalities, tend to avoid calls from ROP ERDF and even NOP preferring direct calls from European Commission (URBACT and UIA).

Whereas the main inputs towards the joint action of municipalities towards a metropolitan perspective is certainly provided through formal and informal agreements, programmes and projects, other governance bodies and mechanisms exist, that contribute to favour the joint action of metropolitan municipalities. On the one hand, in most cases this occurs in relation to selected territories and/or specific sectoral issues, somehow limiting the overall metropolitan value of the cooperation. On the other hand, however, these initiatives constitute interesting practices that the metropolitan authorities should learn how to interact with and coordinate, in so doing diversifying their action and experimenting innovative routes towards metropolitan development. The most relevant example in this concern is represented by the Local Action Groups (LAGs), that in selected context act as managers and beneficiaries of funds and stimulate the joint development of integrated territorial strategies and actions (Box 4).

HOT SPOT MESSAGES

Looking for a role to play

Metropolitan areas differ across Europe in terms of institutional recognition, arrangement and development path, as well as the role they play in the coordination and engagement of local municipalities therein.

They are using EU cohesion policy as a space for experimenting with modalities of top-down and bottom-up interactions with local bodies. This institutional training ground has allowed metropolitan areas to explore different ways of engagement and coordination through stipulating agreements, adopting shared development programmes or implementing on-site projects. This experimental dimension is important as well as the possibility for metropolitan areas to play a more formal and institutionalised role in implementing the EU cohesion policy.

CASE STUDY

Box 4_The role of LAGs in favouring intermunicipal cooperation within metropolitan areas

In the Metropolitan City of Florence, the LAG Start, financed with a specific measure of the Rural Development Programme, acted as a mechanism for the involvement of municipalities in the use of EU cohesion policy. It operated like a local development agency favouring the development of innovative rural development strategies integrated between public and private entities, and promoting and coordinating innovative projects in its area of action (Mugello, Val di Sieve, Val di Bisenzio, Chianti hills).

Also the territory of the Metropolitan City of Turin hosts three Local Action Groups (Escartons, Valli del Canavese, Valli di Lanzo Ceronda e Casternone), that have adopted the Community-Led Local Development approach under the Rural Development Programme. The Metropolitan area also features a SNAI strategy area (Valli di Lanzo); however, the metropolitan authority does not play any role in its programming and implementation. In fact, the CLLD is coordinated by the Region through its Rural Development Programme and implemented by the LAGs.

In the case of Lisbon, 10 LAGs have established protocols of functional articulation with the Lisbon Regional Operational Programme (ROP) 2014-20. Importantly, two of them have a declared inter-municipal aim and involve collaboration across more municipalities: the A2S – Association for Sustainable Development of “Salóia” Region, that located at the heart of a countryside area in the north of Lisbon, and ADREPES – Association for Regional Development of Setúbal Peninsula, covering a section of the south portion of LMA. These cooperation arrangements are not directly related to the main metropolitan institution, making the governance framework of the Lisbon metropolitan area more complex.

4 How metropolitan areas use the EU cohesion policy to engage business actors and social groups

Metropolitan areas have different modalities to engage business actors and social groups. According to the evidence gathered in the METRO research, metropolitan areas can include these actors at different stages of EU cohesion policy implementation (Figure 6).

Business actors and social groups might be included in the **elaboration of EU cohesion policy programmes** – informing, consulting or including them in the decision-making process – or for the adoption of own strategic documents as in the case the Metropolitan Strategic Plan 2021-2023, *‘Torino Metropoli Aumentata’* which was approved in 2021 after an inclusive participatory process (see Box 5). In Brno, the participatory approach of the EU cohesion policy foresees the involvement of relevant actors in the territory to participate in the discussion and definition of strategic development goals within the thematic objectives of Integrated Strategy. The explicit recognition of the territorial dimension of the EU cohesion policy initiated the establishment of the Regional and National Standing Conferences. However, actors like NGOs and business partners are involved only in the implementation of the EU cohesion policy through their projects as defined by individual objectives of OPs.

These actors might be involved also in the **management and governance** of EU cohesion policy funding programmes as part of **monitoring committees** or part of the management body as happens for the LAGs. For example, every Polish OP is endowed with the Monitoring Committee. The Committee acts as an independent advisory and opinion-making body, appointed by the Managing Authority. It is composed of representatives of the government, local government and organizations outside the administration (including representatives of science, non-governmental organizations, social partners). However, the metropolitan

structures have no statutory role in these committees.

Finally, business actors and social groups might be included during the **implementation** of EU cohesion policy funding projects, as beneficiaries and partners or lead partners of projects involving more than one beneficiary. For instance, in the case of the ITI managed by the *Métropole de Lyon*, the focus on deprived network allowed for the involvement of various social housing actors in the projects that derived from the latter.

Figure 6



HOT SPOT MESSAGES

Partnership matters

The EU cohesion policy has room for creating synergies among private and public entities while their coordination is crucial in addressing territorial challenges. Private actors are involved in drafting strategies, programmes or implementing projects, with managerial roles. The participation of social actors and business groups definitely provides an added value to the EU cohesion policy implementation that would further benefit from an increase of the role of those actors in this process.

CASE STUDY

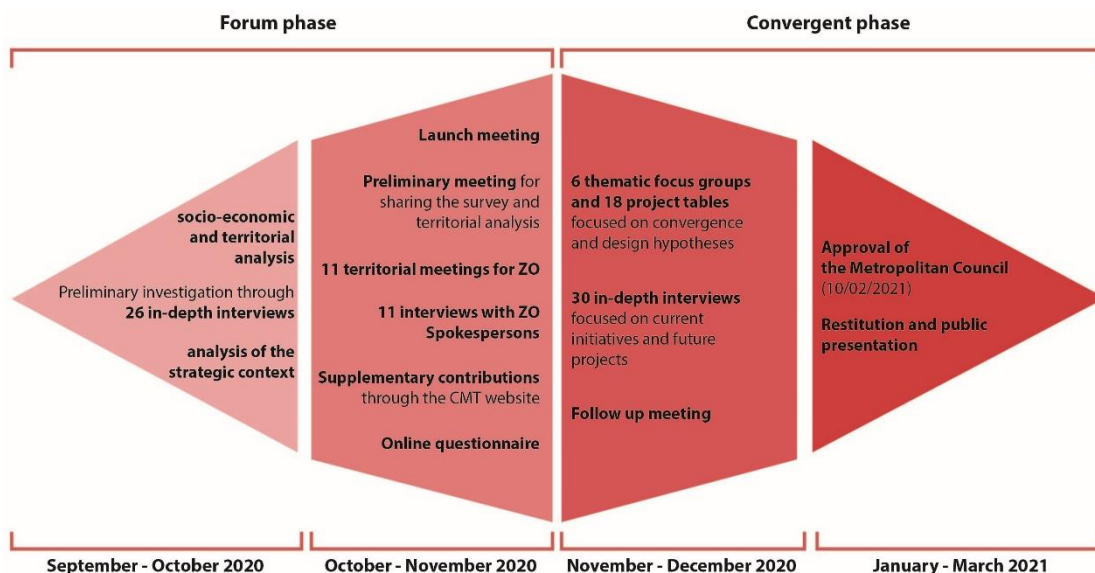
Box 5_Participatory mechanisms for engagement. The case of Turin Metropolitan Strategic Plan

The Metropolitan Strategic Plan has been approved in 2021, after a participatory process – which was structured in two phases – lasting more than three months, between September and December 2020, and involving several categories of actors.

The first phase - known as the forum phase - was aimed at framing the main problems of the metropolitan territory and, based on these, some priority lines of development consistent with the interests of the different actors and areas that make up the metropolitan territory. During this phase, 37 in-depth interviews were carried out involving the 11 representatives of the homogeneous zones and 26 stakeholders representing the main points of view of social groups and the business community. The results of this preliminary survey were discussed in 11 territorial meetings by homogeneous zones. In parallel, two additional channels were set up to collect contributions and opinions from local citizens. An online form and an online questionnaire were launched to survey some general perceptions on the main critical issues in the area and to collect suggestions for the design and implementation of the Plan.

The second phase - known as the convergent phase - aimed at formulating project ideas that would take into account the results of the forum phase, in order to structure the contents of the Metropolitan Strategic Plan, and was developed through 24 thematic focus groups (15 participants on average) and 30 in-depth interviews on specific topics. The discussion in the focus groups was set up starting from a position paper which reported the results of the forum phase. The focus groups were aimed to elaborate project ideas consistent with the insights that emerged in the forum phase. The in-depth interviews were carried out in order to articulate some specific aspects that emerged in the focus groups, also concerning activities already in place in the metropolitan area.

The restitution of what emerged in the focus groups, the results of the questionnaire, the integrations collected with the in-depth interviews and the framework provided by the scientific surveys constitute the sources from which the contents of the Strategic Plan have been elaborated.



5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this policy brief was to provide information concerning the added value that the EU cohesion policy has provided throughout Europe in favouring the consolidation of metropolitan governance and in the development and articulation of cooperation practices therein.

In relation to these processes, less institutionalized metropolitan areas seem to perceive a higher value and would like to exploit the opportunities offered by the EU cohesion policy to further consolidate the position of the metropolitan institutions within national and regional administrative hierarchies. However, also formal metropolitan authorities generally acknowledge the added value that the EU cohesion policy could have in consolidating cooperation dynamics with the national and regional levels, with the various municipal authorities they include as well as with the business community and the social actors that are active within their boundaries.

The provided policy messages address whether and under what conditions the EU cohesion policy may contribute to the consolidation of integrated metropolitan governance structures and stimulate further cooperation therein. Moreover, where functional dynamics are not matching the borders of metropolitan institutions, the use of EU funds may help to stimulate institutional actors to cooperate according to area-based approaches.

5.1 Recommendations for the metropolitan level

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

(Variable networking) **Valorise the role of the metropolitan institution**, using the opportunities offered by the different EU instruments (Operational Programmes, ITI, CLLD, the Recovery and Resilience Facility) to adapting the scale of metropolitan governance to actual functional challenges (i.e. cooperating with neighbouring territo-

rial units towards a broader perspective and acting within its own territory through variable geographies).

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

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

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

5.2 Recommendations for the national and regional institutions

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

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

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

5.3 Recommendations for EU-level actors

(Cooperation catalyst) **Recognise metropolitan areas as catalysts of cooperation within heterogeneous territories** and involve them in EU

cohesion policy programming and management, in so doing improving the multilevel partnership among local, regional and national actors as well as economic and social stakeholders.

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

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

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

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



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