



Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

TARGETED ANALYSIS //

METRO

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

Synthesis report // December 2021

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Abbreviations

CLLD	Community led local development
EU	European Union
FUA	Functional Urban Area
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
OP	Operational Programme
PQ	Policy Question
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises

Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

United in diversity: detailed cases analysis and common recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A building block for wider relevance and research on metropolitan areas

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 Context and purpose of METRO

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

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

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

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

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

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

These questions were answered through five main actions:

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

2 Key findings

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

2.1 Comparing functional and institutional dynamics

A first set of considerations concerns the **high heterogeneity that characterises the metropolitan phenomenon and its governance in the European continent.**

The nine metropolitan contexts investigated by the project contexts are highly differential in relation to the territorial characteristics of the metropolitan areas and of their respective FUAs (Figure 1). Moreover, the actual correspondence between the FUAs and the territories that are interested by the action of the nine metropolitan areas varies widely from case to case.

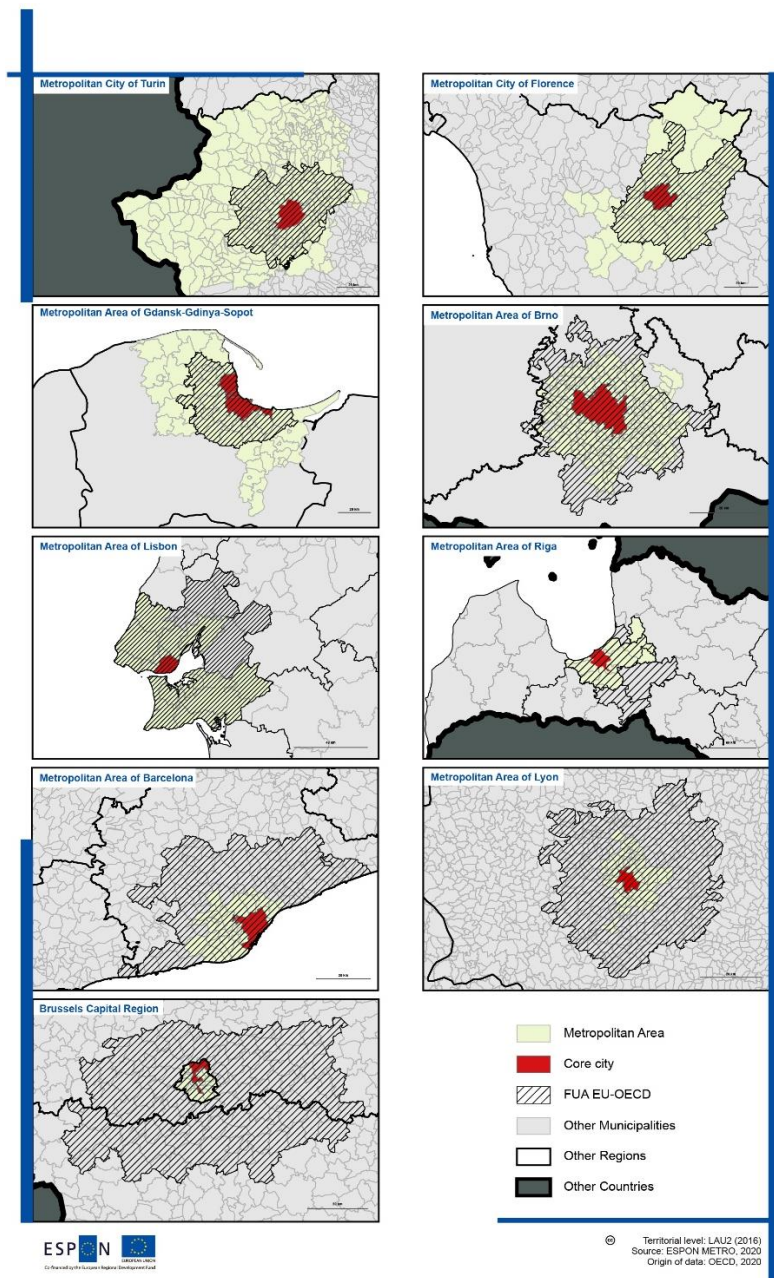


Figure 1. Correspondence between functional and institutional phenomena in the METRO case studies.

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

Also the nature of the metropolitan institutions is very diverse, with some metropolitan areas that are characterised by long-standing formal institutions, or by institutions that have been formalised after a first phase of informal collaboration, others are just at the beginning of their history of metropolitan cooperation. Moreover, among these clusters of formal, informal and semi-formal metropolitan entities, a variety of structures, mechanisms and tools for metropolitan governance have been detected, that in turn are strongly dependent from the national and regional institutional frameworks within which the metropolitan areas under scrutiny operate.

2.2 The role of metropolitan areas within the governance of the EU cohesion policy

The nine case studies explored in the project confirm the multi-level nature of European territorial governance, revealing that the governance of European cohesion policy concerns a large number of actors at various territorial levels, whose configurations and mechanisms of interaction varies from country to country.

Overall, the **metropolitan areas under investigation played a rather limited in the programming, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy** in the 2014-20 programming period. In particular, the lack of involvement in the programming activity may depend on a number of variables: (i) the late institutionalisation of metropolitan areas in their respective national contexts, (ii) their exceptionality within the latter, that contribute to subordinated them to ordinary local authorities in the negotiation, or simply (ii) the lack of any formal status, that prevented their involvement. As far as the 2021-27 programming period is concerned, the situation does not seem to have changed to a relevant extent. However, in some cases it is possible to witness a higher engagement of metropolitan authorities that, mostly through soft negotiation processes, have managed to exert some sort of influence on the agenda of the regional and national authorities responsible for the programming activity

When it comes to the management and implementation phases, the role played by metropolitan areas mostly depends on the differential architecture that characterises the EU cohesion policy in each country and the programmes and instruments that are employed. Whereas all metropolitan areas under investigation have benefited from the implementation of the EU cohesion policy as beneficiaries of selected projects and activities, in some cases they also played a management role as intermediate bodies. **The main and most interesting arrangement through which this has happened is represented by the adoption of Integrated territorial investments (ITIs)** dedicated to the development and implementation of integrated metropolitan development strategies. However, metropolitan ITIs have been put in place only in four cases over nine, with the differential implementation of the instruments among European countries and reasons that seems to depend on its regulatory framework, that not sufficiently prescriptive to successfully challenge national and regional authorities that are unwilling to devolve budgets and responsibilities at the local level (Figure 2).

At the same time, other arrangements concerning the devolution of management competences in relation to either specific priorities or a dedicated share of resources also produced interesting results. A particular mention is deserved by the National Operational Programme *Città Metropolitane* that, unique of its kind in Europe, has been put in place in Italy to promote social innovation and to reinforce the smart city paradigm in Italian metropolitan cities. If we set aside the fact that the projects are mostly implemented by the core municipalities, this instrument could serve as an inspiration for the development of some sort of Metropolitan OP or ITI, that may be adopted throughout Europe to support integrated metropolitan development.

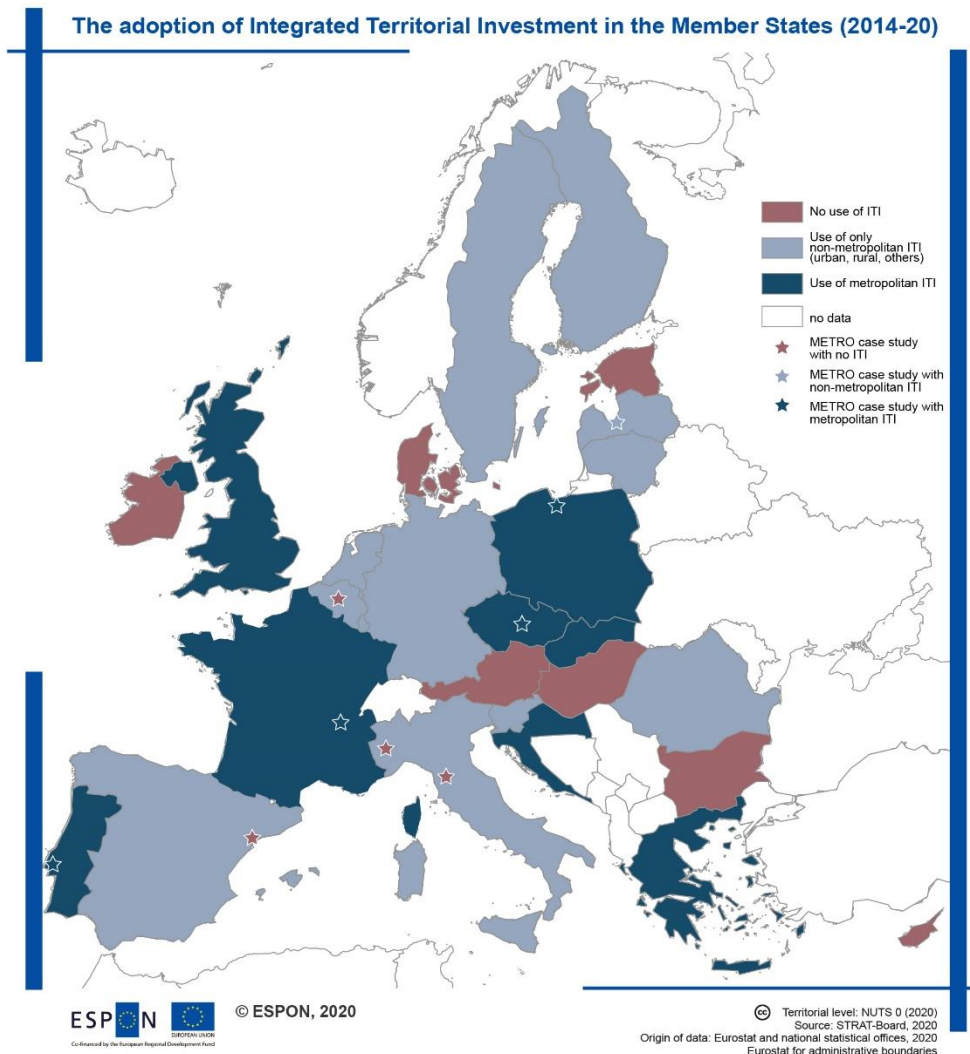


Figure 2. The adoption of Integrated Territorial Investments in the Member States (2014-20)

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

When examining the various thematic objectives that substantiate the EU Cohesion Policy programmes that have an impact on the nine METRO areas, the analysis reveals a stronger focus on the priorities of research and innovation, information and communication technology, SMEs' competitiveness, and low carbon economy, that emerge as key priorities for both developed and less developed regions. This demonstrates a strong emphasis on policies aimed at innovation, competitiveness, and decarbonization of the economy. Other thematic priorities across metropolitan areas concentrate in education and social inclusion, targeting deprived families and groups, as much as environment and resource efficiency. Climate change and risk prevention as well as public administration modernization objectives do not present the same relevance.

Whereas the analysis shows that **metropolitan areas have been recipient of a large majority of the 11 thematic priorities that underpinned the EU cohesion policy in the programming period 2014-20**, the EU cohesion policy objectives appear to be coherent with the main goals of metropolitan cooperation. However, the actual level of coherence and the drivers behind it are differential, and vary from context to context.

Some contexts are characterised by **circular dynamics of influence**, that contribute to enhance the coherence between the European and the metropolitan dimension. This model concerns metropolitan areas that are characterised by their own development agenda and priorities, while at the same time are entrusted with the management of a more or less relevant amount of EU cohesion policy resources. Other metropolitan

areas are mostly subject to **top-down influences**, that contribute to the development of metropolitan development strategies and policies that are shaped on the priorities of the EU cohesion policy. This case concerns those metropolitan areas that, due to their scarce institutionalisation, were not characterised by a consolidated metropolitan agenda, and were then entrusted with the development and management of a dedicated EU cohesion policy strategy. A third case concerns those metropolitan areas that are sufficiently institutionalised to develop their own development strategies and policies, but neither possess an adequate level of financial resources to implement them nor are entrusted with the management of a relevant share of the EU cohesion policy. Here metropolitan authorities **react from the bottom-up to the stimuli** of the EU cohesion policy, shaping their own strategies and policies in a way that will then allow for maximising the channelling of ESIF over the identified actions. Overall, the level of coherence between metropolitan development goals and EU cohesion policy is maximised in those cases where metropolitan governance and cooperation exists almost exclusively as functional to the management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy, or where no direct management exists and the metropolitan authorities are conditioned to adapt their territorial agenda and policies in a way that then allow to maximise the channelling of EU resources on the include priorities and actions. However, this is not necessarily an asset, as it may mean that the metropolitan priorities have been tailored over those defined in the EU cohesion policy framework without reflecting on their actual fit with the domestic context.

When it comes to the **added value that the EU cohesion policy may produce in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policy**, the results of the project suggest that the magnitude of funds received by each territory and their weight in relation to the budget of metropolitan and local authorities contribute to influencing it, but is not the only relevant variable. As important is the actual institutionalisation of the metropolitan governance in a given context, as well as the devolution of the management of EU cohesion policy resources to metropolitan institutions. Drawing on this evidence, the project identifies the ideal condition in which the potential for the EU cohesion policy to produce an added value in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policies is maximised, as occurring in the presence of high levels of funding, that are managed by a formal metropolitan institution whose boundaries overlap perfectly with those of the metropolitan functional area. Starting from this ideal condition, it then builds a typology that is composed of all the other possible cases that differ from it in relation to one or more of the identified variables. Exploring this typology, it is possible to reflect on the potential that the different metropolitan configurations entail for the EU cohesion policy to produce a metropolitan added value, as a function that is inversely proportional to the transaction costs that are required to set up the necessary conditions to maximise this added value. At the same time, this exercise allows stakeholders from the different metropolitan areas in Europe to recognise where they position among the identified categories, to then receive indications on what added value the EU cohesion policy can generate in their case, what are the variables determining it, and what are the actions they may want to pursue in order to improve their situation.

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

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

Whereas the EU cohesion may or may not played a role in the emergence of metropolitan institutions and governance, once they were in place it has contributed in most cases to the consolidation of existing forms of cooperation – for instance favouring the upgrade of formal and informal networks, supporting the formalisation of associations of local entities etc. – and the further institutionalisation – e.g. favouring their incremental recognitions.

Table 1. The role of the EU cohesion policy in the establishment of metropolitan institutions and governance

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

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

2.5 The role of metropolitan areas in facing the COVID-19 pandemic

Finally, whereas metropolitan areas appear well positioned to react to COVID-19 pandemic and to contribute to planning its aftermath, due to the crucial role they could play in the promotion and coordination of inter-municipal strategies and actions and the support that they can provide to municipalities in the development and implementation of projects, the collected evidence report a scarce involvement and a limited role of the EU cohesion policy.

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

3 Policy messages

From the ESPON METRO results, it is possible to distil a number of policy messages that aim at supporting metropolitan, national/regional and EU-level stakeholders towards a further enhancement of the metropolitan dimension of the EU cohesion policy and a stronger engagement of metropolitan actors within the latter.

3.1 Strengthen the role of metropolitan areas within the EU cohesion policy

Metropolitan areas played a rather limited role in the programming, management and implementation of the EU cohesion policy in the 2014-20 programming period, mostly as a consequence of the differential architecture that characterises each country and the programmes and instruments that are employed.

In order to favour further engagement, metropolitan areas should **identify thematic priorities and actions for which the metropolitan level generates a higher impact**, and use available instruments and processes to motivate and claim a role accordingly and address regional, national and EU authorities through concrete proposals. In doing so, they should **network actively with other metropolitan areas at the national and EU level to exchange knowledge and good practices and jointly organise lobbying and promote actions** towards further recognition of the metropolitan dimension in the EU cohesion policy. At the same time, metropolitan areas would benefit from a **strengthening of the collaboration dynamics linking them with all the municipalities within the metropolitan area, the 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.

National and regional actors may support the process, **acknowledging the crucial role that metropolitan level can play** in dealing with socio-economic and territorial challenges. Accordingly, they should **involve metropolitan institutions in the design of EU cohesion policy National and Regional Operational Programmes**, to enrich them with a metropolitan dimension, and **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. All this would help the **structuring of a coherent multilevel governance framework** that ensures the effective coordination of the EU, national, regional, metropolitan and local planning and policies.

Also EU level can play an important role, first and foremost through the **definition of the boundaries of a specific EU metropolitan development discourse and policy** in parallel to, but independently from the one focusing on sustainable urban development. This would contribute to formally **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. At the same time, additional support can come from **the implementation of the European code of conduct on partnership** in the Member States when programming and managing the EU cohesion policy programmes and the **introduction of 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.

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

The added value that the EU cohesion policy may produce in the planning and implementation of metropolitan policy is highly varied. The magnitude of funds received by each territory and their weight in relation to the budget of metropolitan and local authorities contribute to influence this added value, together with the actual institutionalisation of the metropolitan governance in a given context, as well as the devolution of the management of EU cohesion policy resources to metropolitan institutions.

In order to enhance the added value of the EU cohesion policy in their planning and implementation, metropolitan actors should consider **providing themselves with an overarching, comprehensive metropolitan strategy matching the EU cohesion policy**, in order to facilitate the channelling of resources on concrete metropolitan actions. When possible, use it to upload pivotal metropolitan priorities on the regional, national

and EU agendas. At the same time, they should use existing frameworks and instruments creatively, to **integrate sectoral actions anytime it is possible and propose integrated projects with a potentially metropolitan-wide, high impact**. The different means should be used to allow a **differential action over different types of territories** (FUA, urban-rural relations, remote rural areas etc.) in so doing tackling territorial misfits and heterogeneity through a multi-network approach.

At the same time, also national and regional actors can play a role in the process, **involving metropolitan representatives when programming National and Regional Operational Programmes as well as other relevant programmes, in so doing strengthening their metropolitan dimension**. **Identifying the metropolitan level as a relevant nexus between national, regional and local authorities**, in the spirit of higher subsidiarity, the national and regional government should **introduce programmes and instruments managed at the metropolitan level** (as dedicated OPs, ITIs or other ad hoc agreements), to guarantee the allocation of funding **enhancing vertical and horizontal coordination** in the definition of priorities and operational plans with a metropolitan dimension.

Finally, EU-level actors should **acknowledge the metropolitan scale as the most suitable scale to efficiently tackle functional urban challenges and facilitate supralocal cooperation** and **provide metropolitan governments with dedicated programming instruments** (ITI, Metropolitan Operational Programmes), deputed to address relevant metropolitan issues (e.g. socio-economic polarisation, smart economic transformation, mobility, social inclusion, climate change). At the same time, **managerial burdens should be streamlined and the logics and mechanisms behind the various EU funds simplified**, in so doing favouring their integration within territorial development strategies and actions.

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

Through its cohesion policy, the EU has favoured the emergence and consolidation of metropolitan governance and cooperation throughout Europe. However, the potential of the EU cohesion policy agreements to further stimulate the engagement of metropolitan municipalities and other private and social actors hasn't been capitalised to a full extent yet.

In order to use the cohesion policy to consolidate their role, Metropolitan areas should **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, and **use the EU cohesion policy and other means as a leverage** to overcome the differential interests of basic territorial units and encourage them to join forces. At the same time, it is important to **valorise the role of the metropolitan institution**, using the opportunities offered by the different EU instruments (OPs, ITI, CLLD, RRF) to adapt the scale of metropolitan governance to actual functional challenges. Whenever possible, **existing metropolitan policy forums** should be used 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.

National and regional actors may accompany these efforts **devolving the management of specific OPs priorities or of a dedicated Metropolitan OP to metropolitan institutions**, to 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. In doing so, they should **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 multi-level decision making process

An important input to metropolitan activities and their governance can also be delivered through the action of EU level actors, if they **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. Overall, the EU level should **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. **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.



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