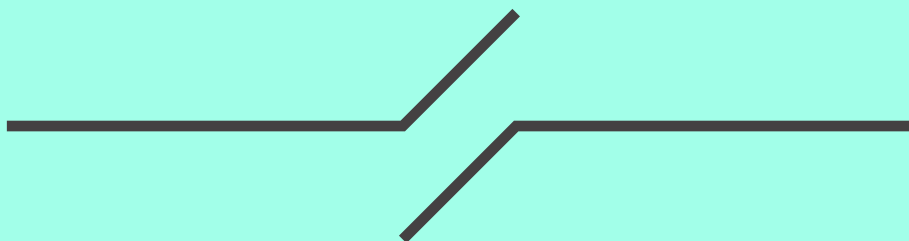


**SMART  
METROPOLIA**

**PRZESTRZENIE  
RELACJI**



**Obszar Metropolitalny  
Gdańsk Gdynia Sopot**

SMART  
METROPOLIA  
2017

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WDRAŻANIE AGENDY MIEJSKIEJ  
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# THE METROPOLITAN CHALLENGE IN EUROPE

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There is a substantial mismatch between the size of the cities and their functional urban areas in Europe: in average, 2.3 times more people live in the travel-to-work area of cities than the number of people who vote for the mayor of the core city. The coordination across the municipalities of the functional urban area is one of the most important challenges of integrated urban development. This is especially true for the larger urban areas, the metropolitan areas which should be the locomotives of urban development in the EU.

The metropolitan challenge is discussed from different angles in this paper. The short overview on the benefits and bottlenecks of metropolitan cooperation is followed by discussing recent policy trends and good practices of metropolitan coordination. The concluding chapter summarises lessons from the present and ideas for the future regarding EU policies and tools for metropolitan areas.

## **1 Benefits of metropolitan cooperation and the main bottlenecks**

It is well-known among economists that coordination between neighbouring municipalities in functional urban areas is crucial to reach the economy of scale – size matters in economic activities and in services. Another advantage is that coordination helps to avoid the negative effects of competition (in investments, services, taxes) between local authorities while it also helps to integrate policies. All in all it can be said that the metropolitan area is the

appropriate spatial level for effective integrated approaches to sustainable development, helping also to bridge urban-rural issues and achieve more balanced development.

There are many examples in Europe showing that without metropolitan cooperation suburbs can become freeriders of city services and counterproductive competition becomes dominant among municipalities for investors. Especially quickly growing cities suffer if the benefits and costs of growth cannot be distributed across the municipalities of the metropolitan area.

The Eurocities „Metropolitan Areas In Action” research (Eurocities, 2013) explored on the example of 40 European cities the realities of territorial collaboration forms around large European cities. It was shown that on Functional Urban Area (FUA) level usually only informal collaborations exist; while the strong collaborations found in a few cities usually do not cover the full FUA territory. To handle this „metropolitan area mismatch” with the establishment of a new general administrative level for metropolitan areas is not easy, as in most countries it would be difficult to add a new level to the already overcrowded system of administrative levels. There were two suggestions formulated on the basis of research to strengthen cooperation on FUA level (Tosics, 2014):

- to give more power and functions to the existing weak collaborations on FUA level, by „collecting some competences” from the upper regional level and some from below, given the municipalities (among others, Zürich and Manchester show such tendencies);
- to expand in territorial sense the existing strong collaborations to cover the whole area of the FUA better through „replacement”: dissolve the existing administrative level around the large cities and merge them with the city into a metropolitan unit, while keep this level unchanged in other parts of the country (this happened in Italy with the creation of Metropolitan Cities, and similar tendencies are observable in France).

The Eurocities research arrived to the conclusion that stronger metropolitan collaboration requires top-down frameworks and policies (both from the side of the EU and the national level) and

bottom-up cooperation efforts (by the municipalities of the FUA area, led by the core city).

## 2 Recent policy trends in metropolitan cooperation in the EU countries

The following table gives a rough overview of recent efforts towards metropolitan development in different countries.

COUNTRY	INITIATIVE	TOP-DOWN (TD) OR BOTTOM-UP (BU)	GATEKEEPER LEVEL
FRANCE	Municipal associations; series of laws since 1999  Regional reform (2015): future of departements?	TD-BU  TD	Regions
ITALY	Metropolitan cities initiative: 1990, 2000, 2012, 2014; thinking about the future of provinces	TD	Regions
GERMANY	Metropolitan regions initiative: starting from the late 1990s	BU	Laender
POLAND	Regional reform in Metropolization of regional seats since 2007, based on EU money (ITI)	TD-BU	Regions
ROMANIA	Municipal associations since 2004, Growth Poles to allocate EU resources since 2007	TD	

Source: ESPON SPIMA 2017, Eurocities 2013.

The national policies listed in the table refer to the largest cities of the given country (although France has also cooperation laws for relatively smaller urban areas). The OECD definition of metropolitan areas sets a lower limit of 500 000 inhabitants (OECD, 2015:12). The 20 *métropoles* of France are all above 200 thousand (and 9 of them above 500 thousand), while the Italian metropolitan



cities all above 430 thousand population. In Poland, all ITI associations around the 17 regional seat cities are above 200 thousand while roughly half of them above 500 thousand population.

The OECD definition corresponds to the original understanding of the European Metropolitan Authorities association, founded by the largest secondary metropolitan areas and cities, like Barcelona, Lyon, Milan. It is, however, worth to define also a „secondary group” of metropolitan areas, with relatively lower population figures (around 150-200 thousand), which are drivers of development in their territory via their functional relations. Thus metropolitan areas should be defined not only on the basis of the population of the core city and not even of the total population of the area, but taking also the geo-political aspects into account.

Behind the national metropolization efforts, usually financial (save money on administration) and policy (improve efficiency of governing) reasons can be found. In the case of Poland and Romania the better use of EU Cohesion Funds was the driving force. There are, however, also examples for politically motivated approaches, when the government intervenes without proper discussions with the affected municipalities and carries its own agenda (e.g. in order to change the leadership of the core city). To avoid such misuses of metropolization debates with the affected municipalities and all other stakeholders, involving also the civil society and private entrepreneurs are always needed when preparing any metropolitan solution.

It is important to note that even if in a few countries visionary national metropolitan policies exist, their real functioning depends strongly on the gate keeping power of the intermediate administrative regions: e.g. some of the Italian metropolitan cities are blocked by their regions and also some of the German Metropolregionen suffer from the lack of coordination between the Laender to which they belong.

The content of metropolitan coordination can be manifold, but usually includes some of the following: strategic and land-use planning, mobility regulation (transport associations, road charging), infrastructure and housing development.

### **3 Good practices of metropolitan coordination: governance and planning solutions**

There might be many ways to achieve cooperation on the metropolitan level. Below two success cases are mentioned briefly: Barcelona, with the establishment of a new organization and Zürich, with strong spatial planning policies.

#### **3.1 Successful metropolitan organizations**

Around the 1.6 million city of Barcelona by a law of the Catalan Parliament in 2010 the Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona (AMB) has been formed, involving 36 municipalities with over 3.2 million population. AMB has a budget of €1,5 bn (the third largest budget after Catalunya and Barcelona city), paid by the municipalities and not from national or regional level. The biggest contribution comes from Barcelona, and the mayor of Barcelona is the president of the AMB. Public services for the metropolitan area are run by AMB, including public transport, water cycle, waste of products and environment. It has the competence to develop the Metropolitan Urban Master Plan and has strong competences in spatial planning, land and housing policies. As a novelty, AMB became subject of EU financing: a €30 million ERDF project was signed between AMB and Catalunya. Despite its importance there are still many problems: the AMB is not reaching in size the full metropolitan area and lacks stronger political and financial power (e.g. compared to Stuttgart Region).

#### **3.2 Planning cooperation on metropolitan level**

Zürich is a city of 415 thousand population, in the center of a 1.9 million metropolitan area, including 8 cantons (the strong, directly elected middle-tier governments) and 122 settlements. The Swiss government defined metropolitan areas and prescribed mandatory planning cooperation within these. In the Zürich area it took 7 years to build up the cooperation, which includes regula-

tion of growth and working out how to compensate those of which the growth is limited. The agreement was achieved in the informal level of planning conference, the resolution of which is not binding but gradually taken over by the 8 cantons which make binding decisions to implement cooperation.

In this model an important aspect is the indirect support of the federal level, through the approval process of the cantonal spatial plans. The federal level, which was involved in the discussions about the metropolitan plan, considers the progressive metropolitan plan when deciding about the approval of the plans of the cantons – which in that way cannot differ fundamentally from the metropolitan plan.

In the case of Zürich, metropolitan cooperation has been achieved through planning procedures, not institutional structures. As it was shown, even in this case the strategy of the national level is of crucial importance.

## **4 EU policies and tools for metropolitan areas: lessons from the present and ideas for the future**

### **4.1 Lessons from the present period (2014-2020)**

In the early 2010s in the debates about Cohesion Policy an important novelty was the large interest paid to integrated urban development. There was an agreement achieved about the setting up of a dedicated funding for Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) in the form of Article 7 of ERDF. This funding, minimum 5% of ERDF, created a good potential for strategies towards integrated place-based approaches – especially in those countries where ERDF funding was substantial. The Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) was aimed to become the main tool, blending ERDF and ESF financing and compulsorily prescribing planning on the metropolitan level.

In the course of the debates, however, some member states rejected the original ideas of the Commission and the application of the ITI tool and planning on metropolitan area level did not become com-

pulsory, it has been degraded to only one of the options in the regulation. Although in some of the countries ITI has been applied on FUA level, resulting in new bodies for metropolitan cooperation, this did not become the general trend and in most of the countries no metropolitan cooperation exists at all in the allocation of EU means. Most of the original ambitions have faded away – this was a missed opportunity from the perspective of metropolitan planning (Tosics, 2016).

No wonder that recent evaluations show many emerging problems in the use of EU means for metropolitan cooperation. It is a general view among analysts that the required strong thematic concentration on sectoral priorities very much limits the integration on territorial level, as the priority axes are usually not flexible enough to accommodate local needs. There are problems even in those countries which apply ITI on metropolitan level: the national level might misuse the metropolitan dimension if not including sufficiently the metropolitan and local stakeholders into planning and implementation. The complexity of the regulation might lead to substantial time delay if the national level is not prepared enough which might lead to loss of substantial chunks of funding. Finally, metropolitan planning might lead to decrease in democracy if no citizen input is required.

#### **4.2 Unfortunate conditions regarding the future of the EU and Cohesion Policy**

Recently the EU is facing political and financial crisis at the same time. The rise of populist and far-right forces has led in some countries to the establishment of illiberal regimes, not following the long-established democracy model of the EU. The financial crisis is equally alarming: *brexit*, the leave of the third largest net contributor to the EU, will blow a €13 – €17 bn yearly hole in the EU's budget.

It is very unlikely that the remaining countries will pay more into the EU budget. The unavoidable budget reduction will affect both Cohesion Policy and Agricultural Policy fundamentally. Thus, there is a strong argument that after *brexit* the whole architecture

of Cohesion Policy has to be revisited in order to stay effective. A fresh look would be needed – to reconsider all „holly rules” which were considered so far as untouchable. This is of course difficult as each programme and institution want to keep/maximize their influence and money.

Due to the strong democracy deficit in the EU (which is one of the main reasons of the unfortunate political changes), Cohesion Policy will probably stay as being the only EU policy in which people are directly involved and can have the feeling that investments are done for them. Regarding a large-scale reform of Cohesion Policy there are many burning issues. Simplification is urgently needed, one aspect of which should be deciding on the basis of results and not bills. The most important ex-ante conditionalities can not be eliminated but could be applied more proportionally, taking the performance history of the country into account. If conditionalities are linked in that way to the European Semester, then Cohesion Policy can remain a policy for all territories, also for those more developed ones which get small amounts and suffer from the unproportional bureaucracy. For the moment, no other option can be seen for the future as keeping shared management for significant portion of the cohesion policy.

Taking all these considerations together, there is a chance in the future Cohesion Policy for a stronger territorial dimension and simplification in the form of less thematic priorities and giving larger choice for metropolitan areas. This agenda is summarised in the last chapter below.

#### **4.3 Towards a stronger metropolitan dimension post 2020**

A meaningful metropolitan dimension would require more role to Europe in creating the framework within which the national regulators have to give larger role to the metropolitan level. The introduction of a Metropolitan Agenda by the EU would require substantial increase in the share of the territorial dimension (SUD). More weight should be given for integrated development on the metropolitan level, allocating block grants on that level, replacing the thematic concentration. For all this to function, the EU should

support the idea that metropolitan authorities and organized agglomerations (represented by a politico-administrative institution with at least delegated competences) are eligible to bid directly for EU Cohesion Policy money – even if the national government is not fully in agreement with that.

An easier (and probably more realistic) option would be for the EU to give financial incentives to metropolitan level programmes and projects, creating in that way an initiative for the national level to consider the metropolitan level in a more serious way.

The EU should also support metropolitan level planning: metropolitan areas should become not just final beneficiaries but real partners, in the strategic planning, designing, managing and evaluating programmes for their development (including the possible topics and projects within an ITI). The EU should develop tools and guidance to support planning on metropolitan level, with the aim that such plans will be accepted on the next directly elected administrative level (regions above or municipalities below).

Through knowledge sharing programmes the EU should give governance oriented support to metropolitan areas and more freedom for them to chose which support they would need and how they would use the money. Such an agenda would give impetus also to non-organized metropolitan areas to establish some institution which fulfils the criteria.

It is very important to emphasize that even within an eventual Metropolitan Agenda the establishment of metropolitan areas should be the product of voluntary efforts, even if within *top-down* national frameworks. The higher level – EU initiated and nationally regulated – metropolitan framework should be filled up from below, avoiding the traps of political use of the national framework, and the blockage of unwilling national and regional regulators. It goes without saying that larger cities have to lobby on EU and national level for the appropriate Metropolitan Agenda on the EU level and in their countries.

Without Cohesion Policy it is not possible to build a common Europe. An EU Metropolitan Agenda could be a potential way forward to overcome the recent political and financial crisis amongst the European Union.

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