**METREX
Spring
conference**

Forging
a Metropolitan
Europe

Summary
by Iván Tosics

METREX

Brussels2024

Introduction

METREX issued its Manifesto for a Metropolitan Partnerships (Unleashing the potential in metropolitan regions and areas) in November 2023, emphasizing that metropolitan regions and areas are best in place to address the poly-crisis we face.

Following the Manifesto's launch, METREX continues working on the most important aspects that need to be addressed to frame the long-term vision of a metropolitan Europe. Three main tracks of work have been selected to be the focus for the next 1-2 years:

WHAT: exploring and discussing the most pressing planning issues that can best be dealt at the metropolitan level.

HOW: clarify the options for an efficient and functional metropolitan level, including the governance and financial issues.

WHY: further developing the vision by inviting people to together forge a metropolitan future for Europe and campaigning for it.

These three tracks will form the backbone of METREX activities following the Brussels conference. Members are asked to be active players to further elaborate around these thematic tracks. The milestones of this co-working effort will be the Bucharest conference in the Autumn (see Program) and the Spring conference in 2025, to result in a Metropolitan Proposal towards the European Parliament before summer 2025.

The main aim of this paper is to summarise the statements and debates of the Brussels conference along the three axes.

The Main Takeaways
by Sandeep Shingadia

«The Brussels 2024 journey was fascinating.

The first roundtable looked at 'New demands in spatial planning'. The phrase that I will take away will be the triangle of hell, and that's something that we need to avoid when we're thinking about urban spatial planning. Roundtable two, on 'Governance structures and strategies', raised a lot of discussion. It is a complex area, and there isn't a one-size-fits-all response.

I think we're all well aware of that, but we need to have the right strong governance and decision-making processes to make sure we can support and deliver our objectives. Roundtable three, 'Forging a Metropolitan Europe', hopes and dreams at the year 2049, highlighted extremely valid points that we be further developed in the next months.

Eric's fascinating presentation brought really strong points around that network territory and the connectivity that is needed across those metropolitan areas.

In particular, I like to refer to how do we make sure we are planning for the communities that we serve and whether are we representative.

This is a bigger challenge as we move into a more multicultural dimension, but *are we set up and geared up to make sure we are responding with the right projects for the right areas at the right time?* Those are all questions that need to drive our common reflection at the next METREX Autumn Conference in Bucharest '*Are we fit for the future?*'».

WHAT: New demands in spatial planning

Addressing climate change has already added huge items to the spatial planning agenda: how do we deal with the 'technical issues' like sea-level rise, extremities in weather, restored or better-balanced ecosystems, urban sprawl etc. But we also need to plan in a way that we induce the necessary behavioural change, where the classic spatial planning instruments might fall short. What is the role in all of that of the metropolitan areas?

Keynote Speech
by Antoine de Borman, Director of perspective.brussels

Triangle of hell of urban planning: conflicting priorities between demographic evolutions, climate and environmental objectives, and social cohesion.
When urban planners anticipate the future demographic changes in the urban area, they develop different scenarios where to put the new residents. In these plans, it's crucial to address also the climate change and the environmental elements. They can choose between two models: a low-density, diffuse city, very dispersed, or a more compact city, intensely reused, with smaller distances for the most, due to the concentration of activities in the same places. The compact city model, however, has its consequences on social cohesion: if more people are concentrated on the same area, then the land becomes more expensive, it

is more difficult to address housing affordability and the quality of social context might deteriorate.
It is not easy to address those three challenges together, but it's possible to find the right balance between them. While being aware of the possible social shortcomings, most planners agree with the narrative of attractive, compact, dense, intensively used cities, and also with the importance of fighting against urban sprawl.
The question is, what can be done at the European level to address those challenges? Although urban development is not a European competence, many EU policies, such as the Cohesion Policy, Nature Restoration Law, and EU Soil Monitoring Law have an impact on urban areas. These policies approach the challenges from the right thematic (anti-sprawl)

angle but usually not on the most appropriate territorial level, as the metropolitan scale is mishandled. There is much to do to achieve the needed metropolitan dimension of EU policies by taking the metropolitan interests and realities into account in EU policymaking.
Urban planning agencies and activities can play an essential role in this, as urban planning agencies usually take the integration of the different dimensions of the same territory into account. This integrated territorial approach is very important, through policies based on facts and data, exploiting also the advantages of knowledge exchanges and working in networks.

Roundtable 1

Moderation by Henk Bouwman, METREX Secretary General

Perspectives & debates with:

Prof. Roger Vickerman, Kent University; Ass. Professor Alexander Wandl, TUDelft; Jaromír Hainc, Prague Institute of Planning and Development; Ilona Mansikka, Helsinki Uusimaa Region

Transport planning has changed a lot during the last 60 years: the previous models have been replaced by new thinking, in which the keyword is accessibility. It is about providing citizens the ability to access not just the workplace, but also health care, education, and other sorts of social activities. Individuals must have access to all modes of transport, which is not the case today: some people have choices while others do not.

The accessibility-based model should better balance the use of different modes of transport, and should restrict the use of cars by making people realize what the full costs are. Pricing across all transport modes is crucial. COVID was a reset regarding the use of transport. COVID brought change to the traditional mobility pattern that was the mass movement of large numbers of people at a similar time of the day, going to and from work. Now it is large numbers of people going at different times of the day for different purposes.

That means that it is much more difficult to plan a coherent transport system and the decentralization makes it even more difficult.

Another important change came around in working practices – in most cities public transport ridership went back to only 80-100% of pre-COVID times (in the USA even much less).

Coherent transport planning became more difficult as the movement of people became more unpredictable: it is not any more everyone moving between home and work at the same peak hours.

In London, the share of those below 35, who have no car and did not even get a driving license (as public transport is so good) is high, while in rural areas simply transport services do not exist...

The creation of a consistent transport policy on a national level is going to be much more challenging in the future. This is why the accessibility-based way of thinking is important.

A shift towards a more circular economy is crucial to achieving

a more sustainable and inclusive built environment that meets future demands. Circular economy approaches are seemingly simple, aiming to narrow, slow down, and close materials streams and thereby reduce our dependency on raw materials. However, the value of circularity depends on where we start the thinking and where we end it.

The important aspect is that the whole value chain should be reconsidered. For example, renewable energy is a good aim, but opens new challenges regarding critical raw materials which might require the opening of new mines somewhere else.

Focusing (again) too much on compact urban development will mean pushing all unwanted functions to rural areas.

Instead, we should think about urban and rural at once and about flows and circularity. All this requires achieving new types of integrated thinking.

For integrated spatial planning, the metropolitan area would be the optimal territorial scale, to deal with the shortage of housing, continual suburbanization, and climate change.

The metropolitan context, however, is in many countries not recognized, and cooperation of municipalities within the same metropolitan area is restricted, even if many of the municipalities are very small, much below the size allowing them to run their spatial planning capacity. This situation can only be changed by national intervention, prescribing

cooperation at the level of the metropolitan area.

In the Czech Republic, a new Building and Planning Law is due to take effect from July 2024.

However, only a few small partial steps could be achieved regarding the metropolitan context. People do not care about the organization of governance; it is difficult to explain them that better solutions would be possible. Politicians, both on local, regional, and national levels, are also skeptical about better solutions.

Addressing climate challenges requires the integration of climate questions and solutions into regional planning.

The work of the METREX Metropolitan Climate Challenge Expert Group (having organized 10 webinars through 2.5 years) has shown that the big questions of adaptation, accessibility, how to ensure renewable energy, carbon sinks, and storage can be best tackled at the metropolitan or regional level. However, the land-use conflicts are huge and difficult to handle in the lack of an EU policy framework.

Planners and practitioners have to work together closely and elaborate suggestions to politicians for integrated policies.

Open discussion

What is the role of place-based strategies in achieving integration in a metropolitan context?

One of the key elements is the use of data, including big data on larger territorial scales: strategies depend on the correct use of data. There are, however, huge differences between countries regarding the availability of data in different territorial settings (outdated registry, not set definitions, etc.). And when drawing conclusions and formulating suggestions, the social dimension must be taken into account, as people understand the concept of place very differently: for some, the metropolitan scale doesn't exist at all as being limited to their small local neighbourhood.

What is the importance of polycentricity, and how can this be applied as a planning principle?

Traditional spatial strategies depend largely on physical linkages within the functional areas. And in those strategies, the connection between (mainly) capital regions was crucial. But we know now that the interrelationship between the capital regions and smaller regions is crucial for economic development as a whole. For example, the Rail Baltica will connect smaller and bigger regions and will

give better and more diverse economic opportunities, linking labour markets and universities improving competitiveness. There is an increasing understanding of cooperation beyond physical linkages, based on e.g. flows of economic functioning, creating invisible links. While planners' work is based on data and physical imaginaries, politicians and people often make decisions on other bases, e.g. perceptions. At the metropolitan level efforts should be undertaken to make the invisible links visible and available for a wider reflection, beyond the slightly outdated theory of physical polycentricity: a new challenging mission for the current spatial planning world.

The ESPON IMAGINE project is an interesting example of this way of thinking.

HOW: Governance Structures and Strategies – Are we fit for the Future?

The complexity and interrelatedness of the spatial planning issues ask for integrative thinking that goes beyond the local municipalities. The metropolitan level seems the answer, but do we have enough capacity, resources, and competencies, are we organised well enough? Also, here we can improve by learning from each other's way of organisation, and in which state we currently are. Are there governance models possible that are informal and can be established right now, that can grow formal over time?

Keynote Speech
by Sandeep Shingadia, Director of Strategic Partnerships and Delivery Integration, Transport for West Midlands Combined Authority

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) represents around 3 million people. It was formed in 2016 and became instrumental in devolving powers and attracting record levels of investment into the region. In Spring 2023, the West Midlands successfully secured a Deeper Devolution Deal from Government thought to be worth around £1.5 billion.

The creation of the WMCA as a platform to work with local authority partners has led to shared efforts on driving inclusive economic growth, investing in transport, skills, and housing, leading to make the West Midlands a better place to live, work and visit.

West Midlands Combined Authority has been created in the Conservative governments' framework of devolution (other countries would use the term decentralization), which started in 2016. The Combined Authority model has emerged out of historical sub-regional bodies and restructures mainly metropolitan city and regional areas. Combined authorities are legal structures, with or without a directly elected mayor. Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) was the first in 2011. The 2016 act allowed for a directly elected mayor, and out of the 10 combined authorities 8 decided for that option.

The West Midlands Combined Authority encompasses 7 local authorities. It is a strategic authority with powers to transform economic development and regeneration. In November 2015, the government and the Combined Authority agreed on the vicious devolution deal, including a directly elected power strip for transport skills, housing and to drive growth in more regions. In 2017, the evolution was deeper, and a new funding was agreed including significant further investment in transport. The West Midlands has seized these opportunities demonstrating what local leaders can achieve if empowered with the tools they need. Local leaders have increased investment in transport, pioneered new approaches to brownfield development, and delivered the annual education budget securing over a 10% increase in 2020 alone, the proportion of the population with level three skills.

Even so, the West Midlands Combined Authorities lacked the key levers and flexibilities to unleash the potential of devolution, the productivity of the region has remained at 90% of the national average in

the last decade.

Last year WMCA was identified as one of the two Trailblazers to push the frontier of English devolution and activism to follow deeper devolution deals, representing the broadest transfer of power from Whitehall to English regions for decades. It demonstrates levelling up in action, empowering local leadership to make the right decisions to stimulate growth and inclusion across our towns and cities. These new commitments include delivering a single settlement that allows to take a far more strategic and impactful approach to distributing funding for transport, housing, adult skills, net zero land take, and local growth. A landmark housing deal with up to 5 million pounds with more funding for affordable housing programs and to make available public sector land for regeneration and development. Further fiscal devolution including tenure retention and business rates worth an estimated 45 million pounds a year to the Combined Authority to legislate who designs priority areas that will attract 25-year business rate potentials to accelerate growth, development, and regeneration.

«This is an exciting moment for us and should I say we are grateful to the government for engaging with us constructively over the past year on our shared mission to empower local leadership. But English devolution does not end here. We want to see how other areas of England get similar powers and flexibilities to those we have now. We want to see the frontier of English devolution pushed even further to implement our recent Trailblazer devolution deal. We need to see a sustainable funding solution for our regional transport system which underpins the regional economy. We want to see more fiscal devolution which allows us to reinvest money generated here back into the local businesses fostering growth and the creation of more jobs. We think we could move even further towards a fully devolved and integrated employment and skill system and make the West Midlands an even better, more affordable place to live and work with the right policy levers, making a great contribution to the national effort to get to net zero land take and to have inclusive economic growth.»

Roundtable 2

Moderation by Gianina Panatau General Director, The Bucharest Metropolitan Area Intercommunity Development Association, ADIZMB

Perspectives & debates with:
Hon. Oliver G. Gilbert III, Miami-Dade Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) Vice Chairman; Aileen Bouclé, AICP, TPO Executive Director/NARC; Maciej Fijalkowski, Director Warsaw Metropolitan Association; Prof. Valeria Fedeli, Politecnico di Milano; Laura Papaleo, Genoa Metropolitan City; Filipe Ferreira, Lisbon metropolitan area

In this roundtable the following important ideas have been raised.

Anti-fragile metropolitan thinking

Within the department of architecture and urban studies at the Politecnico of Milano, a research centre on metropolitan issues has been established with special ministerial funding. The focus is on antifragile territories. The responsible researchers are inspired by the theory of antifragility that comes from an American scholar, Nassim Taleb. It is about resilience under conditions of uncertainty, exploring how people and places can become antifragile, which means, in the words of Taleb, not just bouncing back from the crisis, building back better, but leveraging the conditions under which people in uncertainty, risk and fragmentation flourish. In other words, antifragility is «... an ability to benefit and grow from a certain type of random events, errors, and volatility, as

well as 'convex tinkering' as a method of scientific discovery» by which he means that decentralized experimentation outperforms directed research (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nassim_Nicholas_Taleb).

Along with this inspiring concept, this centre works with public administrations and tries to promote projects that work in the field of urban studies, governance and policy design.

It is important to understand why public institutions are fragile all over Europe.

In many cases, they do not have an established setting. And if they have, sometimes this setting is outdated and inert.
In Italy, it took 25 years before having a law on forming metropolitan cities. And now we have metropolitan cities that have been designed on a logic that was of the last century.
This makes them fragile and sometimes unable to fulfill their missions.
Also, their boundaries do not represent the real, current metropolitan or regional urbanization dimension. They struggle to adapt to the rapid changes in society.

The result is that we have metropolitan institutions that are fragile but are also often themselves fragilizers.
They produce, for example, classic spatial planning, following the aspirations of city-forming.

This is no longer an answer to how to support people and places reacting to crises.

In their governance forms, metropolitan institutions have some big challenges.

First, **they should always be a combined authority**. Combining means not just the traditional municipalities working together but bringing together the many relevant actors, even if they are outside of the formal boundaries. We need metropolitan areas, or cities, or partnerships, that allow for spaces of exchange, generating arenas for decisions, where stakeholders and actors are changeable, not fixed, because otherwise, they fragilize, rather than help.

Second, **they need tools** for working on a combined and strategic understanding of the metropolitan arena.

Third, **they need an integrated and multisector agenda**: on the classic transportation, housing, welfare, of course.
But more and more, on new policy fields and challenges that are cutting across the territories, such as ecosystemic functions.
Or conflicts for the use of water in the mountains and in the central city areas, waste management, economic development, high-speed train generating corridors which grow rapidly while the remaining territories are left behind.
So, a reviewed policy agenda is necessary, focusing on topics

that are not 'just' urban but that are trans-local.

These three elements are the basis for **metropolitan governance** that wants to be strategic for places and people acting as **enablers rather than fragilizers**.
If you only replicate and scale up the city model – in terms of spatial planning and governance systems – the risk is to make things worse.

The dynamics of regional transportation planning within the context of the most populous and multi-jurisdictional governance structure in the State of Florida

In the US in the early 1970s the Congress decided to form a new governance level for regional coordination and urban influence with a focus on connectivity.
The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) governance structure is consistent in terms of having an elected body governing, to oversee the planning agencies and setting the tone and direction for the future, based on data and demographics.
All areas with over 50 thousand residents have to be part of an MPO. These have to produce different types of plans and programs: a 20-year framework for transport projects and investments (updated every 5 years); a Congestion Management Process to address the congestions; a rapid transport concept; and new mobility options in last-mile transit. In 1965 Metropolitan Planning Organizations, regional councils, councils of governments (COGs), and regional planning and development agencies established the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) which serves as the national voice for regions by advocating for regional cooperation as the most effective way to address a variety of community planning and development opportunities and issues.

In the work of MPO the goals are the most important, which have to be achieved by governance and strategy. People do not talk about modal shifts but about how much time was lost in congestion. Experts can help to achieve the goals, but then it has to be explained to the people. They're not talking about different modes of transportation, they're talking about sitting in traffic for 45 minutes an hour and a half, two hours. Every year 4 bn USD is lost due to sitting in congestion. This must be compared with the costs of building rapid transit.

The goal of the MPO was to make the lives of people easier through defining an urbanized area and a transit system that wasn't just transit, but also the lifeblood of housing and economic development. Rapid mass transit, land use, resiliency and housing are all inextricably intertwined. Governance matters, and being able to write a policy is important, but being able to communicate why it is important to regular people is the most important thing. The ability to communicate expert knowledge on metropolitan areas to people is what helps us change all the urbanized areas.

In Europe, the situation is slightly different. In delivering our goals to the European Commission, and to the European Parliament, we have governance problems: we are not structured in a good way, we cannot receive money, and we cannot have a financial program, because we are not clearly organized, and we don't have management powers. We have very different competencies, and very different legal structures, in the different EU countries.
So it is, unfortunately, not so easy as in the United States, primarily because we do not have an overall metropolitan legislation. Instead of the European Union, the Member States can elaborate legislation on metropolitan areas, some of them do, others do not.
This is why we are trying to find some common ground, not one size fits all, but some common ground for our organizations to go with a stronger voice to the European Commission and say «this is what we are, we want money to do this or that».

The Metropolitan governance system in Italy, on the example of the Metropolitan City of Genoa

Metropolitan cities in Italy have been discussed since 1990, becoming operational in 2015. The Metropolitan City of Genoa is small, accounting for 67 municipalities among which the capital city representing all alone 70% of the population. This is a shrinking metropolitan area. The territorial challenges are mostly related to transportation, sustainable mobility, efficiency, and in finding the balance between urban and rural areas. The metropolitan level is concerned with achieving the integration between the economic and the social aspects of the territory.

The Metropolitan City of Genoa has competencies in strategic metropolitan planning and by law, they are forced to work together with all the municipalities in designing a metropolitan strategic plan which needs the approval of the Metropolitan Council. The latter consisting of elected representatives of the municipalities is presided by a Metropolitan Mayor, who is also the main city's major. The council can call for a Metropolitan Conference, which is a gathering of the mayors of all the municipalities encompassed in the metropolitan area – something quite complicated to manage. In short, this is the type of metropolitan government system adopted in Italy, and enforced by law.

There is a **strong collaborative attitude** among the various Italian metropolitan cities to overcome the hurdles provoked by this system.

Metropolitan Areas as problem solvers

The Lisbon Metropolitan Area counts 2.8 mill inhabitants and it was established in 1991. In 2013 it celebrated a second birth when the National Law recognized the metropolitan status making it embedded in the Portuguese territorial legislative system.

This change turned them in one of the two formal Metropolitan Areas in Portugal.
Main goal of the MAs is to be problem-solvers, regardless of the legal forms and mandates they have.
«Our message to the European Commission should be: here we are and we can do stuff. *What stuff is this?* » emphasises Filipe Ferreira.
In the Lisbon metropolitan approach, three policy areas are the most prominent.

Mobility is successfully solved in a top-down way, it is the Metropolitan area which is now directly managing it.
Quoting Filipe «we largely imported the Birmingham way of doing. It was very important to visit the British city and see how they organise themselves. Based on these learnings the management model for transport in the Lisbon metro area has been decided with a top-down approach. The central government has decided to have an inter-municipal network and Lisbon was the first pilot. Our current operation is larger than the combination of all the other 23 operations being implemented in the country».

Climate adaptation: in 2016-17, continues Filipe «we were the first Portuguese inter-municipal entity to build a climate adaptation plan with the en-

gagement of our community, public and public actors, academia and civil society. Soon after the climate adaptation process ended, we launched strategic climate adaptation projects in cooperation with the municipalities of the metro area. We are supported by Jaspers, the agency inside the European Investment Bank that helps regional and local authorities cope with climate adaptation capacity building. Projects are lined up along 2 parallel axes of observation: one is ITI financing, and the second is the bankability aspect.
Because the budget from the European Union is not enough, it is also needed to work with the European investment bank in gathering the financial resources».

Food transition policy.
Right now, «we are in the final phase of our metropolitan food transition strategy. It began with a European-funded project where the metropolitan area was only an observer. But by the end of the project, the decision was taken: the metropolitan area had to take the lead. Along with the strategy we are managing a regional network with over 40 partners, and in the following months, a pipeline of inflatable projects entirely focused on food transition will be developed» is Filipe's conclusive note.

The phases of development of Polish metropolitan areas

Warsaw Metropolitan Association is quite a new entity.
In Poland, there were four phases of building metropolitan cooperation.

Phase one started about 20 years ago with the transportation agreement between communities.

Phase two was settled in 2014 to establish an ITI for the Warsaw Functional Urban Area, including 40 municipalities, and 2.8 million inhabitants. In the period 2014-2020 about 200 projects were implemented with more than 165 million euros of co-financing, more than 500 kilometres of bicycle roads, and more than 60 park-and-ride facilities were developed in the metropolitan area.

Phase three started only a few years ago, when the ITI area grew, the Warsaw Metropolitan Area was established with 3.1 million population, 70 municipalities, and 9 counties (including Mazovia Voivodship which has 5.4 million inhabitants).
In this context, the cooperation status has changed and has become a voluntary association.

Phase fourth and last is the current preparation of our version of metropolitan law for the Warsaw metropolitan area, which could become an example for other Polish metropolitan areas that do not have such a law yet.

Open discussion

The case of Metropolitan Cities in Italy has proven that metropolitan areas are very relevant. The recovery and resilience plan, using EU funds, was instrumental in distributing substantial investments to metropolitan cities.
The metropolitan level played an **important role** in letting the single municipalities **create a site-specific solution** for their urgent needs. During this process, it became clear that this **money is needed** not only for temporary projects but also **to let the metropolitan cities become stronger** in the long run.
Capacity building at the local authority level is fundamental, to keep the employees and improve the quality of competencies on a holistic level, not becoming more sectorial.
Furthermore, investing in **technology and data analytics** is essential.
Another important task is **communication, involving people**, understanding their statements, and translating these into policy plans (within fixed deadlines).

These competencies are present, but scarce in metropolitan cities.
For all these purposes, money and resources are needed to strengthen the capacity of the metropolitan level.
In the US. Perspective, creating the Metropolitan Planning Organizations by Congress ensured a locally driven decision-making process within State and Federal law.
In this context, every state and every county and region has to meet certain federal and state requirements.
It is acknowledged that those living closest to the problems are often the owners of the solution, meaning that what works in one county may not work in another area, even when they share the same problems.
A model which makes the MPO metropolitan planning organizations unique.

Have we got the appropriate structures in place to deliver the things that we need to deliver? There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution in Europe. *So how do we get clarity on that structure?*

And we have spoken a lot about funding systems and funding is a big driver in making sure we can deliver the right things. But we do not want to go to the government and say give us money for specific projects.

We want the government to give us a big pot of money that we can use for housing, capacity building, and transport and then show that we've got the decision-making and leadership to determine how that funding gets spent at a local level.

What seems important here is understanding all of those challenges in an integrated way. That can be addressed at that local level when equipped with the right governance model to support the decision-making.

Another important note: when we define the metropolitan area, we are not just talking about the big city, but about the rural-urban mix.

The METREX Conference in Braga was very much focused on those urban-rural linkages and partnerships that are essential to achieve this change of perspective.

Metropolitan cooperation and metropolitan areas became important because of mobility. When mobility opportunities increased in the 20th century, communities are not able anymore to answer the problems contemporary society is facing.

Despite of everything, Metropolitan areas are a very new concept: we still don't know how territorial cooperation should function and we still haven't convinced people that it's necessary. Assuming that we have good functioning communities with very strong legitimacy, with very strong political leadership, which are very efficient, only a few basic and very crucial elements, among which public transportation, spatial planning, the blue-green infrastructure and economic development, should be addressed at the metropolitan level. And all this should be done efficiently without building another administrative monster that will just live for itself.

The next METREX conference in Bucharest in Autumn 2024 will be on organisational matters and governance.
Here the Italian approach might be further discussed, where metropolitan cities have become important when the national government decided on a national operational program dedicated to these cities, recognizing that they could be strategic drivers to tackle trans-sectoral problems, through metropolitan partnerships.

The question is launched: *how other national governments can be convinced to dedicate a national programme to metropolitan areas?*
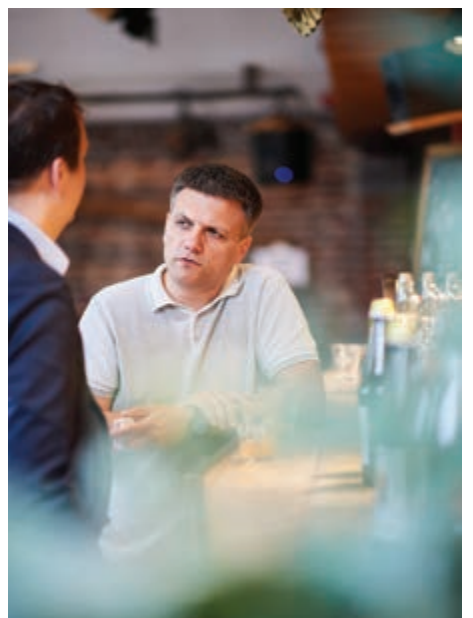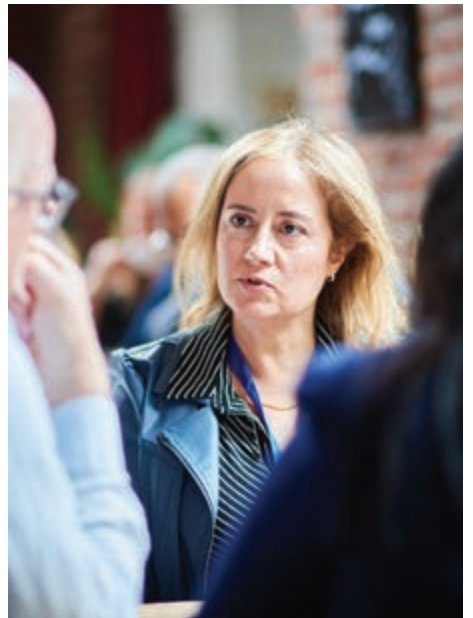
WHY: Visioning Europe. Forging a Metropolitan Future

After an Age of Cities and accepting the ongoing coagulation of people into increasing agglomerations, can we imagine a Metropolitan Century? What are the future roles of nations, will there be a revival of 17th-century rivalry between city regions, or can we specialise and together build a Metropolitan Europe, competing with other global continents? How do we involve citizens and rurals from all backgrounds in forging their future?

Keynote Speech
by Professor Luděk Síkora, Charles University Prague & MECOG project

The Common Metropolitan Vision is a recent document with the title "We are the Metropolitan Areas", developed within the Interreg project MECOG, gathering metropolitan areas from Germany, Poland, Czech Republic and Italy. (see more: MECOG Project).

«This vision serves as a policy advocacy document, which will articulate the long-term and shared position of the partners.
Looking at the German, Italian, Czech, and Polish cases, we said, the strength is in the diversity of experiences. The document is written to promote the relevance of the metropolitan dimension in European national policies. Besides, we also attempted to highlight the local benefits because the promotion of

the metropolitan dimension will be only possible with support from the local realities – not only via a top-down approach.
Before we started, we researched the challenges and opportunities that metropolitan areas face.
Key issues include sustainability, demographic changes, suburbanization and sprawl, climate change, and energy production.
Moreover we focused on the procedural challenges: the fragmentation of the government, which comes with not enough competencies, not enough recognition from the national level and the European level.
Regarding the opportunities for metropolitan areas, it can be said that there's a quite favourable environment on the level of the EU policies and

instruments. The ITI (Integrated Territorial Investment) instrument, which is used e.g. in the Czech Republic, France, Poland, is a very powerful tool that helps to strengthen metropolitan cooperation.
Major opportunity can be also found in the development of the metropolitan cooperation practice: learning by doing, *'the problem solving attitude'* in responding to the needs of the population.
Participation in networks and knowledge sharing, using the good practices and success stories is an opportunity as well. To achieve the Common metropolitan vision, whose main goal was to get the metropolitan dimension to be recognized in the European and international policies, we first have to create a clearer narrative: *what do we mean by metropolitan dimension and how to elevate it in the*

documents and policies? Where do we want to be in the next 10-30 years?

The preamble is that Metropolitan Areas are functional urban regions, urban core and surrounding territories functionally linked when it comes to the housing and labour markets through integrated transportation systems. They include large cities, as well as the towns which are the local centers, suburbs and rural villages together with agricultural land and forestry. Metropolitan areas are also about the governance mechanisms, besides planning also governance, also cooperation within these zones.

In the Vision for metropolitan areas, we build a comprehensive picture of the future. Then we argue about our strengths and commitments, with a focus on the current potential resources, capabilities, and knowledge, which enable our capacity to address major societal changes, implement policy priorities, and achieve goals. The final part is about metropolitan empowerment. We do have the power, but we need more: the strength for institutionalization, and the recognition, which will both allow us to effectively achieve the goals on which we already work.

The Vision encompasses the economic aspects, the life of the day-by-day and creativity. This vision encompasses, as well as the holistic development, governance, planning, and cooperation, all framed by the key values of democracy, participation, and equality. The overarching goal of these efforts is to establish sustainable and resilient metropolitan areas committed to societal leadership and social responsibilities.

A first concrete achievement is that metropolitan areas are recognized. There's the ITI instrument that is part of the recognition. We are part of European national policymaking. There has been an increasingly important relevance of the metropolitan dimension in national and European policies that comes together with the acknowledgment of the opportunities. It's just probably not so fast and quick as we would expect. In the end, the Vision it's a framework for a long-term and enduring commitment of the metropolitan leaders, stakeholders, and actors, to advance the development

of metropolitan societies, to maximize its positive impacts.

Talking about metropolitan empowerment, we need to believe in ourselves. We have a strong voice and we are recognized, but we need more.

In conclusion, the Vision is written from a positive perspective: we are the metropolitan areas and this is our common metropolitan vision.

Roundtable 3

Moderation by Łukasz Medeksza, Deputy Director of the Strategy and City Development Department Municipality of Wrocław with Sebastien Rolland, UrbaLyon Planning Agency

Perspectives & debates with:

Emiel Reiding, Director Metropolitan Region Amsterdam ; Idoia Postigo, Bilbao Metropoli30; Tundé Adefioye, Lecturer St.Lucas School of Arts, Antwerp; Peter Defranceschi, Head of ICLEI Brussels Office

In preparation for the roundtable, two questions were answered by the participants.

What is your biggest fear for the future? War, climate change, extremism, food shortage.
What is your main hope for 2049? Peace, inclusion, prosperity, tolerance.

Limits of growth in an urban region

Urban matters become more and more metropolitan matters. We witness this in Amsterdam as well.

Our region is growing, and more and more challenges are crossing municipality borders (housing, energy, economic prosperity), but opportunities lie in metropolitan cooperation as well. Strengthening metropolitan partnerships, investing in innovation, better connectedness, and economic development on the metropolitan scale is therefore important and needed. While we speed up our efforts and investments in affordable housing, better mobility metropolitan systems, greater competitiveness in our capital region, we also look at the human aspect of the major transitions. The well-being of our citizens is key, so we look for an optimal balance between the economy, ecology, and society.

In the Netherlands urban planning was not so popular on the political level for the past decade. We made ourselves problems by not foresighting. We face now climate, and energy issues. New companies don't get new spaces because there's no energy in the Amsterdam area, and accessibility to drinking water has become difficult as well. Belgium and The Nederlands have both problems with nitrogen, mostly caused by agricultural activities. Those are short-term issues which should have been solved earlier by foreseeing them. Planning is crucial, you should look ahead 10, 20 years, 30 years, forcing you to envision the longer term.

Metropolitan cooperation born from crisis

The Metropoli 30 non-profit public-private partnership was born more than 30 years ago in a context of crisis in Bilbao. Shipbuilding and steel industries collapsed at the end of last century, and that brought a severe and dramatic crisis to the metropolitan area, leading to unemployment of nearly 30, 35 percent in villages nearby Bilbao.

Public institutions, private companies, and social organizations of the 30 municipalities decided to join forces and define an ambitious revitalization plan for the metropolitan area of Bilbao. It is in this context that Bilbao Metropoli-30 was created. «We were born as a reaction to a critical situation, powerful enough to steer the revitalization process». Replicate such a scheme of public-private and social collaboration today would probably not be the same.

The main goal of BM-30 (gathering 140 organizations, among which the 30 municipalities that form together the 1 million metropolitan area of Bilbao, academic institutions, companies, professional associations and foundations) is:

to foster a shared long-term vision for the metropolitan policy of Bilbao, within the flexible framework of the metropolitan concept (free from geographical limitations), and

to align the efforts of our public and private members into transformative projects implementing the vision; to name a few, the Urban Revolution Aurrera! movement and The Bay Urban Visioning Awards.

We have created a nice narrative for an industrial region becoming a modern and cultural metropolis, looking at all the challenges that we have now: getting older, low birth rate, lack of opportunities for young people.

Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2006, mentioned three challenges that I think are shared by the planet in general, which are zero carbon, zero exclusion, zero poverty. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2006/summary/
I would love to make those three big challenges be part of Metropolitan Bilbao's challenges».

Links between the different challenges

When we're talking about the different net zero challenges (emission, exclusion. poverty), we must see these as interconnected to each other. We cannot forget that in most of our cities, the poorest people are most impacted by climate change. And in terms of exclusion, we can't forget about migration provoked by the climate crisis. Migrants from Nigeria, Sudan, and Eritrea come all the way here to find jobs because their lives in their native country has become impossible. But we haven't found a real solution for these people, instead, Rishi Sunak's government is thinking that the best way to address this is to ship people from England to Rwanda. And we should not forget about the impact of the US-encouraged neocolonialism.

The Nigerian-American philosopher, Olufemi Taiwo talks about neo-colonialism in the following way: the deepening of neo-colonialism is the deepening of expansion of foreign domination through climate initiatives that exploit poor nations' resources, compromises their sovereignty.

This should force our thinking to become more aware and mature: all these issues should be included in the plans that we make for our cities, and consider who these plans are excluding and why it is excluding them. The Amsterdam rent crisis is an interesting illustration.

There are a lot of people who have two or three jobs and cannot afford to live in Amsterdam. Many of them are newly migrated to Amsterdam, but also Dutch folks who are living in poverty.

This is to say that we need to continue to find ways to make these links between the type of exclusion and the cause: whether is the climate change or old colonial ideas or a different government.

Not only that.

We should learn to consider the long-term effects of our choices: the negative impact might affect the next generations or people elsewhere (see Shell in Nigeria).

The central role of metropolitan areas in the green transition

The central policy of this European Commission (that is about to reach its closing terms) is the European Green Deal, including circular economy, just transition, and so on. A lot has been done and research shows that in order of implementation, the urban level is the primary reference. If there's a problem, like climate change or crisis, people go to the mayor, to the local authorities. But in terms of decision-making, the big international conferences of governments are decisive. In order to really make a change, huge money and lots of skills are needed.

And we need to talk about exclusion. Cities are open, there are no walls. But at the same time in Europe, we start building walls around. The strength of cities is that they're hubs of democracy. You see so many mayors that, contrary to the national level, try really to keep up the democratic spirit. And democracy is our law, based on the people. *But then again, who are the people, it's not just the ones voting, it is about all the people in the cities, how much voice do they have?*
One of the central issues is resilience. *But what is resilient if not a metropolitan area?*

Because the city is too small, to be resilient in terms of food, and health, you need a metropolitan area. You need this kind of wider space and this type of cooperation. Metropolitan regions and areas are fundamental for a Europe that needs to act faster, make innovative choices, and easily adapt vis-a-vis the multiple crises we are facing.
However, for Europe to be greater it needs all government levels to work in synergy as "t*he whole is greater than the sum of its parts*".

Open discussion

It is a very interesting statement that the different net zero challenges (emission, exclusion, poverty) have also to be evaluated regarding their links to each other.
Taking into account the inter-relations is crucial: what is good from one aspect can be bad from another. For example, renewable energy takes up a lot of space, while fossil fuel takes up no space at all in our cities. Energy consumption has to be evaluated also according to the pollution produced.
No one raised the question: *how do we get young people involved? What are the topics that are relevant for them? And how do we learn also from their needs and hopes?*

One of the trends that we are facing from BM30, which is a project open to the world, is what we call urban revolution, Aurrera! This is a password that means something like 'let's go'. We are not advocating for any insurrection with this revolutionary work. We are just trying to urge the engagement of people and let them have a say. Because we are seeing that changes are not happening at the intensity and the speed that is needed. So that's why we think we need what we call 'an urban revolution'. The Bay Urban Visioning Awards

was created to achieve that: make visible and widely known that the urban revolution is possible.

The democracy issue is very important, and metropolitan areas could be the places that master democracy by building up cooperation and governance across their area. «Democracy is not only the formal democracy of the elections, but it is about the open society» (Vaclav Havel). It is about civil society, informal networking, about soft spaces of cooperation. Metropolitan areas can showcase that civil society can build democracy from the bottom.

The background assumption of this achievement will be possible only when economic growth is the leading principle. And this is a very big challenge for our metropolitan areas.

We have heard so many times that metropolitan areas are the economic powerhouses of the future, and the growth depends on metropolitan areas. However, in the next decades

not economic growth, not even green growth, but degrowth is the new challenge. If we want to survive, and this is not about the war but about climate change, then metropolitan areas should be the leading forces showing another way of development, where GDP increase is not the major goal, but where we organise our lives more democratically, on a more equitable basis, based on the reuse of existing resources. **De-urbanisation, cooperation** (and no competition) should be instead **the new leading principles.**
We have to develop such a kind of vision about the future, otherwise the world will collapse. And I think the metropolitan areas can do it much better than the national governments.

Keynote Speech
by Eric Corijn, Professor Emeritus Free University, Brussels

The narrative of Eric Corijn captures the pressing need for a new approach to urban and metropolitan development in Europe, emphasizing the importance of addressing global systemic challenges through a holistic and inclusive framework.

The Need for a New Urban Narrative in Europe

As Europe faces unprecedented global challenges, the traditional urban story is no longer sufficient. Instead of focusing solely on individual cities, we must consider the broader territorial structures—a network of interconnected metropolises forming a cohesive ecosystem. These metropolitan regions are not isolated entities but integral parts of a larger, interdependent structure that must address critical global challenges together.

Addressing Global Systemic Challenges

The urban agendas of today must prioritize our relationship with nature, the fight against climate change, the preservation of biodiversity, and the reduction of our ecological footprint. The continued reliance on extractive economies is unsustainable, risking economic collapse if not addressed. Therefore, a radical economic transition is essential, one that integrates environmental sustainability with economic viability. However, the transition is not only economic.

We must also confront social inequality head-on, building a new kind of cohesion based on three foundational pillars: **nature, society, and culture**. Metropolitan areas, characterized by their super-diverse populations, present unique challenges in this regard. Unlike in the past, these societies are not homogeneous communities; they are complex tapestries of differences that must be woven together to form a cohesive whole.

Building a Society Based on Differences

Urbanity and social solidarity must be forward-looking, emerging from future possibilities rather than past traditions. The central challenge is to develop an intercultural, multilingual, and multi-religious society that bridges these differences. This requires innovative approaches that go beyond classical institutions, relying on co-productive and participative democracy. Such a society would thrive on networks and transversal bridging operations, fostering connections across diverse groups.

Reformulating Metropolitan Governance

In this context, metropolitan governance systems must undergo significant reform. The dual challenges of climate change and economic transformation demand new ways of thinking. While traditional approaches have focused on infrastructure and spatial organization (the hardware), the new focus should be on the **software**: mental mapping, culture, and education. A new metropolitan policy must incorporate specific educational programs and curricula that promote solidarity and cohesion in today's multi-communitarian societies. Education should foster a shared sense of belonging and mutual understanding among diverse populations, reinforcing the social fabric of metropolitan areas.

Conclusion

The future of European metropolitan areas lies in their ability to adapt to and address the complex challenges of the 21st century. By rethinking governance, embracing diversity, and fostering a culture of inclusivity, Europe can build resilient, sustainable, and cohesive metropolitan regions that are equipped to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

MAIN STATEMENTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

PLANNING

- Integrated and inclusive planning is needed on the metropolitan level by planning agencies that have a mandate for that;
- The compact city model has to be reconsidered due to its externalities on peripheral areas within and beyond the metropolitan borders;
- Besides physical linkages invisible (perception or flow-based) linkages should be taken into account;
- Mobility planning should change towards the accessibility criteria;
- Circularity should be applied to the whole value chain.

GOVERNANCE

- The traditional, fixed government forms of metropolitan governance should be combined with more flexible tools and partnerships to handle the problems of fragility;
- Metropolitan institutions should get resources (beyond projects) also for capacity building, technical development, and communication;
- Metropolitan areas should act as problem solvers in key policy areas (climate, mobility, food, etc.).

VISIONING

- Foresight on the whole metropolitan area is important to well-ground future strategies;
- To strengthen democracy and resilience an urban revolution is needed, in which metropolitan areas lead in building up cooperation and governance across their area with the civil society in informal networking, soft spaces of cooperation;
- Metropolitan areas should strive for a novel way of non-exclusive development towards poor people and countries, based on inclusive growth in a more democratic way and on a more equitable basis through the reuse of our existing resources;
- Metropolitan areas should develop a real urban storyline about the future, in which they play a key role in their reformulated governance system: urbanity as a political project, developing a metropolitan vision based on destiny instead of tradition, hybrid instead of identity, participation instead of representation, the network instead of silo/zoning.

A visit
to a (post-)
productive City

By Adrian Hill
METREX Productive City EG coordinator
Partner at Osmos Network

1. Pannenhuis metro station
2. Parck Farm
3. Be.Here
4. Greenbizz
5. Centre TIR
6. Magazin 4
7. Village de la Construction
8 Centre TIR
9. Heidelberg Cement
10. Up-site tower
11. Parc Beco
12. Brasserie de la Senne
13. Tour et Taxis
14. Gare Maritime

This is a report and summary of a tour during the 2024 METREX spring conference in Brussels visting the Tour & Taxis site in the north of Brussels.

The expression «plans are worthless, but planning is everything» couldn't be a more appropriate moto tour.
A hundred meters separates one of Brussels' showcase buildings, Gare Maritime, from the messy and noisy logistics and production around Greenbizz.brussels, Be.Here, the Centre TIR and the Port of Brussels, all connected through a new linear park system that will soon link the city centre with the north of Brussels. Brussels has suffered from many terrible plans (check out the area around the North Station) and poor planning (such as the banality of the EU quarter) but this is an exceptional example.
How did this happen? Brussels is considered an exemplary case of a 'political lasagna' and in Europe's most cosmopolitan and perhaps most politically charged regions, 'diversity' and 'cohabitation' have been embraced more out of need than design. In the process of sometimes forced dialogue, tensions have given to unique and joyful outcomes. A road provides a transition between premium office space and an anarchist brewery. A busy and perhaps dangerous logistics road is protected from a school on a perpendicular street. A park creates a neutral zone for the richer and poor to interact. Part of the reason why this part of the city is so dynamic and diverse is because land is owned or managed by private and public partners (at various levels and across various institutions). For years the site was trapped in a bureaucratic icefield, where there was little investment or change. It was the private sector, particularly the owners of the Tour & Taxis site (now owned by Nextensa), which drove considerable investment. However, this was also thanks to the commitment by public institutions from the Brussels Capital Region (Brussels Environment) and the Flemish government to lease two large sites.

In this way, the area is now the fruit of extensive dialogue and small steps towards collective investment.

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Report from the Conference Tour
A visit to a (post-)productive city
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