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## ESPON Workshop

# Cohesion Policy, backbone of Europe? The role of metropolitan areas

Alfredo Corbalan

(Planning Agency of the Brussels-Capital Region – [perspective.brussels](http://perspective.brussels))

The Brussels-Capital Region is a stakeholder of the ESPON METRO project where it is represented by [perspective.brussels](http://perspective.brussels), the planning Agency of the Region.

The level of involvement of each European metropolitan area in cohesion policy is very different across Europe. I would like to point out one specificity of the Brussels-Capital Region that could be an inspiration for others Metropolitan areas across the EU. Brussels is probably **the only European metropolitan area that has direct access and autonomy to negotiate and manage the Cohesion policy on its territory** and the same applies with the Recovery plan. Brussels has been managing its own ERDF and ESF operational programs since several programming periods with successful results and concrete innovative project on the ground. The Brussels case shows that Metropolitan areas are totally capable to directly manage the Cohesion policy and this could be an inspiration for members states to open that possibility to others Metropolitan areas.

Nevertheless, there is one imitation to this positive aspect. The territory of the Brussels-Capital Region does not correspond to the real functional urban areas which is spread across the 3 Belgian Regions. In Belgium, each of the three Regions is competent to define its own policies and priorities related to both cohesion policy and spatial planning. There is a need of more coordination and cooperation between the 3 regions on these issues in order to provide a more harmonious metropolitan development for the full metropolitan area of Brussels. In that case, examples coming from others METRO stakeholders could help Brussels to develop a suitable metropolitan governance.

**Alfredo Corbalan on behalf of EUROCITIES (as Chair of EUROCITIES Working Group on Metropolitan Areas)**

EUROCITIES is very involved in the METRO project. The project proposed by Turin Metropolitan area was supported from the beginning by 2 EUROCITIES working Groups (Cohesion policy and Metropolitan areas).

We take this opportunity to thanks ESPON for supporting our members once again, confide in them and for helping us to produce scientific evidences in favor of better metropolitan cooperation.

The words of trust, place-based approach, social cohesion, territorial cohesion mentioned by the previous speaker are very dear to EUROCITIES network and our work related to metropolitan areas . After all metropolitan cooperation is above all a question of trust between partners.

- As shown by Professor Cotella cohesion policy is key to strengthening metropolitan cooperation with the use of funds, the establishment of new innovative cooperation framework and the development of metropolitan investment, projects and visions. In this

context, **we call for tools such as ITIs and CLLD to be continued to be experimented**, and built better in the new programming period. We call also for the **Territorial agenda, the urban agenda, the future rural vision and the new European urban initiative to have a strong metropolitan and functional area approach.**

- Beyond Cohesion policy. strengthening metropolitan cooperation will be also key to localize the European Green Deal, to build circular economy, manage better ecosystem and fight against urban sprawl. In that sense **we advocate for a better urban rural cooperation to avoid dichotomy between urban and rural territories because European citizens don't know administrative borders in their daily life.** We are very glad to see that the Commission also seems to understand that metropolitan areas are central to achieve a just and green recovery of our continent and territories.

Through its network EUROCITIES will continue raising the importance of metropolitan cooperation in the coming months, Especially in the post-COVID context **it would be a great mistake not to consider metropolitan areas prominently in the next programming period and in partnership agreements.** We look forward to contribute to the dissemination of key results of METRO project in the coming months.



**Alfredo Corbalan** is in charge of European, international and interregional affairs for perspective.brussels, the Urban Planning Agency of the Brussels-Capital Region. He is also the Chair of the EUROCITIES Working Group on Metropolitan Areas. In the last 15 years, Alfredo has been involved in different European and local projects related to territorial development and metropolitan cooperation. He has also a practical knowledge of the functioning and management of European funded projects and programmes (ERDF, URBACT, INTERREG, ESPON, UIA...). Alfredo has a Master's Degree in Public administration and law from Sciences-Po Aix-en-Provence in France and a Master's Degree in European Policies from the Institute for European Studies in Brussels.