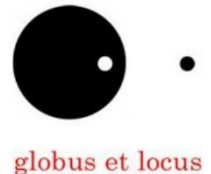




Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence



## ESPON IMAGINE

### *Final Regional Forum*

# Urban regions within the new cohesion policy: Developing an ITI for and from Milano-Bologna urban region

## *Executive summary*

The final event of the ESPON IMAGINE Targeted Analysis consisted in an interactive workshop on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021, organized by the IMAGINE research team (Politecnico di Milano, Globus et Locus, SciencesPo) in collaboration with IMAGINE stakeholders (Città Metropolitana di Milano, Città Metropolitana di Bologna, Provincia di Pavia, Provincia di Piacenza, AIM, Associazione Interessi Metropolitan, Metrex, POPSU and Warsaw metropolitan area), to showcase and discuss how the ITIs (Integrated Territorial Initiatives) have been fruitfully implemented in relation to new regional imaginaries and the general objective of the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy, and to generate new knowledge towards the development of an integrated territorial initiative in the Milan Bologna urban region, as well as in other urban areas. Over 90 stakeholders, researchers, experts and researchers joined the event, held online due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

Stakeholders of ESPON IMAGINE:



## **Introduction**

**Valeria Fedeli (IMAGINE scientific coordinator, Politecnico di Milano)** and **Piera Petruzzi (ESPON EGTC)** welcomed the participants, presenting the event as an occasion to discuss how trans-territorial collaborative projects are implemented, and to describe the challenges European territories and cities are facing.

The opening speech by **Nicola Favia (Dipartimento per le Politiche di Coesione, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri)** highlighted the relevance of the ESPON IMAGINE project in bringing together political and technical experts to address strategic issues of cohesion policy. The Milan-Bologna axis is strategic for development in Italy and in Europe, for both the demographical, social and economic dimension of this macroregion. Discussing the opportunities offered by ITIs and by a potential ITI embracing the Milan-Bologna integrated area would provide relevant answers to critical questions, such as: which role would play Metropolitan Cities in implementing cohesion goals set by European and national agendas? Which projects would Metropolitan Cities develop? How could central government support Metropolitan Cities? This Regional Forum should strive towards answering these questions, relevant for territories all around Europe, in general, and for Italy and the Milan-Bologna community, in particular.

**Valeria Fedeli (IMAGINE scientific coordinator, Politecnico di Milano)** summarized the approach and findings of the research project. Cities and metropolitan areas are experiencing processes of uneven renewal. The traditional understanding of the urban is not sufficient to understand the new scenario: new spatial imaginaries are needed in order to elaborate a new common narrative to address the most recent economic processes and to experiment innovative tools to regulate them.

IMAGINE produced of a new regional portrait of the Milan-Bologna corridor, and described the role of mobility in this area. Data collected during the research confirmed the Milan-Bologna system as a polycentric urban region with a strong urban/rural integration. Regionalisation processes are shaping social and economic dynamics, but are also producing important spatial discontinuities and economic growth differentials. The high speed railway had an impact on territorial cohesion, acting as a magnet to attract competitiveness in his immediate surroundings, but also created a divide between “fast” mobility and slow (regional) mobility. At the same time intermediary spaces are attracting new functions, and urbanization processes are organized at regional scale. Emerging issues like environmental fragility, high land consumption, transition to circular economy need to be governed at trans-administrative scale, yet the demand for cohesion in the corridor remains mostly unanswered. Previous seminars organized within the project highlighted the EU Green New Deal as an opportunity for the solution of common problems, and the possible role of ITI to provide a new tool for territorial and governance integration.

## ***First panel discussion: Corridors of European Union, regionalisation machines and resources for a new territorial cohesion***

*Chair Valeria Fedeli, Politecnico di Milano*

This first panel highlighted the role of corridors as spaces of regionalization and devices of territorial cohesion, and discussed possible scenarios to transform the Milan-Bologna corridor into a territorial platform.

As an inspirational story, **Bernd Scholl (ETH Zurich)** presented the case of the EGTC Code24, whose main objective is to facilitate and promote the territorial cooperation for the integrated development of the multimodal Rhine-Alpine Corridor (running from Rotterdam to Genoa) from the regional and local perspective. Urban nodes along this corridor share common problems: noise, logistic problems, role of urban hubs and threats of sprawl. Through the EGTC, the Institute of Spatial Planning of ETH Zurich, together with fourteen international partners, faced these challenges pursuing questions of spatial and infrastructural development along the corridor: the project extended urban cooperation and exchanges of information and best practices between cities.

In the **1st Viewpoint, “Living like a urban region”** **Marco Piuri, (Trenord), Marco Spinedi (Interporto di Bologna)** and **Sandro Innocenti (Prologis)** discussed possible approaches and strategies to make the flows of people and goods in the Milan-Bologna system smoother and more efficient.

The debate highlighted the need to move from a “corridor” to a “platform”, developing a community approach to provide an efficient answer to the demand of mobility. Around the skeleton of the corridor, where infrastructures and functions are concentrated, a “nervous system” must be built to assure that the people can get to their destination in a reasonable time from all the territories of the area. Such a system requires a better utilization of existing assets and a more intense use of intermodality: local governments should define common objects and criteria, in order to allow operators to organize their projects and to integrate their offer of mobility in an efficient way.

Also the regulation of freight flows along the corridor require the definition of common rules and objectives at the corridor level, surpassing local and regional differences to respond to the increased demand for logistics services generated by the Covid-19 crisis. Traffic concentration must be pursued as a mean to achieve a better connection to the Mediterranean ports, to increase train use, to reduce load breakings, to make better use of existing platforms and to minimize the impact of the new ones (including “last mile” hubs in urban areas) on human and environmental systems.

Mobility and logistics operators should be granted a role in the governance of flows in the macro-region, recognizing their capacity to interpret the changes in the demand and their potential to foster innovations towards both efficiency and sustainability.

The **2nd Viewpoint, “Competing like a urban region”** focused on the role of intermediate actors in the production of local collective competition goods to improve livability and competitiveness. **Franco Baraldi (Camera di Commercio di Bologna)** warned against the representation of the corridor as a “bridge” between two metropolitan cities: in order to comprehend the competitive advantages of the Milan-Bologna area, its complexity and variety must be considered. Developing a common vision can help to overcome the limits of local and sectoral instances: in the recent years, the cooperation between local Chambers of Commerce allowed for a better production of services for competitiveness and innovation. But the Milan-Bologna corridor also need to recognize itself as a system: this conscience is required for a more efficient and fair spatial organization of social and economic functions, and to attract new talents and investments. This can only be achieved with the inclusion of private actors and local communities in the governance: not only to ensure the alignment of demand and solutions, but also to diffuse the awareness of the interdependences between metropolitan areas, small cities, marginal areas. With this approach, the challenges of environmental and social sustainability can be interpreted in an opportunity to reduce inequalities, and to generate more knowledge and more jobs.

## **Second Panel Discussion: Strategic functions challenging administrative geographies**

Chair Paolo Perulli, *Globus et Locus*

This second session discussed the mismatch between processes of regionalisation fed by strategic function and the forms of institutional governance. Introducing the topic of the panel, **Paolo Perulli (Globus et Locus)** pointed out the mismatch between functions and institutions in the current scenario: the increasing mobility and evolution of functions requires changes in the institutional framework, to govern issues organized transversally to administrative boundaries. These issues have been exemplified by the case of the ITI of the municipalities of Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba, illustrated by **Ivan Curzolo (EGTC GO)**: these three cities constitute a single urban system which has been divided by national borders for the most part of the XX century. With the inclusion of Slovenia in the EU and in the Schengen area, the border fell, causing not only the disappearance of many economic activities (logistics services, customs, etc.), but also the redundancy of many urban services and functions. The EGTC and ITI instruments allowed the three cities to organize a strategic plan for the integration of the urban system, intervening on mobility and welfare services, and developing the capacity to achieve common goals (the main one being the title of European Capital of Culture 2025).

The **1st Viewpoint, “Growing like a urban region”**, explored the role of regional policy-design in the assemblage of a new regional imaginary. According to **Raffaele Cattaneo (Regione Lombardia)**, the changes taking place in the economic and social scenario are posing an epochal challenge to the institutional assets. The issues of sustainability, contrast to climate change, and the transition from linear to circular economy need to be addressed at a scale which is bigger than the municipal, provincial, and regional ones. Yet, these issues produce effects at the local level, and they cannot be managed only by the national or European authorities. They require a glocal approach: global strategies implemented through local actions in a bottom-up way. New multi-level governance models are needed, based on strong cooperation between public and private actors both on the horizontal and vertical axis: a difficult task for administrations which have been built on principles of autonomy and strict divisions of competences. The changes in the functional scenario require a revolution of the institutional practices, towards an improved capacity of the administrations to work together on common goals. In this direction, experiments of informal governance networks have already been organized: an example is the agreement of the regions of Lombardia, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto and Piemonte on policies against pollution (“Accordo di Bacino Padano”). The European Union contributes to the diffusion of these practices with research projects like ESPON IMAGINE and new tools for the regulation of trans-territorial issues (i.e. EGTC or ITI or Macroregional Strategies): cohesion policies should encourage the diffusion of these experiences, which are important steps in the transition towards governance models based on multi-level institutional cooperation.

Commenting Cattaneo’s speech, **Lanfranco Senn (Università Bocconi)** highlighted the presence of two different drivers for informal trans-institutional cooperation: it may be produced by political decisions or by functional decisions (common interests in research and production). In other words, there are problems which should be solved at political level, and problems which should be solved by interest convergences: different models of governance should be devised to regulate different situations. **Piero Bassetti (Globus et Locus)** declared that multi-level governance requires a reflection on the nature of the power. Multi-level governance models imply the distribution of power among different levels: it’s a sharing of power with different roles. It means a deep change in the nature of political authorities: from

“ruling things” to “doing actions together”. A constitutional change which requires experimentation and legitimization.

The **2nd Viewpoint, “Seeing like an urban region”** explored the spatial organization of knowledge-based sectors, highlighting two different dynamics: while **Alberto De Martini (Conic)** described the tendency towards the development of stronger networks between metropolitan-based creative activities and productive territories in the Milan-Bologna area (a phenomenon accelerated by the new opportunities for teleworking generated by the Covid-19 pandemic), on the other hand **Francesco Timpano (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore)** denounced the lack of integration between the innovation networks (between universities, research centers, enterprises) of Lombardia and Emilia-Romagna. Each region has its own platform for sharing projects, and developed different styles of governance for the innovation system. This situation causes duplications and increases competition between research centers. Experiences of trans-regional innovation programs should be encouraged, to share experiences and projects between the two regions (in this sense, the city of Piacenza could be an interesting laboratory: it belongs to Emilia-Romagna, but it has courses and research centers managed by universities from Milan).

### ***Third Panel Discussion: Metropolitan cities and the translocal commons***

*Chair Carlo Berizzi, AIM, Associazione Interessi Metropolitan*

This third panel discussed the content of a new urban-rural alliance and the hypotheses for an interregional strategy inspired by the EU Green Deal perspective. The inspirational story for the session has been the one of Süderelbe AG, a project fostered by Interreg RUMORE, described by **Joerg Knieling (Hafen City University)**. Süderelbe AG established an urban-rural partnership in the southern area of the metropolitan region of Hamburg to generate actions for the organization of public transport in rural areas, for the distribution of public services and innovation networks outside the city core, for the reduction of soil consumption. Süderelbe AG is an interesting example of flexible cooperation across the borders of municipalities and federal states, in a non-homogeneous metropolitan region where strong disparities exist. The project highlighted the need for differentiated territorial strategies to front existing disparities, and also the importance of cooperation in “soft spaces with “fuzzy boundaries” to tackle “hard space” restrictions: acting on specific initiatives for growth or on specific corridors.

The **1st Viewpoint “Acting like a urban region: actors and policy networks”** focused on possible ways to support local development in the Milan-Bologna area. **Claudia Sorlini (Fondazione Cariplo)** described the challenges the area is facing, regarding pollution, mobility, sustainability, and highlighted the crucial role played by bank foundations in the activation of experimental bottom-up projects of innovation which public actors are not able to pursue. They are limited by their statutes to projects regarding specific areas or regions, but collaborations between different foundations are possible to intervene on trans-territorial system like the Milan-Bologna one. Sorlini also pointed out the growing importance of the voluntary sector in local development initiatives, recommending their inclusion in the governance of the corridor. **Marco Giubilini (ANCI Emilia-Romagna), Maurizio Cabras and Francesco Severgnini (both from ANCI Lombardia)** focused on the obstacles to overcome in order to achieve governance efficiency in a polycentric system characterized by strong differences between metropolitan areas, small towns and rural areas: administrative borders, localism, lack of the competences to organize innovative projects in many public administrations. Nevertheless, many experiments of trans-territorial cooperation towards common goals have been realized in the Milan-Bologna region, fostered by municipal and regional

authorities, welfare actors, third sector associations. ANCI itself is committed to the empowerment of the collaboration capacities of small municipalities, and in the definition of new governance models able to face the challenges posed by social and economic transformations.

**The 2nd Viewpoint** of the panel involved representatives of the **Metropolitan Cities of Milan and Bologna**, and of the **Municipality of Bologna**, in a discussion on **“the EU Green Deal as a reference for establishing a new trans-local alliance”**. Metropolitan Cities have been established only recently in Italy: they are charged with the regulation of complex and interconnected systems but they lack authority and resources to solve critical urban issues. The Metropolitan Cities of Milan and Bologna fronted these issues with the organization of inclusive governance networks, involving actors from the communities, the economic sectors, the voluntary sector, the cultural sector: as a result, many investments and innovative projects have been organized at the metropolitan scale.

The cities of Milan and Bologna identified common areas of interest: sustainable development, contrast to climate change, reduction of soil consumption, mobility, but also new issues exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, like urban logistics, use of public spaces, changes in residential dynamics. The EU Green Deal could be the basis for new trans-local alliances for the regulation of many of these issues, which require actions organized at the corridor scale to produce good results. The metropolitan cities will be called to play a pivotal role in the governance of these alliances, but the presence of other public actors and private stakeholders (i.e. utilities providers, mobility providers, third sector) will be critical to allow the gathering of intelligence and resources (including the ones made available by the PNRR). One of the proposals advanced by the metropolitan cities regards the activation of an ITI to intervene on the regulation of logistics systems along the Milan-Bologna corridor.

#### ***Fourth Panel Discussion: Urban regions in the 2021-2027 EU cohesion policy***

*Chair Henk Bouwman, Secretary General METREX:*

The final session hosted a round table dedicated to the role of EU urban regions in the 2021-2027 cohesion policy, and on the exploration of the hypothesis of an ITI for the Milan-Bologna urban region. The roundtable started with a presentation of the ESPON IMAGINE research on ITI by **Marco Cremaschi (Sciences Po)**, followed by a discussion between **Sebastiano Zilli (European Commission DG REGIO)**, **Wiktor Szydarowski (ESPON EGTC ESPON)**, **Mara Cossu (Ministero della Transizione Ecologica)**, **Luisa Pedrazzini (Regione Lombardia and ESPON MC Italy)**, **Xavier Tiana Casablanca (Metropolitan Area of Barcelona)**, **Andrzej Czajkowski and Małgorzata Kucińska (City of Warsaw)**, **Maria Prezioso (University “Roma Tor Vergata” and ESPON Contact Point Italy)**.

The discussion touched many topics and produced important recommendations towards the organization of ITI initiatives in the Milan-Bologna corridor:

- The new policy objectives of the European Commission for the period 2021-2027 open many possibilities for cooperative initiatives organized at the scale of metropolitan area, functional urban area or territorial corridor, identifying challenges which cannot be faced within administrative borders and instead require territorial convergence: not only under objective n.5 (“Europe closer to citizens”), but also under Objective n.1 (“a smarter Europe”) and Objective n.2 (a greener Europe”). An ITI for the Milan-Bologna region could produce a common strategy, on which local projects, each taking resources from different European and national programs, could be based.



- On the other hand, many resources of the national and European programs will be destined to urban areas, not to metropolitan regions, and metropolitan areas are not involved in the definition of European policies: all consultations are done between national associations of cities, regions and the national authorities. European urban networks need to support the building of a real protagonism of metropolitan areas, convincing politicians that this scale is the efficient one to solve urban problems, and the results of projects like IMAGINE should be diffused not only among technicians and researchers, but also to political decision-makers.
- International experiences like the one of Warsaw demonstrated that partnership projects like ITI are difficult to manage: they require permanent coordination structures, and also training and skills, to enable personnel from different institutions to work together and create common projects. The lack of funds and tools for governance and for capacity building is a critical problem, which strategic alliances for the Milan-Bologna corridor will need to face.
- ESPON, European city networks and the Italian Ministry for Ecological Transition are important providers of knowledge, technical support, and technological transfer for initiatives of urban and territorial development. In particular, ESPON is very interested in the exploration of the role of metropolitan areas in the achievement of cohesion and sustainability objectives, and in the regulation of new functional geographies crossing administrative boundaries, like the one highlighted by the IMAGINE project.

### **Conclusions**

**Piero Bassetti (Globus et Locus)** made some concluding remarks on the connection between the local and global dimensions, which is the heart of the ESPON IMAGINE project. Today, the organic connection between local and global levels requires the ability of the territory to reorganize itself through a “political” compromise with its functions. The latter, however, tends to be independent from the territory, giving rise to an unprecedented relationship between “mobility” and “permanence”.

The ESPON IMAGINE project involved local governments and stakeholders of the main economic and territorial functions in a discussion on the development of a regional imaginary and an integrated territorial strategy between Milan and Bologna. The project represents a starting point for the development of strategic networks and programs able to govern the transformation of urban and regional scenarios both within the Milan-Bologna corridor as well as by acting as a model for other corridors, in line with the European Union’s urban and regional development policies.

During the IMAGINE project, it has been observed how the issue of governance evokes the problem of widespread and concentrated institutional subjectivity. Today, more than ever, these emerging needs challenge institutions to redefine their own forms of governance as well as the nature of their governance. Both territorial and functional institutions are increasingly called to play a key role in building new processes of governance and policy planning open to the dialectic of interests and values based on the knowledge and new social practices that find their expression in urban zones, intermediate territories and in the polyarchic relationships shared between them.

The ESPON IMAGINE project can therefore be an important experiment in institutional innovation with the aim of developing an operational and coherent vision of the Milan-Bologna system. From this point of view, the proposal for an ITI for the Milan-Bologna urban region can represent an opportunity to institutionalize new horizontal and vertical partnerships.

The Milan-Bologna system is, in fact, a system that certainly exists, but that must be supported in order to thrive, through the ability to find incentives for cooperation and to highlight the advantages which the development of a broader vision can guarantee to each actor.

The actors involved in IMAGINE: institutional and territorial actors, banking foundations, technopoles, research networks and universities, companies representing the connective functions (mobility, logistics, multiutilities, innovation and creative industries, etc.), all hold a crucial role since they may possess the vision and necessary resources needed to activate experimental trans-regional, public-private cooperation projects.

In essence, the importance of the invention of a political dimension emerges from the topics discussed in this forum and in previous meetings. Bassetti invited the actors involved to ask themselves which government or power reference should be the interlocutor in the urban and macro-regional perspective developed by the IMAGINE project: European powers (Green Deal), the Italian government or functional powers (finance, logistics, energy, circular economy, etc.). Reconciling the implantation of a specific policy with its power-generating dimension is a complex issue that must be carefully considered.

Bassetti's conclusion therefore focuses on the exhortation to all the partners of the ESPON IMAGINE project to report the problems encountered as a result of the work done to the power centers involved. Only in this way we will be able to promote a more integrated governance between Milan and Bologna. A goal of great relevance for the urban and political development of the whole Northern Italy.

**Alessandro Balducci and Valeria Fedeli (Politecnico di Milano)** launched the proposal to turn the IMAGINE network in a permanent forum, to foster the production of intellectual capital (information exchange) social capital (creation of trust among the actors) and political capital (alliances for the future cooperative actions). IMAGINE made the first steps towards the construction of a common imaginary for the Milan-Bologna system, and the Forum could be the basis to continue the discussion and to organize cooperative actions like an ITI, starting from the identification of a critical issue to be fronted with a "flagship project". In the short term, the publication of the final report of IMAGINE will help to disseminate the results of the project, both in the Milan-Bologna area and in other contexts.

In the final remarks, **Piera Petruzzi (ESPON EGTC)** highlighted the necessity to bring the findings and the proposals elaborated by the IMAGINE projects to the attention of political actors, and to share the knowledge generated by the project in other Italian and European metropolitan regions. Petruzzi also remarked the commitment of ESPON to support processes aimed at the generation of new governance models based on public-private, trans-territorial cooperation to address the need for sustainability, cohesion, and innovation of cities across Europe.