

Development Trends in Large European Metropolitan Areas



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In these last minutes, I will make a few comments. I do not intend to start a discussion with these very knowledgeable experts; I would like to put forward some elements of our work. I am a member of the European Economic and Social Committee.

We are not a study or analytical institute but we try to convince the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of important trends going on.

A watchword: “change”

As long as I am a member of that Committee, my watchword is “change”.

There is an enormous change in the world. Shifts are pretty visible to everyone nowadays and one of those is that technological cycles are playing a huge role in cities. They are influencing the way people are living; they are also influencing the way people are coming together. The emphasis laid by Lewis on productivity speaks a very clear language.

We adopted yesterday the last opinion on metropolitan areas and the impact of Europe 2020.

We requested the creation of a task force at European level consisting of, indeed, academic but also practical people from cities, in addition to the internal work the Commission is doing. They all have to work together. The experiences we have with technological platforms can also be done for cities. That is the main objective of the document.

Finally, five remarks:

1. Figures are crucial.

Figures do not explain everything but you have to base your proposals, and also descriptions of what is going on, on facts as much as possible.

2. Tradition plays a significant role.

Both speakers put forward cities that are more or less of global importance: Oxford and Cambridge - very nice examples- and also Eindhoven in The Netherlands. The three of them have to do with tradition: Oxford and Cambridge, because they have been for long University cities with an enormous international output and Eindhoven for being the traditional modern sanctuary of Philips Electronics. That can be of extreme importance.

3. Governance is critical.

Leadership must be combined with bottom-up development. I have been struck over the past years that successful cases result from a very strong leadership. By definition, a strong political leadership is influential BUT has to work hand in hand with organised civil society, universities, schooling, users of all sorts, social partners... When everybody agrees, enormous positive results can be created. Whereas a bottom-up approach without a top-down one will never work!

4. The urban-rural diptych

The rural urban focus raises violent debates in some countries. Such polarisation exists in Germany. In France, rural areas are defending themselves and trying to find protection against urban sprawl. In our view, this is totally nonsensical. It is perfectly clear that no city can survive without the rural areas, and rural areas certainly cannot survive without the cities. Therefore, our definition of metropolitan areas includes the surrounding and rural areas and their influence. We also notice that in Deutsch Metropol region this is well foreseen. In the debate on metropolisation in France this is necessarily also the case since the polycentric system is taken into consideration. There are by definition a lot of rural areas in between. I hope that, this will be said strongly in the Commission policy paper!

5. The development gap between capitals and other parts of the countries

The reality is as described by Lewis. I notice however that, in Germany, this is not the case because of tradition. Germany has never been a centralised country. The Fürstenstümmer have their own capitals,

their own specialisation and you see that Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich and others, have their own strongholds whereas Berlin is economically nowhere. That is a problem in Eastern Europe. Yet I know that, in Poland, interesting developments are going on and bringing forward the development of other metropolises. In France, they are now working, as long as it goes and as deeply as it goes, but they try to set up a metropolitanisation.

Europe 2020: an instrument of promotion for metropolitan areas

Considering the needs to enhance our competitiveness, I believe we have to strengthen our metropolitan functions and this has largely to do with the blurring of national boundaries.

Whatever governments and the Elysée may say, it is an undeniable phenomenon. Regions are far more in the wind of international trends than they were before, when you had the protection of a national feeling, national policies and boundaries. This is no longer the case... to that extent!

Moreover a European boundary is very difficult to set up. So, there is something of a global vocation of metropolises, of specialisation... Then you come back to leadership, to productivity, to possible outputs of technological cycles!

That is, by and large, what we are asking to the Commission. Europe 2020 can be of help, because Europe 2020 is bringing Member States far closer to the European level and the European level far closer to Member States. Europe 2020 is the right instrument to put the metropolitan areas issue still more clearly on the agenda!