Conclusions of the Eurocities' Working Group on Governance in Metropolitan Areas

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Sharing experience and know-how

Metropolitan areas have been a concern for us in Lille over many years. We have locally explored different solutions and scenarios in the context of France and its neighbouring country, Belgium. This also explains why for years we have being trying to understand the situation in Europe, in neighbouring countries, what led us to exchange and share experience both through dedicated city exchange programmes such as Urbact, and to propose working under the Eurocities with our colleagues from Oslo on how we govern metropolitan areas. Eurocities is a network of 130 major European cities. It functions via forums and working groups led by city officials. These are not therefore groups of university researchers but groups based on experience gained by local stakeholders in different cities. This work is far from completion, but I can share with you some of our first findings.

A little less than a year ago, we set up a working group on the governance of metropolitan areas. It includes some thirty cities. Lille and Oslo were the joint coordinators. The aim was to share practices in different cities with a view to drawing some conclusions on what works and what doesn't in Europe with regard to metropolitan cooperation and governance.

A new perception of urban regions

We need a new view of urban regions. What we feel as particularly important is the growing mismatch between actual cities and their political definitions on the one hand and the fact that the situation in urban areas is changing more quickly. Consequently, there is not only a gap but a constantly shifting gap.

Attempts to carry out a "top-down" reform in a democratic system as complex as ours are very likely to be out of sync with the reality of our cities. It is probably somewhat vain to run after a top-down solution purely institutional. We have seen many attempts by states to resolve this problem fail, for many reasons. Metropolitan authorities were abolished in the UK; the law on the *città metropolitane* in Italy, voted in 1990, has not been applied. No città metropolitana has been created. The metropolitan city concept has been rejected in referenda, such as the one held in Rotterdam. "Hardware" solutions are apparently not the most likely to succeed.

The ideal scale and critical mass of metropolitan regions

The message that this working group wishes to convey is that firstly, it is relevant to pursue policies on these metropolitan areas on a scale where they have a greater change to success. There is not one definition of a metropolitan area. The definition of a metropolitan area depends on local contexts and on the type of questions that may be asked. We cannot take it for granted that a metropolitan area in terms of urban transport is the same for R & D.

Four types of definition exist.

1. A morphological, built-up area.

2. A functional area. It is assumed that there are metropolitan areas that go beyond the definition of a functional area based on commuter travel.

3. Much larger economic zones with occasionally partnership between cities. Examples include Rennes and Nantes, who are trying to work together, in France, in a cross-border partnership between Copenhagen and Malmö, within networks, involving not two but five cities, such as in the province of Nord-Brabant in The Netherland between Tilburg, Eindhoven, S'Hertogenbosch, Helmond and Breda.

4. Larger regions which depend on a metropolitan centre and on a services centre are more

scattered, such as rural regions in the north of Scandinavia.

The second reason why we must work within an metropolitan area framework is because there is an increasing need to bundle the resources of local authorities. In Europe the resources of local authorities are in decline, sometimes dramatically so, and are even nose-diving, as in UK where the budget lines of towns and cities have been cut by 25 to 30% from one year to the next.

We need a metropolitan dimension because this is the critical size necessary to deploy a series of strategies and secure a fair use of public resource.

In search of greater international regional cohesion

Today, we must try and avoid as much as possible the adverse effects of competition between authorities in neighbouring regions. Far too often, the competitiveness of a region is confused with competition between its local entities. This is particularly apparent in the tax system.

Today, the local taxes are levied in disproportion to the services to be supplied by local councils. Taxpayers pay either taxes where they work and not where they live or where they live and not where they work. We observe difference between a local or regional authority that levies taxes and one that needs this public money to supply services that the population expects.

There are three main approaches to metropolitan governance in Europe today which can possibly be applied simultaneously on the same territory.

An institutional top-down approach: a largely top-down approach with clearly defined frontiers and well established structures. French urban communities are an example. We see few new examples of this approach today but many such structures continue to operate.

A fluid, ad hoc approach: In recent years the trend has been towards more fluid, flexible approach that derives from regions organising themselves spontaneously or at least in an ad hoc way.

A scale built on development strategies : the third approach followed in some countries, is based the ability to undertake strategic planning on a scale far above those of the local authorities and which implies the ability to build a consensus around a development strategy without modifying the formal development structures in place
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Governances in preference to government

The problem is not much one of adapting existing administrative structures but of finding way to align metropolitan areas with administrative structures as they exist, i.e. to look for forms of governance rather than for forms of government. We need a pragmatic vision in keeping with national and local contexts. We cannot impose a system of governance in Europe.

The need for a multi-tier system of governance

In this context why do we need the support of European, national and regional authorities? Regional refers to federal states where the issue is not dealt with at federal level but at a federated "state" level. Firstly, we feel that the responsibility for coordination at the metropolitan level must be shared between different tiers in the political hierarchy. This is not strictly speaking the remit of regional, local or national authorities but is necessarily the joint responsibility of all these different levels. Eurocities strongly supports multi-tier governance.

The second point is that this is a European issue. The obsolescence of political borders within urban areas can be observed across Europe. This is of crucial importance. In order to fulfill common objectives in European on cohesion and in line with the 2020 policy programme, we must tackle the issues on the right scale on a wide range of subjects. In many cases, the right scale is new, flexible and is often between two established tiers.

Recognising and advocating metropolitan areas in European documents

These issues should probably be addressed in two time windows. What can we do quickly, what can we do in the short term and what can we do locally? It seems impossible to manage this collectively in Europe in the short term. We therefore need a long-term European programme to handle these issues. What can we propose more tangibly? Firstly, we need to create instruments in European survey metropolitan areas, mainly in terms identifying programming and strategy documents, whether at national level or at EU level. We could also look at what incentives, and why not financial and above all legal incentives, could be given to develop partnerships on a metropolitan scale. Finally, there is a clear need to develop information and knowledge on these questions through research and exchange programmes.