



# The Urban Dimension of Macro-Regions

## 1. The cohesion policy: an instrument at the service of cities

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In 2007, the European ministers in charge of the management of the territory approved the European Territorial Agenda, with the aim of strengthening relations between territories and fostering cooperation at transnational level. Also in 2007, acknowledging that cities are the element that defines Europe's territorial structure and the driving force for sustainable development, the same ministers approved a document with specific orientations for cities: the Leipzig Charter. While developing the ideas present in other proposals, such as the Alborga Charter or the treaty of Bristol, the Leipzig Charter proposes a polycentric urban system, with special emphasis on the importance of cities in the formulation of future policies. Measures were encouraged for the creation and conservation of the quality of public areas and for the modernisation of the infrastructures network, as well as for improving energy efficiency and the promotion of an efficient and affordable public transportation system. As a base for the support of the local economy, proactive innovation and education policies need to be developed. In this sense it must not be forgotten that the urban perspective of the fight against climate change can be witnessed in the immediate success of the Covenant of Mayors, which over 2700 cities have signed by June 2011.

As the Treaty of Lisbon states, territorial cohesion, together with economic and social cohesion, must be at the centre of European policies. Local administrations, aware of the specificities that are referred to in article 174 of the mentioned Treaty, constitute the most appropriate level regarding these goals. So, Strategy 2020 should not only provide a way out of the crisis, but it should also give way to the balanced development of European territories. The Declaration of Toledo in May 2010 strengthens the links between these different European initiatives and appeals to a greater role for cities, highlighting the "urban dimension" in the cohesion policy as the EU's driver of growth. Consequently, it points out the need to promote the *Integrated Urban Regeneration* as a strategic instrument to achieve an urban model that is more intelligent, more sustainable and more socially inclusive, and especially to face the current urban challenges and implement the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy in the built environment and in the already consolidated urban networks.

These points are likewise included in the Fifth report regarding the cohesion policy that was published last year. As is stated by the different contributions, the cohesion policy must promote the adaptation of the different territories, favouring their development in a sustainable manner. As a basic instrument, it is worth highlighting the partnership between cities and citizens, which should impulse a bottom-up contribution towards European policies, as part of a democratic agreement, which facilitates an integrated development and establishes the bases for more ambitious programmes and projects that are directed towards priorities and results.

## **2. Macro-regions: The territoriality, graduality and dynamism of territorial cohesion**

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Even if territorial cohesion and solidarity are the base for the European regional Policy against inter-regional competence, regional diversity must not mask deepening in inequalities regarding economic development. In this regard, the territorial dimension of the cohesion policy renews its importance, not only with regards to the programming of the future structural funds, but especially with regards to the characterisation of territories with respect to access to the said funds; and because these funds must be combined with the different sector policies. Thus, the fifth report highlights both the role of cities as well as the specific problems derived from the geography, orography and position of certain territories. An *ex ante* evaluation of the sector policies will facilitate that the territorial cohesion objectives are integrated in the corresponding European and national policies with territorial impact, in order for it not to be necessary to use the financial resources to compensate the negative effects of the sector policies. A possible response to this challenge could come from the current and future development of the macro-regional strategies.

From the Baltic and the Danube experiences, the macro-regions are defined as *“an area that includes the territory of a number of different countries or regions associated by one or more common characteristics or challenges”*. Because it involves flexible territorial cooperation formulas between various units, the definition is not limited to a specific geographic scale and it facilitates the participation of member States (and their neighbours), regions, cities and other interested parties.

The main idea is to develop a series of activities in a coordinated manner, framing them within a well defined range of priorities, with the aim of taking advantage of the synergies and promoting scale economies. Territorial integration is therefore highlighted and not just the thematic aspects of cooperation programming. Both those macro-regions that are in progress as well the proposed ones show the importance of the territorial dimension of cohesion and are an interesting example of multi-level coordination that goes beyond borders.

Because the territorial dimension must allocate both the choice of priorities as the level of execution, this type of strategy proves to be especially favourable for cities with common characteristics, limited in their quality of life by their specific geographic condition (cross-border, peripheral, maritime...). This guarantees the acknowledgement that cities are the first point of contact with citizens, and that, according to the principles of subsidiarity and participation, network cities must carry out a key role in the process of interregional cooperation, because interaction must take place from the base and must not be created or imposed unilaterally or from the top-down.

This aim should also be taken into account in the development of the Strategy 2020 because support and interaction with local and regional initiatives through the cohesion policy must be strengthened. In this same regard, the scope of the partnership and investment contract must take into account the potential of the *“integrated strategies”*, because they are destined to elude the lack of a precise and quantified definition of the objectives. The consistency granted by the strategies integrated in the EU policies solves the inefficiencies derived from lack of coordination. Through the benchmarking of good local practices, the projects that integrate a macro-regional strategy can advance from a state of *“study and analysis”* to one of *“implementation of initiatives”*.

However, the macro-regions must not be confined to the efficient use of resources, but they must base their legitimacy on consensus, a long-term approach, the definition of specific projects and cooperative work based on the principle of subsidiarity. For example, the

selection of priorities must be done through dialogue and active queries. In the search for a greater concentration of themes, and therefore a smaller and more accessible scope for the implementation of initiatives destined to the solution of problems that are affecting the EU, it is necessary to take into account the interregional, transnational and cross-border associations; which are capable of comparing and evaluating priorities in the European territories, while at the same time providing a better coordination between the national and community levels. The superposition and dispersion of individual efforts must be avoided.

As a note, it is worth highlighting that the macro-regions should not constitute a new level of governance, but facilitate the participation of the regional and especially the local authorities, reducing the administrative load and making the different finance mechanisms among them more coherent, in order to give priority to results above procedures.

Taking advantage of the effects of proximity, governance must effectively include the social level, especially in those cases faced with geographic specificities. Striving for an adequate articulation of the territory, real multi-level governance at a macro-regional scale contributes to the improvement of the cooperation processes at all levels between the public and private actors, in a logic that combines vertical and horizontal subsidiarity. This goal should be reflected in a specific development indicator: the “governance” indicator proposed by the CEMR.

### **3. Local development, sustainable development**

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#### *The environment:*

As can be seen in the Covenant of Mayors, the local European authorities have become involved in sustainable urban policies that are energetically efficient and that promote the use of public transportation. With the local level being the most effective in the fight against climate change, cities hope to be an example with regards to environmental initiatives. In addition to adaptation and mitigation measures, the proposals focus on renewable energies and energy efficiency in fields such as housing and public transportation. A compact urban approach is proposed, which prevents cities' excessive expansion and which facilitates urban regeneration.

With regards to cities with specific characteristics, many involved in current or future macro-regional strategies, it is worth highlighting the aim of carrying out initiatives that take into account the maritime dimension, urban-rural integration, and the reduction of the perverse effects created by borders or even the search for solutions through transnational cooperation.

This context promotes the valuation of the environment through eco-activities, the development of renewable energies, the necessary forward-looking analysis of the measures of adaptation and mitigation.

Cities try to adjust to the environmental limits and reduce their ecological footprint. This aim will only be effective through joint actions. Within the urban area, measures are proposed aimed at an early and improved integrated management of the risks of climate change, towards the installation of accessible heating systems in more comfortable houses, to promoting local businesses that control their carbon costs, to creating employment niches in green and sustainable industries, a green transportation system and, above all, energy security for the macro-region. Special attention should be devoted to waste. After recycling and composting have been maximised, there are still residues that cannot be recycled. Historically, dumps have been used to manage this waste, but it is essential to find alternative solutions.

### *Economic growth:*

The local authorities understand the cohesion policy as a fundamental instrument to respond to external shocks and therefore to guarantee a balanced development. Likewise, and due to the different sizes of the different European cities, the aim of an integrated strategy is for them to reach a critical mass that makes it possible to obtain synergies for a full development that they would be incapable of achieving on their own. In this way, the macro-regional strategies can be the link that allows coordination by establishing a system of priorities through a wide range of sources.

Cities are the centres that make it possible to attract creative and innovative human resources, as well as financial investment. In the search for territorial competitiveness and attraction, the cluster logic makes it possible, especially for medium-sized or surrounded cities, to create scale economies by pooling European, national, regional and local resources, together with the private sector and Universities. The macro-region becomes the appropriate area to provide entrance for cities to R+I activities, new technologies (especially e-administration) and innovation, training, entrepreneurship and support to SMEs. The European Social Fund must find its place within the macro-regions and likewise integrate the urban dimension.

With regards to an urban-rural integration that facilitates the articulation of a macro-regional territory, the analysis and implementation of systems of economy of proximity (short circuits) is proposed to facilitate the exchange and creation of wealth at a local level. Cities can and should be the organisers of these systems, both by directly acquiring the products as by acting as intermediaries or developers of the local markets, either physically or online.

### *Mobility:*

The development of accessibility, being in contact and mobility is essential to guarantee the effects of a macro-regional strategy. Accessibility is defined as the communication among large centres and the peripheral areas, in order increase European connectivity and competitiveness. The definition of trans-European transportation networks must not leave out the secondary networks, nor the role of cities as nodes of intermodal connection, nor those initiatives, such as the motorways of the sea which facilitate that accessibility.

Being in contact refers to the interior connections in the heart of the macro-regions. If each city has to be an actor in the integrated strategy, the projects directed towards improving transportation systems must ensure the efficient connection between cities. An effective macro-region is one that ensures viable means of communication between the cities that compose it.

However, the strategy of macro-regional transportation would not be complete if it did not pay attention to urban mobility. Cities must include effective mobility systems that are inclusive and intelligent as ineluctable connection nodes and in order to provide environmental and employment strategies.

Port cities deserve a special mention because, as centres of activity and providers of connectivity with the interior hinterland and with the rest of Europe they are key pieces in a macro-regional strategy, both at economic development level as well as at exterior competitiveness level.

### *The civil society:*

The future design of the cohesion funds and of the macro-regions must integrate the EU Strategy 2020, giving it a human face. The causes and consequences of the crisis must be

taken into account. Sustainable development is not only economic or environmental, but also and especially social.

Cities likewise demand, within the macro-regional strategies, guarantees that enable them to continue offering public and general interest services that are accessible and of high quality. Likewise, the population's ageing and the increase of unemployment, especially of women, makes it interesting to consider the professionalisation of women's labour. As citizens with full rights, their service to society must be acknowledged and formalised.

As a melting pot that brings together different cultures, and in the same way that a city is more than a city hall, European cities are aware that the local political processes have a key protagonist, the citizen. In a macro-regional strategy, the principle of collaboration and participation by the local stakeholders and other actors must be guaranteed through a real and adequate consultation to the civil society regarding the priorities and methods, from the initial phase of negotiation to the evaluation, passing through the assignment of resources.

In this way, the macro-regions must serve to widen the participation of cities and citizens in the cohesion policy, through a strict application of the principle of subsidiarity, just as the Treaty of Lisbon states. Therefore, bottom-up tools must be defined which ensure the direct participation of cities and citizens, based on examples such as the local action groups of the programmes URBACT, LEADER and FARNET.

#### *Identity and heritage:*

The Baltic and Danube experiences, as well as the proposals from the Atlantic, the Adriatic or North Sea, show that the historical cohabitation between the different territories that make up the macro-regions is a live entity that makes any initiative inefficient if it is not common, creating opportunities in a natural way. We cannot forget that the sum of all these identities is what has created the European Union.

These macro-regions share a culture, a history and a long series of commercial and economic exchanges that have set the bases for an even closer cooperation. Cities have been the essential protagonists of these processes, as well as the objects, storehouses, destinations and promoters of the mentioned exchanges. The common history, the heritage, the geography cannot be understood individually and the heritage thus becomes a common wealth that has to be protected and developed in a collaborative manner. These exchanges can be increased through actions directed towards promoting mobility and personnel exchange between different administrations, universities and companies through the macro-region.

Therefore, cities must be considered promoters of joint promotion tools for products and services to strengthen the identity and image; as well as creative industries. Actions directed towards preserving the quality of the historical public spaces are proposed, as well as the traditional landscape, through the protection of the heritage, the creation of green areas, and the regeneration of abandoned industrial areas, as well as their integration in the city.

## 6. Conclusions

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As is can be seen from the different “urban” European documents since 2007, the integrated approach in the development policies of cities consists in seeing the city as a key point in the achievement of objectives framed within a territorial perspective, of integrated urban regeneration and its strategic potential for a more intelligent, sustainable and socially inclusive urban development in Europe. Cities have the necessary capacity to carry out local development plans that are coherent with the European Strategy 2020 for future sustainable growth. It is therefore understood that the model of city of the future needs to go through networking with other cities, taking advantage of common resources and synergies during this period of financial crisis, with the aim of reaching the necessary means and knowledge to obtain its development and thus achieve the sustainable city of the future.

By being integrated in a macro-regional strategy, European cities, especially those faced with specific geographic characteristics, strive to encourage synergies and cooperation to contribute to the emergence of an area of solidarity and development of projects. In this way it is requested that European instances encourage a balanced and polycentric development of the territory. A macro-region must serve not only to overcome administrative and geographic frontiers, but also to conjugate the wills of different agents; without overlooking the benefits of a common history. A history that cannot be understood without the fundamental role of cities.

This development must be built through actions that facilitate a sustainable urban development and that integrate them in scale economies. The actions must not only provide a way out of the crisis, but also extend the benefits of social inclusion and citizen's participation. Thus, regarding the urban dimension of the macro-regions the following is proposed:

- The full integration of the urban dimension in the Europe Strategy 2020, the cohesion policy and the macro-regions, respecting a bottom-up logic that is in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity;
- The use of the Leipzig Charter and the referential of sustainable development as the road map;
- The benchmarking of good local practices which serves the transition from “state of the art” to implementation projects, rounded off with an impact analysis of European policies on the territory of the macro-regions;
- Facilitate new ways for economic development, such as the green economy, the maritime economy, the economy of knowledge and the economy of proximity;
- Favour urban accessibility, contacability and mobility;
- Guarantee the offer of adequate general interest services, that are extensive and of high quality;
- Establish participation mechanisms that are open to the civil society, the different levels of government and other interested parties;
- The construction of macro-regional initiatives that take into account the identity, heritage and common values of the territories.

Cities must be part of a process, the macro-regional one, which seeks to develop a more open, efficient and ambitious cooperation. All this beginning with the development of actions through agreements with investigation centres, universities and the private sector,

expanding the field of actors involved, and not limited to the national level but expanding the field of cooperation to the transnational level and to new forms of cooperation. The aim is to develop urban development strategies that are integrated in the set of actors at European, national, regional and local level. The work methods proposed are:

- Networking, creating an impulse area for cities, to accompany the actions carried out and a privileged point of contact for the different agents with European institutions and with the rest of the cities of the area.
- The evaluation of sustainable urban development, influenced by the current crisis, using the different Charters and Declarations as reference, through a database that includes the realities that belong to the different cities so as to prepare a common strategy. All this beginning with the different experiences that promote taking advantage of synergies and the pooling of the existing resources of the participating cities in an efficient and feasible manner through partnerships.
- Citizen participation based on the principles of subsidiarity, coherence and proportionality. Granting citizens the opportunity to participate in European policies starting from their capacity to prepare development projects. The macro-region must serve as a sounding board for the needs of citizens but also as an instrument for communication. The coordinated structure transmits citizens' initiatives and demands, in addition to turning people and local entities into active agents, creating a conscience of a common project, that is at the same time individual and collective, allowing citizens to make the results their own and feel they are an active part of the European project.