

Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

// ESPON Week in Slovenia 29 November 2 December 2021

Quality of Life for territorial and citizen-centric policies /

ESPON online workshop

Cohesion Policy and Quality of Life. The role of metropolitan areas.

Wednesday 1 December 2021 at 14h15-15h30 CET

Metropolitan areas have an important role in supporting the quality of life of their citizens. Speakers at this online workshop will use the final METRO project findings to address the role of cohesion policy in planning and implementing metropolitan policies, while also reflecting on how these policies can help to achieve cohesion policy objectives.

At this workshop experienced policymakers and experts will explore opportunities, challenges, and objectives of the cohesion policy in metropolitan areas, and how a metropolitan dimension will contribute to enhance the quality of life in their territories.

Coordinator Piera Petruzzi, ESPON egtc

Moderator Lia Brum, Metropolis (ES)

Opening speech: “Quality of Life in our metropolitan areas and cities”

Christophe Demaziere, DEMAZIERE (FR)

First of all let me thank ESPON for organising this workshop and also for asking me to make a short presentation. This is an honour for me. I would like also to thank the Slovenian authorities which lead the European Council this semester. Because among the social priorities that they put forward, we can find the aim of improving the quality of life for people in Europe. This topic is highly relevant and, as a French, I can only wish that in the next semester the French Presidency will go on with this priority.

Now, I turn to the topic of the workshop: the quality of life in European metropolitan areas.

Of course, each metropolitan area defines its own trajectory according to its place in globalisation, its history, its economic and social resources, or its inclusion in an institutional system. Therefore my comments are certainly not valid for all European metropolises. Furthermore I shall focus now on the discourses and actions of the public decision-makers who steer the development of metropolitan areas. I would like to formulate here the hypothesis of a strategic turn: metropolitan issues are no longer stated in the same way as a few years ago, and the quality of life is a hot issue. If I am correct, the metropolitan policies will be redefined in the coming years.

So if we ask whether the quality of life is an objective for metropolitan decision makers, my answer is positive. In the current COVID crisis, metro areas are acting to enhance the livability. What does this mean for metropolitan regions as a whole? This question arises since the metropolitan cores sometimes boast themselves to be the champions of sustainable urban development. But if we talk of quality of life we must

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consider the suburban areas as well. This sets the issue of coordination between local governments which are interdependent while being autonomous in terms of decision making.

1. IS THE QUALITY OF LIFE A NEW OBJECTIVE FOR METROPOLITAN ACTION?

It seems to me that the metropolitan actors, whether elected or professional, have distanced themselves from the lexicon of competition, technological innovation and excellence. Now, decision makers rather make the environmental issue a priority. They seem to be much more concerned with the livability of the metropolis. They express the will to work towards more inclusive, hospitable, sober and resilient metropolises. This is not just rhetoric. It is also the result of events that metro areas have experienced in the last years. One can refer here to heatwaves, but also to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has made us all aware of the interdependence between territories at different scales (from local to global). Large cities are proving to be vulnerable because of the link between urban density, population concentration and the spread of the virus. A second factor is that the inhabitants of metro areas express more and more a demands for nature, for social justice, and for the quality of life. In brief, the ecological, social and sanitary crises underline the limits of the urban development model, as it has largely prevailed until now.

2. DO METROPOLITAN AUTHORITIES HAVE CAPACITY TO FACE UP TO THESE CHALLENGES?

The answer is not easy since the reconsideration of values and the change in policy tools will take time. However, it appears already, that in the field of urban development and spatial planning, the ecological inflexion and the search for a 'just city' are already noticeable. All over Europe, several 'flagship projects' projects in gestation have been stopped, they are no longer considered as a panacea. Instead, spatial planners refer more and more to the idea of a 'green city', and engineers praise more and more nature-based solutions. In brief, we enter into a new era of city development, characterised by the importance of nature for the quality of life in cities.

This said, the desire to be at the forefront of the competition between the large cities has not completely disappeared. Moreover, some of the European metropolises - the least equipped - continue to develop facilities or infrastructures to increase their attractiveness on a national and European scale. But elsewhere the limits of policies that gave priority to competitiveness have appeared. For instance, housing policies have too often focused on the 'creative class', on contributors to the knowledge economy. Urban regeneration may have nurtured processes of gentrification rather than having regulated them. Certain areas in the metropolitan region, like the most central districts, but also inner city areas, have become inaccessible to the middle classes. They are then relegated or pushed further out to the periphery.

To try to reverse this situation, it is now time for policies that improve the daily lives of all those who live and/or who work in the metropolises. The challenge for metropolises is certainly to become fully livable, focusing on the concrete conditions of daily life, at different geographical scales: the home, the neighbourhood, the municipality, and the metropolitan region as a whole.

3. WHAT GOVERNANCE FOR LIVABLE METROPOLITAN AREAS?

Core municipalities have made huge efforts to facilitate the use of bicycle, to plant trees, to make cities walkable, and so on. However, until now the livability of metropolitan regions as a whole is also taken in charge by the outskirts of metropolises. If demographic growth goes on in the future, metropolitan cores will need these peri-urban areas because the social demand for houses with gardens is not decreasing in

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many countries. It has even been amplified by the difficult experience of confinement in the heart of the metropolis.

Tomorrow, the fight against climate change will slow down the densification of the central spaces of the metropolis. On the other hand, we should acknowledge that suburbanisation, as it has developed over the last few decades, does not satisfy the obligation to use land resources more sparingly. And it can lead to more commuting which is contradictory with the aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in metropolitan regions.

So, the question that is posed to areas on the edge of metropolises is how to reconcile construction development and the quality of the living environment, while satisfying the provisions of climate regulations? How to ensure that the inhabitants of metropolitan areas, whether they live in the core or in the suburbs, can find the amenities and facilities they need for their daily lives? How can metropolitan investments ensure that the inhabitants of metropolitan areas have a transport offer nearby that gives them a "right to the metropolis"? And for the inhabitants of the dense heart of the metropolis, policies should also ensure that they have a right of access to nature, downstairs in a nearby park but also in large natural areas suitable for nature-based leisure activities.

In brief, the health crisis, but also the ecological crisis are shaking up the framework for public action in the metropolitan areas. Good health and more generally good living is at the agenda of European metro regions. However, with the economic slowdown and the rise in social spending, which is very visible in many European cities, the investment capacities of local authorities are sometimes lower. This may lead them to reduce their ambitions about improving the quality of life. In this context, the European cohesion policy is very important for metropolitan areas to be able to act effectively to increase the quality of life. The METRO project addresses this issue in more detail, for example in relation to local initiatives that were taken by local authorities during the COVID pandemic. In the remainder of this workshop researchers and stakeholders of the METRO project will provide more detail on different aspects of this strategic alliance between metro areas and the EU. So I am very happy to leave them the floor. Thank you very much for listening!