



METROPOLITAN

A European Agenda for Metropolitan Regions and Areas

Discussion Note

December 2004

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Proposition

The purpose of this short Discussion Note is to present and substantiate the Proposition that,

The competitiveness and well-being of Europe's metropolitan regions and areas is essential to the achievement of the objectives of the European Convention (for territorial cohesion), the Lisbon and Göteborg Agendas (for economic competitiveness and sustainability), the European Spatial Development Perspective (for better urban balance) and the Third Cohesion Report (for social and economic cohesion)

and to recommend a Response and Way Forward.

The metropolitan dimension to European affairs

Competitiveness requires an economically and socially inclusive, and environmentally responsible, approach to urban affairs. Urban competitiveness and cohesion can be progressed most productively through the establishment of effective means for strategic decision making and action over Functional Urban Regions and Areas (see the Reports of the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network – ESPON. www.espon.lu) and, in particular, those of metropolitan significance.

Decisions and action, involving all key stakeholders and civil society, will need to develop metropolitan strengths, address weaknesses, promote opportunities and have regard to threats (the SWOT approach).

In essence, Europe's future will depend to a great extent on the longer-term competitiveness and well-being of its metropolitan regions and areas. This is the *metropolitan dimension* to European affairs.

The Response

If this *Proposition* is accepted, in principle, then the issue is how to respond to the *metropolitan dimension* to European affairs. The following approach would allow progress to be made by appropriate means in the varying metropolitan circumstances that exist across Europe.

1 Definition

- The definition of Functional Urban Regions and Areas (FURA), across the wider Europe, on a common and accepted basis (for example, travel to work/labour markets). ESPON already provides the basis for this.
- The collection of urban data and the identification of indicators of competitiveness and well-being (economic, social and environmental) on this basis. This would require coordination through EUROSTAT.
- The definition of FURA of metropolitan significance, meaning those that individually or collectively (on the basis of polycentric clusters) have the population size, economic potential and/or locational importance (gateways, transfer hubs etc.) to function as European growth areas. ESPON has already identified a preliminary number of Metropolitan European Growth Areas (MEGA).

2 Recognition

Within MEGA the key economic, social and environmental stakeholder interests will then need to be brought together for two initial purposes. Firstly, to agree on a common spatial definition of their MEGA and secondly to recognise their common strategic interests.

In effect this will mean recognising their current economic, social and environmental realities and future prospects. It could require the production of the equivalent of a MEGA Strategic Issues Report (on a SWOT basis) to set the agenda for integrated partnership action over the medium (5-15 years) to longer term (15+ years).

3 Identity

Given MEGA recognition, the stakeholders can then, collectively, consider the means of identifying their MEGA, and the strategic issues it faces, in the minds of civil society and the wider national and European institutions. There are already a number of examples of such an approach, for example, the emerging German metropolitan areas, the French *Communautes Urbaines*, Italian metropolitan enabling legislation, English and Scottish enabling legislation for sub (metropolitan) regions and City regions, *Regio Randstad* (and its metropolitan component parts) and the Øresund region.

4 Marketing, influence and support

In term of economic competitiveness, the strengths and opportunities of a MEGA can then be marketed with confidence and substance. This will also enable a MEGA to influence the priorities and programmes of national and European institutions and to attract support from such programmes.

5 MEGA governance

There will come a point where the positive promotion and development of a MEGA (strengths and opportunities) will need to be matched with action on issues of economic and social cohesion (weaknesses and threats) and balances struck between possibly competing interests and priorities. These are essentially issues of governance in the wider metropolitan public interest.

Sustainability is essentially about the informed and integrated consideration of economic, social and environmental interests, particularly in relation to the wise use of natural resources. A Metropolitan Framework for the medium to longer term is one means of achieving the balances that need to be struck. Such a Framework could have the component parts of a Vision for the longer term, to set a context and broad directions, and a Strategy for the medium term comprising a range of policies, programmes and strategic projects.

Metropolitan Visions are helpful in engaging the interest and imagination of stakeholder interests and civil society. They can help to marshal the body of informed and supportive opinion that is required to sustain the collective and successful implementation of an agreed Strategy over the medium and longer term.

The production and implementation of a Metropolitan Framework requires an appropriate mechanism of metropolitan governance. Governance may be considered as taking the decisions and initiating the action required in the wider public interest, including civil society and sectoral interests, to effectively address agreed strategic issue of common concern over the medium and longer term.

Mechanisms for effective governance can range from statutory elected or appointed authorities with comprehensive powers, through authorities with selective powers to voluntary associations of interests with advisory influence only. The range of competencies that are accorded to metropolitan bodies of these kinds will depend on the agreed strategic issues that they need to address in an effective way.

In addition to appropriate competencies, metropolitan governance will need to have the technical capability to take informed decisions on a continuing basis and to monitor, safeguard, update and roll forward a Metropolitan Framework. The provision of relevant data and information for effective metropolitan governance can be contracted out but the insight and understanding required for informed decision making will remain a core in house requirement.

6 Metropolitan strategic issues, the longer term view and the spatial dimension

Metropolitan regions and areas share many common strategic issues, such as managing economic change, including the need for restructuring and renewal, coping with increasing social and cultural diversity, facilitating communications and the movement of goods and people, enabling appropriate and necessary development and safeguarding valued natural and heritage resources.

The consideration of such a range of economic, social and environmental issues in an integrated and balanced way can be achieved through the production of an agreed Metropolitan Framework with the involvement of all the appropriate and relevant stakeholders and the support of civil society. Such a Framework will have to take a medium to longer term view because it is only over such extended timescales that strategic issues of this kind can be addressed effectively.

A Metropolitan Framework will have a spatial dimension because of the need to balance urban renewal with urban expansion, integrate land use, transportation and infrastructure, sustain the vitality and viability of city and town centres, enable economic competitiveness through the provision of development opportunities, promote social inclusion, assess the environmental impact of development and safeguard valued resources.

The Way Forward

It is hoped that the Proposition and substantiating justification summarised above can provide the basis for an agreed Way Forward by a partnership of the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), supported by METREX, the Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas. This might then be progressed through the agenda of the Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning during the Luxembourg and UK Presidencies in 2005.

Although the Proposition and substantiating justification appear to be accepted, in principle, within many European institutions and bodies and metropolitan regions and areas, progress on the ground is varied and uncertain. The imperatives of the Lisbon Agenda for the economic future of Europe are such that an initiative is now urgently required to stimulate and sustain progress with a European Agenda for Metropolitan Europe.

It is in this context that this Discussion Note advocates most strongly that a specific and targeted initiative is needed, from the top in Europe, to promote, support and progress the most effective contribution possible to the Lisbon Agenda from Europe's metropolitan regions and areas.

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One way of achieving this would be for a named METROPOLITAN initiative to be packaged within the framework of the measures, initiatives and programmes enabled by the Structural Funds for 2007-2013. This would give formal recognition to the urgency and significance attached to the need for effective action at the metropolitan level.

METROPOLITAN might facilitate,

- The definition and recognition of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas on the basis data and indicators to be defined by ESPON and EUROSTAT and agreed with the other relevant stakeholders (European Commission, EESC, COR etc.)

METROPOLITAN might promote,

- Mechanisms for the appropriate and effective governance of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas in their particular individual circumstances. This would enable the concept of subsidiarity to become operational at the metropolitan level.
- The production of Metropolitan Frameworks, with the active involvement of relevant stakeholder interests and with the participation of civil society, to identify and assess the key strategic economic, social and environmental issues being faced in the medium and longer term and the integrated responses that would be effective in addressing these.

METROPOLITAN might actively support,

- The implementation of Metropolitan Frameworks, within the provisions of the Structural Funds, through innovative or demonstration programmes or strategic projects.

METROPOLITAN might also support,

- The exchange of knowledge and information on metropolitan affairs to develop and expand the practitioner knowledge base.