

## METROPOLITAN VISION 2050 (MV2050)

***Through its 'Vision for Europe 2050', METREX wants to elevate and strengthen the metropolitan dimension in policy, strategies and programmes aimed at tackling myriad challenges facing Europe today. This White Paper presents metropolitan-centred or 'metro-minded' solutions reflecting insights and practical ideas gathered through wide stakeholder engagement.***

### THE CHALLENGE – Why a Metropolitan Vision and why now?

Collins dictionary declared “perma-crisis” the word of the year in 2022. Indeed, Europe is facing unprecedented social, economic, demographic and environmental challenges. War in Ukraine, climate hazards, a cost of living and credit crunch, growing inequality, and political scepticism, Covid-19 and its aftermath... As the European Union battles one crisis after the other, its dreams of greater “unity in diversity” appear to be edging further away.

At the same time, we have been witnessing major changes in the way we live and how we move about for work and leisure. This affects decisions on green mobility, affordable housing, migration, social exclusion and (youth) unemployment, zero-emissions and circularity targets, mass tourism, gentrification, etc. Through their rich network of connections in various fields and on different levels and dimensions, metropolitan regions, areas and extended communities (hereon *metropolitan partnerships*) are at the forefront of many of these manifest challenges.

What's more, heavily populated and industrialised areas and regions are major contributors to CO2 and thus key players in discussions to address Europe's Green Deal ambitions. Metropolitan partnerships are also centres of valuable knowhow, innovation, social capital and creativity which, in turn, translate into job-creation and (green) economic growth.

Despite this, the materials, resources and teams needed to solve these concurrent and often compounding challenges are not available or not working together effectively. While most metropolitan concerns are transversal, policymaking almost singularly falls under the remit of one European Commission department, DG REGIO. Allocations in the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) reflect strategic decisions made several years ago, before the latest crises unfolded (Ukraine war, inflationary pressure, and energy market turbulence). Meanwhile, key players in many metropolitan partnerships are expressing dissatisfaction with the way the Next-Generation-EU post-Covid recovery package is being handled – often overlooking metropolitan-level actors involved in implementing the EU funds.

It is now patent that through its funding mechanisms (including Cohesion, Structural, and wider Common Agricultural Policy) the EU and its agents within Member States are favouring rural areas and communities. Yet it is Europe's metropolitan partnerships that drive economies, host vast populations, and bear the greatest cost in the face of new challenges, from immigration waves to energy poverty.

Several questions loom over the European Union right now. Is it smart and agile enough to deal with what French President Macron called today's “poly-crises”? Is decision-making still too top-down and one-size-fits-all? Are national governments equipped to tailor their actions to specific – local, regional and national – situations? Are much-needed ideas and capital – so valued in a modern, green and digital economy – flowing freely where they are most needed?

Perhaps the biggest question, what will happen if the metropolitan dimension continues to be undervalued in national and European policymaking? The fear is that skills, resources, and capacities will be misallocated or further (re)centralised, competition between cities, regions and rural areas will intensify and lead to clashes, and the north-south gap will widen, to name a few. None of this is inevitable... but why take the risk?

*Help metropolitan partnerships continue to grow and flourish, and many of these problems can be resolved!*

## THE PATH – What’s needed to move forward

### *More metro-minded partnerships*

It is important to underline that most large EU cities already practice a version of coordinated metropolitan governance, whether formal/informal, structured/volunteer, permanent/temporary. Our starting point is then to reinterpret metropolitan added value in light of what it takes to further build and maintain “metro-minded partnerships” through richer services and greater connectedness.

This is the essence of the **metropolitan dimension** where problems and their solutions are co-owned. But by promoting this, is METREX advocating a new level of administration to achieve this? No we are not, We are rather looking for ‘**smarter**’ **administration** and much better integration on the local, city-wide, national, regional, and pan-European level – not more layers!

To achieve this, METREX and partners need a place at the budgeting table and to be included as a permanent part of the decision-making processes. That means Europe may have to think more like a collective organism, mimicking institutional structures at the metropolitan level, while never forgetting that the metropolitan dimension is as much about a certain culture or way of doing things as it is the mechanisms or organisations ushering in more self-determination for metropolitan partnerships.

To be absolutely **clear**, **MV2050 does not advocate or promote a precise model** for this metropolitan way of administering things. That is something for each area and region to determine in line with local, regional and national conditions, and bearing in mind that many already have working models for such partnerships. But we do call for all metropolitan players to team up and form their own league of friends and supporters – including political and business leaders, academia, civil society, and the media – and decide the necessary formal cooperation most suited and feasible to their terrain.

## THE PROPOSAL – A multi-layer, multi-term approach

### *What’s needed from the EU...*

- We, the metropolitan networks, fully support the European Parliament’s MFF restructuring ambitions and urge the creation of a separate budget line for ‘metropolitan partnerships’ or the ‘metropolitan dimension’, starting as a pilot if necessary. **[short-term, ST]**
- We should be actively involved in the process of shaping the next MFF according to the main arguments in this White Paper and the desire for greater self-determination. **[ST]**
- We see clear benefits in including metropolitan partners as obligatory stakeholders in processes regulated by the EU code of conduct on partnerships. **[ST]**
- We see a growing role for metropolitan partnerships within existing programmes and initiatives such as the Rural Pact, and for METREX, EMA, Eurotowns, etc. to be better consulted during Commission dialogues under its pan-European networks initiative. **[on-going]**
- We call for a revision of redundant notions such as ‘GDP per capita’ as the main EU Cohesion Policy metric and want to be actively involved in shaping new indicators. **[ST]**
- We see efficiencies in dealing directly with a dedicated ‘metropolitan partnerships’ or ‘metropolitan dimension’ Commissioner and department. **[long-term, LT]**
- We are convinced that the Committee of the Regions needs to include more direct representation from metropolitan partners among its members. **[LT]**
- We strongly favour shaping the big EU infrastructural (e.g. TEN-T), agricultural (CAP) and innovation policies (Horizon Europe) to strengthen Europe’s metropolitan dimension. **[LT]**
- We can see strong long-term benefits in physical examples of Europe’s metropolitan links (flagship projects such as high-speed railway networks connecting metropolitan partnerships and regions). **[LT]**

- We support the idea of creating a European metropolitan atlas and instruments/metrics for monitoring and communicating progress and best practices. [LT]
- We need to seed new metrics in coherent ways and through regular and validated ‘trend chart’ mechanisms administered by a reputable agency or institution, and thus recognised and promoted by multipliers (government, NGOs, media, etc.). [LT]

#### **What’s needed nationally...**

- We favour moves to adapt and improve national regulations and policies concerning metropolitan partnerships and institutions, including spatial planning systems, providing services, and other means to improve quality of life (i.e. French model). [on-going]
- We encourage the active promotion of a “culture of good metropolitan practices” (strategies and governance models) and welcome the opportunity to offer our advice in that regard. [on-going]
- We strongly support capacity building on metropolitan concerns (analysing issues and trends) and measures to improve the quality of staff/education in metropolitan institutions (i.e. Portugal model). [on-going]
- We strongly advocate creating and implementing national operational programmes, funded with EU money, dedicated to metropolitan partnerships and regions (i.e. Italy model). [ST]
- We strongly encourage national and regional governments to take a “whole-of-area” perspective when making industrial development and peri-urban planning decisions, factoring in the wider implications on transport, logistics, social disruption, etc. (i.e. Barcelona Metropolitan Area). [ST]
- We call for more benchmarking of cross-national and cross-border cooperation in large and critical infrastructure (i.e. Germany model). [LT]

#### **Metropolitan partnerships...**

- Are an organic expression of shared responsibility
- Can be formal, informal, structured, voluntary, permanent, temporary
- Cover different actions, entities, communities, groups, etc.
- Involve towns, cities, regions, nations, cross-border neighbours, etc.
- Leave room for experimentation and improvement
- Imply no territorial, hierarchical, geopolitical or other delimitations

## **THE PLAN – How to move forward**

### **The right tools for the job**

With the right tools, connections and agency, metropolitan communities are capable of solving some of the greatest challenges facing Europe and the world today, creating a better future for the people, places and diverse pieces of the puzzle that make up the metropolitan (or ‘M’) system.

METREX sees this being delivered through a pragmatic ‘*M-as-a-service*’ approach laid out for all stakeholders to use in meeting the challenges they face in transforming the EU into a “modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, ensuring no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, economic growth decoupled from resource use and no person and no place left behind”. A uniquely metropolitan pick-and-mix solution in line with the New Urban Agenda, UN-Habitat initiatives, and wider EU and international commitments including the Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals.

### **We see this taking shape in key stages over coming years**

#### **➤ Stage 1: Seed and feed**

It is important to seed the *M-as-a-service* idea in the right ground; at local, regional, and European levels, across traditional geographical and political boundaries, and also among different service sectors (health, transport, education, etc.) and stakeholders (urban planners, utility providers, etc.). This also means feeding the right mindset where metropolitan thinking is a positive reflex not an add-on or inconvenience. This phase is also a chance to try out new ideas and pilots in different contexts and at different speeds, as required.

Use cases can be aimed at overcoming hurdles, many of which will be unique to a situation, community, area or region.

➤ Stage 2: Grow and show

Encouraged to try out a new idea or tool, metropolitan partners can explore its limits and look for ways to improve it. They can demonstrate what works best and show what actions are needed given different parameters, reporting back their findings so others in their partnership can learn from it. Here, we envisage a *3-circle concept* – a system of concentric tree-ring circles which expand with progress and age as metropolitan partnerships grow new connections, and strengthen relationships among their community (self-sewn), between different members (grafted) meeting within a network or local/regional/European consortia, and between individuals/collectives and various external agents (fertilised) who can fund, support and generally promote the metropolitan agenda.

➤ Stage 3: Invest and harvest

All stages require a significant investment in time and funds, and the outcomes need to be fed back into a learning repository, or *3-circle platform*, developed as a veritable sharing plate to sustain everyone needing inspiration or tried-and-tested solutions to move ahead in their way and at their pace.

**How to monitor and review the plan**

With an agreed set of metrics, taking into consideration the needs of the diverse actors and meeting rigorous scientific standards, we can develop a set of tools and templates to ensure that data is gathered and analysed in a consistent way from one metropolitan partnership to another.

Milestones need to be built in the review/planning to ensure the right level of reflection on progress and inform future developments of the campaign. METREX can envisage reviewing and updating this ‘living document’ in due course over the coming years.

**The tools can include:**

- Scorecard of pledges under each vision goal adapted to each region/metropole
- Template for monitoring progress and a checklist to tick off at intervals
- Survey of stakeholder progress, needs, and sentiments

**Communicating the results**

For ‘metro-minded’ partnerships, policies and actions to gain traction there needs to be strong communication support, including campaigning around the main actors delivering the tools and solutions, and a website or platform functioning as both an up- and downlink for the intelligence and knowhow gathered through the implementation of the above visionary measures.

A complementary communication campaign strategy accompanies the MV2050 process, which fleshes out the broad strokes outlined in this Vision White Paper.

**The communication needs:**

➤ Internal actions and collaborations

In this sense, ‘internal’ means within the (expanded) metropolitan community including established networks plus a wider group of political ‘friends’ in current or newly-created government offices/departments, as well as other stakeholders working in a metro-capacity.

➤ External outreach and needs

Phased campaigning will be needed to communicate the new metro-minded approaches advocated later in the ‘insights’ section and brought to light via the discovery and consultation for this Vision. This falls under Stage 1 ‘seed and feed’ actions. Branding would help to visually cement the approach in the way that consumers are now aware of ecolabels when making purchasing decisions; citizens could be more ‘metro-conscious’ when considering who delivered a service or solved a problem. As awareness and recognition grows about the make-up and role of metropolitan partnerships in the wider (national and European) sense, reinforcement campaigning is important, supported by the release of intermittent (midterm) data from ‘trend

chart’ monitoring so audiences can appreciate the added value of metro-minded thinking, policies and actions. This falls under Stage 2 ‘grow and show’.

➤ 3-circle platform

An important component of the growth and communication strategy communicated above is the development of the *3-circle platform* for **metropolitan dimension advances and progress**. It would need to be built, populated and curated in order to function as the central repository of major/noteworthy developments at all metro-levels, from the local to the rural to the suburban, and through the community-building tools, news, latest cases and harvestable best-practice-sharing. The platform would aim to keep the network informed and provide reported data and solutions to validate further investment in metropolitan partnerships and their efforts to tackle the challenges, both near and far.

## THE MESSAGE – What metropolitan stakeholders convey

After consulting our members representing metropolitan partnerships all over Europe and conducting interviews and workshops with policymakers, scientists and industry leaders, METREX identified a **clear pattern in the narrative**:

- Metropolitan stakeholders are “united in adversity”; a “kinship” of long-term partnerships targeting the bigger picture, but this dimension is undervalued or “delegitimised” nationally, regionally and at the EU level.
- The “metropolitanisation” of Europe is already happening, both formally and informally, but the EU’s framework is not fit for purpose; we need to **level out the finance/influence** and cooperate more to improve everyone’s quality of life and resilience – rural, urban, suburban, etc.
- Metropolitan partnerships may differ in their history, make-up and connectedness, but their policies and responses have similar features and layers: **proximity interaction** (i.e. retail, shops, etc.); **metro-economy** (i.e. linked transport, industry, services, etc.); and **cross-territorial brand** (beyond the metro-area), with further clusters and networks via national and pan-European actions (i.e. **smart specialisation strategies**) capturing the “regional dimension”.
- The main challenge is to defy the absence of rigid definitions and structures through better local and **cross-domain collaboration** and good practices pinned to **tangible concerns** (i.e. climate action, waste and pollution, new ways of working) and collaborative responses between sectors and actors (e.g. industry, agriculture, etc.) at national, regional and wider levels.
- Agility – the ability to **adapt to crises and circumstances** – is best handled at the metro-level; a “circuit breaker” for tackling increasing societal challenges.
- To avoid “missed opportunities” going forward, the EU must give **greater agency to all metropolitan partners** involved in shaping policies and multilevel governance systems in all functional areas, from managing wastewater to public transport to better housing.
- Metropolitan partnerships need a freer hand – unobstructed by higher levels – to further develop and share imaginative, bottom-up and often collective approaches to **break open the silos** currently defining the metropolitan space.
- Stakeholders favour collaborative “**metropolitan mindsets**” and for leaders to be champions of “**territorial intelligence**” focusing on a wider range of social and economic issues, and able to understand trends and patterns better.
- Metropolitan partnerships want long-term support for stronger, bottom-up approaches and enhanced lateral and layered ties between various actors representing civil society and the cities, regions and different zones of Europe.
- There needs to be a deeper, richer understanding of Europe, its internal bonds and principles of subsidiarity and shared responsibility, contributions and benefits, with citizens at the centre of

- agreements and funding decisions, aptly informed by the needs of those ultimately implementing and benefiting from them (a **collaborative partnership** envisioned as a “bunch of grapes”).
- A benchmark for a more formal metropolitan governance model is the **German example** of city regions and states (equivalent to a region in most other countries); other versions to observe are the French and Portuguese models, as well as the Barcelona Metropolitan Area.
  - A functional mapping or atlas of city regions, metropolitan regions and urban regions like **Paris City Region** is one proposal to visualise wider metropolitan competences and capacities, and circumnavigate “unhelpful regional typologies” for NUTS, FUA, etc.
  - Investment and funding (public and private) are vital to elevate the metropolitan dimension. “**Soft landing services**” for two-way investment can bring new businesses to a region. Thinking beyond EU instruments (Cohesion, Structural Funds) and the urban agenda is important, as too a sharing mentality (“generosity is the key”).
  - **Blended configurations** (organised and voluntary) and capital are a flexible way forward to develop/enhance metropolitan influence in fast-changing settings and in the face of global pressures (i.e. new ways of working, greater competition, supply chain and reshoring issues).
  - Metropolitan partnerships thus need **fast and effective internal cooperation** to meet global imperatives (it is “much more than an intra-regional question”).

## 1. THE INSIGHTS – What metropolitan partnerships offer

### *Understanding community needs best*

“Local and regional authorities make EU law happen [so] their feedback on how EU rules are implemented on the ground to make them simpler, fewer and less bureaucratic is essential,” according to the Committee of the Region’s Fit for Future (F4F) Platform plenary on 5 December 2022. This view is echoed by the metropolitan community, and more could be made of the CoR’s insights and positioning and representation on the ground.

Indeed, for many years authorities represented in metropolitan partnerships have had to deal with enormous challenges which **transcend the administrative borders** of local and regional communities, from building and managing big infrastructure, adapting to climate change, coping with crises and learning how to be more resilient, to managing the influx of migrants, fighting epidemics, securing production chains, food security, energy management... the list goes on.

Metropolitan partnerships have thus built up expertise – knowhow, people and tools – in dealing with complex issues and **solving big socio-economic problems** on a daily basis and often with quiet efficiency. But there is a general lack of understanding and acceptance at national and EU levels of this contribution.

### *Historical and contemporary references*

Historical networks of cities, such as the Hanseatic League, the trade networks of Venice and Genoa, and Greek *poleis* understood that the nature of their power was rooted in cooperation and the idea that everything gravitated around the ‘*metro*’ or the mother. Local identity and stature was embodied in historical and architectural achievements, artistic expression and spatial manifestations typically associated with the “metropolitan lifestyle” that emerged over the millennia.

More recently, new municipal models and policies such as the ‘15-minute city’, resilient city, and circular economy are all clear nods to pan-European metropolitan networks doing what they do best... **purpose-driven, collaborative activities that serve the greater community and the greater good!**

### *Where are metropolitan partnerships most active?*

- Metropolitan partnerships are already active in most levels of governance, from the EU and nation-states to regions, cities/towns, and communes. But metropolitan partnerships need to reinforce these

- ties, find champions, and nurture new collaborations with industry and among chambers of commerce, unions, and other collectives working towards common goals.
- Metropolitan partnerships thus deal with urban, suburban, peri-urban issues as well as transboundary concerns. As networks of actors, they are and have always been rooted in socio-economic realities, intimately familiar with the needs of business, industry and productive centres, as well as town planning, housing and utility management, transport networks, etc.
  - Metropolitan partnerships are the vanguard of what it means to be European, supporting and implementing EU principles and political instruments, from subsidiarity to neighbourhood and development policies and strategies, through to spatial planning, European Bauhaus initiatives, etc.
  - Metropolitan partnerships are able to play this driving role thanks to established institutions, regulations, and governance processes ensuring transparent and fit-for-purpose allocation of budgets to deserving projects and communities.
  - Metropolitan actors are reliable partners, familiar with and actively engaged in many of the main EU policies, including structural projects, industrial policy, digital and 'twin' transitions, and NextGenEU. They can be depended on to manage even the largest, most complex implementations.
  - Metropolitan economies are multipliers by nature, with the largest share of GDP generated in and radiating from their industrial zones, ICT hubs and accelerators, networks of excellence, and more. They can be trusted to invest and generate significant returns in both traditional sectors and through digital innovation.

#### REGIONAL-METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT IN NUMBERS

- 1:3** ... proportion of rural to urban populations in the EU (110,874,382 vs 336,072,330)
- 59.4%** ... share of EU population in metropolitan partnerships (265,437,351 vs 446.828.803), in 2021
- 68.2%** ... share of EU GDP<sup>1</sup> generated in metropolitan partnerships
- PM10 – 71%** ... share of the metropolitan partnerships in the greenhouse emissions
- PM2.5 – 96%** ... share of the EU urban population exposed to air pollutant concentrations above EU and WHO guidelines in 2020<sup>2</sup>
- 81%** ... percentage of migrants choosing to live in metropolitan partnerships

1. Based on 2019 data (subsequent data is incomplete and Covid-19 affected)

2. Europe's air quality status 2022: [www.eea.europa.eu/publications/status-of-air-quality-in-Europe-2022/europes-air-quality-status-2022](http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/status-of-air-quality-in-Europe-2022/europes-air-quality-status-2022)

3. The Contribution of Migration to Regional Development, Opracowanie OECD: <https://doi.org/10.1787/57046df4-en>

## THE MV2050 – Shaping the future

### About METREX and its goals

METREX is a pan-European network of metropolitan partnerships, areas and regions. We are active not only in the EU, but also in the European Economic Area and in the UK. We are a group of senior practitioners involved in metropolitan policy-making, cooperation and decision-making on the ground. Our mission is to promote the **metropolitan dimension** in Europe, share knowledge and experience on urban and rural themes, enable integrated thinking, accelerate urgent transitions, and contribute to a common policy framework and effective decisions on various governance levels. We cooperate on a daily basis with the **European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA)** network and other metropolitan and municipal networks – such as **Metropolis, Eurocities, and Eurotowns**.

By outlining our MV2050, METREX wants to build the foundations of a stronger, greener, more resilient and connected Europe by the year 2050. The deadline is inspired by global climate neutrality targets and European Green Deal commitments. It is also a quarter of a century down the road, which is both significant and symbolic as the span of a typical generation. Our ultimate aim is to show how Europe can grow in strength by empowering the best agents of positive change in its regions to work more closely together. Our

Vision involves a host of institutions, policies and financial instruments fit for a modern, agile, stress-resistant future of Europe.

## THE PROCESS – How MV2050 came about?

### *New era of open cooperation with and between metropolitan partners*

In November 2021, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms Elisa Ferreira made an announcement that many had been waiting to hear. At the EMA conference in Porto she opened the door to greater cooperation with metropolitan partnerships and welcomed proposals on how that could be achieved.

METREX took up the gauntlet and started a discovery process to gather views, expectations, needs and actions as the basis for a **new era of cooperation – a stronger metropolitan dimension** – that could be presented to the European Commission as a Vision with a list of proposed investments and ideas that could be funded with national and EU money. We announced the start of this work during the METREX conference in Torino, May 2022. In Autumn 2022, a series of meetings kicked off with partners, experts, and possible stakeholders of the Vision, including a lively workshop during the MetroSolutions Congress organised by the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, in cooperation with EMA and others (October 2022).

The premise of this ongoing process is that the **metropolitan level can deliver on Europe's commitments** to science, business, society, and the environment. But for that to materialise, metropolitan partnerships need to be better understood and valued – politically, structurally and financially. That means securing an appropriate share in decision-making and funding at EU and national levels.

Our consultation process explored all possible avenues in developing a set of desirable but workable solutions with a distinct and expanded European metro-regional flavour and flair. A package of metropolitan ideas, tools and proposals makes up the final output – tangible yet adjustable to the different situations on the ground throughout Europe.