



METREX
Autumn
conference

Framing Metropolitan
Cohesion Policies:
exploring Urban-Rural
Partnerships

Braga2023

 **METREX**

Introduction

This year the METREX Autumn conference was held in Braga, Portugal, 22-25 October, hosted by the Intermunicipal Community of Cávado, and supported by a number of national partners including the Operational Programme NORTE 2030, Regional Directorate Cultura Norte, and the D. Diogo de Sousa Museum of Archaeology. Internationally, it was supported by the EU Rural Pact.

The biannual event offered an international platform for learning and discussing Cohesion Policy and Urban-Rural Partnerships, and how metropolitan regions and areas are best-in-place to deliver the collaborations necessary for mutual benefits.

Representing over 100 million inhabitants, the metropolitan regions and their networked space of flows are essential partners to support the EU institutions in implementing main, common policies by bringing urban and rural areas together. It is this approach that inspired the conference.

Therefore, the agenda of the event focused on how the metropolitan level can strengthen urban and rural partnerships to respond to Europe's big challenges in housing and innovation, the green and digital transition, energy, transport, and how the transitions called for by the EU are delivered on the ground, shaping a positive future of both urban and rural territories.

METREX Members, from Portugal and from across Europe, shared experiences and metropolitan-level solutions.

These cases also put the recently finalised **Manifesto for Metropolitan Partnerships** into context by demonstrating their proactive responses to dealing with food systems, digitalisation and mobility.

"Braga and CIM Cávado have been committed to international collaborations, focusing on learning, sharing good practices and developing new projects" says the president of

CIM Cávado, Ricardo Rio, opening the works. "The goal is to promote policies that guarantee territorial cohesion and encourage collaboration within their areas of influence, respecting and celebrating regional diversity to improve the quality of life for all citizens" the president concluded, highlighting that hosting the METREX Autumn Conference in Braga was an opportunity to exchange with peers how Portuguese regions tackle common challenges and elevate the importance of urban-rural partnerships.

We like to start this report with some conclusive remarks

Metropolitan partnerships between urban and rural exist and are already working. This is the first and strong learning aspect attained during the conference in Braga. Despite the different stages of cooperation and the tools/strategies that support that process, the eight cases presented and discussed in Braga are exemplary of metropolitan partnerships unfolding. Achieving and pursuing this goal is definitely not an easy task in cross-cutting topics. On the contrary, it is about activating a process, implying a step-by-step approach towards the definition, **experimentation and implementation of a new institutional framework** (Uwe Ferber).

What emerges from the two-day discussions is the **need to organise urban rural partnerships in an proactive way. The goal of the partnership** itself is to **mobilise synergies by bringing the rural and the urban together**. Because the partnership won't happen all alone. It is about introducing

spatial and management planning at the metropolitan scale to **create the conditions and to support the cultural understanding of the metropolitan territory** as a common dimension. It is indeed about integrating bottom-up and cross-sectoral mechanisms but, most of all, **it is about nurturing and enabling territorial cooperation**.

Partnerships are the real core of the metropolitan dimension.

Among many considerations, it was also pointed out that difficulties start at the European scale where the funding and policy programmes are defined, influencing all the choices – and the possibilities – of the levels downstream.

The current distinction between urban and rural is mirrored in the siloed structure of the various departments of the European Commission, where DG Agri and DG Regio stand as distinctive voices; they have a long tradition of working independently from

each other and only recently inaugurated a season of cooperation. Also, the fact that rural development is only associated with agriculture and agri-production is limiting the construction of a more complex and articulated vision.

In this context, the EU Rural Pact is seeking to overcome these limits and go beyond the idea of the rural world as an island, but there is a long way to go. As was often underlined and stated on many occasions during this conference, **the separation between urban and rural does not exist, it is an artificial construction. The urban and rural need to be conceived intertwined and functionally articulated** as interconnected eco and functional systems, **implying a change in the European level as well as in the national governments**, which remain the gatekeepers for the EU funding and policy instruments (Ivan Tosics).

The case studies showcased during the conference act as laboratories (Uwe Ferber), where breaking silos and

multifunctional and efficient ways of operating is achieved through an **innovative and distinctive 'metropolitan problem solving' attitude** (Filipe Ferreira).

Financing, strategic and technical instruments, tools and competences which are typically urban are applied in the rural areas with the aim to respond to territorial challenges, showing that the priority is to align the "rur-urban" complexity with an adequate funding system allocating resources.

Metropolitan areas can be efficient when they are financially independent, if they are important actors and the subsidiarity is relevant at the national level (Łukasz Medeksza). This is not the case in all countries.

What we could add to the METREX Manifesto is that **metropolitan areas should be given the necessary financial independence and the necessary strengths by the national government** and, if it is not the case, the European Commission should set the

conditions for that. Europe should not allow metropolitan areas to be subordinated to national thinking.

Organising metropolitan institutions and their own funds to implement their own policies should be the goal **to achieve cohesive and just European territorial development.**

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Framing Local Issues and Challenges

The first session of the conference addressed the issue of local governance, with the participation of António Cunha, President of North Portugal Regional Coordination and Development Commission (CCDRN), Ana Abrunhosa, Minister of Territorial Cohesion of Portugal, and a video message from the European Commissioner of Reforms, Elisa Ferreira.

António Cunha emphasized the importance of innovation in governance and public participation, highlighting the transformation of the CCDRN into a public institute as an appropriate step to bring the government closer to the region's needs. In particular, Mr. Cunha **underlined the territorial complexity of Portugal's northern region, where urban and rural areas often coexist, calling for new management and governance models.**

This territory does not fit in any preexistent government or European regulatory framework, where a false dichotomy between urban and rural is applied to determinate the allocation of funds. From her perspective



as the Minister of Territorial Cohesion of Portugal, **Ana Abrunhosa highlighted the diversity of the CIM Cávado territory** where elements often associated to an urban profile, such as high education, entrepreneurship, modern culture and industry, coexist with rural traditions, agriculture productions, protected ecosystems and natural heritage (eg. National Park Peneda Gêres).

All these considerations point towards **the importance of promoting territorial complementarities and synergies, overcoming the traditional – yet outdated – division between urban and rural** to achieve cohesive regional development.

Ms. Abrunhosa stressed the importance of sharing experiences between urban and rural regions, especially in the context of digitalization and carbon neutrality. “Rural areas are attractive for clean energy and play an important role in carbon capture”, said Ms. Abrunhosa. The Minister also highlighted the need for an integrated approach to promote sustainable development and territorial cohesion, with an accent on the role – and empowerment – of inter municipal communities in managing the next EU financing Framework. “These are times of change. Of decentralization”, Ms. Abrunhosa concluded. Through a pre-recorded message, **Elisa Ferreira**

highlighted the relevance of a polycentric development model, directing investments to integrated territories, as well as the need for innovation and creative thinking. Joint development won't simply happen, Ms. Ferreira observed, if not supported by coordinated strategies and investments in infrastructures (social, cultural and mobility), in institutional reorganisation and in people. Metropolitan regions and areas have pioneered this change and taken on a leading role in promoting a new comprehensive and integrated vision, founded on principles of territorial cooperation and rebalancing regional development across urban-rural linkages. The New Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 Program is investing €40bn in a number of measures and tools for 'integrated territorial investments' (ITIs) and community-led local developments, providing support for innovative actions and capacity and knowledge building. Technical support instruments are more widely available for municipalities, and high-level groups of experts and officers will work on: new challenges of the future, a new emphasis on geography (place-based geography has to be rethought with understanding of development traps), new partnerships with local municipalities.



Perspectives and Debates

EU Cohesion Policy Beyond 2027

with Prof. Fernando Alexandre, MEP José Manuel Fernandes, Jakub Mazur, Ricardo Rio, Duarte Rodrigues

The debate session was introduced by **Fernando Alexandre**, Associate professor at the School of Economics and Management, University of Minho, proposing an overview on the northern region's demographic and economic dynamics throughout the period 2010-2021, highlighting subregional differences.

CIM Cávado dominates in the northern region in relation to population growth (mostly due to the increase in population in the council of Braga) and increases in GDP values, with 12% percent of the regional GDP and the 4 percent of the national GDP. Also, the impact of the University of Minho in improving access to higher education in the Cávado Region is worth noting, which in 2021 exceeded the national average of 20 percent. In relation to national GDP per capita, in the last decade, the north region and its sub-regions of AMP, Alto Minho, Ave and Cávado registered a significant convergence, while in 2021, Cávado's GDP per capita surpassed that of the north region.

This is the most industrialized region of the country and, in recent years, changes in the productive structure have had quite a significant impact. Fast transformation in Minho also determined a significant growth in the salary rates, more than in the rest of the country. The explanation for these positive dynamics lies in the transformation of the productive structure, which has seen increasing investments in R&D. The value of exports is another highlight. In the transformation of the Portuguese economy in the last 10 years the exports have

doubled. Today the north represents more than 40 percent of Portugal's exports. And that is where 'the square' plays an important role: in 2008, the municipalities of Barcelos, Braga, Guimarães and Vila Nova de Famalicão created a partnership to invest together in digital technologies, mobility and culture.

The area is known as 'the square': it is not a region that exists on an administrative level, but a territory with more than 6 percent of the national GDP, 600.000 inhabitants, and Jakub 20 percent of the





northern GDP. In and within the space of these four municipalities, dynamics are very peculiar: strong knowledge and research-based interconnections (Minho University in Braga and Guimaraes), high productivity led by the transformation of the industrial structure and services offer, and an increase on the salaries for managers and workers challenging the cohesive development of the northern region as a whole.

Participating with a video message, **José Manuel Fernandes**, MEP of the European Parliament, emphasised the crucial role of cohesion policy in reducing regional disparities, underlining the importance of regional objectives and specific regulations. **Duarte Rodrigues**, vice-president of the Portuguese Agency for Development and Cohesion,

praised Cávado's economic and population success, focused on growth driven by productivity and employment. Mr. Rodrigues said that Portugal and Europe should carefully address the subject of productivity and take into consideration the qualification of production, the scale in terms of growth, and territorial conditions, where the cities have a fundamental role in anchoring the assets of the surrounding areas, as well as the sustainability aspects. All this is because of **the complexity of the cohesion process, which requires other forms of analysis and innovative approaches**. The Agenda 2030 programme in Portugal commits to complement the positive dynamics of the two large metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto, maintaining the level of cohesion, which calls for other strategies to be

developed and implemented. This demands for **more complex and differentiated actions** that go beyond the administrative limits. In this sense **the urban-rural partnerships play a decisive role in achieving functional regional development**.

Adding to this, **Jakub Mazur**, Deputy Mayor of Wroclaw and President of METREX, **drew attention to the importance of funds in building collaborative stakeholder consortia across regions** to drive development.

According to Ricardo Rio, Mayor of Braga, **the development model in these less developed regions have successfully changed**. Braga developed a strong industrial profile in the last decade which resulted in internal convergence. **EU funds stimulated local innovation**, more so than the central state. Decentralisation is important to stimulate growth as well as subsidiarity. Specificities of the areas must be taken into account; diversities might drive development. Mr. Rio concluded the session by highlighting the importance of **empowering local decision-making, as well as recognising the role of the cohesion funds in the creation of infrastructures and services as much in supporting the governance and management capacity in local and regional governments**.

European Union. Perspectives for the Rural World

with Silvia Nanni, MEP Isabel Carvalhais, Mayor Margarida Belém

The morning ended with a debate led by MEP Isabel Carvalhais and Margarida Belém, President of Arouca Municipality, in which the rural vision of the European Union was discussed.

The session was moderated by **Silvia Nanni**, from the General Directorate of EU Agriculture and Rural Development, who explained the Rural Vision 2040.

The result of a cooperation between three European commissioners (Demography & Democracy, Agriculture and Reforms), **the Rural Vision recognises the diversity of rural territories across Europe while identifying common challenges and opportunities.**

In shaping this long-term vision, the Commission gathered the views of rural communities and businesses via public consultations and stakeholder-led events.

Through this collaborative process, the Commission created a comprehensive [Rural Action plan](#) to help rural communities and businesses reach their full potential in the coming decades.

The Rural Action plan includes nine flagship actions and 24



thematic actions.

In 2021, the European Commission launched the [Rural Pact](#).

This is a formal space and framework to boost cooperation between national, regional and local governments, civil society organisations, businesses, academics and citizens to act towards the shared goals of the rural vision.

Rural Pact's main goals include:

- **Amplifying rural voices** and bringing them higher on the political agenda
- **Structuring and enabling networking**, collaboration and mutual learning

- **Encouraging and monitoring voluntary commitments to act for the vision.**

With the aim to steer the Rural Pact process, the Rural Pact coordination group has been formed. METREX, representing metropolitan regions and municipalities, is among its 30 members together with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). The debate stressed **the need for investment and qualification of rural communities**, recognising their central role in issues such as climate change, food security and democracy, thus promoting a more cohesive and sustainable future in the

European Union.

By giving balanced territorial development the status of a serious political priority, the challenges faced by rural regions can be truly addressed.

MEP Isabel Cavalhais reminded the audience **that rural regions cover 83 percent of the EU territory** and are home for 137 million Europeans, representing the 30 percent of the European population (one-third of the total). The contribution and the work of this population is key to the overall European sustainability and autonomy goals. The rural vision calls attention to the rural areas, where the rural world has dignity in itself. These same territories continue to struggle with depopulation, desertification, loss of biodiversity, lack of mobility, connectiveness, requiring a system of monitoring and data collection to understand the present reality. This type of effort will support the definition of a more adequate financing framework with a real and concrete strategy for the rural world that must be articulated with the national and regional strategies. **Among other aspects, a crucial one has to do with generational renewal in agriculture linked to access to land.** This is a rural-specific issue concerning the challenging question of how improve transparency

regarding EU fund and how to attract new and young entrepreneurs.

The final important message for the rural world from MEP Isabel Cavalhais is that even small projects, such as those seen in Arouca, make a difference when looking at their effective territorial impact.

Margarida Belém, Mayor of Arouca (AMP), intervened presenting the rural municipality located in the eastern part of the metropolitan area of Porto. In territory it is the largest municipality in the AMP, formed by 17 municipalities. Its population density is low, and economic development is low, but developing. The municipality has registered an increase in entrepreneurial activities, anchoring its development on different levels, both at the metropolitan scale as well as at the local level, collaborating with local action groups with strong entrepreneurial culture. The Municipal Action plan 2030 shows a clear vision based on specific local assets (geological heritage), which make them distinctive and unique.

For this reason, the municipality is a member of the Unesco Geopark Network, having three exceptional geological resources.

Tourism and geoparks are the keys for the development of the area (one of the assets is Ponte 516 – an innovation coming from the initiative of a small local community - <https://516arouca.pt/>). European Funds have been important to shaping the territorial strategies and leveraging local assets (natural and geological values as well as agriculture food chain) through the methodology of the LEADER programme, which has been extremely successful.

The final message from Ms. Belém focused on **the need for greater articulation between regional development and rural development strategies in the application of the European Funds**, allowing for a truly local integrated collaborative strategy with smart specialisation. **National programmes should be more focused on reducing existing asymmetries at the municipal level** and supporting municipal actors to implement public policies.

The future of the cities is extremely connected to the wealth of the rural world. To realise that requires a **cultural change and a greater awareness of the values and the existing dependence and connectivity between urban and rural areas.** Without the rural world there is no urban life.

Portuguese Regions & Metropolitan Areas explained

with Cristina Azevedo, Jorge Brito, Marta Coutada, Filipe Ferreira, Júlio Pereira, Ariana Pinho



The first day of the conference ended with the debate session “Portuguese Metropolitan Regions and Areas explained”, moderated by **Cristina Azevedo**, political analyst and consultant for the Cohesion Fund. The session included the participation of **Filipe Ferreira**, Metropolitan Secretary of Lisbon Metropolitan Area, **Ariana**

Pinho, Metropolitan Secretary of Porto Metropolitan Area, **Jorge Brito**, Executive Secretary of the Intermunicipal Community of the Coimbra Region, **Júlio Pereira**, Executive Council Member of the North 2030 Management Authority, and **Marta Coutada**, Ave Intermunicipal Community Executive Secretary.

The political organisation of the country and the territorial system are de-facto set apart. The urban system is organised around two metropolitan areas along the coast, with several regional urban centres that are included in intermunicipal communities, among which there are a set of subsystems of territorial cooperation, being interurban or urban-

rural relations. This territorial hierarchy doesn't reflect the political structure, which in a territory like Portugal brings a lot of challenges and conflicts that aren't unravelled by this centralised government structure.

Due to the political nature and constitution of the metropolitan areas, these urban magnets are not well related with the rest of the territory, amidst a population pattern and an economic model resembling a conurbation of different realities spread across the territory.

In this context, the limitations to regional and metropolitan governance are imposed by the administrative hierarchy by a system based on administrative boundaries, which do not reflect the territorial reality, the mobility flows, or the economic dynamics.

Across Europe several poorer areas became much stronger after political and decisional power was decentralized, and during the 1990's there was some political will to follow that path. However, in 1998, following a badly prepared decentralisation proposal giving political power to new regions, a referendum was held but turned out a flop with fewer than 50 percent of voters attending.

Centralism is a cultural problem in the country, where governance is truly centralised, with elected politicians maintaining this *status quo*.

It is an important remark, because with planning such an important task on the metropolitan level, there is no competence or political power to implement such a crucial task in Portugal. Metropolitan scale government does not technically exist in Portugal, with the definition of the two metropolitan areas just a legally powerless normative at the national level, that exists solely to respond to the EU impositions.

Emphasis was given to the need for autonomy of metropolitan areas in the decision-making processes and their fundamental role in solving contemporary challenges, such as the energy transition, climate change and mobility, and they're definition should come up through the territorial mobility patterns and functional logic of economics, socio and cultural uses, allowing governance at local and regional level to be effective.

A conclusive reflection to the afternoon session

by Filipe Teles, Pro-rector, Aveiro University, President, EURA

National urban policy is missing, especially related to middle-sized cities which would mostly need a coherent policy framework.

In 2013 the last legal step towards metropolitan areas was approved, but still this is a weak and 'in progress' institutional framework.

The power lies within the municipal level, and supra and intermunicipal cooperation need to be granted by the local authorities. CIMs (Inter Municipal Communities) have the capacities but not the legal authority and the financial means, thus the only possibility for them is to follow the money, i.e. what EU funds allow.

Branding is here for metropolitan areas, but this is not enough.

For a real metropolitan level, four aspects need to converge: institutional architecture; specific competences; autonomy enabling decision-making; sufficient resources (dedicated money from above or from below).

Next year Portugal will celebrate 50 years of democracy, contrasting with the reality of CIMs and metropolitan bodies still only indirectly elected.

The current context is more complex than that: in fact, there are flexible levels in between the central and the local levels but the status of all of them must be clarified.

It is a myth in Portugal that differentiated decentralization is not possible.

All bodies have exactly the same power, despite the fact that it is totally different to manage Lisbon metro area and smaller CIMs.

What is very unusual is that all metropolitan issues are framed in NUTS2 or NUTS3 level, when metropolitan or intermunicipal governance should rely on one very important aspect that was explained at the beginning of the conference day: **this is not only about functional areas but also identity and sense of belonging of the population.**

The day ended in Vila Verde where participants explored the cultural and gastronomic richness of the town, among others the famous Lenços dos Outubros, at Aliança Artesana, the regional beers at Cervejaria Letra and the artisanal chocolates at Chocolate com Piment, followed by a traditional dinner of celebration.

For Júlia Fernandes, president of Vila Verde Municipality, the importance of cohesion policy is evident in the search for equitable opportunities in all regions, and this visit to Vila Verde emphasised precisely this need for territorial equality.

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The Manifesto for Metropolitan Partnerships

with Łukasz Medeksza, Deputy Director of the Strategy and City Development Department Municipality of Wrocław, Poland

Łukasz Medeksza, Deputy Director of the Strategy and City Development Department Municipality of Wrocław, Poland, opened the day introducing the final version of the [Manifesto for Metropolitan Partnerships](#) (formally launched a few weeks later at the EU Parliament in Brussels), and the reasons behind this cooperative efforts driven by a collective and long-standing reflection among the METREX members in dialogue with colleagues and political leaders of the sister network organization EMA – European Metropolitan Authority.

Metropolitan areas and regions are a glass of good wine. This is the metaphor Łukasz has chosen to express the sense of identity and territorial connection which exist at the metropolitan scale: “wine is a product of the rural areas but it is stored and sold mainly in the urban areas; it is a product of high quality and of generations and generations of hard work; it is about identity, economy, culture, joy of life, social bonds, traditions, you name it [...] and nowadays it has also become a tourist attraction”



This image was used to point at the scale of the global wine export industry, which only last year has reached an estimated 37.6 billion of euros, the highest figure ever recorded, comparable only to the fashion design industry according to data published by the European Commission. These two sectors today, together with high-tech and the semiconductor industry and 5G technologies are contributing to define and influence the metropolitan areas and regions of Europe, showing that the metropolitan dimension is not only about public institutional governance models or EU policies, but it is also about the real life,

the real pulse of industries in the most high-end and, at the same time, most advanced creative and lifestyle sectors.

Metropolitan regions and areas are the places where day after day, across urban and rural settings, Europe creates and re-creates itself: 60 percent of EU inhabitants live in regions and areas; over 80 percent of newcomers choose them as places to live, so they are still growing. Nearly 70 percent of EU GDP is produced there. On the other hand, over 70 percent of greenhouse emissions in the EU come from the metropolitan regions and

areas. They were also severely impacted by the pandemic.

Metropolitan regions and areas have always coped with such challenges.

However, as new and deeper challenges arise, to tackle them we need new models and stronger cooperation involving multilevel government and different actors.



Why Metropolitan Partnerships are the future, and we have to fight to achieve that?

METREX members are active promoters of ambitious cross-border and geopolitical projects like the [SURE Eurodelta Network](#) or the [Nordic Baltic Network](#) as well exchange learning platforms such as the most recent METREX Atelier on [Last Mile solutions for Milan Metropolitan City](#) or the *Farm to Fork framework strategy* implemented in the metropolitan areas of Nürnberg, Lyon and Lisbon. **Metropolitan regions and areas are spaces of innovative territorial governance and strategic development**, despite many organizational differences (some metropolitan institutions are formalized models of governance, while others have more informal

settings) and in spite of the challenges ahead. In addition to the huge crises we have been experiencing in recent years – climate change, the covid pandemic and war in Ukraine, and their consequences – we are aware of two new, huge challenges we must deal with:

- a **housing crisis** indicated by sky-rocketing prices of ownership and rental over the EU, mainly in the biggest cities,
 - the **growing demographic gap** between Europe and Africa, which may lead to unprecedented waves of migrations towards Europe, triggered by heat, poverty, and wars.
- All these issues and

challenges should also be a part of future cooperation between the EU institutions and metropolitan regions and areas, in the form of Metropolitan Partnerships. Momentum is building behind the metropolitan level. Both the most recent EMA declaration signed in Helsinki in September 2023, and the resolution adopted by the UN Habitat in Nairobi in June 2023, stress that metropolitan regions and areas are indispensable to achieving the sustainable development goals.

The metropolitan regions and their networked space of flows are essential partners to support the EU institutions in implementing the most

ambitious and urgent policies – such as the European Green Deal, energy transition, industrial policies, digital transition, investments into transportation networks, and more.

All this require **rethinking Europe’s institutional framework and developing metropolitan partnerships all over Europe by empowering metropolitan areas as driver of change.**

It is through **the Manifesto** that METREX **has introduced the notion of metropolitan partnerships** not only as a form of cooperation between various actors from various sectors at the metropolitan level but above all in binding such partnerships with the European institutions.

The definition of a Metropolitan governance “is not a Don Quijote hopeless fight but it is about a European spirit...is about **rediscovering the real power engines of Europe in turbulent times of global changes**, it is about preserving the European quality of life of metropolitan regions and areas which deserve infrastructures, spaces and buildings of highest quality in order for their economies and cultures to thrive.

All we are asking for is wise decisions and adequate funding.”



From the EU vision to the local strategies and practice

Metropolitan Partnerships across Urban and Rural

with Dr. Ing- Uwe Ferber, BMBF Network Urban-Rural-Partnerships, METREX Metropolitan Landscape Expert Group leader

Initiatives for urban-rural partnerships are the focus of many international policy papers and frameworks including the [OECD Rural Policy Review](#), the [UNHabitat framework for action to advance integrated territorial development](#), [The Farm to Fork Strategy](#) at the hearth of the [European Green Deal](#), the [New Leipzig Charter](#) among others; they all have contributed to nurture the elaboration of the Manifesto.

The vision of the Manifesto builds itself on the current practices and it is tested on its principles by eight different cases offered by the METREX membership. They are very diverse in terms of metropolitan structure and governance; however, they offered a wide spectrum of scopes and sectors as well as a diverse set of instruments and mechanisms concretely

applied to translate that vision into operational actions of cooperation allowing for an integrated metropolitan strategy.

Building metropolitan partnerships is about creating the conditions for a new understanding of the metropolitan territory as a common dimension organizing the integration of different aspects: from the spatial development of the transport systems which enables the connections to the regional production and the distribution of products and goods (Lisbon, Milan), to the mobility infrastructure increasing the accessibility to services allowing multi-scale territorial solutions (Strasbourg, Bucharest), or the cross-sectoral strategic approach enhancing the connections between urban and rural-mountain areas (Turin) to ensure homogeneous

territorial development at the metropolitan scale and beyond (Grand Lyon); it is also about the reconsideration of the territorial organization (CIM Cávado) to ensure funding eligibility based on local stakeholder cooperation. In addition, it is about including the perceptive layer of the citizens (West-Pomeranian region), the sense of identity and belonging to the metropolitan area where tangible and intangible linkages, democratic participation and inclusion are supported by **a functional institutional framework of cooperation.**

The following cases offer an overview on the metropolitan partnerships being implemented within the METREX membership.



CASE #1: FOOD TRANSITION STRATEGIES

Lisbon Metropolitan Area

Filipe Ferreira, metropolitan Secretary

A Food policy transition towards a circular economy through enhanced urban and rural partnerships

Estratégia para a Transição Alimentar na Área Metropolitana de Lisboa



Lisbon Metropolitan area is home to approximately 3 million people. It coincides with the Lisbon administrative region.

In this context, *Food transition* has become a strategic policy area for the development of the region and therefore one privileged link to connect several sectoral areas as climate action, biodiversity, spatial planning and economic development.

The starting point has been the Lisbon 2030 Regional Strategy which embodies the policy framework for the region until the next decade.

This process has led to creation of [FOODLINK – Food Transition Network](#) – a platform gathering 10, then became 40, members.

AML coordinates the network with CCDRLVT and ICS-Lisbon University through monthly meetings and visits to concrete new collaborations between territorial players, including local producers, business companies and local governments in what has been described by Filipe Ferreira as an immersive experience for the AML which can see growing the number of people who wants to be

involved. **Food transition is right now a full policy area** within the metropolitan policy structure.

The aggregation of new partners is submitted to the signature of a letter of intent and the agreement to a ten-point



commitment.

AML is also one of the promoters of «AML Alimenta» project in partnership with 2 Local Development Groups (A2S and ADREPES) and with Lisbon and Tagus Valley Agriculture and Fisheries Regional authority (DRAPLVT).



The Metropolitan Partnership

The partnership has three priorities:

- 1/ to value the local markets as **Food Hubs** for the region;
- 2/ to **engage** with school's teachers and **enhance territorial capacity building** (70 teachers involved in 24 schools and 12 municipalities);
- 3/ to **develop a culture of food** through Food fora addressing local food production, Mediterranean diet and food waste in school canteens.

Food transition strategy in the lisbon metropolitan area

AML is also developing a Food Transition Strategy. The overall process is conceived as a collaborative governance scheme for the implementation of the food strategy. Crucial domains are production, distribution, consumption and valorisation of food waste. In this complex reorganization of tasks and roles for the different players, the main goal of the AML is to maintain the scope of the strategic framework open enough to accommodate the requests and the inputs of the territorial stakeholders.

What will happen next?

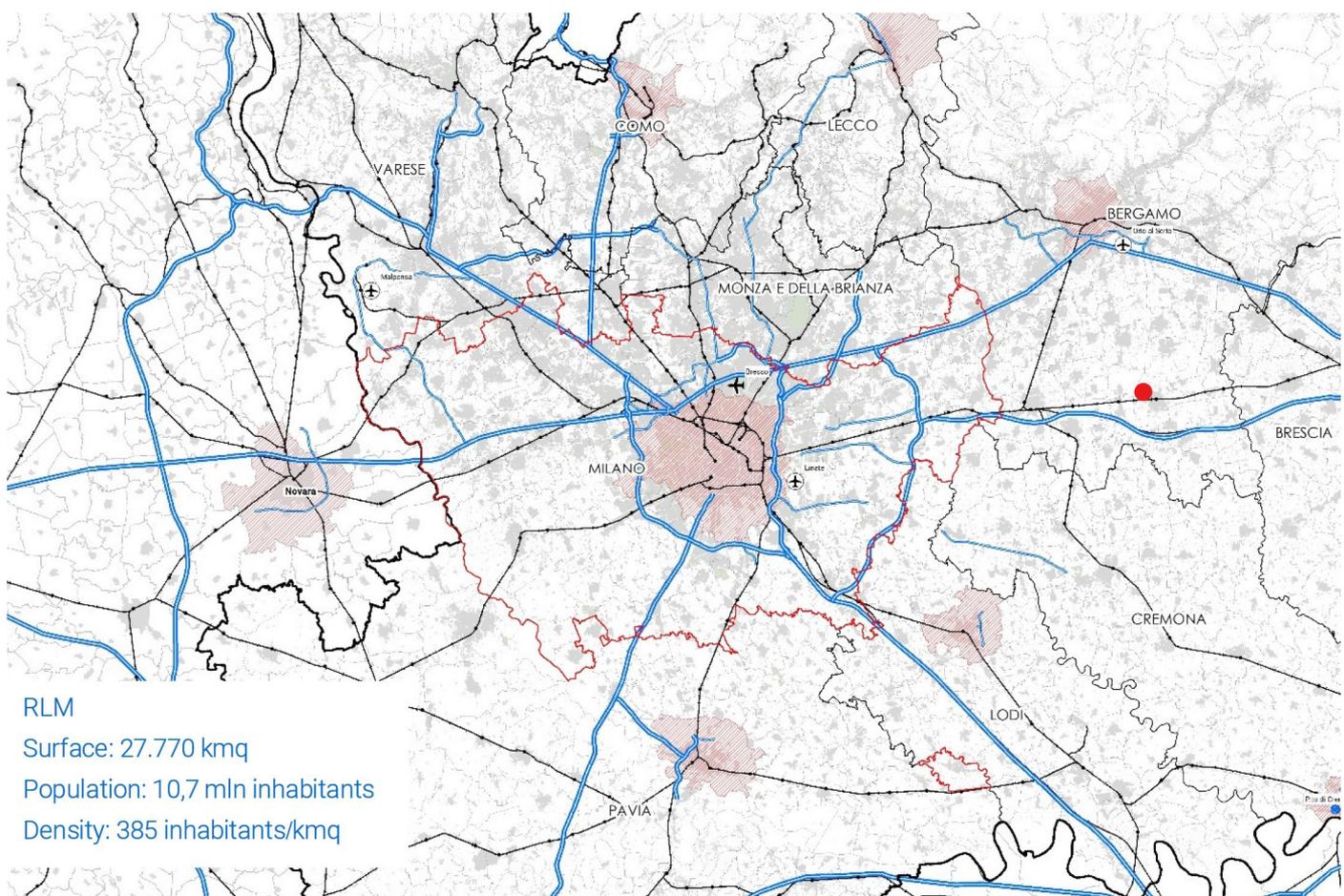
The food transition is right now a policy priority for the metropolitan area and, not anymore, a niche project. It is a **full policy area within the metropolitan area policy framework**. Among the priorities, a new **Metropolitan Action Plan** will be defined along with a pipeline of investments, **anchoring this strategy to the opportunities granted by European funding** (e.g. Green Deal). In this context, **the ambition is to position the metropolitan institution as a knowledge hub** enabling a long-term cohesive economic and sustainable development strategy for the region.

CASE #2: SUSTAINABLE URBAN LOGISTIC PLAN (PULS) FOR LAST MILE SOLUTIONS

Città metropolitana Milano

Marco Griguolo, Deputy Mayor

Last Mile logistic system's solutions for the Metropolitan City of Milan to reshape the sector, redraw connectivity and achieve sustainable territorial development



What is called the **Logistics Region of Milan** (10.7m inhabitants, population density 385 inhabitants/km²) goes beyond the borders of the metropolitan area embracing the nearest Provinces of Monza and Brianza, Lodi, Pavia, Como, Varese and Bergamo, and interregional connections

to the logistic hotspots in Piedmont (Novara), Emilia-Romagna (Piacenza) and Veneto (Verona). Because of its strategic position at the crossroads between the Mediterranean Sea and northern Europe, located in the center of the Po Valley, Milan has become a crucial node for

trade flows since the beginning of the first Millennium. In this context, **the territory of the Metropolitan City of Milan reveals the highest concentration of important systems of large scale distribution**: 90 percent of the area for logistics aggregate around the main road and

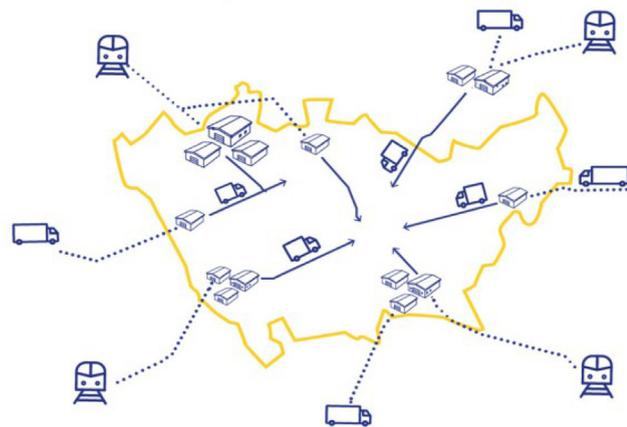
railways axis, one-hour away from the central urban area; while the management centers of the large logistics groups and groups of international shipments are mostly located in the eastern parts of the metropolitan area (air shipping is based in Linate Airport connected to the nearby intermodal systems of Melzo and Milano Segrate). Meanwhile, warehouses of

the main logistics operators and distributors, such as GLS, TNT, Bartolini, UPS, DHL, and the warehouses or stores of shipping companies such as Amazon, Ikea, and Esselunga, are in the north-west parts of the metropolitan area along the highway connecting Milan to Turin, as well as towards Bologna and Genova. Large stores and distribution centers in the periurban areas of the

metropolitan city support also the supply chains serving the city center of Milan and reaching stores and commercial businesses located within the urban perimeter. Moreover, the growth of e-commerce has provoked a significant increase in the number of pick-up points that are present at the urban level: 1,500 are active now, equivalent to one every square kilometer.

The challenging question is where to locate logistic services

The high concentration of logistics infrastructures and distribution centers within the metropolitan territory has urged the Metropolitan City of Milan to identify specific strategies to improve the efficiency and sustainability of the territorial logistics system. The outcome of this effort is the PULS (the Sustainable Urban Logistics Plan of the Metropolitan City of Milan), which has led to the identification of **LOGISTICS HUBS**, pivotal points located in the municipal territories along major transport infrastructures, such as railways, main roads, airports. In what is still the evolving phase of the planning process, **critical issues** have emerged and mainly concern the current land use regulations. At present, only large logistic centers are under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan city, while medium and small-



sized warehouses depend on the municipal permits. The challenge that needs to be addressed is the absence of comprehensive spatial planning and development measures at the metropolitan level providing guidelines in the identification of the appropriate sites for logistic hubs, according to existing distribution axis and flows.

To summarize, **the PULS' objectives** include:

- 1) Reduction of the environmental and social

impact generated by the storage and delivery activity;

- 2) Innovation of the logistics market;
- 3) Contraction of sprawl related to logistic infrastructures

To achieve these goals, PULS should be able to coordinate the municipalities in the identification of logistics settlements where production spaces and distribution services satisfy the logistics needs of the territories without provoking distress for the context involved.

CASE #3: MOBILITY ON DEMAND

Eurométropole de Strasbourg

Pia Imbs, President

The 'Mobility Revolution' is a new model to meet the challenge of on-demand mobility for all, which will allow multi scale territorial solutions

It was in 1989 when Strasbourg initiated its ecological transition, tackling the issue of mobility. This awareness allowed the city to reduce the use of the car in the city center and create an alternative transport system.

Thus since 1995, the image of Strasbourg, in addition to the cathedral and its UNESCO architectural heritage, includes its tram and 650km of cycle paths. Today the Eurométropole wants to achieve another goal: the 'Mobility Revolution', a new model which will allow each territorial scale to adopt solutions that are most suited based on three pillars: 1) A more convenient and more accessible mobilities package, throughout the territory; 2) Intermodality; 3) Free public transport for under-18s.

The political will is to give everyone the right to a wide spectrum of mobility services. The instrument that allows that is a political project co-created with all the territorial stakeholders (residents and economic players) that goes

beyond the traffic restrictions of the ZFE (*Zone à faible émissions*) which concerns 33 municipalities: the attention is given to the most vulnerable people with the aim to support them, either in replacing their private vehicles with more efficient models, or by offering them alternatives to the car.

The Mobility Revolution is a global vision for the mobility policy and includes: a process of consultation to adapt the system, to respond to expectations and questions, and to reassure and amend the

program accordingly; a plan of communication to keep the various stakeholders informed throughout the implementation of the scheme. To this end, they have set up political monitoring committees (with representatives of all political groups), territorial monitoring committees (social, citizens, associations) and economic monitoring committees (with representatives of the various sectors).



Budget and Planning measures

From a financial point of view the project counts on the availability of an unprecedented budget of €50m supporting a number of tools, among which is a **mobility wallet** (an account credit with up to €2,000 valid for three years, integrating other existing grants and giving access to a range of 'à la carte' mobility services, in partnership with mobility operators such as public transport, bicycle rental, car-sharing) and **car conversion aid**.

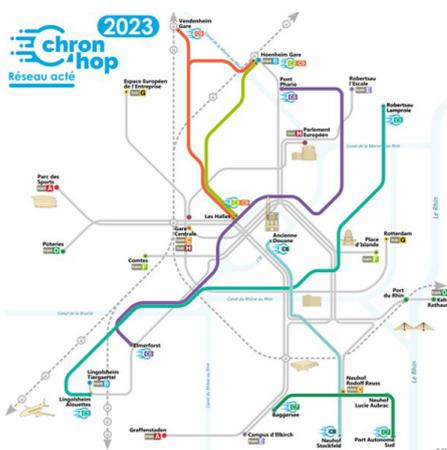
The financial aspects are then combined with the introduction of planning measures to ensure accessibility and on-demand transport services.

They include:

1. A mobility package for dense urban areas zones

(Strasbourg and its inner ring) Extensions to the main public transport lines towards the peripheries in all directions.

[See Chron hop 2023](#)



2. A mobility package for peri-urban areas and villages (outer ring).

These improvements also include the extension of the cycle track network to offer better accessibility and improved possibilities for cycling to work and for leisure, through electric bikes, which offer an efficient support for the modal shift towards carbon-free travel.

3. A mobility package for a wider population zone on a cross-border scale - the third ring

These connections with the 'third ring' of neighbouring inter-communities also include cross-border train and bike lane connections between Strasbourg and Kehl in Germany (in this case, financial support comes from both

towns).

All in all, €500m for the mobility revolution.

Considered a pioneer example for mobility service and infrastructure, Strasbourg will host the Mobility EXPO 1-3 October 2024, a unique opportunity for presenting and sharing the innovations which have made the Eurométropole the most efficient public transport networks in France.



Cross-border rail network



CASE #4: UPGRADING THE ROAD SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE TO BALANCE INNER AND OUTER TERRITORIES

Bucharest Metropolitan Association

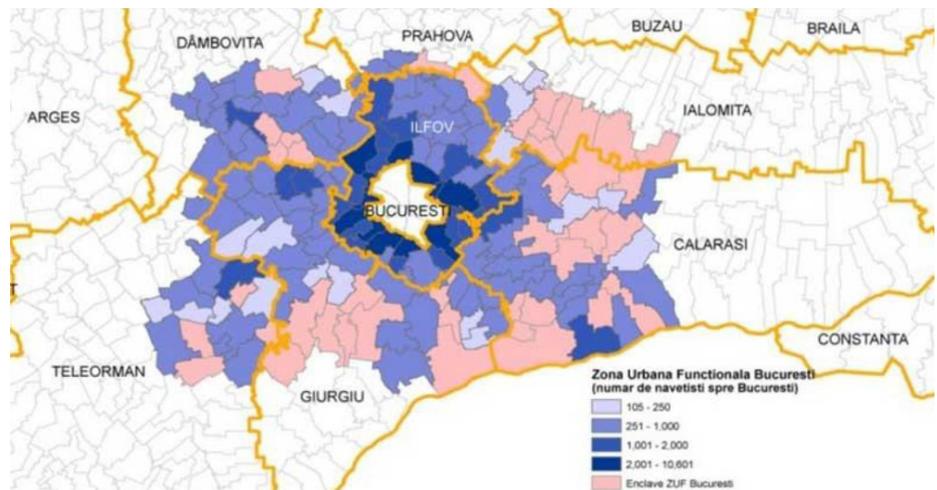
Gianina Panatau, Director

Metropolitan coordination in the development and implementation of the infrastructure road system to increase accessibility and cohesive territorial development

In Romania, the legal framework for local authority partnerships has existed since 2001 in the form of Intercommunity Development Agencies, based on the French model.

Based on this legal framework, the establishment of metropolitan areas in Romania began around 20 years ago, with the role of implementing joint public utility services, but without having a significant impact on local development. However, **the need of the Territorial Administrative Units (UAT) for coherent development, common and interconnected projects, common infrastructure, led to the formalization of metropolitan areas with the Law no.246/2022. It is not an ideal legal framework.**

However, the recognition and definition of metropolitan areas in Romania is a first step, and together with the Federation of Metropolitan Areas and Urban Agglomerations in Romania (FZMAUR) there is a focus to improve upon it. Also, the new Urban Planning Code talks



about a new form of planning, namely the General Urban Plan of the Metropolitan Area.

Bucharest, the capital city of Romania, surrounded by the Ilfov County, forms the Bucharest Metropolitan Area and has the same border as the development region.

The region has experienced significant economic growth and plays a crucial role in the country's economy. Around 12 percent of Romanian population lives in the Bucharest metropolitan territory. This is a dense urban core surrounded by many smaller and less developed

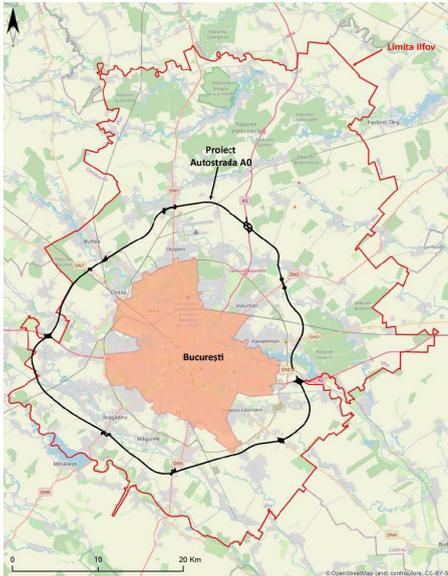
areas (8 cities, 32 communes and 91 villages), with the main activities taking place in the central city, which is served by a road network ill-equipped for current levels of traffic.

These conditions led to:

- Traffic congestion;
- Increased commute times;
- Parking challenges;
- Public transportation demand;
- Environmental impact;
- Need for investments in infrastructure upgrades.

The main challenge for the region is to secure investment to improve the infrastructure road

system to increase accessibility and cohesive territorial development at the metropolitan level.

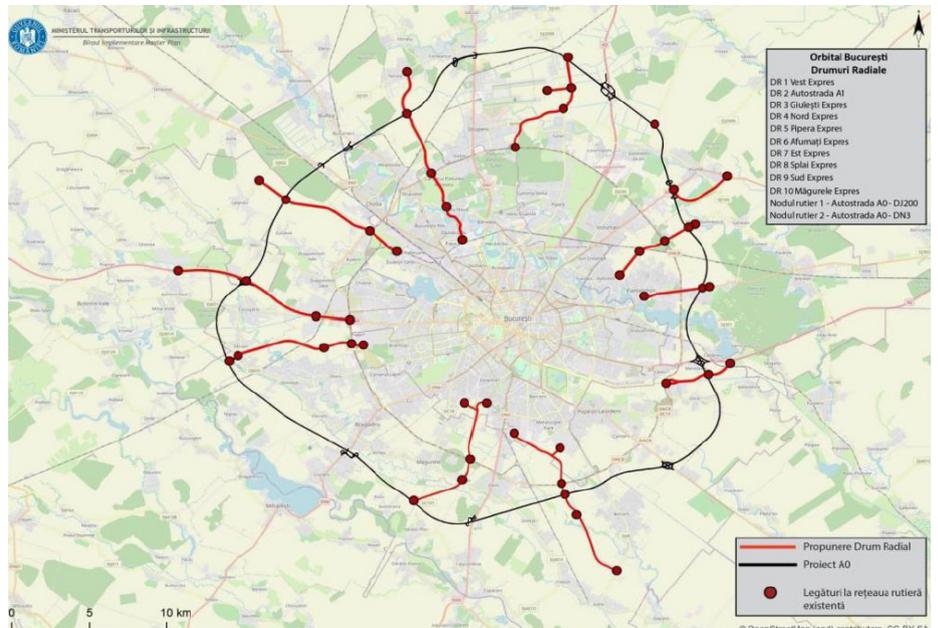


Planning and financing measures

Three planning and financing measures have been implemented to address and tackle these challenges:

Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan for Bucharest metropolitan area

The local authorities understood the need for development and planning of transport at the metropolitan level, and in 2016 created the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (PMUD). This fostered the reorganisation of Bucharest Public Transport Company and transformed it into STB (Bucharest Transport Company) in 2017.



By integrating various transport services under a unified entity, local authorities aimed to address the fragmentation and inefficiencies of the previous system.

Infrastructure investment

In 2019, work started on the A0 highway, a 100-km ring road that will surround Bucharest and is also part of the Transcarpathia Corridor, ensuring the connection between the Black Sea and the western borders of the country. The project will also expand the metropolitan area from an economic point of view, through the development of the real estate market in the peri-urban area, and the industrial parks and logistics centres in the proximity of A0.

Orbital Project

The benefits of the A0 project to the metropolitan area are complemented by the

development of the Bucharest Orbital Project, which involves the construction of radial roads that connect the Bucharest Ring Road with the existing beltway (DNCB) and the urban space of the Municipality of Bucharest.

The Bucharest Metropolitan Area oversees the project's implementation. Started in 2022, it will be finalised by 2028, with an estimated value of approximately €700m, being financed through the National Transport Program, respectively from the Cohesion Fund of the European Union.

Creating a new system of connectivity, Bucharest Ring Highway will integrate the large boulevards of Bucharest, the DNCB and the A0 project. This will optimise and reduce congestion on streets and boulevards in the areas of interference between the urban

and peri-urban areas of the metropolitan region. In this context things will change profoundly in the coming years.

The Orbital Project seems in fact an opportunity to introduce a different approach to territorial development by looking at the new axis as a way to frame a green belt while working to achieve a balanced quality of life throughout the overall metropolitan dimension. Moreover, this is a very good example where the responsibility for the coordination is at the metropolitan scale, implying decision on allocation of services, housing developments combined with agriculture production and conservation of ecosystem services.

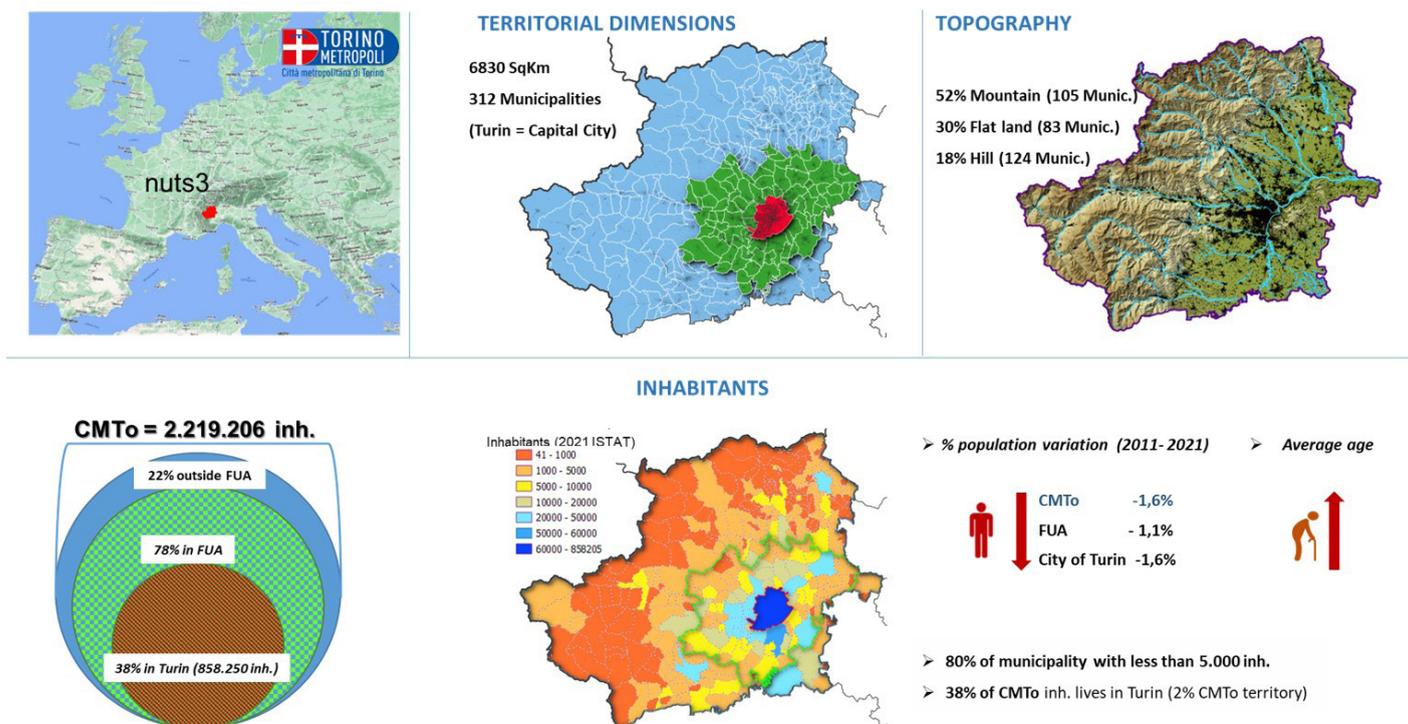




CASE #5: GOVERNANCE & STRATEGIC TOOLS

Città metropolitana di Torino Alessandro Bertello, Senior Expert

Metropolitan strategy to enhance the connections between urban and rural-mountain areas to ensure homogeneous territorial development at the metropolitan scale



Urban-Rural Partnership is a very sensitive issue for the Metropolitan city of Torino (MCTo). MCTo has some peculiarities that make it quite different from the other metropolitan cities in Italy and probably in Europe.

MCTo is the biggest metropolitan city in Italy, covering 6.830 Km², with the highest number of municipalities (312), and one

of the highest populations (2,219,206 inhabitants). MCTo territory is geographically complex (52 percent mountain, 30 percent plain and 18 percent hill), 78 percent of the population lives in the Torino functional urban area that counts for one-third of the territory.

These figures demonstrate that building strong partnerships between urban, rural and mountain areas is extremely

important.

Connecting urban and rural mountain areas and improving the environmental quality and accessibility is thus an important part of the metropolitan strategy to ensure homogeneous territorial development at the metropolitan scale.

The main tool that CMCTo has to enhance cohesive and coherent territorial

development is the **Strategic Metropolitan Plan (SMP)** which envisages:

1. **the construction of a new alliance between the Turin agglomeration and its territory, based on integration and complementarity;**
2. **the valorisation of the differences and specificities**

of each context within the metropolitan area, combining natural and artificial environments, developing the potential of both to build equity, well-being and sustainability.

However, **no specific funds are foreseen for the SMP,** therefore the realisation of the

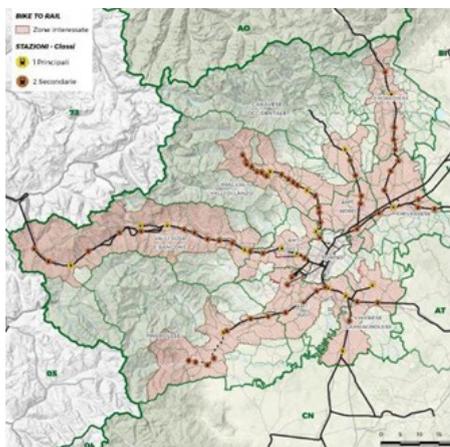
agenda of actions must rely on other financing sources (Next Generation EU, EU Programmes, National funds, Regional funds) and on the institution's regulatory and management activities. **This slows down the efficient and systematic implementation of the SMP.**

Program of actions

Besides the financing hurdles, there are a number of actions undertaken which aim to translate the metropolitan vision into practice.

Measures include projects aiming at:

- **reducing the digital divide** with a €1m investment mainly focused to the rural and mountain areas. As an example, a small part of the financing was used to equip five alpine refuges with internet connection.
- **increasing sustainable mobility** with BICIPLAN: the Bike-to-rail programme involves the development of an extensive network of cycle infrastructures that connects small towns and villages to railway stations and interchange nodes (€1m from the Ministry of Transport for 10 feasibility studies).



Network of cycle infrastructures

- **enhancing the environmental quality of the metropolitan spaces** with the **Forestation Strategy Program** which follows the National Strategy and the World Forum guidelines (€10m funded by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) and Ministry of Environment have served to plant 265,000 trees on approximately 300 hectares of land, restoring fire-affected areas, degraded areas and river banks).



In relation to the latter, the Metropolitan City has created the **Catalogue of Redevelopment and Environmental Compensation Interventions (CIRCA)**, a tool available for the municipalities and other territorial bodies to survey areas where it is necessary:

- to implement projects whose goal is the conservation of the natural environment and the ecosystem services;
- to increase the network of

green infrastructures;
▪ to improve the capacity to respond to climate change.

The catalogue is combined with a list of environmental interventions that can be effectively applied.

Technical Assistance Service

The Metropolitan City has created a **technical assistance service**: this is a unit that is composed by 12 highly qualified staff among which are engineers, geologists, architects and administrative experts. The service performs the functions of a design studio in the matter of construction, territorial planning, roads, urban qualification, fire emergency, administrative practice. The unit can follow all phases from design to construction (preliminary design) and provide assistance in facilitating access to financing (final design, executive design, direction of works and operation management). It can also provide advice on expropriation matters.

CASE #6: MEANING & PERCEPTION OF THE URBAN-RURAL PARTNERSHIPS

West-Pomeranian Region

Julita Miłosz-Augustowska, Regional Office for Spatial Planning

Working towards a new understanding of the metropolitan dimension to achieve integrated urban development

When talking about rural areas in Poland, a number of issues need to be considered which relate to the general understanding that **the rural dimension is perceived as an obstacle** or a possible expansion space for the city. Furthermore, rural areas are often considered as a system surrounding the urban settlement and not an integral part of the functional urban areas, most often a reserve of land for the expansion of the urban center.

This approach is leading to consequences such as:

- polarization of development processes;
- deterioration of living conditions of some residents in rural areas;
- reduction of the efficiency of the entire functional area;
- inefficient and unsustainable use of the territory.

Rural-urban cooperation is not yet recognized as a goal. There are a number of instruments and tools requiring cooperation agreements between urban areas to receive regional funding, as well a number of incentives in the strategic and



planning documents aiming for this kind of cooperation.

Among the most significant:

- partnership of local government units,
- cooperation agreements;
- local government contracts;
- integrated territorial investments;
- cross-sectoral partnerships for the metropolitan area;
- strategic and planning documents as the basis for action.

In this context, intermunicipal

cooperation as a platform for further ideas and projects is not a goal in itself. Challenges include:

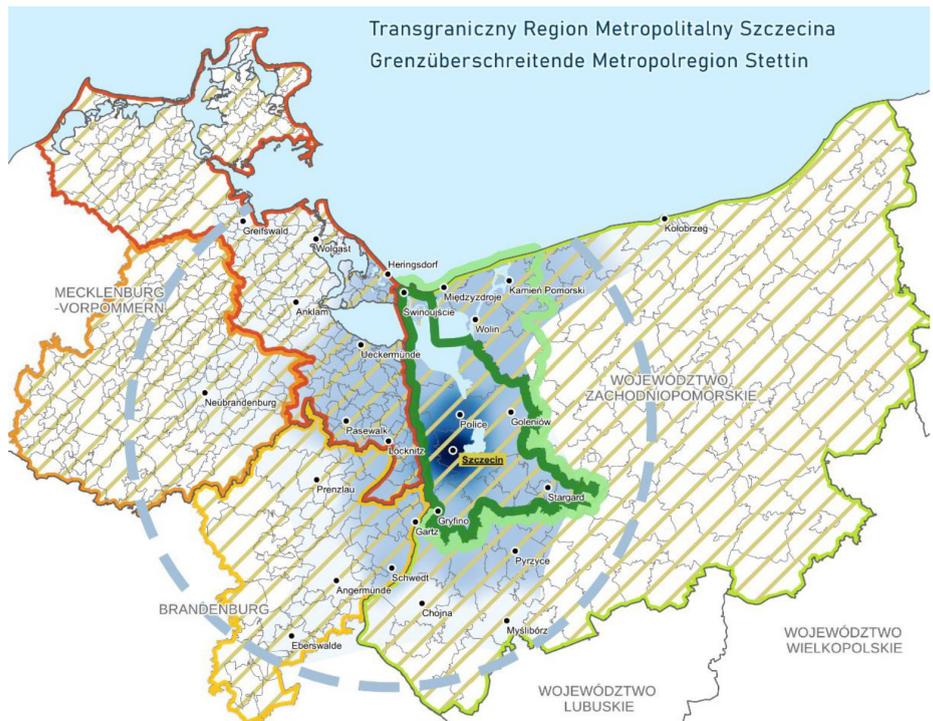
- the difficult fiscal and economic situation of municipalities;
- lack of dedicated funds;
- lack of legal regulations for metropolitan areas.

Szczecin metropolitan area is home to 680,000 people and is organised into a non-profit association reuniting the core city of Szczecin and the

surrounding urban and rural communes. It was founded in 2005 by 15 local governments, five of them being rural communities. **The association is a formal body** with quite a transparent representative structure (fees are sized to the number of inhabitants and when it comes to vote, they all have one voice) but due to the lack of legislation dedicated to metropolitan areas in Poland **it has no binding power**. Interestingly, even though this is a cross-border region with Germany, the Polish association doesn't allow for German members.

Integration of the transport network: efforts are directed to establish an integrated public transport system through cooperation among urban and rural communities. This is something generally understood, translating into a common effort to address the transportation system, not only the infrastructure but also the mobility patterns across the whole region.

Develop and implement a coherent urbanisation system and reduce the negative effects of migration: urban-rural cooperation is generally perceived when mainly focusing on housing-working relations and commuting. The territory witnesses a commuting phenomenon where young families move to the rural areas while keeping jobs, facilities and services (culture, education



and healthcare) in the urban areas. These trends provoke an intensification of services production in the urban centers while rural areas see their basic services disappear.

Moreover, **cross-border dynamics:** income on average is double in Germany, while real estate prices are 30 per cent less than on the Polish side. This is something called **metropolitan stretching**. These concrete linkages between the two countries cannot be ignored. In the context of the Schengen zone, a new community, mainly formed by young families, has moved to the rural areas in the German territory while keeping their jobs, social and cultural facilities in Poland, only 20 minutes away from the borders. **Commuting across the border is an aspect that needs to be addressed together with housing affordability**, which is

a huge topic but not discussed yet in the metropolitan association.

In contrast with the strong tools of Città metropolitana di Torino, the voluntary association of Szczecin Metropolitan Area suffers the absence of a metropolitan law and sees all the spatial planning tools in the hands of the municipal authorities; furthermore, in many cases the local spatial plans do not exist and therefore the opposition to development plans becomes even more difficult. Besides the challenges exposed, one aspect seems to emerge as the right set to address the theme of territorial cooperation and that is the energy supply and the use of renewable energy sources, both very popular in the West-Pomeranian region, which is the largest producer of energy from renewable sources in Poland.

CASE #7: SPATIAL PLANNING & COORDINATION

GrandLyon & Beyond

Karen McCormick, Senior Urbanist UrbaLyon

A complex and robust example of territorial cooperation beyond the metropolitan borders, with the involvement of the private sector (real estate and business companies for the eco-construction productive chain)

Urbalyon is a non-profit association formed 60-years ago to facilitate the emergence and implementation of common policies and projects contributing to the quality of Lyon Metropole area's planning and sustainable development. It is governed by 50 partners dedicated to the public interest, with an annual budget of around €8m. It has a team of 90 people offering a varied set of competences and a broad spectrum of activities along with the territorial widening of the metropolitan area.

Over the years it has changed and adapted its scope along with the challenges posed by territorial development of the area. First, the *Atelier d'urbanisme de la Ville de Lyon* (1961), then the *Atelier d'urbanisme de la Communauté urbaine* (1969), then *Agence d'urbanisme (1978) de l'agglomération lyonnaise* (1997) and finally the *Agence d'urbanisme de l'aire métropolitaine lyonnaise* (2015).



The bioclimatic and positive master plan of the city of Belleville in Beaujolais concerns a polarity of 15,000 inhabitants 45km north of Lyon.

The engagement of the Urban Planning Agency (UrbaLyon) made possible to set up a multidisciplinary team combining a number of skills useful to address this particular territory embracing the management of water, soil and subsoil, landscape, urban and heritage aspects, mobility

and energy. Among the main goals were also a specific focus on the public facilities' improvement (sports, cultural spaces and school) both in terms of energy adaptation of the buildings and dense hybridization of different uses.

The master plan and the action program, besides being organised in phases, were developed in one year and amounted to approximately €150k. The technical engineering services of the

city and the intermunicipal aggregation have merged to multiply the capacity and better serve this new territorial polarity.

Interdisciplinary approach

The strength of the project lies in the transversal approach of

the thematic expertise which has promoted synergies and created an ecosystem.

This is based on three guiding principles:

1. value local resources,
2. adapt local know-how and
3. involve local actors.

For example, the landscape strategy developed serves both the ecological approach to water and run-off management issues, as well as climate change adaptation and active mobility infrastructures (walking and cycling paths).

The implementation of the Master Plan

Conceived as a flexible guide defying the rhythm of the project's implementation, the master plan was organised in four sections:

- The first one is the **fertile city**. Built around the concept of biodiversity, this layer was aimed at strengthening the ecosystems of the territory and carrying out the adaptation made necessary by climate change.

The second is the **mobile and peaceful city**. It is based on the creation of soft mobility systems and pedestrian paths.

- The third is the **welcoming and lively city**. Incentivising private investments, it foresees 1,200 new houses and 600 renovated houses. The aim is to generate a lot of housing to meet a growing population of a railway station city within the new metropolitan area and generate a critical mass to structure the local construction sector. Difficulties in matching the local housing market costs and the quality standards of construction led

to the development of the local branches of eco-construction with the involvement of local eco-construction companies and sector organizations.

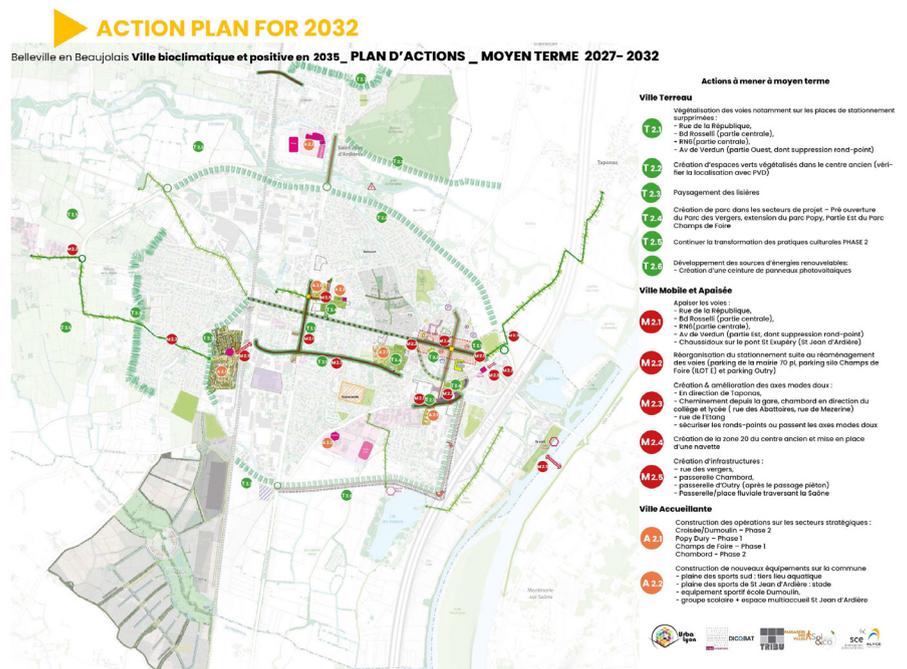
- The fourth, **project management**.

Conditions of success

1. Engagement of the local community, actors, citizens and companies.
2. The coordination between the local technical services of the town and the intermunicipal level.
3. A charismatic, visionary

and pragmatic Mayor acting in sync with the director general of the technical services (the same for the city and the inter-municipality).

4. The creation of a project hub called the House of Transition as a space to communicate the progress of the project and organise local activities.
5. A full-time job for fundraising management.
6. Management of team meetings with the project director allowing for revisions and adjustments in progress.



CASE #8: URBAN-RURAL PARTNESHIP IMPLEMENTATION

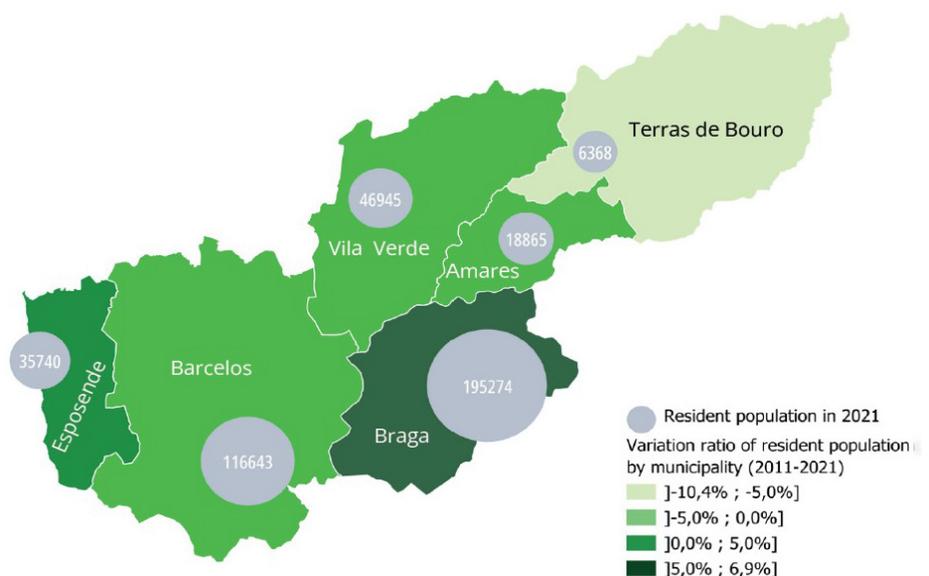
CIM Cávado / ATAHCA

Rafael Amorim, Executive Secretary

Territorial reorganisation to ensure funding eligibility based on local stakeholder cooperation

Between 2011 and 2021, the northern areas of Portugal have shown a significant demographic loss of 74,000 inhabitants (2.0 percent of its regional population). In contrast to this, the territory of CIM Cávado registered a population increase of 87,000 inhabitants (2.1 percent). This increase in the population rate did not distribute equally across all municipalities (six municipalities, 170 parishes).

In recent years the territory has registered significant asymmetries, characterised by urban pressure, especially in Esposende and Braga, which contrast with the remaining rural parishes witnessing a process of demographic, social and economic decay and **territorial desertification**. Not only that, with a surface area of approximately 1.216 km², the territory of CIM Cávado presents, from a geographical point of view, a great proximity between rural and non-rural parishes which today have different



opportunities. Most of the territory of Cávado is made up of parishes classified as rural, however in the territory there are parishes which, despite not having this classification, present strong characteristics and traces of rurality.

In order to develop a coherent action for the overall territory, the local development association ATHACA has proposed to revise **the rural map of the territory** to cover

the parishes of Braga and Esposende.

The approval of this proposal will represent a boost for 34 rural parishes, ensuring their funding eligibility for the EU 2021-27 programming period.

When talking about **proximity of rural areas to main urban centres**, other considerations need to be taken into account. Even in the classification of low-density territories, there is a discrepancy with some

parishes excluded despite being characterised by a low degree of urbanization and where common land uses are forestry and agricultural; since they are not classified as low-density areas, they cannot benefit from the same opportunities as those classified as low-density territories.

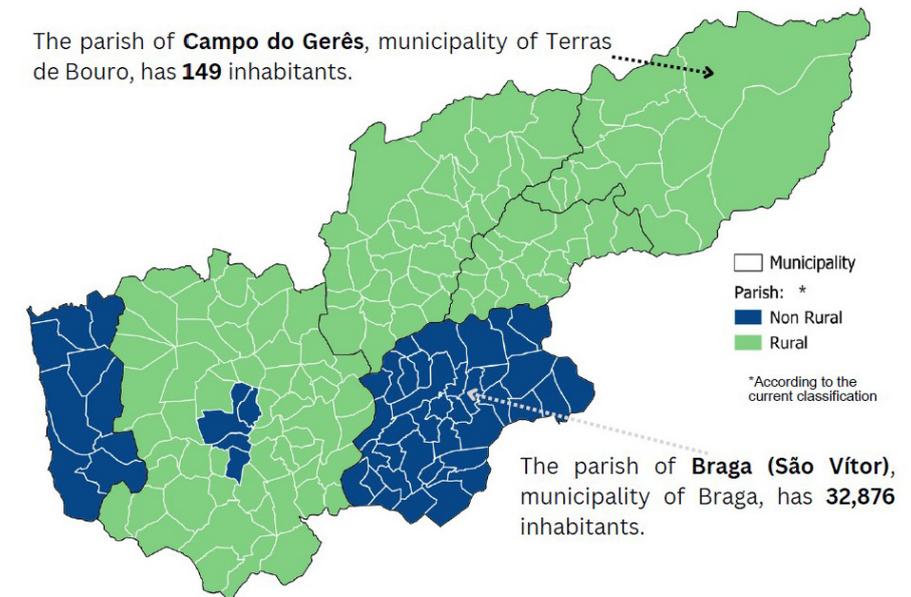
In these areas, **the proximity between urban and rural allows one to explore and value the existing connections**, starting from the opportunities associated to their location and their interdependence where socio-economic dynamics of the nearby urban centres can influence and 'flow' into the surrounding rural areas.

Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas

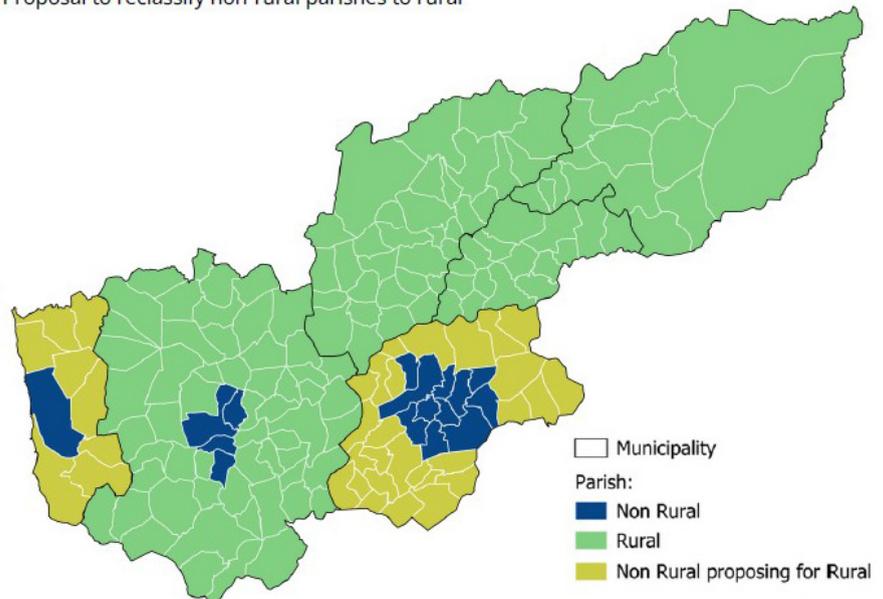
Rural territories face specific challenges that make them less attractive for living and working, contributing to the exodus of the population towards urban areas.

Urgent problems which have been highlighted include:

1. aging populations,
2. lack of infrastructure and support services for a fragile population,
3. lack of connectivity,



Proposal to reclassify non-rural parishes to rural



4. limited access to public services,
5. fewer job opportunities.

Trying to respond to these challenges and issues, and taking advantage of the emerging opportunities related to the ecological and digital transition, the EU has launched the **Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas**, which aims to create:

- Stronger rural areas
- Resilient rural areas that promote well-being

- Interconnected rural areas
- Prosperous rural areas

Within this new economic model, rural areas are valued for the functions that can make them pillars of economic development. The promotion of an integrated action will allow the rural areas of CIM Cávado to become attractive for people, to boost social revitalisation, economic and sustainable development in balance with the urban environment.

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