

THE URBAN DIMENSION OF MACRO-REGIONS

1. Cohesion policy: an instrument at the service of cities

As the Treaty of Lisbon states, territorial cohesion, together with economic and social cohesion, must be at the centre of European policies. Local administrations, aware of the specificities that are referred to in article 174 of the mentioned Treaty, constitute the most appropriate level regarding these goals. So, Strategy 2020 should not only provide a way out of the crisis, but it should also give way to the balanced development of European territories. The Declaration of Toledo in May 2010 and the proposals for the 2014-2020 period strengthen the links between these different European initiatives and appeal to a greater role for cities, highlighting the “urban dimension” in the cohesion policy as the EU's driver of growth.

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

As territorial cohesion and solidarity found European regional Policy, regional diversity must not mask deepening in inequalities regarding economic development. In this regard, the territorial dimension of the cohesion policy renews its importance, not only with regards to the programming of the future structural funds, but especially with regards to the characterization of territories with respect to access to the said funds; and how these funds combine with the different sector policies. The so-called ex ante evaluations linked to the Partnership Agreements should facilitate the inclusion of territorial cohesion objectives in the corresponding European and national policies with territorial impact, avoiding the use of supplementary financial resources to compensate the negative effects of the sector policies. A possible response to this challenge could come from the current and future development of the macro-regional strategies.

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

The main idea is to develop a series of activities in a coordinated manner, framing them within a well-defined range of priorities, with the aim of taking advantage of the synergies and promoting scale economies. Territorial integration is therefore highlighted above the thematic aspects of cooperation programming. Both those macro-regions that are in progress as well the proposed ones show on the ground the importance of the territorial dimension of cohesion and are an interesting example of multi-level coordination beyond borders.

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

However, the macro-regions must not be confined to the efficient use of resources, but they must base their legitimacy on consensus, a long-term approach, the definition of specific projects and cooperative work based on the principle of subsidiarity. For example, the selection of priorities must be done through dialogue and active queries. In the search for a greater concentration of themes, and therefore a smaller and more accessible scope for the implementation of initiatives destined to the solution of problems that are affecting the EU, it is necessary to take into account the interregional, transnational and cross-border associations; which are capable of comparing and evaluating priorities in the European territories, while at the same time providing a better coordination between the national and community levels. The superposition and dispersion of individual efforts must be avoided.

As a note, it is worth highlighting that the macro-regions should not constitute a new level of governance, but facilitate the participation of the regional and especially the local authorities, reducing the administrative load and making the different finance mechanisms among them more coherent, in order to give priority to results above procedures. Common platforms where all governance levels participate in an equal footing are thus a fundamental condition of success.

Taking advantage of the effects of proximity, governance must effectively include the social level, especially in those cases faced with geographic specificities. Striving for an adequate articulation of the territory, real multi-level governance at a macro-regional scale contributes to the improvement of the cooperation processes at all levels between the public and private actors, in a logic that combines vertical and horizontal subsidiarity.

3. Conclusions: Cities as macro-regional nodes

Cities have the necessary capacity to carry out local development plans that are coherent with the European Strategy 2020 for future sustainable growth. It is therefore understood that the model of *city of tomorrow* needs to go through networking with other cities, taking advantage of common resources and synergies during this period of financial crisis, with the aim of reaching the necessary means and knowledge to obtain its development and thus achieve the sustainable city of the future.

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

Thus, regarding the urban dimension of the macro-regions the following is proposed:

- ≡ The full integration of the urban dimension in the Europe Strategy 2020, the cohesion policy and the macro-regions, respecting a bottom-up logic that is in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity;
- ≡ Facilitate new ways for joint economic development, such as market exchanges, the green economy, the creative industries, the maritime economy, the economy of knowledge and the economy of proximity;
- ≡ Favor territorial **accessibility, contactability and urban mobility**;
- ≡ Guarantee **the offer of adequate general interest services**, that are extensive and of high quality, especially at a local level and supported transnationally;
- ≡ Establish **participation mechanisms** that are open to the civil society, the different levels of government and other interested parties;
- ≡ The construction of macro-regional initiatives that take into account the **identity, heritage and common values** of the territories.

Cities must be part of the macro-regional process, as it seeks to develop a more open, efficient and ambitious cooperation. The development of cities located in macro-regions is impossible without the reorganization of transnational cooperation and vice-versa, the development of macro-regions losses all its sense without cities.

For a start, the development of actions through agreements with investigation centers, universities and the private sector, as a basic requirement for the success of macro-regions, must count on cities. Local authorities can expand the field of actors involved, which should not be limited to the national/ regional levels and ought to be translated at the transnational level into new forms of cooperation. The work method proposed is networking, creating an impulse area for cities, to accompany the actions carried out and a privileged point of contact for the different agents with European institutions and with the rest of the cities of the area.

CECICN is ready to act as interlocutor of European institutions and the intermediary agent between EU institutions and cities and territories to facilitate the implementation of these ideas.