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1. The specificity of metropolitan areas in Europe

Some 75% of European citizens live in cities and urban areas. The most fundamental challenges related to environmental and social issues are concentrated in urban and metropolitan areas. However, metropolitan areas do not have the adequate tools to address these challenges. Indeed, there are few examples of metropolitan governments. Both international reports and the academic literature describe the lack of incentives for metropolitan cooperation (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2022; ESPON, 2021; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, metropolitan governments have a scarcity of financial resources, and their representatives have been requesting more funds to address key issues like sustainable mobility, social cohesion and healthy environments in urban areas (Tomàs, 2023a).

This is why EU instruments like Next Generation have the potential to accelerate planning and investing at this scale. The €672.5bn from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) funds could be the seed for cooperation between municipalities that would not occur spontaneously. Moreover, the RRF could potentially be an opportunity for metropolitan areas to be recognised as important players on a national scale.

This chapter analyses how RRF funding has been received by metropolitan areas, the way in which these funds are invested, and the governance mechanisms in place to structure the work between the national and local level. To do so, we focus on three case studies: Barcelona, Lyon and Turin. They are medium-sized metropolitan areas, they are not the capitals of their countries and all have a two-tier metropolitan government. As we will see, they present some specificities due to their national political cultures and political systems.

2. Comparing the three metropolitan areas

At the European level, we find different models of metropolitan governance, cooperation and instruments. On the one hand, we have metropolitan governments provided with their own budget and

responsibilities. On the other hand, voluntary cooperation between municipalities and public-private actors. In between, there are sectoral metropolitan agencies (mainly for transportation, water, waste and urban planning) and no specific metropolitan bodies but a vertical coordination exerted by existing authorities (like counties or regions) (Tomàs, 2019). Even if they have limited competences, indirect election and a lack of fiscal authority, metropolitan governments have a legal recognition and can better deliver public policies at a metropolitan scale. This is why we focus on the cases of Barcelona, Lyon and Turin. The following table summarises the main features of each metropolitan area:

Table 1: The three metropolitan areas

Case	Population 2021 (millions)	Surface (km ²)	Density (hab/km ²)	Municipalities (number)	Most important competences	Main areas of investment of RRF
Area Metropolitana de Barcelona (AMB) [1] (2010)	3.2	636	5,093	36	"Transport and mobility Waste and water management Urban planning Economic development Public spaces"	"Housing rehabilitation (€53.5m) Transport and Mobility / Low emission zone (€40m) Waste management (€12m) Green energy (€3.6m) Self-consumption photovoltaic panels (€2.8m) Digitalisation: (€1m) Tourism: (0.5m)"
Métropole du Grand Lyon [2] (2015)	1.4	538	2,602	59	"Economic development Education, culture and leisure Solidarity Living environment"	"Ecological transition [3] (energy renovation of public buildings) Social cohesion (training and integration of young people and vulnerable workers) Economic competitiveness (rehabilitation of industrial wastelands)"
Città Metropolitana di Torino [4] (2015)	2.2	6,827	322	312	"Transport and mobility Urban planning Living environment Economic development"	"Urban Integrated Plan (€224m: €113.5m for the city of Turin) Urban reforestation (€6.5m) Hydrological risks plan (€4m) Sustainable mobility / Bicycle corridors (€4m) Education: maintenance of school buildings (€86m)"

[1]. Source: <https://www.amb.cat/s/web/area-metropolitana/coneixer-l-area-metropolitana.html>

[2]. Source: <https://www.grandlyon.com/metropole/missions-et-competences>
https://www.grandlyon.com/fileadmin/user_upload/media/pdf/institution/budget/financement/20220707_financement_bond-framework-june-2022.pdf

[3]. In the case of France, the specific amount devoted to the Métropoles is not available.

[4]. Source: <http://www.cittametropolitana.torino.it/cms/urp/comuni-unioni-comuni>
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiYzgzZjMyZTgtMjhjZC00ZDZhLWU0YWVtODIwZTY4ZDBlODQ2IiwidCI6IjA4MzIzZjU2LWVhYzQzNDM0Mi1hNDk5LWU5MDBkNTMxMkYkMyIsImMiOjIj>

The three metropolitan governments were created in the 2010s, although the municipalities of these areas have a long tradition of cooperation and previous metropolitan arrangements. *Città Metropolitana di Torino* (CMTO) is the largest area, with 312 municipalities. It was created in 2015 by the “Delrio” Law (2014), replacing a second level of local government (*Provincia di Torino*), which exceeds the limits of the metropolitan area. As Italy is a decentralised state, the constitutional reform recognised the existence of *città metropolitane* and then replaced 14 out of 21 provinces with metropolitan governments in the most urbanised areas of the country. New institutions kept the competences of the provinces and were given the added responsibility of social and economic development, though with scarce economic resources. The CMTO is indirectly elected. Led by the mayor of Turin and governed by the Metropolitan Council, it is made up of 18 councillors (plus the mayor) and remains in office for five years, but it is dissolved when the municipal council of the capital city is renewed. Moreover, there is the Metropolitan Conference, a consultative and proposing body, made up of the metropolitan mayor and all the mayors of the municipalities belonging to the Metropolitan City.

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Meanwhile, metropolitan areas are not recognised in the Spanish Constitution. As Spain is a decentralised country, metropolitan governments can be created by regional legislation. The parliament of Catalonia approved the creation of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB) in 2010; it was constituted in 2011 and is the only metropolitan government in Spain. The AMB gathers 40% of the Catalan population in a dense urban area, but it is smaller than the functional urban area (which is made up of 5 million inhabitants). It is ruled by a Metropolitan Council made up of 90 councillors from the 36 municipalities; from the outset the presidency has been in the hands of the mayor of Barcelona (which has 1.6 million inhabitants). The mayors of the 36 municipalities are all represented, and the rest of councillors are designated in relation to their population and according to the results of local elections, held every four years. It is, then, an indirectly elected metropolitan government.

France has a lower degree of political decentralisation, and the laws affecting metropolitan areas are approved at national level (laws in 2010 and 2014). *Métropole du Grand Lyon* gathers 59 municipalities and 1.4 million inhabitants in a relatively small area (538 km²). Lyon is the smallest case among the three cases analysed in this chapter in terms of population (1.4 million), being the core of a larger functional area (more than 2 million inhabitants). It is a territorial authority created by the law of January 27th, 2014, on the modernisation of territorial public action and the affirmation of metropolises (MAPTAM law). Since January 1st, 2015, the new authority has stemmed from the merger of the Urban Community of Lyon (the existing metropolitan government) and the General Council of Rhône. It is the only *métropole* with this special status and the only directly elected metropolitan area in France. For the first time in 2020, under a two-round system, citizens elected the metropolitan councillors by direct universal suffrage. The Metropolitan Council is made up of 150 members – the metropolitan councillors – who sit for six years and choose the president. Moreover, there is a consultative body formed by representatives from civil society, which does not exist in Barcelona or Turin.

To sum up, we find institutional differences between the three cases. They all have legal recognition: Turin is recognised by the constitution, the highest level of sanction. Lyon and Barcelona, meanwhile, are regulated by national and regional laws, respectively. Turin and Barcelona have indirect bodies of political representation, while the metropolitan assembly of Lyon is directly elected. The three metropolitan governments are embedded in a complex multilevel system of governance, which includes the central, the regional and the local level (with multiple bodies and authorities at this level).

In relation to the main areas of RRF investment and contribution to the EU's green agenda, Barcelona and Turin devote most of their funds to housing, transport and sustainable mobility (low emission zones, public bike-sharing schemes). All the projects that will be developed with these funds integrate the green and digital dimension, transversely if not always explicitly. In the case of Lyon, the financed projects are related to ecological transition through the CRTes (*contrats de relance et de transition écologique*)¹. The main areas concern the energy renovation of public buildings and public housing, transport and sustainable mobility, and protection of biodiversity. Moreover, there are some projects linked to enhancing economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

Regarding the amount of investment, in France it is not possible to know the source of the funds in detail. The central government launched the *France Relance* plan, based on ecological transition, competitiveness and cohesion, and coordinated via calls for projects addressed to the different actors (companies, citizens, public administrations). The total funding of the plan is €100bn, €40bn of which coming from European funds. If we look in detail at the Agreement for Recovery and Ecological Transition in the Métropole of Lyon (*Accord Territorial de Relance de la Métropole de Lyon*), signed on March 23rd, 2021, there is a list of financed projects (for instance, almost €70m allocated to the renovation of secondary schools), but their representatives are unable to identify specific projects that were funded exclusively by the RRF. As we have said, the RRF accounted for 40% of the national recovery plan, but there is no precise visibility on which projects or which calls for projects this 40% came to finance.

1. In the context of the Next Generation programme, and compared to Barcelona and Turin, Lyon stands out because of the emphasis on social cohesion and digital transition, linked to the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) package. The REACT-EU package is devoted to investment projects that foster crisis-repair capacities and contribute to a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy, including support for maintaining jobs, short-time work schemes and support for the self-employed. In Lyon, the funds are mainly devoted to training, retraining and integration of young people and vulnerable workers towards promising sectors.

In the case of the CTMO, the €224m come from the Urban Integrated Plan, where €113.5m are assigned to the city of Turin. Like the case of Bologna, the city of Turin has been the main beneficiary of the funds. Moreover, €86m are allocated to the maintenance of public buildings (secondary schools), which is a competence that the AMB does not have. The rest of the funds are earmarked for projects on urban reforestation (€6.5m) and sustainable mobility and bicycle corridors (€4m), as well as for the development of a hydrological risks plan (€4m).

Lastly, Barcelona has been allocated the lowest amount of investment (to October 31st, 2023). The main appropriations are housing rehabilitation (€53.5m) and those linked to transport, mobility and the development of the low emission zone (€40m). There are residual funds for waste management (€12m), green energy (€3.6m) and self-consumption photovoltaic panels (€2.8m), digitalisation (€1m) and tourism (€0.5m).

3. The role of metropolitan areas in the design and implementation of the EU recovery process

In order to access the funding, EU member states were asked to prepare National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs), stating the investments and reforms necessary for the recovery. As many articles and reports have explained, local governments played a limited role in the design of both the EU cohesion policy and recovery funds (ESPON, 2021; Eurocities, 2021; Fernández de Losada and Martínez, 2022). While most national plans addressed urban challenges (sustainable mobility, housing, renewable energy), they were mainly designed with a top-down approach. As Boni and Zevi state, “there was no seat at the table for cities” (2021: 22), and even less so for metropolitan areas.

Once the national plans have been approved, the key issue is to what extent metropolitan areas have become important actors in the implementation phase. Have national plans recognised the specificities of metropolitan areas? Are metropolitan governments able to participate in the funding calls? In other words, have they been legitimated as political actors? In our three cases studies, we see different situations.

Previous experience with EU cohesion policy was relevant. In Turin, the CMTO identified potential interactions and synergies between European funds and instruments and policies already in place in order to align them with the main objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy 2021-27. The main tool was the development of a Metropolitan Strategic Plan. Moreover, in 2019 the metropolitan city also established a specialised unit in charge of promoting and coordinating projects that are funded with supranational resources (“European and International Projects and Programmes”). At the same time, the new unit seeks to ensure a higher consistency between these projects and the metropolitan city strategies with respect to EU programming (ESPON, 2021).

In the case of RRF funds, the national plan – based on six missions – fails to clearly identify the territorial targets and priorities. The distribution of funds has been mainly based on competition between local governments. All *città metropolitane* have been able to participate in the calls of the ministries. Indeed, the ANCI (*Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani*, the national association of local governments) has been the direct representative in the dialogue with the state. The funds have been awarded to all metropolitan governments, in proportion to their populations. According to the official statements, the state recognises the role of metropolitan areas as motors of social and economic development. However, we are unsure if it is due to institutional inertia, that is, simply because *città metropolitane* have replaced the provinces, or it really marks a change in the acknowledgment of the specificities of metropolitan areas.

In the case of the metropolitan area of Turin (CMTO), once the money has been received, it has been redistributed to the metropolitan municipalities, which have submitted the projects to be developed. In this sense, the role of the CMTO is more of an intermediary between the state and the municipalities than a leading actor in creating metropolitan projects. This could be partly explained by the type of funded projects, which are related to physical transformation to be developed at a

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municipal level. Indeed, the CMTO helps the municipalities to implement the projects and manage the funds. This is one of the main challenges of RRF funds: the implementation must be quick and municipalities lack the means to manage these funds according to the European requirements. Finally, like the EU cohesion policy experience (ESPO, 2021), there has been a larger concentration of funds in the central municipality (the city of Turin).

The situation of Barcelona is quite the opposite. The reforms and investments planned by the Spanish government in its Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan have a strong urban dimension. However, the calls to opt for these funds have only been designed for cities and provinces (a second tier of local government). In other words, not only has the AMB been unable to participate in the design of the plans, it cannot be a beneficiary of most of them. This is a striking case that can only be explained by the Spanish territorial political culture (Tomàs, 2023b).

The AMB is the only metropolitan government in Spain: the rest of the territory is organised into municipalities and provinces, the two types of local government recognised by the constitution. In this landscape, the different ministries ignore the existence of the sole metropolitan authority. This invisibility is not linked to a partisan issue, as metropolitan representatives and central government political leaders have been of the same political stripe. The Spanish anomaly stems from an institutional incomprehension of the metropolitan reality and the territorial diversity. In this sense, the implementation of the RRF funds is a lost opportunity to move towards a more comprehensive knowledge of the territorial specificities. Moreover, the previous experience regarding the EU cohesion funds showed that the AMB set its priorities according to the European strategy while trying to develop its own agenda (ESPO, 2021). In other words, the AMB had a fruitful previous experience but, even then, it failed to be a relevant political actor.

Another reason explaining the metropolitan institution's lack of participation in these funds is linked to the composition of the AMB. As the institution is made up of 36 municipalities and some of them are participating in the calls, there is the assumption that financing the AMB would prejudice other Spanish urban areas. In other words, municipalities would be doubly financed, individually and collectively through the AMB. This narrative illustrates that there is a lack of understanding of the metropolitan nature of the AMB. In the calls where the AMB has been able to participate, mainly linked to housing, transportation and mobility issues, the question of multilevel governmental coordination becomes relevant, both with municipalities and the regional government.

First, the AMB must deal with municipalities: coordinate the projects that will be presented and decide who will manage the fund. Indeed, the AMB is made up of 36 municipalities with disparate populations and resources. For instance, the city of Barcelona manages the funds itself, while smaller municipalities require the guidance of the AMB. Second, as part of the funds are implemented through regional governments, the AMB needs to engage in dialogue with the Catalan government. For instance, the funds on housing, waste and water management are to be

managed in coordination with existing consortiums where the Catalan government – and the state – participates. Finally, the second tier of local government (*Diputació de Barcelona*), which supports small and medium-sized municipalities, among them those belonging to the AMB, has also been provided with funds (for instance, relating to tourism). It has been the case that some municipalities have been funded both by the provincial and the metropolitan levels of administration, without any coordination. The need for better synchronisation of levels of administration remains a huge challenge.

In France, with a more centralised system, the implementation of RRF funds has been another example of the difficulties in establishing more horizontal governance relationships between local governments and the central government. Top-down policies have been reproduced, giving metropolitan governments little room to decide. The fact that it is impossible to distinguish the sources of the funding (state or EU) is relevant in terms of transparency and communication. In this case, what is interesting is the complementarity between the Agreement for Recovery and Ecological Transition in the Métropole of Lyon (*Accord Territorial de Relance de la Métropole de Lyon*), signed on March 23rd, 2021, and the Metropolitan Coherence Pact, voted on 15th March, 2021 by the Metropolitan Assembly. While the agreement focuses mainly on projects related to ecological transition (and secondarily on economic competitiveness and social cohesion), the Lyon Metropolis provides financial support to member municipalities through seven compatible priority areas with the components of the recovery plan (revitalisation of town centres, education, sustainable mobility, green and blue infrastructures, fight against food waste, housing-reception, accommodation, economic development and employment integration). This support represents an amount of €65m over 2021-2022. The state is expected to support projects financed by the metropolis by mobilising the support grant for exceptional local investment (DSIL) and the local investment support grant (DSID) energy renovation in support of projects carried out by the municipalities of the metropolis, depending on proposals from municipalities and the eligibility of projects.

The experience of the RRF programme makes it clear that, as happened with the involvement of metropolitan areas in the design and implementation of cohesion policy, some relevant changes are needed to strengthen their political power.

4. Lessons learned and policy recommendations

The pandemic has had a significant impact on large urban and metropolitan areas, especially areas where density is associated with poverty and poor housing conditions. Cities and metropolitan areas have had to respond to new forms of social and economic problems without the necessary powers and financial resources. The EU reacted with the launch of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) programme, which is financially strong and highly ambitious. However, as denounced by the European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA, 2020), the original RRF regulation refers only to the member states, while subnational authorities are not mentioned. This is a paradox since cities and metropolitan areas have the potential to guide the green, digital and just transitions that Europe needs for recovery. As stated in another EMA publication (EMA and AMB, 2022), most European metropolitan areas have the management capacity and the technical and financial resources necessary for increasing the impact of these funds.

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Given that the state governments have centralised the distribution of these funds (with differences between the cases), the EU should open up parts of the RRF directly to local governments, including metropolitan areas. Not only because of the principle of subsidiarity, but especially because of the specificities of metropolitan areas. Indeed, metropolitan areas are functional realities, but they have difficulties in becoming relevant political actors, regarding their legal status. The cases of Turin, Lyon and Barcelona are an example of this condition: they operate on the fringes of the mechanisms that the state governments have established to prioritise the investments. The experience of the RRF programme makes it clear that, as happened with the involvement of metropolitan areas in the design and implementation of cohesion policy, some relevant changes are needed to strengthen their political power.

One of the key problems of metropolitan areas is their legitimacy, even in directly elected systems of democratic representation like Lyon. Metropolitan governments remain technical and obscure institutions both to other public administrations and citizens, in a similar manner to EU institutions. Moreover, in the cases of monocentric metropolitan areas, the interaction between metropolitan area governments and the government of the core cities is essential to ensure that recovery investments are carried using an integrated approach, as well as promoting balanced territorial development, and support all municipalities internally. For example, the competitive approach in Italy meant that core cities with more institutional capacity managed to get more funds than municipalities in the metropolitan area.

The majority of European inhabitants live in urban areas; this is why the territorialisation of the projects is so important. If metropolitan governments were able to design the plans according to their specificities, the projects would be developed in a more efficient way, contributing to the legitimacy of both European and metropolitan institutions. This change would need the development of a new European political culture, which is still dominated by the predominance of the state governments.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the implementation of the projects funded by the RRF programme has been difficult for the three metropolitan institutions consulted. The schedule is very tight and there are complicated bureaucratic procedures, especially those regarding anti-fraud plans and the “do no significant harm” (DNSH) principle. In this sense, it can be a negative incentive for participation in future calls, and procedures should be simplified.

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