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## With the metropolitan city: identity needs and strategic opportunities within

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### Abstract

The Italian concept of metropolitan city is quite different from European realities in which cities were not set up *ex ante*, but over the years and until a natural legitimacy of their status, they gained identity thanks to a long cultural, geographical and administrative process. Metropolitan cities in Italy come from a craving for reform path of local authorities, well defined with Law Delrio promoting the transformation process of all the 86 Italian provinces. This law praiseworthy pointed to Italian cities as a priority issue to the integrated territorial development. One of the pillars of this reform is definitively the establishment of the first 10 Metropolitan cities, that is Turin, Milan, Venice, Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Bari, Rome Capital area (with special authority), Naples and Reggio Calabria (to be launched in 2016), with the replacement of the corresponding provincial administrations. Unlike provinces, metropolitan cities will have complex purposes, such as the general region planning including communication facilities, service and infrastructure networks, public services organization of general interest, traffic, mobility and economic development. The chance to have a new governance model had been long awaited, something suited to urban areas which not quite smoothly have to manage difficulties as transport, environmental quality, waste organization and management, mobility etc. all not related to the canonic administrative boundaries. Dealing with the main territorial matters in just one administrative decision-making center means, for these urban areas, to handle them completely in a conceptual and territorial way, but also it ensures efficiency and more facilities for the population even peripheral.

This rising process throughout the country, especially in southern Italy, is based on the acknowledgement of its own identity, and concern the understanding and the approval of the new boundaries, seizing the opportunities derived from the new layout. Connecting places and territories it is obviously a great chance, but can take place only through those slow understanding processes of the unavoidable developments of urban, social and administrative transformation. As regards the province of Reggio Calabria, for example, it is a well-known fact that many hinterland municipalities have demographics under a thousand inhabitants due to a relentless drive of the population to the main cities and to the Northern Italy, which offers definitively more. Not to mention the European cities, where the effects of the economic crisis are not as obvious as in Italy. Therefore, the establishment of the

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metropolitan city despite the crisis, such as the one of the province of Reggio, can certainly be an opportunity for the revitalization and integrated development. It also entails the overcoming of the unsolved issues related to the mobility of municipalities' interconnection that is a key point of the Metropolitan Agenda.

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## 1. Structural opportunities

For years, the European Community has focused on cities its strategies of economic and territorial development. This is because cities are great places for testing and starting new innovative policies to improve the quality of life of their inhabitants. The majority of Europeans lives in urban areas where commercial and financial activities lies mainly, but where above all the leading networks of mobility and social relations are directed. Although cities concentrate 75% of energy consumption and 80% of polluting emissions, they are also places where innovative technologies to reduce pollution and energy consumption are applied. This explains the fact the cities take on most of the problems from the environmental and social point of view, so they need specific policies to solve these contradictions. The multi-fund National Operational Programme "Città Metropolitane" (NOP Metropolitan Cities) is part of the Italian National Urban Agenda and Sustainable Urban Development outlined in the 2014-2020 Partnership Agreement & Programme. It focuses on the urban development and provides for action plans in the Digital Agenda and for energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, housing deprivation and social economy sectors that should be realized with a financial endowment amounted to EUR 588.1 million granted from the European Structural Funds and on National Co-Funding of EUR 304.833,333, for a total of EUR 892.933,333. According to EU Commission estimates, 678 associated municipalities will guarantee the interoperability of their information systems and 70% of municipalities of the metropolitan areas will offer fully interactive digital services to citizens. In brief, the NOP impact can represent the main key to many areas, especially in southern Italy, since 70% of municipalities of the metropolitan cities will have full interactive services. Furthermore, it will provide integrated information systems for the 678 associated municipalities and incite to a decrease of annual primary energy consumption of public buildings (2.2 GWh /year) through 38,000 square meters rehabilitated. NOP provides also more than 200 km of bike trails, new houses to homeless out of an estimated 34,000 population, accompanying socio-economic activities to 485 individuals out of 18,000 from marginalized communities and the regeneration of more than 2,250 spaces and more than 35,000 square meters for activities with a social objective.

## 2. The metropolitan view, from Europe to Italy

The metropolitan area is an American-type topic relatively new, born in response to issues concerning the need of coordinating public policies on territorial services mainly related to transport and taxation, and requiring a single referent skilled at international level. Undoubtedly, we should not consider the metropolitan city under its quantitative aspects related to demographics or to the size of the urbanized area, but as a metropolis with its own typical purposes. The metropolitan city represents a network system able to attract and integrate population and territories, so it does not identified itself with the simple merger of towns and suburbs (Pellegrini, 2005). However, our system detects the metropolitan poles beforehand, according to functional criteria that do not refer to any demographic criterion, nor to physical boundaries (Censis, 2013). Actually, the research commissioned by the Union of Provinces to Censis reveals that the Italian debate on metropolitan areas has taken on a character of absolute specificity being unique in Europe, since no European country force for a single model. This leads to the fact that metropolitan cities develop themselves regardless of their political and administrative institutions and that they are not imposed. All that underlies the birth of a metropolitan city is lacking in Italy: from size to debate and from the same motion that leads to the establishment of the metropolitan city (Salvaggiulo, 2014).

In times of crisis, it seems that the achievement of the metropolitan city rank is a strategic goal in Italy and it aims at improving the quality of life of its citizens through the interception of Community funds needed for those implementations of development strategies required from the Community itself. Indeed, the Italian idea of

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