

METROPOLITAN AREAS SPEARHEADING THE GREEN, DIGITAL AND LABOUR MARKET TRANSFORMATION

ANNUAL FORUM REPORT

HELSINKI 2023

28–29 September 2023

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Foreword

We are pleased to present the report of the 8th European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA) Forum, hosted by the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region in the Finnish capital on 28–29 September 2023.

The Forum gathered political representatives from twenty-five European metropolises with the main goal of emphasising the significance of metropolitan areas in tackling the challenges of green, digital and labour market transitions. Nearly one hundred participants attended the event, which consolidated EMA's position as a crucial political forum for metropolitan affairs.

This EMA meeting is especially significant, as it takes place hard on the heels of the United Nations Habitat (UN-Habitat) Assembly's adoption of Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res.6 (9 June 2023). This is the first time that a United Nations (UN) resolution has called for the reinforcement of metropolitan governance to further advance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through enhanced policy coherence and cross-sectoral alignment. We celebrate this recognition from UN-Habitat and assume responsibility as leaders on the metropolitan path towards sustainable development.

During the EMA Forum, presidents, mayors and political representatives discussed the challenges faced by our respective metropolises and shared their innovative solutions. These discussions were particularly insightful, focusing on subjects such as climate change innovation,

skills shortages in metropolitan labour markets, and the need to become partners in European and national policy design processes.

In this regard, the Helsinki Political Declaration – adopted during the Forum – urges the European Union (EU) institutions, and the incoming European Commission and Parliament in particular, to clearly acknowledge the role of metropolitan areas within the EU and secure their participation in the collaborative journey towards a stronger Europe by integrating them into the institutional architecture of the Union.

The Declaration also focuses on six crucial points to empower metropolitan areas as incubators of innovation and catalysts for the dual green and digital transition. These pathways will lead to transformative actions, offering solutions that promise a brighter future for our citizens. Nor does the declaration forget Ukraine, condemning Russia's aggression on Ukrainian territory and reaffirming commitments adopted in the 2022 EMA Forum in Katowice.

This publication, which encompasses the Helsinki Political Declaration and the primary statements made by all the participants during the EMA Forum in Helsinki, is a solid contribution to the debate on the role of metropolitan areas in the EU. We hope you will find it an inspiring read and look forward to seeing all of you again in Amsterdam in 2024.

Antonio Balmón

*Executive Vice-president of the AMB
and Mayor of Cornellà de Llobregat*

Markku Markkula

*President of the Board of the Helsinki-
Uusimaa Region*

Helsinki-Uusimaa Political Declaration

On 29 September 2023, as mayors, leaders and political representatives of the European Metropolitan Authorities (EMA), we convened in Helsinki for the 8th European Metropolitan Authorities Forum. Our collective purpose is to propel the visionary agenda of our metropolitan areas within a comprehensive strategy to expand the scope of green, digital and labour market transformations. With unwavering determination, we pledge to foster a sustainable, innovative and inclusive future for all.

Considerable achievements have already been made and, in this regard, we welcome the recent normative resolution approved by UN-Habitat in June 2023, which calls for the reinforcement of metropolitan governance to further advance the SDGs through enhanced policy coherence and cross-sectoral alignment. Furthermore, we applaud the METREX initiative for having launched a Manifesto for a Metropolitan Europe as part of its Metropolitan Vision for Europe 2050. This initiative is dedicated to developing metropolitan-level solutions for a prosperous, safe and sustainable Europe.

As stated in Katowice on 27 June 2022, we firmly condemn Russia's aggression on Ukrainian territory, which has had a tremendous impact on Europe and globally. European Metropolitan Authorities members are committed to supporting Ukrainian refugees and exploring present and future actions to rebuild the country.

In light of the pressing challenges that confront us, we acknowledge the urgency of our shared responsibilities:

- the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events demand our swift and decisive action to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and preserve biodiversity;
- the evolving dynamics of global trade, resource allocation and technological innovation require that we follow a policy of strategic autonomy to ensure our resilience in the face of changing circumstances;
- and the aftermath of a global economic downturn necessitates a unified effort to support the steady recovery of the EU/EEA zone and restore economic vitality.

Strengthening inclusive growth through green and digital transformation

As we navigate the complexities of the current landscape, we are resolute in our commitment to shaping a collective future that benefits every European citizen. We pledge to harness the potential of our metropolitan areas as incubators of innovation and catalysts for the twin green and digital transition. In our pursuit of carbon neutrality, we are steadfast in leveraging the transformative power of digital technologies to drive down carbon emissions across diverse industries.

1. Advancing circular economy, climate action and affordable green housing

We cannot overstate the pivotal role of European metropolitan areas in facilitating a circular economy and green transition. To effectively mitigate climate change,

increase resource efficiency and combat the degradation of biodiversity and the economy, we call upon European leaders to establish concrete circular economy targets and to seamlessly integrate these into policymaking decisions. Recognising the extensive potential for circularity in sectors ranging from electronics, plastics, textiles, energy, construction and food, we advocate for an environment that fosters innovation and offers creative financing solutions; supports tax incentives to promote circular economy practices; and shifts from taxing labour to taxing pollution and resource use, thus enabling systemic change and the propagation of a regenerative economy.

Housing is another critical concern for our metropolises as they grapple with an unprecedented scarcity and pricing crisis that affects numerous families. Ensuring the right to access quality housing is a fundamental political and social challenge faced by our metropolises.

2. Nurturing skills for green and digital transition

The seismic shifts brought about by the dual green and digital transition require a workforce equipped to harness emerging technologies, drive innovation and propel Europe towards a sustainable future. We must emphasise the urgency of updating and enhancing skills and competence within our metropolitan areas. Through investment in educational and workforce training initiatives and engaging young people in climate actions and projects, we cultivate the requisite expertise, encourage international collaboration and attract skilled professionals to align our workforce with the demands of present and future opportunities.

3. Elevating European strategic competitiveness

Recent geopolitical events have underscored the fragility of global supply chains. We are primed to overcome these challenges with our rich educational resources, spirit of innovation, commitment to fair competition and the unified EU market. By taking the lead in addressing global obstacles, we bolster Europe's competitive edge and global

influence. This also entails the nurturing of small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups in recognition of their potential to drive transformative change.

4. Forging a trustworthy digital landscape

Establishing a reliable and resilient data-sharing ecosystem is paramount in an increasingly digital world. Our policies on digital trade must mirror our interests, empowering businesses of all sizes within the EU. Building upon the achievements of the von der Leyen Commission, exemplified by the AI Act, Digital Services Act, Digital Market Act, and Data Governance Act, we are committed to formulating a European framework, rooted in human-centric values, that promotes trust, resilience and ethical data usage.

5. Enhancing metropolitan coalition to achieve the SDGs

As we approach the halfway mark for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), alarmingly, only 12% of measurable targets are on track. To address this, local and subnational governments and stakeholders must play a central role, as two-thirds of the SDGs hinge on metropolitan involvement. Metropolitan solutions, although effective, are beset by institutional, financial and regulatory hurdles. As a matter of urgency, we must strengthen local and metropolitan governance to drive SDG implementation in the final phase of the 2030 Agenda.

We are committed to strengthening metropolitan governance through stronger policy coherence, cross-sectoral alignment, multi-stakeholder engagement and participation to accelerate the six focal points for transformative actions in the context of the SDGs: food systems; energy access and affordability; digital connectivity; education, jobs and social protection; and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

6. Empowering metropolitan areas in European policies

European policies should amplify economic, social and territorial cohesion across EU regions and metropolitan areas. These areas are the nuclei of growth, education, research and unity, proving their resilience in times of crisis. Challenges such as health, education, housing, mobility, pollution, biodiversity, climate change, inequality and migrant inclusion can be better addressed from a metropolitan perspective. European metropolitan areas are committed to EU Missions and are willing to take responsibility.

In the post-2027 era, we advocate for robust support for the sustainable and innovative development of metropolitan areas, particularly in the dual green and digital transition. To create a Europe that genuinely serves its citizens, we must elevate the vision of metropolitan areas in policy planning, management and execution. Replete with multi-sectoral and multi-level partnerships, these areas are essential arenas for the realisation of this vision. We also call on the EU/EEA to engage with its Member States in giving metropolitan areas a greater say in national design, implementation and evaluation of EU policies and funds, in this way ensuring that the interests and needs of metropolitan areas receive due consideration in the implementation of EU policies in the territories.

United under the banner of progress, sustainability and resilience, as EMA members we are poised to lead the charge in innovation, driving transformative actions and offering solutions that will shape a brighter future for all the citizens of Europe.

Through our commitment to circular economy principles, the nurturing of essential skills, the fostering of strategic competitiveness and the assurance of a secure digital future, we pledge to the European Union, the new European Commission and the new European Parliament resulting from the June 2024 elections to clarify the role of metropolitan areas within the EU/EEA, integrating them into the institutional architecture of the Union for greater involvement in this collaborative journey towards a stronger Europe.

Members of European Metropolitan Authorities

29 September 2023



From left to right: Antonio Balmón, Omar Al-Rawi, Henryk Borczyk, Joanna Brzezińska, Elzibeta Burtan, Giuseppe Cirillo, Adrian Craciun, Azahara Dominguez, Juraj Droba.

EMA in numbers

58 metropolises
22 countries
122 million inhabitants



Helsinki EMA Forum in figures

80 participants
14 countries
25 cities, metropolitan areas or regions

PARTICIPANTS

City Council of Vienna, Barcelona Metropolitan Area, Gornośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolia, City of Lodz, Krakow Metropolis Association, City of Brno, Naples Metropolitan City, Constanta Metropolitan Area Association, Guipuzkoa Province, Bratislava Region, Metropole Ruhr GmbH, Brussels-Capital Region, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Wrocław, Grand Lyon, City of Warsaw, Bucharest Metropolitan Area, Bilbao Metropolia-30, Viken County, Rome Metropolitan City, Porto Metropolitan Area, Turin Metropolitan City, Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam.

EMA Helsinki 2023

Welcome and greetings



Antonio Balmón
*Executive Vice-president of the
Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB)
and Mayor of Cornellà de Llobregat*

Metropolitan areas and cities are not merely geographical spaces; they also serve as vibrant human hubs where intense interactions thrive. These urban centres are directly shaped by the daily activities and concerns of their inhabitants. Therefore, it is crucial to pay close attention and develop policies that influence the course of everyday life in these areas.

The AMB is committed to fostering a metropolis that leaves no one behind, addressing issues that include mobility, social and economic policies, urban planning, climate change mitigation, sustainable and affordable housing, equality, water supply and security policies.

The AMB created EMA in 2015, and it has become a platform for political dialogue between metropolises, European institutions and national and regional governments. European Metropolitan Authorities meetings provide a space to share experiences and learn from each other's approaches to common issues.

Finally, it is important to underscore the significance of human potential, particularly in terms of innovation and creativity, as critical factors in addressing the challenges listed above. The European green and digital transition cannot be undertaken without a transformation in labour skills.

Welcome and greetings



Reetta Vanhanen
Chairperson of the City Council of Helsinki

The 2023 EMA meeting will focus primarily on the global climate change crisis and the urgent challenge of securing a skilled labour force currently affecting the European regions. A skilled workforce is crucial to fostering innovation and prosperity in response to the challenges of this new century. Climate change has transitioned from a distant concern to a pressing issue that national, local and metropolitan authorities must immediately address. They bear the responsibility to formulate and implement policies to mitigate its effects and prepare both citizens and urban infrastructures for the years ahead.

Worthy of particular mention is Helsinki's ambitious carbon neutrality programme, which incorporates a range of comprehensive strategies for reducing emissions in the coming years, encompassing

a shift towards renewable energy sources, sustainable transportation solutions, energy-efficient buildings and more. Embracing the concept of a circular economy offers an opportunity to redesign and reconsider resource utilisation to minimise waste production. By actively managing waste systems and promoting sustainable consumption practices, Helsinki is committed to investing in sustainable urban development and health-oriented thinking.

Clean energy and sustainable transformation are at the forefront of this effort, with significant investments in technology and environmental initiatives aimed at combating climate change as well as the creation of a more equitable and friendly environment.

Keynote speech I

EU & Helsinki Region: How to invent the future?



Markku Markkula

President of the Board of the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Former President of the European Committee of the Regions

Failure to take action on the part of any metropolitan area or region will have a collective impact on all the others. Therefore, it is important to share a common vision and follow a strategic approach in our actions. To achieve this shared vision, it is crucial to foster cooperation and collaboration across stakeholders in the public and private sectors, as well as among owners, creators and citizens.

Metropolitan areas are committed to a digital, clean and sustainable transformation, in alignment with the SDGs set by the UN for 2030. The

European Union offers an opportunity to focus on reducing emissions and implementing policies for smart and carbon-neutral metropolises, as well as adapting to climate change.

The Helsinki-Uusimaa regional council is focusing on three specific targets: (1) achieving carbon neutrality by 2030, (2) increasing research and development investments (with the government committing to allocate 4% of the Finnish GDP), and (3) raising the import rate to over 80%. This last target is closely tied to the country's smart specialisation strategy. The modernisation of industry is also a key concern, particularly given the significant impact of the ongoing digitalisation process.

Technology plays a pivotal role, and it is crucial to acknowledge the benefits of investing in research and development and collaborating with research

centres and universities to harness deep technology for the benefit of municipalities and society as a whole. Finland is one of the most innovative countries in Europe as a result of such investment and collaboration.

It is also important to consider well-being and a harmonious balance with nature as broader indicators of success beyond GDP. To this end, urban and land-use planning are two very important tools, particularly in addressing issues such as the interplay between energy and housing, transportation challenges, and ensuring that remote rural areas are not left behind.

Finally, circular economy must be considered a priority in our policies and programmes, as part of a holistic approach to achieving the SDGs. Key actions for the years ahead in Finland include focusing on health, digitalisation, emission reduction, minimising environmental impact, fostering innovation and empowering the younger generation.

Panel I

Innovations: Accelerating or mitigating climate change?

Focusing on circular economy solutions and policies in combating climate change and the role of metropolises as innovative hubs



Panel participants
from left to right:

Omar Al-Rawi
Hein van der Loo
Julia Frohne
Pekka Timonen
Pierluigi Sanna

Hein van der Loo

*Mayor of Almere, Metropolitan
Region Amsterdam (MRA)*

There is a very high level of awareness of the acceleration of climate change in our society, but this is not matched by an equivalent level of action. This is our main challenge and one that can be confronted through two key ideas. The first of these is the significance of alignment between public and private sectors for overall effectiveness. The second underscores the necessity to think and act conceptually, strategically and collectively, while also encouraging individual actions.

Metropolises are the heart of the circular economy, where business initiatives and actions come to life. Within this sphere, governments play a crucial role in numerous initiatives, alongside other significant actors.

The MRA is currently involved in various initiatives closely related to the circular economy. For instance, the fashion industry is working diligently to reduce waste production and create sustainable, recycled fashion within a circular economy system. Another example involves waste-to-energy initiatives, particularly in relation to circular building and sustainable construction projects. This proves that innovation and change do not necessarily have to be radical or disruptive; every small action contributes to the bigger picture.

Pekka Timonen*Mayor, City of Vantaa*

Vantaa is part of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, with ambitious plans that include reducing emissions and taking action to combat climate change. But how to achieve these goals in the shortest possible time frame and the steps we must take to steer us in the right direction are questions that remain to be addressed.

The primary objective is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. This means that emissions produced need to

be offset by environmentally friendly actions. To achieve this goal we need to make significant investments in the energy sector. The top priority is to swiftly transition away from fossil fuels. To this end, a collaboration has been established with a company committed to transitioning from non-renewable energy sources to more sustainable alternatives.

At the same time, the importance of a collaborative approach needs to be emphasised. Although solid plans and strategies are already in place, their successful implementation depends on the commitment of all the parties involved. Innovation is a key factor in our journey and an

environment supportive of new initiatives needs to be created to foster it, both within the local economy and the global market.

Governing bodies must facilitate market access for new businesses and regulate their operations, thus paving the way for innovative solutions to the pressing global challenges we face.

Omar Al-Rawi*Member of the Vienna City Council*

Vienna is currently placing its primary emphasis on the social dimension of climate change, with social cohesion playing a key role in its strategy. Although recent concerns, such as rising prices and inflation, remain significant, the most pressing issues in today's societies are climate change and the circular economy. In this regard, we must consider how major cities can redouble their innovative initiatives to meet these challenges.

In Europe, we can find many excellent examples of how

to implement the necessary policies to address these problems collectively. The Vienna City Council, for example, takes responsibility for social housing, and promotes innovative projects related to the use of sustainable energy, waste deceleration and smart city initiatives.

Simultaneously, the city has also embarked on an industrial endeavour, seeking solutions for repairing and prolonging the useful life of electrical devices as part of a policy to promote sustainability and reduce the use of fossil fuels. Similar initiatives include recycling old devices, the Slow Food project, connecting different sectors such as transportation, and reversing the delocalisation of production centres by bringing

them back into the city's territory, among others.

As a result, the level of awareness has increased and we are witnessing a willingness to change the current situation. Every day, more people are getting involved and committed, creating a dynamic that will establish itself in the coming years and lead to positive and healthy competition to find new solutions. Innovation is the cornerstone of success.

Pierluigi Sanna*Deputy Mayor, Metropolitan City of Rome*

Time is crucial when it comes to addressing climate change. In Italy and the Mediterranean region, the impacts of climate change are already being felt, and Rome is one of the worst affected cities in the region. The Metropolitan Area of Rome is therefore dedicating both time and resources to two key investments.

First and foremost, deforestation is a critical issue. A three-year plan has

been developed, supported by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, with the aim of planting a million trees.

The second key concern is waste management. Given the significant challenges faced by Rome in this regard, we are in the process of establishing a new waste management strategy. It is important to inject a sense of urgency into these discussions. It is a very serious and complex problem, and any solutions need to be equally substantial.

Additionally, there is the energy aspect to consider, and innovation will play a pivotal role in resolving many of these issues. Italy has the potential to harness energy resources and

strengthen renewable energy sources, making them more reliable. Certain obstacles have yet to be overcome, however, particularly in the case of solar and wind energy sources.

Therefore, innovation strategy should focus on finding solutions to reduce energy waste and improve energy efficiency. For now, these primary steps are being taken to work towards the shared goal of achieving environmental neutrality.

Julia Frohne*CEO of Business Metropole Ruhr GmbH*

The Ruhr metropolitan area is complex to manage due to its large size, encompassing 53 municipalities. The area is subject to continuous structural changes, especially in its industrial sector. Although historically dominated by coal and steel-intensive industries, it now needs to pivot towards a more competitive and sustainable industrial model.

Currently, with the advent of new energy possibilities, technologies and the internet, the region stands

at the forefront of industrial transformation. In its pursuit of achieving carbon neutrality, the Ruhr region is guiding its intensive industry towards hydrogen production. While promising strides have already been made, there is an urgent need to speed up the process. To achieve the goal of carbon neutrality by 2030, the reduction of CO₂ emissions must be accelerated.

A notable example of a pragmatic initiative in this area is the successful project to restore the Emscher River, which traverses the Ruhr Valley. For decades, the Emscher served as the region's sewer, with large industries causing serious pollution and degradation. Over a span of thirty years, the transformation

of the river has been effectively accomplished, and within the initial budget limits. This serves as a clear illustration of how careful planning and restructuring can yield positive results.

Finally, a transnational approach to actions needs to be adopted, disregarding borders and thinking beyond them. Collaboration and trust between neighbouring countries is essential, as the consequences of climate change will be shared by all.

Keynote speech II

Finland and Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, trailblazers in clean energy



Kai Mykkänen
Minister of Climate and
Environment of Finland

The housing construction sector is currently navigating one of its most challenging cyclical economic situations. However, the realm of green energy and climate neutrality offers a promising forward path. Finland has made strides in this direction, but has also raised the question of whether the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2035 is in fact feasible or whether adjustments must be considered.

The key aspects of achieving carbon neutrality are the shift towards clean and renewable energy sources, and reducing CO₂ emissions. Carbon neutrality requires the striking of a delicate balance between making environmentally responsible decisions while considering the market economy. The aim must be to avoid compromising the competitiveness of the energy sector or switching to alternative energy sources that may increase prices.

Nonetheless, promising progress has been made and Finland has made significant efforts to transition to greener electricity production.

For instance, substantial investments in hydrogen have been made as well as in wind and nuclear energy. Over the last twenty months, wind capacity has doubled, achieving its highest capacity to date. In addition, Finland has inaugurated Europe's largest single nuclear plant, which now contributes between 40% and 50% of the country's electricity production.

Energy required for heating plays a crucial role in Finland, given its cold climate. The utilisation of underground deposits could potentially meet a significant portion of its year-round heating needs. The focus is on heating modern urban areas by harnessing solar energy during the summer to generate heat without resorting to burning fossil fuels.

There is a strong consensus among Finnish citizens regarding the transition away from fossil fuels. This shift has likely been influenced by recent geopolitical events. Industry has adapted to reduce its reliance on Russian gas and, despite the impact on prices in Europe, Finland has proven its resilience and demonstrated energy autonomy and security.

Another concern is the issue of deforestation. Some forests are experiencing slower growth, possibly due to dry early summers and increased harvesting as part of the transition to bioenergy, replacing coal and gas. This government is committed to implementing measures that support the growth of green areas without compromising necessary harvesting levels.

In conclusion, two key points must be emphasised. Firstly, innovation is paramount. Technology-based solutions are actively being promoted and have garnered substantial investment interest in the country by demonstrating energy solutions and new projects. Evidence of this is the successful development of solutions to the challenges of previous decades,

such as acid rain, cancer, deforestation in Europe and ozone layer depletion. Humanity has come together, looked to innovation and found positive, effective solutions to these issues. Today, working globally and in solidarity, we must seek innovative solutions to tackle current challenges, such as how to curb carbon emissions.



Panel II

Solving the skills shortage in the green and digital transformation

What is the role of metropolitan areas in modernising labour market policies and services, assessing and anticipating skills needed and promoting equal opportunities for all?



From left to right:

Johanna Juselius

Juraj Droba

Idoia Postigo

Denise Wall

Juraj Droba

President of the Bratislava Region

The need for transformation requires efficient measures in both economic and social spheres, particularly as we move towards 2030. One significant challenge faced by our region is the notable investment gap when compared to Western European countries. We inherited poorly maintained roads, inadequate educational facilities and a scarcity of resources. To effectively address the pressing challenges and unique needs specific to the metropolitan regions, it is

essential that we also secure sufficient financial support for our metropolitan authorities to address the structural problems they face.

In terms of addressing workforce shortages, the options include importing talent, nurturing local skills, or creating conditions to retain and develop the region's workforce. Opting for the third of these as the most sustainable approach, it is crucial to engage all stakeholders. The dynamics of the labour market have evolved significantly in recent years, with new job opportunities emerging. Equipping our workforce with the necessary expertise in the technologies

essential for green and digital transitions is therefore critical.

In this regard, education is a foremost priority for us, with the focus on quality, innovation, active collaboration, partnerships and inclusivity for disadvantaged sectors. Furthermore, lifelong learning, and formal and informal educational activities play a crucial role in reducing skill mismatches and adapting to changes and developments in the labour market. By emphasising collaboration, education and sustainable workforce solutions, the region aims to bridge the investment gap and achieve its transformative goals by 2030.

Idoia Postigo*General Director of Bilbao
Metropoli-30*

Bilbao has historically been an industrial hub for low-cost construction and the steel industry. However, the crisis that occurred 30 years ago brought about new needs and made it clear that private corporate initiatives alone would not be sufficient to steer the transformation of the region. The Guggenheim Museum has become an icon of this change that turned an industrial region into a modern cultural metropolis. Such a physical transformation necessitates a change in cultural mentality, which has played a crucial role in shaping the evolving personalities and abilities of its population.

In the face of global competition for investment, Bilbao and its metropolitan area actively engage in projects to enhance the region's appeal. "Professionalism for the Future Bilbao", for example, inspired by the Monterrey Institute of Technology, concentrates on skills development through diverse actions. The post-2008 crisis initiative, "Centro de Vida y Carrera", connects students with various social realities, emphasising ethics and soft skills.

Efforts in the Vizcaya region focus on creating networks and social hubs to attract individuals to settle in the area. Key actions include addressing territorial equity, countering the drain of skilled individuals from non-capital cities, considering equity in the green and digital transition, and addressing social equity

to avoid living condition disparities based on technical skills.

The Metropoli-30 plan underscores the need for collaboration between the public sector, the private sector and society to drive substantial transformation. It advocates for a fluid conversation between companies, the educational system and university institutions. While urgent attention is required to address skill shortages, particularly in health professions, it is crucial to recognise that training for expertise is a long-term process demanding timely attention.



Johanna Juselius

Chief Specialist, Advocacy, Helsinki-Uusimaa Region

The Finnish Government has set the target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2035, with the Helsinki Metropolitan area leading the way by embarking on this journey five years ahead of the national timeline. This regional initiative not only exemplifies a commitment to environmental sustainability but also positions our area as a trailblazer, setting a noteworthy example for the entire country. Acknowledging the significance of a national approach, particularly in environmental sustainability and digitalisation, Finland has set ambitious digitalisation targets, leading to its prestigious top position on Europe's Digital Economy and Society (DESI) index.

The national digital strategy, aligned with the European framework, emphasises that comprehensive skills development requires substantial investment in digital infrastructure, robust communication networks, data economy infrastructure and cybersecurity capabilities. Despite abundant opportunities in the digital domain, there is often an underutilisation of resources and a concurrent shortage of skilled labour, necessitating collaboration between companies and industries to address these challenges.

Potential solutions include global talent recruitment and comprehensive domestic workforce training. However, given the notable concern regarding unequal access to technology for women, Finland has already taken proactive steps by incorporating

digital tools with this gender perspective into its educational curriculum from preschool stage onwards. The aim is to cultivate independent and skilled individuals equipped with valuable digital competencies, recognising the cross-sector significance of digital skills for the future.

Regional priorities encompass increasing empowerment, engaging all stakeholders, and bridging the gap between education and industry to ultimately boost the employment rate. In alignment with this, we are also working to attract diverse talent by facilitating the entry and stay of migrant workers to contribute to Finland's overall growth and diversity.



Panel III

Metropolitan areas voice EMA demands to European institutions and Member States

Metropolitan areas are better placed to deal with the specific challenges of the green and digital transition, but how can they achieve active representation in the making of European policies and programmes?



From left to right:

Jakub Mazur
Jacopo Suppo
Jorge Sequeira
Antonio Balmón

Antonio Balmón

*Executive Vice-president
 of the AMB and Mayor of
 Cornellà de Llobregat*

The Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB) comprises 36 municipalities that collaborate collectively to achieve common goals. Home to half the population of Catalonia, our territory has been a joint project for over 40 years, involving different administrations, resources and political sensitivities. It is the administration with the third-largest budget in the region and plays a crucial role for our citizens by managing powers related to mobility and transport, waste management, water supply, sustainability, environmental policies, housing, urban planning, and economic and social development.

The AMB has a direct relationship with all levels of

administrations: local, regional, national and European. Given that our competencies require us to collaborate with outside organisations, the AMB has been cooperating with other institutions since its inception.

Despite these efforts, metropolitan areas have not yet achieved full integration into the design and execution of national and European policies and programmes. The competencies we manage have a daily impact on our citizens. Therefore, specific resources and institutional involvement are imperative at all levels to guarantee the delivery of high-quality services. It is not enough to view us as merely a consultative or implementing body; we aspire to be

recognised as a fully integrated partner within the structural framework of the European Union.

Consequently, a substantial journey lies ahead. Following the European elections in June, a new European Parliament and Commission will be constituted and it will be our responsibility to foster the metropolitan

dimension before these new representatives. Furthermore, we do not wish to embark on this journey alone; rather, we firmly believe that we can achieve more ambitious goals by collaborating with all of you, our European metropolitan partners.

Jorge Sequeira

Vice-president of Porto Metropolitan Area (AMP)

The AMP maintains robust connections with the national government and plays a pivotal role between the State and the municipalities. It acts as a key player in making collaborative decisions on regulations, participates in the allocation of European funds, maintains an open dialogue with government officials and oversees the state of this northern Portuguese region.

The AMP has established an office in Brussels to foster its relationship with the European institutions while ensuring it remains well informed about EU decision-making processes. Nevertheless, we all know that metropolitan areas still lack institutional involvement at European level, and we believe that a more profound consideration of the metropolitan level should be

mandatory in the design of European policies and funds.

Turning our attention inward to our territory, it is important to reflect on the imperative balance between the city at its core and the rural areas. This equilibrium should be enforced and safeguarded at all administrative levels, with policies crafted to ensure equitable fund distribution among all regions. For instance, although issues such as forest fires or depopulation especially affect rural areas, their impact on urban territories is also relevant.

Considering this framework, metropolitan areas are the most suitable administrative scale at which to address these problems, and should therefore play a more significant role in institutional decision-making. Collaborative efforts are paramount, and EMA is an excellent initiative to work at this level. Simultaneously, a unified path of action among all our metropolitan European partners should be reached, outlining goals, policies

and recommendations for implementation that are common to all of us. This would send a strong message to the European institutions and lend greater weight to our metropolitan voice.

Jacopo Suppo*Deputy Mayor, Metropolitan City of Turin*

Turin is currently in a fortunate position as it has secured a substantial amount of European funding for investment in social and urban development, public services and infrastructure. This investment is viewed as a significant opportunity in our territory.

It is now essential to adopt a different approach to future needs, and substantial changes must therefore begin to be implemented. Turin is home to a multitude of manufacturing

industries, making our territory a leader in this sector. Turin's 312 municipalities encompass a range of conditions, from urban cities to rural areas, with a notable agricultural segment. Therefore, it is imperative to formulate policies that can accommodate these differences and work towards progress.

This new approach must begin by working at every level of intervention, not only at national level, but also engaging mayors, smaller parties and citizens of municipalities, as all play a pivotal role in driving change.

The environment is the primary focus. Regrettably, Turin is one of the most polluted metropolitan areas in Europe, and this significantly affects the well-

being and health of its citizens. It is therefore vital to develop tools that protect and build safe and clean infrastructure, and prioritise citizen well-being. This means providing our citizens with the necessary conditions for positive development and recognising them not merely as consumers of these policies but as their direct beneficiaries.

A number of notable solutions have been achieved through collaboration among key regions and cities in Italy. Consequently, cooperation among the main Italian metropolitan cities and other institutions will be encouraged and supported in further policy development.

Jakub Mazur*First Deputy Mayor of Wrocław and President of Metrex*

Metropolitan areas should be actively represented in the EU, playing a crucial role in decision-making and receiving inclusion in funding programmes. Achieving this goal requires the ongoing promotion of a European metropolitan partnership. In addition, beyond sharing ideas, substantial funding is essential to support policy implementation. Municipalities and metropolitan regions need specialised tools to address the challenges of infrastructure transitions, green initiatives and digitalisation, as these aspects are pivotal to the future.

Metropolitan areas find themselves at the forefront of the battle. For years, they have dealt with the most pressing issues in cities that have evolved over decades. Metropolitan regions and cities encompass a significant portion of the population, necessitating investments in infrastructure, public transportation and housing policies.

Europe finds itself at a critical juncture with elections approaching in many Member States and European elections next year. The results of these elections will be closely monitored, though from afar, since it is the political parties that will largely determine future demands and courses of action to be followed. In many cases, the will of national government departments does

not align with metropolitan aspirations and needs.

Nonetheless, a consensus has been reached at the European metropolitan level, and a roadmap formulated in the form of a manifesto under the METREX initiative. The next step is to engage in discussions with party representatives to transmit the importance of this strategic document, which brings together social needs and objectives. It is of paramount importance to convey these ideas and elevate them to the national level. Therefore, continuous negotiations with the central authority must take place in the future to help shape new policies.

Final notes

A global perspective of the metropolitan fact



Rafael Forero

Policy, Governance and Metropolitan Expert at UN-Habitat

The metropolitan hub of UN-Habitat (MetroHUB) encompasses various critical responsibilities, one of which is to disseminate EMA's collaborative experience to other regions, including Africa, Latin America and Asia. The aim is to demonstrate how metropolitan authorities can foster cooperation and elevate the role of metropolitan entities in the international scenario.

With regard to the EMA's Political Declaration, the reference to the SDGs is worthy of mention. Citizens of societies around the world are living in a challenging period, since the reality is that only 12% of the SDG targets are on track. Hence, it is imperative to realign

strategy and involve subnational levels, especially regional and metropolitan, in achieving better outcomes in this arduous but essential endeavour. The EMA's Political Declaration demonstrates a significant degree of awareness and alignment with these objectives.

In June 2023, during the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly held in Nairobi, for the first time a normative resolution was established recognising the metropolitan level and the role of metropolitan authorities in localising sustainable development agendas. The determination of EMA, as manifested in its declaration, to be acknowledged as a significant actor with greater empowerment could significantly support the implementation of other UN resolutions as well.

The path to bolstering the metropolitan level on the international stage requires a robust connection between the world of nations and the world of cities. The traditional configuration of the last century, where international cooperation was primarily confined to countries and nations, has evolved. Nowadays, to ensure the effective implementation of global goals and address sustainability challenges, city diplomacy is indispensable, and metropolitan authorities play a pivotal role in this regard.

UN-Habitat is keen to establish a permanent collaboration with EMA. While progress has already been made through engaging in meaningful bilateral work, discussing significant ideas, collecting data, and inspiring and developing projects, the aim is to formalise and institutionalise this collaboration. The work of EMA must be elevated to UN, OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and EU policy level.

Another goal to pursue is to extend the recognition of this emerging reality of metropolitan regions to other countries, with especial focus on the UN General Assembly. To achieve this, the development of Voluntary Metropolitan Reviews of SDG implementation is highly recommended. Metropolitan areas are making a greater contribution than is currently being reported. It is therefore of critical importance to enhance reporting and data, and systematise information to cast a spotlight on projects undertaken and ideas generated. A series of voluntary metropolitan reviews will serve as evidence of the importance of metropolitan authorities in this new era of multilateralism.

Conclusions



Markku Markkula

President of the Board of the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, Former President of the European Committee of the Regions

Several crucial and recurring themes have been discussed during the EMA Forum. Foremost among these is an emphasis on the necessary path to follow, highlighting the essential need for speed, especially in the context of innovation. Innovation is another term that has come up frequently, underscoring the need to elevate the role of innovation in the policymaking process. We must redouble our efforts to implement the ideas expressed here, both within the EU and beyond its borders.

Today, it appears that EMA is ready to demonstrate and perform its role. We must take unequivocal action and decisions, and broadcast to Europe and the wider world how metropolises can

contribute to the political landscape. Authorities must be convinced that metropolitan regions are capable and ready to make substantial impacts, transcending what cities alone can accomplish.

Additionally, metropolitan areas should exert more influence through straightforward steps taken by the people, for the people, and together with the people, perhaps through collaboration with members of the Committee of the Regions or the European Parliament who share the interests expressed in the forum, and among EMA and METREX members.

The EMA's Political Declaration outlines various points of action, such as the digital and green transition, fostering European competitiveness and forming coalitions to work together to achieve common goals. These desired outcomes must be considered acknowledging the urgency and importance of unity.

Metropolitan strategies must be designed to empower

conurbations to create their own narratives. In doing so, they can explore ways to integrate their various elements and facilitate transformation, encompassing sustainable development, climate neutrality, and the integration of economic, social and cultural aspects. Culture, in particular, plays a crucial role in learning and ensuring inclusivity, and in the promotion of creativity. Initiatives like the Bauhaus, with its innovative vision, must serve as an example and inspiration.

Finally, the emissions reduction trajectory currently falls short of the 2030 target. In the coming years, the European Commission will seek assistance to reach these targets, and influence in this matter must be exerted. Establishing a European framework for EMA's work is paramount, defining priorities and concrete steps to transition from mere dreams and visions to an engaged transformation involving various stakeholders.



From left to right: Hein van der Loo, Jacopo Suppo, Jorge Sequeira, Cécile Houpert, Joanna Brzezińska, Omar Al-Rawi, Elzibeta Burtan, Henryk Borczyk, Giuseppe Cirillo, Idoia Postigo, Antonio Balmón, Jakub Mazur, Michal Olszweski, Adrian Craciun, Azahara Dominguez, Gianina Panatau, Christophe Meunier, Filip Chvátal, Juraj Droba, Markku Markkula, Roger Ryberg, Pierluigi Sanna.



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