

City-Regions in Europe: the Potentials and the Realities

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to analyse the recently very fashionable ‘city-region’ (metropolitan area) issue. Two very different sources of information will be taken into account for the same group of cities. One of these is a very fresh ESPON analysis on urban functions for all EU metropolitan areas, which differentiates between morphological and functional urban areas. The other is a recent URBACT project, which focuses on exploring administrative set-ups and territorial policies within eight European metropolitan areas (Birmingham, Budapest, Cologne, Frankfurt, Glasgow, Lille, Malmö and Milan). The combination of these two empirical sources allows the comparison between geographic-economic ‘realities’ and administratively-politically dominated ‘actions’ for the eight case study urban areas.

On this empirical basis it is interesting to explore the large differences between EU countries and regions towards city-region cooperation. Dominated one the one hand by local conflicts between settlements of the same area and on the other hand by the challenge for international competition between metropolitan areas, there are substantially different cases observable, how metropolitan-wide policies are built up (top-down or bottom-up) in relation of planning, economic and regulatory functions. From the analysis it becomes clear that in the European context the boundaries of national states and administrative-political regions (and settlements) constitute very strong barriers against policies which would aim to optimize the position of the metropolitan areas.

Within the general topic the paper aims to have a special outlook on public transport solutions on city-region level.

Key Words: city-regions, metropolitan governance, European urban development