

THE COHESION POLICY IN IASI (ROMANIA): MULTISCALAR GOVERNANCE, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND METROPOLISATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the place of the Cohesion Policy (CP) within a multiscalar urban policy constellation that shapes metropolisation dynamics. While there is broad agreement the CP seeks to foster metropolisation at regional scale and above, how this ties into its action at city scale and below in specific urban contexts is not always well understood. Through a mixed-methods case study of the Romanian city of Iași informed by a brennerian perspective, three main questions are tackled: in a given city, does the CP exert a coherent influence upon metropolisation dynamics? How does it weave-into place-specific metropolisation dynamics? How does it relate to other elements of the relevant governance constellation? This paper finds that, while the CP does not have a very coherent action at city scale, it enables local actors' own agendas. Those agendas are oriented towards metropolisation and locational policies broadly compatible with the CP's priorities, because local actors are embedded in and channelled by a multi-scalar policy context of which the CP is a part.

Keywords: Cohesion Policy; urban policy; metropolisation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Qualifying the Cohesion Policy's urban action is not straightforward. Even though, within Romania's Iași County, the city of Iași received 92% of funds spent under the Cohesion Policy's all-important Regional Operational Programme (in Romanian, POR) between 2014 and 2020; managers of the POR insisted in interviews they were not conducting "urban policy". This paper builds upon a case study of Iași to clarify through what levers and in what policy context the Cohesion Policy fosters metropolisation in a city.

1.1. The "metropolisation gap" in Cohesion Policy literature

Over the last four decades, the Cohesion Policy (henceforth "CP") shifted its focus from ensuring balanced regional growth to supporting the growth of larger cities (Lorek, 2015; Vinci, 2021), while simultaneously placing increased emphasis on competitiveness (Ivanov, 2009; Bourdin, 2018). This shift tied into a wider discursive and political reappraisal of the economic, spatial and policy role of larger cities, as well as the increased concentration of people and wealth in such cities – both aspects of "metropolisation" (Veltz, 2000, Kühn & Lang, 2015; Lang & Török, 2017). Widespread as assumptions of a "metropolitan turn" of

the CP at EU and regional scales are, however, how it actually affects fosters metropolitan dynamics *within* cities is less well understood. The problem is that the CP is not an urban policy in any conventional sense, as it lacks the appropriate legal basis, but also that it funds wildly different projects across very different urban contexts. Revealing the incomplete state of current literature, debates still go on as to whether it constitutes a coherent urban policy at all (Vinci, 2021).

This paper thus attempts to tackle three outstanding questions: does the CP, in a given city, have a coherent metropolisation agenda? How does it weave into local urban contexts? And how does it relate to other elements of the governance constellation that fosters metropolisation?

1.2. Theoretical background and case studied

This paper showcases how the CP enables metropolisation in a given city from an urban governance perspective, mobilising concepts from N. Brenner's (2004; 2009) theorisation of State rescaling. The essence of Brenner's thesis is that transformations of urban governance and transformations of national policy priorities are two sides of the same coin. This means urban governance is fundamentally a multiscalar reality, whence, nowadays, a rescaled State regime channels local actors towards metropolitan, competitiveness-oriented policies. This framework is applied to a case study of Iași, historical capital of the Romanian region of Moldova – not to be confused with the neighbouring Republic of Moldavia (Figure 1). This case study was conducted using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. Data on the CP's spending in Moldova was used to build an exhaustive picture of its footprint in the region and the city, while a series of interviews were conducted with urban stakeholders and relevant policy documents examined.



FIGURE 1 – LOCALIZATION OF IASI WITHIN ITS REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

1.3. Plan and conclusions

The first part of this paper provides theoretical context, underscoring the “metropolisation gap” in CP literature, introducing the brennerian framework, and detailing methodology. The second part studies CP projects in relation to different aspects of metropolisation in Iași and local actors’ agendas, while the third explores the policy context in which those agendas are formulated.

This paper’s conclusions are that the CP does not have a single-minded “metropolitan purpose” in Iași. Instead, the CP owes the effect it has upon the city’s metropolisation to the agency of local actors who mobilise the resource it offers towards their own metropolisation agenda. Those agendas are broadly aligned with the CP’s priorities because a broader policy context, of which the CP itself is part, channels local actors in that direction. In sum, the CP enables the metropolisation strategies of local actors, while its governance structure is part of a policy context that channels them towards adopting such strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Descriptions of the CP’s “metropolitan turn” at regional scale

The CP has, since at least 2007, largely focused on fostering economic growth in metropolises. This followed, first, a reorientation of the Policy’s purpose away from spatial rebalancing and towards economic growth, in line with the Lisbon strategy and the Europe 2020 Agenda (Allen, 2010; Ivanov, 2009; Bourdin, 2018; Görmar & al., 2019); and, second, discursive, scientific and political reassessments of the role of large cities in achieving this and other goals (Vinci, 2021; M. Christofakis & A. Papadaskalopoulos, 2011; Lorek, 2015; Kühn & Lang, 2015). The post-2007 CP accordingly operates under a “centre-periphery model of regional integration” (Bourdin, 2018): Cohesion Funds target larger cities that must ultimately “anchor” or “lift” the surrounding regions towards economic growth (Escach, 2017; Baudelle, 2017). Medeiros and van der Zwet (2019) thus estimated that, over the 2014-2020 period, some 40% of ERDF funds would be spent in cities. Given, however, the difficulty to collect usable, Europe-wide data on the CP’s actual spending and the scarcity of case studies, such claims usually build upon readings of relevant programming documents (see for instance Benedek, 2016, or Hadjimichalis, 2019; contrast with Athanassiou, 2021, as an inspiration).

2.2. The influence of the Cohesion Policy upon metropolisation is insufficiently studied

The resulting “metropolitan shift” narrative, however, mostly concerns the regional scale and above; it largely leaves out the question of how the CP influences urban dynamics at city scale. In particular, this paper raises three questions about the CP’s relationship to metropolisation.

1. The CP as a whole is not a straightforward urban policy – not only does it lack the appropriate legal basis, but its priorities and methods have varied wildly across programming periods and cities (Vinci, 2021). This is to the point that authors have denied a coherent EU agenda for cities exists (Atkinson & Zimmerman, 2016). In a single, given city, can the CP be considered to exert a coherent influence upon metropolisation dynamics? Else, how do these dynamics show the imprint of the CP?
2. The CP's action is most prominent in Central-Eastern and Southern Europe. These areas host no global city, but capital cities – whose prominence comes from longer-term factors (Rey & al., 2005) – and a range of medium cities – with widely diverging trajectories (Turcanasu and Rusu, 2008; Coudroy de Lille, 2016). The CP does not have a single type of textbook metropolises to work upon. How then does it, in a given city, weave into place-specific metropolisation dynamics?
3. Metropolisation is, among other things, a result of overlapping policy and governance choices at different scales (Harrison, 2014; Kühn and Lang, 2016; Clark, 2018; Bouba-Olga and Grossetti, 2018). Within a given governance constellation that drives metropolisation in one city, what is the CP's place?

We contend that a case study looking at the CP as one element of a Rescaled Competition State Regime can help answer these questions.

2.3. *The Brennerian framework and its relevance to studying the CP*

From the late 1970s on, according to N. Brenner, western States increasingly concerned with economic growth put growing emphasis on fostering spatial competitiveness. “Dynamic” cities and spaces were to pursue their own locational policies, competing for insertion into global networks. Institutionally, this involved both empowering local government and goading it in new ways towards competitiveness- and growth-centric national priorities. The outcome was the creation of what he dubs Rescaled Competition State Regimes (RCSR): *rescaled* because the nature of the relations between different scales of the State has changed; *a competition State* because competitiveness and economic growth have become overriding objectives of the State; and *regime* because it is the current, provisional outcome of an on-going process.

Through a broad, constructivist concept of “the State” encompassing national, sub-national, and municipal government, Brenner thus links (a) changes in dominant policy goals of the State with (b) changes in the balance and nature of relationships between different levels of government, a process he calls *rescaling*. This implies two key insights. First, that urban governance is an inherently multi-scale reality, involving levels of the State beyond city or metropolitan area governments. Second, that rescaling involves not

merely “siphoning” a quantity of power from one level of government to another, but a transformation in the *nature* of the relationship between them. As Brenner (2009, himself quoting from Peck, 2002) puts it,

“Newly constituted, state-organised interscalar rule-regimes were explicitly designed to facilitate urban locational policies by channelling ‘the strategic options and tactical behaviour of local actors’ towards developmentalist, competitiveness driven agendas.”

The above strongly echoes trends of the CP between the 1990s and the late 2010s – time of its greatest emphasis on competitiveness and metropolises. The EU is what Brenner dubs an *integral* State space, i.e., it is a State as shaping socioeconomic relations across spaces (Brenner, 2009; compare art. 174 TFEU). The CP plays a particular role within this European State, as it represents an attempt not only to foster competitiveness but also to transform the nature of relationships between governance scales (Baun & Marek, 2008; Piattoni, 2016). Approaching the CP through the RCSR framework can help understand both the CP’s own internal functioning and its relation to other elements of the EU integral State space.

3. METHODOLOGY

Though thus conceptually grounded, this paper’s essential outlook is that of a case study. Assembled mostly during fieldwork conducted on-site in Iași in the spring of 2022 (with invaluable aid from the Alexandru Ion Cuza university’s geography department), its material is both qualitative and quantitative. On the qualitative side, twenty-one interviews were conducted with stakeholders, academics, professionals, and citizens of Iași, in Romanian, French, German, and English. This variety of perspectives was complemented with engagement with the normative and semi-normative documents produced around the CP in Moldova, including the Regional Operational Programme and the strategic documents produced by the Iași city council, the Iași metropolitan area, and the North-East Regional Development Agency (ADRNE), among others.

On the quantitative side, data on CP-funded projects was collected from the open databases of the ADRNE, the Romanian Ministry of European Funds, and the Romanian Rural Development Agency (AFIR). This data covers the four main Operational Programmes of the CP in Romania – Major Infrastructures (POIM), Human Capital (POCU), Competitiveness (POC) and Regional (POR) – as well as the EAFRD-funded Rural Development Programme (PNDR). Those five programmes represent some 99,5% of EU structural funds spending in Romania. The database assembled was normalised, and filtered to include only the projects geolocated at County or Locality level (93% of the total). POR, POC and AFIR projects are geolocated at local (LAU2) level in those databases. For POIM and POCU projects, LAU2 geolocation has to be done manually, so that this was only done for projects located within Iași City proper.

Finally, data from Eurostat and Tempo was added for background information, e.g. population. The picture of Structural Funds spending in Iași thus assembled is then interpreted in light of the qualitative material.

Research on the CP within regional sciences is dominated by quantitative methodologies; these, however, often reproduce – in their data, indicators, models – assumptions about the CP (Ribardi re et al., 2014; Grasland and Le Texier, 2015; Bourdin and Ragazzi, 2018). Symmetrically, qualitative research (even critical of the CP) that relies too exclusively on programmatic and evaluative documents produced within the CP ecosystem may overestimate its actual coherence and reach. Thus, Bourdin and Ragazzi (2018) as well as Ayouba et al. (2020) have argued for exploring mixed-methods approaches. The second part of this paper emphasises quantitative analysis while the third mostly relies on qualitative observations, but in both it is strived to crosscheck quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The choice of such a mixed-methods case study is an attempt to address such concerns, while also being relevant to exploring the bottom-up dimensions of the CP. However, it presents a major limit in that, unlike quantitative studies across the EU, it is difficult to generalise its finding across European space.

4. ASPECTS OF METROPOLISATION IN IAȘI: THE COHESION POLICY AND LOCAL ACTORS' AGENDAS

Metropolisation is approached here as a multi-scalar process, involving different types of urban and economic transformations as well as different types of governance at different scales (Veltz, 2000; Brenner, 2009; K hn & Lang, 2016; Lang & T r k, 2017). Studying how relevant dynamics affect given cities may be more fruitful than trying to hammer out a one-size-fits-all definition of “metropolisation” or a “metropolis”, all the more so as reductive overuse of the concept in Central and Eastern Europe has been criticised by Coudroy de Lille (2016). Whether Iași, its local authorities striving for recognition on par with Cluj or Timisoara, is a “metropolis” is an open question to which a categorical answer must be given elsewhere, if at all. Rather, the below section studies CP-funded projects in Iași in relation to five different aspects, or definitions, of metropolisation: regional concentration of people and activities; concentration of high added-value activities; agglomeration-wide integration; insertion into international networks; and city image.

4.1. Regional polarisation and the CP's urban focus in Moldova

Concentration of people and activities is a primary aspect of metropolisation; within Moldova, Iași increasingly concentrates both – as well as European funds. Moldova, identified here with the Romanian “North-East region”, is a shrinking region within which the city of Iași keeps growing (Groza, 2010). According to Eurostat, between 2008 and 2018, the region's population decreased from 3 772 thousands to 3 222 (-14,6%) whereas the Iași Functional Urban Area's (FUA) population waxed from 400 thousands

to 500 thousands inhabitants (+25%), increasing the FUA's share in regional population from 10,6% to 15,5%. Although population data in Romania are sometimes unreliable, the trend here is clear. No GDP data exists at the local level, but Iași County's share in the regional GDP similarly increased from 26,6% in 2007 to 31,2% in 2019.

This picture of regional polarization can be compared with the CP's regional footprint. Using the data described above, CP grants under the POC, POCU, POR and POIM were mapped at the county level. Moreover, projects funded under the POR – the largest Operational Programme in Romania – are geolocated at the local level. This allowed mapping POR spending within Iași's Functional Urban Area (FUA). The main findings are summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1 - GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF COHESION POLICY PROJECTS IN MOLDOVA

	North-East region (Moldova)	Iași County	Iași FUA
Population (thousands inhabitants, 2018) <i>And share of the regional total</i>	3 222 100%	792 24,6%	500 15,5%
Number of CP projects (2014-2020) <i>Idem.</i>	1 469 100%	413 28,1%	No data
CP grants (million euros, 2014-2020) <i>Idem.</i>	1 960 100%	522 26,8%	No data
Number of POR projects, 2014-2020 <i>Idem.</i>	1 086 100%	268 24,7%	233 21,4%
POR grants (million euros, 2014-2020) <i>Idem.</i>	1 489 100%	422 28,3%	388 26%

The most important figure to emerge is that although in 2018 the Iași FUA represented “only” 15% of the Region's population, it received 26% of grants allocated to the region. Strikingly, almost 92% of POR grants allocated to the Iași County were spent in the Iași FUA. This implies that, at a regional scale, concentration of people and economic activities is matched and exceeded by concentration of CP funding in Iași. This fits, perhaps exceeds, assumptions in the literature that the CP would focus on the regional “metropolis”.

4.2. “Metropolitan” economic growth and Cohesion funds

However, assumptions that the CP has assumed a distinctly “metropolitan” dimension also imply it is now a growth-centric policy, geared towards fostering specifically “metropolitan” economic growth. Both detractors and supporters of the CP assume it would single out large cities as the place where it can encourage the rise of high-added value, “knowledge economy” (etc.) activities. That is debatable, due to the heterogeneity – and very ubiquity – of CP-funded projects. This section attempts to assess the repartition of PC intervention by economic sector.

POR, POC, POCU and POIM projects carried out in Iași were all sorted, using the database described above and after exploratory sampling, into categories according to their field of action. Though the categories thus created can be discussed, this allowed a precise view of the CP's impact on different sectors of Iași's economy.

For the Regional Operational Programme, eight categories were devised: (1) Culture (inc. tourism, museums, heritage); (2) Education (inc. higher ed.); (3) Public spaces renewal; (4) Enhancement of buildings' energy efficiency; (5) Support to marginalised populations; (6) Health (inc. medical infrastructures); (7) Transportation; (8) Support to private businesses. Data is summarised in Table 2. It is the last category that interests us here, since grants channelled towards private businesses could be assumed to play a distinctive role in a reshaping of urban economies around notions of metropolitan competitiveness. Two insights stand out. First, although support to private businesses makes up an overwhelming majority of projects funded under the POR, it represents only a fraction of projects' value and grants spent, 10,7 and 15,6% respectively. Mathematically, those projects aimed at private businesses have a rather low value, with a median value of 277 00 euros and an average of 554 000 euros. This gap reflects the particular weight of some larger projects. This leads into the second insight: that the business-support projects funded by the POR are extremely heterogeneous. They range from refurbishing a fitness club to developing infertility therapies, through consolidating a demolition firm and buying computers for a consulting firm specialised in EU funds.

TABLE 2 - CATEGORISATION AND REPARTITION OF POR-FUNDED PROJECTS IN IAȘI CITY

Category	Number of projects And share of the POR total in Iași city	Projects' value (million euros) And share of the POR total in Iași city	Value of EU grants (million euros) And share of the POR total in Iași city
Culture	11 5,1%	30,7 3,5%	29,3 8,1%
Education	5 2,3%	6,8 0,8%	6 1,7%
Public spaces renewal	3 1,4%	9 1%	8,7 2,4%
Energy renovation	5 2,3%	51,6 6%	42,7 11,8%
Support to marginalized populations	12 5,6%	38,8 4,5%	33,3 9,2%
Health	5 2,3%	495,5 57,2%	57,2 15,8%
Transportation	6 2,8%	140,5 16,2 %	127,8 35,4%
Business support	167 78%	92,6 10,7%	56,5 15,6%
POR total in Iași city	214 100%	865,5 100%	361,5 100%

Next, the Competitiveness Operational Programme (POC) funded 78 projects in Iași for 84 million euros of grants (equivalent in value to 23% of the POR). Based on the projects' description in the used databases, 44,4% of its grants went to projects dealing with health or biotechnologies; 30,2% to informatics and communications; and 9% to advanced materials, chemistry and nanotechnology. Other notable areas of interventions were education and teaching. The largest funded project concerns research on bio- and nano-materials at the Petru Poni macromolecular chemistry institute; the second largest, biomedical research at the Grigore Popa University.

The Human Capital Operational Programme (POCU) funded 45 projects for 35 million euros of grants (i.e. 9,7% of the POR). Some of its funding – 27% – went to projects seeking to enhance the skills and employability of already qualified workers, e.g. funding internships for university graduates. However, more than 70% of its grants went to projects either supporting municipal social services, or aimed at preventing school dropout in vulnerable communities. Finally, within Iași (thus leaving out urban interconnection projects), the Major Infrastructures Operational Programme (POIM) mostly financed refurbishing of the city's utilities grids (78% of its grants).

This exploration of projects funded by the CP in Iași city under the POR, POC, POCU and POIM operational programmes highlights their heterogeneity. The POC is indeed focused on high added-value “knowledge economy” sectors, but it represents only 9,2% of CP grants given a green light in Iași județ under those four CP programs; this is significantly more than the POCU (4% of that total) specialised in support to marginalised communities. They are both dwarfed, however, by the POIM (47,5%), which focuses on basic infrastructural improvement. Above all, the POR, second-largest program in Iași (39,3%) and representing the bulk of CP action in Iași outside of infrastructural projects, supports an extremely heteroclit range of projects. Sectorial analysis of CP grants in the Iași județ thus lends credence to the idea that, infrastructure building aside, the CP does not have the kind of coherent focus that would allow it to decisively influence a city towards more “metropolitan” patterns of growth.

4.3. EU Funds and metropolitan integration: issues in Iași and geography of CP intervention

The next two sections review the role of CP funds in relation to another aspect of metropolisation: the integration of Iași's metropolitan area. After a presentation of issues facing the agglomeration, the repartition of CP funds within it, the role of European funds in two towns, and their impact on metropolitan governance are successively studied.

Iași agglomeration includes an inner city, Iași City proper; a functional urban area (FUA) encompassing Iași City and neighbouring towns; and a loose metropolitan association, the Zona Metropolitana Iași (ZMI), regrouping the FUA towns and a further ring of semi-rural towns (cf. figure 2). Three tendencies define urbanisation within the agglomeration) (1) further densification of the inner city, including brownfield retail

and residential development; (2) redeployment of industry away from the inner city and towards the north-west and south-east along the Bahlui valley; (3) residential sprawl, dominated by individual housing, on the valley's slopes and on nearby hills. Currently however, services remain concentrated within the inner city while infrastructures and utilities outside it are under-dimensioned, reflecting (among others) low institutional integration across the agglomeration (Ursu, 2016; Sandu & Groza, 2017; Tentis-Tanase et Tentis, 2019). This challenges not only the CP's objective of territorial cohesion as "balanced and harmonious development [...] within cities", but also metropolisation conceived as greater centre-peripheries integration (see Giffinger & Suitner, 2015).

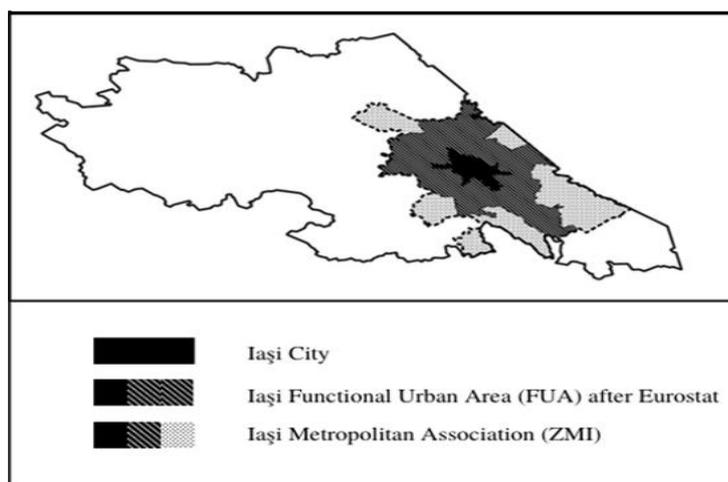


FIGURE 2 – THE IASI METROPOLITN AREA WITHIN IASI COUNTY

Within our database, projects funded within the ZMI under the POR and the POC (the only programs geolocated at LAU level) were sorted according to their location: (A) within Iași city; (B) within communes of the FUA other than Iași City; or (C) within communes of the ZMI outside the FUA. Full results are laid out in Table 3. It appears that, among all POR grants in the ZMI, 94% are spent in the inner city (the value is higher yet for the POC). Bearing in mind, again, that 92% of POR grants allocated to the Iași County were spent in the Iași FUA, the POR's action in Iași county appears concentrated to a remarkable extent within Iași City.

TABLE 3 - SPATIAL REPARTITION OF POR- AND POC-FUNDED PROJECTS WITHIN THE IASI METROPOLITAN AREA

Operational programme	Within the Inner City	Within the FUA outside the inner city	Within the ZMI outside the FUA	ZMI total
Regional OP				
Number of projects	214	18	2	234
Projects value (million euros)	865 (96%)	36,7 (4%)	0,51 (0,06%)	920 (100%)
Grants value (million euros)	362 (94%)	23,9 (6%)	0,47 (0,1%)	386 (100%)
Competitiveness OP				
Number of projects	37	9	1	47
Projects value (million euros)	104 (96,9%)	3,2 (3%)	0,085 (0,8%)	108 (100%)
Grants value (million euros)	70 (96,5%)	2,4 (3,3%)	0,066 (0,9%)	73 (100%)

4.4. EU Funds and metropolitan integration: periurban case studies and governance

To confirm or correct this perspective, case studies were conducted in two periurban towns. Miroslava, West of Iași, is an important manufacturing centre; hosting between 20 and 30 000 inhabitants, it managed to boast the highest municipal income of Romania's non urban communes in both 2015 and 2016. That is because it received, between 2014 and 2020, 11,8 million euros from the POR (almost half of the FUA outside of Iași's total), and 1,6 million from the POC – but also 4,6 million euros in grants from the PNDR, under the CAP's Rural development policy. Those grants funded (1) global overhaul of the town's infrastructures, especially the roads linking it to Iași and the EU market; (2) overhaul of the town's utilities grids; (3) support to the town's business park. Aroneanu, to the Northeast, is on the other hand a residential town that grew from 2 700 inhabitants in 2008 to some 4 000 in 2022. Between 2014 and 2020, about 1,5 million euros from the POR, PNDR, POCU and POC went to the commune's towns (excluding funds granted to agricultural exploitations). They funded the installation of health professionals, heritage renovation, electrical grid overhaul, a sports base, and a community house, among others. Just as EU-funded infrastructural investments made Miroslava viable as an industrial hub, those grants made Aroneanu welcoming to growing numbers of commuters from Iași.

Even though the bulk of CP funds are spent within Iași city, this doesn't prevent local actors from seizing upon any CP and non-CP EU grants available to secure their town's place within the Iași metropolis. They are willing and able to harness EU structural funds towards their projects of urban transformation, whether or not they were fully intended for such a purpose (as seen in "rural" funds funding suburban industrial expansion). In these cases, EU funds so used have an actual transformative effect on the agglomeration, sometimes spectacularly so.

Moreover, studying the influence of CP funds upon metropolitan integration implies looking at its influence upon metropolitan governance. The ZMI is Romania's oldest metropolitan association; it was created in 2004 as a prerequisite to receiving EU (pre-accession) funds. However, this does not in itself prove a substantial effect of the CP upon metropolitan governance, as the ZMI is a very loose association of towns. Bequeathed a narrow legal basis, underfunded (100 000 euros yearly budget), and once staffed by as few as two employees, it was for a time an empty shell. It was, however, revitalized since 2020. The ZMI has reinvented itself as a "matchmaking agency" (in the words of its executive director) setting local government up with EU funding opportunities. That way, it was able to sidestep the limitations of its budget and legal authority, gaining new employees as well as the attention of local authorities, and becoming able to subtly influence the development of Iași's agglomeration. While the CP's action is concentrated in the inner city, EU funds still enable both the efforts of individual towns to secure insertion within the agglomeration and the hesitant emergence of metropolitan governance.

4.5. EU funds and insertion into international city networks

Metropolisation may also imply insertion into transnational cities networks. As Iași stands in a rather peripheral location at European, Romanian and even regional scales, improving its connection to other European cities is an important concern for local actors. A coalition including the City Hall, the County Council and the Chamber of Commerce has pushed through successive overhauls of Iași's airport since 2013 – including a modern airstrip, taxiways, and a new terminal. As a result, whereas in 2010 the airport serviced a lone destination outside in Romania, it now services 22, mainly large Western European cities. The Iași mayoral team and business actors surveyed hail the new airport as a “game changer” that boosted local competitiveness, and remain committed to further expansion. Much of the costs associated with this extensive overhaul were borne by EU funds, essentially from the POIM and the former Sectorial Operational Programme – Transports (POS-T) – covering up to two thirds of each tranche's cost and never less than one third. The CP here conspicuously enabled local actors' strategies to boost their city's competitiveness by plugging it into European city networks.

4.6. Urban attractiveness, culture and the CP

Finally, metropolisation include an important representational dimension. The same local actors are concerned with building up Iași's “cultural infrastructure”, both to assert the one-time Romanian capital's national status and to attract students and young professionals. Among others, four museums were regrouped in a new downtown museum centre, using funds from a CP project unassumingly titled ““consolidating, repurposing and refurbishing the attic of a historic building”. But the flagship project in remaking Iași's image and attractiveness was the renovation of a historic downtown building into the “Braunstein Palace”. Now housing the city's cultural institutes and art galleries, the renovated Braunstein Palace embodies Iași's claim to European, cultural and metropolitan status (Dargaud 2022, unpublished). Like the museum centre, the brunt of associated costs – 3,79 million euros out of 3,86 total – was borne by the CP under axis 5 of the POR, “Developing cultural heritage and tourism as drivers for local economic development”. Less obviously perhaps than with other dimensions of metropolisation, the CP plays an important role in enabling local actors' efforts to bolster the city's attractiveness and fashion its metropolitan image.

5. CHANNELLING LOCAL ACTORS TOWARDS METROPOLISATION STRATEGIES BEYOND THE CP

The above highlights how, in spite of the often dispersed nature of CP efforts, EU funds have been given coherent and effective purpose in propelling suburban towns, connecting Iași internationally, and reshaping its image. The CP's effectiveness in fostering metropolisation appears to rely on, first,

concentration of funding in that large city, and second, on enabling local actors' metropolisation agendas; thus raising the question of multiscalar urban governance. The following sections – building largely on programming documents and interviews with stakeholders – explore the multiscalar urban governance framework that channels local actors towards such agendas, examining first the CP's influence, then that of a broader policy context, and the limits of such channelling.

5.1. Fostering metropolisation agendas: the CP's part and its limits

Both concentration of funds in Iași and channelling of local actors towards metropolisation policies are in part consequences of the CP's governance. The CP has been said to herald the coming of a new era of “multi-level governance” (Piattoni, 2016); at least, it embodies a form of governance (strongly associated with the EU) that is (A) multiscalar, (B) regulatory and (C) growth-focused (cf. Majone, 1999; Baun & Marek, 2008; Surubar, 2021). The four “fundamental principles” of the CP – concentration, programming, additionality, partnership – outline the programme of an RCSR focused on maximising the growth of select places through multiscalar actors partnerships.

CP governance directly and indirectly encourages the concentration of EU funds in larger cities. The CP has set itself explicit goals of fostering the goals of those cities: in 2007-2013 Iași was designated a “growth pole” allocated a specific envelope of funds, and in 2014-2020 it retained some dedicated funding under axis 4 “Sustainable Urban Development” of the POR. 58 million euros of POR funds were earmarked for Iași in 2014-2020, down from 122 million in 2007-2013 (ADRNE interview). Like estimates that 40% of CP funds are allocated to cities, this falls very short of our estimation of POR grants for Iași County over 2007-2022 around 388 million. Alongside this explicit programming, structures of CP governance explain this degree of focus on Iași within the County. Besides funds earmarked for specific cities, most EU funds are subject to competitive bidding. In this process, larger cities are advantaged by (A) the additionality principle and (B) EU grants working as refunds, both of which favour cities with financial firepower; (B) the additionality and partnership principles, which advantage municipalities with institutional and political connexions; (C) their ability to meet the administrative cost of filing a request for CP funds – whereas smaller towns are reduced to farming this process out to private agencies, Iași City Hall has built separate teams for each step of the process. The emphasis on competition and the agency of local actors in forging multiscalar growth coalitions enshrined in CP governance advantage larger cities more than the CP's explicit focus on them.

Besides favouring larger cities, the CP's governance also seeks to influence the form of their urbanisation; that is, to foster among local actors growth-oriented metropolisation agendas. This effort, too, has direct and indirect dimensions. Three nested normative documents guide the use of EU funds – the EU-wide guiding directive for each programming period, the State-level Partnership Agreements, and the regional

or sectorial Operational Programmes. Providing an apparently thorough and constraining normative nexus, they seek to limit the use of CP funds to projects compatible with the Union's priorities. Moreover, CP rules also seek to foster the agency of local actors in pursuing growth strategies. A prerequisite for a local government body unlocking funds is it having a so-called Local Development Strategy (LDS); the redaction of this document must both ensure the efficient use of funds and acculturate local government to the independent pursuit of growth and locational policies.

The CP on its own, however, does not appear able to set the urban agenda of local actors, who enjoy considerable leeway in harnessing its funds to their chosen purpose. Firstly, the CP is saddled by EU actors with multiple, sometimes contradictory objectives (Allen, 2010). This translated in a list of no fewer than eleven Thematic Objectives on the 2014-2020, affording local actors proportionate freedom to cherry-pick funds for their own purposes. Secondly, the choice of regulatory governance alleviates but doesn't solve the fundamental weakness of CP governance: the mismatch between the sheer number of projects funded and the small EC staff tasked with overseeing them. Documents- and accountancy-based monitoring does not fully suppress "creative" use of EU funds by local actors. Thirdly, the degree to which local actors have internalised EU norms must not be overestimated. In the case of LDS, it is a public secret that the redaction of those documents is not always taken seriously. One important local authority's LDS is padded, two editions in a row, with a dozen pages lifted from a geology textbook (giving interesting, though not economically crucial, details about the subsoil of the Moldovan Plateau). Local planners and stakeholders exercise their agency not by blindly following the goals set by the CP, but by harnessing its resources towards their own agendas. Though the influence of the CP's regulatory framework is strong, narratives and bureaucratic strategies afford local actors relative autonomy within its structure.

5.2. Fostering metropolisation agendas: the role of the encompassing policy context

As the CP's governance structure does not fully explain why local actors choose to use its resources to pursue metropolitan strategies compatible with CP priorities, the role of other actors and of the local context must be brought into the narrative. Based on similar sources, the following section looks at three potential explainers: the regional context, the structure of local finances, and the political and ideological context.

Romanian Moldova is, as mentioned above, a shrinking region. Overall demographic decline coexists with local urban growth because of sustained internal migration. In this context, local actors tend to see local development as a zero-sum game, with the alternative being between continued growth and depopulation. Iași city officials thus make strenuous efforts to reinforce the city's competitiveness and attractiveness, while in smaller towns local officials grasp at every development opportunity to conjure away the spectre of *depopulare*. Second, it is also a region with an infrastructure deficit, owing, on the

one hand, to its peripheral position and lack of central government investment, and, on the other hand, to its fast economic growth. Independently of the CP's governance structure, these structural regional data help explaining why local actors are dedicated to local growth and locational policies.

Moreover, these actors draw upon limited resources. In Romania, cities, towns and villages (*municipi, orase* and *comune*) draw upon three main sources of public income: (A) their own fiscal revenues, in most places relying on a land tax; (B) per-capita transfers from the State, country-wide outweighing the former 4 to 1; and (C) European grants (OECD, 2016; COR, 2023). Own fiscal revenues only cover a fraction of needs except in the very richest cities, and State transfers are rigid. A basic reality for Romanian local government officials is that EU funds are the only income source they can directly increase, and thus the paramount tool in their quest for local growth. This is true to a lesser degree for the richest cities, with a sizeable fiscal base. On the other hands, EU funds are, in the words of a local government official, "the treasure of the small towns", as they are the only source of income that allows them to pursue new projects. The role of EU funds as the one steerable resource of local government goes a long way in explaining the influence it has on local government practices in spite of the limits of its regulatory governance.

Finally, there is in Moldova (and beyond) broad agreement across government scales on a view of development that emphasises urban growth. Local actors' shift towards metropolitan and neoliberal policies form part of a broader "Europeanization" of urban and regional planning, understood as its integration in a common discourse and policy space as described by Lang & Török (2017). This policy space involves the EU, the national government, and local actors, but also the World Bank. The later dedicated several reports to advising the Romanian State about the importance of metropolitan growth ("Growth Poles – the next phase", 2013; "Magnet Cities", 2017; "Catching up regions", 2019), reports that are known and agreed with by interviewed local stakeholders. Moreover, in Iași, the recent alignment of the County council and the City's political affiliation into the liberal PNL party has probably facilitated their tight cooperation to develop Iași, evident notably in the expansion of the city's airport. "Soft harmonization of ideological backgrounds of planning" (Lang & Török, 2017) and formal politics thus played a role in consolidating fostering the emergence of a shared growth agenda among local actors, centred upon Iași's metropolisation.

5.3. The limits of Cohesion Policy governance

Nonetheless, the resulting policy constellation has limits, both internal and as force for implementing the CP. Even enabled by the CP, this coalition hasn't lifted the limits to Iași's growth overnight; doubts may be had whether it is a "metropolis" in the same sense as Bucharest or Krakow. The CP may even be said to have reinforced a major hurdle to Iași's metropolisation, the institutional fragmentation within the FUA.

Though the CP has in many regards been a driver of metropolitan integration, direct access of EU funds also emboldens some urban authorities within the FUA to policies independent of City, Metropolitan or County authority; one official in Miroslava summarised the town's attitude to the ZMI by emphasising that, thanks to EU funds, "we can handle it alone". Finally, the single most important issue for Iași's future – whether it will soon sit just west of an internal EU border – remains, of course, wholly out of local actors' control.

Finally, the current local policy constellation is at odds with recent shifts of the CP's and the Union's objectives towards climate neutrality. Local actors' commitment to airport extension has already been touched upon; there is also a strong local campaign for highway building while the rail network falls into disrepair, and growth within the agglomeration remains land-intensive and car-centric. CP regulations aimed at fostering climate-friendly mobility are handled with *pro forma* urban interventions and a discourse that elements of greener growth promoted by the CP are "ahead" of Iași's needs, and that the city needs to go through a "first step" of carbonated growth first (the interesting exception being the CP-funded overhaul of the city's tramway network).

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Findings summary

We are now in a position to answer the three questions asked at the beginning of this paper: in a given city, does the CP exert a coherent influence upon metropolisation dynamics? How does it weave-into place-specific metropolisation dynamics? How does it relate to other elements of the relevant governance constellation?

The answers to these three questions appear interconnected. We found, first, that although the CP's programming and governance structure led to funds being concentrated in a leading city, projects carried out there were too heterogeneous to ascribe the CP *on its own* a coherent influence upon urban dynamics. However, second, we found that the CP was a resource harnessed by local actors towards place-specific policies aimed at developing some aspects of metropolisation in the city. On top of boosting the city's economy, EU funds in Iași have been instrumental to: integrating the agglomeration and setting new terms for its metropolitan governance; inserting it into international city networks; and reshaping its image. Those policies are distinctly locational, with a strong focus on bolstering Iași's attractiveness and competitiveness, and broadly compatible with the CP's vision.

This leads us to our third answer: the CP's effectiveness relies on the agency of local actors pursuing place-specific urban agendas, but the later actors are channelled towards policies compatible with the CP's and the Union's focus on growth and metropolises. The CP's regulatory governance plays a role in

this channelling, but mostly it is efficient because local actors are embedded in a broader policy context. In Moldova, regional economic and demographic fundamentals – shrinkage plus economic growth in a peripheral region – coupled with the structure of local government finances make local government perpetually on the lookout for EU grants. As competition is an essential feature of the CP's governance, this quest tends to turn into a race in which larger cities are at a structural advantage; they are the one with the necessary financial, administrative, and networking capacities. This multiscalar context explains why, in Moldova, the CP's action is concentrated in cities beyond what is explicitly programmed, to an even greater extent than expected in the literature. Moreover, local actors' interpretation of the fact of shrinkage and their insertion within a European discursive and policy space, perhaps even more than the CP's own regulatory governance, explain why, within cities, CP funds are harnessed towards locational and competitiveness policies.

6.2. Discussions

Through a case study of a single European city, this paper sought to lay out the CP's workings; that is, to illustrate how it interweaves with place-specific, multiscalar policy constellations to influence urban dynamics. It highlights how the “metropolitan turn” of the CP at regional and Union scales is deeply intertwined with dynamics of metropolisation playing out at city and local scales.

Recognising the centrality of local actors' metropolisation strategies provides a way to understand the CP's role in metropolisation. The CP's coherence lies in its focus on cities; in that sense it is indeed a metropolisation policy. Within cities, however, its action is heterogeneous enough to doubt whether it is a coherent urban policy at all. Yet it enables local actors to pursue their own agendas, with coherent and transforming effects upon urban dynamics. This model provides a way to square scholarly arguments that the CP mostly funds projects with little influence on metropolisation (cf. Coudroy de Lille, 2016) with local actors' insistence that European funds are transforming their cities. Significantly different impressions of the CP's impact result from considering it either “top-down”, from the perspective of its internal coherence, or “bottom-up”, from the perspective of local actors' strategies that pursue CP-compatible metropolisation goals.

In spite of the broad leeway local actors *de facto* enjoy in “implementing” the CP, local actors tend to work towards agendas of urban change broadly compatible with the CP's, and the Union's, priorities (climate policy being a big exception). This is because those local actors are embedded within an encompassing integral State space, which displays strong signs of an RCSR, of which the CP itself is an important part, and which channels their options strongly towards growth and locational policies. That is not to say that the entire Union now forms a single unified integral State space, but rather that Union-level structures

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such as the CP are tightly intermeshed with local specificities in defining the policy space that, in turns, informs urban change.

However, these conclusions are drawn from a single case study. The CP's governance, indeed its action, may not have the same traits in other European spaces. Moreover, this work raises two questions about the PC's future. First, the extreme concentration of Cohesion funds in some cities raises the question of whether urban growth really will "spill over" into balanced regional growth. Second, it is questionable whether the CP's action may indefinitely continue to contradict the Union's climate commitments.

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