

## // ESPON Conference

Rome, 14 January 2026 (morning)

### Understanding and Reinforcing the Urban Dimension in Cohesion Policy



TBC, Rome city center (Italy)





## // Context and objectives

Urban Europe is diverse but united in its need for empowerment. Cities are laboratories for ecological transition, innovation, and inclusion. Yet their contribution to Cohesion Policy remains constrained by governance asymmetries and uneven access to resources.

Over recent programming periods, cities have been given a greater role in the EU budget, reflecting their growing recognition as key actors in achieving territorial cohesion and driving green and digital transitions.

Building on these advancements, the post-2027 period offers an opportunity to further strengthen the contribution of cities by aligning EU funding with local strategies, enhancing multilevel governance, and addressing capacity gaps. These steps can help ensure that Cohesion Policy continues to deliver effectively on its mission of promoting balanced and inclusive territorial development across Europe.

This ESPON Conference, organized in cooperation with the stakeholders and partners of ESPON URDICO, will address the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy, presenting new evidence from the [ESPON URDICO project](#). URDICO explores how European cities implement the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy and use EU funds to promote sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban development. By comparing governance models, funding synergies, and institutional innovations across diverse cities, the study identifies practical lessons for more effective multilevel urban governance. URDICO sheds light on both the good practices and the challenges related to cities role, providing evidence to support implementation in 2021–2027 and to inform thinking on potential developments after 2028.

This conference will foster dialogue among city representatives, researchers, national and EU policymakers on how to strengthen the role of cities in delivering Cohesion Policy. A keynote on the EU Agenda for Cities will outline future priorities for EU support to urban areas, feeding into the debate on the post-2027 Cohesion Policy framework.

Representatives from the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, national authorities and cities will join the discussion to help shape evidence-based, forward-looking approaches to urban governance across Europe.

Key objective of the conference:

- Presentation of the urban dimension of the EU Cohesion Policy from the ESPON URDICO Project, based on evidences collected from 8 cities.
- Discussion on how the URDICO evidence could be useful in implementing the urban dimension of the Cohesion Policy.
- Provide a platform for dialogue and discussion with representatives of cities and key EU institutions in charge of Cohesion Policy.

Target groups:

- Local stakeholders, in particular city representatives involved in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy.
- National and regional stakeholders, in particular authorities involved in the negotiation and strategic designing of the Cohesion Policy.
- European-level policymakers and institutional representatives engaged in Cohesion Policy and territorial development.
- Media covering EU policy and urban topics.



**// DRAFT PROGRAMME 14 January 2026, 9:00 – 14:20**

**9:00**

**Registration**

9:30-10:00  
(30 minutes)

**Opening and Welcome Remarks**

**Moderator**

Nicolas Rossignol, Assistant Director Research and Policy, ESPON EGTC, Luxembourg

**Speakers**

- // Roberto Gualtieri, Mayor of Rome
- // Rita Allegrini, Director, Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, ESPON MC Member
- // Claudio Casini, Head of the EC Representation in Rome

10:00-10:40  
(40 minutes)

**Keynote “The Urban Dimension of Cohesion Policy”**

*Lessons from ESPON URDICO and Special Address on the EU Agenda for Cities*

**Moderator**

Deutscher Städtetag / Association German cities or France Urbaine, Observers in URDICO

**Speakers**

- // Iván Tosics, Metropolitan Research Institute, Budapest, Lead Partner ESPON URDICO
- // Hugo Sobral, Deputy Director-General for Programme Implementation, European Commission, DG REGIO, Brussels
- // Veronica Nicotra General Secretary, ANCI, Rome, ESPON URDICO Observer

Themes:

- Role of evidence and projects such as ESPON URDICO in shaping future policy
- Vision for the future EU Agenda for Cities
- Strengthening cooperation in the next programming period

10:40-11:55  
(75 minutes)

**Evidence and policy recommendations**

*This session will address and discuss the evidence and policy recommendations supporting the urban dimension of the Cohesion Policy in Europe on the basis of the URDICO case studies. Each presentation will be of about 5 minutes, to leave 5 minutes for stakeholders' reflections.*

Focus:

- Lessons from stakeholder cities
- Policy recommendations for post-2027 Cohesion Policy
- Coordination across governance levels
- Future role of ESPON evidence for urban policymaking

**Moderator**

Pietro Reviglio, City Diplomacy - Research and EU Urban Policy, Eurocities, Stakeholder ESPON URDICO

**// Administrative capacity in Strasbourg and Valencia: Why Some Cities Thrive and Others Just Survive?**

Success hinges on cities' ability to manage complexity. Strasbourg showcases professionalised offices and dedicated EU units. In contrast, Valencia, with overstretched staff and fragmented governance, faces metropolitan coordination gaps.

**Speakers**

- // Prof. Christophe Demazière - University of Lille, and Joaquín Farinós Dasí - University of Valencia (Partner ESPON URDICO) (10') and Delphine Bourdin-France Urbaine / Marion Perez-Laugel-Strasbourg, Ana María Pont Pérez-Valencia (Stakeholder cities) (10')



### // Centralisation vs decentralization. Rotterdam, Prague and Budapest: Why Some Cities Shape Policy—and Others Follow It

Rotterdam illustrates how decentralised governance empowers cities such as Managing Authorities or Intermediate Bodies; Prague show partial co-decision; Budapest's capacity remains unused due to limited cooperation at the national level.

#### Speakers

// Matthijs Johan Pieter De Bruijn-UTD Consulting, Prof. Luděk Sýkora-Charles University, Ivan Tosics-MRI (Partner ESPON URDICO) (15') and Hans Verdonk-Rotterdam, Oldrich Hnátek / Filip Hlavacek-Prague, György Nagyházi-Budapest, Stakeholder cities (15')

### // Evolving instruments: ITI Making Integration Real and the Italian NOP Metro, Lessons from Ghent, Warsaw and Florence

ITIs are a key innovation; when well-embedded they support territorial integration (Ghent, Warsaw). The Italian NOP Metro emerged as a good practice of multi-level governance.

#### Speakers

// Tim Devos / Annelies Staessen-University of Ghent, Mirosław Grochowski-University of Warsaw, Erblin Berisha-POLITO (Partner ESPON URDICO) (15') and Heidi Tency-Ghent, Paweł Sajnog-Warsaw, Alessandra Barbieri-Florence, Stakeholder cities (15')

*Discussion with the audience*

11:55-12:10  
(15 minutes)

### Coffee break

12:10-13:10  
(60 minutes)

### High-level Panel discussion

*Reaction to the results, cities recommendations and proposals presented by ESPON and discussion on how these could be useful in implementing the urban dimension of the Cohesion Policy.*

#### Guiding Questions:

- Which governance models best deliver integrated urban investments?
- How to maximise synergies among Cohesion Policy, RRF, and the EU Programmes?
- How to strenght city-level administrative and fiscal capacity?

#### Moderator

Prof. Eduardo Medeiros, Advisory Board member of URDICO

#### Panellists

// Mirka Janda, Member of the team of Commissioner Fitto, Brussels //(or Gabriele Giudice, Cabinet Expert, Responsible RRF coordination and RRF implementation and Mid-Term Review// Or Felicia Stanescu, Deputy Head of Cabinet, Responsible for Future of cohesion policy/next MFF and RRF implementation)

// Jan Olbrycht, former chair of the Urban Intergroup of the European Parliament, advisor to budget commissioner Piotr Serafin, advisory board member of URDICO

// Sari Rautio, Member of the CoR, Rapporteur of MFF post 2027 OR // some of the politicians from the cities involved

// Carla Tavares, MEP, Co-Rapporteur on the MFF post 2027 OR // Ros Sempere OR // Novakov

// André Sobczak, Secretary General, Eurocities, Stakeholder ESPON URDICO

// Michele Palma, Head of Department, Department for the Cohesion Policy and the South, Italy

// Benedek Jávor, Head of Representation of Budapest to the EU, Former Member of the European Parliament, Lead Stakeholder of URDICO

*Discussion with the audience*



13:10-13:20  
(10 minutes)

### **Closing Remarks**

*Summary and next steps*

#### **Speakers**

// Benedek Jávor, Head of Representation of Budapest to the EU, Former Member of the European Parliament, Lead Stakeholder of URDICO

// Nicolas Rossignol, Assistant Director Research and Policy, ESPON EGTC, Luxembourg

13:20-14:20  
(60 minutes)

### **Networking lunch**