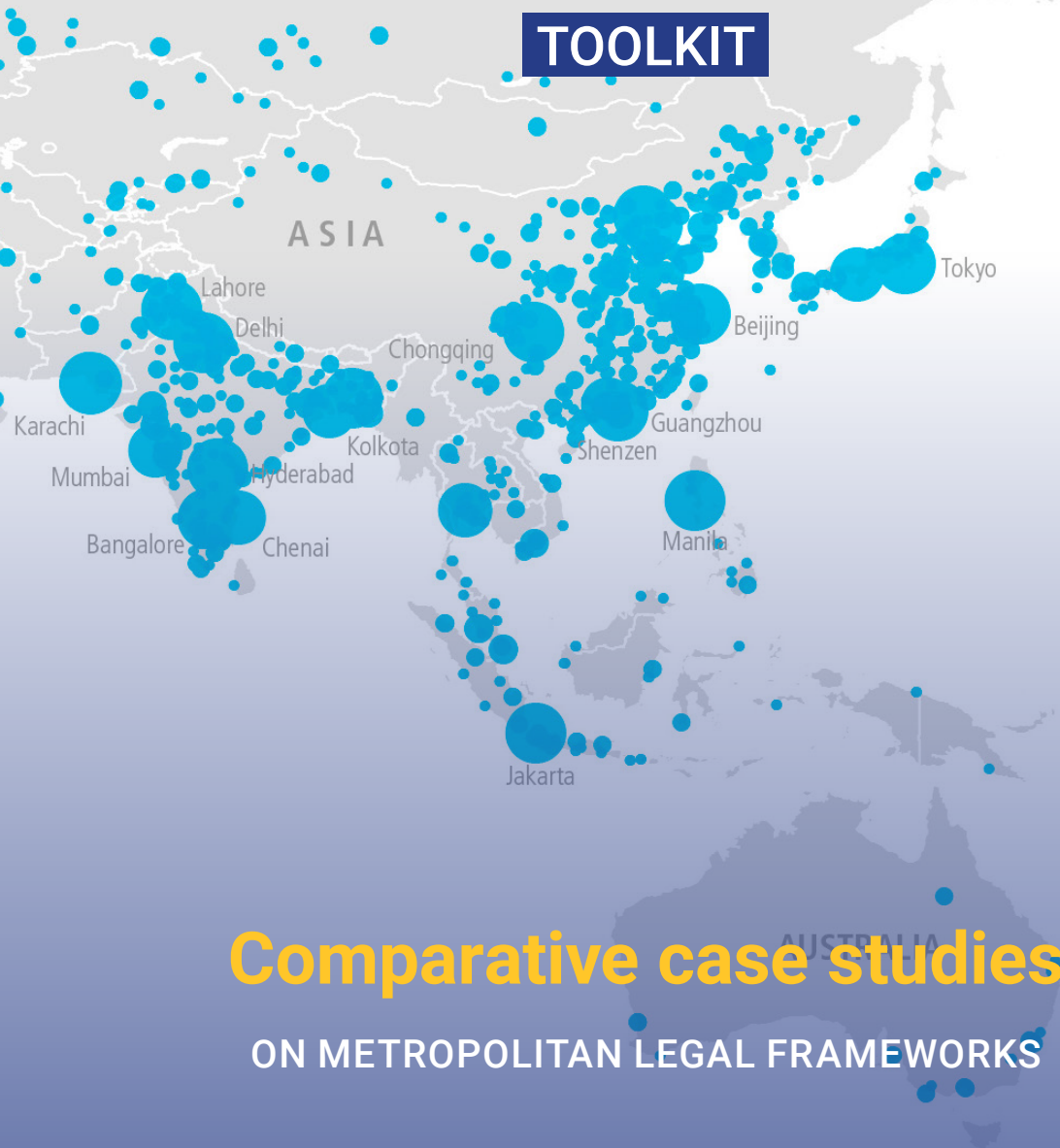


MetroHUB

# METROPOLITAN LEGISLATION TOOLKIT



## Comparative case studies

ON METROPOLITAN LEGAL FRAMEWORKS



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**Metropolitan Legislation Toolkit: Comparative Case Studies on Metropolitan Legal Frameworks**

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P.O. Box 30030 00100 Nairobi GPO KENYA

Tel: 254-020-7623120 (Central Office)

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**Coordinators:** Remy Sietchiping

**Author:** Sapna Singh

**Peer reviewers:** Anne Amin, Maria del Pilar Téllez S., Rafael Forero, Samuel Njuguna

**Editing support:** Antonio Kipyegon

**Design and Layout:** Jean Robert Gatsinzi

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# 1. Introduction

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The governance of metropolitan areas requires legal and institutional frameworks that respond to their unique scale, complexity, and interjurisdictional nature. As metropolitan regions become the dominant form of urban settlement globally<sup>1</sup>- concentrating people, infrastructure, and investment services- ensuring their effective management is a strategic priority for sustainable development. However, metropolitan areas often lack the legal recognition, institutional tools, and coordinated mechanisms required to function as cohesive units<sup>2</sup>. This has resulted in fragmented planning, unclear or overlapping mandates, fiscal disparities, and inadequate citizen engagement.

Chapter 4 of the toolkit, "*Fundamental Elements of an Effective Metropolitan Regulatory Framework*", identifies seven legal and institutional components that enable effective metropolitan governance, functional delimitation, defined competences, governance structures, planning instruments, financial architecture, accountability mechanisms, and citizen participation. Building on this framework, this document (Component 3 of the Metropolitan Legislation Guide) presents a comparative analysis of international case studies exemplifying how different metropolitan regions have developed legal structures to address these core elements.

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The purpose of this document is threefold:

- First, to illustrate how metropolitan legislation has been applied in diverse institutional and territorial contexts.
- Second, to extract practical insights and lessons from real-world experiences that can inform legal processes elsewhere.
- Third, to provide technical guidance to legislators, metropolitan authorities, and practitioners interested in strengthening their metropolitan governance frameworks in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda

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<sup>1</sup> UN-Habitat. (2022). *World Cities Report: Envisioning the Future of Cities*. <https://unhabitat.org/wcr>

<sup>2</sup> UN-Habitat & Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. (2021). *Rethinking Metropolitan Governance: A Territorial Approach to Multilevel Governance*. <https://urbanpolicyplatform.org/rethinking-metropolitan-governance>

Each section of this document corresponds to one of the seven elements of an effective metropolitan legal framework. For each element, case studies are presented from a range of governance models- flexible, structured, and hybrid- highlighting the strengths, challenges, and enabling conditions that shaped their implementation. Through this comparative approach, the document aims to bridge technical analysis with practical examples, supporting context-sensitive legislative design and reform.

# Section 1. Fundamental Delimitation of the Metropolitan Territory

## Overview

Defining the territorial boundaries of a metropolitan area is a foundational step in establishing an effective regulatory framework. The legal delimitation not only sets the jurisdictional scope within which planning, service delivery and governance functions operate, but also influences the institutional identity and legitimacy of the metropolitan entity. Legal frameworks may adopt fixed administrative definitions, flexible functional criteria, or hybrid approaches that evolve over time. This section explores how different cities have approached this process and what can be learned from their models.

## Case studies

### Barcelona, Spain

Under Law 31/2010, of the Parliament of Catalonia, the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB)<sup>3</sup> is defined as a public legal entity composed of 36 municipalities. The law provides explicit mechanisms for modifying the territorial perimeter through regional legislation, supporting long-term coherence while allowing for adaptability. The legal definition is tied to planning, mobility, and environmental functions at the metropolitan scale.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Catalonia. *Law 31/2010 on the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona*. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2010/BOE-A-2010-17279-consolidado.pdf>

### Bratislava, Slovakia

On contrast to the formal legal boundaries noted in other cases, Bratislava does not operate under a dedicated metropolitan law. Instead, the Act on Regional Self-Government (2001)<sup>4</sup> allows the self-governing region to coordinate with municipalities through voluntary arrangements.

<sup>4</sup> Slovak Republic. *Act No. 302/2001 Coll. on Self-Governing Regions*. Available at <https://www.minv.sk/?regional-government>

## Montreal, Canada

The Loi sur la Communauté Métropolitaine de Montréal (2000)<sup>5</sup> formally identifies 82 municipalities based on administrative boundaries and functional linkages such as commuting zones and shared infrastructure. The province of Quebec retains the authority to adjust the perimeter via decree, creating the balance between legal certainty and responsive governance.

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<sup>5</sup> Government of Quebec. *Loi sur la Communauté métropolitaine de Montréal*, C-37.01. Available at <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/C-37.01>

## Seoul, South Korea

The Framework Act on the Construction of the Seoul Metropolitan Area<sup>6</sup> defines a hierarchical zoning system (core, inner and outer zones) which guides the application of planning and regulatory policies. The national-level approach emphasizes functional realities such as transportation flows and urban expansion.

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<sup>6</sup> Republic of Korea. *Framework Act on the Seoul Metropolitan Area Readjustment Planning*. Available at [http://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_service/lawView.do?hseq=25858&lang=ENG](http://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=25858&lang=ENG)

## Comparative analysis

Taken together, these examples illustrate a spectrum of approaches to defining metropolitan boundaries, ranging from codified and fixed as seen with Barcelona, to functional and hierarchical as is the case with Seoul to flexible and informal like Bratislava. Barcelona and Montreal represent strong legal models where territorial boundaries are explicitly defined and backed by legislative authority. While Montreal includes a broader range of municipalities than Barcelona, both frameworks offer mechanisms to adjust the perimeter which reinforces institutional legitimacy while also retaining adaptability.

Seoul takes this a step further by embedding zoning logic directly into national law, segmenting the territory into zones that reflect real-world dynamics like commuting patterns and population density. This functional nuance enhances the city's ability to align policies with the actual distribution of urban activity, even if the zoning structure is more complex to administer.

Bratislava represents the other end of the spectrum, where formal legislation does not define a metropolitan area per se, but rather enables coordination through regional planning structures.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> UN-Habitat & GTF. (2021). *Rethinking Metropolitan Governance: A Territorial Approach to Multilevel Governance*. Available at <https://urbanpolicyplatform.org/rethinking-metropolitan-governance>

While this flexibility allows the region to adapt to local political dynamics, it also creates challenges around institutional visibility, enforceability, and equitable service delivery.

In essence, while Barcelona and Montreal demonstrate how legal clarity can support strong governance and planning coherence,<sup>8</sup> Seoul reveals how functional realities can be legally embedded in metropolitan management. Bratislava highlights the value and risks of relying on informal or voluntary cooperation in the absence of a formal legal boundary.<sup>9</sup> These cases indicate that the choice of model depends not only on legal tradition but also on the political goodwill for integration, the maturity of governance institutions, and the complexity of the urban system.

## Lessons learned

- Legal clarity enhances operational coherence- Clearly defined perimeters, as seen in Barcelona and Montreal reduce uncertainty and facilitate coordination across municipalities.
- Flexibility supports responsiveness to urban and territorial change- Legal frameworks that allow for periodic revision of boundaries ensure alignment with demographics and spatial realities.
- Functional criteria improves planning- Seoul’s zoning system demonstrates how legal frameworks can be grounded in real-world data on mobility and land use,
- Voluntary arrangements may hinder enforcement- While flexible models like Bratislava’s can suffer from weak accountability and inconsistent participation unless legally formalized.

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<sup>8</sup> OECD/ITF. (2018). *Public Transport Governance in Greater Barcelona*. International Transport Forum. Available at: <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/public-transport-governance-barcelona.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> OECD. (2015). *The Metropolitan Century: Understanding Urbanisation and its Consequences*. OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264228733-en>

## Section 2. Metropolitan Competences and Functions

### Overview

The definition of competences (what a metropolitan entity is empowered to do) is central to its effectiveness. A sound legal framework should go beyond symbolic recognition and assign clear, functional responsibilities that reflect the scale and nature of metropolitan challenges. Competences may include mobility, environmental protection, land use planning, housing, waste management, and economic development. Equally important is how these competences are exercised, whether directly, through delegated authority or via intergovernmental collaboration. The models adopted in Barcelona, Medellín, Porto and Seoul reveal varied approaches to defining and operationalizing metropolitan competences and functions.

### Comparative case studies

#### Barcelona, Spain

Law 31/2010 provides the AMB with clearly defined, mandatory competences in strategic planning, urban mobility, housing, environmental management, and economic development. The law also allows the AMB to assume additional responsibilities through delegation or agreement, giving it both the legal authority and operational flexibility to address emerging issues at scale.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 3

#### Medellin, Colombia

Under Law 1625 of 2013, the Metropolitan Area of the Aburra Valley (AMVA)<sup>11</sup> is granted a mix of exclusive shared competences, including spatial planning, environmental governance, transport infrastructure, and risk management. The AMVA can enter inter-administrative agreements with local and national actors which enables adaptive and collaborative governance grounded in the principle of subsidiarity.

<sup>11</sup> Republic of Colombia. *Ley 1625 de 2013 por medio de la cual se expide el régimen para las Áreas Metropolitanas*. Available at <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=53006>

### Porto, Portugal

Law No. 75/2013<sup>12</sup> defines the competences of metropolitan areas like Porto in a more functional and sector-specific manner. Rather than establishing a single comprehensive metropolitan authority, the law supports intermunicipal cooperation through specialized agencies such as the Agência Metropolitana de Transportes which manage shared services without centralizing institutional power.

<sup>12</sup> Government of Portugal. *Lei n.º 75/2013 de 12 de Setembro*. Available at <https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/lei/75-2013-529412>

### Seoul, South Korea

Seoul's metropolitan competences are regulated through multiple national laws, including the Urban Planning Act and the Framework Act on the Construction of the Seoul Metropolitan Area<sup>13</sup>. These laws assign direct responsibilities to the Seoul Metropolitan Government for land use planning, transport systems, housing, environmental protection, and disaster risk reduction which give the metropolis strong executive powers and legal clarity.

<sup>13</sup> Republic of Korea. *Urban Planning Act & Framework Act on the Seoul Metropolitan Area*. Available at [http://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_service/main.do](http://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/main.do)

## Comparative analysis

These four metropolitan areas represent distinct approaches to the allocation and exercise of competences, shaped by institutional context, legal tradition, and governance culture. Barcelona and Seoul anchor their models in strong legal mandates<sup>14</sup>, with comprehensive competences assigned to metropolitan-level authorities. In both cities, planning, mobility, and environmental protection are treated as core functions that require supra-local coordination. However, while Barcelona's competences are grounded in regional law and include mechanisms for intermunicipal coordination, Seoul's are embedded in national law and emphasize executive authority at the city level.

Medellin's framework lies between these two poles. It provides a solid legal foundation for action but emphasizes collaborative execution.<sup>15</sup> The AMVA operates through a hybrid model that allows for direct implementation in some areas and delegated or shared responsibilities in others.

<sup>14</sup> OECD. (2017). *The Governance of Land Use in OECD Countries: Policy Analysis and Recommendations*. OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268609-en>

<sup>15</sup> United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). (2016). *Co-Creating the Urban Future: GOLD IV Global Report on Decentralization and Local Democracy*. Available at: <https://gold.uclg.org/reports/gold-iv>

This design enables responsiveness to local needs while reinforcing the metropolitan scale where necessary. Porto illustrates a lighter-touch model. Rather than investing authority in a centralized institution, its framework empowers thematic agencies that operate across jurisdictions. This allows for functional cooperation in sectors like transport without requiring major structural reform. However, this model may face challenges in achieving strategic coherence across sectors or long-term political legitimacy.

Together, these cases show that defining competences is not just a matter of listing functions, it is about enabling effective public action at the appropriate scale. Strong legal mandates (as in Barcelona and Seoul) facilitate planning and execution, while hybrid or decentralized approaches (as in Medellín and Porto) offer flexibility but require strong coordination mechanisms and political will.

## Lessons learned

- Legal specificity supports institutional clarity- Cities such as Barcelona and Seoul show the importance of detailed, legally mandated competences to avoid duplication or ambiguity.
- Hybrid models of governance allow for functional adaptability- Medellín demonstrates how shared, delegated, and exclusive competences can coexist under a coherent framework.
- Inter-agency arrangements require clear mandates- Porto's model enables cooperation but underscores the need for coordination to ensure integration across functions.
- Alignment between scale and function is essential- Effective competences are those matched to the spatial scale of the problem, especially in transport, environment, and land use.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Peterson, G. E. (2009). Unlocking Land Values to Finance Urban Infrastructure. World Bank. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2586>

## Section 3. Governance Structures and Decision Making

### Overview

Governance structures define how decisions are made, by whom, and with what degree of representation, legitimacy, and technical capacity. An effective metropolitan framework must establish clear institutional arrangements, such as councils, boards, or assemblies, while ensuring equitable representation of constituent municipalities and mechanisms for executive leadership. Legal frameworks should also define how decisions are deliberated, voted on, and implemented, striking a balance between efficiency, inclusiveness, and legitimacy. This section compares governance models from Barcelona, Bratislava, Montreal, and Santo Domingo

### Case studies

#### **Barcelona, Spain**

Law 31/2010<sup>17</sup> created the Metropolitan Council of the AMB as the highest decision-making body, composed of representatives from all 36 member municipalities. Representation is proportional to population, and the Mayor of Barcelona serves as President of the Council. The Council is vested with legislative and budgetary authority, and is supported by sectoral commissions and a permanent technical structure.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid 3

#### **Bratislava, Slovakia**

Bratislava lacks a dedicated metropolitan authority. Instead, governance occurs through the self-governing regional authority, which coordinates with municipalities through informal agreements and regional planning forums<sup>18</sup>. Decision-making processes are flexible but lack legally defined structures for representation, voting, or enforcement, depending heavily on political cooperation and shared interest.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid 6

### **Montreal, Canada**

The Communauté Métropolitaine de Montréal (CMM) is governed by a Community Council made up of mayors and designated officials from its 82 member municipalities.<sup>19</sup> The governance structure ensures territorial representation and is supported by technical advisory bodies and standing commissions. Public consultation processes are institutionalized, reinforcing democratic oversight in planning among other decisions.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid 4

### **Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic**

Law 176-07<sup>20</sup> provides for a General Assembly of Local Governments, composed of mayors and municipal representatives. This collegiate governance model enables shared policy coordination while preserving municipal autonomy. While the Assembly functions as a decision-making forum, its deliberations rely heavily on political consensus, and binding authority is more limited compared to structured models.

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<sup>20</sup> Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana. Ley No. 176-07 del Distrito Nacional y los Municipios. <https://www.dgii.gov.do/legislacion/leyesTributarias/Documents/Ley176-07.pdf>

## **Comparative analysis**

These examples reveal four distinct configurations of metropolitan governance, each reflecting different degrees of institutionalization, representation, and formality. Barcelona and Montreal stand out for their structured, legally defined governance bodies with proportional representation and strong technical support<sup>21</sup>. Barcelona's Metropolitan Council combines executive leadership (through the Mayor of Barcelona) with collective decision-making by representatives of all member municipalities, creating a system that is both functional and democratically grounded. Similarly, Montreal's Community Council leverages territorial representation and technical commissions to support participatory and informed governance.

Santo Domingo's model presents a more political and less formalized approach. While it brings together municipal leaders in a General Assembly, decision-making is largely consensus-based and lacks a strong legal mandate for enforcement. This allows for flexibility and respect for local autonomy, but it can also result in weaker institutional capacity and reduced accountability.

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<sup>21</sup> OECD. (2021). Metropolitan Governance for Cohesive and Competitive Regions. OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/publications/metropolitan-governance-for-cohesive-and-competitive-regions-b0957f09-en.htm>

Bratislava reflects the least formalized of the models. Without a specific metropolitan institution, governance is based on voluntary coordination within the regional self-government framework. While this allows for adaptive and negotiated decision-making, it can suffer from inconsistency, limited legitimacy, and weak enforceability, particularly in the face of conflicting local interests.

Comparatively, Barcelona and Montreal demonstrate how formal governance structures with legal mandates and representative mechanisms can enhance coherence, accountability, and policy continuity. In contrast, Bratislava and Santo Domingo illustrate the trade-offs involved in relying on informal or politically driven coordination. While such models (Bratislava and Santo Domingo) offer flexibility, they may struggle to implement binding decisions or scale up institutional capacity in the long term.

## Lessons learned

- Legalized governance structures enhance stability- Barcelona and Montreal demonstrate how defined councils with clear voting rules and representative balance support effective and legitimate governance.
- Inclusiveness strengthens metropolitan legitimacy- Ensuring proportional representation and structured participation mechanisms can help reconcile local interests with metropolitan objectives.
- Consensus-based governance can limit enforcement- Models like Santo Domingo's demonstrate the benefits of flexibility, but also the limitations of relying on political goodwill alone.
- Informal arrangements require strong political leadership- Bratislava's model depends heavily on cooperation, which can be fragile without clear institutional backing or defined procedures.

# Section 4. Planning Instruments and Legal Hierarchy

## Overview

Metropolitan planning instruments translate strategic visions into spatial and regulatory frameworks, guiding land use, infrastructure, service delivery, and environmental management. Their legal strength, whether binding or indicative, determines the enforceability of metropolitan plans across jurisdictions. Effective metropolitan legislation not only establishes the types and hierarchy of plans but also provides mechanisms for multilevel articulation, ensuring consistency between national, regional, and local planning instruments. This section compares the approaches of Barcelona, Ciudad del Este, Milan, and Riga.

## Case studies

### **Barcelona, Spain**

The Metropolitan Urban Master Plan (PDU), mandated by Law 31/2010<sup>22</sup>, is a binding planning instrument that aligns the 36 municipalities within the AMB. It sets legal parameters for land use, housing, infrastructure, and environmental protection. As a higher-order plan, it takes precedence over municipal plans, ensuring strategic coherence and legal certainty across the metropolitan territory.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid 3

### **Ciudad del Este, Paraguay**

Planning in Ciudad del Este is coordinated across borders through the Binational Entity of the Metropolitan Area (EBAM). However, the absence of a binding legal hierarchy for metropolitan plans has limited the enforceability of joint planning initiatives. Coordination remains largely technical and voluntary, lacking the legal authority to override municipal decisions.

### Milan, Italy

Under Law 56/2014 (Delrio Law)<sup>23</sup> and the Metropolitan Statute, Milan is required to develop a *Piano Strategico Metropolitano* (Strategic Metropolitan Plan) every three years. This plan aligns policy priorities across sectors and municipalities and is complemented by a *Piano Territoriale Metropolitano*, which has binding legal force over land use decisions. Both plans are integrated within national and regional planning frameworks.

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<sup>23</sup> Government of Italy. *Law 56/2014 (Delrio Law)*. Available at: <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2014-04-07;56!vig=>

### Riga, Latvia

The Law on Regional Development (2002)<sup>24</sup> requires the Riga Planning Region to prepare regional development plans that align with national priorities in areas like education, transport, and the environment. These plans are binding on municipalities for strategic planning purposes and are supported by shared technical instruments and spatial data systems.

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<sup>24</sup> Republic of Latvia. *Regional Development Law* (2002). Official translation available at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/60945>

## Comparative Analysis

These four cases reflect a continuum of legal authority in metropolitan planning, ranging from fully binding instruments with hierarchical force to informal, voluntary coordination mechanisms. Barcelona and Milan exemplify structured planning regimes where metropolitan instruments are not only legally mandated but also legally superior to local plans.<sup>25</sup> Barcelona's PDU is particularly notable for embedding sustainability, climate resilience, and territorial equity directly into binding legal text. Its enforceability ensures consistent application of spatial policies across a diverse metropolitan landscape.

Milan complements its planning structure with periodic strategic planning cycles, anchoring its instruments in both vision-setting and legal regulation. The combination of strategic and land-use instruments, with varying levels of binding authority, allows for adaptability while preserving legal coherence.

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<sup>25</sup> OECD. (2017). *The Governance of Land Use in OECD Countries: Policy Analysis and Recommendations*. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268609-en>

Riga follows a similar path, albeit within a national framework that emphasizes coordination.<sup>26</sup> Here, regional development plans link national policy objectives with local implementation, giving the Riga Planning Region a facilitative but still authoritative planning role.

In contrast, Ciudad del Este demonstrates the challenges of planning without clear legal hierarchy. Although institutional cooperation exists, the lack of formal legal precedence for metropolitan plans weakens enforcement and integration. Planning remains dependent on intergovernmental consensus, which may falter in the face of political or administrative differences or transitions.

Collectively, these cases demonstrate that binding metropolitan planning instruments backed by legal authority are critical to ensuring compliance, territorial coherence, and strategic investment. Where legal frameworks are weaker or less defined, planning tends to remain fragmented or dependent on ad hoc cooperation.

## Lessons learned

- Binding plans promote coherence and enforceability- Barcelona and Milan show how metropolitan plans can guide development across jurisdictions when supported by law.
- Strategic and spatial instruments should be integrated for better outcomes. A layered planning system, like in Milan or Riga, enables both long-term visioning and regulatory control.
- Legal hierarchy is essential for implementation- Without formal legal precedence, as in Ciudad del Este, metropolitan plans may be ignored or inconsistently applied.
- Multilevel articulation strengthens alignment- When metropolitan plans are synchronized with national and regional frameworks, they reinforce policy consistency and avoid duplication.

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<sup>26</sup> Cotella, G., Brovarone, E. V., Rivolin, U. J., Santangelo, M., & Smetkowski, M. (2020). *ESPON METRO – The role and future perspectives of Cohesion Policy in the planning of Metropolitan Areas and Cities: Inception Report*. ESPON EGTC. Available at: <https://www.metropolis.org/sites/default/files/resources/ESPON-METRO-Inception-Report.pdf>

## Section 5. Financial Architecture and Sustainability

### Overview

A legally vigorous financial framework is essential for the operational viability and institutional autonomy of metropolitan entities. Without the ability to mobilize, manage, and allocate financial resources, metropolitan bodies are unable to deliver services, implement plans, or exercise their mandates effectively. Metropolitan legislation must define the sources of revenue (such as own-source income, intergovernmental transfers, borrowing powers, and innovative financing mechanisms) and align these with assigned competences. It must also promote fiscal accountability and coordination across different levels of government. This section compares financial arrangements in Barcelona, Bratislava, Brussels, and Medellín.

### Case studies

#### **Barcelona, Spain**

The AMB's financial system, defined under Law 31/2010<sup>27</sup>, integrates multiple sources: own revenues (mobility and environmental taxes), intergovernmental transfers, municipal contributions, service fees, and borrowing. The AMB is authorized to collect contributions from member municipalities and access credit for infrastructure investment. This diversified structure provides the AMB with financial autonomy and long-term sustainability.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid 3

#### **Bratislava, Slovakia**

The Act on Regional Self-Government (2001)<sup>28</sup> grants the Bratislava region access to shared taxes, state subsidies, and EU structural funds. However, the absence of a dedicated metropolitan authority or a stable metropolitan revenue base weakens long-term investment planning. While the region serves as an intermediary for resource distribution, fiscal fragmentation across municipalities limits coordinated spending.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid 6

## Medellín, Colombia

Law 1625 of 2013<sup>29</sup> provides the Metropolitan Area of the Aburra Valley (AMVA) with authority to raise revenues from environmental taxes, public service fees, and inter-administrative agreements. The metropolitan entity also benefits from national transfers and partnerships. Medellín has leveraged this framework to independently fund transport infrastructure, environmental protection programs, and resilience planning.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid 11

## Comparative analysis

These cases highlight the spectrum of legal and institutional approaches to financing metropolitan governance. Barcelona and Brussels illustrate how diversified and legally embedded financial structures empower metropolitan authorities with operational stability and strategic autonomy.<sup>30</sup> In Barcelona, the legal authority to collect direct revenues, combined with borrowing capacity, has enabled the AMB to sustain regional services and implement major infrastructure projects. Its fiscal tools are closely linked to its competences, reflecting a mature alignment between legal mandate and financial capacity.

Brussels presents a model of fiscal devolution, where the regional government has substantial control over its revenues and expenditures. Sectoral agencies operate with dedicated budgets and clear legal mandates, ensuring that financing is linked to implementation capacity. This model offers strong financial sustainability but depends heavily on effective coordination across agencies and with the federal government.

Medellín, meanwhile, showcases how metropolitan areas in the Global South can mobilize diverse resources within a hybrid legal structure. The AMVA's access to multiple revenue streams (including environmental levies and inter-administrative agreements) demonstrates how legislation can enable innovative financing approaches that go beyond traditional tax collection. However, its reliance on cooperative arrangements also highlights the importance of strong institutional partnerships.

Bratislava's experience contrasts with these more consolidated models. While it benefits from national transfers and EU funding, the lack of a dedicated metropolitan revenue mechanism hampers its ability to implement cohesive metropolitan-scale projects.

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<sup>30</sup> OECD. (2013). *Investing Together: Working Effectively across Levels of Government*. OECD Publishing. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264197022-en>

This highlights a key lesson: without legal provisions for own-source revenue or predictable intergovernmental transfers, metropolitan authorities may face gaps between mandates and means.

## Lessons learned

- Diversified revenue streams enhance financial autonomy- Barcelona and Brussels demonstrate that combining taxes, transfers, fees, and borrowing powers support sustainable metropolitan operations.
- Legal alignment between functions and finance is critical- Clear assignment of competences must be matched by access to corresponding financial resources.
- Innovative mechanisms expand fiscal capacity- Medellín's use of environmental levies and cooperative financing demonstrates the potential of creative approaches within enabling legal frameworks.
- Fragmented systems limit strategic investment- Bratislava's model underscores the challenges of operating without dedicated metropolitan financing or formal coordination of municipal budgets.

# Section 6. Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms

## Overview

Accountability and transparency are critical for ensuring that metropolitan authorities manage public resources responsibly, deliver on their mandates, and retain public trust. Legal frameworks must institutionalize mechanisms for oversight, both internal and external, including audits, performance reporting, citizen monitoring, and access to information. These mechanisms help metropolitan entities operate efficiently, avoid mismanagement, and ensure that policies are implemented equitably and with legitimacy. This section compares accountability systems in Barcelona, Cochabamba London, and Medellín..

## Case studies

### Barcelona, Spain

Law 31/2010<sup>31</sup> mandates the creation of a Special Accounts Committee within the AMB, composed of representatives from all political groups. This committee reviews the use of financial resources, ensures alignment with the approved budget, and releases findings in public reports. Open data portals further enhance transparency by allowing citizens and stakeholders to access institutional and financial information.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid 3

### London, United Kingdom

The Greater London Authority Act (1999)<sup>32</sup> requires the Mayor of London to publish annual reports on compliance with metropolitan plans, including the London Plan. The London Assembly functions as a legislative oversight body, holding the mayor accountable through audits, public hearings, and parliamentary scrutiny. Financial management is subject to independent audits and mandatory disclosure.

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<sup>32</sup> UK Parliament. Greater London Authority Act 1999, Sections 85–89 (Mayor’s annual report, Assembly oversight, and financial duties). Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/29/contents>

## Medellín, Colombia

Under Law 1625 of 2013<sup>33</sup>, the Metropolitan Area of the Aburrá Valley is required to submit regular management reports to its Metropolitan Board. These reports evaluate program implementation, budget execution, and policy outcomes. Additionally, participatory planning processes and public consultations on the metropolitan plan are institutionalized to support transparency and citizen oversight.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid 6

## Comparative analysis

These case studies reveal both opportunities and gaps in how metropolitan areas institutionalize accountability. Barcelona and London provide strong examples of formal oversight structures grounded in legislation<sup>34</sup>. In Barcelona, the existence of a multi-party oversight committee ensures that financial decisions are reviewed with political balance, while digital tools promote public access to institutional data. London's system is even more layered, combining mandatory reporting with active legislative oversight and public engagement. The London Assembly's ability to conduct inquiries and audits reinforces a culture of accountability that extends beyond mere compliance.

Medellín's model demonstrates how legal requirements for performance reporting and citizen consultation can operate within a hybrid governance system.<sup>35</sup> Although oversight is primarily internal, the structure allows the Metropolitan Board to evaluate outcomes and guide corrective action. Importantly, Medellín links planning processes with participatory mechanisms, integrating transparency into the broader policy cycle.

Cochabamba highlights the consequences of limited legal articulation of accountability. While the intention to ensure transparency exists in principle, the absence of clear legal mandates for audits or reporting results in institutional gaps. This weakens public oversight and reduces the capacity of the metropolitan entity to evaluate its own performance or respond to community concerns.

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<sup>34</sup> OECD. (2015). *The Metropolitan Century: Understanding Urbanisation and its Consequences*. OECD Publishing. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264228733-en>

<sup>35</sup> UN-Habitat. (2013). *Planning and Design for Sustainable Urban Mobility: Global Report on Human Settlements*. Available at <https://unhabitat.org/planning-and-design-for-sustainable-urban-mobility-global-report-on-human-settlements-2013>

In sum, strong accountability frameworks are grounded in law, supported by internal and external checks, and bolstered by mechanisms that allow citizens to access information and participate in oversight processes. Without these foundations, metropolitan governance risks becoming opaque, fragmented, and unresponsive.

## Lessons learned

- Legal mandates are essential for oversight- Barcelona and London illustrate how legislation can institutionalize both internal controls and public-facing transparency mechanisms.
- Oversight must be both technical and participatory- Combining audits and performance reviews with citizen engagement strengthens legitimacy and responsiveness.
- Public disclosure builds trust- Open data systems and mandatory reporting, as in Barcelona and London, foster a culture of transparency.
- Weak legal provisions undermine accountability- Cochabamba illustrates the risks of relying on informal norms or voluntary practices without regulatory backing.

## Section 7. Citizen Participation and Democratic Legitimacy

### Overview

Citizen participation is a foundation of democratic metropolitan governance. It strengthens legitimacy, aligns policies with community needs, and fosters public trust in institutions. Effective metropolitan legislation must establish mechanisms for participatory planning, monitoring, and policy evaluation, especially ensuring inclusion of marginalized groups. These mechanisms can take the form of advisory councils, mandatory consultations, digital platforms, or sectoral forums. This section compares how citizen participation is institutionalized in Milan, Montreal, Seoul and Zagreb.

### Case studies

#### Montreal, Canada

The Act respecting the Communauté Métropolitaine de Montréal (2000)<sup>36</sup> mandates public consultations regarding strategic metropolitan planning. Permanent commissions with citizen representatives are established to oversee planning and policy implementation. These mechanisms provide structured spaces for community input and ensure that public feedback influences decision-making.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid 4

#### Zagreb, Croatia

The legal framework regulating Zagreb's Urban Agglomeration<sup>37</sup> mandates the establishment of a "Partnership Council" comprising municipal representatives, civil society actors, and economic stakeholders. The council monitors the implementation of the regional development strategy and functions as a consultative body for policy alignment and social accountability.

<sup>37</sup> Government of Croatia. *Act on Regional Development (2009, consolidated 2014)* and accompanying ordinances. Available (Croatian): [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2014\\_02\\_147\\_259.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2014_02_147_259.html)

## Comparative analysis

These case studies show how metropolitan areas are embedding democratic participation into their legal frameworks and governance systems, though the approaches and tools differ significantly. Montreal and Milan institutionalize consultations as a formal part of the planning process.<sup>38</sup> In Montreal, citizen commissions provide consistent and structured input throughout the policy cycle. This not only builds transparency but embeds civic voice directly into legal procedures. Milan's model also ensures legal compliance with participation mandates, though its approach is more cyclical, tied specifically to the triennial planning process.

Zagreb's "Partnership Council" reflects a model of multi-stakeholder engagement that extends beyond one-off consultations. It integrates civil society and economic actors into the long-term governance of development strategy, reinforcing shared responsibility across sectors. This model stands out for its balanced inclusion of both institutional and non-institutional actors.

Seoul, by contrast, introduces a technology-driven approach to participation. Through "M-Voting," residents engage directly in decision-making, helping to shape urban initiatives in real time. This model democratizes participation at scale and reflects the integration of digital technology into legal and governance processes. It also enhances the inclusivity of engagement by reducing access barriers, particularly for younger or tech-savvy populations.

Together, these experiences show that citizen participation must be more than symbolic. Whether through legal mandates, institutional bodies, or digital innovation, participatory governance must be designed as a substantive, structured, and ongoing process. Cities that embed these mechanisms into law, and operationalize them through clear procedures, are better positioned to ensure democratic legitimacy, responsiveness, and social accountability at the metropolitan scale.

## Lessons learned

- Legal mandates give participation institutional weight- In Montreal and Milan, consultation is not optional. It is embedded in law and structured around formal processes.
- Multi-stakeholder bodies build long-term legitimacy- Zagreb's Partnership Council demonstrates how civil society and municipal actors can co-govern metropolitan development.
- Digital tools expand accessibility- Seoul's "M-Voting" platform exemplifies how smart governance can democratize participation and lower entry barriers.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid 15

- Inclusion must be intentional- Participatory mechanisms should be designed to engage marginalized groups and reflect the diversity of the metropolitan population not just the most vocal actors.

## Conclusion

The case studies explored in this document illustrate the diverse ways in which metropolitan areas around the world are developing legal frameworks to govern complex, functionally integrated territories. While institutional contexts vary widely, several cross-cutting lessons emerge across the seven foundational elements of effective metropolitan regulation.

First, **legal clarity matters**. Whether defining territorial boundaries or assigning competences, the presence of codified, unambiguous mandates strengthens institutional legitimacy and operational effectiveness. Cities such as Barcelona, Montreal, and Seoul demonstrate how formal legal frameworks can empower metropolitan authorities to plan, coordinate, and deliver services at scale.

Second, **flexibility is essential**. The best-performing systems balance legal structure with adaptability, whether by enabling periodic revisions to territorial boundaries, allowing differentiated models of financial cooperation, or incorporating new technologies into participatory processes. Medellín, Milan, and Riga show how hybrid and context-sensitive approaches can work when paired with strong institutional capacity and political will.

Third, **multilevel coordination underpins success**. Metropolitan governance does not exist in isolation; it must operate within broader national, regional, and local systems. Cases like Brussels, Johannesburg and Riga highlight the importance of aligning planning, financing, and decision-making across levels of government, with clearly defined roles and collaborative mechanisms.

Fourth, **democratic legitimacy is not optional**. Strong governance requires meaningful citizen participation, transparency, and accountability. From Montreal's permanent commissions to Seoul's digital voting and London's public audits, these tools help ensure that metropolitan governance is both responsive and inclusive. Importantly, they transform governance from a top-down process into a shared civic responsibility.

Finally, **form must follow function**. Metropolitan frameworks that match institutional design to territorial reality, such as those in Barcelona, Medellín, and Milan, are better equipped to manage urbanization, reduce fragmentation, and deliver sustainable outcomes. In contrast, where legal frameworks are weak, outdated, or overly rigid, governance tends to be reactive, under-resourced, and politically fragile.

As 'metropolitanization' accelerates worldwide, advancing coherent, legally grounded, and functionally empowered governance systems is not merely a technical necessity; it is a strategic imperative. As cities grow, so must the laws that govern them, not only in complexity, but in purpose, legitimacy, and ambition.

## Annex 1: Comparative Matrix

City	Territorial delimitation	Competences	Governance	Planning instruments	Financing	Accountability	Participation
<b>Barcelona</b>	Legally defined (36 municipalities) with adjustment mechanisms	Mandatory and delegated powers in planning, transport, housing	Metropolitan Council with proportional municipal representation	Binding Metropolitan Urban Master Plan (PDU)	Own revenues, transfers, municipal contributions, borrowing	Special Accounts Committee, open data portals	Legally mandated consultations and commissions
<b>Bratislava</b>	Flexible, based on regional cooperation	Coordinated via regional authority, not formalized	Voluntary coordination via regional self-government	Regional development plans (not binding on all)	State subsidies, shared taxes, EU structural funds	Limited, lacking formal audit mechanisms	General mention in law, weak in practice
<b>Ciudad del Este</b>	Binational area with Brazil, informal boundaries	Limited, mostly technical cooperation	Binational coordination entity (EBAM)	No binding authority, joint planning initiatives	Dependent on national and bilateral support	Voluntary transparency, not legally mandated	Technical consultations
<b>Cochabamba</b>	Mancomunidad of municipalities, no formal authority	Cooperative governance, weak institutional mandate	Council of Mayors, consensus-based	No binding plans	Voluntary contributions, national transfers	Weak limited legal mechanisms	Acknowledged but not operationalized

<b>London</b>	Defined Greater London boundary	Planning, transport, economic development	Mayor and London Assembly	Binding London Plan, annual compliance reports	Greater London Authority budget and UK government support	Annual reports, external audit, parliamentary scrutiny	Public hearings, open government data
<b>Medellín</b>	Defined under Law 1625 for Aburrá Valley	Mix of exclusive and shared powers (planning, environment, mobility)	Metropolitan Board with inter-administrative coordination	Strategic Land Use Plan with binding elements	Environmental taxes, service fees, inter-agency agreements	Management reports to Board, participatory planning	Public consultations, planning council
<b>Milan</b>	Statutory metropolitan boundary under Delrio Law	Strategic and land-use planning, intermunicipal coordination	Metropolitan Council under mayoral leadership	Strategic and binding territorial plans	Public investment, transfers, shared regional authority	Mandated consultations and reporting	Legally required public consultations on plans
<b>Montreal</b>	82 municipalities, defined by provincial law	Exclusive powers in planning, economic development, environment	Community Council with technical commissions	Binding metropolitan development plan (PMAD)	Tax contributions from members, borrowing authority	Public reporting, audit, citizen oversight	Permanent commissions with citizen representation
<b>Riga</b>	Defined regional planning zone	Regional coordination of national policies	Planning region authority under national framework	Binding regional development plans	State budget support, EU funding	Shared technical instruments, monitoring systems	Structured stakeholder involvement

<b>Seoul</b>	Hierarchical zoning (core, inner, outer belts)	Direct responsibilities in planning, transport, housing, environment	Strong mayoral system under national law	Binding urban and climate plans	National support, local taxes, strong fiscal authority	Legislated reporting and audits	Digital platform (M-Voting), integrated in smart governance
<b>Zagreb</b>	Urban Agglomeration model under national law	Coordinated through cooperative agreements	Partnership Council with civil society and local reps	Development strategy with consultative oversight	Municipal and national funding, shared responsibilities	Council monitors implementation	Partnership council includes civil society

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