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## Polycentric metropolitan areas in Europe towards a unified proposal of delimitation

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## Polycentric metropolitan areas in Europe: towards a unified proposal of delimitation

Rafael Boix<sup>1</sup>, Paolo Veneri<sup>2</sup>, Vicent Almenar<sup>1</sup> and Francesc Hernández<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Metropolitan areas concentrate the main share of population, production and consumption in OECD countries. They are likely to be one of the most important units for economic, social and environmental analysis as well as for the development of policy strategies. However, one of the main problems that occur when adopting metropolitan areas as units of analysis and policy in European countries is the absence of widely accepted standards for identifying them. This severe problem hinders comparative research between European countries using metropolitan areas as units of analysis.

In this text we defend the necessity of a methodology to identify metropolitan areas in Europe. This methodology should fulfil three requisites: first, to be useful for analysis and planning, which requires to represent in a realistic way economic, social and environmental phenomena. Second, to be applicable to all the European countries. Third, to be flexible enough to deal with the existence of different administrative and territorial structures across countries as well as to take into account that many metropolitan areas, particularly the largest ones, are polycentric and highly networked.

The aim of this paper is to identify metropolitan areas in Spain and Italy using similar methodologies and to evaluate their application to other European countries. The results allow comparing the metropolitan realities of these countries as well as providing the metropolitan units that can be used in subsequent comparative researches. Two methodologies are proposed: the Cheshire-GEMACA methodology (FUR) and an iterative version of the USA-MSA algorithm, the latter one particularly adapted to deal with polycentric metropolitan areas. Both methods show a good approximation to the metropolitan reality and produce very similar results: 75 FUR and 67 DMA in Spain (75% of total population and employment), and 81 FUR and 86 DMA in Italy (70% of total population and employment).

**Keywords:** metropolitan areas, polycentricity, commuting

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Metropolitan areas concentrate the main share of population, production and consumption in OECD countries. They are likely to be the most important units for economic, social and environmental analysis as well as for the development of policy strategies.

The metropolitan area does not fit well with the administrative boundaries. Metropolitan areas change over the space and time reflecting the evolution of the economy and society. Its assimilation with the administrative city, region or province usually introduces severe drawbacks when the metropolitan area is only a part of this territorial unit or when it considerably exceeds the administrative boundaries<sup>3</sup>.

Unfortunately, the discussion about the boundaries of the metropolitan area does not restrict to the accuracy of the indicators but rather affects the welfare of the residents when the definition of metropolitan area is transformed in policies affecting the basic pillars of competitiveness, social cohesion, environment and quality of life, and governance.

A second issue arises from the fact that the comparison between the metropolitan units identified in different countries is difficult as countries use different methodologies and in several countries no definition of metropolitan units has been carried out at all. International institutions, more than others, have tried to find general methodologies to map metropolitan areas (OECD 2006; ÖIR, 2006) although it represents a difficult aim due to the existence of different territorial structures across countries.

This severe problem appeared when we tried to perform comparative research between Spain and Italy using metropolitan areas as units of analysis: no official definition of metropolitan area was available and the few available approximations made by researches or institutions, when conceptually feasible, were not comparable. On the basis of these problems, the aim of the paper is to identify metropolitan areas in Spain and Italy using similar methodologies. The identified metropolitan units have three basic purposes. The first one is to provide a general view of the characteristics of each country's metropolitan reality. The second is the comparison of the metropolitan processes of both countries. The third one is the identification of metropolitan units that can be used in subsequent analysis. This has been

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<sup>3</sup> An example of the first problem is the assimilation of the metropolitan area of Barcelona to the province: province data averages the results of the indicators and dissolves some of the potentialities and problems of the real metropolitan area. On the other hand, Milan and Madrid constitutes an example of the second case, where the limitations of data force the use of the province, too small to capture the real extension of both areas. In this case, the areas have expanded out of the administrative boundaries and we could erroneously conclude that there is a reduced presence of some activities or maybe their disappearance if they moved out of the administrative limits.

done focusing on two functional approaches to the concept of metropolitan area. First, a general methodology applicable to most of the UE countries is used, in this case, the Functional Urban Area (FUR) methodology as proposed by GEMACA (1996). Second, the use of a native methodology (Dynamic Metropolitan Area) specifically designed to deal with the specific characteristics of networking and policentricity. We assess the results of their application to Spain and Italy, two very similar countries in terms of social, economic and territorial structures and expand the discussion to their use in other countries.

The research proposes two contributions. Firstly, from the methodological point of view, we expand the traditional approaches to the identification of metropolitan areas to introduce a new category we named “network approach” that explicitly recognizes that metropolitan areas are cliques of networks of cities and can be monocentric or polycentric. This fact is recognised in the proposal of a methodology of identification named Dynamic Metropolitan Area (DMA). Secondly, there is a lack of detailed empirical comparative studies on the identification of metropolitan areas in different countries using similar methodologies. The lack of official definitions as well as the scarcity of studies in Spain and Italy to identify metropolitan areas is perceived as a severe drawback that dissuades from the use of metropolitan areas as units of analysis in both countries. This paper provides two sets of metropolitan areas, identified using rigorous approaches and replicable standards that can be used for other researchers in subsequent investigations.

The paper is structured as follows. The second section discusses the approaches used to identify metropolitan areas in European countries. The third section provides a review of the previous works of identification of metropolitan areas in Spain and Italy. The fourth section proposes two methodologies for the identification of metropolitan areas and in Spain and Italy. The fifth section presents the results of their application to Spain and Italy. The work ends with some concluding remarks and the short discussion about an agenda towards a unified identification of metropolitan areas in Europe.

## **2. GENERAL APPROACHES TO THE DEFINITION OF METROPOLITAN AREAS**

The identification of metropolitan areas can be carried out using four basic approaches. Three have been proposed in the Espon 1.4.1 Report (ÖIR, 2006):

1. The “administrative” approach identifies metropolitan areas on the basis of the status of previously definite legal or administrative units. It is conceptualised as an instrument for purposes of governance and control. The

identification departs from local or provincial boundaries and applies some criteria to distinguish between metropolitan and non-metropolitan units (population thresholds, governmental decisions, historical reasons, etc.). Examples of the administrative criteria can be found in the OECD reports (OECD 2006) and in the empirical applications of the ESPON FUAs (Table 1).

2. The “morphological” approach identifies metropolitan areas as those continuous urban settlements that reach certain thresholds of density, dimension or degree of urbanization. The metropolitan area is conceptualised as a physical object, without referring to any relational consideration. Serra et al. (2002) provides an example of the application of this criterion (Table 1) and other example can be found in Rozenblat and Cicille (2003).

3. The “functional” approach defines metropolitan areas as economic and social entities and not as mere geographical areas (ÖIR, 2006 – p. 17). Administrative boundaries are not longer a priority criterion and the focus is shifted to the functional relations between the units that form the metropolitan area. Using this approach, a metropolitan area is defined as an area of interactions between a core (which may be defined using morphological criteria as population or employment thresholds) and its hinterland of neighbour municipalities which show a significant relationship with the core (usually approximated with travel-to-work commuting flows). Examples of this criterion can be found in the FURs identified by the GEMACA group (1996) and the USA metropolitan areas (Table 1)<sup>4</sup>.

We propose a fourth approach we named “network approach” which recognises that the interaction characterizing a metropolitan area takes place in multiple directions and levels so that the metropolitan one is defined by a complex and multidirectional network of interactions between actors placed in several interconnected layers. The basic representation of the metropolitan area can be reduced to a dense network of cities. This approach has two basic implications:

first, that the basic model is polycentric and can have several first-order centres. Thus, the monocentric model is only a constrained form of the polycentric one. This also lead to a change of paradigm, from central places to network models (Camagni and Salone, 1993).

Second, that the methodologies of identification of metropolitan areas will evolve towards graph-based methods, found on the systems theory, better prepared to deal with polycentricity, networking and increasing complexity.

In fact, we can consider morphological and functional approaches as restricted versions of the network approach where there are important

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<sup>4</sup> Freeman (2005) provides a comparison between the characteristics and results of the US metropolitana areas, GEMACA and Urban Audit.

constraints in the information available as well as a notable reduction of the conceptual complexity.

While the administrative approach is clearly inadequate to identify economically and socially integrated urban areas, the morphological approach presents the further problem of finding too small cities that difficultly could be called metropolitan areas. The functional approach appears to be a good and suitable method as it takes into account the socioeconomic relations between the several units which form the metropolitan area but it is constrained to limited complexity and is implicitly based on monocentricity. If the aim of the analysis is the study of urban polycentricity or, in general, of the urban spatial structure, the network approach seems to be the most suitable. In the absence of symmetric information, it is possible to combine several criteria in order to apply the best option when available or an alternative otherwise, for instance in the definition of LUZ by Urban Audit (Table 1).

Table 1. Empirical application of methodologies for the identification of metropolitan areas in the UE and USA

Identification method	Description of the method	Source and kind of data	Advantage	Disadvantages	On the whole
<b>OCDE's Metropolitan regions (2006)</b>	NUT3	Administrative definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Simplicity</li> <li>- Availability of many typologies of data</li> <li>- Units of analysis stable during the time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Socio-economic dynamic doesn't coincide with administrative definition</li> <li>- Static unit of analysis steady in time and space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On the whole, the province seems to identify a too wide territory for metropolitan areas, except for some of the biggest ones</li> </ul>
<b>Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) ESPON 2006</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A Functional Urban Area (FUA) is composed by a <i>core</i> and by a neighbour area that is economically integrated with the <i>core</i>.</li> <li>- Due to the difficulties associated to the identification FUAs tend often to be approximated with NUT3 with more than 20,000 inhabitants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Various sources: usually Census data on population, employment and commuting at a municipal and NUT3 level.</li> <li>When a NUT3 is adopted, a simple administrative definition is used. FUAs are usually determined on a functional approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Little information needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spatially static units of analysis</li> <li>- There has not been identified a method applied to every country, so the method applied could be administrative, morphological or functional. As a matter of fact, few times the identified area correspond with the area of expansion of economic flows.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On the whole, the method utilised is not clear neither univocal. Project 1.1.1 proposed a methodology that cannot be applied to many countries due to a lack of available data, including Italy and Spain. The biggest unit of Espon (MEGAs) are often similar to provinces and take with them all the above mentioned problems of administrative units.</li> </ul>
<b>Functional Urban Regions (GEMACA II)</b>	Neighbouring municipalities with an employment density of more than 7 jobs per hectare ( <i>core</i> ) plus the ring of contiguous municipalities that have more than 10% of their commuters travelling towards the above-identified <i>core</i> .	Census data on population, employment and commuting at a municipal level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dynamic unit of analysis in time.</li> <li>- Easy and clear methodology that could be applied to almost every European country. There should be some problems for those countries that have municipalities units particularly big.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are some ambiguities on which kind of land to use (urban land, municipal land, etc.)</li> <li>- It is very sensitive to the urbanisation pattern.</li> <li>- In polycentric or contiguous metropolitan areas, the direction of the expansion of densities doesn't have to follow the direction of economic interaction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excellent performance. Despite the integration of the <i>core</i> with an urban ring, not always the methodology understands that neighbour FURs constitute a single city, especially when the identification is carried out for planning or transport policy purposes.</li> </ul>
<b>Urban Areas (Serra et al. 2002; Carreras et al. 2009)</b>	Urban <i>Core</i> with at least 100,000 inhabitants and with a density higher than 1,500 inhab./Km <sup>2</sup> . All the contiguous municipalities with a density higher than 250 inhab./ Km <sup>2</sup> must be added to the <i>core</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Population and municipal surface data.</li> <li>- Morphological approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dynamic unit of analysis on time.</li> <li>- Basic requirements of information and simplicity of application.</li> <li>- Possibility of an European comparison between unit identified in this way.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It doesn't take at all into account the relations between the different parts of the metropolitan area. So it is difficult that this unit of analysis coincide with an actual economic integrated area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Simplicity of application and few data are needed. However, due to its pure morphological approach, it seems not to be adequate for economically integrated areas.</li> </ul>

<b>Larger Zones (Urban Audit, 2006)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Urban <i>core</i> plus all the municipalities that present more than 15% of total commuters travelling towards the core.</li> <li>- When there is not available statistical information, NUTS3 can be used as a proxy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Census data: flows of work commuters, employed resident people, jobs and resident population.</li> <li>- When there is enough statistical information it is a functional approach, while in the case of NUTS3 only an administrative approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dynamic method in both time and space.</li> <li>- It takes into account socio-economic relations between municipalities.</li> <li>- Easy method</li> <li>- Possibility of an European comparability of the units of analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The identified urban areas are usually too small, often limited to the central city of a bigger metropolitan area.</li> <li>- Due to the dimensions of the identified units, the methodology cannot capture the polycentric spatial organization of cities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- After having applied this methodology to some countries, it emerges that the identified units are even smaller than Local Labour Market Areas (LLMAs) (ISTAT 1997). These units have the problem that tend to separate sub-centres of the same metropolitan area.</li> </ul>
<b>Metropolitan areas of USA's Census Bureau</b>	<p>The <i>central core</i> is made of a municipality of more than 50,000 inhabitants and of other municipalities that send these municipality at least 15% of their resident employed population.</p> <p>The urban ring have to be built adding to the <i>central core</i> the municipalities in which more than 15% of employed resident people work in the <i>central core</i> and with a density of at least 62inhab./km2.</p> <p>Alternatively, the conditions to add ring municipalities are a density of 37 inhab./km2 and at least 30% of resident employed population that work in the <i>central core</i>. In this way are applied both contiguity and consolidation criteria.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Census data. Commuting to work flows, resident employed population and jobs and resident population.</li> <li>- Surface area at the municipal level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dynamic method both spatially and temporally.</li> <li>- It takes into account socio-economic relations.</li> <li>- Use of high quality data (census data)</li> <li>- Possible European comparability</li> <li>- Use of consolidation criteria</li> <li>- I is possible to classify areas in different levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Metropolitan areas with this method could be too small to be suitable for planning, transportation purposes or to catch polycentricity. However they are usually bigger than LUZ</li> <li>- Only one interaction between the <i>central core</i> and the urban belt since the aim of the method is that of build statistical areas and not to identify the real city.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This method seems to work well, but it still doesn't solve the problem of the study of polycentricity and doesn't seems to be enough suitable for the planning of infrastructures and mobility.</li> </ul>

### 3. METROPOLITAN AREAS IN SPAIN AND ITALY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### 3.1. Spain

The Spanish Constitution (art 141.3 and 152.3) confers to the regions the possibility, for sets of contiguous municipalities, to associate in territorial entities that are different from the region or the province they belong. The law of local corporations (LRBRL, art 43) asserts that metropolitan areas are local entities composed of municipalities of large urban agglomerations with social and economic linkages where the joint coordination and planning is necessary.

The first attempts aimed at identifying metropolitan areas in Spain concern to the Dirección General de Urbanismo of the Ministry of Housing (1965, 1967). The morphological criterion, inspired by Davis (1959), consisted of the identification of a central core of at least 50,000 inhabitants and a strong socio-economic relationship between the core and surrounding municipalities. The whole metropolitan area should have a population of at least 100,000 inhabitants, a density larger than 100 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, high rates of growth, and contiguity. Following these criteria, 26 areas were identified in 1960 (34% of the national population) and 24 in 1967 (36% of the national population)<sup>5</sup>.

A second approach, also from an institutional source, is found in the “III Plan de Desarrollo Económico y Social” (1972). The document proposes three criteria to identify metropolitan areas: statistic, economic development, and planning. The application of the statistical criterion to 1965, 1969 and 1985 provided 25, 30 and 32 statistical metropolitan areas respectively (De Esteban, 1981).

The Ministry of Housing (Ministerio de Vivienda 2000, 2005 and 2007) has recently elaborated other maps although more centred on the identification of “urban areas” than of the metropolitan ones. The procedure follows a morphological approach that departs from data of population, housing, territorial structure and urban dynamics, and the transportation network. The Spanish territory has 82 Large Urban Areas (with at least one municipality larger than 50,000 inhabitants) and 269 Small Urban Areas. The first has 9% of Spanish municipalities and 71% of total population of the country, and can be considered a proxy of the metropolitan phenomenon.

Serrano (2006), adopts a morphological approach to identify “urban areas and agglomerations” in Spain. This category contains those continuous areas formed by a “central” municipality of more than 75,000 inhabitants surrounded by a belt of municipalities so that the entire area has at least

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<sup>5</sup> A review about the identification of metropolitan areas in Spain from 1960 to 1980 is provided by De Esteban (1981).

100,000 inhabitants. The belt is determined using a distance-based criterion: 40 Km from the central city for the large areas, and 15 Km for the small areas. For the year 2001, he identifies 45 urban agglomerations which have 9% of the Spanish municipalities and 61% of the total population. The largest agglomerations are Madrid (41 municipalities and 5 million inhabitants), Barcelona (74 municipalities and 3.8 million inhabitants) and Valencia (63 municipalities and 1.56 million inhabitants). This methodology is quite simple, and only population and distance data are required. On the other hand, no justification is raised for the election of the distance thresholds and why they are the same for all the range of large or small urban areas. In fact, the small number of municipalities surrounding Madrid suggests the inaccuracy of this morphological criterion to take into account the socioeconomic structure of complex metropolitan areas.

Clusa and Roca (1997) provides an algorithm in two stages for the identification of the metropolitan area of Barcelona based on the former USA Federal Register (Office of Management and Budget, 1990) procedure for the identification of metropolitan areas in New England. In the first step, they identify a central core as a municipality of more than 50,000 inhabitants plus those municipalities in which at least 15% of their resident employees commutes to this municipality. The hinterland is formed by those municipalities in which at least 15% of their resident employees commutes to the central core. As a difference from the USA procedure, Clusa and Roca iterate four times the criterion to form the hinterland, each time using the result of the previous iteration as the core. Contiguity criteria are used after the last iteration. As labour markets tend to be self-contained, the choice of four iterations is based on the empirical fact that after the third iteration the number of municipalities included is very small and in subsequent iterations tend to nil. The area identified using this procedure for the year 1991 has 145 municipalities and 4.2 million inhabitants.

This criterion has been latterly applied to the entire region of Catalonia by Trullén and Boix (2000) and Boix and Galletto (2004) who identifies five metropolitan areas and their evolution since 1986. Roca et al. (2005) extended the procedure to identify the metropolitan areas of the seven largest cities in Spain in 1991 and 2001. The results for 2001 remark the size of Madrid (608 municipalities and a population of 5.6 millions) and Barcelona (227 municipalities and a population of 4.5 millions). With more than one million inhabitants they also identify Valencia (152 municipalities and a population of 1.7 millions), Seville (60 municipalities and a population of 1.4 millions) and Bilbao (104 municipalities and a population of 1.1 millions).

Other attempts to identify metropolitan areas in Spain have been carried out at a regional level. The administrative approach prevails when Public Administrations approach the metropolitan area (e.g. Madrid is usually assimilated to the province and Valencia to the county). The

morphological approach prevails in Lejarza and Lejarza (2002) for Valencia, and Sánchez (1998) for Zaragoza. Functional approaches have been applied to Barcelona by Esteban (1995) and Salvador et al. (1997), and to Andalusia by Feria and Susino (2005). Rubert (2005) applies a pool of methodologies to the MA of Castellon.

Focusing with more details in the functional approaches, Esteban (1995) and Salvador et al. (1997) applies the FUR methodologies (Cheshire and Hay 1989; GEMACA 1996) to identify the boundaries of the metropolitan area of Barcelona. The latter is similar to the FUR procedure proposed in the next section, and using 1991 data produces a FUR composed of 131 municipalities and 4.1 million inhabitants.

Feria and Susino (2005) employ a functional approach based on absolute and relative cut-offs of population and commuting flows. Following this approach, each metropolitan area must have a central city of at least 100,000 inhabitants. The hinterland is composed by those municipalities which send to the central city at least 15% of their resident employees or where the commuting received from the central city exceeds of 15% of the local jobs. In both cases, the minimum flow must reach 100 commuters. As this procedure performs better on centralized structures, the authors propose that the relative threshold could be also reached by iterating, although in this case they require a minimum value of 500 commuters. Contiguity criteria are applied to obtain the final shape of the metropolitan areas. The procedure identifies 8 metropolitan areas in Andalusia, where the most important are Seville (40 municipalities and 1.29 inhabitants) and Malaga-Marbella (29 municipalities and 1 million inhabitants).

From an international point of view, the OECD identifies three metropolitan regions above 1.5 million inhabitants in Spain (Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia). Urban Audit (2006) finds 18 Large Urban Zones, where Madrid (5.4 million inhabitants) and Barcelona (4 million inhabitants) are the largest metropolitan units. Rozenblat and Cicille (2003) differentiate 22 Spanish large European agglomerations. ESPON (2006) identifies 100 Functional Urban Areas, where Madrid is the only above 5 million inhabitants and Barcelona, Valencia and Seville have above 1 million inhabitants.

### **3.2. Italy**

Italian Metropolitan Areas are an institution provided by the national law n. 142 of 1990. The law provides a general criterion to guide the identification of metropolitan areas, where each pivotal municipality has to be strongly integrated from an economic, social or cultural point of view. The act fixes 9 metropolitan areas while other 5 have been introduced by regional laws. Despite the importance of the urban and metropolitan fact in Italy, there are only very few works aimed to the identification of metropolitan areas.

Cafiero and Busca (1970) adopt a morphological approach based on a threshold of density and spatial contiguity. These criteria have been also utilised by Svimez (1983; 1987) and Cecchini (1988), who identify 39 metropolitan areas. Their main limitation is the choice of the thresholds of density and dimension and the results do not seem to fit well to different territorial situations. For example, the metropolitan area of Milan seems to be too big if compared with the small area obtained for Rome.

Marchese (1989, 1997) identifies 32 metropolitan areas following a morphological procedure in two steps. First, he selects all contiguous municipalities which show a certain threshold of employment density and then he divides these continuums in four groups on the basis of their dimension. In the second step, he selects those sets of contiguous municipalities that can be considered metropolitan areas on the basis of the existence of centrality factors, as high rank services for families and firms.

Vitali (1990) identifies “urban areas” using a morphological approach similar to the one used by Serrano (2005) for Spain. Vitali departs from the basis that each province’s capital is the centre of a larger “area of attraction”. Around each centre, a circle is drawn to delimit the area of attraction, using a radius of 10, 15 or 20 Km, depending on the dimension of the centre. The three groups of urban areas identified have the same geographical extension and shape (circular).

The ISTAT-IRPET (1989) provides the most significant attempt to identify large urban units using a functional approach. It departs from the previously identified local labour markets which are subsequently aggregated in Functional Labour Regions. For 1981 Census data, ISTAT-IRPET (1989) identifies 995 local labour markets which combines in 177 Functional Labour Regions. Recently, the Italian government has proposed to apply a threshold of population to the 2001 local labour markets to identify the so called Local Metropolitan Systems (Consiglio dei Ministri, 2006 – p. 228). Although they can provide a feasible approach for small and medium metropolitan areas, local labour markets are clearly inappropriate for the largest metropolitan areas as Milan or Rome, formed by several local labour markets.

The annual report of ISTAT (2007 and 2008) offers other approaches to the identification of “urban areas” and “functional regions” starting from the 2001 local labour markets. The “Rapporto Annuale 2006” (ISTAT 2007, p. 137-147) provides 32 labour markets with characteristics of Larger Urban Zones coming from the third Urban Audit report. Moreover, there are other 46 local labour markets defined as urbanized but that are not considered in the Urban Audit 3 project. The “Rapporto Annuale 2007” (ISTAT 2008, p. 149-153) identifies 41 metropolitan regions as those local labour markets which combines morphologically urban characteristics and urban functions. These metropolitan regions cover 34.7% of the national population.

#### **4. FUR AND DMA FUNCTIONAL AND NETWORK METHODOLOGIES**

The general approaches exposed in section 2 suggest the use of functional and network methodologies when data are available. Two methodologies are proposed: the FUR by GEMACA II (1996) which is a functional methodology applicable to most of the UE countries; and an improvement of the Clusa and Roca (1997) iterative methodology, which is a network approach elaborated from the basis of a functional methodology.

##### **4.1. A previous thought about the basic territorial unit of observation and the use of commuting data**

Maybe the first problem of comparative research is the choice of the basic territorial unit. In anglosaxon countries it is usually the council, in Mediterranean countries the municipality, whereas in other the typical election could be parish, districts and so on. Even when using similar units we must deal with different sizes and characteristics of these units. From this point of view, the use of an homogeneous unit independent from the particularities of each country or region seems to be a reasonable idea. Recent working papers by OECD (2009 and 2010) propose the use of “building blocks” in the form of 1 Km<sup>2</sup> grids which are subsequently aggregated to form the cores of the metropolitan areas.

That is a proposal to be taken into account. However, some points can be made here. The first one is that this is only viable when detailed microdata including the location (postal address) of the population are available in all the sample of countries, which is quite unusual. In absence of these data, the lineal homogenous assignation of the population of the county or the municipality to the grids don't have any evident advantage regarding the use of the aggregated unit. The second point is if the use of grids has more social or economical sense that the use of counties or municipalities or, if we are looking for smaller units of departure, quarters of postal districts. Again, it is not evident if the use of grids avoids the problems of heterogeneity and/or, more than avoiding it, introduces an artificial ecological fallacy problem<sup>6</sup>. In any case, these thoughts want to pay attention to the fact that this is an open question, that there is not a sole solution, and that a careful reflection is necessary in the first stage of the analysis. In the next sections, we follow the most extended tradition by departing of the

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<sup>6</sup> An third solution is proposed by Coombes (2000), who proposes the re-definition of localities using synthetic data. Even if this depends on the availability of information, provides an interesting solution between the homogeneity of the units and their social and economic significance.

municipality as the basic territorial unit. Our justification is that it better reflects the administrative, social and economic spatial structure.

A second relevant point is the use of commuting flow data as the basic measure of interaction. Davoudi (2003) reports some objections to its use as a sole indicator of interrelationship. Basically, the advantage of travel-to-work commuting is that incorporates a synthetic mix of social, economic, infrastructural, housing, and administrative interactions. On the other hand, in an extended network approach, as discussed in the section 2, the use of multi-layer information will provide in the future a richer set of measures. In any case, and even being critical, our experience during a long time suggest that travel-to-work commuting has an excellent performance as a synthetic measure of interaction and deals perfectly with networking between cities .

#### **4.2. Functional Urban Regions (FUR)**

The concept of FUR was used for the first time by Berry (1967) for the USA. In Europe it was introduced by Cheshire and Hay (1989). The main reason for the use of this concept was to identify comparable urban units across Europe, as some years before had done Hall and Hay (1980) by introducing the close concept of Daily Urban System (DUS). Despite their name evoke the concept of a region, FURs are metropolitan areas (Cheshire and Hay, 1989) and the methodology for their identification follows a functional approach, as their boundaries are determined on the basis of economic relationships (Davoudi, 2008). The procedure employed follows the works by GEMACA (1996 and 2001) for the North-West Europe Urban System<sup>7</sup>:

1. A “core” composed by one or more contiguous municipalities with a density of at least 7 jobs per hectare and with no less than 20,000 jobs;
2. A “hinterland”, which consists of all the contiguous municipalities where at least 10% of the resident employees commutes with the core. Municipalities that are completely surrounded by the FUR are also included.

#### **4.3 Dynamic Metropolitan Areas (DMAs)**

Network methodologies to identify metropolitan areas could depart from aggregative (bottom-up) or partitive (top-down) techniques. In the first case, we group cities in successive iterations to form the metropolitan area, whereas in the second one the objective is to divide the cities in blocks or clusters and subsequently decide which of them have metropolitan

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<sup>7</sup> Cheshire and Magrini (2008) use a variation of this procedure where the density of job per hectare increases to 12.35. In the case of Spain and Italy both thresholds produce the same empirical results.

characteristics. Until this moment, most of the procedures, included our proposal, rely on bottom-up approaches.

The network methodology we propose to map metropolitan areas is based on Clusa and Roca (1997) and Roca et al. (2005) adaptation of the USA Federal Register's methodology (Office of Management and Budget, 1990) and, similar to the FUR, the metropolitan area is composed by a central core and a hinterland. The main differences are that the initial relative threshold of commuting for the formation of the core and the hinterland is more exigent although it is iterated to take advantage of the trend of labour markets to be self-contained and the recursive networking between cities. In addition, we introduce a previous step to better differentiate between central and non-central cities and to take into account the polycentric nature of some of these areas. The complete procedure is named Dynamic Metropolitan Area (DMA):

1. The first stage of the DMA algorithm is aimed to determine the "central core" of the metropolitan area, formed by the "first-order centres" and their primary belt. A first-order centre must have at least 50,000 inhabitants. The "central core" is formed by one of more first-order centres and the surrounding municipalities that commute at least 15% of their resident employees with them<sup>8</sup>.

2. In the second stage, as a difference from the USA procedure, the hinterland is formed in four iterations. It is in this part of the procedure where the existence of networking between cities is exploited. In the first iteration we include those municipalities for which at least 15% of their resident employees commutes to the central core. This criterion is applied other three times using as "core" the result of the previous iteration, so that: hinterland 1 = core + municipalities commuting 15% of their resident employment to the core; hinterland 2 = hinterland 1 + municipalities commuting 15% of their resident employment to the hinterland 1, etc. Contiguity criteria are used after the last iteration, so that all the isolated municipalities completely surrounded by other that belong to a MA are included, while those that are not contiguous are excluded.

However, in the large metropolitan areas is usual to find several contiguous and non-contiguous cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants so that it is difficult to differentiate a first-order centre from a second-order subcentre or to avoid the assignation of the subcentres of a polycentric

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<sup>8</sup> After 1991, the Federal Register has introduced several changes in the identification of the core and has increased the commuting threshold to 25% in order to hold back the growth of the statistical units. It is noted that its primary assignment is not to identify metropolitan areas but rather to provide manageable statistical units. However, as our purpose is different, we prefer to base our procedure in the former 1990s methodology due to the fact that: (1) the 2001 version eradicates cities and towns in favour of counties and reduces its applicability to Spain and Italy; (2) based on previous works, the 15% threshold is considered to produce good results.

metropolitan area to different areas. To separate first-order centres (central cities) from other large municipalities, we propose a pre-application of the procedure so that:

1. The percentages of commuting between all the potential first-order centres are calculated. If one of these cities sends more than 15% of its total commuting to another one, the first is considered a sub-centre of the latter. If both cities share reciprocally more than 15% of their total commuting, then both have to be intended as a unique central core of the same metropolitan area.

2. A recursive pre-application of the core-hinterland steps is proposed in order to differentiate first-order centres from the remaining second-order subcentres. Thus, if in some of the four iterations a potential first-order centre reveals as city of the core or the hinterland of another metropolitan area, this city is removed from the list of first-order centres and the pre-application starts again until it separates all the first-order centres from the second order subcentres larger than 50,000 inhabitants.

#### **4.4. Consolidation of FURs and DMAs**

Following the Federal Register (Office of Management and Budget, 1990), contiguous FURs or DMAs can be aggregated in a single area if some conditions are respected. To simplify these conditions, we consider that two areas must be aggregated in only one metropolitan area if some of them have a flow of commuters from one to another of more than 10% of their total resident employees. If the percentage is close although lower to the 10%, the integration is done if there is other robust evidence that the areas are economic and socially integrated.

#### **4.5. Names of the FURs and DMAs and classification by intervals**

For simplicity, the name of the FUR or DMA corresponds to the name of the largest city.

Following the suggestion by the Federal Register (Office of Management and Budget, 1990) and GEMACA (2001), we propose to divide the FURs and DMAs in four intervals or classes regarding the total size of the areas:

1. Level A, formed by the metropolitan areas larger than 1 million inhabitants
2. Level B, formed by the metropolitan areas between 250,000 and 1 million inhabitants
3. Level C, formed by the metropolitan areas between 100,000 and 250,000 inhabitants
4. Level D, formed by the metropolitan areas with less than 100,000 inhabitants.

## 5. APPLICATION AND RESULTS

Most data for the identification of metropolitan areas in Spain and Italy (population, employment and commuting) come from the 2001 national Censuses elaborated by the Spanish Institute of Statistics (INE) and the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). Land data has been obtained from the national property registers. Cartographical basic layers used for GIS (municipalities and regions) come from INE and ISTAT.

### 5.1. Functional Urban Regions

The FUR procedure allows to identify 65 FURs in Spain. They have 51% of municipalities (4,200), 76% of population (31 millions) and 77% of employment (16.3 million jobs). There are 5 level A FURs (above 1 million employees) which have 13% of Spanish municipalities, 35% of national population and 38% of employment (Table 2). Madrid is the largest FUR, with 575 municipalities, 5.9 million inhabitants and 2.6 million employees. Barcelona has 174 municipalities, 4.3 million inhabitants and 1.9 million employees. Valencia has 150 municipalities, 1.7 million inhabitants and 700,000 employees, Seville has 57 municipalities, 1.3 million inhabitants and 480,000 employees, and Bilbao has 87 municipalities, 1.06 million inhabitants and 420.000 employees.

There are 23 level B FURs (between 250,000 and 1 million inhabitants). They have 20.5% of Spanish municipalities, 28% of population and 27% of employment. There are 26 level C FURs (between 100,000 and 250,000 inhabitants) which have 14.6% of Spanish municipalities, and 10.5% of population and employment. Finally, the 11 level D FURs have 3.8% of municipalities, and 2% of population and employment.

Regarding their spatial distribution, FURs are distributed across all the country. However, the largest FURs regarding their extension tend to be localised in the centre-north of the country whereas the most populated tend to concentrate in the upper-right part of the country (Figure 1).

In Italy, 81 metropolitan areas have been identified following the FUR procedure. They contain 43% of municipalities (3,475), 67.6% of total population and 71.5% of employment. There are 6 level A FURs, which have 14.4% of Italian municipalities, 30.5% of national population and 32.4% of total employment. The largest FUR is Milan, with 499 municipalities, 5.2 million inhabitants and 2.4 employees. Rome is the second one, with 239 municipalities, 4.3 million inhabitants and 1.5 million employees. Naples, Turin, Florence and Palermo have respectively 125, 215, 51 and 43 municipalities, as well as 3.5, 2, 1.2 and 1 million inhabitants. Naples has 778,000 employees, Turin 826,000, Florence 528,000 and Palermo 224,000.

There are 34 level B FURs that represent 15% of Italian municipalities, 26% of population and 27.4% of total Italian employment.

The 38 level C FURs have 12.8% of municipalities, 10.7% of population and 11.1% of national employment. The 3 level D FURs have 0.6% of municipalities, 0.4% of Italian population and 0.6% of employment.

Italian FURs are distributed quite uniformly across the Italian territory even if in the northern-east part of Italy a higher density of FURs can be observed. Many urban areas are identified in particular along the “Via Emilia” and the Po Valley, while in the south the FURs tend to be more spatially separated (Figure 1).

## **5.2. Dynamic Metropolitan Areas**

The DMA procedure identifies 67 DMAs in Spain. They have 49% of Spanish municipalities (4,000), 76% of population (31 millions) and 77% of employment (16.3 million jobs). There are 5 level A DMAs, which have 13% of Spanish municipalities, 35% of national population and 38% of employment (Table 2). Madrid is the largest DMA, with 548 municipalities, 5.8 million inhabitants and 2.6 million employees. Barcelona has 209 municipalities, 4.5 million inhabitants and 2 million employees. Valencia has 129 municipalities, 1.7 million inhabitants and 700,000 employees. Seville has 60 municipalities, 1.4 million inhabitants and 480,000 employees. Bilbao has 108 municipalities, 1.1 million inhabitants and 430,000 employees.

There are 24 level B FURs which have 20.6% of Spanish municipalities, 28% of population and 27% of employment. There are 24 level C FURs which have 12% of Spanish municipalities as well as 9.7% of national population and employment. Finally, the 14 level D FURs have 3.2% of municipalities and 2.5% of population and employment.

The application of the DMA procedure to Italy identifies 86 urban areas. They have 48.9% of Italian municipalities (3,962), 69.4% of total national population (39.6 millions) and 73.4% of employment (14.2 million jobs). There are 6 level A DMAs, which have 16.7% of the Italian municipalities (1,355), 30.7% of population and 32.7% of employment (Table 2). The rank of the first DMAs is the same as in the FUR case. Thus, Milan is the biggest metropolitan area, with 597 municipalities, 5.3 inhabitants and 2.4 million employees. Rome is the second, with 200 municipalities, 4.2 million inhabitants and 1.5 million employees. Naples has 119 municipalities, 3.4 million inhabitants and 757,000 employees. Turin has 341 municipalities, 2.2 million inhabitants and 896,000 employees. Florence has 59 municipalities, 1.3 million inhabitants and 580,000 employees. Finally, Palermo has 39 municipalities, 1 million inhabitants and 222,000 employees.

Regarding the other dimensional classes of metropolitan areas identified with the dynamic procedure, there are 31 level B DMAs which have 19.9% of the Italian municipalities, 26.2% of the population and 28.6% of the total national employment. The 40 level C DMAs have 11.2% of

municipalities and population and 10.8% of total employment. Finally, the 9 level D DMAs have 1.1% of total municipalities and 1.3% of national population and employment.

*Table 2. Metropolitan areas in Spain and Italy. Main results. Total values*  
*a) Functional Urban Regions*

FURs	N° Areas	Municipalities	Population	Employment
<i>SPAIN</i>				
Level A (> 1,000,000)	5	1.043	14.436.219	6.180.480
Level B (250,000 - 1,000,000)	23	1.666	11.412.405	4.438.068
Level C (100,000 - 250,000)	26	1.185	4.251.746	1.676.858
Level D (< 100,000)	11	306	869.903	348.329
Total Spanish FURs	65	4.200	30.970.273	12.643.735
Total Spain		8.108	40.847.371	16.329.713
<i>ITALY</i>				
Level A (> 1,000,000)	6	1.172	17.361.480	6.417.324
Level B (250,000 - 1,000,000)	34	1.217	14.794.555	5.559.483
Level C (100,000 - 250,000)	38	1.036	6.124.900	2.336.696
Level D (< 100,000)	3	50	250.452	104.770
Total Italian FURs	81	3.475	38.531.387	14.418.273
Total Italy		8.101	56.995.744	20.993.732

*b) Dynamic Metropolitan areas*

DMAs	N° Areas	Municipalities	Population	Employment
<i>SPAIN</i>				
Level A (> 1,000,000)	5	1.049	14.506.823	6.219.367
Level B (250,000 - 1,000,000)	24	1.672	11.326.179	4.409.462
Level C (100,000 - 250,000)	24	990	3.951.546	1.568.868
Level D (< 100,000)	14	258	1.091.995	402.086
Total Spanish DMAs	67	3.969	30.876.543	12.599.783
Total Spain		8.108	40.847.371	16.329.713
<i>ITALY</i>				
Level A (> 1,000,000)	6	1.355	17.479.230	6.510.073
Level B (250,000 - 1,000,000)	31	1.614	14.956.574	5.779.957
Level C (100,000 - 250,000)	40	905	6.358.585	2.308.902
Level D (< 100,000)	9	88	766.873	281.186
Total Italian DMAs	86	3.962	39.561.262	14.880.118
Total Italy		8.101	56.995.744	20.993.732

Source: Elaboration from INE (Spain) and ISTAT (Italy) Census Data, 2001

Table 3. Metropolitan areas in Spain and Italy. Main results. Percentages

*a) Functional Urban Regions*

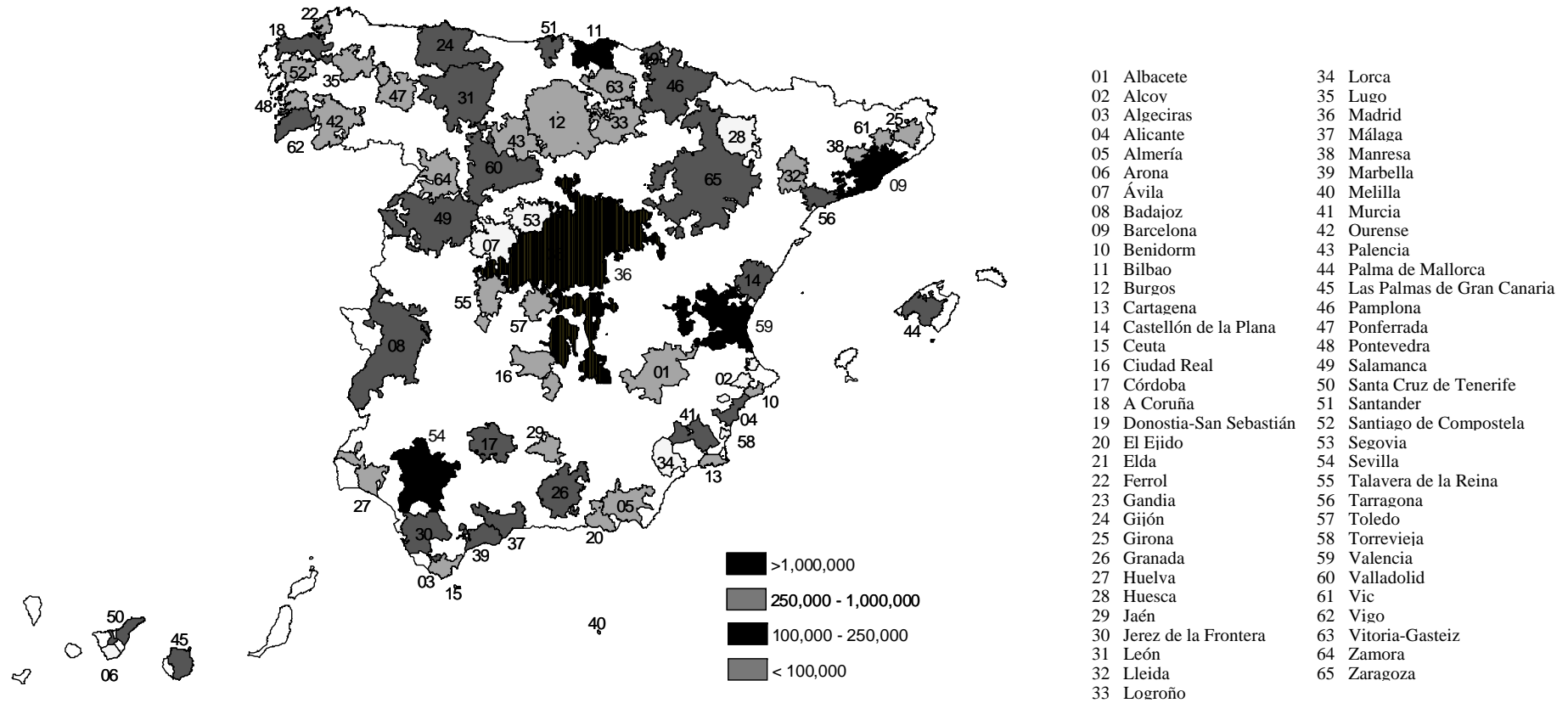
FURs	Municipalities	Population	Employment
<i>SPAIN</i>			
Level A (> 1,000,000)	12,9%	35,3%	37,8%
Level B (250,000 - 1,000,000)	20,5%	27,9%	27,2%
Level C (100,000 - 250,000)	14,6%	10,4%	10,3%
Level D (< 100,000)	3,8%	2,1%	2,1%
Total Spanish FURs	51,8%	75,8%	77,4%
Total Spain	100%	100%	100%
<i>ITALY</i>			
Level A (> 1,000,000)	14,5%	30,5%	30,6%
Level B (250,000 - 1,000,000)	15,0%	26,0%	26,5%
Level C (100,000 - 250,000)	12,8%	10,7%	11,1%
Level D (< 100,000)	0,6%	0,4%	0,5%
Total Italian FURs	42,9%	67,6%	68,7%
Total Italy	100%	100%	100%

*b) Dynamic Metropolitan areas*

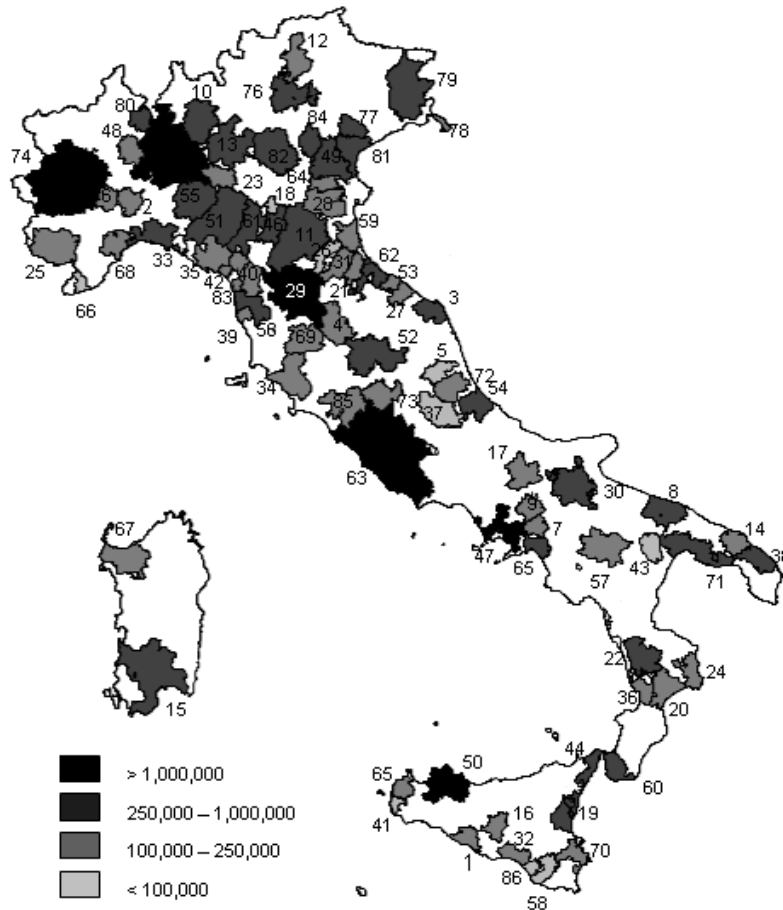
DMAs	Municipalities	Population	Employment
<i>SPAIN</i>			
Level A (> 1,000,000)	12,9%	35,5%	38,1%
Level B (250,000 - 1,000,000)	20,6%	27,7%	27,0%
Level C (100,000 - 250,000)	12,2%	9,7%	9,6%
Level D (< 100,000)	3,2%	2,7%	2,5%
Total Spanish DMAs	49,0%	75,6%	77,2%
Total Spain	100%	100%	100%
<i>ITALY</i>			
Level A (> 1,000,000)	16,7%	30,7%	31,0%
Level B (250,000 - 1,000,000)	19,9%	26,2%	27,5%
Level C (100,000 - 250,000)	11,2%	11,2%	11,0%
Level D (< 100,000)	1,1%	1,3%	1,3%
Total Italian DMAs	48,9%	69,4%	70,9%
Total Italy	100%	100%	100%

Source: Elaboration from INE (Spain) and ISTAT (Italy) Census Data, 2001

Figure 1. Functional Urban Regions  
a) Spain



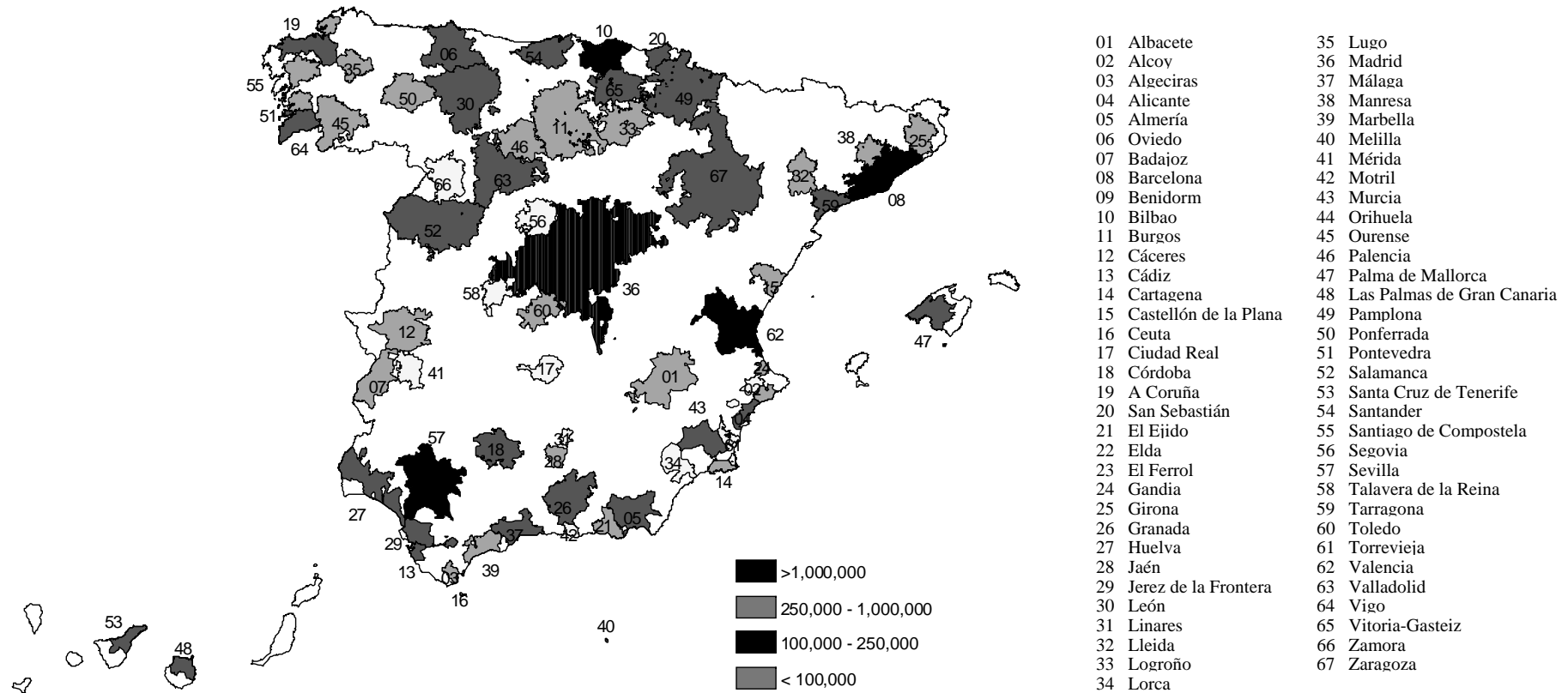
b) Italy



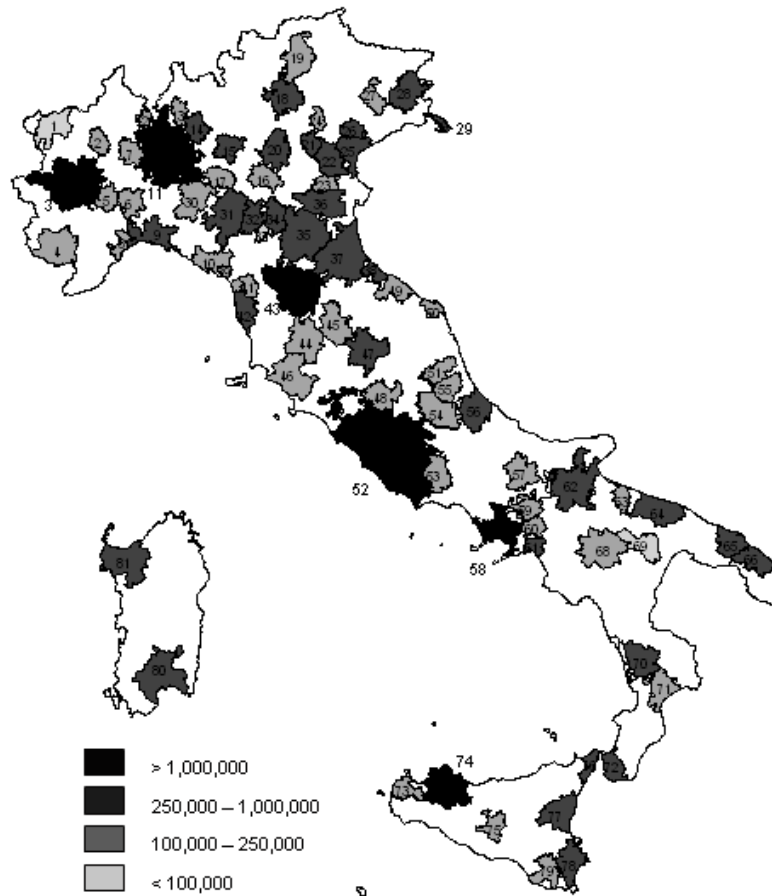
01 Aosta	28 Udine	55 Teramo
02 Biella	29 Trieste	56 Pescara
03 Torino	30 Piacenza	57 Campobasso
04 Cuneo	31 Parma	58 Napoli
05 Asti	32 Reggio di Emilia	59 Benevento
06 Alessandria	33 Sassuolo	60 Avellino
07 Novara	34 Modena	61 Salerno
08 Genova	35 Bologna	62 Foggia
09 Savona	36 Ferrara	63 Barletta
10 La Spezia	37 Ravenna	64 Bari
11 Milano	38 Rimini	65 Brindisi
12 Varese	39 Massa-Carrara	66 Lecce
13 Lecco	40 Viareggio	67 Taranto
14 Bergamo	41 Lucca	68 Potenza
15 Brescia	42 Livorno	69 Matera
16 Mantova	43 Firenze	70 Cosenza
17 Cremona	44 Siena	71 Catanzaro
18 Trento	45 Arezzo	72 Reggio di Calabria
19 Bolzano	46 Grosseto	73 Trapani
20 Verona	47 Perugia	74 Palermo
21 Vicenza	48 Terni	75 Caltanissetta
22 Padova	49 Pesaro	76 Messina
23 Rovigo	50 Ancona	77 Catania
24 Bassano	51 Ascoli Piceno	78 Siracusa
25 Venezia	52 Roma	79 Ragusa
26 Treviso	53 Frosinone	80 Cagliari
27 Pordenone	54 L'Aquila	81 Sassari

Figure 2. Dynamic metropolitan areas

a) Spain



b) Italy



01	Agriento	30	Foggia	59	Ravenna
02	Alessandria	31	Forlì	60	Reggio di Calabria
03	Ancona	32	Gela	61	Reggio di Emilia
04	Arezzo	33	Genova	62	Rimini
05	Ascoli Piceno	34	Grosseto	63	Roma
06	Asti	35	La Spezia	64	Rovigo
07	Avellino	36	Lamezia Terme	65	Salerno
08	Bari	37	L'Aquila	66	Sanremo
09	Benevento	38	Lecce	67	Sassari
10	Bergamo	39	Livorno	68	Savona
11	Bologna	40	Lucca	69	Siena
12	Bolzano	41	Marsala	70	Siracusa
13	Brescia	42	Massa	71	Taranto
14	Brindisi	43	Matera	72	Teramo
15	Cagliari	44	Messina	73	Terni
16	Caltanissetta	45	Milano	74	Torino
17	Campobasso	46	Modena	75	Trapani
18	Carpi	47	Napoli	76	Trento
19	Catania	48	Novara	77	Treviso
20	Catanzaro	49	Padova	78	Trieste
21	Cesena	50	Palermo	79	Udine
22	Cosenza	51	Parma	80	Varese
23	Cremona	52	Perugia	81	Venezia
24	Crotone	53	Pesaro	82	Verona
25	Cuneo	54	Pescara	83	Viareggio
26	Faenza	55	Piacenza	84	Vicenza
27	Fano	56	Pisa	85	Viterbo
28	Ferrara	57	Potenza	86	Vittoria
29	Firenze	58	Ragusa		

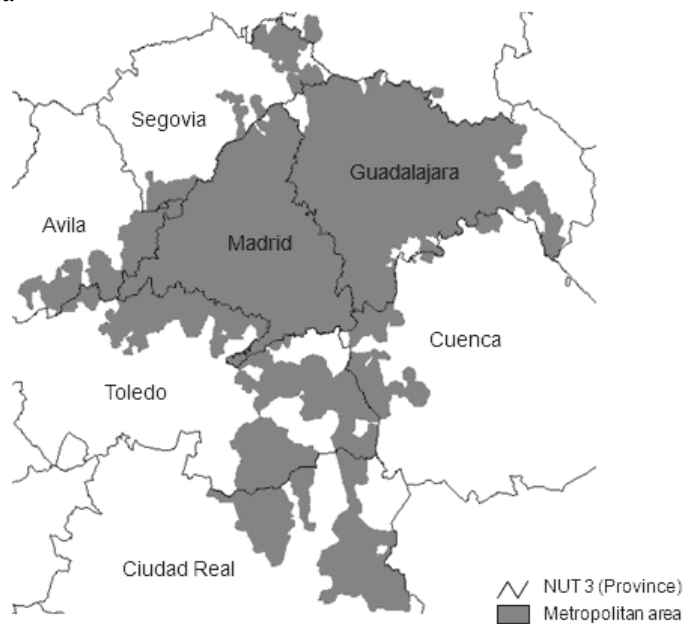
### 5.3. FUR, DMA and NUT 3

It is noticeable that FUR and DMA methodologies produce very similar results regarding the total figures and their distribution among levels in both countries. The spatial patterns of distribution are also very similar. In Spain, the different criteria for the identification of the cores provide the basis for the inclusion as FUR of some smaller local labour markets as Vic, Arona or Avila whereas these cities do not comply with the DMA initial criterion. On the other hand, due to the iterative procedure, DMA produces more clearly definite boundaries in both countries and facilitates the consolidation in more compact metropolitan areas of Jerez-Cadiz and Badajoz-Caceres-Merida in Spain, and Sassuolo and Modena in Italy.

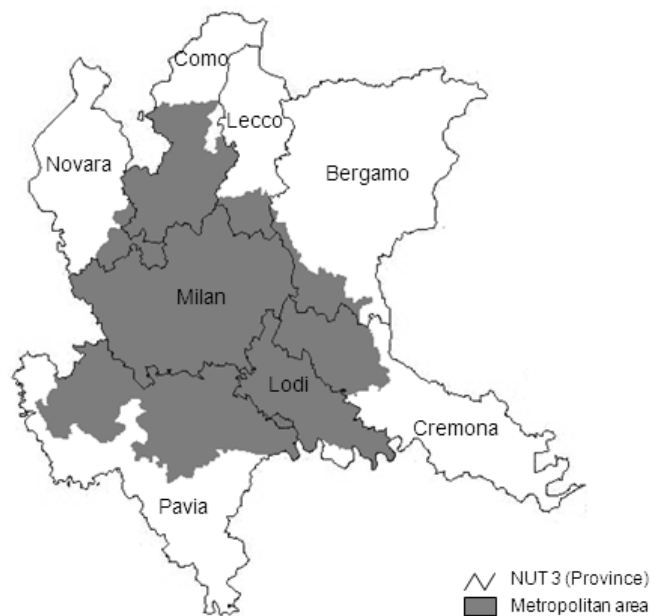
However, there is strong difference between metropolitan areas (FURs and DMAs) and NUT 3 (provinces) in both countries. NUT 3 is too small to characterize Madrid, Rome and Milan although it is usually too large to catch the rest of metropolitan areas. In the case of Madrid and Milan, the metropolitan area expands to other six provinces where Madrid basically absorbs the neighbourhood province of Guadalajara and Milan absorbs Lodi. Only in rare cases (Álava and Valladolid in Spain, and Taranto and Pescara in Italy) the metropolitan areas are close to the administrative boundaries.

At the view of the results, an additional issue is the consideration of FUR and DMAs below 100,000 inhabitants as true metropolitan areas as well as in Spain the case of the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla (isolated in the north of Africa). As the classification in levels allows the filtering, our position has been to provide the results according to the proposed criteria although we warn against this fact and let the potential users of these areas the final decision.

Figure 3. FUR and NUT 3 (Provinces). Detail for Madrid and Milan  
a) Madrid



b) Milan



## **6. CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS AN AGENDA FOR A UNIFIED PROPOSAL OF DELIMITATION OF METROPOLITAN AREAS IN EUROPE**

The aim of the research is to identify metropolitan areas in Spain and Italy using comparable methodologies in order to give evidence about the metropolitan processes in each country, to provide a comparison between the metropolitan configurations of both countries and to generate metropolitan units to be used in other researches. For these purposes, FUR (functional approach) and DMA (network approach) methodologies have been used. Some conclusions have been made:

First, both methodologies produce very similar results. This can be explained because the lower commuting shares of the FUR procedure tend to converge to the iterative results of the DMA algorithm. This unexpected coincidence reinforces the feasibility of the commuting thresholds in both procedures and the validity of the metropolitan units identified to be used in further researches.

Second, metropolitan areas (both FURs and DMAs) clearly diverge from the administrative boundaries (regions or provinces). As a matter of fact, the points highlighted in this section should help to focus on the discrepancy between the administrative level of governance and the functional urban organization of the territory.

Third, there is a high level of metropolitanization in both countries analyzed. These results remark the relevance of metropolitan areas as socioeconomic units of analysis and their importance for the design and implementation of policy strategies. In particular, we identified 65 FURs and 67 DMAs in Spain, which have about 50% of municipalities, 76% of population and 77% of employment; and 81 FURs and 86 DMAs in Italy, which have between 43 and 49% of municipalities, 70% of national population and about 72% of national employment.

Fourth, almost a half of the metropolitan population and employment concentrates in the largest metropolitan areas of the country, those above one million inhabitants. In terms of FUR or DMA, there are five large metropolitan areas in Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville and Bilbao) which have about 35% of national population and 38% of employment. In Italy there are 6 largest metropolitan areas (Milan, Roma, Naples, Turin, Florence and Palermo) which have about 30% of national population and 32% of employment. These results suggest that these metropolitan areas are keystones to be considered for the implementation of economic policies and to face globalization and competitiveness.

On basis of these results, we propose to advance in an agenda towards a unified delimitation of metropolitan areas in Europe. This could be implemented through successive stages: first, the proposed procedures should be applied to those other countries where commuting data are available (e.g.

France, Germany, Portugal, the UK, etc.). This allows for corrections and improvements in the methodology if necessary. There is here the problem with those countries where commuting data are not available although a provisional solution can be provided by means of the dynamization of stock data, this is, through the estimation of the interaction between cities by means of gravity models. The second stage of the agenda involves the coordination of the National Statistic Offices to homogenize commuting statistics and don't lose the detail of cross-country interactions. This also allows to taken into account cross-country metropolitan areas and to extend the use of functional and network methodologies to identify mega-regions, currently identified using morphological approaches.

A third stage, the use of full-network procedures based on the integration of a full range of measures of interaction in multiple layers, seems to be a distant future.

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