The Italian tradition of strong autonomy among local bodies and a resistance to forms of aggregation in new levels of government, renders difficult the path of the constitution of the metropolitan city foreseen by Law 142/90. The phenomenon of inter-local authority cooperation, for the linked management of certain services, constitutes an interesting terrain for experimentation in constructing the relationships the metropolitan dimension needs, thus creating the conditions from below for the construction of the metropolitan city beyond that which will then be identified as the most suitable form of metropolitan government.

This paper offers a critical reflection on the growing tendency, on the part of small Italian local authorities, to form associations, in an autonomous way, to propose strategies, policies and interventions, giving life to a form of self-government (unions of local councils, associations of local councils) capable of aggregating the support of all the bodies involved in the process of the definition of the vision of the metropolitan area.

Key-words:

metropolitan government, inter-municipal cooperation, boundaries and conflicts

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