

Integrated Territorial Investments as a new form of management and implementation of EU funds in Poland

Marta WYSOGLĄD

Foundation Institute for Social Innovation and Development ANIMAR, Wrocław, Poland

Abstract:

Aim: One of the key instruments related to the development policy of functional areas are Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). The concept of ITI is a complete novelty of the cohesion policy implemented in Poland. The article presents the mechanism of ITI operation and differences between individual voivodships.

Design / Research methods: The work was based on the analysis and synthesis of the EU and Polish regulatory provisions on cohesion policy 2014-2020, data on the financial allocation for ITI implementation and literature on the subject of the EU regional policy.

Conclusions / findings: The findings show that the funds allocated contribute to the implementation of complementary and better tailored to local communities projects. Identifying the ITI areas depends on many factors and on the socio-economic potential of a given territory and as a consequence, on the use of the Union funds.

Originality / value of the article: The very concept of ITI is interesting because it contributes to the development of functional areas and leads to cooperation between, first and foremost, territorial self-government units at various levels.

Implications of the research (if applicable): The axiological and practical issues of the paper form a specific core constituting the basis for development impacts at local government level. The analysis of existing data and legal acts will allow its premises to be used in research as well as in practice.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Public Policy, Regional Development Planning and Policy.

JEL: R58, O19

1. Introduction

Under the 2014-2020 financial framework, the prominence of cohesion policy increases compared to the 2007-2013 programming period on account of the territorial nature of the policy. The development challenges which the European Union is facing, in particular at a time of economic turbulences of the individual Member States, require from cohesion policy effectiveness and territorial differentiation. With an integrated approach to development and the focus on results, the cohesion policy can operate more effectively. The territory is becoming the basis for planning and monitoring public policies, as well as being the recipient of collaborative actions (Rynio 2011: 197). Thus, the aim of the cohesion policy for 2014-2020 is to support an integrated strategy which aims at stimulating sustainable development of urban areas. The first time that the definition of an integrated approach towards functional areas emerged was in the European Commission's documentation (European Commission 2013: 35). Combining the determinants and knowledge in terms of individual areas not only within their administrative but mainly within their functional boundaries (socio-economic and spatial characteristics geographically selected and based on a cohesive profile) allows for defining actions which are better suited to the specificity of a particular place. Furthermore, a systematic monitoring of the functional areas development creates appropriate conditions for a more accurate account of spatial differences in the regional policy and for actions tailored to every area. It is while looking at the development issues through the prism of functional solutions that the aims and instruments of the development policy can become more diverse and better suited to the specificity of the individual areas, as their potential is better used and barriers to growth are more precisely identified. Planning and carrying out development activities across functional areas must therefore also form a collaboration platform for different units and levels of governance. The collaboration between different partners operating within functional areas is necessary for the development activity to be more comprehensive, coherent, more coordinated and concentrated as well as for resolving conflicts (Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego 2013a: 3).

At a national level, the term of a functional area as an element of regional policy was set out in the National Regional Development Strategy 2010-2020: Regions-Cities-Rural Areas (KSRR). The definition adopted within the KSRR framework is consistent with the terminological assumptions of the Concept for National Spatial Development 2030 (KPZK 2030; see Rada Ministrów 2011). In addition, by reducing the functional areas to the concept of a problem area,

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the Act of 11 May 2017 on Spatial Planning and Development makes the definition of a functional area more precise in that it describes it as the systematization of the functional areas at the national level. The functional area, according to the act, is considered to be an area marked by a particular phenomenon in terms of spatial development, or there are spatial conflicts which are indicated in the voivodship spatial development plan or in the study of conditions and directions of spatial development of commune (Official Journal 2017, item 1073, article 2, point 6a). The basic principles governing regional policy have been defined as follows (Zaucha, Zarychta 2015: 292):

- geographical concentration combined with the Areas of Strategic Intervention (OSI), thematic concentration,
- partnership and cooperation,
- conditionality,
- decision-making based on reliable information,
- integrated territorial approach,
- coordination,
- subsidiarity,
- multi-level management of regional development processes,
- sustainable development.

The consequence of having distinguished functional areas as the objects of the EU regional policy after the year 2014, including those in Poland, is precisely the identification of organizational-financial instruments with the Integrated Territorial Investments being currently just such an instrument.

2. Defining the ITI areas in Poland

The ITI is an instrument dedicated in the first place to sustainable development of urban areas in line with the premises of the EU and Poland's regional policy (Szafranek 2015: 4). One of the requirements for implementation of the territorial dimension of development policy, including the use of ITI, is to identify and establish formally functional areas within the functional and spatial structure. In Poland, four types of urban functional areas (MOF) formed around centers have been identified (Rada Ministrów 2011: 185-210):

- voivodship, including metropolitan types;

- regional – i.e. towns which do not play the role of voivodship centers, but still exercise important administrative, economic and social functions, as well as enjoy a considerable potential for development from the point of view of the objectives of the policy for the country’s spatial development;
- sub-regional – i.e. towns with a population between 50 and 100 thousand, exercising important functions in the socio-economic and spatial development of voivodships;
- local – i.e. towns with a population of less than 50 thousand, which concentrate economic functions with their service facilities being used by rural areas.

Delimitation of functional areas and preparing the strategy and spatial development plans for the individual functional areas leads to a stronger spatial integrity of the centers, which in turn fosters the development of all regions in Poland. The delimitation was carried out according to the following principles (Śleszyński 2013: 182-183):

- administrative – related to differentiation and location of cores and external zones. The core is made up of a city that is the capital of a voivodship;
- topological – involving the application of the requirement in terms of cohesion (the urban functional area must be spatially continuous) and separateness (every commune has to belong to just one urban functional area);
- meeting the criteria – related to the individual communes meeting the functional, socio-economic and morphological targets.

With these premises providing the basis for the implementation of the Integrated Territorial Investments across the areas representing a territory covered by “the voivodship ITI”, which has to be composed of a voivodship city together with the towns from the MOF core and other communes within the functional area. In total, the ITI will be carried out across 24 functional areas, including 17 which are located within the functional areas of voivodship cities, and 7 across the functional areas of subregional/regional towns in four voivodships, namely: Śląskie, Dolnośląskie, Wielkopolskie and Zachodniopomorskie. Individual ITIs are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Urban functional areas in Poland

| Voivodship | The name of the functional area | Type of the area MOF OW/MOF |
|--------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Dolnośląskie | Wrocławski Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF OW [Urban functional area voivodship center] |

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| | | |
|---------------------|--|----------------------------|
| | Aglomeracja Jeleniogórska | MOF[Urban functional area] |
| | Aglomeracja Wałbrzyska | MOF |
| Kujawsko-Pomorskie | Bydgosko-Toruński Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF OW |
| Lubelskie | Lubelski Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF OW |
| Lubuskie | Lubelski Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF OW |
| Łódzkie | Łódzki Obszar Metropolitalny | MOF OW |
| Małopolskie | Krakowski Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF OW |
| Opolskie | Aglomeracja Opolska | MOF OW |
| Podkarpackie | Rzeszowski Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF OW |
| Podlaskie | Białostocki Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF OW |
| Pomorskie | Obszar Metropolitalny Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot | MOF OW |
| Śląskie | Subregion Centralny Województwa Śląskiego | MOF OW |
| | Subregion Południowy Województwa Śląskiego | MOF |
| | Subregion Północny Województwa Śląskiego | MOF |
| | Subregion Zachodni Województwa Śląskiego | MOF |
| Świętokrzyskie | Kielecki Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF OW |
| Warmińsko-Mazurskie | Miejski Obszar Funkcjonalny Olsztyna | MOF OW |
| Wielkopolskie | Miejski Obszar Funkcjonalny Poznania | MOF OW |
| | Aglomeracja Kalisko-Ostrowska | MOF |
| Zachodniopomorskie | Szczeciński Obszar Metropolitalny | MOF OW |
| | Koszalińsko-Kołobrzesko-Białogardzki Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF |
| Mazowieckie | Warszawski Obszar Funkcjonalny | MOF OW |

Source: self-reported data based on Stowarzyszenie Białostockiego Obszaru Funkcjonalnego (2016: 10-11).

Most functional areas which are financed by the RPO funds have been established in Śląskie (4) and Dolnośląskie voivodship (3). At the same time, these are the voivodships displaying the highest urbanization level nationally (in 2013, urbanization index for Śląskie voivodship was at 77,4%, while for Dolnośląskie at 69,4%) (Szafranek 2015: 85).

3. Funding Integrated Territorial Investments in Poland

The primary aim of ITI is to foster the development of urban functional areas. Among the special aims of this instrument the following targets could be classified as such (Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego 2013b: 4):

- the implementation of integrated projects which respond in a comprehensive way to the needs and problems of metropolitan areas,
- fostering their development in terms of cooperation and integration across the functional areas of the largest Polish cities, mainly where the problems of lacking collaboration and

complementariness of actions performed by different administrative units is on the largest scale,

- promoting a model of partnership cooperation of different administrative units and socio-economic partners across urban functional areas,
- Increasing the impact of cities and thus connected functional areas on the shape and manner of actions which are supported across their area under cohesion policy.

According to the premise adopted by the EU for the implementation of regional policy, ITI should be employed in situations where the strategies for urban development or other strategies or territorial pacts require an integrated approach encompassing investments under more than one priority axis of one or several operational programs (Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego 2013b: 8). ITI is an instrument which is to enable unused potential to be unlocked at the local level, including the urban level, and to support broad commitment of local actors to cooperate with a view to solve problems jointly (Słodowa-Hełpa 2014: 31-32).

The advantage of ITI is the fact that it promotes an integrated use of European funds and has potential to achieve better outcomes for the same costs of public investments (Ratuszniak 2013: 2). It was assumed that actions which are territorial in nature should be carried out under ITI in three basic dimensions (Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego 2013b: 10):

- smart economic growth (e.g. strengthening functional interdependencies, agglomeration benefits, enhanced importance of social capital, networking);
- sustainable economic growth (using space for renewable energy sources, shaping compact sustainable cities, developing environmentally friendly transport, ecological corridors);
- economic growth that is socially inclusive (activation of population and making work and services more accessible).

The implementation of cohesion Policy within the ITI arrangement needs appropriate financial security. In Poland, at least 5,2% of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) allocation and 2,4% of the European Social Fund (ESF) allocation have been earmarked for this purpose. Access to these funds has been planned under 16 ROPs. The value of funds allocated for the implementation of ITI under the voivodship arrangement is presented in Table 2. The value of funds coming from the ERDF is considerably higher than that from the ESF in all voivodships. The allocation of funds across the voivodship functional areas appears to be related mainly to their size. A comparatively smallest amount of funds has been provided for the functional area in Warmińsko-

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Mazurskie voivodship (45,2 mln euro), Opolskie (46 mln euro), Świętokrzyskie (62,3 mln euro) and Lubuskie (66,6 mln euro). The highest amount of funds, on the other hand, has been allocated to Śląskie voivodship (484 mln euro), Małopolskie (229,9 mln euro), Pomorskie (215,8 mln euro) and Łódzkie (203,5 mln euro). In one of the Polish voivodships having the status of a temporary region, 165,8 mln euro were allocated to Mazowiecki ITI.

Table 2. Funds allocated for implementation of Integrated Territorial Investments according to the voivodship arrangement

| Voivodship | Voivodship ITI in total, current prices (mln euro) | Allocation under FOP (bln euro) | % of allocation | Allocation in ITI ERDF | Allocation in ITI ESF |
|---------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Dolnośląskie | 173,0 | 2 253 | 7,68% | 155,9 | 17,0 |
| Kujawsko-Pomorskie | 153,8 | 1 904 | 8,08% | 135,7 | 18,1 |
| Lubelskie | 105,4 | 2 231 | 4,72% | 93,3 | 12,1 |
| Lubuskie | 66,6 | 907 | 7,34% | 58,9 | 7,7 |
| Łódzkie | 203,5 | 2 256 | 9,02% | 180,2 | 23,3 |
| Małopolskie | 229,9 | 2 878 | 7,99% | 201,5 | 28,4 |
| Opolskie | 46,0 | 945 | 4,87% | 40,9 | 5,1 |
| Podkarpackie | 70,8 | 2 114 | 3,35% | 62,8 | 8,0 |
| Podlaskie | 75,8 | 1 214 | 6,24% | 67,2 | 8,6 |
| Pomorskie | 215,8 | 1 865 | 11,57% | 189,4 | 26,4 |
| Śląskie | 484,0 | 3 477 | 13,92% | 421,7 | 62,3 |
| Świętokrzyskie | 62,3 | 1 365 | 4,56% | 56,5 | 5,8 |
| Warmińsko-Mazurskie | 45,2 | 1 728 | 2,62% | 42,1 | 3,1 |
| Wielkopolskie | 178,6 | 2 450 | 7,29% | 158,4 | 20,2 |
| Zachodniopomorskie | 109,1 | 1 601 | 6,81% | 97,9 | 11,2 |
| Mazowieckie | 164,8 | 2 090 | 7,89% | 141,1 | 23,7 |
| | | | | | |

Source: self-reported data based on Ministerstwo Rozwoju (2015: 213).

4. Legal and organizational aspect of the ITI functioning

For the implementation of the instrument of Integrated Territorial Investments, a necessary requirement is to draw up an ITI strategy which sets out the key directions of development for urban functional areas tailored to the characteristic features of different areas, the level of their socio-economic development and thus-specific needs. The documents prepared by all urban functional areas are consistent with the overarching programs and development strategies of voivodships, of the country and of the EU. As such they oscillate around three main priorities (Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego 2013b12):

- smart development;
- development of economy that is based on knowledge and innovation;
- sustainable development;
- promoting an economy which is more resource efficient, greener and more competitive;
- socially inclusive development;
- supporting a high-employment economy which ensures social and territorial cohesion.

The assumption under the strategy for the implementation of ITI is that local-tier authorities are to be responsible for preparing projects since they know the local conditions best while their projects will provide the best response to local development needs. Thus, the responsibility of local governments for investing EU funds will thereby be substantially enhanced. The projects are to promote the development of inter-connected areas. Before applying for support, the areas will have to be included in the common ITI strategy. The projects will be selected predominantly under a non-competitive procedure (individual projects critical for the area); however, within the framework of ROP, assessment is also provided for under a competitive procedure (Gwizda et al. 2014: 99-100; Rada Ministrów 2011: 99-100).

For the projects under ITI, it will be possible to get funding only if the following conditions are met (Gwizda et al. 2014: 100).

- an ITI Association has to be established;
- ITI Association has to adopt an ITI strategy, which, among other things, should consist of the diagnosis of the area, expected outcomes and aims of the ITI implementation, funding sources for the strategy and a preliminary list of projects selected under the non-competitive procedure;
- a contract or an agreement has to be concluded (containing in particular the scope of tasks to be implemented) between the relevant managing authority and the ITI Association.

An important element in implementing the projects is to formalize the rules governing the cooperation between the Managing Institution and the ITI Association. This cooperation can be in the following forms: signing an agreement or establishing an association. Table no 3 presents the type of the legal form and the number of local government units which decided to undertake cooperation under a particular ITI. The size of ITI associations varies considerably from very small incorporating 5 LGUs (e.g. Zielona Góra ITI Association), to very large incorporating no less than 81 LGUs (Katowice ITI Association). What is also diverse is the structure of partners in the ITI

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associations themselves, since Częstochowa ITI Association was established by 31 LGUs, of which 6 are urban-rural communes while 23 are typical rural communes.

Table 3. The legal form of ITI in Poland

| Name of the functional area | Legal form | Number of communes/districts |
|---|--|------------------------------|
| Wrocławski Obszar Funkcjonalny | Agreement | 15 |
| Aglomeracja Jeleniogórska | Agreement | 18 |
| Aglomeracja Wałbrzyska | Agreement | 22 |
| Bydgosko-Toruński Obszar Funkcjonalny | Agreement | 25 |
| Lubelski Obszar Funkcjonalny | Agreement | 16 |
| Lubuski Obszar Funkcjonalny | Agreement | 5 |
| Łódzki Obszar Metropolitalny | Association of Łódzki Obszar Metropolitalny | 31 |
| Krakowski Obszar Funkcjonalny | Association of Metropolia Krakowska | 15 |
| Aglomeracja Opolska | Association of Aglomeracja Opolska | 21 |
| Rzeszowski Obszar Funkcjonalny | Agreement | 13 |
| Białostocki Obszar Funkcjonalny | Association of Białostocki Obszar Funkcjonalny | 10 |
| Obszar Metropolitalny Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot | Association of Obszar Metropolitalny Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot | 36 |
| Subregion Centralny Województwa Śląskiego | Association Związek gmin i Subregionu Centralnego | 81 |
| Subregion Południowy Województwa Śląskiego | Agreement | 41 |
| Subregion Północny Województwa Śląskiego | Agreement | 34 |
| Subregion Zachodni Województwa Śląskiego | Agreement | 12 |
| Kielecki Obszar Funkcjonalny | Agreement | 12 |
| Miejski Obszar Funkcjonalny Olsztyna | Agreement | 7 |
| Miejski Obszar Funkcjonalny Poznania | Association of Metropolia Poznań | 23 |
| Aglomeracja Kalisko-Ostrowska | Association of Aglomeracja Kalisko-Ostrowskiej | 24 |
| Szczeciński Obszar Metropolitalny | Association of Szczeciński Obszar Metropolitalny | 13 |
| Koszalińsko-Kołońbrzesko Białogardzki Obszar Funkcjonalny | Agreement | 19 |
| Warszawski Obszar Funkcjonalny | Agreement | 40 |

Source: self-reported data based on Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego (2013b: 29-35).

Within the framework of tasks delegated to be performed by ITI when implementing funds, a detailed scope of tasks carried out by an ITI association is set out in the contract or agreement concluded between the ITI Association and the competent Managing Institution. For the majority of the ITIs in Poland, the duties related to servicing ROP Dolnośląskie Voivodship 2014-2020 are very limited and are mainly comprised of having to participate in the evaluation of applications for financing (in terms of their compliance with the ITI Strategy) and to participate in accepting and publishing the list of projects to be financed. An exception here is the Intermediary Institution of ITI Wałbrzych Agglomeration as their participation in servicing the implementation of ROP involves the following (Zarząd Województwa Dolnośląskiego 2017: 129):

- choosing projects to be financed in accordance with specific criteria;
- concluding agreements with beneficiaries;
- monitoring projects' progress;
- controlling selected projects;
- verifying and approving expenditures incurred in the project by means of applications for payment;
- reception and assessment of applications for financing;
- concluding agreements for financing project with applicants whose projects were selected for financing;
- accounting for the agreements signed with beneficiaries;
- monitoring projects' progress within the financial and material scope.

Considering such a wide range of tasks, the selection of projects within this area is significantly influenced by the local authorities and not the Managing Institution.

5. Summary

Integrated Territorial Investments represent a new form of cooperation between local governments financed from the European Funds. The partnerships of voivodship cities or regional cities and contiguous communes as well as voivodship authorities jointly set goals and indicate investments which are necessary for those goals to be achieved. This formula allows for going beyond the rigid administrative boundaries of local governments, which in turn translates into more effective undertakings that are jointly carried out. The advantages for the ITI concept entail the following:

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- Targeted support for urban areas;
- Identification of individual needs of urban areas and implementation of a more effective policy addressed in the form of an integrated approach;
- Promoting thinking in categories of urban area and its functional surrounding, and not only in terms of voivodship cities;
- Building a multilevel management system and strengthening cooperation between local government units across the functional areas;
- Decentralization in decision-making at the regional and local level;
- Unlocking unused potential at the local, urban and regional level.

Moreover, the ITI concept provides an incentive to implement, exercise and then expand onto other areas a new integrated approach incorporating – apart from the logic of interlinks – also intensive cooperation of entities and principles based on proof and territory. To this end, it is not only the provisions laid down in documents that are needed but also a changed mindset when it comes to development, as otherwise spending resources predominantly on infrastructure will continue instead of investing in human capital. This may also result in realizing local interests instead of achieving the goals promoted by the European Union.

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