



The RSA Research Network on EU COHESION POLICY

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INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENTS (ITI) BASED INSTRUMENT STIMULATING INTERCOMMUNAL COOPERATION IN POMERANIA REGION

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Abstract

European Union Cohesion Policy is an important instrument of development of the regions which help to reduce regional disparities and but also strengthen their competitiveness. Currently, one of the most significant processes regarding public policies in the EU, is the change from sector to integrated territorial approach, characterized by the focus on the use of endogenous potential of the territorial boundaries defined by functional relations, integration of public investment in spatial dimension and multi-level management system. In the current programming period 2014-2020 steps were taken to strengthen its territorial dimension as important condition of effectiveness of implementing Cohesion Policy. This include introduction of the new instrument such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI).

With accession of Poland to the European Union in 2004 the role of, created only decade earlier, Regions, as well as their institutional capacity increased substantially. This caused that already two year after the accession, programming and management of significant part of Operational Funds was decentralized to regional level. In current programming period 2014-2020 this process went even further with introduction of Integrated Territorial Investments which allow giving competences in this area to subregional level in this case to associations of municipalities.

Poland's National Spatial Development Concept as the main strategic document in the field of spatial development is using the new territorial approach. The document assumes that a range characterized by integrated operations should be specified for the areas with common (such as socio-economic and spatial) geographical features named as functional areas. NSDC 2030 in relation to spatial development plan of regions, requires that the policy will be determined for the functional areas in order to strengthen cohesion policy and forming lasting partnerships. In addition, it is stress a need to strengthen the role subregion centers which development may be a slowdown due to the growth of metropolitan areas.

Paper presents the first experience in implementation of Integrated Territorial Investment (which in Poland are reserved only for capitals of the regions and their functional areas) based on mechanism called Integrated Territorial Agreement (ITA). The negotiation process under the new mechanism was held in 8 medium size urban functional areas specified on the basis of functional relations with towns located in Pomeranian Region in Poland. This instrument was based on creation of wide partnership and bottom up

approach to programming development strategy for Urban Functional Areas. In this paper we try to assess effectiveness of this processes. Defining not only strong points but also bottlenecks which can diminish impact of this mechanism on implementation of European Union Cohesion Policy.

In terms of using this type of the ITI based mechanism Pomerania is an exception in comparison with other regions of the country. However, it draws attention to the fact that this mechanism was used once and did not give a clear answer whether ITA can be an effective tool to support territorial dialogue between local government levels, local activists, NGOs, regional and local planners and to manage the challenges related with spatial planning at different spatial levels and provides a multisectoral cooperation. However, for the first time it has been attempted to resign from planning in administrative boundaries of local government units and to introduce approach based on territory defined by functional relations. The process has required looking for spatial solutions which may be related with the investments that regardless of their location will influence development of much wider area. Possible the financial benefits and consequences made the negotiation process between the territorial units in the functional areas and regional authorities even more difficult, especially that this tool was implemented for the first time.

Noteworthy is the fact that in, the currently under development, Pomeranian Spatial Development Plan the basis for defining the boundaries of urban functional areas are the Integrated Territorial Agreements (ITA). Lesson learned from past experience leads to a continuation of the approach and identify further regional importance of functional areas. Their boundaries can be defined both from the local and regional government initiative as well as on the basis of specific criteria which were proposed in the further Drafts Ordinance of the Minister of Infrastructure and Development concerning specific conditions for the identification of functional areas and their boundaries. Variability of the approaches indicates the difficulty in establishing a common methodology of delimitation of functional areas for the whole country.

A question can be raised: has Integrated Territorial Agreements proven useful for strengthening intercommunal cooperation? It surely shows innovative approach to bottom up programming of development on supralocal level. During the process of shaping Integrated Territorial Agreement form of several crucial for development of this territories investment was negotiated, by sitting down at the common table and working out a compromise.

In the same time the main challenge was to introduce system solution and to avoid concentration on possible funding schemes as well as to avoid thinking through the lens of available funds in single programming period which is a perspective not long enough to prepare and implement successful development strategy.

Another challenge for the public bodies and agencies was to stop thinking only in their administrative boundaries and focus on delimited, cohesive territory on which the strategy and its action plan may have an impact on.

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