
Integrated Territorial Investments as an Instrument of Urban Policy: The Case of the Bialystok Functional Area

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Tadeusz Truskolaski¹

Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the article was to examine the impact of Integrated Territorial Investments on the development of cooperation between municipalities belonging to the Bialystok Functional Area.

Design/Approach: The study was conducted by quantitative methods. As part of the research procedure, documentation of the Bialystok Functional Area was included. The process of creating the area and allocating European funds was presented. The impact of funds on the functioning of the area was examined. Analytical data are presented using tables and maps by the local government units.

Findings: The results of the study confirmed that changes in the policy and tools for financing functional areas in the form of integrated territorial investments have enabled the development of cooperation between neighboring territorial units. The level of integration of municipalities and residents has increased. Further cooperation is needed.

Practical Implications: The analysis and its results confirm the need to finance the cooperation of neighbouring local government units. The results can be used to improve financial tools. Continued research, including extension to other functional areas, may allow to see the correctness and improvement of urban policy.

Originality/Value: Due to the importance of these issues for the effective functioning of functional areas, including the Bialystok functional area, it is necessary to promote this approach. The article presents funding for integrated projects in both scientific and practical terms.

Keywords: Integrated Territorial Investments, urban functional area, urban policy, EU funds, local development.

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¹Associate Professor, University of Bialystok, Faculty of Economics and Finance, Poland, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5465-2942, e-mail: tadeusz.truskolaski@post.pl

1. Introduction

The development of an urban area should be treated not only in the context of a city, within its administrative borders, but also the surrounding areas, where urbanization processes take place dynamically. This kind of approach requires not only a comprehensive outlook on the urban-related issues, but also the implementation of new tools, which will address existing problems and challenges. The areas located close to administrative borders of municipalities were most often underinvested as individual units focused on the development of areas located close to the centers. The attempts to change the existing situation have usually faced obstacles stemming from various developmental concepts implemented in particular municipalities as well as from the lack of tools, including strategies and financial resources for solving the problems that appeared.

The aim of the article is to examine the impact of Integrated Territorial Investments on the development of cooperation forms between municipalities belonging to the Białystok Functional Area. The following research hypothesis was concluded in the article – Integrated Territorial Investments have contributed to reinforcing the functional connections between the city and the adjacent areas as well as to the development of cooperation in other economic fields.

2. Urban Policy and its Theoretical Foundations

In 2018, the population of cities in the world constituted 55.3%. According to the forecasts for 2030, this index will increase to 60% and in 2050 to 70%. In 2018, the population of cities in Europe constituted 60%, the forecast for 2030 70% (Nowa Agenda Miejska, 2018). In 2019, the inhabitants of cities in Poland constituted about 60% of people. According to the forecasts for 2030, the population of cities in Poland will amount to 58% and finally in 2050 55% (Prognoza ludności..., 2014 pp. 109-114).

Cities are the generators of social and economic development. These are the places of entrepreneurs' main activity, scientific development and where innovations and modern technologies emerge. Cities use 80% of energy and they account for over 85% of Europe's GDP. This kind of activity generates also numerous problems, including negative social phenomena as well as those connected with the lack of or insufficient infrastructure. Either positive as well as negative processes do not close within the administrative borders of cities, but transfer to the surrounding areas creating enclaves of dynamic urbanization and suburbanization. The pro-development urban policy can be considered in five dimensions, such as: (Błaszczuk, 2013 p. 35):

- pro-growth approach;
- gearing towards the development understood as acquiring exogenous resources as well as generating exogenous resources;

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- orientation towards acquiring and accumulating capital;
 - focus on satisfying the needs of particular groups of inhabitants;
 - Orientation towards the dimension of scale either in spatial as well as organizational structure.

Urban-related issues are noticed and examined also at the United Nations level. In October 2016, in Kyoto, the international conference took place with the participation of heads of countries and governments, regional and local authorities, parliament members, practitioners and theoreticians dealing with regional and local development in order to adopt the New Urban Agenda. It is foreseen that within 30 years, cities' population will double and thus significant challenges will emerge for the sustainable development concerning social housing, infrastructure, safety, health, education, employment and the use of natural resources (UN, 2016).

At the European level, 4 documents relate directly or indirectly to urban policy, mainly the Lisbon Treaty, which apart from economic and social dimension, introduces the territorial dimension of European policy. Secondly, the Leipzig Charter adopted in 2007 on sustainable development of European cities. An important element shaping urban policy is also the Pact of Amsterdam established in May 2016, in which 12 thematic priorities of the Urban Agenda were agreed. The list of issues is rather wide and includes, jobs and skills in the local economy, urban poverty, housing, inclusion of migrants and refugees, sustainable land use and environmentally friendly solutions, circular economy, climate adaptation, energy transition, urban mobility, air quality, digital transition, innovative and responsible public procurements. The list was described by Szlachta as 'a little bit eclectic', however, presenting the developmental problems of European cities at the end of the second decade of the 20th century (Szlachta, 2018 p. 61).

The significance of sustainable development was highlighted in the Europe 2020 Strategy and more specific information on urban policy can be found in the European Commission report 'Investment for jobs growth. Promoting development and good governance in EU regions and cities' (Krajowa Polityka Miejska 2023, 2015 p. 9). In relation to that, it was determined that 50% of resources from the European Regional Development Fund for the years 2007-2013 will be allocated to seven national development priorities and to thirteen pillars connected with urban policy (Lang and Török, 2017). The European Union allocates resources not only for the sustainable development of cities, but also assists to gather data necessary for assessing demographic, social and economic as well as environmental processes in the cities, which allow to elaborate proper diagnosis and define developmental priorities (Robin and Acuto, 2018).

In the Act on the rules for conducting development policy, one of the chapters is devoted to urban policy, but also its functional areas. In this document, the rules were determined on elaborating the project of national urban policy, the necessity of updating it, considering the EU programming periods, i.e., seven-year time periods

(Act of 6 December 2006). In this respect, the most important documents constituting the basis for elaborating the National Urban Policy are the Assumptions of the National Urban Policy of 16 July 2013 as well as the adopted resolution of the Chamber of Ministers on 20 October 2015. The National Urban Policy as well as the part of the National Regional Development Strategy 2010-2020 and its update i.e., the National Regional Development Strategy 2030 (*Krajowa Strategia Rozwoju Regionalnego...*, 2019 p. 92) “*Regions, cities, rural areas (KSRR) and in the wider context the National Spatial Development Concept 2030.*” This document highlights that “*the biggest cities act as a catalyst for the country’s development and simultaneously are a good place to live, which is supported by an active and multidimensional urban policy*” (*Koncepcja przestrzennego zagospodarowania kraju...*, 2012) and also increases the significance of functional areas within which a common investment market is created and an intensive economic, scientific and cultural collaboration is conducted.

In the National Urban Policy, we can also find reference not only to cities, but also their functional areas. The document stresses primarily the comprehensiveness of activities undertaken by public bodies, including the local government units, but also holds references to government institutions especially concerning direct activities related to investments. It provides the possibility for central agendas to financial and organizational support connected with the development of cities and surrounding areas (*Krajowa Polityka Miejska 2023*, 2015 p. 7). Urban areas are characterized with specific problems and challenges, which demand comprehensive and functional approach especially at the border with formally rural areas, which acquire ‘urban’ characteristics due to suburbanization processes.

The relations of suburbanization processes with urban policy were also examined by Heffner, who assesses this phenomenon in the context of regional policy goals “*as well as other policies having direct impact on development direction of rural areas surrounding the cities*” (Heffner, 2016). This kind of attitude implies the necessity of a holistic approach to urban-related issues in one document. Urban policy should be conducted according to the same rules as regional policy, including three additional requirements, i.e., integrity, integrated territorial approach and multilevel governance. The main objective of urban policy is to enhance cities and urbanized areas in the field of their sustainable development (*Krajowa Polityka Miejska 2023*, 2015). More and more often, the issue of environmental protection is raised, or it is even recommended to conduct urban policy based on enforcing environmental protection laws (nature-based solutions) (Zwierzchowska, 2019).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation in Poland, also relates to urban policy in one out of 15 objectives, which was formulated as follows: “*make cities and human settlements safe, resilient, sustainable and fostering social inclusion* (Ministerstwo Rozwoju, 2017 p. 5). Although in the objective defined in this manner, an urbanized area was excluded, undoubtedly problem solving in wider context, i.e., with areas directly bordering the cities, is not only advisable, but also

necessary. It is difficult to imagine sustainable development of an urban area, understood as *“a global development model, which harmoniously connects satisfying the needs of contemporary societies with the concern about the fate of future generations”* (Dymnicka, 2013), without including in those processes the areas, which directly border cities and are an indispensable element of mutual interactions.

Three basic functional zones can be distinguished, residential, commercial (trade and service) and industrial (Jopek, 2014). The first one includes surely the areas that are connected with a city, but belong to different administrative units and fulfill mainly the housing function for many people, who moved from the city due to lower prices of estates as well as the need to provide better living conditions for themselves and their families. Other activities located in the city are work, school for children, leisure, cultural institutions and thus the penetration of those functions causes that administrative borders disappear and to a more and more greater extent those areas become one functional organism. More people than the official number of inhabitants use public services of cities, i.e., urban transport, education, health and cultural services.

Urban policy can be examined in two approaches. The first one defines the subject, scope, objectives and instruments of urban policy resulting from the activities of public authorities and which aim at solving problems connected with cities and their development. A wider approach aims at looking the urban policy as a process, i.e., *“the course of targeted measures that initiate, stimulate, revive and lead to changes in functional and spatial structure of cities”* (Kaczmarek, 2013). Urban policy functions comprise of: (Kuźnik, Klasik, Szczupak and Baron, 2015):

- function of conceptual opening connected with the change in the way of thinking and creating new possibilities of urban development,
- function of activities integration, which can be implemented in urban functional areas;
- function of showing ‘white spots’ connected with the change of development paths in urban areas.

The key issue for implementing urban policy is to specify not only its scope, but also implementation instruments. Firstly, the planning instruments should be listed either at a regional level that result from voivodship strategies and regional operational programmes as well as at a local level. The next group consists of organizational instruments aiming at implementing projects programmed in the planning documents. In this context, a reference should be made to the resolution of the European Parliament and the European Council establishing regulations pertaining to EFRR and ESF, which in practice comes down to elaborating and implementing Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). It is especially crucial to establish a proper envelope for financing urban policy. In EU documents, it is assumed that not less

than 5% of resources designated for regional operational programmes will be allocated to urban policy, understood in a wider context, as functional areas.

3. Urban Functional Areas

Until 2014, functional areas had not formally existed. The Act of 24 January 2014 on amending the Act on the rules for conducting policies and development as well as some other Acts (Act of 24 January 2014) introduced the concept of a functional area. Also, in the Act on spatial planning and development, chapter 4a was added, devoted to functional areas, which specified their 3 basic types: supra-regional, regional and local (Act of 27 March 2003). A functional area was defined as “*an area of a specific phenomenon of spatial planning or spatial conflicts, forming a compact layout, consisting of functionally related sites with common factors and expected uniform development goals*” (Act of 27 March 2003). The previous understanding of a metropolitan area was replaced by an urban functional area of a voivodeship center. Two basic reasons are mentioned for creating functional areas and implementing the Integrated Territorial Investment instrument (Isola, Leone, and Pira, 2017):

1. Lack of coordination between governmental, regional and local levels.
2. Improper administrative ability of regional and city authorities to manage development processes in the area composed of various administrative units.

The creation of urban functional areas is an attempt to answer several questions connected not only with the development of cities, but also adjacent municipalities. The suburbanization processes that have intensified in recent years led to serious problems, especially in the field of communication emerging at the borders of numerous cities. The hitherto attempts of solving them did not bring expected results mainly due to (Kuznik, 2015):

- restrictions resulting from formal competencies as it did not belong to the scope of local government’s tasks,
- lack of financial resources especially those written in the EU programming documents,
- lack of diagnosis of increasingly more complex phenomena and processes comprising urbanization problems, especially the suburbanization ones,
- postponing difficult decisions resulting often from the dilemma from inside the agglomeration.

A significant challenge pertaining to cities management, either now and in the future as well as the implementation of urban policy, is the exact definition of a city, only by its administrative borders, or by taking into account the agglomeration area, or even wider the metropolitan area (United Nations, 2018 p. 3). The development of cities is a process that is constant, dynamic and variable in time. Cities and agglomerations are treated as innovation centers, but they are also the basic hubs of

settlement networks. On the one hand, they attract investments and job resources, but on the other hand, they do not provide proper conditions for residence. Thus, new functional interrelations are created work, house, leisure. These kinds of relations force commuting to work, cultural and education facilities, and this causes that administrative borders of cities become rather artificial creations and the problems occurring on both sides are basically identical and focus mainly on communication issues.

The processes of agglomerations and metropolises emergence belong to basic megatrends of the global economy. On the one hand, it is an inevitable process and, on the other hand, it is vigorous and deals with creating multidimensional phenomena and interrelations. Most functional areas concentrated around big urban centers can boast about a positive balance of migration, a significant supply on the labour market as well as the growing needs of inhabitants in terms of demands pertaining to the quality of life (Kudłacz, 2014).

“*Cities are open systems*” (Kuźnik, 2015 p. 10) and thus influencing various activities located within the city is limited. However, if some activities of entities functioning within the city cause problems, the responsibility of solving them falls to the authorities of the city and the adjacent municipalities. Those issues were often diagnosed, however, solving them faced many organizational obstacles and especially the financial ones. Kuźnik conducts a typology of urban functional areas and differentiates their 5 types (Kuźnik, 2015 p. 13):

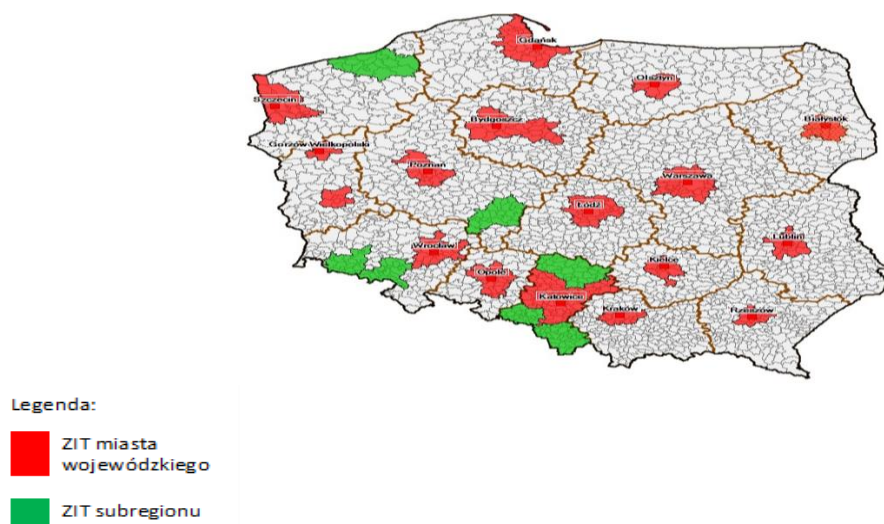
1. Functional area of a city, where the city is considered with its surrounding, where suburbanization processes take place in urban and rural settlement units.
2. Urban agglomeration as a set of cities, which is composed of cities of various sizes and focused around the region’s capital.
3. A policentric agglomeration understood as conurbation, which brings together cities of similar sizes and significance.
4. Metropolitan area, which plays a significant role in national and international settlement network.
5. Urban-rural functional area characterized with high population density, where intensive urbanization processes take place.

The cooperation between particular administrative units within functional areas faced many obstacles, which could not be overcome without implementing special instruments dedicated only to this kind of problem. Danielewicz describes a set of problems pertaining to cooperation in the field of metropolitan areas and the author of the article notices the identity of those phenomena and presents the below listed barriers in terms of functional areas that include, among others (Danielewicz, 2013):

- strong politicisation and responsibility fragmentation at particular levels of public authorities,
- systems of financial supply of public administrative units,

- low level of trust of the central city's adjacent municipalities,
- slight willingness of cooperation between large administrative units and small ones,
- lack of coordination between the authority levels of central city and municipalities,
- lack of inhabitants identification with functional areas,
- mismatch between administrative and functional borders.

Figure 1. Urban functional areas in Poland



Note: Red: Voivodeship city ITI, Green: Sub-region's ITI
Source: Białystok Functional Area.

Additionally, Lackowska notices that “*particularism of local government units turns out to be difficult to overcome and metropolitan solidarity difficult to sustain in relation to conflicting interests*” (Lackowska, 2014 p. 98).

The set of aforementioned problems, which actually existed in terms of cooperation between big cities and smaller administrative units, could be tackled thanks to implementing the Integrated Territorial Investments instrument. Functional areas relate to over 18 million inhabitants, which constitutes 46.8% of Polish population. They cover more than 54 thousand km², which constitutes 17% of the country's area. Seventeen voivodeship cities with an external zone and 7 sub-regions jointly amount 521 municipalities, including 126 urban municipalities, 274 rural municipalities and 121 urban-rural municipalities. In eleven voivodeships, one functional area was constituted in each, which is focused around the central city. In 4 voivodeships, except for ITIs connected with a voivodeship city, the sub-regional ITIs were introduced in two voivodeships i.e., Zachodniopomorskie and Wielkopolskie Voivodeships one ITI each, in Dolnośląskie Voivodeship two ITIs and in Śląskie

Voivodeship three sub-regional functional areas, which means that the whole voivodeship was covered with Integrated Territorial Investments. It should also be noticed that in Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship one ITI was created, which covered either Bydgoszcz as well as Torun and in Lubuskie Voivodeship, which also formally possesses two cities with a voivodeship status, two separate functional areas were created connected with Zielona Góra and Gorzów Wielkopolski. The effects of this cooperation on the example of the Białystok Functional Area will be presented below. It is the best example that creating either institutional, organizational as well as financial possibilities gives tangible results and reduces existing problems. For instance, in case of politicization, in spite of existing differences, it is possible to focus merely on substantive issues as 10 municipalities of BFA noticeably succeeded in it.

4. Key Results of Collaboration between Białystok Functional Area Municipalities²

The Association of Białystok Functional Area (BFAA) was founded on 6 December 2013. Integrated Territorial Investment instrument was an impulse to establish cooperation between municipalities. The core of the Association of BFA is the voivodeship city of Białystok and the external zone, composed of rural-urban municipalities i.e., Choroszcz, Czarna Białostocka, Łapy, Supraśl, Wasilków, Zabłudów as well as rural municipalities i.e., Dobrzyniewo Duże, Juchnowiec Kościelny, Turośń Kościelna. Jointly BFAA covers 10 local government units. From the EuroPAP ranking (EuroPAPnews 2019) pertaining to the activity of 2478 municipalities in Poland in terms of implementation of EU projects from the cohesion policy, the BFA municipalities took relatively high positions.

Table 1. Positions of Białystok Functional Area municipalities among 2478 municipalities in Poland according to the value of EU projects on 30 June 2018.

Position	Municipality	Contract value (PLN)
13	Białystok	2 251 454 390
98	Łapy	244 186 364
113	Wasilków	219 110 921
114	Juchnowiec Kościelny	214 655 745
126	Turośń Kościelna	201 635 504
130	Zabłudów	195 986 319
131	Choroszcz	195 980 807
194	Supraśl	143 289 632
383	Czarna Białostocka	80 786 039
1152	Dobrzyniewo Duże	20 108 606

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the article from EuroPAP News *EU Projects in municipalities* – www.europarlament.pap.pl.

²The first part of the article was elaborated on the basis of the internal materials from the Białystok Functional Area Office as well as the author's personal experiences as the President of BFA.

When elaborating the Strategy for implementing the ITI instrument in Białystok Functional Area – “Białystok Functional Area – an attractive place to live and work” seven objectives were mainly considered, which stemmed from the previously conducted diagnosis and the most urgent needs occurring in 10 municipalities: (Strategia Zintegrowanych Inwestycji Terytorialnych..., 2019):

- Objective 1. Investment attractiveness
- Objective 2. Competencies to work
- Objective 3. Access to culture
- Objective 4. Active social integration
- Objective 5. Low-emission economy and environmental protection
- Objective 6. Transport accessibility
- Objective 7. Integration of strategic management of BFA development

Due to a small amount of financial resources (about 76 million euro for the seven-year programming period), four of them were accepted for direct implementation i.e., Objective 1 and 2 as well as 4 and 5.

Table 2. *The total value of EU projects and the value of projects within ITI in Białystok Functional Area on 30 June 2018.*

Municipality	Value of contracts within ITI in PLN per 1 inhabitant	Value of contracts in PLN per 1 inhabitant	Participation of contract values within ITI in the total value in %
Choroszcz	1 844	13 094	14,08%
Czarna Białostocka	894	7 031	12,72%
Dobrzyniewo Duże	1 594	2 200	72,48%
Juchnowiec Kościelny	2 194	13 368	16,41%
Łapy	1 578	11 063	14,26%
Supraśl	1 346	9 547	14,10%
Turośń Kościelna	1 112	32 543	3,42%
Wasilków	1 340	13 385	10,01%
Zabłudów	2 090	21 213	9,85%
Białystok	571	7 573	7,54%

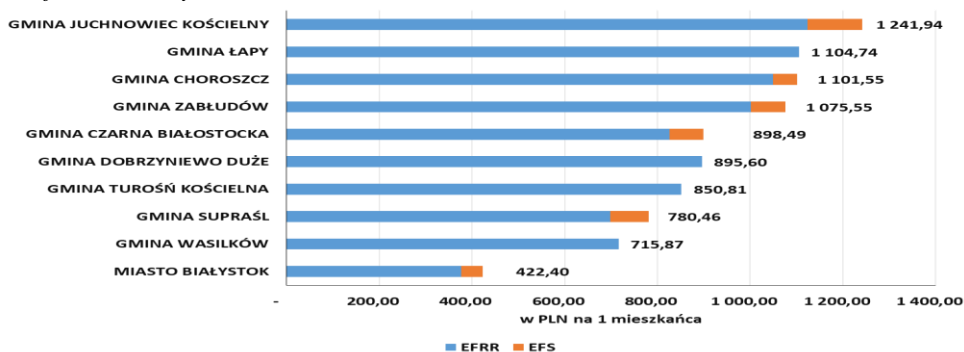
Source: *Own elaboration on the basis of the article from EuroPAP News EU Projects in municipalities – www.europarlament.pap.pl.*

The implementation of projects financed from the ITI instrument constitutes between 3.42% and 15.41%, only in the rural municipality Dobrzyniewo Duże it amounts to over 70%. It demonstrates that the BFA municipalities, due to the established cooperation within the ITI instrument, can more efficiently reach for EU funds from the cohesion policy. The majority of these resources were utilized by cooperating with other BFA municipalities. Additionally, they collaborate in Local Activity Groups (LAG) within the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) instrument, i.e., the experiment implemented in the years 2014-2020 only in

Podlaskie and Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeships. Among all the municipalities in Podlaskie Voivodeship implementing this instrument, the BFA municipalities are the most efficient in terms of implementing CLLD and due to this they obtained from the Podlaskie Voivodeship Marshal's Office, as a ROPPV Managing Institution, an award in the form of increasing the primary allocation to even 60%.

BFA municipalities, due to the cooperation established when they were implementing the ITI instrument, learned how to act more dynamically for the development of their municipality and the whole functional area and obtain EU funds more efficiently. They started to cooperate by solving problems and not – as previously – by competing for the developmental resources. The cooperation of BFA municipalities enabled the implementation of partnership project in the field of low-emission economy.

Figure 2. Contracts within ITI (amount of EU co-funding in PLN per 1 inhabitant) as of 31 January 2019.



Note: Blue – ERDF Orange - ESF

Source: BFA Office elaboration, on the basis of data from SL2014.

The data presented in Figure 2 most clearly prove that the BFA central city Białystok takes care of good cooperation with the adjacent municipalities and due to this the city used much fewer resources per one inhabitant than other administrative units. Compared to Juchnowiec Kościelny municipality, Białystok spent only 34% of resources.

In the Strategy of Integrated Territorial Investments of Białystok Functional Area for the years 2014-2020, a non-competitive project was identified within the ITI instrument from the Regional Operational Programme for Podlaskie Voivodeship for the years 2014-2020 “Partnership project”. The development of low-emission public and cycling transport system with the total value amounting to 159.3 million PLN, including the EU co-funding of 90.4 million PLN. The project is implemented by nine BFA municipalities. The activities in this project are supplemented by complementary projects in a non-competitive project selection procedure indicated in BFA ITI Strategy within the Operational Programme Eastern Poland (with total

value - 454.1 million PLN, including the EU co-funding – 324.8 PLN. Intermodal transportation hub in Białystok (transport interchange centre with the collective public transport corridor), improvement of access to Białystok centre for public transport as well as the development of public transport infrastructure in Białystok. As a result of those projects' implementation, 72 pieces of low-emission bus fleet, including 12 pieces in the "Partnership project" were purchased. 60 km of bicycle paths will be built, including about 48km in "Partnership project" and new urban transport lines will be created (bus), or old ones will be modernized, over 200km, including about 20km in "Partnership project". The need for further, future, joint activities contributed to the Association of BFA joining the pilot program for preparing and implementing the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP). The pilot program is organized to prepare for the next financial perspective by the Ministry of Investment and Economic Development, in collaboration with the Ministry of Infrastructure, the European Commission, Jasper Initiative as well as the Centre for European Union Transport Projects.

Without cooperation between the city of Białystok and BFA municipalities, it would not be possible to implement projects connected with BFA low-emission economy. It is due to, among others, the restrictions written down in Partnership Agreement relating to the possibility of implementing the so-called 'black' tasks – undesirable (road building and modernization) on condition that their value constitutes a smaller part of the project compared to the so-called 'green' tasks – desirable from the low-emission economy point of view (among others, purchase of low-emission bus fleet, bicycle paths construction). Białystok purchases the fleet and municipalities build and modernize roads that will be used by public transport from Białystok. Bicycle paths are built by all the project implementors. Such activities allow to achieve the estimated annual decrease in greenhouse gas emission by over 11 000 tones of CO₂eq, which will improve air quality. BFAA sees the necessity of further joint activities in this field.

BFA municipalities jointly and comprehensively take care of the development of vocational education for the labour market's needs. The comprehensive support for vocational education in BFA covers:

- creating and constant functioning of BFA Competency Centre, which aims at adjusting vocational schools students competencies to the needs of regional economy (project from ESF selected through a competition procedure within ITI from ROPPV BFA Competency Centre – comprehensive model of support and modernization of vocational education system in BFA);
- implementation of integrated projects assuming the improvement of vocational education quality as well as modernization of vocational education facilities (integrated projects from ESF as well as ERDF selected through a competition procedure within ITI from ROPPV);
- popularization of vocational education either among the former lower secondary school students and their parents, which constitutes the objective of Good

Profession – Nice Life – popularization of vocational education in Podlaskie Voivodeship (the Association of BFA is one of the partners in the project selected through a competition procedure within ROPPV)

The BFA Competency Centre (BFA CC) is a model for vocational education development. It has a direct impact on BFA economic development. It covers all vocational schools in the whole BFA and within this regular research is conducted on 1800 posts that check professional competencies necessary to work at a particular job post. Due to them, an application was created on the basis of which, a student receives a demand consultation (a student can enter e.g., his salary expectations, see in which companies he can earn it, what sector he can work in, which school educates in this field, what competencies he can gain, what he will lack, what courses he must complete – courses are provided by the Competency Centre). Each vocational school in BFA prepares a development strategy that is assessed by the Białystok Accreditation Committee, appointed within BFA CC. On this basis, education quality is examined and cooperation rules are checked with the local labour market, whether education satisfies the needs of the market. The schools implement their own strategies, among others, through integrated projects financed jointly by ESF and ERDF within the ITI instrument (competitions for projects are prepared and conducted by II ITI BFA in collaboration with MI ROPPV and BFA CC). The Association of BFA as a partner in the project ‘Good Profession – Nice Life’ deals with popularization of vocational education, i.e., one of the elements of vocational education development model defined within BFA CC.

Economic growth is thus a key to improve the BFA inhabitants’ quality of life and due to that the tasks implemented within this field are based on collaboration between municipalities (all the BFAA members), Białystok powiat, non-governmental organizations (among others, the Białystok Personnel Training Foundation), all the vocational schools in BFA, companies conducting economic activity in the region, universities and other partners. Social capital, which in Poland is at a relatively low level, is jointly built (public trust institutions).

Collaboration model between non-governmental organizations for family support. Mutual activities in BFA led to the cooperation of also the non-governmental organizations, which elaborated one model for family support in BFA municipalities and according to it, they implement tasks by dividing between them the access to particular BFA municipalities.

At the initiative of the President of Białystok, all the Białystok Functional Area municipalities formed a joint electricity buying group, which at the moment of tender settlement brought savings of 1.2 million PLN and when taking into account the prices of electricity on 28 March 2019 even 9.5 million PLN. These sums reveal more when they are referred to relatively smaller budgets of rural and rural-urban municipalities, because they were the biggest beneficiaries of joint activities. The City of Białystok created formerly a buying group only for its own units and from its

point of view, the savings were similar. One joint buying group created jointly by a voivodeship city and municipalities forming the external zone is the favour on the city's side towards municipalities as it generated savings, which consolidate cooperation even more. Apart from that, due to the constant invoice monitoring, BFA municipalities learn how to better manage their resources. The success of the first buying group led to the willingness of continuing the activity in this field as well as the creation of next buying group gas.

Further joint activities are also planned, but this time for inhabitants, who live at the intersection of the city of Białystok and municipalities forming the external zone. The inhabitants face problems with access to water-supply and sewage system of Białystok, which does not run there and also there are no plans of this kind, but they live near municipalities, which have their own networks next to the inhabitants' houses. Thanks to the agreements that will be discussed soon and will be signed by the members of BFAA, the inhabitants' problem can be solved. The cooperation is very constructive, however, as it has been taking place only for five years, it cannot be described as permanent. It demands further support of such instrument as ITI, which can enhance and stabilize it.

5. Conclusions

The discussion that took place in the literature pertaining to metropolitan areas did not have practical significance (except for Górny Śląsk) due to formal lack of their delimitation. Legal solutions adopted either by the European Commission and Polish parliament focused on functional areas of voivodeship cities. Introduction of new tools and regulations, either programming as well as financial ones, allowed to create and institutionalize functional areas in Poland. Integrated Territorial Investments became a fact and allowed to develop cooperation between central points and the adjacent municipalities.

The aim of the article, which was to examine the impact of Integrated Territorial Investments on the development of cooperation forms between municipalities belonging to Białystok Functional Area was fully achieved. The research hypothesis stated in the introduction to this article was positively verified. The effects of jointly undertaken projects in Białystok Functional Area were presented. Additionally, it was proved that joint activities do not end at EU projects, but give an impulse to create new agreements, including especially buying groups connected with electricity as well as joint activities protecting against natural disasters.

It should be firmly emphasized that Integrated Territorial Investments became part of political and substantive landscape of big cities and their surroundings. The effects of cooperation within those areas should be presented as 'good practice' either at European as well as national levels, which should become an impulse to continue this instrument in the next programming period for the years 2021-2027.

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