

Tomasz Kaczmarek

*Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management
e-mail: tomkac@amu.edu.pl*

Functional Urban Areas as the Focus of Development Policy in Poland

Abstract: This article presents the premises, current status and the prospects of using functional urban areas as the focus of Poland's development policy. For the past 10 years, cities, especially large ones, have been increasingly impacting on their surrounding areas defined as functional urban areas. The size of those areas is determined by the process of suburbanisation. The article emphasises the issue of uncoordinated development of functional urban areas surrounding core cities and on grass-root and top-down attempts to integrate their development.

Key words: functional urban area, metropolitan area, urban policy, intermunicipal cooperation, integrated territorial investments

Introduction

The term “functional urban area” denotes the area occupied by a large city and its surrounding areas for which it is the main labour market and the source of specialised services. The term “city-region” is its derivative echoing the concept of an economic nodal region, with a strong centre of industry and services as its heart.

Functional (metropolitan) urban areas are complex administrative, settlement and economic structures characterised by:

1. metropolitan settlement structure involving one core city (or more than one), a suburban area and a functional urban area linked to the urban agglomeration,
2. infrastructural and transport network, mainly gravitating towards the centre, but developing radially over time,
3. spatial and functional network allowing for the movement of goods, persons, capital and information
4. numerous local administrative units – rural, urban-rural and urban communes as well as town counties and rural counties (Polish: gminy and powiaty).

It has been emphasised for many years that the harmonisation of the development of core cities and their functional areas (metropolitan areas) leads to achieving a cooperative advantages and multiplier effects (i.a. Hamilton 2000, Herrschel, Newman 2002, Jouve, Lefevre 2002, Salet, Thornley, Kreukels 2003, Heinelt, Kübler 2005, Kaczmarek, Mikuła 2007). In the case of such complex settlement structures, especially metropolitan ones, it is necessary to resolve certain problems related to management and spatial planning. Most of them are within the remit of public administration entities, including local government bodies. These are tasks which (Kaczmarek 2014):

- limit urban sprawl by the adoption of joint and coordinated spatial development plans,
- require cooperation due to such processes occurring within a network, e.g.: integration of public transport,
- improve the distribution of technical and social infrastructure and optimise the localisation of basic elements of that infrastructure,
- may contribute to providing better and more efficient services, e.g.: joint management of schools,
- whose efficiency grows with the extension of a territory (e.g.: tourist or investment promotion).

From the perspective of integrated management and planning, the above mentioned tasks are becoming more and more common and significant as functional areas develop. Cooperation (the kind that does not preclude natural competition) may lead to advantage linked to the streamlining of management, coordination of investment localisation, more efficient service provision and, consequently, a better quality of life and management in functional areas. However, apart from the advantages of integrated territorial management, there are also disadvantages, which include:

- partial loss of independence of communes in the scope of managing local affairs,
- necessity to become subordinated to development strategies and policies of higher level,
- necessity to share costs related to the functioning of the infrastructure and services of the functional area as a whole (especially important where inhabitants of suburbs use services provided by institutions situated in core cities,
- gradual loss of local identity to the benefit of functional areas (metropolitan ones).

In comparison with a number of European countries, where the structure of functional areas is already well developed (e.g. Germany, France, the Netherlands, see Kaczmarek 2005), Poland is at the initial stages of transforming functional areas into important subjects of planning and management. This is due to historical conditions (late entry into the suburbanisation phase, relatively short period of local governments being active) and to legal and administrative as well as political factors. Undoubtedly, the need for coordinating activities in functional urban areas becomes obvious only with the development of negative phenome-

na and increased demographic (e.g. shrinking of core cities), economic, transport and ecological problems.

Over the past twenty years, the size and dynamics of suburbanisation processes have set new directions in the scope of territorial management and strategic as well as spatial planning in Poland. As Izdebski says (2010), a proper solution to managing large urban areas as particular functional areas is one of the most difficult problems faced by the public administration in Poland.

Functional urban areas in the light of national strategic and planning documents

The functional (metropolitan) area of a city is a new subject of development and governance policies indicated in Polish strategic and planning documents such as:

- *Krajowa Strategia Rozwoju Regionalnego 2010–2020* (National Strategy of Regional Development) (NSRD 2020),
- *Koncepcja Przestrzennego Zagospodarowania Kraju 2030* (National Spatial Development Concept) (NSDK 2030).

In accordance with the above mentioned documents, special planning solutions, development strategies and spatial development plans should be implemented in functional urban areas due to the degree of complexity of social, economic and spatial issues and to the need to increase the coordination and efficiency of public services.

The National Strategy of Regional Development 2010–2020 – regions, cities and rural areas is a document setting the priorities of the regional development of the country for the current decade. This document identifies the objectives and priorities of Poland's territorial development, principles and instruments of regional policies, a new role of regions as part of regional policies and an outline of the mechanism of coordinating actions undertaken by individual ministries.

NSRD 2020 introduces a number of modifications to the method of planning and implementing Polish regional policies and various public policies having the biggest impact on the achievement of territorial objectives. A number of provisions relate to the management of territorially-oriented policies and comprises the issues of cooperation, coordination, efficiency, monitoring and evaluation. Nowadays regional policies are seen from a broader perspective – as public intervention aimed at the implementation of the country's developmental objectives by way of territorial-oriented actions. NSRD 2020 perceives the major cities of provinces, including the city of Poznań, as the main centres of regional development and principal contributors to improving the competitiveness of those regions. Thanks to strong cities, which are homes to modern and competitive companies offering jobs as well as high quality educational and cultural services, the position of each region will be strengthened and the scope of positive impact on the whole province will be extended.

NSRD 2010–2020 lists the best exploitation of the potential of territories most likely to generate economic growth as the primary objective of regional policies (Warsaw and other provincial centres and their functional areas). The integration of functional urban areas consists in providing support to solutions aimed at integrating the space of functional urban areas for the purposes of spatial development, public transport (infrastructure, rolling stock and organisational solutions), public utility services and the labour market.

The term “functional urban areas” is relatively new to Polish planning terminology. In the organisational context it is introduced by the National Spatial Development Concept 2030 (NSDC 2030), published in 2012 in the *Monitor Polski* (item 252) as an annex to the Council of Ministers’ Resolution No. 239 of 13 December 2011. This is an officially binding document relating to Poland’s spatial planning policy. The introduction of functional planning as a separate cross-cutting planning category, necessary to ensure effective planning in areas with specific features, not affected by administrative restrictions and independent of national, provincial or local plans (functional area plans) is one of the key elements of the Concept.

The issue of functional links between cities and their hinterland is also mentioned in the Concept among the conditions of national spatial planning for the next 20 years. In the opinion of the authors of the Concept, an increased direct impact of cities on their surrounding areas, defined as functional urban areas, is being observed. The size of this area is usually delimited by urban sprawl – both build-up areas and urban lifestyle as well as increased commuting to city centres. This means that Poland witnesses to a decline of the traditional division of settlements into towns and villages, as rural areas, especially those in the vicinity of big urban centres, are less and less limited to agricultural functions only.

According to NSDC 2030, functional urban area is a settlement system marked by spatial continuity and composed of separate administrative units. It covers a compact urban area and its urbanised zone functionally linked to it. NSDC divides functional urban areas into four types: provincial (also metropolitan), regional, sub-regional and local hubs. This division applies to the functions of urban centres in the country’s settlement system and is based mainly on their size (number of inhabitants).

NSDC clearly addresses the problem of the uncoordinated development of the functional urban areas of major cities (regional hubs). The suburban zones of these core cities have been witnessing to spontaneous urbanisation and growing spatial chaos. This results in landscape degradation and growing socio-economic costs to be incurred by individual functional urban areas. Uncontrolled suburbanisation may lead to natural environment degradation and to recreation areas and investment sites becoming less attractive, which, in turn, may result in the deterioration of the image and investment attractiveness of those areas. As social infrastructure and service provision develop slowly and there are not enough jobs in those areas, their inhabitants are compelled to work and satisfy some of their needs in the cores of main urban centres. Moreover, as public transport is not developed well enough, inhabitants of suburbs are dependent on individual

transport which contributes to the deficiency of transport systems and to congestion as well as to lowering the efficiency of an urban centre as a whole.

When the term “functional urban areas” first appeared in operational documents, work was started on the determination of the criteria and methods of their delimitation. According to NSDC 2030, the Ministry of Regional Development (currently the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development) sets the number and character of functional areas, including metropolitan areas, in accordance with the Spatial Planning and Land Development Act. The delimitation of the functional areas of provincial centres is to be conducted by local government bodies and included in provincial land development plans, using uniform criteria jointly developed by the government and local governments with the participation of social and economic partners. In 2012, a paper prepared for the Ministry of Regional Development by Prof. Przemysław Sleszyński of the Polish Academy of Sciences was published. It contained proposals for the delimitation of the functional areas of regional cities (capital of voivodship, *Polish: stolice województw*). In 2014, the Minister of Infrastructure and Development presented a draft regulation on the detailed conditions of delimitating functional areas and their boundaries. However, so far no decision as to the size of functional urban areas has been made.

Functional urban areas – regulatory attempts and central government’s supporting instruments

It is clear from the experiences of European countries that top-down support for integrated metropolitan governance is usually a result of the poor emanation of this process across local structures (Kaczmarek 2005). The lack of consistent cooperative initiatives coupled with increasing infrastructural, economic and social problems results in the emergence of governmental initiatives aimed at the introduction of top-down legal, organisational and financial solutions.

Discussions focussing on reforms in the domain of governing the functional areas of metropolises (the metropolitan reform) started in Poland 10 years ago. As a result of those discussions, in 2009 the Government of the Republic of Poland intensified work on a bill introducing new forms of cooperation between local government bodies in functional urban areas. The national urban policy bill and the cooperation of local government bodies in this scope, otherwise known as the Metropolitan Act, was intended to achieve social and economic as well as spatial cohesion and to create a basis for the efficient and integrated management of metropolitan areas. The internal system of metropolitan structure was to be roughly close to the formula of an intercommunal multitasking partnership. The legislative process in the case of the above mentioned bill was abandoned at a later stage and the discussion on changes to the administrative system of cities died down. The diversified positions of political parties (also coalition) in Polish Parliament, governmental actions lacking determination and very different

visions of the reform at various levels of local governments had a big influence on abandoning the metropolitan reform in Poland. Regional governments' and some local governments' reluctant attitudes to metropolises (for fear of losing influence on these areas) are to be blamed for that.

As there was no political and social consent as to the legal regulation of the status of metropolitan areas, the policy of the government started to aim at technical and financial support offered to grass-root integration in functional urban areas. As stated before, the Polish key strategic and planning documents (NSRD 2020 and NSDC 2030) declare support to solutions integrating functional urban areas in the scope of land management, public transport, public utility services and the labour market. Details referring to activities aimed at urban development are specified in the governmental document National Urban Policy, whose principles were adopted by the government in the middle of 2013 and consulted with communities in 2014.

Functional urban areas, especially metropolitan areas, have gained more importance in the system of territorial planning and governance. Funds coming from national entities participating in the implementation of urban policies as well as EU structural funds are to be the main source of financing the national urban and metropolitan policies (White Paper on Metropolitan Areas, 2013). To prepare functional urban and metropolitan areas to absorb EU funds and, more importantly, to promote and program their integrated development, in 2012-2013 the Ministry of Regional Development dedicated a special technical support programme to them. It included grants (awarded under calls for proposals) for activities supporting local government bodies in the scope of planning and developing functional urban areas. Several dozens of functional urban areas have used this programme, including all metropolitan areas developing diverse programme documents requiring cooperation and arrangements, such as: development strategies (e.g. the metropolitan areas of Warsaw and Łódź) or spatial development concepts or studies (e.g. Poznań Metropolis, Wrocław Functional Area).

The territorial dimension is one of the main principles of programming in the European Union for the years 2014–2020. Within this period, functional areas will become the full-fledged subjects of policies and beneficiaries of EU funds under a new programme called Integrated Territorial Investments – ITI. It intends to stop perceiving areas from the perspective of administrative boundaries, including cities' individual potential. Relations between cities and their functional areas are emphasised. They may be evident at institutional and programme levels and at the level of particular infrastructural, social, educational activities aimed at increasing positive mutual influence (The Principles of Including the Urban Dimension of the EU Cohesion Policy, 2013).

In Poland, the ITI instrument will help with the implementation of such activities as:

1. promoting the model of partnership cooperation between different administrative units in functional urban areas;
2. increasing the efficiency of interventions through the implementation of integrated projects responding in a comprehensive manner to the needs and problems of cities and their functional areas;

3. increasing the impact of cities and their functional areas on the shape and method of the implementation of activities supported in their area as part of the cohesion policy.

The implementation of the ITI instrument is obligatory in provincial cities and their functional areas. In accordance with the provisions of the document *The Programming of the Financial Perspective for 2014-2020 (2013)*, funds available to ITI projects in 17 functional urban areas are to amount to a total of EUR 2,385,000,000. An indispensable condition for ITI implementation boils down to establishing an institutional form of partnership called an ITI partnership. ITI partnerships are to jointly represent the authorities of cities and their functional areas before the central and regional authorities. Communal partnerships and associations are proper legal forms of partnerships. In metropolitan areas, where they have been active for years, the process of adaptation to the new territorial policy of the European Union is undoubtedly easier, for example because when identifying new ITI projects consent is achieved sooner.

Forms of local government cooperation in functional urban areas

Nowadays, cooperation between administrative units is regarded as an organisationally, economically and socially indispensable element ensuring their efficient functioning. Cooperation has become a task in its own right for civil service and although only facultative in the legislation of a number of countries, it has become a necessity and norm in practice. Positive experiences gained from cooperation endorse the view that properly implemented cooperation between communes may constitute not only a supplement, but also an alternative to territorial and administrative reforms and governmental regulations (Kaczmarek, Mięka 2007). Inter-territorial cooperation is nowadays seen as an indication of the flexibility of the public administration system. As Delcamp says (1997, p. 91) “cooperation is the response that a state, indirect structures or local communities themselves are trying to give to institutions inadequate to economic and social reality”.

Looking from the legal and administrative perspective, territorial corporations whose introduction is possible in metropolitan areas can basically be divided into three groups (Norris, 2011):

1. creating another level of local government administration through granting special local government unit status to metropolitan areas,
2. territorial corporations remaining in public or civil law partnerships (communal partnerships, associations, commercial law companies),
3. corporations having no legal personality, acting on the principle of informal agreements, contracts, meetings (councils, partnership, etc.)

As Izdebski says (2010), the local government reform in 1990, one of the steps being of paramount importance to the transformation of the country's sys-

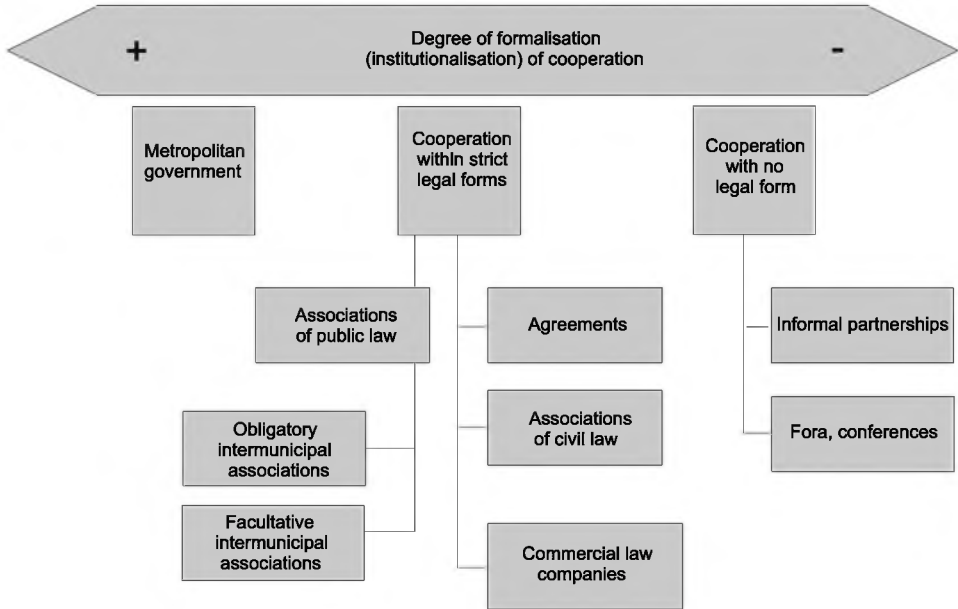


Fig. 1. Forms of cooperation of local government bodies
Source: author's own work.

tem, paradoxically contributed to severing the previously existing ties between cities and their immediate areas. Although those ties were not based on the principles of local governance, they ensured, however, a minimum of harmonious functioning to functional urban areas (e.g.: as part of state-owned public utility companies, public transport). The subsequent administrative reform of 1998 did not consider a solution to the administrative status of cities and their functional areas by transforming them into a “metropolitan district”. Therefore, the introduction of a second level of administration to local governments caused further administrative fragmentation in relation to functional areas by introducing a division into communes alongside with a division into towns with district rights and rural districts surrounding them (*Polish: miasta na prawach powiatu and powiaty ziemskie*).

However, local government reforms in Poland have formed legal basis for intercommunal cooperation and enabled local governments to make autonomous decisions in this matter. Polish intercommunal cooperation, almost 25 ago after the introduction of self-governing communes, is still much less advanced than in a number of western European countries.

A grass-root process of creating local coalitions of cities and their neighbouring communes and districts has been in progress in Poland for about 10 years. This might be seen as the beginnings of the process of integration of management and planning in functional urban areas. The areas of influence of metropolises have been witnessing the emergence of diverse, less-formal structures (councils, partnerships) and more formal ones (communal partnerships, associations) in-

Table 1. Metropolitan Areas in Poland – selected examples of forms of cooperation

Form of cooperation	Name	Founded in
Intermunicipal association	Górnośląski Związek Metropolitalny, Silesia,	2007
	Metropolitalny Związek Komunikacyjny Zatoki Gdańskiej	2007
	Związek Międzygminny „Gospodarka odpadami aglomeracji poznańskiej”	2010
Commercial law company	Agencja Rozwoju Aglomeracji Wrocławskiej	2005
Metropolitan Association	Stowarzyszenie Metropolia Warszawa	2000
	Stowarzyszenie Szczecińskiego Obszaru Metropolitalnego	2005/2009
	Stowarzyszenie Metropolia Poznań	2011
	Stowarzyszenie Metropolia Bydgoska	2010
	Stowarzyszenie Gdański Obszar Metropolitalny	2011
Partnership agreements	Porozumienie Partnerskie Rzeszowskiego Obszaru Metropolitalnego	2005
	Porozumienie Partnerskie w sprawie Bydgosko-Toruńskiego Obszaru Metropolitalnego	2005
	Porozumienie Partnerskie Białostockiego Obszaru Metropolitalnego	2005
	Porozumienie w sprawie Lubelskiego Obszaru Metropolitalnego	2005
Council	Rada Metropolitalna Zatoki Gdańskiej	2007
	Rada Aglomeracji Poznańskiej	2007
	Rada Krakowskiego Obszaru Metropolitalnego	2007
	Stała Rada Współpracy Aglomeracji Kalisko- Ostrowskiej	2008

Source: author's own work.

tended to find solutions to mutual problems and to coordinate metropolitan area governance. Table 1 lists the most important ones of them:

The most important integration initiatives listed in table 1 testify to the need for cooperation between cities and their functional areas that has emerged in recent years. This is mainly a result of increasing problems related to intensive suburbanisation and the current general economic crisis affecting local government funds, especially in cities. In the years to come, a new and integrated territorial approach provided for in the policy of the country and the European Union should result in a growing number of initiatives leading to that kind of local government cooperation in Poland.

Conclusions

The process of suburbanisation spanning over the last two decades has resulted in the emergence of new and previously unknown problems relating to public utility services management, public transport, spatial development and diverse relations between cities and their functional areas. The new processes require the

central and local governments to initiate purely political, as well as organisational and planning activities.

The issue of managing functional metropolitan areas has been discussed in Poland for almost 10 years. Despite being emphasised in the most important national documents (National Spatial Development Concept 2030, National Strategy of Regional Development 2020), it is not a priority for the central policy. As a result, a reform specifically regulating the administrative system of metropolitan areas has been abandoned. At the same time, grass-root metropolitan cooperation in Poland is at its initial stage and not always does it boil down to the choice of appropriate forms of metropolitan governance adapted to the specificity of a particular area and its scale of local problems.

Support at programme level offered by the European Union is becoming a very important element determining local policies. The new approach in the territorial policy of the European Union provides instruments supporting the integration of functional urban areas. To become their beneficiaries, local governments have to form territorial partnerships encompassing cities and their functional areas. Will the ITI financial support that is dedicated to functional urban areas for 2014-2020 become a catalyst for integrated management? Will financially motivated cooperation bring notable economic and social results? These questions will be answered in some years. However, as early as at the stage of introducing this instrument it is obvious that it offers some benefits, such as:

1. the commencement of decentralisation of urban policies to the benefit of regional and local levels (local governments themselves make decisions as to ITI projects. Local government representations may become a managing institution),
2. activation of local governments, development of joint strategies and development programmes indispensable for obtaining financial support,
3. reactivation of previously dissolved or abandoned partnerships and the emergence of new local government partnerships,
4. a chance for a more integrated functional and spatial development of metropolitan areas.

Despite the fact of providing organisational and financial instruments supporting local government cooperation in functional areas, it is necessary to make legislative changes granting those areas (especially metropolitan areas) special status, sources of income and specific powers, out of which spatial planning at higher levels would be the most important ones.

However, it is still extremely difficult to change territorial and planning laws, and legislative proposals concerning these domains are strongly opposed to by various groups with common interests (including local government environments themselves). The authors of the OECD report *Urban Policy Reviews. Poland* (2011) say that even in the case of successful grass-root initiatives in metropolitan areas it is still necessary to develop intercommunal cooperation platforms, owing to which cities, communes and districts could become involved in joint problem solving in the scope of social, economic or land management development. It is in this context that the possible scope of a metropolitan re-

form in Poland should be considered. As Izdebski says (2010), this reform could be implemented in stages and should provide for large flexibility in systemic and territorial solutions for the country's particular metropolitan areas.

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