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THE INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENT (ITI) AS A TOOL FOR GOVERNING THE RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES: EVIDENCE FROM POLAND



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MASTER THESIS: JUNE 2016

The Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) as a tool for governing the rural-urban linkages: Evidence from Poland

MSc PLANET EUROPE

European Spatial Planning, Environmental Policy and Regional Development

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*You Face,
And have faced hardship :*

*If we see challenges as important –
And they are –
Then the challenged person is very important :*

*Your challenges then,
Make you vital
And critical
To the world !*

*How important
And how serious
Will you be considered,
If you cope with your hardship ?*

*So grave and imperative
Is your challenge
You become of infinite value
If you sincerely, honestly
Even intend to challenge your hardship !*

(Caffè Nero's Poet)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Arnoud Lagendijk and Prof. Jan-Evert Nilsson, for supporting and helping me during all the phases of this thesis, with all their advices and comments but also with their understanding. I would like also to thank all the interviewees who participated in this study and allowed me to collect the necessary data for conducting this research.

A special thank goes to my family, who gave me the possibility to participate to this Master Programme and who always supported me in all my life choices. Without them I would be nothing.

Thanks also to my friends, who despite the long physical distance were always present. Last but not least, I would like to thank Marzia. Her amazing patience and understanding let me write this thesis in a special and comfortable environment, which has certainly influenced my work in a positive way.

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List of Abbreviations

CLLD:	Community Led Local Development
CPR:	Common Provision Regulation
EC:	European Commission
ERDF:	European Regional Development Fund
ESF:	European Social Fund
ESIF:	European Structural Investment Funds
ESDP:	European Spatial Development Perspective
ESPON:	European Observation Network, Territorial Development and Cohesion
FUA:	Functional Urban Area
FUR:	Functional Urban Region
IB:	Intermediate Body
ISUD:	Integrated Sustainable Urban Development
ITI:	Integrated Territorial Investment
MA:	Managing Authority
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
NSRD:	National Strategy of Regional Development
OECD:	Organization Economic Cooperation and Development
OP:	Operational Programme
POIS:	Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment
POPW:	Operational Programme Eastern Poland
ROP:	Regional Operation Programme
RUR:	Rural-Urban Region
RUPR:	Rural-Urban “Project” Region
SIA:	Strategic Intervention Area
SME:	Small and Medium size Enterprise
SPESP:	Study Programme on European Spatial Planning
TO:	Territorial Objectives

ABSTRACT

The growing awareness of functional linkages between rural and urban territories has led to a re-thinking of the rural-urban dichotomy. This was flanked by a more general reconceptualization of space, directly coming from the rise of spatial planning and the shifting process from government to governance. Thus, the concept of “soft space” came to the fore, defined as the space of governance and integrated approach. The EU Commission has launched a new instrument aimed at fostering the territorial approach of the new Cohesion Policy, namely the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). This research wants to investigate the added value of the ITI instrument in governing and institutionalizing the rural-urban linkages at the metropolitan level. In doing so, the author has created a conceptual framework based on three main concepts directly coming from the concept of soft space, namely institutionalization, governance capacity, and integrated approach. The empirical study is focused on Poland, in particular, dealing with the case of Warsaw, Krakow, and Wroclaw. As a result, this research argues that the ITI in Poland has represented an attempt to improve the cooperation between capital cities and their surrounding areas, even though its outcomes can be questionable.

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale for Research:

Urban and rural areas are continuously becoming more interdependent and interlinked (Davoudi & Stead, 2002, p.22). The classical distinction between urban and rural territories is no longer suitable for describing the current situation (Tacoli, 1998). Urban problems can be better tackled through the involvement of rural territories and vice versa (Caffyn & Dahlström, 2005). Those relationships are mostly related to the share of several functions that implicitly involved both spatial typologies, identifying what is defined as a “functional region” (Copus, 2013). Inside such functional region, urban and rural areas are both belonging to an economic, spatial and governance structure, that per se is characterized by interconnected activities, identified considering the physical proximity (OECD, 2013). The need to govern the rural-urban functional region has been widely recognized by scholars, who have seen several opportunities in solving different types of problems, such as urban sprawl, depopulation of rural areas, services provision and social polarization (Ros-Tonen, Pouw, & Bavinck, 2015). More recently, inside the European debate, rural-urban relations have also been accosted to the umbrella concepts of the balanced and sustainable development.

The recognition of the presence of those rural-urban linkages directly underlines the fact that the existing administrative division of territories is no more appropriate to reflect the existing situation (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015). Such evidence, in a planning perspective, has brought to a new conceptualization of territory. A territory is thus seen as a space characterized by several types of flows, rather than a mere container defined by clear boundaries (Faludi, 2013). This discussion has led to the creation of the term “soft space”, which represents their softer nature, comparing with the “hard” spaces characterizing the existing administrative system (Albrechts, Healey, & Kunzmann, 2003; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009, 2010; Walsh, Jacuniak-Suda, Knieling, & Othengrafen, 2012; Waterhout, 2010).

Soft spaces are seen as the best way to represent the challenges coming from the hollowing out of the State and the consequent rise of new governance methods that open up the decision-making process to a different type of stakeholders (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009, 2010; Healey, 2004). Under an institutional perspective, the debate on soft space took the form of the conceptualization of the region. Indeed, soft space has led to a creation of non-standard regions which have been labeled as “project region” (Debarbieux, Price, & Balsiger, 2015). Project region has been defined as “more or less bounded entities, created by actors to address specific problems; they are distinct from, yet often articulate with ‘constitutional regions’ that represent jurisdictionally defined sub-national levels of state organization” (Debarbieux et al., 2015, p.3).

The European Commission (EC) in its new Cohesion Policy 2014/20, following the place-based approach, directly pushed for the use of rural-urban partnership as a tool for achieving the objectives of the EU2020 strategy and thus ensuring a social, economic and territorial cohesion. In pursuing the integrated territorial approach, therefore, the EC has established new financial tools able to help regional development actors in coordinating activities and implementing integrated territorial strategy. One of this tool is the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI).

This research aims to understand how the ITI can be seen as a suitable tool for governing and institutionalize the rural-urban linkages. Consequentially, the central research question leading this study is the following:

- How the ITI can govern and institutionalize the rural-urban linkages?

In answering this question, the rural-urban region (using a planning perspective) has been considered as a project region following the definition explained above. In doing so, three main dimensions have been identified by the author, namely institutionalization, governance capacity and integrated approach. A conceptual framework has therefore been constructed around those three main concepts, also considering the structure offered by the ITI. To answer the research question, the author has chosen Poland as the case study for this research. Indeed, Poland has been a frontrunner in the use of the ITI at a metropolitan scale. Moreover, Polish capital cities are extremely suffering of an uncontrolled expansion towards their surrounding rural hinterlands, and thus exemplarily express the need for the establishment of cooperation practices between urban and rural territories.

As a result, this research argues that the ITI in Poland has represented an attempt to govern the rural-urban linkages at the metropolitan scales, even though its final outcome can be questioned. Moreover, several weaknesses have been identified in both the ITI formula and more in general in the concept of soft space.

1.2 Societal and Scientific Relevance:

This research is offering several contributions regarding both scientific and societal aspects. First, the rural-urban issue as such, albeit it is not a new concept in the literature on regional development, only in the last two decades has gained a growing importance, mainly linked to the role of the cities in the economic panorama, and its consequent process of urban sprawl. Thus, it is a topic which still requires investigations. In this context, the study tries to offer a contribution helping scholars in clarifying the elements that characterize the rural-urban region, suggesting to look at it as a functional soft space. Indeed, the second contribution coming from this research regards the concept of soft space. Being a very new concept, it still presents some unclear points, deriving from its fuzzy nature. Nevertheless, this research would like only to point out some of those “weaknesses” without having the scope of finding innovative solutions. Another aspect of scientific relevance is the study of the ITI as such. Indeed, the tool is a very new instrument used in the framework of the Cohesion Policy. This research thus tries to offer several inputs concerning the implementation of the ITI at the metropolitan scale, and hence as a way to manage the rural-urban cooperation. Last but not least, following the discussion on the ITI, practical suggestions can be grasped by both European Commission and actors involved into the instruments’ implementation.

Dealing with the governing of the rural-urban linkages at the metropolitan level, this study offers possible solutions that affect directly the quality of life of citizens living in metropolitan areas. Environmental and demographic issues, such as energy, water, and waste are clearly touched by this study, as well as problems as social segregation and public services provision. A good government of the rural-urban linkages may also affect the way people living their life, influencing both important and day-to-day choices. As the last point, this research also addresses the problem of democracy and political accountability of the decision-making process between elected and non-elected institutions.

1.3 Research Structure:

The thesis is structured as a follow: Chapter two contains a critical review of the relevant literature and introduces pertinent concepts for the research. It further sets out the theoretical and conceptual framework used in the research. Chapter three define the methodology and the research design used. Furthermore, a critical reflection on the limitations of the study is presented in this chapter. Chapter

four presents the analysis and interpretations of the data collected within the research process. Chapter five summarizes the key findings and presents some points for discussion and ideas for further research that arise from the empirical analysis and theoretical considerations.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Rural-Urban Linkages

According to several studies (OECD, 2013), in 2050 almost 70% of the global population will live in urban areas. Population flows from rural to urban agglomerations are impacting the economic and social trends of both territories. Urbanization is a process that is not merely impacting urban areas, but it puts particular pressure also on its related hinterlands. Problems of urban sprawl, landscape fragmentation, and consumption of agricultural land, as well as societal challenges such as social segregation, quality of life and access to public services, are increasingly characterizing the European space (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015). On the other hand, the growing expansion of urban areas is being seen as an opportunity to re-think the rural territories as suppliers for the crescent urban demand for food, energy, water, tourism, having a positive impact on rural jobs and markets (Copus, 2013). The classic dichotomy between rural and urban territories is no longer suitable to describe the current situation. Indeed, nowadays, it is already clear the need of developing a reconsideration of the synergies between rural and urban territories (Tacoli, 1998).

First of all, to develop such consideration, it is important to understand what are those linkages and how they can be conceptualized. Literature from different academic domains has deeply analyzed the connections that characterize the rural-urban connections. Douglass (1998, as cited in Ros-Tonen et al. 2015) have conceptualized them as "two-way flows of people, goods, public and private services, capital and information" (p. 90). Zonneveld and Stead (2007) state that "Urban and rural areas are interdependent and economically, politically, socially and physically connected through a variety of issues including housing, employment, education, transport, tourism and resource use" (p.441). They built on the categories identified by the SPESP project (former ESPON) which has distinguished between eight kinds of relationships namely: Home-work (commuting) relationships; Central place relationships; Relationships between metropolitan areas and urban centres in rural and intermediate areas; Relationships between rural and urban enterprises; Rural areas as consumption areas for urban dwellers; Rural areas as open spaces for urban areas; Rural areas as carriers for urban infrastructure; Rural areas as suppliers of natural resources for urban areas. Bengt and Schmidt-Thomé (2006) have used a more simplistic approach dividing them into two main groups, structural and functional relationships. Structural relationships are physical interdependencies, while the functional one are connected to the socio-economic process of different functions. Following the same path, (Tacoli, 1998) distinguished between "linkages across space (such as flows of people, goods, money and information and wastes); and sectoral interactions, which include 'rural' activities taking place in urban areas (such as urban agriculture) or activities often classified as 'urban' (such as manufacturing and services) taking place in rural areas" (p.3). However, she clearly pointed out that generalizations regarding the relationship between urban and rural should be avoided, due to their strong local dependence. For Pretty (2003, as cited in Ros-Tonen et al. 2015), urban and rural areas are also linked to different forms of social capital interactions that enables horizontal and vertical linkages between different people and across scales and levels, becoming the arena of new forms of governance (Tab. 1 for a resume).

Tab. 1: Different definition of Rural-Urban Linkages (Source: own elaboration)

AUTHORS	DEFINITION/TYPOLOGIES RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES
Douglass (1998)	Two-way flows of people, goods, public and private services, capital and information
Tacoli (1998)	Linkages across space (such as flows of people, goods, money and information and wastes); and sectoral interactions, which include 'rural' activities taking place in urban areas (such as urban agriculture) or activities often classified as 'urban' (such as manufacturing and services) taking place in rural areas
SPESP (1999, Former ESPON)	Home-work (commuting) relationships; Central place relationships; Relationships between metropolitan areas and urban centres in rural and intermediate areas; Relationships between rural and urban enterprises; Rural areas as consumption areas for urban dwellers; Rural areas as open spaces for urban areas; Rural areas as carriers for urban infrastructure; Rural areas as suppliers of natural resources for urban areas.
Pretty (2003)	Different forms of social capital interactions that enables horizontal and vertical linkages between different people and across scales and levels, becoming the arena of new forms of governance
Bengs & Schmidt-Thomé (2006), (ESPON)	Structural and functional relationships. Structural relationships are physical interdependencies, while the functional one are connected to the socio-economic process of different functions.

More recently the OECD (2010 b) proposed a more exhaustive categorisation of the rural-urban connections which embedded all the different interpretations and which will be used as a basis for this study. Before presenting such categories, it should be underlined that those relationships are mostly related to the share of several functions that implicitly or explicitly involved rural and urban territories and thus are framed considering the concept of “functional region” (Copus, 2013). Indeed, despite the globalization process and growing communication technology that characterized the current space of flows, proximity still play an important role, since most of the interactions still occur between contiguous territories and thus remain place-based (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015). The five categories are (Fig. 1):

1. Demographic linkages
2. Economic transactions and innovation activity
3. Delivery of public services
4. Exchanges in amenities and environmental goods
5. Multi-level governance interactions.

Demographic linkages include migration patterns and commuting. Commuting is used to identify the labor market areas and is extremely related to the actual distance between rural and urban areas. On the other hand, migration has a wider spatial scales and includes other interactions that determine the process of urban concentration, as well as depopulation of the peripheral rural areas. Economic interactions involve cross-sectorial relationship and innovation activities, generally driven by productive complementarities, such as the exchanges of goods and services provided between rural SMEs and nearby cities, as well the flow of knowledge and innovations between rural and urban. The third typology concerns service provision. From transport, waste and water management to education and healthcare, rural-urban are inevitably interconnected and dependent one to another. Amenities and environmental goods interactions refer to the potentialities that rural territory has to offer to the urban center (e.g. renewable energy, air quality, biodiversity); The last one is multi-level governance and refer to the relation in governing the rural and urban territories. However, it should be noted that in the framework of this study, multi-level governance will not be considered as one of the apriori relationships that occur in the rural-urban context, instead it will be seen

as a consequence of the firsts four linkages and thus, as will be discussed later on, will be one of the focus of this study. Multi-level governance interactions are in fact considered as an effect more than a cause.

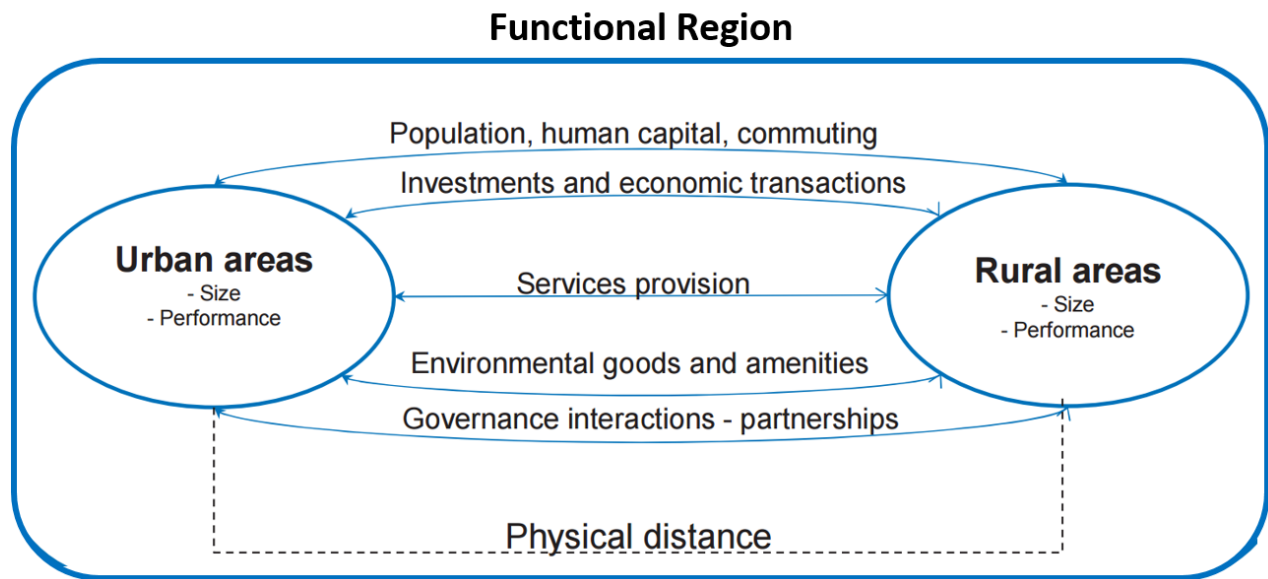


Fig.1: OECD Urban-Rural relationship in functional region (Source: authors' adaptation from OECD 2013, p.23)

Therefore, in the framework of this research, for rural-urban linkages will be meant all the territorial and functional interdependencies (belonging to the above classification) which occur in a specific area that involve different administrative units (OECD, 2013). It is worth to clarify that the OECD classification does not take into consideration other types of linkages, such as personal preferences related to peoples' lifestyle (e.g. school choice, shops preferences), which instead, here, will also be taken into account.

2.2 The Rural-Urban Region

As already mentioned above, most of the rural-urban linkages are shaped by spatial proximity. Usually, the functional region in which those connections take place does not coincide with the administrative boundaries of municipalities or higher tiers of government, since the geographical dimension of such interactions extends beyond the formal limits (Davoudi & Stead, 2002). In order to better grasp and analyze rural-urban interactions and depending on the type of territory and the function under analysis, different methods can be used for defining the functional region. One of the factors that influence such distinctions is the different weight urban and rural dimensions can have in the regional context. Moriconi-Ebrad (1994, as cited in Nilsson et al. 2013) focused on population distribution and distances between centres and settlement size distribution, distinguishing between "regions dominated by a large metropolis, polycentric regions with high urban and rural densities, polycentric regions with high urban densities, rural areas under metropolitan influence, rural areas with networks of medium-sized and small towns and remote rural areas" (p.53). Following physical proximity and poly-centricity aspects, the OECD (2010) have instead identified three typologies of rural-urban interface, namely metropolitan region, networks of small and medium-sized cities, sparsely populated areas with market towns.

Another factor that characterizes the methods of defining the rural-urban interface is the divergence of the concepts of rurality and urbanity in different territories, which depend on several aspects such as legislation and political traditions (Eppler, Fritsche, & Laaks, 2013). Indeed, the identification of the functional regions has been mostly undertaken at both European and Member State level using different criteria such as population density and size, employment density, agricultural employment, administrative functions,

educational facilities. The OECD (2002) had developed the concept of Functional Urban Region (FUR), which refers to "a territorial unit resulting from the organization of social and economic relations in that its boundaries do not reflect geographical particularities or historical events. It is thus a functional subdivision of territories. The most typical concept used in defining a functional region is that of labor markets. (p. 11)". Following the previous statement, the ESPON project (2005) has developed another approach called Functional Urban Area (FUA) which added to the criteria mentioned above, population density, and artificial surface. Nilsson et al. (2013), try to build a more broadly applicable regional typology, developing the concept of the Rural-Urban Region (RUR) which they define as " a spatial extension of the Functional Urban Area including both the peri-urban and rural part of an urban catchment up to a distance where daily commuting ceases due to travel times becoming too long. Areas of recreational use, food supply and nature conservation located in predominantly rural areas are also part of the RUR"(p.54). Inside a rural-urban region, the distinction between urban and rural is less clear. Indeed, it can be said that three type of territories are involved: the core city, the peri-urban transition zone and the more distant rural area (Nilsson et al. 2013). Peri-urban areas are zones where urban areas expand into surrounding rural landscapes, blurring the urban-rural distinction as a result of population growth and urban sprawl. Urban sprawl leads to a new fusion of space that is not rural but not yet urban. These territories have heterogeneity in populations as well as a diversity of lifestyles. Peri-urban areas are characterized by strong urban influence and good quality of services, but risks from pollution and urban growth (Ros-Tonen et. Al. 2015). (Tab. 2)

Tab. 2: Different Definitions of the Rural-Urban Region (Source: own elaboration)

Rural-Urban Region Based on Rural and Urban Weight in the Region	
Authors	Definition
Moriconi-Ebrad (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regions dominated by a large metropolis; Polycentric regions with high urban and rural densities; Polycentric regions with high urban densities; Rural areas under metropolitan influence; Rural areas with networks of medium-sized; Small towns and remote rural areas
OECD (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metropolitan region; Networks of small and medium-sized cities; Sparsely populated areas with market town

Rural-Urban Region Based on Concept of Rurality and Urbanity		
Authors	Label	Definition
OECD (2002)	<i>Functional Urban Region (FUR)</i>	A territorial unit resulting from the organization of social and economic relations in that its boundaries do not reflect geographical particularities or historical events. It is thus a functional subdivision of territories.
ESPON project (2005)	<i>Functional Urban Area (FUA)</i>	FUR + population density, and artificial surface
Nilsson et al. (2013)	<i>Rural-Urban Region (RUR)</i>	FUA+ peri-urban and rural part of an urban catchment up to a distance where daily commuting ceases due to travel times becoming too long

To sum up, it can be said that the several methods used for defining the rural-urban interface can be grouped into two main categories. A first branch which is characterized by a mere functional approach that tries to define a rural-urban region mainly focusing on the people flows, based on statistical data such as travel-to-work area. On the other hand, a second branch seems to take into account also other aspects more related to the spatial dimension of the rural-urban linkages, such as urbanization, without losing the attention to the functional factors that characterize the rural-urban interactions.

In the context of this research, both approaches will be considered. Indeed, the rural-urban region is considered as space where all the rural-urban interactions take place, involving urban, peri-urban and rural territories as defined by (Nilsson et al. 2013). Nevertheless, it is extremely significant to underline that rural-urban region takes into account the evidence that territorial relationships change and thus cannot be caught by using the conventional conceptualization of territory as a bounded entity. Bearing this in mind, the author has identified the concept of soft space as the most suitable tool for conceptualizing the rural-urban region. The next session will present the rise and features of the soft space concept.

2.4 Governance, Spatial Planning and the new Soft Space

Before going into the explanation of the soft space, it is important to understand the wider picture in which such a concept has arisen.

During the 1990s, a new debate regarding the reterritorialization of Europe came to the fore. The increasing effects of globalization have pushed a reshaping territorial process which has been defined as "glocalisation", in which cities and regions have increased their significance as economic actors and engines of growth (Brenner, 1999b). Such a wave was reflected in significant socio-political changes, focusing on the construction of new institutional arenas within the structure of the government (Brenner, 1999a; Jessop, 2000). Indeed, the role of the State has been completely restructured, leading to a consequent shift from a fixed form of government to a flexible approach of governance. The State has therefore undertaken a transformation from a Fordist to a Post-Fordist State (Jessop, 2000). It did not involve only a mechanism of devolution towards a lower territorial scale, but also an opening of the arena towards different stakeholders belonging to the market domain (Deas & Lord, 2006). The rescaling process and the involvement of multi-actors brought into the discussion arena the concept of multilevel governance. Governance has been considered as a form of government that encompass all types of collective actions, focused on the public realms (Healey, 2006). However, it should be kept in mind that despite the birth of new forms of governance, policy and decision-making process are still strongly linked to the "rules of the games" set by the government, which despite its "disorientation" plays still a pivotal role (Arts & Lagendijk, 2009).

Into the framework of such a new networked-governance environment, a strong territorial attention has been developed, followed by an increasing interest towards the concept of strategic spatial planning (Healey, 2004). Spatial planning has been identified "as a part of the meta-governance apparatus that provides the 'governance of governance', the often difficult to discern processes through which rules of the game are codified and inscribed by diverse actors, not just central government, exercising powerful disciplining effects on how policies are scripted and implemented, and by whom" (Albrechts et al., 2003, p. 808). The restructuring of planning indeed is seen as the search for an appropriate role of the State, through new forms of neoliberal spatial governance. A strong attention has been given to the improvement of policy integration of different sectors (economic, environmental, cultural and social), which were considered a driving force for the development of the sub-national and local territories (Deas & Lord, 2006; Healey, 2004). This was associated with the search of new concepts that could have driven the process of policy integration and that could have fostered the attention to the new way of governing territories, ending into the identification of the term sustainable development (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010). The potential of spatial planning as a promoter of the balanced and sustainable development have been strongly promoted by the planning policy communities of European Union. The Europeanization of the spatial planning is especially evident in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) published in 1999. It is within this document that the concept of sustainable development is combined with the EU objectives of economic competitiveness,

environmental sustainability, and social cohesion. The ESDP, identifying the need for a more integrated approach, states that spatial planning needs to address sectoral and spatial planning conflicts through a "close cooperation amongst the authorities responsible for sectoral policies; with those responsible for spatial development at each respective level (horizontal cooperation); and between actors at the Community level and the transnational, regional and local levels (vertical cooperation)" (CEC 1999, p. 25; brackets added by the author). The integrated approach was supported by a re-consideration of the spatial policies, which have undertaken a shift from a spatial neutral to a place-based approach (Barca, McCann, & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012). The place-based approach calls for a revitalization of the importance of space in the process of development: space matters and shapes the potential for development not only of territories but, through externalities of individuals who live in them. The main assumption is that all places have some potentialities, defined as territorial capital, which are often underutilized. Therefore, exogenous and integrated policies are seen as a way to foster the changes and development of a particular territory (Barca et al., 2012).

The Europeanization of spatial planning led to an increase in importance of planning at both European and Member States level. Spatial planning became a governments' instrument used to shape the development of a society, through a place-making process which is distinctive for: "encouraging long-term strategic visions; providing the spatial dimension to improved integration across a range of sectoral plans and activity; supporting 'balanced' approaches to sustainable development; and improving engagement with stakeholders and the public" (Nadin 2007, as cited in Allmendinger & Haughton 2010). This was accompanied by the research of new flexible governance spaces which could have reflected the changing planning paradigm (Healey 2004).

Starting from the evidence that contemporary socio-spatial relations do not fit the formal administrative boundaries, spatial planning literature started to think on alternative idea of territory which could have challenged the common perspective. Indeed, the territory has commonly been seen as an area that appropriate of its control limits through a delineation of the borders, and thus through the establishment of sovereignty in that specific place (Faludi, 2013). Such conceptualization has been driven by a historical approach and a strong sense of identity, which characterized the so-called "territorialism". However, the socio-spatial dynamics that characterized current territories are more linked to the concept of "space of flows", where jurisdictions do not represent a resistance for the creation of collective and social actions (Healey 2006). As a consequence, a new typology of space has been developed, which ended into the definition of soft space. The main idea behind such a concept is that territories are anymore seen as mere containers (Faludi 2013). Allmendinger and Haughton (2009) which first have used the word soft space, defined them as: "the 'in-between' spaces of governance that exist outside, alongside or in-between the formal statutory scales of government, from area masterplans to multiregional growth strategies" (p.217). Thus, such spaces of governance are often contraposed to the "hard space", which refer to the statutory place of government. Typical hard spaces are national, regional, metropolitan and local government which have a defined hierarchical distribution of responsibilities and powers (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010). As (Waterhout, 2010) underlines " 'hard' and 'soft' spaces of governance are mutually constitutive, so that one cannot work without the other. The aim is not to replace 'hard' institutional spaces with 'softer' ones, rather to create complementary and potentially competing opportunities for development activities to focus around, whether at some kind of 'sub' regional or 'sub' local government scale" (p. 2).

Soft spaces are characterized by flexible and fuzzy boundaries determined by different factors which can vary depending on their initial purpose (Allmendinger & Haughton 2010). In a sub-regional context, where there is a functional spatial jurisdiction, soft space formation can have the purpose to foster a metropolitan strategic planning, leading to a preparation of sub-regional plans, which per se are not legally binding, but which works for the coordination of municipal statutory (Haughton, Allmendinger, & Oosterlynck, 2013). Alternatively, they can also be seen as a way to legitimate particular governing bodies in the process of integration between non-statutory and statutory plans. This lead to the problem of democracy and legitimization of soft spaces. Indeed, soft space can also be considered as arrangements used to take decision

outside the realm of democratic politics, and thus “subverting the accountability process of electoral responsibility” (Allmendinger and Haughton 2010).

Welsh et al. (2012) referring to Allmendinger and Haughton’s (2009, 2010) further clarify the definition of soft spaces arguing that “Soft spaces are a particular type of space, which are the result of a deliberate, conscious strategy constructed by governing actors (usually public sector led) to represent a geographical area in a particular way that lies outside of the political-administrative boundaries and internal territorial divisions of the nation-state” (p.5). Haughton et al. (2013), have indeed seen soft space as a new form of “neoliberal governmentality” that, through the creation of consensus around the widespread adoption of concepts such as balanced approach and sustainable development and the empowerment of quasi-state apparatus, have normalized and instituted the rationalities behind the neoliberal market-led approach into everyday planning.

2.4.1 *The three dimensions of soft space: institutionalization, governance capacity, and integrated approach*

One of the contradictory points of soft space is that, despite the above mentioning re-consideration of space, they still need a certain degree of institutionalization in order to drive the decision-making process. Following the idea of (Healey, 2006) a place, simply considered as a territory, is only implicitly existing. Therefore, without forgetting the intrinsic non-statutory dimension of the soft space, a certain degree of institutionalization inevitably needs to be taken into account, to make an effective use of such concept.

Under an institutional perspective, the discourse about soft space and its institutionalization took first the form of the conceptualization of region, in order to understand what is a region and how it is constructed (Varró & Lagendijk, 2013). The relational thinking typical of soft space brought to a new conceptualization of the region, which somehow challenge the formal administrative one, with the consequent establishment of a growing number of those ‘unusual’ or ‘non-standard’ regions (Deas & Lord 2006) throughout Europe. Debarbieux et al. (2015) define such new typology of region as “project region”. Project region is socially constructed and is characterized by the actions taken by local and non-local actors, according to their interest and powers. A project region changes over time, depending on agreement and organizations, which act inside and outside the territory; they are therefore intrinsically temporary spaces, with fuzzy and informal boundaries, created by actors to address specific issues. The actors involved in the regional building process belong to public and hierarchical scalar systems, as well as to other societal domains, such as civil society and market (multi-level governance). Such regions, which per se are characterized by fuzzy boundaries and low level of formality (soft space), sometimes may undergo a hardening process over time, and thus become a stabilize spatial identity; however, as noted by (Metzger & Schmitt, 2012), albeit project regions may harden, such institutionalization should not be considered as an automatic transformation into durable and irreversible territories (hard space).

A related dimension to the conceptualization and the institutionalization of the soft space as project region is the governance capacity. Indeed, the definition of project region clearly calls for the creation of a certain governing body in charge of managing the interactions of the complex decision-making process. Nelles (2013) define the governance capacity as the aptitude to “recognize collective challenges and opportunities, assemble relevant actors, debate alternatives and secure agreement on solutions, and take collective action” (p. 2). The governance capacity has two different dimensions. A horizontal dimension which is characterized by the capacity to effectively coordinate activities at a certain scale and implement transformative regional agendas; and a vertical dimension which represent the ability of the rural-urban organization in participating as agents and partners for the development of policies formulated within higher level of government, in order to impact those policies through the uploading of their own specific interests (Hulst & van Montfort, 2007).

On a policy level, the conceptualization of soft space as a project region is directly linked to the need for ensuring an integrated approach (Walsh et al., 2012). Indeed, as already explained, soft spaces are born from

an increasingly importance given to the concept of place-based sustainable development. In such contest, policy becomes the driver and the most significant output that the governing body has for ensuring an integrated policy-making process (Waterhout, 2010). As for the governance capacity, also in the policy sphere, the collaboration takes place at two different levels. The horizontal dimension concerns the integration between departments within the same local agency, while the vertical dimension concerns integration across different tiers of government. Nevertheless, integrated approach is an umbrella concept that has been described in different ways. Stead and Meijers (2009), identified three different components, depending on the level of integration that the policy has: Policy integration, Policy coordination, Policy cooperation.

Policy integration is defined as “the management of cross-cutting issues in policy making that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields, and that do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual departments” (Stead & Meijers, 2009, p.323). Policy coordination, instead, is considered as the alignment of tasks and activities of multiple units that can ensure a coherence within and between policies, trying not to produce redundancy, lacunae, and contradictions, but without removing organizational (departments) boundaries. Thus, policy coordination is different to policy integration because it does not lead to a joint policy for the sectors involved, but it just makes them mutually consistent. (Stead & Meijers, 2009). The last component identified, and which is also part of the first two, is policy cooperation. It is defined as the deliberative relations between autonomous policy organizations, which collaborate in order to achieve a mutual benefit. Such cooperation exists in terms of programmes, resources, and information, and it is strictly related to the accomplishment of individual operating goals. Therefore, we can conclude saying that depending on the level of collaborations’ commitment, three different levels of integrated policy making can be defined (Fig 2).

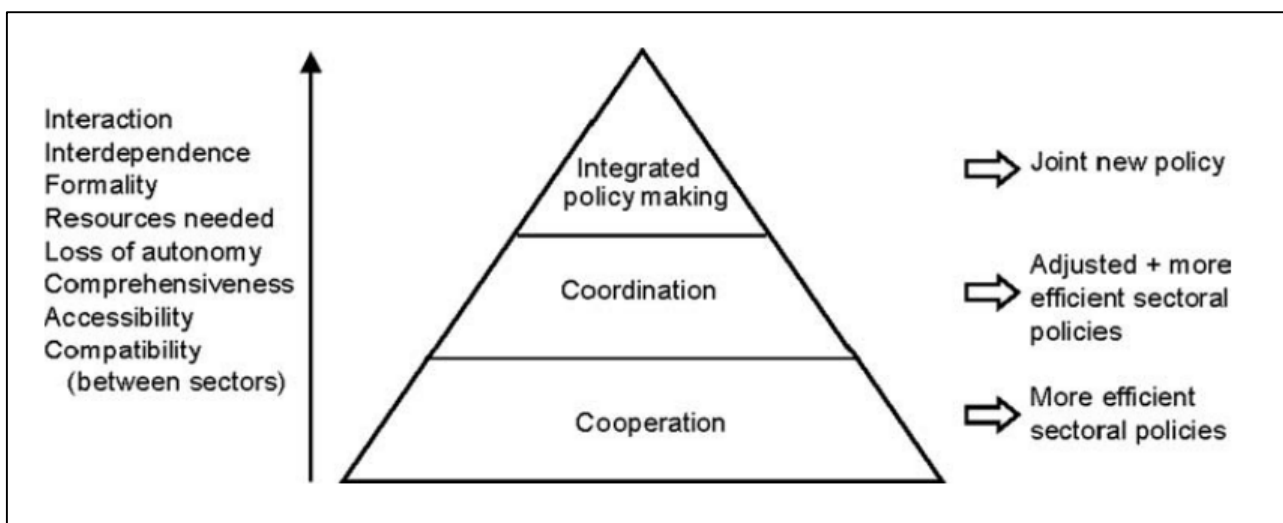


Fig.2: Levels of Integrated Approach (Source: Stead & Meijers, 2009 p.323)

The emerging conditions facing by the governments, the growing attentions to networks and governance, and the shifting towards a softer form of space led to the research of new appropriate governing instruments, which could better reflect such changing spaces’ paradigm. Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007) define an instrument as "a device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries. It is a particular type of institution, a technical device with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete concept of the politics/society relationship and sustained by a concept of regulation (...) thus, instruments are institutions in the sense that they determine the way in which actors are going to behave". An instrument can be a way for "reducing uncertainty and to structure collective actions"(p. 4).

Thus, the need for managing and institutionalized a project region dominated by fuzzy boundaries, networks, and multilevel governance, brought to the rise of the partnership, seen as flexible instruments able to better express the needs coming from such changing geography (Bache, 2010).

Partnership was considered as a management response also to the mainstream of the concept of sustainable development and the needs to adapt the decision-making process to complex practices of the multi-level governance (Agranoff, 1998). Moreover, it has been estimated has a highly political instrument, which could have de-politised and democratized the policy-making process by involving different kinds of stakeholders belonging to different domains (market and civil society) (Bache 2010). Indeed, the construction of a partnership always requires the creation of a new type of public entity (more or less formalized)- involving government, business, organizations, associations- which are stimulated by the local government but that has its role in the process of policy-making (Bache 2010). They are classified as postmodern structures of governance which are characterized by less interventionist forms of public regulation. In this sense, they "organize a different type of political relations, based on communication and consultation, and they help to renew the foundations of legitimacy" (Lascombes and Le Gale 2007).

In conclusion, it can be said that soft spaces have represented an attempt to overcome the "non-debate" (Varró & Lagendijk, 2013) between territorial and relational spatial thinking. It seems that soft spaces are the creation of two main factors. On the one hand, the rescaling process and the hollowing out of the State, while on the other hand the rise of the spatial planning and his consequent focus on network society. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the rise of this new typology of spaces is representing the growing attention of spatial planning towards balanced and sustainable development, or whether they are used as a specific political tool to influence the policies debates towards a neoliberal direction.

The concept of soft space in this research is used to analyze better the new forms of spatiality emerging at the sub-regional level, in particular in the context of a rural-urban region. Soft spaces are seen as a "tool" able to grasp and overcome the tension between the rigidities associated with the distinct logic of territoriality and the new governance practices coming from the rising of the strategic spatial planning approach. In this contest, soft spaces represent the most suitable arena in which multi-level governance and sustainable development take place, and thus are characterized by a high level of temporality and fuzziness that better reflect the complexity of societal and institutional issues. Three are the main dimensions that characterized such new concept, namely institutionalization, governance capacity and integrated approach, which are respectively conceptualized under the labels of project region, multilevel governance, and sustainable development.

Taking into account the focus of this study on the rural-urban context, and considering the rural-urban region as a fuzzy and flexible territory, determined by the continuous flows between the rural and urban areas, the soft space perspective has allowed the author to consider the rural-urban region as a fuzzy and flexible project region, established with the aim of better managing the rural-urban linkages and thus ensuring a mutual exploitation of both rural and urban territorial potentialities.

Nevertheless, the soft space approach and its non-statutory nature bring to the fore significant challenges related to the practical implementation of governance's methods and integrated approach. The next session will try to identify those challenges considering the now defined rural-urban "project" region (RUPR).

2.5 Governing the Rural-Urban "Project" Region

2.5.1 The Whys:

Before studying in deep how the rural-urban project region can be governed and the challenges related to it, it is worth to understand the reasons behind the need of governing the rural-urban linkages. However, it is important to highlight that this research does not want to question whether or not a rural-urban cooperation is needed. In fact, this section is limited to the description of the different approaches that scholarship had in considering the rural-urban cooperation, and its interpretation in the context of this study.

Several scholars belonging to different domains, from the planning to the economy sphere, (Artmann, Huttenloher, Kawka, & Scholze, 2012; Caffyn & Dahlström, 2005; Eppler et al., 2013; Lucatelli & De Matteis, 2013; OECD, 2013; Ros-Tonen et al., 2015) have identified commonly reasons that are at the basis for the establishment of a rural-urban cooperation. As already explained in the first paragraph, the growing expansion of the urban centers is seen both as an opportunity and a threat for the surrounding rural hinterlands, and thus, the rural-urban cooperation is seen as the best way to deal with it. Another aspect is that social relationships as well as many contemporary challenges, such as climate change, environmental pollutions, do not stop within the formal administrative boundaries (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015). Furthermore, rural-urban cooperation has also been considered as a way of reducing socio-economic inequalities at the sub-regional level and at the same time for strengthening endogenous potentials of territories, for ensuring a more balanced regional development (Lucatelli & De Matteis, 2013; Ros-Tonen et al., 2015; Zonneveld & Stead, 2007). This includes problems related to service provisions such as transportation, health facilities, as well as growing income inequalities between rural and urban areas, with the consequent social polarization and the increasing gap between center and periphery (Hughes & Holland, 1994). Such approach had been promoted by the European Union, in its attempt to foster the importance of territorial cooperation (Davoudi & Stead, 2002; Zonneveld & Stead, 2007). Here again, a pivotal role was played by the already cited ESDP, arguing that: “cities have increasingly diverse functional inter-dependencies with their surrounding countryside. These interdependencies require voluntary cooperation across administrative boundaries between local authorities, to strengthen the region as a whole in competitive terms. (...) Towns and countryside must share an integrated approach since they form a region and are mutually responsible for its further development” (CEC, 1999, p.25). After the ESDP, the rural-urban cooperation, viewed as a way of achieving a more balanced development, has been pursued in several policy documents, amongst which the two Territorial Agenda (CEC, 2011). Acknowledging the diverse linkages existing between rural and urban territories, both documents argued for the need of pursuing an integrated governance, which should be based on the development of place-based strategies. In particular, metropolitan regions should recognize their role as entities responsible for the development of their wider surrounding (peri-urban and rural), for instance, improving the accessibility of urban centers from rural territories.

Following the European approach, for this study, rural-urban cooperation is understood as a project-oriented cooperation initiatives of various actors belonging to the rural-urban project region, with the aim of achieving a mutual benefit and therefore ensuring the reduction of socio-economic disparities between rural, peri-urban and urban areas.

2.5.2 The Challenges:

The concept of project region as such encompass several theoretical challenges related to its practical usage. This is even more true in a rural-urban context, which involves a multitude of actor typologies.

Scholarship studying the rural-urban cooperation have identified two main problems in the process of collaboration. The first one is administrative fragmentation (Ros-Tonen et al. 2015). It includes all the challenges related to the institutional divisions of power and competencies. Overlapping jurisdictions that involved stakeholders from different scale levels increase the risk of high transaction cost which can undermine the cooperation efficiency (Cash et al., 2006). The efficiency of cooperation is extremely related to the concept of governance capacity, considered as the ability of the rural-urban actors involved into the cooperation process to understand the challenges that arise from the rural-urban project region (Kooiman & Bavinck, 2013). Those challenges can arise from the statutory versus non-statutory game, and thus be related to the legal and legitimacy problems, but also to the ignoring of cross-scale and cross-level interactions (Cash et al., 2006).

Administrative fragmentation also influences the policy integration. In the context of a rural-urban project region, policy coordination seems to be problematic for a variety of reasons. First there is no alignment of policy and investment geographies used by different public sector institutions; second, there is a financial dependence on the non-statutory institutions to the administrative one; third due to their temporality, there

is always a different timescales which many of these bodies work to: “ planning is essentially long term, and investment programmes are often short term, linked to public spending rounds and the short-term political nature of much decision-making over projects such as transport infrastructure” (Haughton et al. 2010). Moreover, the rural development issue is most of the time dealt in the light of agricultural policies, without taking into consideration the linkages with the urban sector (Copus, 2013).

The second hindrance to the rural-urban cooperation is the institutional administrative rigidity (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015). It is related to the capacity of the existing administrative institution to take sufficiently into consideration the rural-urban linkages, and thus to promote a governance approach for the rural-urban project region. Such capacity is also linked to the institutional capacity that belongs to the governments involved. Indeed, most of the time the rural-urban linkages are not seen as an opportunity by the government either at the regional or municipal level (Tacoli, 1998). Such difficulty is mostly encountered by the small rural municipalities, which despite acknowledging the opportunities of cooperation do not have the resources (financial or human capital) to deal with complex process. On the other hand, in a rural-urban region, small rural and peri-urban fringes can fear collaboration with stronger urban municipalities, due to the power and representation asymmetry, and to the fear of being absorbed by a creation of a new metropolitan entity. Vice-versa, large cities, instead of seeing rural and small towns as a suitable partner, they are mostly perceived as competitor for all the types of regional development subsidies (OECD, 2013). In conclusion, it can be said that “networking between cities and small/medium municipalities can prove difficult especially in areas with strong development problems, weak administrative structures and lack of a cooperation tradition” (Lucatelli & De Matteis 2013).

It is, therefore, clear that the relationship between urban, peri-urban and rural areas is extremely complex and that it offers several challenges which require specific solutions. To overcome the administrative and policy fragmentation, it is required multi-level governance and an integrated approach that can ensure a good level of policy collaboration (Ros-Tonen et al. 2015). While institutional rigidity cannot be overcome as such, it can instead be reduced through the adaptiveness of the governing system towards new form of institutional configurations that transcend geographical and administrative boundaries (Evers & de Vries, 2013). However, as already explained, considering the rural-urban region as a project region, it is necessary to look at possible governance tools which can better represent the flexibility and functional nature of the rural-urban project region. In such a context, the partnership has been seen as the most suitable tool which could provide major opportunities to both territories to come together and implement a win-win solution to face their challenges, in a holistic and integrated way (Lucatelli & De Matteis 2013).

2.5.3 The Rural-Urban Partnership

There is much consensus about the benefits that partnership may bring, in particular regarding the contribute it gives for the overcoming of some problems related to governance fragmentation and cross-sectoral working (Caffyn & Dahlström, 2005). A key concept is that of “collaborative advantage” which represent an unusual creative products- such as the achievement of an objective- that “no organisation could have produced on its own and that each organisation, through the collaboration, is able to achieve its objectives better than it could alone” (Huxham 1993, as cited in Caffyn & Dahlström, 2005, p 288). However, the partnership use can also have some side-effects such as the difficulty of establish effective way of working (collaborative naivety), the inertia of achieving progress and objectives (collaborative inertia), which in turn can leads to a sentiment of exhaustion (collaborative fatigue) (Huxham and Vangen (1994), as cited by Caffyn & Dahlström, 2005).

Therefore, the question is how an effective partnership can be constructed in a rural-urban context. Lucarelli & De Matteis (2013) identified three main phases: “a) the identification of the problem based on the existing territorial linkages; b) a consultation phase with all the relevant stakeholders; c) a project phase and d) a governance phase during which the initiatives shall be managed and become sustainable in the long term” (p. 93).

One of the main drivers of the spread and use of the partnership instrument has been without any doubts the European Commission. Indeed, the use of partnership has been inserted in 1988 during the reform of the structural funds. Its use allowed to a predominant role of the Commission and sub-national actors into the policy implementation, and therefore challenging the dominance of the member states. Starting from there, partnership has always gained importance into the European domain, becoming the main tool for promoting both vertical and horizontal cooperation between state and non-state actors, and thus to promote the concept of multi-level governance and integrated approach. (Bache 2010).

The EU, as explained above, in promoting the rural-urban connections has referred to the use of a rural-urban partnership as the most suitable tool for governing those linkages. First, rural-urban partnership is seen as a way to foster the efficiency of European structural and investment funds (ESIF), following the new results-oriented wave of the Cohesion Policy; second a contribution to the promotion of rural-urban partnership all over Europe can foster multilevel governance use and the dialog and the knowledge transfer in the whole European territory; Last but not least rural-urban partnership can definitely contribute to achieving the cohesion objective settled by the EU (Artmann et al., 2012).

2.6 The Integrated Approach of Cohesion Policy

During the programming period 2007/2013 critical reflection relating to a low effectiveness of Cohesion Policy, has been undertaken and presented in several policy papers, including the famous Barca Report (Barca, 2009), which have led to important changes related to the new importance that territories have in pursuing the socio and economic cohesion. Such changes were defined as the integrated territorial (or place-based) approach. The main focus of the place-based Cohesion Policy, which characterize the current programming period 2014/20, is on the effective use of the territorial capital of each territory. The approach seeks to pursue cooperation and dialogue between different institutions and actors involved in the regional and sub-regional development.

However, as already explained above, several hindrances are characterizing an integrated territorial approach in regional development. Indeed, the Cohesion Policy had to be reformulated in order to adapt to the needs of the new integrated approach. The current Cohesion Policy is based on territorial objectives (TOs) directly related to the EU 2020 strategy goals. The Common Provision Regulation (CPR), which set the rules for the use of the ESI Funds, calls for an integrated approach, arguing that: “Member States shall take account of geographic or demographic features and take steps to address the specific territorial challenges of each region to unlock their specific development potential, thereby also helping them to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the most efficient way.” (CPR, annex 1, section 6.1). The integrated approach proposed by the CPR specifically takes into account the importance of addressing the rural-urban linkages, in particular “in terms of access to affordable, high-quality infrastructure and services, and problems in regions with a high concentration of socially marginalized communities” (CPR, Annex 1 section 6.5).

The ESI funds, thus, become the main outputs used by the Cohesion Policy for pursuing such integrated approach and stimulate the creation of rural-urban forms of cooperation. In order to facilitate the use of the ESI funds in an integrated manner, the CPR has introduced new financial instruments which allow the use of the ESI funds in packages at the sub-regional level. Those instruments are the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, in this study, only the ITI will be studied, seeking to understand its role in governing and institutionalizing the rural-urban project region, for an integrated approach. The next session will explain the main features of the ITI, with particular attention to its role in a rural-urban context.

2.6.1 Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)

Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) is described by the EU Commission as “a tool to implement territorial strategies in an integrated way. ITI allows Member States to implement Operational Programmes in a crosscutting way and to draw on funding from several priority axes of one or more Operational Programmes to ensure the implementation of an integrated strategy for a specific territory” (CEC, 2014, p.17).

The ITI is expected to support integrated actions at different territorial scales, “as it offers the possibility to combine funding linked to different thematic objectives, including the combination of funding from those priority axes and operational programmes supported by the ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund (Article 36 of the

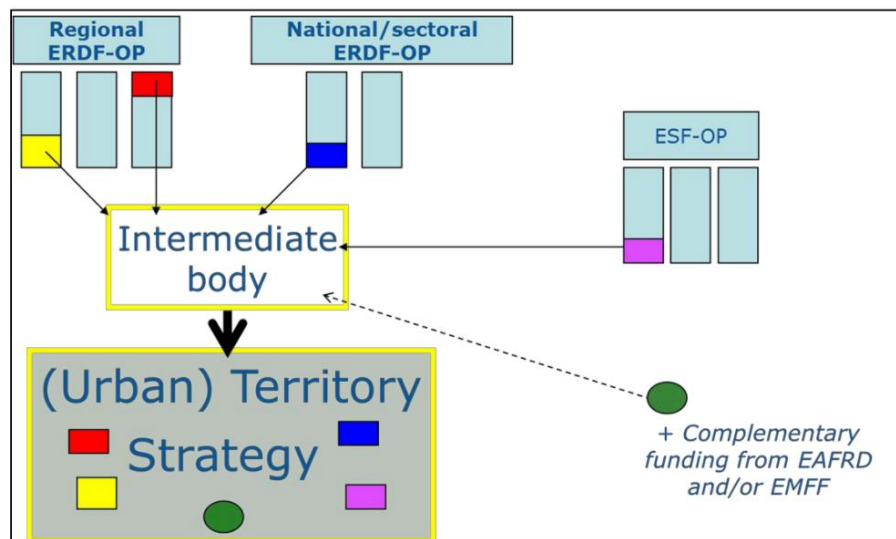


Fig.3: ITI Multi-Funds Structure (Source: Van Der Zwet, Miller, & Gross, 2014 p.17)

Common Provisions Regulation). An ITI can also be complemented with financial support from the EAFRD or the EMFF” (Fig.3). Inside the Cohesion Policy, the ITI is also promoted as a suitable tool for the implementation of the integrated sustainable urban development (ISUD) objective (the Cohesion Policy imposes to all Member States, that at least 5% of the ERDF will be spent under the ISUD objective (Art. 7, ERDF).

The elements requested by the CPR for the establishment of an ITI are:

- A designated territory and an integrated development strategy – the territory of an ITI can be any geographical area (urban, urban-rural, sub-regional, or inter-regional). The ITI can also involve a cross-border area. In most cases it operates below the managing authority level but can also cross administrative units (for example in the context of city networks).
- A package of actions to be implemented – ITI activities have to contribute to both the development objectives of a territorial strategy and the thematic priorities of the relevant priority axes of the participating Operational Programme(s).
- Governance arrangements to manage ITIs – OP managing authorities bear the final responsibility for managing and implementing ITIs. However, intermediate bodies (local authorities, regional development bodies, NGOs) may be appointed to carry out delegated tasks.

Investments from ITI allow the creation of a development strategy for every ITI region, which is customised according to areas’ specific challenges, and can thereby incorporate cross-sectoral and sector-specific measures, hence supporting the place-based approach. The ambition behind setting up ITIs are diverse, but

one of the main purpose is to recognise the challenges posed in some specific territories and give them more power of decision over their development strategy (CEC, 2014).

The implementation of the ITI in all the Member State has resulted very problematic, due to the lack of clarity of the EU Commission documents, which leaves too much interpretation to the rules set by the CPR, and the intrinsic flexible nature of the tool itself (CEMR, 2014; Van Der Zwet, Miller, & Gross, 2014). In order, to solve this issue and to offer guidance to Member States, the EC has published a guide for regions and sub-regional actors that are dealing with the establishment of the ITI. Such guidance presents four scenarios, each with a different territorial context: the case of a metropolitan area, the case of a polycentric sub-region; the case of a city district; and the case of a cross-border area (CEC, 2014).

The first scenario clearly describes the case of a metropolis and its related hinterland, (both rural and peri-urban), where challenges related to the administrative fragmentation, policy integration, and institutional inertia are undermining the development of the rural-urban area as a whole. The ITI is presented here, as a suitable tool for: Increase the governance capacity in tackling challenges; ensure a policy integration through the creation and run of a joint strategy for the entire functional area; strength cooperation between several stakeholders involved in the development of the metropolitan area; enhance the sustainable socio-economic development, through the facilitation of rural-urban integration. Moreover, different steps characterize the process of establishment of an ITI, ending with a signed agreement between the managing authority (MA) and the municipalities involved, clearly stating the respective roles assigned to the new intermediate bodies by the MA. (Fig 4)

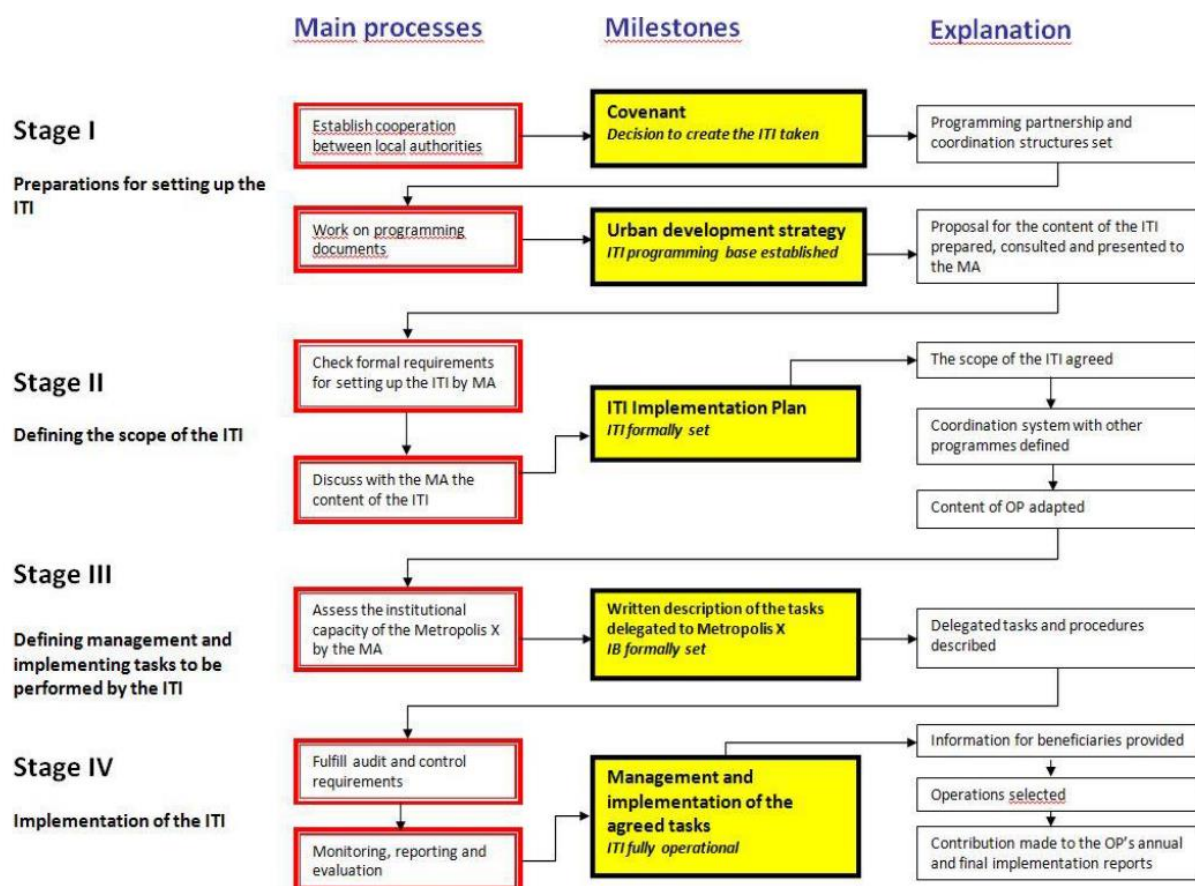


Fig.4: ITI Implementation Process (Source: CEC 2014 p.40)

In conclusion, it can be said that the ITI has been developed by the EU Commission in the framework of a radical paradigm shift of the Cohesion Policy, which is strongly related to the concept of integrated approach. More in particular, the ITI is also seen as a suitable tool for empowering regional and sub-regional authority

in dealing with several territorial challenges, not least the rural-urban connections. Therefore, in the framework of this research, the ITI will be considered as an instrument able to better exploit the opportunities offered by the governing of the rural-urban linkages. The author, following the theoretical discussion above, wants to test the role of the ITI considering the three main dimension of governance capacity, integrated approach, and institutionalization. The following paragraph will better explain the focus of the research and the conceptual framework used for guiding the current study.

2.7 Research Focus and Conceptual Framework

2.7.1 The Focus

According to the previous discussion, the focus of this thesis is the study of the ITI instrument, in order to see whether it can be considered a tool for governing and institutionalize the rural-urban linkages, using evidence coming from its use in Poland. Therefore, the research aims to answer the following question:

- How the ITI can govern and institutionalize the rural-urban linkages?

To better answer the main question, the author has developed several sub-questions that will be used to guide the research:

- 1) How does the ITI institutionalize the RUPR?
- 2) To what extent does the ITI increase the level of governance capacity and integrated approach of the RUPR?
- 3) How does the institutionalization influence the governance capacity and the integrated approach in a rural-urban context?

The research will be conducted using a conceptual framework based on three main concepts, namely:

- Institutionalization - considered as the hardening process undertaken by the RUPR;
- Governance capacity - considered as the capacity of the rural-urban body to govern the RUPR;
- Integrated approach - seen in terms of ensuring an integrated approach to the policy-making process).

The rural-urban region is here considered as project region, based on the concept of the soft space. A fuzzy region that is characterized by flows of people, ongoing activities that involve different administrative units, and a certain degree of institutionalization. Governing the rural-urban project region has enormous potentialities for offering solutions to different common challenges, such as demographic, economic, and spatial issues (Caffyn, & Dahlström, 2005), but at the same time, they offer different challenges related to the decision-making process. The problems of fragmentation, institutional rigidity, and policy segregation are the most important ones. New forms of governance based on a flexible approach, such as the use of the partnership constructed around a clear territorial vision, is seen as a suitable way of overcoming these problems. It is in this context that the ITI will be studied. Indeed, ITI has been introduced by the EU commission as a tool for ensuring the integrated territorial approach, which characterizes the current programming period of Cohesion Policy. In this research, the ITI is in fact considered a possible added value in the governing of the RUPR. In particular, the ITI could contribute in three main ways:

- It contributes to the establishment of an agreement amongst all the involved stakeholders, and incentives the cooperation between rural, peri-urban and urban municipalities;
- It imposes the elaboration of a joint strategy between all the municipalities involved and in collaboration with higher tiers of government;

- It forces its governing body to develop an implementation plan, which takes into account the development of the whole rural-urban interface.

Moreover, the main objective of the ITI is to achieve a more balanced development in term of socio-economic condition at the sub-regional level, ensuring a better implementation of the EU 2020 strategy.

2.7.2 The Case Study: Poland

The member state that mostly used the ITI instrument in Europe has been Poland. Poland has decided to use the ITI aiming at:

- Fostering cooperation across levels of government in functional urban areas
- Fostering cooperation between different types of areas – rural and urban
- Implementation of integrated projects – comprehensive response to specific needs and challenges of a functional area
- Increasing influence of local authorities on the policy and actions delivered in functional areas – in particular under EU cohesion policy programme (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015).

The ITI will be implemented in Poland as follows:

- In regional capital cities and on their functional areas (the so-called Regional ITIs), constituting the most important centers in the country.
- In cities of regional or sub-regional importance and on their functional areas (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015).

2.7.3 Conceptual Framework

The research will be conducted following a conceptual framework built around the three main concepts of governance capacity, integrated approach and institutionalization identified above. This decision came from the previously expressed assumption that the governing of the rural-urban project region is facing some challenges, related to the complexity of the system to be governed. The cooperation between a multitude of stakeholders, which moreover have different institutional capacity, is extremely difficult. The governance capacity of the body governing the rural-urban interface is, therefore, an essential feature for the exploitation of the rural-urban linkages. The same can be said for the policy level. Indeed, policy segregation is another significant barrier to an efficient use of the opportunities deriving from the rural-urban linkages. Last but not least, a certain degree of institutionalization is essential to steer the development of the RUPR, in terms of balanced and sustainable development. Bearing this in mind, the decision of using such conceptual framework is also due to the fact that the ITI - as it has already been shown- may contribute to those three aspects to the governing of the RUPR.

Scholarships always approach to these three issues separately, albeit making direct or indirect reference to the other two concepts. However, the author considers that a monolithic approach would not be exhaustive for the purpose of the present research. Indeed, the main idea behind such conceptual framework is that the governance capacity, integrated approach, and institutionalization are three different faces of the same tetrahedron, which are kept interlinked by the cooperation process (Fig. 5). Institutionalization is inevitably influencing governance capacity, which in turn influences the level of policy integration. However, the same discourse can be made the other way around.

Following the theoretical discussion above, both governance capacity and integrated approach imply as a first step a certain level of institutionalization of the organism governing the RUPR. Such governing body can vary from a high degree of formality to a very informal one. In this conceptual framework, for

institutionalization is considered the process by which a rural-urban region (that per se is defined as soft and fuzzy) hardens, reaching a level of alignment and stabilization, which result “in the carving out ‘permanencies’” from spatial flows, albeit with the further qualification that these ‘permanencies’ must not be imagined as somehow eternal, rather as contingent upon the processes that create, sustain and dissolve them” (Murdoch 2006, as cited in Metzger & Schmitt, 2012). It is in this contest that institutionalization will be treated, referring it to the process of creation of “non-standard space”, that are redefined and reconstructed, depending on the aspirations and tensions that shift over time” (Deas Lord, 2006).

As we have already seen, linked to the institutionalization is the concept of governance capacity. Following the definition of Nelles (2013) presented above, for governance capacity in a rural-urban context, is meant the ability of the actors involved in the rural-urban partnership to recognize the challenges of the RUPR and take collective actions, to ensure a collaborative advantage for both rural and urban territories. For this conceptual framework, both vertical and horizontal dimension will be taken into consideration, to fully grasp the complexity of cooperation coming from the multi-level governance.

Coordination does not appear just between government units but also at the policy level. Indeed, as we have already seen, policy collaboration is the main output that characterizes the integrated approach. Managing and ensuring sectoral policy integration; and achieving a sustainable development of the rural-urban region requires both horizontal and vertical coordination between the different actors involved in the policy-making process (Stead & Meijers, 2009). This conceptual framework, in fact, follows the interpretation offered by Stead & Meijers (2009) who consider three different degrees of an integrated approach, namely policy integration, policy coordination and policy cooperation.

To conclude, it can be said that this conceptual framework has considered the three main concepts directly coming from the consideration of the rural-urban region as a project region, not only bringing a definition of such concepts but also identifying their interrelated nature (Fig 5).

REGION

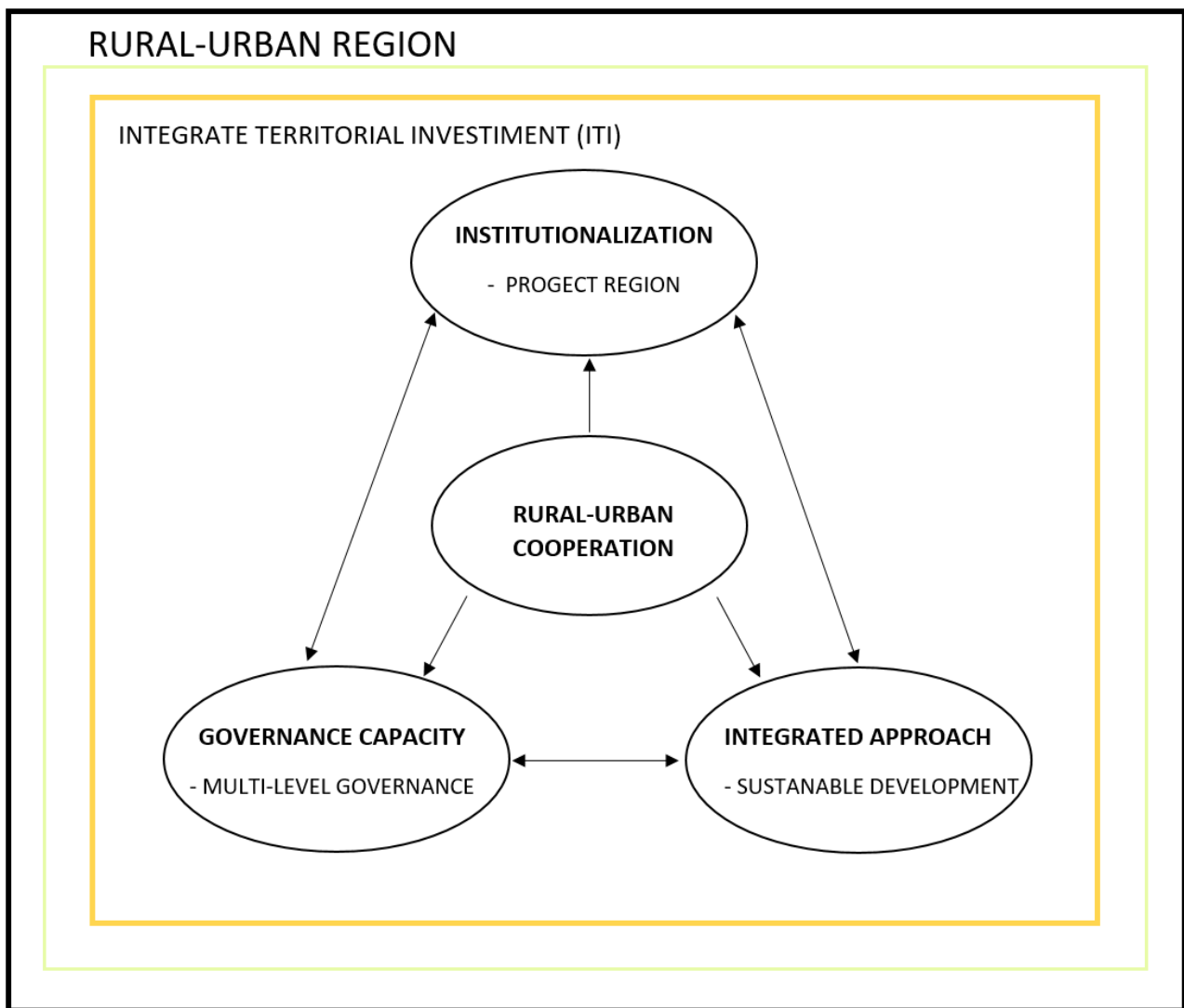


Fig.5: Conceptual Framework (Source: own elaboration)

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy and Research Design:

According to the theoretical framework developed above, the current research is following a constructive and interpretative epistemological approach. Referring to the first feature, it is clear that the study is based on a conceptualization of space, which is directly linked to the decisions and activities developed by individuals or group of people, and thus is socially constructed. On the other hand, for what concern the epistemological and interpretative dimension, the author strongly believes that a deep understanding of a phenomenon can only be ensured through the recognition of the plurality of interpretations that the actors have regarding that particular phenomenon.

Following such philosophy, the current research adopts a deductive approach since it involves the development of different hypothesis based on the theoretical discussion and then being tested through a specific research design. Far from creating a new theory, the study is presented more as a theory synthesis of the different concepts related to the new idea of soft space, which led to the creation of a specific conceptual framework. On the light of the interpretative nature of this thesis, a qualitative research design has been used, mainly due to the decision of exploring and understanding the actors' opinions involved in the process of the ITI establishment. As Creswell (2013) states qualitative research is "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem", 'where researcher is an instrument of data collection who gather words or pictures, analyses them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive in language" (p. 249).

3.1.1 *A Single embedded case study: Poland*

This research has been developed using the design of a single embedded case study. The reason for such a choice is two folds. First, the single case study design allowed the author to conduct a more in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon. Second, because as stated by Yin (2011), it can be used when the "selected case represents an extreme or a unique case" (p.41).

Indeed, the selection of Poland as a case study has been related to the particularity with which the country has used the ITI. Indeed, it has been the member state in Europe where the major number of ITIs has been registered. Furthermore, Poland has been considered a frontrunner, since it was the only country in Europe to adopt the ITI at a metropolitan scale and thus with the scope of making rural and urban territory cooperate. The decision to choose Poland, however, has been a controversial one. In fact, in the beginning, it was not considered as a suitable option, mainly due to the language barriers that the author could have encountered. Nevertheless, during the process of identifying other possible case studies, the author had realized that the level of implementation of the ITI in other countries- which could have been more accessible (i.e. Italy and England)- was still at the early stage or did not fit the scope of the research. As a result, the decision has turned on Poland and, in order to overcome the problem of language, the author needed to focus not just on one ITI but on different ITI Units (see below for a more detailed explanation). Thus, the decision has been made on a single embedded case study, which as described by (Yin, 2011) involves more than one unit of analysis (p.42).

Therefore, three cases have been selected, namely the ITI of Warsaw, Wroclaw, and Krakow. Such decision has been influenced by practical reasons (i.e. the representatives replied to my requests for information) but also based on a pre-study of the context of those three main cities. Indeed, they could be defined as the representatives of three main categories. Warsaw is a unique case in the way it implemented the ITI as well as being the capital and the most complex metropolitan area in Poland; Wroclaw is instead the big centre of

a polycentric region (Lower Silesia); while Krakow is the only big centre in the south-west of the country and is considered as the main economic competitor of Warsaw.

3.2. The Operationalization:

In order to answer to the main and the sub-questions, it is needed to undertake a process of operationalization which will define how the three concepts identified by the conceptual framework will be used to analyze the findings coming from the empirical study of Poland.

First, it is important to better explain the aims of this research and thus carefully describe the objectives of each sub-questions:

- 4) How does the ITI institutionalize rural-urban project regions (RUPR)?

In asking this question the author aims to discover not only the process of institutionalization of the RUPR through the use of the ITI but also the degree of formality, that the instrument has brought.

- 5) To what extent does the ITI increase the level of integrated approach and governance capacity of the RUPR?

The scope of this question is to understand whether or not the establishment of the ITI has led to an increase of the governance capacity and the integrated approach in the RUPR. The author has decided to answer this question taking into consideration the vertical and horizontal dimensions that characterized both concepts. Moreover, to add particular relevance to this question, the integrated approach is also studied to see which level of integration the policy has achieved, allowing for the distinction between policy integration, coordination or cooperation.

- 6) How does the institutionalization influence the governance capacity and the integrated approach in a rural-urban context?

The last sub-question wants to address the correlation that links those three concepts, so as to understand how they are related. The decision to put the institutionalization as an independent variable is due to the reason that the ITI, with its legal requirements, is forcing a process of institutionalization (since it requires a signed agreement between the municipalities and the managing authority), while the governance capacity and the integrated approach are only implicitly (or not legally) influenced. Therefore, the author wanted to understand whether the institutionalization of a RUPR is directly influencing the level of governance capacity and integrated approach.

Having a clear picture of the goals that this research wants to achieve and the concepts that are being used to analyze the findings, it is now significant to understand how those results will be measured. In doing so, the author has developed some indicators that will represent the concepts during the process of data analysis. The indicators in social science are seen as “something that is devised or already exists and that is employed as though it were a measure of a concept” (Bryman, 2012 p.165). The indicators developed in this study come directly from the definition of the three main concepts of governance capacity, integrated approach, and institutionalization. However, a further elaboration was undertaken in order to better represent the scope of each research questions. In fact, it has been defined the framework under which the different assumptions behind the research questions will be tested.

For the first sub-question, following the definition of institutionalization in the conceptual framework, the verb “institutionalize” has been expressed as the hardening process undertaken by the RUPR due to the construction of the ITI in that particular area. It is an open question which aims to discover the hardening process that the ITI has imposed to the RUPR, through a form of institutionalization of the partnership amongst the urban, peri-urban, and rural municipalities (Fig. 6)

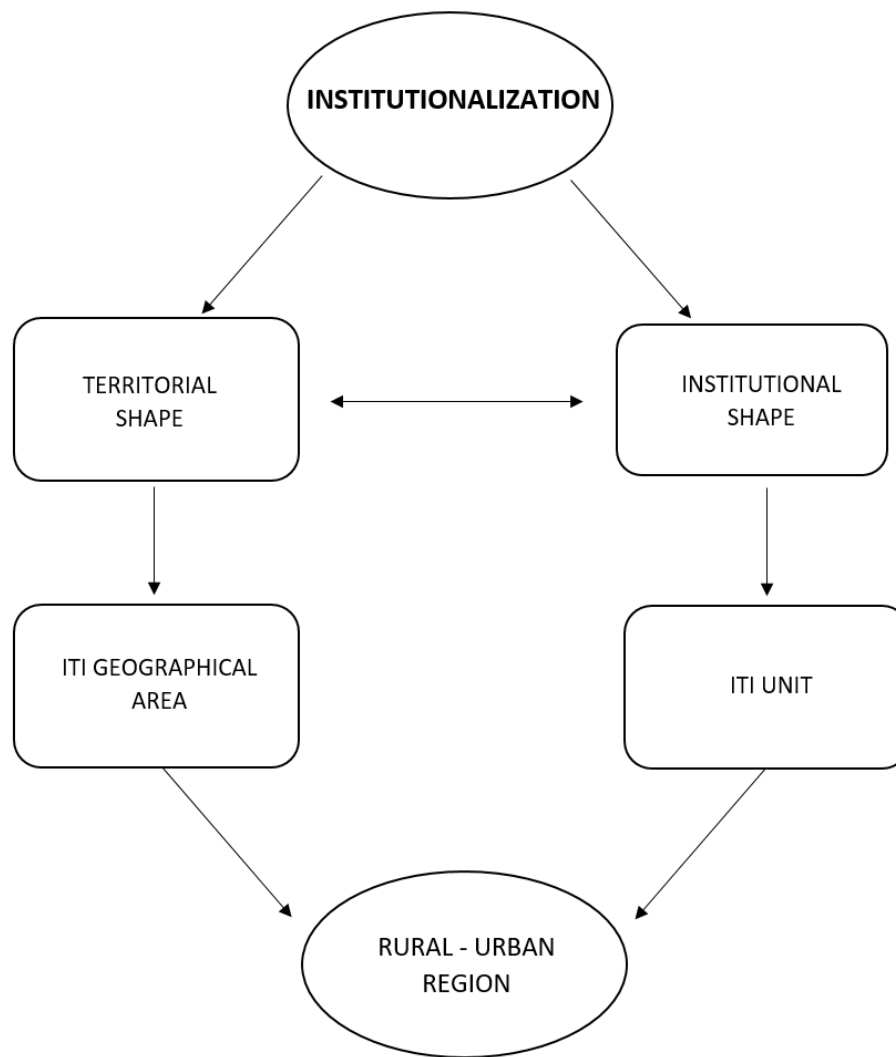


Fig.6: The Institutionalization Process (Source: own elaboration)

It should be noted that in order to answer the “how” question, the author will describe the process of institutionalization considering two main aspects embedded into it: territorial and institutional shape. The territorial shape represents the process of definition of the area on which the ITI will be established and thus, it will consider the methods and criteria used for the development of such a new reterritorialization. On the other hand, the institutional shape wants to study the different institutional opportunities offered by the ITI for the establishment of the ITI Unit. Moreover, the author will critically analyze the degree of formalization of the new space created by the ITI, in particular in the light of its estimated durability.

Regarding the second sub-question, both definition of governance capacity and integrated approach have been used in order to establish the indicators for better identifying the meaning of the two concepts. In order to answer the “what extent question,” the author has decided to consider the division between the horizontal and vertical dimension of both governance capacity and the integrated approach. Therefore, the first assumption that will be tested is that the ITI has led to an increase of the governance capacity in terms of efficiency of coordination of activities between the stakeholders involved and thus has implemented a transformative agenda for the rural-urban area as a whole. On the other hand, the second hypothesis is that the establishment of the ITI may increase the relevance of the actors belonging to the RUPR in participating during the process of policy-making within higher levels of government, so as to influence those policies through the uploading of their own specific interests.

In doing so, the analysis will be mainly concentrated on the ITI management, in particular considering the tasks assigned to the new ITI Unit, and thus its role in setting the cooperation between the rural and urban municipalities as well as the methods used to develop the ITI Strategy, aligning the needs coming from higher level of governments to those emerging from the ground.

Regarding the policy level and thus the concept of integrated approach, again a division between vertical and horizontal has been undertaken. For what concerns the horizontal dimension, the hypothesis that the author would like to investigate is that the ITI strategy is constructed following an integrated approach between the different sectors (e.g., economic, environmental, transport, education, etc.) as well as taking into account the different policy documents of all the municipalities involved (urban, peri-urban, rural). Moreover, the projects which are implemented under the framework of the ITI strategy have to express such policy synergies. For the vertical dimension, instead, the assumption tested regards the collaboration between the different tiers of government during the creation of the ITI strategy. More in detail, it has been analyzed whether the ITI strategy has been elaborated in a consistent way with the policy priorities and scopes of the regional and national strategies/plans.

The integrated approach has also been analyzed considering the degree of policy integration, that the ITI strategy might assume. In doing so, other indicators have been developed so as to better explain such phenomenon. In the theoretical discussion, it has been already shown the existence of three different degrees of integrated approach, namely policy integration, policy coordination, policy cooperation. Therefore, the author wanted to go further in understanding which degree of integration the ITI has brought into the policy-making process of the RUPR. It is significant to underline that in this context, there are no pre-determined assumptions. Hence, the analysis is based on three different indicators, which have been developed referring to the definition that the three levels (policy integration, coordination, and cooperation) have assumed in the conceptual framework. The indicators are defined as a follow:

The integrated approach brought by the ITI to the RUPR can be defined as:

- Policy integration, if the ITI strategy manages cross-cutting issues transcending the boundaries of established policy fields; it leads to the creation of a joint policy for the sectors involved;
- Policy coordination, if the ITI strategy represents an alignment of tasks and activities of the different units involved, in order to make consistent the one to the others, and thus not creating lacunae or contradictions; it does not remove the organizational boundaries, hence still different policies are present;
- Policy cooperation, if the ITI strategy denotes merely a deliberative collaboration into specific sectors between autonomous organizations that want to achieve a mutual benefit.

Therefore, the first dimension that will be taken into consideration regards the objectives identified under the framework of the ITI Strategy. Furthermore, it should be noted that the ITI strategy, as such, cannot be considered without taking into consideration its main outputs, namely the projects, which represent the only possible tool to implement and deliver the strategy on the ground. Thus, even though the strategies have been the first point of analysis during the field work, also the projects have been analyzed, in order to better understand the degree of integration of the ITI strategy (Fig. 7). However, already since the beginning of the research, it was clear that the projects are still in the very first stages and thus the lack of concrete data has made such approach more difficult. In fact, the focus of the analysis has been limited to the criteria used for assessing and approving the projects.

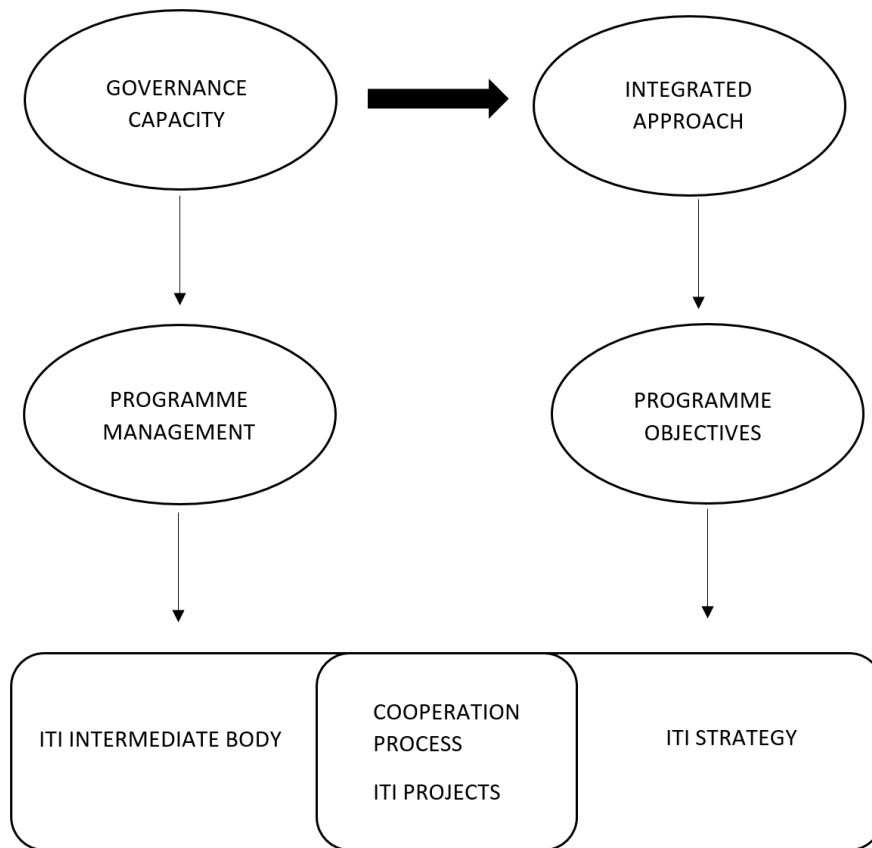
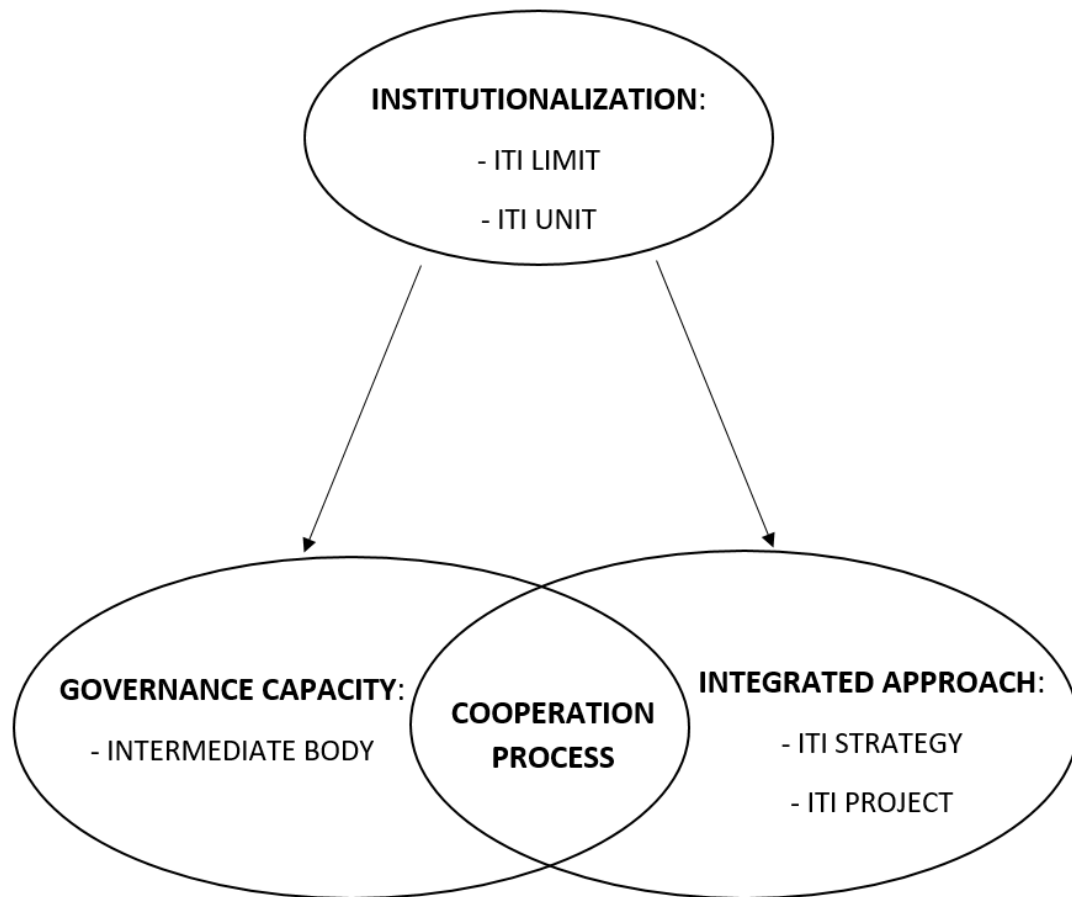


Fig.7: Relation Between Governance Capacity and Integrated Approach (Source: own elaboration)

An important element regarding the second sub-question that has been further elaborated is the relationship between governance capacity and integrated approach. Indeed, albeit in the theoretical chapter the two concepts have been considered as mutually interdependent, during its operationalization (taking into account the context of the ITI), the author has defined such interaction as “one-way” influence, namely the dependence of the integrated approach to the governance capacity (Fig. 7).

The last sub-question is slightly different from previous ones since it can be considered as a follow-up of the first two. As demonstrated by the graphic illustrating the conceptual framework, the three concepts are interrelated amongst them. However, also here, considering the framework of the ITI, the institutionalization seems to be the independent variable that is leading such correlation. One of the reason has been the top-down nature of the instruments and thus the need to fulfill certain requirements imposed by the instrument itself. Another reason instead comes from the theoretical discussion about soft space and the need to consider a territory as an entity having a degree of institutionalization despite its soft nature. Indeed, considering the rural-urban area as a project region, the author has given to the institutionalization a leading role in influencing the concepts of governance capacity and integrated approach. Therefore, in answering to such sub-question, it is significant to understand whether the link between the institutionalization and the two concepts of governance capacity and integrated approach is direct or indirect. Also in this situation, no apriori assumptions have been made. Indeed, the question has been intentionally left as open as possible, in order to not influencing the final results (Fig 8).



*Fig.8: Institutionalizations' Influence to the Governance Capacity and the Integrated Approach
(Source: own elaboration)*

3.2.1 Interviews:

In line with the aim of this research and with its inductive nature, the use of the interviews has seemed to be the most suitable tool in the context of this study. Indeed, the indicators developed above directly recall the need for grasping the point of views of the actors involved during the process of the ITI establishment. The mere investigation of the policy documents, as well as the study of the formal requirements imposed by the ITI, would not have provided an in-depth analysis of the participants' experiences and thus the recognition of significant variables in the process of implementation. As Della Porta and Keating (2008) argued the interviews allow to examine both the context of justification and the context of discovery.

Therefore, the first step undertaken has been the decision to privilege the semi-structure interviews rather than the structured typology. Such decision has been made for several reasons. The first regards the nature of this research, which, as already stated, is totally qualitative and thus did not include statistics or quantitative explanation (which instead would have preferred the use of structured interviews). The second reason is related to the flexibility that characterizes the semi-structure typology. Indeed, it allows the researcher to re-design the prepared questions to the behavior of the interviewer (Porta & Keating, 2008), as well as to grasp information that was not assumed before but that might be relevant to answering the research questions (Bryman, 2015).

The following step, which is strictly related to the decision of the semi-structured interviews, has been the identification of the respondents. In this context, the final decision has been characterized by both practical and theoretical reasons. Indeed, the author has primarily defined the selection of respondents through a

purposive sampling, through the identification of the most appropriate sources adapted to the aim of the research questions. The main purpose of the sampling process is to select the right sources that will then allow to make a generalization of the findings (Bryman, 2015). Therefore, the sampling process has been mainly characterized by the identification of the different actors involved in the ITI implementation process. It has led to the selection of stakeholders belonging to four levels. The first level includes civil servants from the European Commission and the National Ministry of Infrastructure and Development (ministry in charge of the implementation of the ITI). Those people have been chosen in order to understand the essence and the expected results of the ITI. A second level involves civil servants belonging to the Managing Authorities (regions) of the different ITI programmes, which further develops the framework under which the ITI is implemented. The third level is characterized by the people working inside the new government body created by the ITI implementation (ITI Unit) and that coincide with people from the capital cities. The last level includes the municipalities (urban, peri-urban and rural) that are part of the ITI cooperation.

Nevertheless, several hindrances have been encountered by the author during the sampling process. In addition to the limited time and the financial resources which did not allow to conduct the interview in person in Poland, another significant issue has been the language problem, particularly for the selection of the respondents at the municipal level. Indeed, as already argued in the case study selection, the initial direction was to focus mainly on one ITI and to interview as many actors as possible. However, after several attempts in contacting the different municipalities, it was clear that the language issue would have had a negative impact on the research, since it would not have allowed to have an enough number of respondents for ensuring a generalization. Therefore, the author has decided to change the strategy and to open up the selection to several ITIs (Warsaw, Wroclaw, Krakow). This decision has turned to be successful since at the end of the interviewing process, only two representative of the municipalities (not considering the capital cities) and only one representative from each ITI Unit have been reached. Moreover, all of them have preferred to answer to the interview questions in written form in order to avoid misunderstanding due to the low level of English fluency. The author wanted to reach not only civil servants but also politicians directly involved in the ITI Unit. Again, it was not possible because the mayors (or vice-mayors) contacted were not fluent in English.

It should be underlined, that such limitation has indirectly pushed the author to adopt a “top-down” perspective on the studying of the ITI. Indeed, the scarce material collected from the municipalities, did not permit to properly understand the views of people from the ground and thus to focus more on the opinion of those who manage the establishment from above.

At the end 13 civil servants have been interviewed as refigured in the Tab. 3:

Generally, the questions have been regrouped in three main questions ‘categories, referring to the three concepts of institutionalization, governance capacity and integrated approach. However, due the identification of the three different levels, several guides’ questions for the interviews have been created (Annex 1 and 2).

3.2.2 Coding Process

The interviews have been mainly analyzed following a standard coding process. Such analysis has been developed in the light of the above-described operationalization, albeit the author has generated a further elaboration so as to identifying themes and categories that would have allowed a wider interpretation of the findings. For each section identified a code has been assigned. The coding procedure has allowed the author to link the specific interview statements with particular issues/process that affected the scope of the research.

Tab. 3: Interviews Table (Source: own elaboration)

NAME	Abbreviation	Department and role	Level
Daniel Balisnky	Interviewee 1	Ministry of Infrastructure and Development	National
Marton Matko	Interviewee 2	DG Region, Unit H1 Inclusive Growth, Urban and Territorial Development	EU commission
Hubert Guz	Interviewee 3	Malopolska Region, Director Department ERDF	Managing Authority
Konrad Dudzik	Interviewee 4	Malopolska Region, Department Operational Programmes; Manager	Managing Authority
Anna Długosz	Interviewee 5	Krakow ITI Association, Director	ITI Unit
Mateusz Mlost	Interviewee 6	Skawina Municipal Office, Director Department of external funds	Municipality
Kamil Przyborowski	Interviewee 7	Warsaw ITI Partnership	ITI Unit
Magdalena Belof	Interviewee 8	Institute of Territorial Development, Deputy Director	Regional expert
Dagmara Parfanowicz	Interviewee 9	Długoleka Municipal Office, ITI Coordinator	Municipality
Justyna Wiczorkiewicz-Molendo	Interviewee 10	Wroclaw ITI Partnership, Director	ITI Unit
Maja Lukaszewska-Krawiec	Interviewee 11	DG Region, Unit H2 , Programme Manager	EU Commission
Kinga Kowalewska	Interviewee 12	Manzovia Region, Department of Regional Development and EU Funds; Director	Managing Authority
Roman Kozlowski	Interviewee 13	Lower Silesia Region, Director Division for Coordination of Regional Policy	Managing Authority

After the transcription of the interviews, each of them has been analyzed separately, trying to categorize the text into the three main theoretical concepts (institutionalization, governance capacity, and integrated approach). Then, all the findings have been sub-divided into the dimensions identified already during the operationalization process, namely ITI Territory, ITI Unit, ITI as Intermediate body, ITI Strategy and ITI Projects. A further elaboration has led the author to define several themes that characterized the five dimensions, always trying to cluster them in the light of the general concepts. Those themes have then been used to recodify the text and thus allowing the author to interpret the interviewees' opinions in a consistent and trustworthy way. The following table report the main themes identified (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4: Coding table (Source: own elaboration)

Concept	Dimension	Sub-category	Themes/Findings
Institutionalization	- ITI Territory	Process	- ITI role - Implementation Problems - Cooperation Methods
	- ITI Unit	Variables	- History of Cooperation - Political Decision - Formal requirements
Governance Capacity	- ITI as Intermediate Body	Process	- ITI role - Implementation Problems - Cooperation Methods
	- ITI Strategy	Variables	- Money - Decision Power - Formal requirements
	- ITI Projects		
Integrated Approach	- ITI Strategy	Process	- ITI role - Implementation Problems - Level of Integration
	- ITI Projects		

Where applicable, a further regroup has been made considering the different cases studies of Warsaw, Wroclaw, Krakow, as well as taking into consideration the several stakeholders levels (i.e. EC and Ministry, Managing Authority, ITI Unit, Municipality).

In order to transform the finding into results, a triangulation procedure has been undertaken. The source used have not been just the interviews' transcripts but also secondary documents such as scientific articles dealing with the rural-urban cooperation in Poland, but also more recent publications on the ITI tool, as well as the ITI strategies, other policy (e.g. national and regional strategy, partnership agreement, regional operational programme) and operational documents (e.g. terms of references, reports).

3.3. Limitation of the research:

The limitations of the research are related mainly to the decision of using a qualitative strategy and a case study design. More in particular, a single qualitative research is not adequate for undertaking generalizations (Myers, 2000). In addition, they are always influenced by the subjective factors such as the background of the author; and also related to the opinion of the people interviewed.

The second limitation can be found in the decision of using a single-embedded case study. In fact, this research design could not seem appropriated for producing certain generalizations. However, the selection of several sub-cases in Poland will allow making robust generalization valid, at least, for the whole Poland. A further limitation, as already stated above, has been the selection of the respondents and the language limitations encounter by the author during the interviewing process.

4. Results

4.1 Contextualization:

Suburbanization is one of the major change process in cities in Poland today (Jacuniak-Suda, Knieling, & Obersteg, 2013). It is a relatively recent phenomenon which started from the beginning of 21th Century. Indeed, Poland has seen a strong process of urbanization between the 1940s to the 1990s, which led to an increase in urban population from 37% to more than 60% (Kaczmarek, 2013). On the other hand, starting from the 2000s, an always growing shift of population from the core cities to their surrounding rural hinterlands have been registered. Such process of suburbanization is particularly present in the big capital cities, such as Warsaw, Wroclaw, and Krakow. In the period 2002–2011, cities in Poland lost more than 200,000 residents, while rural areas gained more than 485,000 residents (Di Berardino, 2012). Three are the drivers that push Polish people to locate their homes in suburban municipalities, namely an attractive natural heritage; a cheaper cost of land and an easier process for gaining planning permission; the presence of public transport (Kaczmarek & Ryder, 2015).

The causes of the suburbanization process in Poland can be divided into two main categories. One can be associated with macro-structural conditions, such as historical and systemic aspects, while the other are causes associated with microstructural conditions and thus related to personal preferences and motivations (Kaczmarek, 2013).

A poor availability of services in suburban areas in Poland and a high demand for service of the new suburban residents led to strong functional connections between the rural and the urban territories (Kaczmarek & Ryder, 2015). Indeed, one of the main characteristics of the new suburban residents in Poland is that they do not reject their previous urban lifestyle and thus do not become part of the rural society. They make a clear distinction between the place where they sleep, and the place where they work and live their social life (Di Berardino, 2012).

The process of suburbanization is indeed creating two main issues, one related to the physical development of the cities, the other related to the administrative gap and the absence of such functional entity into the political scene (Nilsson et al., 2013). The physical expansion of the cities is not a problem per se, however, in the case of Poland, such growth is totally uncontrolled, mainly due to the lack of a metropolitan spatial planning. This has led to the creation of spontaneous growth of housing, which has also increased the level of competition between the core cities and the small municipalities that fight between each other in order to become more attractive (Nilsson et al., 2014). The uncontrolled housing construction is translated into the lack of appropriate infrastructure which is not suitable to the increasing functional linkages. Transport and connections between the core cities and its functional area are extremely weak and represent one of the main problems in the Polish situation (Kajdanek, 2013).

The need for a new culture of collaboration between neighboring townships is widely recognized and understood by the national and the regional government in Poland. Indeed, it is clearly stated in the National Urban Policy that: "Functional areas of cities consist of a large number of administrative units. [...] The government of each township pursues its own projects independently. This also applies to planning and development policy, which are often pursued without any input from neighboring townships. This approach inhibits cohesive spatial planning and social and economic development across a functional urban region" (Kaczmarek & Ryder, 2015, p. 10).

However, as already stated, the metropolitan area in Poland does not represent an administrative level, and the cooperation between local authorities is not mandatory. The national government has tried since 2009 to develop a new law (Metropolitan Acts) which would have introduced new forms of cooperation between local authorities and thus the recognition of a metropolitan government in the Polish capital cities (Kaczmarek & Ryder, 2015). However, the legal process ended without any results. Nevertheless, the central

government began to provide technical and financial support for fostering the integration between rural and urban at the metropolitan scale. Several policy documents such as Poland's National Strategy of Regional Development (NSRD) 2010-2020 (Krajowa Strategia Rozwoju Regionalnego 2010-2020 – regiony, miasta i obszary wiejskie 2010) and the National Spatial Development Concept (NSDC) 2030 (Koncepcja Przestrzennego Zagospodarowania Kraju 2030 2012) “ include statements designed to strengthen the metropolitan areas of regional capitals and support solutions designed to integrate functional urban areas in terms of spatial management, public transportation, public services, and the job market” (Kaczmarek, 2013, p 50). Due to the failure of implementing the Metropolitan Acts in 2013/14, the government decided to use the ESI funds in order to push for a greater metropolitan cooperation into the main Capital cities. Moreover, the territorial dimension of the cohesion policy and its urban agenda are totally in line with the NSRD 2010/20, where cities and their surrounding functional area constitute the main Strategic Intervention Area (SIA) on which most of the development activities at the national level are concentrated. Nowadays, the functioning of the Polish and regional government administration is strictly conditioned by the implementation of the EU cohesion policy and the Common Agricultural Policies, in particular regarding the use of the ESI funds (Kawka, 2013).

Indeed, the ESI funds are playing an important role in assisting the sustainable development of the metropolitan areas in Poland through the use of the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) (Kawka, 2013; Noworól, 2013; Noworól & Noworól, 2015).

In Poland, the ITI will be used for the implementation of the integrated sustainable urban development (ISUD) and as a part of the 16 Regional Operational Programmes. The ITI will be supported from both ERDF (5.4%) and ESF (2.4%). The basic allocation of the ITI's are determined in the Partnership Agreement in particular under the "Act on the principles of implementation of the Cohesion Policy programmes, financed under the 2014-2020 financial perspective" (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015). The ITI can be financed within at least two priority axis belonging to the two different funds, while additional funds will be channeled from the Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment (POIŚ) 2014-2020 and the Operational Programme Eastern Poland (POPW) 2014-2020. In total, ca. 9% of the ERDF resources will be spent for the ISUD.

The ITI will be implemented in regional capital and their functional area, and at the sub-regional level.

The main scope of the ITI implementation is to increase the participation of local government into the process of implementation of the ESI Funds, not just as beneficiary but as active actors. Moreover, the ITI has been seen as the most suitable instrument that can lead to the strength of cooperation between rural and urban areas and pursued common objectives at the metropolitan level.

There are three basic objectives of the Integrated Territorial Investments:

- Promotion of a partnership cooperation model for various levels and units of administration operating on the functional urban areas.
- Increase of the effectiveness of interventions through integrated projects, responding in a comprehensive manner to the needs and problems of cities and the areas that are functionally associated with cities.
- Increase of the influence of cities and the areas that are functionally associated with them on the shape and manner of carrying out actions in their areas in the frame of the Cohesion Policy (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015).

4.2 The ITI Unit

The main requirement deriving from the use of the ITI is, as we have already seen, the establishment of an ITI Unit with the due institutional capacity for managing a part of the regional operation programme and ensuring the implementation of the sustainable urban development. The creation of an ITI Unit, therefore, is directly leading to an institutionalization of the rural-urban region, which can be characterized by two main steps: The territorial shape and the institutional shape.

4.2.1 Territorial Shape:

The first step of institutionalization takes the form of the delimitation of the ITI areas. The territorial shape of the ITI follows the definition of the Functional Urban areas (FUA) of the regional capitals, declared in the NSDC 2030 and which is further defined by the Polish Partnership Agreement. FUAs are indeed described as “spatially continuous settlement arrangement, consisting of units that are separate in administrative terms. It includes compact urban areas and urbanized zones with functional links to them. Administratively, such areas can cover urban, rural as well as urban-rural municipalities” (NSDC, 2010).

Three main groups of criteria have been used to delimitate the implementation areas of the ITI in the regional capitals and surrounding municipalities (Kaczmarek & Ryder, 2015):

- Functional: the number of those commuting to the FUA core per 1,000 inhabitants at the working age of more than 50 years of age; the number of those officially register as residents in the FUA core per 1,000 inhabitants above 3;
- Socioeconomic: share of the working population in non-agricultural activities as a ratio to the voivodship (Region) average above 75%; the number of business operators per 1,000 inhabitants as a ratio to the voivodship average above 75%;
- Morphological factors: population density (excluding forest and water) as against the voivodship average above 50%; the number of residential flats released for use per 1,000 inhabitants in 2002-2011 compared with the voivodship average above 75%

Moreover, as part of the delimitation process, in order to be accepted by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, an ITI must include at least half of the municipalities of the FUA indicated by the national government.

However, the selection of the municipalities involved in the ITI Unit was a very flexible process, which has been in the hand of regional and main city authority. The only exception in this contest has been Warsaw, due to its state of Capital, and other factors related to it (Noworól, 2015).

The process of delimitation should not be considered just as a merely statistical and functional process, but also as a highly politicized bargain between the different municipalities, mainly related to the amount of available funds (Interviewee 7,12). Therefore, the number of the municipalities involved is very variable depending on the different FUAs. For instance, in the Wroclaw FUA, the ITI is comprising 15 local government units: 2 cities, 6 peri-urban and 7 rural municipalities, while, in Krakow, the ITI will be implemented in the Krakow functional Urban Area, covering Krakow and other 14 surrounding municipalities. A different case is the Warsaw ITI where the Unit involves 40 municipalities. This area includes 2 656 917 inhabitants, 50,3% of the regional population. It should be noted that "one of the specifics of the Warsaw FUA is a very high rate of urbanization (87%), which is significantly higher than for the Manzovia voivodship (64%) and Poland (61%). It should also be taken into account that rural communities in the Warsaw Functional Areas have distinct character when we compare them to the "typical" Polish rural communes" (Interviewee 7).

To sum up, we can conclude that the territorialisation process developed into the framework of the ITI has both a top-down and a bottom-up dimension. Indeed, even though the instrument has been imposed by the central government to the voivodship capitals, it is also true that the decision to be involved in the ITI Unit has been totally a voluntary and political process.

4.2.2 Institutional shape

According to the polish law on local government collaboration, (Polish Municipal Law 8 March 1990), three different types of association can be created, namely an inter-municipal union, an inter-municipal association and a contract or a cooperation agreement, commonly defined as a partnership. In practice, the ITI has been

implemented only using either an ITI association or an ITI Partnership (Kawka, 2013; Noworól & Noworól, 2015).

The association form has a legal status with a clear responsibility and specific task. It created an independent entity of the administrative units involved, and its authority is identical to that of its constituent parts. In the contest of the ITI, an Association is formed by Councils composed of all the member municipalities' representatives, with legislative powers; a Management Boards, acting as steering and audit bodies; and Offices, with supporting service functions.

In the case of the Partnership instead, the organization does not require a separate management organism. This type of collaboration in general terms tends to suffer from a lack of formalization and present some limitations which could influence the governance capacity as well as the way the tasks are performed by the organization and the accomplishing any common goals (Kaczmarek, 2013).

Within the ITI framework, the municipality involved are leading to the sign of the ITI Partnership Agreements. In this case, the ITI Partnership parties are not establishing a different association, but they are represented by a Mayor (usually the mayor of the capital cities) who becomes the Leader, becoming representative and responsible of the whole Partnership. Being just a cooperation agreement, the parties involved into the ITI Partnership play the role of opinion makers and supporters of the Leader. Usually, they are creating a steering committee, also with some legislative powers. The steering committee involves all the municipalities participating in the ITI partnership and has the role of giving an opinion, such as the approval of the ITI strategy. The steering committee is flanked by the ITI Office, which is in charge of all the administrative matters. They are usually placed within the city office of the main capital city.

An important aspect is that the decision of going for an association or a partnership is completely voluntary and is not regulated by any formal requirements from the national government. The decision needs to be taken primarily by the municipalities involved into the cooperation and later be approved by the MA. Considering only the ITI developed into the regional capitals, there have been established nine ITI Associations and eight Partnerships.

In our three cases, Wroclaw and Warsaw have decided to go for a Partnership, while Krakow has implemented an ITI Association.

It is worth to notice the different opinions that the stakeholders involved in the establishment of the ITI Unit have regarding the reasons that lead to the decision of the structure of the cooperation. The first evidence is the difference between the opinions of people from National Government and the European Commission and those from the Managing Authority and the ITI Units. Interviewees from the first group, argue that one of the main variables for such decision is history of cooperation (Interviewees 1,11). They state that the FUA, which had previously undertaken a form of collaboration between municipalities, have decided to establish a more formalized ITI Association, while those which have not been the arena for a cooperation practice have opted for the Partnership choice. On the other hand, civil servants from both MAs and ITI Units mostly see as influencing factors more practical arguments, such as the managing of ESI funds and the process of implementation of the ITI. Only in the case of Warsaw the low capacity and the short history of cooperation between the capital city and the surrounding municipalities has been considered as one of the variables that affected the decision of implementing an ITI Partnership (Interviewee 7,12).

Indeed, it is true that Warsaw FUA in the past particularly suffered from a lack of the culture of collaboration, mainly related to the big difference between the Capital and the other municipalities (Interviewee 7,12, Nilsson et al. 2013)

However, having a closer look at the history of collaboration of the other two cases, it can be said that such hypothesis cannot be generalized for the whole Poland (Fig 9). Indeed, during the interviews with Krakow exponents (Interviewees 3,5), it has emerged that the same problems can be also detected into the Krakow FUAs. In fact, they frequently recall the difficulties of past cooperation due to the disparities between Krakow and the rural municipalities. However, has already stated, the Krakow FUA has been the only one amongst the cases studied here to decide the establishment of an ITI Association. The inverse process indeed can be considered for the Wroclaw situation, where already since 1999 is present a form of rural-urban collaboration

that in 2005 has led to the institutionalization of the Wrocław Agglomeration Development Agency (Agencja Rozwoju Aglomeracji Wrocławskiej), a non-profit joint-stock company, with shares owned by member governments (Kaczmarek & Ryder, 2015). Currently, it has 30 governments including the city of Wrocław and the Lower Silesian Region as well as 28 local communes, private sectors, and human resources firms (Kaczmarek & Ryder, 2015).

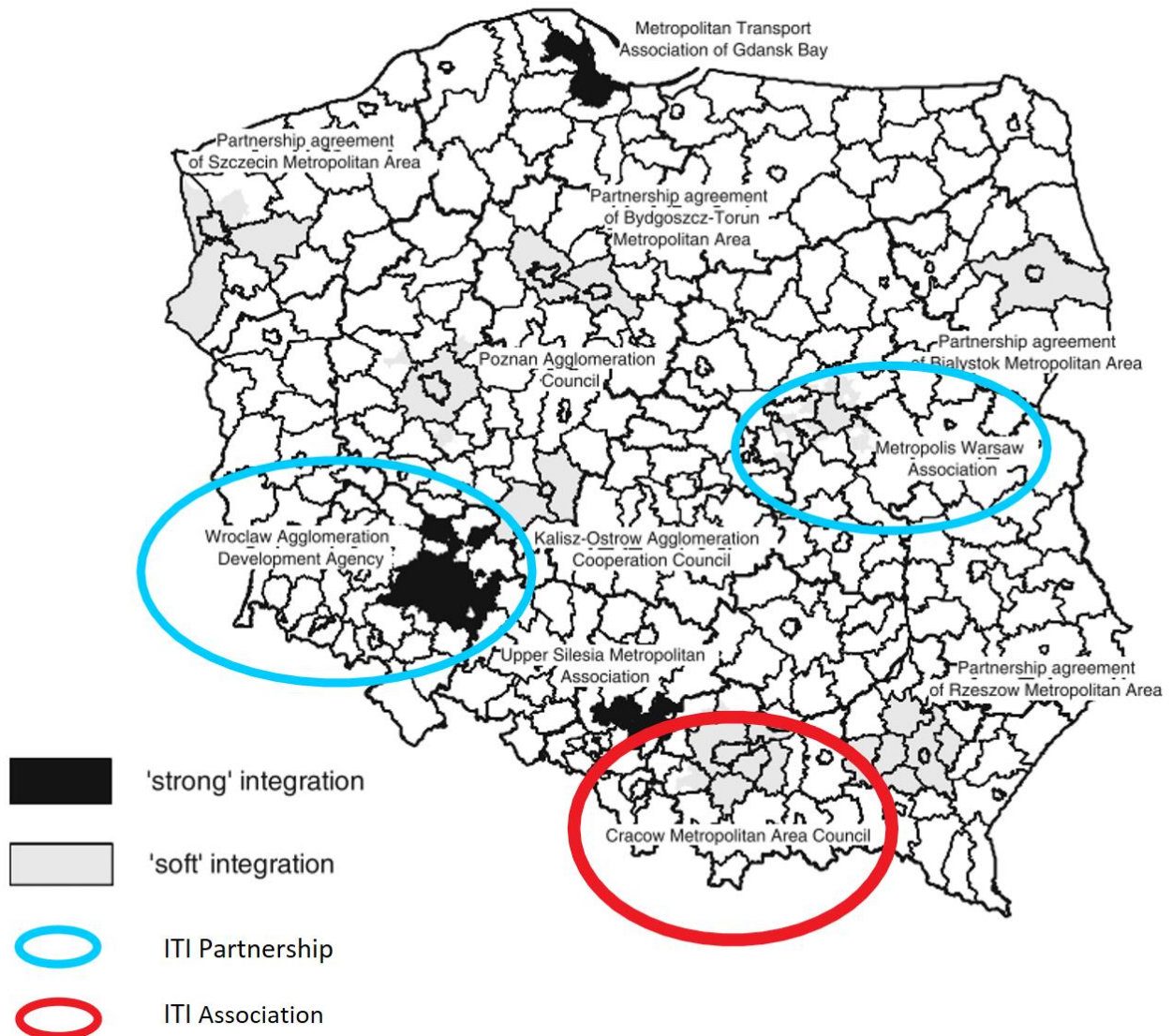


Fig.9: Forms of ITI Unit versus History of Cooperation (Source: Authors' adaptation of Kaczmarek & Ryder, 2015, p.31)

Another reason that emerged from the interviews is related to the intrinsic difference between the two forms of units, namely the level of formalization. Indeed, in particular regarding the ITI Partnership, its flexible nature and thus the opportunity to better adjust the cooperation to the local needs has been one of the main drivers for such a choice (Interviewees 1,7,10). On the other hand, the use of the ITI Association has been considered a way to better manage the huge range of investments plans, which are necessary for implementing the ITI (such as the preparation of the ITI Strategy and calls for proposals) and thus ensuring a stronger cooperation between the municipalities involved as well as to clarify the division of responsibility between the different partners (Interview 5,8).

According to the rules and scope of the European Commission, the use of the ITI instruments should serve as a way to empower cities in taking part directly in the implementation of the Regional Operational Programmes, and thus fill responsible in achieving its goals. In this way, the cities and municipalities do not have just the role of beneficiary but also a more active role in framing the development of their territories (Interview 1,2,11). Such intent, however, has also been a variable that influences the choice between the ITI Partnership and Association. Indeed, some rural areas do not feel comfortable in dealing with all the formal requirements that are coming from the ITI implementation, and thus prefer to leave in the hand of the main city the administrative tasks, hence leading to the decision of establish an ITI Partnership without a creation of another institution (Interviewees 1,10,11). On the other side of the coin, there is instead the fear of the rural and peri-urban municipalities of leaving too much power to the capital cities (Interviewees 1,7,8) mainly due to the lack of trust and to the believe that capital cities in the form of Partnership would not sufficiently represent the needs and scope of all the other partners. In this case, this leads to the creation of a joint association which works in a more independent way.

In conclusion, it can be said that the institutionalization brought by the ITI has been characterized by both top-down and bottom-up decision, and thus ending in the creation of different institutional forms. Several variables have affected such a process; some were widely recognized while others appear just in some of the cases studies. The institutions created, therefore, become the governing bodies of the ITI and thus of the institutionalized RUPR. Next paragraph will deal with this further dimension of the institutionalization, also studying the process of decision and policy-making and thus the governance capacity of this new institution.

4.3 The ITI Unit as Intermediate Body

One of the requirements of the European Commission is that the ITI Unit must fulfill the role of Intermediate body (IB). In order to be declared as IB, the ITI Association/Partnership are obliged, as a condition for approval, to sign a written agreement with the Managing Authority of the Regional Operation Programme (MA) regarding the degree of delegation and specifying the tasks for which the IB is responsible. Following the discussion above, it should be noted that, in the case of ITI Partnership, it is the Leader (Mayor) who performs the role of the IB, while in the more formal collaboration, it is the ITI Association which become the IB. From the empirical study, it has emerged that the creation of the IB has been one of the main problems during the establishment of the ITI (Interviewees 1,2,5,7,10,11), mainly related to the lack of a clear regulation from the EC. In the end, after a long process of discussion amongst the ITI Unit, MA, EC this obstacle has been overcome.

The minimum scope of delegation for an IB consists in the preparation of an ITI Strategy and in the selection of the projects, which can be issued either by competitive calls for proposals or as a preliminary approval of without any competition. However, throughout Poland different tasks have been assigned to the ITI Unit. Here again, the decision is extremely related to the political agreement that has been reached during the establishment process (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015).

The main role of the ITI Unit in the selection of the projects is that of ensuring the consistency with the scopes and objectives of the respective ITI strategy. In doing so, the MA together with the ITI Unit develop a set of criteria which are then used to assess the projects. The criteria need to be approved by the Monitoring Committee, which usually consists of the representative of the ITI Unit, the MA, the National Ministry and the EC. However, there is a difference between the criteria developed for the non-competition formula and those created for the calls for proposals. Generally, they refer to eligibility (formal criteria) and evaluation (substantive criteria) and varying depending on the priority investment that they cover (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015).

The evidences coming from the empirical study have shown the difficulty related to the steps that led to creation of the strategy and the consequent translation in projects. What has been clear is that two are the main variables that influenced these two process, respectively the difference in influencing the decision-making and the need for a fair distribution of available funds. The civil servants interviewed, all express the fact that it was a difficult political process which ended with a compromise, however, they have different opinions regarding the way the decision-making has been influenced. Some of them (Interviewees 1,5,6,7,10) think that during the selection of the objectives inserted into the ITI Strategy, both the needs of the main cities and those of the rural and peri-urban municipalities have been taken into consideration and have been considered without making any difference of power. In arguing this, they mainly refer to the fact that each of the municipality involved, regardless of size and population, have one vote in the Steering Committee and that at the end of the negotiation a consensus amongst them has been achieved. On the other hand, some have clearly stated how the process has been strongly influenced by the main cities and that the other municipalities had to adapt their goals to the priorities of the voivodship capitals (Interviewees 3,4, 12) considering the role they cover as a regional socio-economic center. In the case of Warsaw, it has also been pointed out the importance that it has for the development of the whole country and thus the need to lead the negotiation process (Interview 12).

It should be noted, that albeit the process was based on a political bargaining, the objectives have been selected through a complex consultative process which involved several workshop and round tables with experts, NGOs, Universities, which played a pivotal role in steering the political decision. In fact, one of the main problem encountered during the preparation of the strategy has been to make municipalities understanding which were the real and common needs of the different FUAs (Interviewees 3,6,7,9,10).

If the definition of the strategic objectives of the ITI Strategy has been a very politicized process, it can be said that its implementation has been even more a bargain. However, this time, the factor that mainly impacted the negotiation has been the sharing of the EU funds allocated to the ITI. The majority of the interviewees (10 out of 13) have considered the equal and fair division of the funds the main variable of the discussion. In fact, it is particularly worth to underline that the only available output for ensuring the implementation of the strategy provided by the ITI instrument is the co-financing of projects. Therefore, the main element of the implementation discussion has been “which project needs to be financed and where” (Interviewee 3). Thus, the element which has been on the table during the preparation of the strategy has been the establishment of explicitly criteria that could have ensured such equal allocation of money. Here, an important distinction should be made between the criteria developed for the projects approved in a non-competitive way - and already present in the ITI strategy, and those that are selected under the competitive calls for proposals. Indeed, what has emerged from the empirical study is that the criteria for the non-competitive formula have been the result of a political compromise, driven by the willingness of each municipality to have the maximum return of investments into their own areas (Interviewees 3,5,12). Nevertheless, as we will see later on, those criteria (in particular the substantive one) are developed taking into consideration the scopes and objectives of the ITI strategy as well as the aims of the respective ROPs. Indeed, even though the projects are selected without competition, in order to be approved they still need to reach a minimum threshold of the requirements set by the substantive criteria. The situation may radically change considering the different ITIs. For instance, in Krakow in order to be approved a project has to reach at least 60% of the total score (Interviewee 3).

For what concern the criteria that regulate the calls for proposals, the funds’ distribution is instead considered more as a concern. Indeed, in particular for the ITIs that implement a large amount of the budget through open calls (such as ITI Warsaw, 80% of the total funds), by the end of the programming period in 2020 “it may result in an uneven number of projects that will be realized in different municipalities. It may be a problem because some of the communes which will implement fewer projects may feel bad about it” (Interviewee 7). He also pointed out that they are trying to keep the criteria included in the Terms of

Reference of the different call for proposals enough close to the one present in the ITI strategy, however it usually is a negotiation with the MA, which instead pushes for criteria closer to the one of the ROP, without considering the different needs that the Warsaw FUA has, comparing to the other part of the region.

To sum up, the need to establish an Intermediated body with clear and defined tasks has been interpreted in different way, leading to different assignment of tasks depending on the situation and on the recognized institutional capacity of the hosting organization. The main tasks assigned to the IBs has been the preparation of the strategy and its implementation in projects. Nevertheless, such a process has been highly complex and driven by variables which could have undermined the final outcomes. In the next paragraph, the author will try to assess the presence of the integrated approach in both ITI strategy and projects.

4.4 The ITI Strategy

The third requirement coming from the establishment of the ITI is the creation of an ITI Strategy, which should represent the main document under which the ITI will be implemented. As stated into the Art. 7 of ERDF “any (ITI) strategy should set out integrated actions to tackle the economic, environmental, climate, demographic and social challenges affecting the urban area, while taking into account the need to promote urban-rural linkages” (CPR, EU Parliament 2013). The definition of the ITI strategy is further regulated by the Polish Partnership Agreement, which imposes further requirements that must be fulfilled in order to be accepted by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development. Moreover, the ITI strategy should be in line with the documents elaborated at the EU level (EU 2020 strategy) and at the national level (National Regional Development Strategy, National Spatial Development Concept, and Regional Development Strategies), as well as other strategic and planning documents approved for the functional areas. On the other hand, they need to be strictly adjusted to the objectives and investment priorities present into their respective ROP.

Being them top down requirements for the establishment of the ITI, all the interviewees from each case study have confirmed the consistency between the ITI strategy and the policy documents from higher layer of government. In addition, interviewees from the municipal level (5,6,7,9,10) agreed on the fact that the ITI strategies are also extremely consistent with the development goals of the respective municipalities. In the case of the Warsaw ITI Strategy, it has emerged that “Policy documents of municipalities involved in Warsaw ITI were one of the sources of inspiration for joint activities that could be undertaken in ITI formula. Therefore, the ITI Strategy is coherent with the documents of individual municipalities. None of the local strategies cover less than a half of the eight development directions planned to be implemented in ITI formula. More than twenty of them covers at least seven” (Interviewee 7). On the other hand, Noworól and Noworól (2015)¹ in describing the Krakow ITI strategy underline the existing difference between the ITI strategy and the Krakow city strategy. In fact, they argued that the ITI strategy should not be considered as the strategy for the whole FUA since it is exclusively related to the thematic objectives coming from the Cohesion Policy and the PA. Indeed, in the case of ITI Krakow the main objective inserted into the strategy were TO 1 and 2 related to development of knowledge-based economy, while in the Krakow Development Strategy (considered as the strategy of the main city) the emphasis is put in supporting the environment for scientific research and technology as well as in stimulating innovation and new business. (Ibid.).

As already stated above, the regulation clearly states that the ITI has to have an integrated nature which should ensure the consistency not only between the several existing policy documents but also between different policy sectors. In this regards, two main views have been detected from the empirical study. On the one hand, the majority of interviewees (3,6,7,8,10,11,12) have reported a good level of integration between sectors with a good degree of complementarity of activities, while on the other hand, another branch

¹ Aleksander Noworól has been contracted as external expert for the preparation of the Krakow ITI Strategy.

(Interviewees 1, Noworól A. & Noworól K. 2015) have argued that the level of cross-sectorial integration of the different ITI strategies is not very high. Again here, it is worth to notice the difference between the ITI strategy per se and its translation into projects. Indeed, as noted by the Interviewee 11: "In most of the ITI strategies the complementarity has been taken into consideration, however, a step further is needed in order to ensure that such integration is translated into the projects (...) our main concern (as EU Commission) is that the practical implementation will be then characterized by separated investments". Even though it is still too early to judge the implementation of the ITI Strategy, at the current stage of implementation, the stakeholders interviewed being asked if they consider the projects already present under the ITI formula (mainly non-competitive projects) as integrated, they have reported different opinions. Mainly, those who have argued positively regarding the degree of integration of the ITI strategy stated that also the projects are integrated (Interviewees 6,7,8,10,11,13) both internally (the project itself) and externally (between other projects) (Interviewee 7). On the other hand, it has instead emerged that projects are not integrated (Interviewee 4) or integrated at "a middle level" (Interviewee 3). They argue that such low level of integration is mainly due to the political process that characterized the selection of the ITI projects, which was not only based on substantive criteria.

Different views can be detected regarding the presence of an integrated approach in the ITI Strategy and its projects. However, what is clear is that due to the strict requirement of the ITI formula, an integration can be encountered between the ITI strategy and the policy document of higher tiers of government. The situation is instead different for the projects, which, being still at the beginning, are not fully characterized by an integrated approach.

4.5 The ITI Role:

After having described the process linked to the establishment of the ITI, it is particularly worth to understand the role that the ITI had regarding the three main concepts developed above (Institutionalization, governance capacity and integrated approach), considering the rural-urban context of Poland.

Different roles have been assigned to the ITI instrument by the stakeholders involved in its implementation. The clearest evidence emerging from all the interviews is that the ITI has fostered the cooperation between rural and urban territories in the FUAs in which it has been established. Despite the fact that it is just at its early stage, all the interviewees agreed that the ITI has brought an increase of the degree of cooperation at the metropolitan level, in particular, considering, as we have already seen, the difficult situation that characterized the collaboration between cities and rural territories in Poland. The main problems that the ITI has been able to overcome were two, namely the lack of trust between actors involved in the cooperation and thus undermining the sentiment of competition that characterized Polish local government (Interviewees 7,8, Noworól and Noworól (2015); and the lack of understanding about the need for cooperation (Interviewees 3,7,8,12). Nevertheless, different aspects of the term cooperation have been pointed out by the stakeholders. Some of them have seen the ITI as an institutional platform that gives the opportunity to exchange ideas and combine the development of the capitals cities and the surrounding municipalities (Interviewees 5, 6, 7); Others have seen the ITI simply as a financial instrument that has (and will) increased the efficiency of the ESI funds management (Interviewees 7,9). In line with the latter, several stakeholders see in the ITI a tool that allows the FUAs to make joint investments which could not have been made before (Interviewees 1,4,6,9,10). In particular, such investments will be particularly important for rural areas, which can "cover the capacity gap and unlock unused potentials"(Interviewee 10) as well as participate in different big projects (such as transport) which otherwise could not have been able to implement (Interviewees 4,9). On the other hand, the ITI has also considered a way to look for the first time at the FUA as unique socio-economic area, overcoming the presence of the strong internal inter-municipal competition (Interviewees 7,9,10).

Such an increase of the practice of cooperation has also been translated on a policy level. In the previous chapter, it has been already shown the different views regarding the level of integration of the ITI strategy.

However, another significant aspect that has emerged from the field study is the role that the ITI had in forcing them to create a joint policy document for the whole FUA. The majority of the interviewees agreed on the fact that the creation of the ITI strategy has been “a long but fruitful process” (Interviewee 9), particularly characterized by a learning by doing attitude. Indeed, before the ITI establishment, municipalities were used to work just on specific issues, such as delivery of public services, without considering the development of a common vision for the whole metropolitan area (Interviewee 1,7). As a result, the first stages of the ITI strategy preparation have been directly linked to the identification of common development goals (Interviewees 3,6,7,9) as well as to align the bottom up needs to the priority investments stated into the respective regional operational programmes (Interviewees 3,7). It is worth to underline that such problems were common shared phenomena identified in all the three case studies of Wroclaw, Warsaw, and Krakow. However, the several stakeholders belonging to the different government layers have pointed out how, at the moment of approval of the ITI strategy, these kinds of problems have already been overcome (Interviewees 1,3,7,9,11).

The third element that has been identified regard the future scenario of such cooperation. Indeed, it is a widely recognized hope that the ITI (as an instrument of the Cohesion Policy) and more in general the cooperation at the metropolitan level will continue beyond the end of the programming period 2014/20. However, three main views can be detected. Those who think that the cooperation will continue despite the financial incentives coming directly from the EU (Interviewees 1,7,11). In arguing so, they mainly refer to the evidence that the need for cooperation amongst rural and urban territory is currently widely understood. On the other hand, there are those who think that the cooperation is still extremely related to the aim of getting funds and that, without any extra financial resources, such complex cooperation will not last for long (Interviewees 3,4,8). A third group (Interviewees 2,5,9,10,6), instead, has not mentioned money as a variable for the continuation of the metropolitan cooperation, but for instance, refer to the capacity of leaders to efficiently manage the implementation of the ITI, hence ensuring a collaborative advantage for both rural and urban municipalities (Interviewee 2).

Last but not least, when asked whether or not the ITI would have brought to the creation of a metropolitan administrative level in Poland, the response for all the stakeholders was “no” or “very unlikely,” despite the fact that all highlighted the benefits that a metropolitan layer would bring. Here, the main arguments emerged refer to the fact that the ITI as such is a mere financial instrument in the framework of the cohesion policy, without having a wider scope as the establishment of an administrative level (Interviewees 4,12). Indeed, a creation of a metropolitan layer would lead to a huge restructure of the administrative machine in Poland, which requires a strong political effort of the central government (Interviewees 3,6,11,12), since it inevitably would bring to a loss of consensus in the rural areas (Interviewee 8), due to the loss of their autonomy.

In conclusion, it can be said that the ITI played a pivotal role in fostering the cooperation between rural and urban areas, albeit it did not influence its durability. The type of institutionalization that the ITI brought into the metropolitan arena is very much related to the delivery of the programming period 2014/20 and do not include any wider scope, hence not ensuring the lasting of the partnership. However, strong hopes are held into such instrument for the future, mainly due to the positive results that it has already achieved in terms of integrated approach and governance capacity.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion:

The conclusion will be structured as follow: the first part will be dedicated to a summary of the empirical findings and thus how they answer the research questions of this study; while the second section will be dedicated to the discussion of the results considered in the light of the ITI itself, and more in general on the concept of soft space. In the end, some recommendations for future studies will be presented.

The current study wanted to investigate how the ITI can be an added value for governing and institutionalizing the rural-urban linkages. More in particular three sub-questions were created by the author, namely:

- 1) How does the ITI institutionalize the RUPR?
- 2) To what extent does the ITI increase the level of governance capacity and integrated approach of the RUPR?
- 3) How does the institutionalization influence the governance capacity and the integrated approach in a rural-urban context?

The empirical case of Poland has shown, as a first result, that the ITI has led to different ways of institutionalization of the rural-urban regions studied, depending on the situation. It was an inevitable process coming directly from the formal requirements of the tool itself, which led to an institutionalization of the cooperation between the main capital cities and their surrounding municipalities. However, it has taken different forms depending on the situations. Such process has been characterized by two main steps, namely a territorial shape and an institutional shape. The first step has been a standard procedure made firstly at the national level and then further defined by the regions, which was based on the definition of the Functional Urban Areas. However, the identification of the territory has been a highly politicized process, mainly related to the difficulty of inter-municipal collaboration in Poland, which has indirectly threatened their functional nature.

The second step, instead, has been characterized by the creation of a more or less formal governing body that was created with the aim of fulfil the requirement of the EU Commission and thus ensuring an empowerment of the municipal level in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy. The form of such intermediate body has taken two main directions. On the one hand, in the case of Krakow, a formal ITI Association has been established, in order to better manage the cooperation process and ensure the coordination of the investments offered by the ITI. On the other hand, for the case of Wroclaw and Warsaw, a softer form of collaboration called ITI Partnership has been considered the most suitable option for such cooperation. Here the main factors that influenced the decision has been the flexibility offered by the Partnership formula, in allowing the stakeholders involved to better adapt the form of cooperation to the bottom-up needs coming from the municipalities involved. Furthermore, a second variable, has been the low degree of institutional capacity of the rural area in dealing with the administrative issues coming directly from the implementation of the ITI, as well as in the case of Warsaw, the particular status that the capital city covers in comparison to the peri-urban and rural municipalities. Another result is the evidence that the ITI as such is not creating a durable institution and thus will not lead to the creation of a metropolitan administrative level in Poland. In fact, ITI brought the establishment of task-related institutions with the only aim and scope of ensuring the implementation of a part of the regional operational programmes. Therefore, it can be said that the institutionalization brought by the ITI has led to the establishment of the so-called rural-urban project regions.

Considering the role that the ITI had in increasing the governance capacity of the rural-urban region, it has been shown that stakeholders have widely recognize the added value that the instrument brought in such regard. However, a closer look at the feature of the decision-making process in the ITI framework has made possible to identify some of its limits. Indeed, taking into account the definition of the horizontal and vertical dimension of the governance capacity used in this research, it can be said that the ITI has ensured an improvement of the way the cooperation between different actors works, especially taking into consideration the complex and difficult past situation in Poland. More in particular, it has emerged that both rural and urban needs have been considered during the development of the ITI strategy. They have also been assigned the same power in the decision-making process. However, the presence of an informal higher influence of the capital cities in steering the negotiation was recognized by some stakeholders. On the other hand, the capacity of understanding the challenges and the common objectives of the ITI Association/Partnership can be questionable. In fact, the main result in this regard has been the role that an equal sharing of funds played during the development of the ITI Strategy and the consequent translation into projects. Nevertheless, the contribution that the projects have for the ITI region as a whole, has certainly been taken into consideration, thanks also to the new methods used for the creation of the strategy which involved experts, universities, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders.

For what concern the vertical dimension of the governance capacity, the empirical case mainly showed that the ITI is extremely related to the regional operational programme, since it is a direct sub-section of it. Indeed, an imposition of a narrow range of possible priority investments, all referring to the thematic objectives present in the regional operational programme, has been imposed by the different managing authorities. The ITI body could take its decision, but just in a framework already developed at the regional level. Therefore, it can be said that the degree of influence of the ITI body in uploading their needs in the policy-making process - made by higher tiers of government - is extremely low or even non-existent, and thus resulting in a low level of vertical governance capacity.

Following the two dimensions of the integrated approach, it has been shown that an alignment of the ITI strategy with higher level of policies documents has been ensured (European, national, regional) mainly due to the formal requirements of the ITI, while at the municipal level the opinion between stakeholders is divergent. The main role attributed at this instrument has been the creation of a joint development strategy for all the territories involved into the ITI. Therefore, one result in this context has been the shift from a policy cooperation, which was the only form of inter-municipal cooperation characterizing the Poland's past, to a policy coordination, considered as the creation of the ITI strategy that seeks to ensure the consistency between the actions taken in the different policy sectors, without transcending the policy fields boundaries of the diverse sectors (in other words the level of policy integration as described above has not been achieved). However, the creation of an ITI strategy should be seen only as the first step of the integrated policy-making process, taking also into consideration the results emerging from the investigation at the projects' level. Indeed, here some of the stakeholders have questioned the level of integration that the projects have, reporting the fear that the ITI strategy will be translated into separated investments. Being at the very early stage of their implementations, it is difficult to objectively judge the integrated approach of the ITI projects. However, for the next future, it is certainly needed a step further to ensure that the coordination present at the strategy level will also be transferred in the projects.

In conclusion, in order to answer to the last sub-question, it can be said that the ITI with its formal and strict implementation requirements has influenced the governance capacity and integrated approach of the rural-urban regions. In particular, the creation of a formal intermediate body, with the duty to carry out certain tasks, has made cities taking responsibility for their own development, and thus has led them to think about the need for cooperation and integration. However, on the other hand, in some areas, such institutionalization has led to the concentration of decision power into the capital city not ensuring a collaborative advantage for the rural-urban region as a whole. Moreover, it seems that governance capacity

and integrated approach have also been influenced by other factors, such as the money and political interests.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the ITI has been, only to a limited extent, a successful tool for the development of the rural-urban cooperation and for ensuring a multilevel governance in Poland. However, it presents some limitations related to the structural aspects of the tool itself (which perhaps could also be improved) and to the behaviour of the actors involved in the cooperation process, which have been mainly influenced by their pragmatic thinking.

5.2 Discussion

The abovementioned results have led the author to reflect on some issues belonging both to the ITI instrument as such, and to the theoretical concept of soft space.

The first reflection regards the scope that the national government gave to the ITI and its relation with the ITI territorial delimitation. Indeed, it is clear that the Polish government has put a strong emphasis on the role of the main capital cities as a “engines of growth”, for both regional and national economic development, in particular pushing for an establishment of the ITI in all the sixteen Polish capital cities. On the other hand, they promote the ITI as a useful instrument for achieving a more balanced and sustainable sub-regional development throughout the country, through the strengthening of the rural-urban collaboration at the metropolitan level. Such dichotomy has been also translated into the process of territorialisation during the ITI establishment, which has followed the concept of the Functional Urban Area that per se can be defined as a “city-first, agglomeration perspective” (Harrison & Heley, 2015). Indeed, the FUA approach has led to a spatial-selection process generating an automatic exclusion of those rural areas dislocated physically from an urban centre. This issue has created a clear separation that could particularly be a problem in those regions with the presence of only one big urban centre (in our case Mazovia (Warsaw) and Malopolska (Krakow)). Furthermore, as it has been seen above, the ITI establishment has been a highly political process that led to a further restriction of the territory under the influence of the ITI, threatening their functional nature and thus their effectiveness. Therefore, it can be said that the ITI, bringing a concentration of resources into the metropolitan areas of the capital cities, has indirectly promoted the development of the urban centres and their close surrounding hinterland, and in so doing, could increase the gap between the excluded rural areas and the already developed metropolis, hence losing the objective of promoting a balanced development at the regional level. This aspect is extremely worthy, since it should be reminded that the ITI is an instrument used under the framework of the cohesion policy (in particular under the dimension of the so-called territorial cohesion) and thus should be a tool implemented for ensuring the place-based approach.

In this regard, a more general consideration can be made for the concept of soft space. Indeed, it is not clear how the use of soft space can lead to a reduction of the administrative fragmentation. If, on the one hand, soft spaces can be a solution for the closing of the administrative gap, on the other hand, in order to be effective, they always need to undertake a hardening process that inevitably lead to the definition of boundaries (despite their temporary nature) which generate a further institutional overlapping and thus an increase of the fragmentation. Such fragmentation is not just on an administrative level. In fact, the ITI strategy should not be seen as the development vision for the whole FUA (as it has been shown in the case of Krakow) and thus it can be different from other kind of policies documents that take into consideration the development of the FUA. Such consideration can also be made at the policy level, since the creation of policy document of the different soft space can lead to an increase of the policy fragmentation, and thus questioning the role that the soft spaces have in ensuring an integrated approach.

Another reflection concerns the role that money had in the formation of the ITI in Poland. In fact, it has been shown that it is a widely recognized idea that money has been the main incentive for making rural and urban

municipalities cooperating. Indeed, the equal sharing of available funds has been also one of the main criteria used for the approval of the ITI projects and the main discussion during the negotiation that led to the creation of the ITI strategy. Indeed, as Komornicki and Zaucha (2015) stated “whenever the division of money takes place, pragmatism takes over – and obtaining money from the EU frequently becomes more important than the influence of its spending on a broadly-understood region’s development” (p.27). Following the latter statement, it can be said that one of the factors that influence the level of policy integration of the ITI strategy is clearly the political process that was characterized by the need of reaching an agreement on the sharing of the EU funds between the different municipalities. As a result, the preparation and implementation of the ITI Strategy should be treated to a greater extent as “a lesson of cooperation” than as a contribution to the strategic thinking on the scale of a functional area (Noworól & Noworól, 2015, p.22). It leads to the reflection, that, in the ITI framework, the rural-urban cooperation is considered more as an “end rather than a mean” for achieving certain objectives (Copus 2013, p.19). Indeed, as Copus (2013) suggests, it is very dangerous to consider the effective establishment of a form of cooperation an indicator of the success of the ITI. In this way, cooperation remains an “abstract” objective that does not play any role in shaping the development of the metropolitan territories. On the contrary, it could result on the instauration of a perverse form of cooperation, characterized by a pragmatic thinking linked only to the mere aim of getting funds.

Such consideration opens the floor to the discussion on the effectiveness of the soft space approach. Indeed, being soft-space non-statutory space, lacking of proper binding instruments (e.g. planning plans) -which in turn have the power to effectively steer the development of a territory - the sole objectives they can pursue are short-term outcomes, which often result in a mere increase of cooperation. In this regard, the definition of soft space as “spaces of governance” can be challenged. Indeed, if one of the main dimension of governance is the ability to take collective actions that should lead to an implementation of a transformative agenda for the territories involved, and if cooperation is the end-objective pursued, then it is not clear to what extent a soft space approach can effectively impact such capacity. In addition, considering the intrinsic long-term nature of spatial planning, it is hard to understand how the soft space that per se are temporary and, as we have demonstrated, led to short-term results, can match the definition of space for spatial planning, which instead has a long-term nature. Indeed, considering the discussion above, the author would like to conclude that, more than other things, soft space can be seen as a deliberative form of that “neoliberal governmentality” that has changed the nature of spatial planning (Haughton et al., 2013). In fact, spatial planning “has become less focused on the visionary and imagining the ‘impossible’ and more concerned with pragmatic negotiations around the reductive sense of the ‘sensible’ and the ‘necessary’ in the context of the seeming inevitability of market-based forms of policy rationality (aiming at) maintaining the existing social order rather than challenging and transforming it” (Haughton et al., 2013, p. 232).

5.3 Future Studies

This research has tried to look at the ITI not only as a mere financial instrument in the framework of the Cohesion Policy but also as a policy tool for promoting a form of territorial governance between rural and urban territories. Such perspective has implicitly led to assign at the ITI a particular role that (maybe) was not forecast by the EU Commission during its creation, albeit, theoretically, has demonstrated being suitable. However, due to the early stage of the ITI implementation, as well as to the practical limitations of time extension and language barriers, the author could not provide as strong evidence as wanted for the studies’ conclusion and thus not permitting for elaborating practical recommendations for the stakeholders involved. Moreover, the presence of contrasting opinions emerging from the empirical study did not allow the author to respond in a very systematic way to the research questions previously elaborated.

Therefore, for what concern the ITI, it certainly needs further studies, so as to understand whether or not it brings a real added value to the governing of the rural-urban interactions, and thus to the exploitation of

their opportunities. In particular, it should be taken into account how the ITI can be improved in order to ensure a concrete implementation of the integrated approach, without ending in the creation of separate investments merely linked to a realization of regional operation programme. More in general, future research should also meditate on the role that the EC has in steering the regional development of European regions, and thus question the efficiency of the Cohesion Policy in pursuing a balanced development. On a theoretical level, despite the already existing research on informal planning, future studies should try to better clarify the dichotomy between statutory versus non-statutory institutions, and thus reflect on the effectiveness of the soft space approach.

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ANNEX

Annex 1- General Guideline Interview Questions

General Question		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent do you see the ITI as an instrument that facilitates the governing of the rural-urban linkages? 2. Which was the main reason that leads to the establishment of the ITI in your Functional Urban Area? 3. Which were the barriers encountered by actors during the implementation of the ITI? 4. In your opinion, which are the advantages of using the ITI in a rural-urban contest?
Governance Capacity	How the your ITI is being governed?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Are rural and urban have the same level of representation into the ITI? 6. In your opinion, is the ITI strategy ensuring a "collaborative advantage" for both rural and urban municipalities? 7. What an under-representation of the rural territories does mean in terms of balanced development?
Policy Integration	Is the ITI in your ensuring an Integrated approach?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What the ITI does for overcoming the problem of policies fragmentation between rural and urban municipalities? 2. Which were the steps that led to the development of the ITI strategy? 3. How is the ITI strategy related to policy documents of the different municipalities involved? And what are the connections to the regional and national policies? 4. Does the ITI strategy lead to an horizontal integration between different sectors? In your opinion, are rural and urban needs being equally considered? How?
Institutionalization	Is the ITI a form of institutionalization of the Functional Urban Area?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the ITI Partnership recognize as a "policy actor" into the wider regional policy discussion? 2. Is the ITI creating another layer of metropolitan governance? How is it related with the existing ones? 3. Do you considered the ITI as an instrument that can institutionalize the rural-urban connections? 4. Do you think that the cooperation between the municipalities will continue after the end of the programming period 2014/20.

Annex 2- Written Questionnaire for Municipalities

Questionnaire ITI

1. Why your municipality decided to be involved into the ITI?
2. Which advantages your municipality are getting from being part of the ITI?
3. Which were the problems encountered during the implementation of the ITI for your municipality?
4. Is the ITI facilitating the cooperation between the different municipalities involved? How?
5. Do you think there is an equal representation/power between municipalities in the ITI Association, or not? Please elaborate briefly.
6. Is the ITI strategy related to the policy documents (e.g. plans, strategies) of your Municipality? How?
7. Is the ITI strategy creating a connection between different policy sectors (e.g. transport, innovation, environment) or they are dealt separately?
8. Do you think your municipality will continue this cooperation after the end of the programming period 2014/20? Why?
9. Do you think the ITI can lead to the creation of a metropolitan administrative level in the Functional Urban Area?