

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN LOCAL SPATIAL POLICY ON THE EXAMPLE OF POLAND

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***Abstract:** The purpose of the paper is to determine the extent, to which environmental issues are taken into account in local spatial development plans in Poland and to what extent their approach can be linked to the concept of integrated development planning. The paper analyzes the content of local spatial policy tools - local spatial development plans in the scope related to environmental conditions. The extent to which the provisions (mutually diverse) constitute elements that can be associated with integrated development planning, was determined.*

**Key words:** environment, integrated planning, spatial policy

**JEL codes:** R11, R58

### **Introduction**

Integration of development policy remains a significant challenge in many European countries. The above problem also occurs in Poland. In the current legal and organizational framework, it is applicable primarily at the regional level in relation to selected areas. However, the full integration of planning at the local level remains a problem, especially in the context of spatial policy issues.

The paper addresses one of the important topics related to integrated development planning and occurring in local spatial planning, i.e. environmental issues. The purpose of the paper is to determine the extent, to which environmental issues are taken into account in local spatial development plans in Poland (key spatial policy tools) and to what extent their approach can be linked to the concept of integrated development planning.

### **Integrated development planning and the spatial management system in Poland**

One of the foundations of ever-increasing trends towards integrated planning is the re-orientation of European Union policy, according to which the territorial approach (idea place - based policy) has been increasingly emphasized for several years. In this context, it is about taking into account various development conditions (Camagni, 2011).

Integrated development planning is fully associated with the above objectives. It is supposed to be reduced to "holistic" activities, which are to combine various dimensions and development contexts. It is also about balancing the links between the economic, social and environmental subsystem (Nowakowska, 2012; Tolle, 2014). The implementation of integrated development

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planning is expected to contribute to the implementation of various goals, including, among others, limiting the existing disadvantages in the spatial management system (Morphet, 2009; Vogelij, 2010). Linking (e.g. in specific development documents) various issues, making them mutually dependent, should contribute to the elimination of current discrepancies in this respect (which also includes, as a consequence, the sphere of discrepancies between individual public policies). Functional areas also occupy a special place in this context (which, moreover, is a direct confirmation of the territorialization of development policy - (Nowakowska, 2017). These areas can be distinguished based on diverse features connecting individual territories, including environmental features.

Literature on the subject noticed the need to integrate development processes also in the local sphere and in relation to the spatial management system. The topic of a broader integration of local spatial policy with other policies has been discussed in detail, among others, by Markowski and Drzazga (2015). It was indicated there that integrated planning should be understood as a holistic process of setting the goals and building paths to reach the goals set in this process, taking into account the most important correlations between the most important elements of the controlled system. Integrated plans must be (in addition to other features previously mentioned related to integrated planning) flexible. Only such a one will ensure a broader approach to the objectives and adaptation to economic challenges. In the current organizational framework, most of these guidelines are not implemented (Markowski, 2013). One can only talk about some elements of integrated planning in the spatial management system. However, they do not integrate planning so much, but limit the collision of individual policies. T. Kudłacz also addressed the indicated topic, highlighting opportunities and barriers to the integration of development planning. Among the latter, he mentioned, among others, objective conflict between current development goals and long-term ones (Kudłacz, 2015). It seems important, as pointed out by P. Mickiewicz, to draw attention to issues related to space management, which can be perceived at various levels (regional or local). Certainly, the local (municipal) perspective seems to be the most important here. It is at this level that the widest possible impact on the development of specific areas and the restrictions associated with their use, including environmental restrictions, can be exerted (Mickiewicz, 2015).

However, specific elements included in local spatial policy tools still need to be clarified, limiting the potential collision of various policies and being at least to a limited extent, elements of future integrated planning. This also applies to the environmental dimension.

### **Environmental protection in local spatial policy**

In the literature on the subject (as already indicated), there is no doubt that elements of mandatory consideration as part of integrated planning are also issues related to environmental protection (Żak-Skwierczyńska 2018). The subject literature has repeatedly highlighted the role of environmental values in the spatial sphere. Nevertheless, in literature, environmental issues are perceived separately on many levels (Jaźwiński, 2010). Hence the necessity (and justification) to also include this sphere in the issues of integrated planning. Planning solutions are located among many different instruments of environmental management (Poskrobko and Poskrobko 2012, Miller, Roo 2016). From the perspective of spatial conditions, environmental issues are important for various reasons and in different planes. These natural areas play a significant role in shaping the suburban space (Łaguna, 2009; Honachefsky, 2019), and as a consequence, in protecting the values of areas related to spatial order. Mierzejewska and Wdowicka (2018) explicitly state that spatial management can be understood as a conflict-free, rational use of the natural environment. This statement will be detailed on various levels. One of the most interesting research is presented by Szulczewska (2018), addressing the issues of green infrastructure and its role in the urban structure.

The research shows that environmental issues are included in local spatial policy tools. From the formal side, it can be added that this is a requirement of legal regulations in the field of spatial planning and development. However, in the dimension related to the public policy perspective, a number of problems can be noted, including:

- no guarantee that environmental issues included in spatial policy tools will be implemented;
- lack of precision when considering the environmental issues in spatial policy (Nowak 2013).

It can also be pointed out that the authorities of individual (even structurally similar) communes conduct a diversified spatial policy. This diversity also occurs in the group of communes with significant environmental values (Nowak and Kiepas-Kokot, 2014). In this context, it should be agreed with Baran-Zgłobicka (2017) that strategic and spatial planning can be an effective instrument for managing the environmental resources and shaping the spatial order (as well as creating sustainable development), but only with a full and current diagnosis of natural environment and its individual resources.

On the other hand, as Mickiewicz P. and Nowak M. point out, it should be noted that there is a kind of dissonance between instruments of environmental protection and shaping the spatial policy. This can be expressed by provisions in decisions on environmental conditions for supra-local investments, which may affect (also negatively) the shaping of space in the commune, which may also force actions contrary to the spatial policy of the commune (Mickiewicz and Nowak 2018). This applies especially to line investments that extend beyond a single commune (Mickiewicz and Nowak, 2015). Of course, it should be noted that decisions on environmental conditions are not an instrument of spatial policy (they are an instrument of environmental management), but their role in the context of shaping the space seems to be very important (Mickiewicz et al. 2011).

Therefore, (Giedych, 2018), the need to coordinate activities in the field of environmental protection and spatial planning (understood both in the sphere of adaptation of specific documents as well as specific activities of organs, and even the terminology itself), postulated in the literature, is significantly associated with the need for integrated development planning. P. Mickiewicz and M. Nowak also point to the need for such action based on conducted research in the field of relations between the development of housing investments and degree of land cover with forms of nature protection, and call for such a change in the spatial management system, in which spatial, social, environmental and economic planning would be integrated (Mickiewicz, Nowak 2019).

## **Results**

For the purposes of this paper, the provisions of key spatial policy tools on a local scale were verified, i.e. local spatial development plans from the perspective of elements integrating development planning in an environmental perspective. In this context, the following elements were distinguished:

- attempts to holistically address these issues;
- planning flexibility.

General provisions were also distinguished (which do not cause any significant effects from a formal and legal perspective) and references in local spatial development plans to other acts (which should also be treated as preventing disintegration of planning in the analyzed context).

Local spatial development plans adopted in the first half of 2019 in the communes of the Lesser Poland Voivodeship were selected for the study. This is justified by the following reasons:

- local spatial development plans are key in the analyzed context. They are direct tools of spatial policy that directly affect the development of a given area;
- in the first half of 2019, in connection with government work, a broader discussion took place in Poland about integrated development planning. Therefore, it can be assumed that this could also be more widely applied within local spatial policies;
- the Lesser Poland Voivodeship contains diverse areas. A significant part of these areas is valuable in terms of environment and nature (which is confirmed by significant accumulation of diverse forms of nature protection in the voivodeship). In a view of the above, it can be assumed that its selection ensures that the broader perspective of the problem is taken into account.

In the indicated period, 109 local spatial development plans were adopted in the voivodeship. All of them were analyzed, identifying extensive regulations on environmental protection and nature in forty-one. They are the subject of research.

First of all, one should pay attention to general provisions and directly referring to other acts. This should be put in the following context:

- general provisions may constitute (but only in combination with other provisions) a reliable basis for the integration of the spatial and environmental sphere;
- in the same context, one should understand the appointment of other acts - not so much as introducing new rules, but counteracting potential disintegration of policies.

Table 1.

**General provisions and references to other environmental and natural acts in local spatial development plans**

<b>General provisions</b>	<b>References to other acts</b>
Indicating the obligation to “maintain high standards of the natural environment, in particular the purity of waters, atmospheric air, soils”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reference to acts on the forms of nature protection (e.g. protected landscape area), an indication that the arrangements contained therein are binding;</li> <li>- reference to bans contained in environmental and natural laws, e.g. bans on species protection;</li> <li>- prohibition of negative impact on the Natura 2000 site and the environment - reproduction of the assessment act.</li> </ul>

Source: own study

Table no 1 shows that the elements of local spatial development plans identified in the analyzed context only to a small extent counteract the disintegration of policies, reproducing only earlier approaches. In the context of disintegration policies, this obviously has some significance, even if related to the broader information role of local plans. These provisions, despite their limited role from a legal perspective, may all the more determine the public authorities to include issues mentioned in spatial policy more broadly. They can also be the basis and justification for the interpretation of other planning provisions (which could already be more closely related to integrated development planning). The catalog of the latter is included in the Table no 2.

Table 2.

**Local plan provisions promoting a holistic environmental approach**

Types of provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- development of plots requires the implementation of greenery, in particular native species;</li> <li>- reference to ecological corridors;</li> <li>- obligation to protect biodiversity, including flora and fauna, by building or compacting the existing greenery in accordance with local ecosystems;</li> <li>- order to shape plant compositions adapted to local ecosystems by arranging greenery composed only from native species of flora and restoring damaged ecological connections after completion of investment activities and creating new ecological culverts in the development of real estate;</li> <li>- protection of climatic conditions by using building systems in such a way to preserve the natural ventilation conditions of the area;</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- ban on the implementation of the investment, the onerousness of which would extend beyond the land border or the ownership border of the entity conducting the activity, on which the project will be implemented;</li><li>- all technological solutions should be applied to limit the nuisance associated with the planned development;</li><li>- introduction of pro-ecological, energy-saving, water-saving and low-waste technologies that do not deteriorate applicable environmental quality standards;</li><li>- in the case of projects with a function that is burdensome for the environment, a requirement to establish new, non-conflicting methods of their functioning</li><li>- order to develop undeveloped green areas;</li><li>- order to protect soil during construction work against degradation or contamination.</li></ul>
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Source: own study

Based on the results included in Table no 2, it can be concluded that there are provisions in the studied local spatial development plans to a large extent at least stopping the disintegration of development policy in the spatial and environmental sphere. Out of forty-one local plans containing more extensive environmental provisions, twenty contain provisions (categorized above) counteracting the disintegration of the above-mentioned policies. First attention, however, should be paid to factors blocking the wider effectiveness of the said provisions (which happens regardless of good intentions of the communal authorities). It is connected with:

- the framework of local spatial development plans provided for in the act on spatial planning and development. If they are exceeded, they violate the legal interest of e.g. property owners, will be tantamount to challenging these plans before administrative courts;
- constituting a consequence of the above, a certain generality of the provisions indicated; their overly specific wording in isolation from the statutory basis, will be counterproductive.

Thus, it can be pointed out that the restrictions already mentioned in the current system delay the perspective and possibility of broader integration of individual policies. However, as indicated above, the subject of the paper is primarily the search for elements of integrated policies, and not holistic integration (which for the reasons presented above does not occur). Considering the above, it can be pointed out that provisions contained in Table no 2 boil down to:

- greenery protection;
- implementation of the concept of ecological corridors (appearing in regulations and widely included in literature and studies, but having a limited role in the spatial management system, which should be treated as an oversight);
- providing guidelines for trees;
- determining the requirements for investors during the development of buildings;
- determining the permissible ranges of environmental nuisance of the implemented investment on neighboring plots;
- establishing desired ecological solutions.

All issues identified should be assessed as fully matching the concept of integrated development. On one hand, they exceed the scope of spatial planning alone and can be perfectly

linked to activities and concepts related to environmental protection. They cover both detailed issues and references to broader problems and issues (ecological corridors).

### **Conclusion**

The research confirms that at least some of the communes in Poland are attempting to broadly implement elements of integrated development planning at the local spatial planning level. In this context, various areas should be pointed out. From a substantive perspective, at least some communes correctly identify the key issues. Therefore, in the situation of expanded possibilities of integration of development, there would probably be no major problem in developing the indicated threads under relevant acts. However, the formal sphere remains a problem. Properly integrated issues cannot currently be included in spatial policy tools in a way that guarantees their enforcement. Therefore, these standards often remain dead and not applied (which is an expression of a broader problem of the public authorities inefficiency). However, in some (rather minority) cases, they may still provide a certain basis for forcing participants in the spatial management system to take certain actions. However, this still remains too small, which confirms the validity of theses formulated on the need for broader integration of development policies.

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