

TOWARD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENTS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE IN THE FIELD

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Abstract: Integrated territorial investments represent the latest instrument of the cohesion policy introduced to solve the local problems, especially in urban and functional urban areas. The main objective of this article is to explore the content of research in the field of integrated territorial investments. In this regard, a review of the literature was carried out in order to collect, review, and synthesize 49 papers related to this concept published during 2014-2022. The publications were identified by using the selected keywords in the title or in the abstract, and the search was done in several databases (ISI Web of Science/Clarivate Analytics, Scopus, Sage, Springer, ScienceDirect, Emerald, JSTOR, ProQuest) set for the field of administrative sciences in accordance with the Romanian legislation in force. The overview of the literature revealed integrated territorial investments to be a promising new area of research, especially since the implementation of the mechanism continues in the programming period 2021-2027.

Keywords: integrated approach, integrated territorial strategy, database search, literature analysis

JEL Classification: H54, R42, R53.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The provisions of the cohesion policy for the programming period 2014-2020 provided EU states with new opportunities as regards urban development, especially by using integrated territorial investments (ITI). ITI are particularly important in achieving the objective of a smart, sustainable, and inclusive Europe mentioned in the Europe 2020 strategy. In this context, the ITI mechanism was introduced while considering it an essential tool for the implementation of such strategies. Furthermore, it is an effective instrument of cohesion policy, while encouraging the focus on strategic and integrated dimensions, as well as giving a more targeted direction of structural funds. ITI becomes the solution for obtaining funding from distinct priority axes of one or more operational programs with the aim of implementing an integrated strategy for a certain territory. Therefore, the mechanism cannot be used adequately if the targeted area does not have an integrated intersectoral territorial strategy. The management and implementation of ITI operations falls within the competence of the authority managing the operational program, but intermediate bodies, territorial development bodies and NGOs can also be established in this regard. The way of managing this mechanism is different from one country to another, depending on the existing administrative components (Europa.eu, 2014).

The mechanism can be seen as a continuation of the activities aimed at an integrated approach carried out by the European Community in the 70s and 80s of the last century, leading to the introduction of the urban element

in the cohesion policy. Its introduction is based on three regulations adopted by the European Parliament and the EU Council in 2013 (Kociuba, 2018).

The ITI tool allows cities and their functional areas to access funds through the operational programs, as well as to develop and implement projects in accordance to their needs and priorities. Furthermore, the emphasis is placed on the cooperation of local administrations to solve problems by concluding institutionalized partnerships, thus contributing to unlocking the potential at the local level (Wyrwa et al., 2017).

ITI provides concrete solutions to the specific needs of the territories, contributing to increasing their attractiveness and the efficiency of public intervention. Due to its important role in eliminating inter-regional development imbalances, this instrument is also used in the new programming period 2021-2027, while it is included in the policy objective "a Europe closer to citizens", which is achieved by promoting sustainable and integrated development of all territories, as well as local initiatives (Buda, 2019).

2. KEY ASPECTS REGARDING INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENTS

The most important characteristics of ITI refer to the following (Ferry, 2019):

- a clearly established territory and a strategy aimed at integrated territorial development;

The implementation of ITI for developing the targeted area is conditioned by the elaboration of an integrated development strategy. In general, the ITI mechanism is applicable in geographical areas with certain characteristics, such as urban neighbourhoods, metropolitan areas, urban-rural, sub-regional or even interregional zones. In addition to these, independent geographical units enjoying similar characteristics within a region could benefit from this tool (van der Zwet, 2014).

It is not necessary that ITI cover all the territory within an administrative unit, but its use involves territorial cooperation at the European level. Moreover, any intermediate entity dealing with the implementation of this mechanism should be legally registered and designated by public authorities or public institutions belonging to at least two countries or from an EGTC (European Territorial Cooperation Group) (Europa.eu, 2014).

- several actions needing to be implemented

ITI activities are aimed at fulfilling the thematic objectives established within the relevant priority axes belonging to a program/operational programs, as well as at supporting the objectives mentioned in the territorial strategy. The financing comes from several European funds, without it being mandatory to use all the categories of funds. Moreover, the ITI instrument cannot influence the adoption of decisions regarding the investments made (Georgakopoulou, 2018).

There is also the possibility to finance additional actions intended for the same targeted area by resorting to the priority axes of an operational program/operational programs that are not involved in ITI financing. In fact, several investments contributing directly to developing the targeted geographic area may not be implemented by using ITI because there is no legal obligation in this regard. However, the recommendation is that the investments made should align with the objectives of the integrated territorial development strategy (Ferry, 2019).

- governance systems for managing ITI

The responsibility for managing the ITI mechanism falls to the authority involved in managing the operational program. However, the latter could nominate intermediate bodies at the local or territorial level or even non-governmental entities in order to carry out some activities or all activities regarding the management and implementation of ITI. This situation is different depending on the administrative systems of the state in question or of the region. Certainly, if the ITI mechanism aims at integrated actions to ensure sustainable urban development, at least the activities related to selecting the operation should be the responsibility of the urban authorities (Europa. Eu, 2014).

In the previous programming period 2014-2020, 19 EU member states implemented the ITI mechanism. However, its use has been different from one state to another, depending on funding possibilities, geographic

zones, and thematic areas. In 14 countries, the instrument was implemented in order to ensure sustainable development at the urban level (Ladaru and Marin, 2016). Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia were interested in implementing ITI in functional urban areas, while Great Britain, Belgium, and Germany focused on specific regions. There were also differences between states regarding the number of territories allocated to ITI. Thus, in countries such as Romania, the implementation was valid only for one area, namely the Danube Delta (Profiroiu et al., 2021).

The decision to use this mechanism varies depending on the country. In Poland and the Czech Republic the decision was taken by the government at the central level, while in other countries the ITI implementation was done under the pressure of the municipalities. However, the efficient use of ITI requires increasing the institutional capacity of local authorities, as well as greater involvement of citizens (van der Zwet et al., 2017).

In the programming period 2014-2020, ITI received funds worth 13.8 billion euros, with Poland enjoying the largest amount of money, namely EUR 3.8 billion. In some countries, the funds came from 5 sources (Romania), while in others from three sources (Spain and the Czech Republic) (Ladaru and Marin, 2016; Marin, 2017).

ITI provides flexibility in its use and does not require fulfilling many conditions by the EU member states involved, which makes it possible to apply it in several fields. Moreover, it contributes substantially to the development of local policies through the incentives offered (Szokolai, 2012; Ferry et al., 2018). However, there are also negative aspects related to this instrument, which was criticized due to the lack of guidelines regarding its use that should have been made available by the European Commission. This situation has generated several difficulties in developing guidelines to help the actors involved in its implementation (van der Zwet et al., 2014).

Other problems are related to the excessive regulation that could affect the use of this tool while making its implementation difficult, as well as the lack of management capacity of local actors and management authorities that could jeopardize the approval period of projects submitted for accessing the funds (Ferry et al., 2018).

In this context, an European working group was created to provide explanations regarding the ITI implementation, taking into account the specificities of each member state. Furthermore, the European Commission decided to create a guide to facilitate the understanding of the use of this tool by authorities within the territories involved (CEC, 2014).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the research is to determine the interest in the area of scientific research in the field of integrated territorial investments and to explain its evolution starting from the publication of the first paper to the most recently published one. In this regard, in order to evaluate the level of scientific interest in the field and to determine its evolution, an analysis of the papers published on this topic was carried out.

In order to gain a comprehensive analysis of the literature, the search used the keywords "*integrated territorial investment/s*" that were found either in the title or in the abstract. The data for this study were collected from both academic databases with registered access (ISI Web of science/Clarivate Analytics, Scopus, Sage, Springer, ScienceDirect, Emerald, JSTOR, and ProQuest) and from open access databases (CEEOL, DOAJ, RePEc). The research was carried out in most databases set for the field of administrative sciences in accordance with the Romanian legislation in force. The reason for using several databases was to obtain as much information as possible. Therefore, the relevant articles generating an overall understanding of the field of integrated territorial investment have been identified.

A synthesis of the results was given in Tables 1 and 2 presented below:

- The list of papers from databases with registered access contains 41 articles, 1 review, 19 proceedings papers, and 5 book chapters.
- The list of papers from open access databases includes 31 articles and 6 proceedings papers.

Table 1. The study of integrated territorial investments in the literature - databases accessed within the Anelis Plus project

Database	Period	Relevant publications	Key word
Clarivate (Web of Science)	1975-2022	10 articles, 10 proceedings papers, 1 book chapter	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments
Emerald	1898-2022	-	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments
JSTOR	1910-2022	2 articles	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments
ProQuest	1930-2022	14 articles, 3 proceedings papers	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments
Sage	1847-2022	-	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments
Science Direct	1925-2022	1 article	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments
Scopus, Elsevier	1971-2022	13 articles, 1 review, 4 proceedings papers, 3 book chapters	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments
Springer	1967-2022	1 article, 2 proceedings paper, 1 book chapter	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments

Table 2. The study of integrated territorial investments in the literature - open access databases

Database	Period	Relevant publications	Key word
CEEOL	1950-2022	11 articles	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments
DOAJ	-	12 articles, 1 proceedings paper	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments
RePEc	-	8 articles, 5 proceedings papers	Integrated Territorial Investment/Investments

The main objective of the paper is to identify the relevant articles to gain an overall understanding of the field of the integrated territorial investments. To achieve this objective, two research questions have been addressed:

1: How important is the research field as regards the following elements: number of articles, citations, distribution around journals and countries, distribution per year, classification of journals, collaboration in the field of research between specialists?

2: What are the main aspects emerging from the literature analysis regarding the ITI tool?

4. RESULTS

The total data-set, after the elimination of duplicates, included 49 publications: 32 articles, 1 review, 13 proceedings papers, and 3 book chapters. All the papers selected for the analysis are published during 2014- 2022 and focus on studying the implementation of the integrated territorial investment mechanism. 43 articles are written in English, 4 articles (Kozak, 2016; Kociuba, 2017; Kostalova and Bednarikova, 2019; Zawora and Kowalska, 2021) are written in Polish, while the other two are in French (Lamenie, 2019, Geppert and Affaticati, 2020).

Table 3. The list of selected articles

No.	Articles	Document type	C1	C2	D	E	J	P	R	S1	S2	S3	S4	Country (region)	Citations		
															Web of Science	Scopus	Google Scholar
	Key words: integrated territorial investment/investments																
1.	Buhociu F.M., 2014	Proceedings paper												Romania (Tulcea county)	0	-	1
2.	Szafrank E., 2014	Article												Poland	-	-	2
3.	Tomanek R., 2014	Proceedings paper												Poland (Upper Silesia)	3	1	4
4.	Van der Zwet A., 2014													Belgium (Limburg) and Finland (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Oulu, Tampere and Turku)	-	-	2
5.	Caraman M., 2015	Proceedings paper												Romania (Danube Delta)	-	-	0
6.	Gaman F., Luca O., Burduja S.I., Aldea M., Iacoboaia C., Petrescu F., Șercăianu M., 2015	Proceedings paper												Romania (Danube Delta)	-	-	8
7.	Kozak M.W., 2016	Article												Poland	-	4	14
8.	Ladaru G.R. and Marin F., 2016	Proceedings paper												Romania (Danube Delta)	-	-	3
9.	Marin F., 2016	Proceedings paper												Romania	0	0	0
10.	Panaiteșcu M. and Trandafir M., 2016	Article												Romania (Danube Delta)	-	-	1
11.	Tomanek R., 2016	Proceedings paper												Poland (Upper Silesia)	2	0	1
12.	Tosics I., 2016	Book chapter												Not specified	-	9	33
13.	Glinka K., 2017	Article												Poland (Lower Silesia: Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Legnica and Jelenia Góra)	6	-	15
14.	Isola F., Leone F., Pira C., 2017	Article												Italy (Sardinia)	5	6	11
15.	Kaczmarek T. and Kociuba D., 2017	Article												Poland (Poznań and Lublin)	11	12	27

No.	Articles	Document type	C1	C2	D	E	J	P	R	S1	S2	S3	S4	Country (region)	Citations		
															Web of Science	Scopus	Google Scholar
16.	Kamrowska-Zaluska D. and Obracht-Prondzynska H., 2017	Book chapter												Poland	1	1	12
17.	Katsavounidou G., 2017	Article												Greece (Region of Central Macedonia)	1	-	2
18.	Kociuba D., 2017	Article												Poland	-	4	17
19.	Kowalska I., 2017	Article												Poland (Kalisz-Ostrów)	-	-	4
20.	Krukowska J. and Lackowska M., 2017	Article												Poland	12	-	33
21.	Marin F., 2017	Article												Romania (Tulcea county)	0	0	0
22.	Wyrwa J., Barska A., Jędrzejczak-Gas J., 2017	Article												Poland	-	2	3
23.	Antonopoulos E., 2018	Article												Greece (Patras)	-	-	5
24.	Chrisidu-Budnik A., 2018	Book chapter												Not specified	-	0	0
25.	Feřtřova M., 2018	Article												The Czech Republic (Brno metropolitan area)	-	-	2
26.	Ferry M. and Borkowska-Waszak S., 2018	Article												Poland (Katowice and Lublin)	-	-	12
27.	Florowska L., Bryt-Nitarska I., 2018	Proceedings paper												Poland (Upper Silesian Coal Basin)	-	3	4
28.	Garcia-Ayllon S., 2018	Article												Spain (Mar Menor)	22	24	37
29.	Havlik V., 2018	Article												The Czech Republic and Slovakia	7	7	11
30.	Kociuba D., 2018	Article												Poland	4	5	18
31.	Miller S. and van der Zwet A., 2018	Article												U.K. (London and Cornwall)	-	-	3
32.	Delitheou V. and Georgakopoulou S., 2019	Article												Greece (Piraeus municipality)	-	3	5
33.	Kogut-Jaworska M., 2019	Proceedings paper												Poland	0	-	0
34.	Kostalova J. and Bednarikova M., 2019	Proceedings paper												The Czech Republic	0	-	1

No.	Articles	Document type	C1	C2	D	E	J	P	R	S1	S2	S3	S4	Country (region)	Citations		
															Web of Science	Scopus	Google Scholar
35.	Lamenie B., 2019	Article												France (Île-de-France)	-	1	1
36.	Noworól A., 2019	Article												Poland (Kraków)	-	-	0
37.	Pietrowski W., 2019	Article												Poland (Kielce)	-	-	2
38.	Profiroiu C.M. and Caraman M., 2019	Proceedings paper												Romania and the Czech Republic	0	-	0
39.	Anghelută L.D., and Stanciu S., 2020	Article												Romania (Danube Delta)	-	-	0
40.	Busłowska A., 2020	Article												Poland (Białystok)	-	-	1
41.	Dumitrache (Serbanescu) A.M., Oprisan O., Condrea E., 2020	Proceedings paper												Romania (Danube Delta)	-	-	0
42.	Geppert A. and Affaticati C., 2020	Review												France (Île-de-France)	-	0	0
43.	Iharos B. and Careva K., 2020	Article												Croatia	0	-	0
44.	Kogut-Jaworska M. and Zawora J., 2020	Proceedings paper												Poland	0	-	0
45.	Truskolaski T., 2020	Article												Poland (Białystok)	-	-	3
46.	Katuric I. and Simov S., 2021	Article												Croatia (Zagreb and Zadar)	0	-	0
47.	Profiroiu A.G., Nastacă C.C., Caraman (Pufleanu) M., 2021	Article												Romania (Danube Delta)	1	1	0
48.	Zawora J. and Kowalska I., 2021	Article												Poland	-	-	0
49.	Păceșilă M., Colesca S.E., Popescu R.I., Burcea S.G., 2022	Article												Romania	-	0	0
Total: 454															75	83	298

Legend: C1-CEEOL; C2-Clarivate Analytics (Web of science); D-DOAJ; E-Emerald; J-JSTOR; P-ProQuest; R-RePEc; S1-Sage; S2-ScienceDirect; S3-Scopus; S4-Springer.

The 32 papers (31 articles and 1 review) out of the total number of 49 selected publications are distributed in 25 different journals from various subject areas as follows in Table 4. The classification of the journals was carried out in accordance with the classification of the IISI Web of Science/Clarivate Analytics and Scopus databases. The journals that are not indexed in the two aforementioned databases were included in a certain field depending on their title and the topic addressed.

According to the information presented in Table 4, certain journals fall into two or three areas. It is also interesting that the publications selected for the research come from numerous fields, which could be explained by the various investment priorities that this mechanism refers to.

As for journals' indexation, 12 journals are indexed in one database, while the other 13 journals are indexed in two or more databases, which ensures them a greater visibility among the scientific community. The journals with the highest visibility are *Quaestiones Geographicae*, as well as *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management* because they are indexed in 5 databases.

The main journal in the field is *European Structural and Investment Funds Journal* (5 articles) followed by *Studia Regionalne i Lokalne*, *Quaestiones Geographicae* and *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management* (2 articles each). The first two journals mentioned above are included in one subject area, namely general social sciences, while the third is included in two subject areas, namely geography as well as general earth and planetary sciences, and the last is included both in the field of geography and urban studies. Each of the other 22 journals has published one article on the topic showing that the field of study is in line with the aim of many journals.

Table 4. Subject area of journals containing the papers taken into account in the research

No.	Subject area	Journals
1.	Architecture (1 journal)	<i>Prostor</i>
2.	Business (1 journal)	<i>Quality-Access to Success</i>
3.	Economics (5 journals)	<i>Economics and Applied Informatics; Optimum. Economic Studies; Regional Studies, Regional Science; Economic and Environmental Studies; Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny</i>
4.	Environmental studies (2 journals)	<i>European Planning Studies; Economic and Environmental Studies</i>
5.	General Earth and Planetary Sciences (2 journals)	<i>Quaestiones Geographicae; Belgeo. Revue Belge de Geographie</i>
6.	General social sciences (6 journals)	<i>Studia Regionalne i Lokalne; Economic and Regional Studies/Studia Ekonomiczne i Regionalne; Journal of Danubian Studies and Research; European Structural and Investment Funds Journal; Studia Miejskie; European Research Studies</i>
7.	Geography (8 journals)	<i>Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management; Geocarrefour; European Planning Studies; Regional Studies, Regional Science; European Spatial Research and Policy; Quaestiones Geographicae; Raumforschung und Raumordnung; Belgeo. Revue Belge de Geographie</i>
8.	Management (3 journals)	<i>Ocean & Coastal Management; Quality-Access to Success; Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences</i>
9.	Oceanography (1 journal)	<i>Ocean & Coastal Management</i>
10.	Public administration (2 journals)	<i>Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences; Public Policy and Administration</i>
11.	Political science (1 journal)	<i>Public Policy and Administration</i>
12.	Sociology (1 journal)	<i>Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny</i>
13.	Transportation Science & Technology (1 journal)	<i>Scientific Journal of Silesian University of Technology-Series Transport</i>
14.	Urban Studies (4 journals)	<i>Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management; Geocarrefour; European Planning Studies; Tema - Journal of Land Use Mobility and Environment;</i>

All the papers generated by the database search are published during 2014-2022. The publications are recent because the ITI mechanism is a new financial instrument introduced by the European Commission and implemented in 19 EU member states for the 2014-2020 programming period in order to stimulate integrated territorial development (Profiroiu et al., 2021). Regarding the number of publications, the most important year is 2017 (10 papers), followed by 2018 (9 papers) as well as 2019 and 2020 (7 papers each) and 2016 (6 papers). As we approach the end of the multiannual financial framework 2014-2020, the number of papers decreases. Thus, a single paper was published in 2022 which analyzed the implementation of ITI in Romania. Moreover, in this country the use of this mechanism will continue in the programming period 2021-2027, not only for the Danube Delta area, but also for other areas.

Table 5. The distribution of papers per year

No.	Year	Total number of articles	Type of papers
1.	2014	4	2 article, 2 proceedings papers
2.	2015	2	2 proceedings papers
3.	2016	6	2 articles, 3 proceedings papers, 1 book chapter
4.	2017	10	9 articles, 1 book chapter
5.	2018	9	7 articles, 1 proceedings paper, 1 book chapter
6.	2019	7	4 articles, 3 proceedings papers
7.	2020	7	4 articles, 1 review, 2 proceedings papers
8.	2021	3	3 articles
9.	2022	1	1 article
Total 2014 - 2022			49

As for the countries where ITI implementation is analyzed, 12 countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Croatia, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and the U.K.) are included in the sample. Most research is done in Poland (21 articles) and Romania (12 articles). The ITI implementation in the Czech Republic is found in 4 articles, in Greece in 3 articles, while France and Croatia are analyzed in 2 articles each. As regards Belgium, Finland, Italy, Spain, and the U.K., there is a single article dedicated to each of them.

Except for a few articles comparatively analyzing the ITI implementation in Romania and another country or focusing on analyzing the territorial dimension of integrated investments, as well as the financial capacity of Tulcea County, all other papers selected for the research examine the ITI implementation in the Danube Delta area for which this instrument was created during 2014-2020. The articles dedicated to the other countries focus on analyzing several ITI territories depending on the areas or regions where the mechanism is implemented.

When analyzing the level of scientific interest in the field, it is important to take into account the citations received by the articles selected for the research. The analysis of citations is useful in evaluating the academic impact of a paper. Regarding the citations of the articles under review, most citations were recorded in Google Scholar (298), which is almost 4 times greater than in Scopus (75) and more than 3.5 times greater than in Web of Science/Clarivate Analytics. A possible explanation of this situation is that 28 publications out of 49 are not indexed in Web of Science Clarivate Analytics, while 28 publications out of 49 are not indexed in Scopus. Moreover, many of the citations in Google Scholar also come from other sources such as websites, reports, doctoral theses, etc. Only one article out of the three published in 2021 received few citations because the analysis is carried out until mid-November 2022 and not enough time has passed to receive more citations. This situation is also valid for the article published in November 2022 which has no citation.

Considering that the ITI mechanism targets many countries and areas in the EU and not just a certain country or area, a collaboration in the field of research between specialists, researchers, professors from academic institutions or from the private environment should be developed (Pătărlăgeanu et al., 2020). The collaboration between the socio-professional categories aforementioned is essential for highlighting the implementation of this mechanism from multiple perspectives, especially since there are specific peculiarities regarding its application depending on the country or area.

In this regard, an analysis of the authors of the papers selected for research was carried out by taking into account the organization to which they belong. 26 publications out of 49 have been eliminated from the analysis because they have a single author each. Even if 16 publications have two or more authors, they come from the same organization; that is why they were not seen as relevant. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that only 7 papers with two or three authors coming from different universities or organizations within the same country should be considered:

- *Dumitrache (Serbanescu) et al., 2020: Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania versus University Ovidius from Constanta, Constanta, Romania;*
- *Gaman et al., 2015: Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, Department of Urban Engineering and Regional Development, Bucharest, Romania versus C.A.E.S.A.R. Foundation, Romania;*
- *Geppert and Affaticati, 2020: Sorbonne Université, Paris, France versus Direction des Affaires Européennes, Région Île-de-France, France;*
- *Kaczmarek and Kociuba, 2017: Adam Mickiewicz University, Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management, Poznań, Poland versus Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Department of Spatial Policy and Planning, Lublin, Poland;*
- *Kogut-Jaworska and Zawora, 2020: University of Szczecin, Szczecin, Poland versus University of Rzeszow, Rzeszow, Poland;*
- *Miller and van der Zwet, 2018: Ecorys UK, Birmingham versus University of the West of Scotland, School of Media, Culture & Society and University of Strathclyde, European Policies Research Centre, Glasgow, U.K.;*
- *Zawora and Kowalska, 2021: Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Warszawa, Poland versus University of Rzeszow, Rzeszów, Poland.*

When analyzing the literature in the field, the following aspects emerge:

- Emphasizing the usefulness of this cohesion policy tool. Although several difficulties appeared in its implementation in the member states, the mechanism contributed to developing the areas to which it was intended.
- Providing an overview of ITI implementation in different countries. ITI could become an important element of strategic planning while contributing to increasing cooperation between cities and nearby areas, as well as to improving governance capacity at the local level.
- Providing solutions to various local problems. Its implementation could be successfully achieved if the local authorities agree on their interests and improve their experience and operational capacity to conduct projects, to administer budget funds, and to access European funds.
- Presenting comparative analyses between countries or regions/territories within the same country regarding the ITI implementation. Several aspects related to the application of the mechanism are provided as well as recommendations resulting from the implementation experience.
- Highlighting the advantages and disadvantages generated by using this mechanism. On the one hand, an essential feature of this tool is the flexibility in its application, as well as the reduced number of conditions imposed on the member states while facilitating its contribution to the development of several fields. On the other hand, the limited scope of possible intervention due to the thematic objectives could be considered a challenge of ITI implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

This article provides an overview of ITI concept by pointing out the main findings identified in the literature. In order to understand the ITI tool, two research questions were set, while a review of the literature in the field

was used to answer these questions. The review included 48 papers published between 2014 and 2022 offering a clear view of the concept.

Several issues related to publications in the field, citations received, distribution of articles in scientific journals, classification of journals according to field of study, countries analyzed within the papers identified, distribution of publications by year, collaboration of specialists in the research field were highlighted and examined. Moreover, many elements resulting from using ITI in different countries were pointed out, such as contributing to developing different areas, promoting the cooperation of local actors, improving local governance capacity, improving local authorities' abilities to access European funds, etc.

The analysis of current publications on the ITI instrument could serve as a mental map which facilitates the knowledge of the field, while the effort could be overall useful both for the academic environment and for practitioners. Considering the novelty of this field of study, this article can be a starting point for new research that can later contribute to a better use of the tool.

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