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Title of the Paper

**Political-Administrative Interactions in Inter-Municipal Cooperation:
the Case of Integrated Territorial Investments in Poland**

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Abstract

Problem statement

This paper provides empirical insights into debates on inter-municipal cooperation in Europe. In particular, it draws attention to the interaction between political and administrative factors in implementing integrated economic development policies in functional urban areas that cut across municipal boundaries. The paper focuses on the case of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), a policy instrument introduced under European Union's Cohesion Policy (CP) for the period 2014-2020. One of the main motivations for ITI was the perceived fragmentation of CP funding. Evaluations of the policy have repeatedly noted how the strategic objectives of the policy have been undermined by competition and rivalry for funding, particularly at the local level where short-term political gains supersede longer-term strategic aims that are set out in programme documents to be implemented by programme authorities (Ferry, 2015; Kozak, 2016). A fundamental aim of ITI is to provide an incentive for municipalities to collaborate rather than compete for CP projects: an envelope of funding is set aside for integrated projects that cover functional urban areas. The paper assesses the extent to which this instrument overcomes the tensions and rivalries that exist between municipalities and, crucially, between different actors from political and administrative spheres.

Context

Researchers have acknowledged that public policies have recently become more politicised, and that political influence can create substantial obstacles to successful socio-economic development (Peters, 2013; Shepherd et al. 2014). They have noted these trends in particular in Central Eastern Europe (CEE) (Kopecký et al., 2016), where political influence can be exerted over public administrations which have comparatively limited institutional experience and capacity. CP seems to be an interesting case in this context, due to its substantial resources invested in CEE and consequent high political status. Numerous researchers have acknowledged political factors in CP implementation and effectiveness (i.e. (Dotti, 2016; Milio, 2014; Swianiewicz et al. 2010). Within that, most studies highlight the negative effects of political involvement, particularly on the distribution of resources (i.e. Bloom & Petrova, 2013; Bouda, Descikova, Fadrny, & Filipcova, 2013; Fazekas & Toth, 2016). This creates a fruitful area for research on intergovernmental collaboration: What are the formal and informal rules that govern collaboration between municipalities involved in integrated territorial development? How do political and administrative agendas interact in this? To what extent can an instrument such as ITI provide incentives to ensure that this interaction stimulates genuine collaboration and integrated development?

Scope and methodology

The purpose of the research is to explore the role of political factors in the process of inter-municipal cooperation, and to explain the key processes and mechanisms involved. The research aims to understand and present the process of collaboration from the perspective of local and regional actors, based on a constructivist-interpretivist approach. The main theoretical background is the Institutional Collective Action Framework (Feiock, 2013),

including its adaptation to the European context (Tavares, Feiock, 2017). Within this, the research analyses inter-municipal collaboration within ITI implementation, including the role of political actors in resolving key ICA dilemmas (e.g. dealing with particular collaboration risks, transactions costs and deciding on formal and informal mechanisms ensuring the achievement of common goals). The research takes the case of ITI implementation in two Polish regions. CP funding is an important source of investment in Polish regions and locales and ITI creates an external incentive for potential collective benefit. Based on 3 months of participatory observation, 45 expert interviews and qualitative content analysis of policy documents, the research identifies arenas at different stages of joint policy implementation where political and administrative rationales interact, and highlights the formal and informal rules that govern this.

Originality and contribution

The paper aims to contribute to the theoretical basis and methodological approaches of research on inter-municipal cooperation. It will test an innovative combination of methods to study political influence on inter-municipal cooperation and policy implementation, drawing on organizational ethnography. Exploring resource allocation decisions at the micro-level provides concrete insights into the challenges of inter-municipal collaboration: how the interplay of political and administrative factors and motivations can influence ICA dilemmas and explain the choice of particular policy instruments and legal forms of collaboration. The case of ITI in Poland is especially interesting in this context, as the instrument was imposed ‘from above’ by the EU and the Polish government, but with some flexibility for municipalities to decide the legal form and scope of collaboration. Consequently, there are various ITI models with different transaction costs, providing excellent material for comparative analysis. Moreover, ITI created an unusual situation where collaboration is imposed, but is also incentivised: it does not require municipalities to give up decision-making power nor individual resources, as it provides an opportunity to jointly apply for external, EU-funded projects. Assessing the responses of municipalities and their political and administrative actors to these rules and incentives for collaboration in the CEE context can inform the development of the ICA Framework.

Key words:

Collective Action, Inter-Municipal Collaboration, Metropolitan Governance, Politicization, Public Policy, Cohesion Policy, European Union

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Introduction

The relationship between institutions and economic development is a fundamental issue in economic policy debate. This includes current regional policy debate, prompted by disputes over the impact of regional development policies and the search for new factors or dynamics that can explain development patterns beyond traditional analysis of physical and human resource endowments, trade or technology transfers (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013). Institutionalist literature argues that the contribution of regional policy to economic development is conditional on specific institutional endowments, both ‘hard’ or ‘formal’ institutions (laws and regulations, rights etc.) and ‘soft’ or ‘informal’ institutions (norms, traditions, conventions, networks etc.). However, the role of institutions is not always and everywhere positive. Institutions can have a negative influence on regional development in a variety of ways. These include: excessive bureaucracy, institutional lock-in and rigidity hampering flexibility and responsiveness; duplication and fragmentation stimulating competition for resources; capture by elite actors and rent-seeking by particular interest groups; and, corruption (Pike, 2013).

These issues are apparent in current debates on the reform of Cohesion policy, the European Union’s regional policy instrument. Assessments of Cohesion policy achievements have identified inefficiencies stemming from institutional factors, including: limited coordination and cooperation among the public authorities at regional and local levels accessing Cohesion policy funds, mistrust between individuals or organisations, formal consultation rather than genuine engagement. In some EU contexts, including Central and Eastern Europe, politicisation of resource allocation decisions – selecting projects for their political value rather than strategic impact – has been identified as a potential cause of inefficiency, leading to fragmentation of development initiatives, rivalry for funding between local authorities etc. (Bachtler & Ferry, 2015). Against this background, integrated territorial investment (ITI) was one of the innovative elements of the 2013 reform of Cohesion policy. This recognised that new challenges (globalisation, climate change, energy security, social vulnerability and environmental vulnerability) required a more territorially specific and integrated mix of interventions in order to increase their impact and to exploit fully the development potential of different types of territories. A particular focus is placed on sustainable urban development (SUD), considered to be necessary through integrated strategies in order to strengthen the resilience of cities. SUD allocates an envelope of Cohesion policy funding for the implementation of integrated strategies that tackle the economic, environmental, climate, social and demographic challenges of urban areas. Implementation of the strategies requires a degree of delegation to local authorities covering functional urban areas and anticipates the creation or strengthening of inter-municipal cooperation in order to overcome issues related to politicisation, fragmentation and rivalry and produce genuinely integrated outcomes.

Assessment of this innovation is timely from theoretical and practitioner perspectives. On the one hand, it provides a valuable case to test current theories and conceptual models that assess the role of institutional factors in economic development. In particular, it presents the opportunity to apply the ICA framework in the European context, with a particular emphasis on how political factors that influence inter-municipal cooperation under Cohesion policy. On

the other hand, it offers insights into the impact of the SUD initiative as preparations accelerate for the new Cohesion policy financial framework after 2020.

The basic question addressed in the paper is how political factors affect inter-municipal collaboration and the joint implementation of policy? The paper analyses the process of collaboration within the ICA Framework, and investigates if there are any other political dimensions of this process that were not addressed before within the Framework. In so doing, the paper explores how the process of inter-municipal collaboration looks like from the micro-level perspective of civil actors involved in implementing a joint policy. Moreover, it explores in which particular policy arenas politicians and civil servants are engaged to address collective action problems. The empirical analysis provides insights into how particular elements of the ICA framework work in the Polish context, and which political aspects beyond the framework matter in solving ICA problems.

The paper argues that the ICA Framework can be a good lens for analysing inter-municipal collaboration happening under EU policy, and in the Polish context. Moreover, it shows that researchers have not fully captured the political factors in solving collective action problems. Crucially, it suggests new political dimensions of ICA Framework elements, and introduces new political factors in solving collective action dilemmas, which could be further analysed in the future research.

The paper is structured as following: first, it introduces the theoretical background of the paper. Second, it delineates the key methodological aspects of the study. Third, it presents results of the preliminary analysis of partial empirical material. Lastly, it discusses conclusions and suggests potential extensions of the ICA Framework.

1. Theoretical background

The paper explores the political factors in inter-municipal collaboration. In so doing it uses two strands of literature – the Institutional Collective Action Framework and the politicisation literature. This section will briefly introduce the background of the theoretical aspects that that will be used in the further analysis.

1.1 Political factors in the ICA Framework

The Institutional Collective Action Framework (Feiock, 2004, 2013) provides a bounded-rationality explanation of the collective action dilemmas arising during inter-municipal cooperation. An institutional collective action (ICA) is a collective effort in establishing a cooperative arrangement between government units (Feiock, 2004). Fragmentation of authority and responsibility produces ICA dilemmas, which are the problems that occur between collaborating entities. The Framework provides a conceptual system to investigate collective action problems among local government organisations, and suggests taxonomy of mechanisms mitigating the dilemmas. Its basic elements are visualised in the Figure 1.

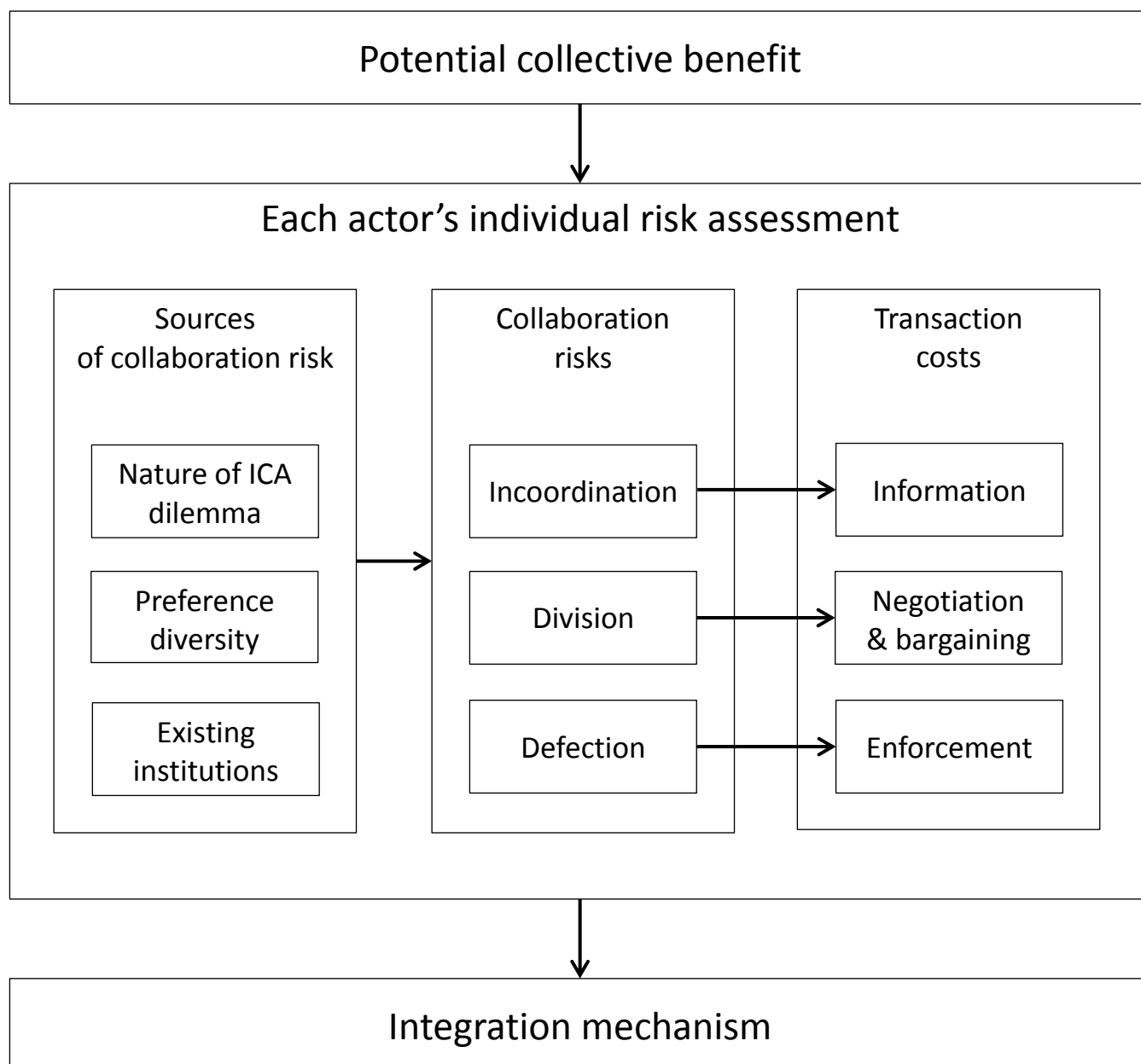


Figure 1 The Institutional Collective Action Framework. Source: own elaboration on the basis of Feiock, 2013

Empirical applications in Europe

The ICA Framework has been applied in multiple studies in order to examine the role of specific elements of the framework in explaining the intensity of collaboration between particular municipalities and the lack of such processes in others. A substantial majority of these studies have been conducted in the USA, and some of them in Asia. However, there are fewer examples of studies using the ICA Framework to analyse inter-municipal collaboration in European countries, limited to: Italy (Percoco, 2016), France (Boschet & Rambonilaza, 2018), Sweden (Johansson, Niklasson, & Persson, 2015) and Norway (Pierre, 2011). The small number of studies applying the framework in the European context is important as researchers have acknowledged substantial differences between the character of inter-local collaboration between the US and Europe. For example, some highlight that in Europe

collaboration often has the form of a new inter-local authority, while in the US it is more likely to happen through informal agreements. This influences the scope of power, which is then delegated to the higher level authority, and can discourage local actors from engaging in collective initiatives. They also point out that, in comparison to the US, municipalities in European countries have low levels of fiscal authority and less autonomy in deciding how to deliver services. This can also limit the scope of potential collaboration (Hawkins, p. 756). However, this does not apply to Poland, which has a high level of decentralisation and relatively autonomous regional and local authorities in terms of fiscal and task prerogatives.

Considering the differences of the local government systems and contexts, it is important to highlight that the ICA Framework has been recently extended to the European context. Tavarez and Feiock (2017) have proposed how it can be used to analyse mechanisms for solving collective action dilemmas during inter-municipal cooperation in various European countries. They have summarised the current literature on collaboration at supra-municipal level, and suggested a new collection of integration mechanisms, typically occurring in the European context. These European mechanisms mitigating collective action dilemmas are set out, following the original matrix of the Framework (see Figure 1).

Enforcement method Scope of collaboration	Embeddedness	Contracts	Delegated Authority	Imposed Authority
Encompassing Complex Collective	City-regions/ Network cities	Multi-Purpose Municipal Associations	Regional/ Metropolitan Governments	Forced Municipal Merges
Intermediate Multilateral	Social Welfare Networks	Single-Purpose Municipal Associations	Inter-municipal Corporations	Metropolitan Transportation Authorities
Narrow Single Purpose Bilateral	Informal Working Groups	Interlocal Agreements	Municipal Corporations	Cynsorcios and Syndicats Mixtes

Figure 2 Policy instruments for mitigating ICA dilemmas in European countries. Adapted from: (Tavarez, Feiock 2017, p. 15)

Political factors studied in empirical studies

The ICA Framework acknowledges the role of political factors in the context of sources of collaboration risks. First of all, both dimensions of preference diversity are partly associated with political aspects: the divergence of participants' interests and power is directly related to the political affiliation of leaders of collaborating municipalities, while the understanding of community homophily includes, among other components, common political ideologies among partnering municipalities' inhabitants. The framework assumes that similarity between both municipal leaders and communities facilitates collaboration by limiting risks and associated transactions costs. Moreover, political structures constitute one of the categories of existing institutions. The framework proposes that available forms of local government and electoral systems shape incentives for entering inter-municipal collaboration,

and that common political structures can limit collaboration risks and transaction costs. The latter partially contributes also to the participant homophily argument.

Researchers have acknowledged that political aspects of inter-municipal collaboration have received limited academic attention to date: *The existing literature has focused almost exclusively on administrators, neglecting networks among elected officials* (Feiock, Lee, Park, Lee, 2010, p. 24). Up to now, there has not been any research that investigates the full complexity of political factors in the context of institutional collective action initiatives. Since 2010, however, a limited number of studies applying the ICA framework have operationalised and examined selected political dimensions. The summary of reviewed articles is presented in the Table 1. Moreover, in order to visualise which political aspects regarding particular elements of the ICA Framework were studied in the previous empirical research, a Figure 3 was created. It shows more in detail the first column of the ICA Framework presented in the Figure 1.

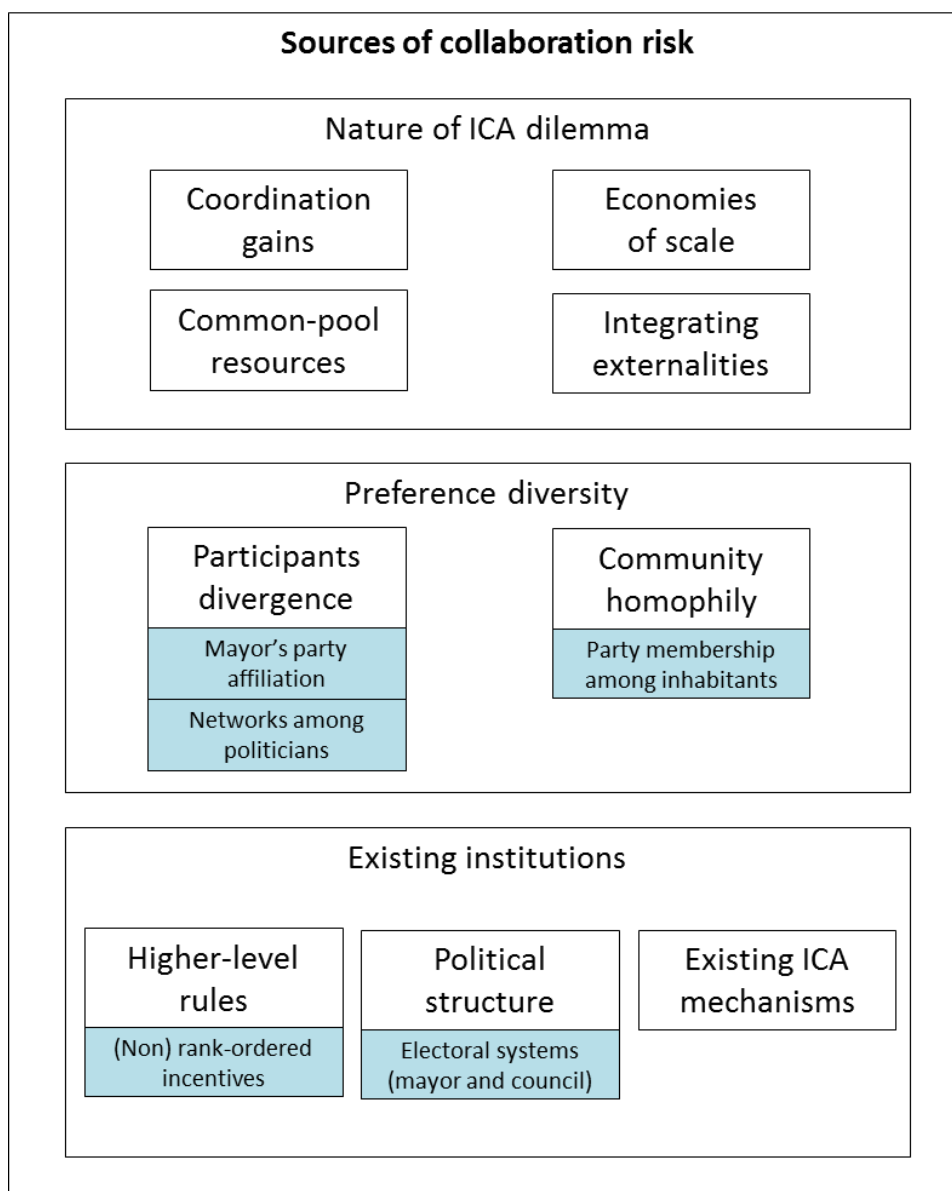


Figure 3 Political factors studied within the ICA Framework (highlighted in blue).
Source: own elaboration on the basis of reviewed literature

Table 1. Political factors in chosen empirical studies applying ICA Framework

Publication	Key research questions	Political factors	Methods	Key Results
(Feiock, Lee, Park, & Lee, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do propensities of elected local government officials to be risk averse shape their willingness to engage in economic development exchanges and the structure of these networks from which they draw their partners? 	Policy networks: Frequency of interactions among elected officials vs. these among civil servants	Survey, social network analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elected officials seek partners embedded in structure of relationships that can reduce the political risk of collaboration as well as provide information; Politically risk-averse elected officials are able to collaborate and share information even in the highly competitive economic development area;
(Hawkins & Feiock, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do political arrangements influence policy adoption and choice of governance mechanism? 	Political structure: Local government model (mayor-council and council-manager)	Survey, statistical analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint ventures are more likely when there are localized benefits combined with mayor–council government, or when broader benefits are pursued under council-manager form of government Prior agreements influence future cooperative actions;
(Feiock, Lee, & Park, 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent the structure of relationships reflects the efforts of actors to efficiently collect and process information or to enhance credible commitment? To what extent differences in incentives and risk aversion lead to differences in politicians' and administrators' networks? 	Policy networks: Frequency of interactions among elected officials vs. these among civil servants	Survey, social network analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local government actors forge tightly clustered networks to verify information and address commitment problems; Despite differences in incentives and risk aversion, politicians and administrators forge similar networks patterns;
(Gerber, Henry, & Lubell, 2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether and how broader political and ideological considerations shape local governments' decisions about participation in regional planning networks? 	Political homophily: Level of party registration distance between municipalities	Survey, statistical analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local governments whose constituents are similar politically, in terms of partisanship and voting behaviour, are more likely to collaborate; Political homophily reduces transaction costs associate with collective actions;
(Shaowei, Rui, & Youqiang, 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the role and significance of political incentives in addressing ICA dilemmas during inter-municipal collaboration? 	Type of political incentive (rank-ordered and non-rank ordered)	Case studies, interviews, document analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The non-rank ordered political incentives attached to a specific policy area strongly stimulate collaborative behaviour of local governments facing ICA dilemmas; Political incentives play a significant role in influencing the collaborative behaviour of local governments;
(Hawkins, 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do self-organising economic development agreements between cities with similar political institutions mitigate the transaction costs of collaboration? How characteristics of these agreements combine with political institutions to shape collective action? 	Political structure: Similarity between elections systems: mayor (mayor-council, council-manager) and council (district, general)	Survey, statistical analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Municipalities with strong-mayor model are more likely to collaborate with each other, as similarity in political incentives facilitates coordination and limits division risks; District model of council elections creates problems in negotiations during inter-municipal collaboration;
(Song, Park, & Jung, 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do political similarities facilitate interlocal collaboration? 	Political homophily: Similarity between partisan affiliations of mayors	Survey, statistical analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political homophily enhances the likelihood of inter-municipal collaboration; Political similarities enhance strong commitment and reduce division and defection risks.

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of quoted literature

In summary, all reviewed studies provide evidence that political factors play an important role in inter-municipal collaboration in various policy areas, while using different variables in order to assess this. Some looked at political homophily regarding a community' or leaders' political preferences, some compared policy networks among politicians and bureaucrats in relation to differences in their attitude towards collaboration risk, some considered different types of policy incentives, and others analysed the differences between political structures. In doing this, majority of the studies measured frequency of interactions between particular municipalities and how chosen political factors influence the fact of entering inter-municipal collaboration. However, none of the studies explained how political factors influence the shape and scope of formed collaboration, how they operate in sustaining the collaboration, and what their role is in the implementation of joint policies or projects. Moreover, each study operationalised political factors to one chosen variable, while the reality of inter-municipal collaboration includes all of the studied aspects together with other, potentially unexplored political factors affecting collective action. Lastly, the studies explored empirically the relationships of variables associated with one of the ICA categories: sources of collaboration risk. Following the statistical test, they theorised in order to explain how the variables influence collaboration risks and transaction costs, and what the motivations behind particular decisions are. However, these relationships and processes are complex and context-related. For example, higher level institutions associated with particular policy may define the role of politicians and administrators in the process of implementation and resource redistribution, which may affect substantially the political incentives of entering inter-municipal collaboration in order to implement this policy. Moreover, politicians and administrators may play various roles in mitigating particular risks and costs during the process of collaboration, which would strengthen their role in the process of collaboration.

This paper will draw on the ICA Framework's key elements during the empirical analysis and use its conceptual system. It will also use the to-date empirical research of political factors as a starting point of the analysis of political dimension of solving collective action dilemmas in ITI implementation. However, due to the exploratory character of the research, the paper cannot be considered as a typical application of the ICA Framework. It will be mainly based on the local actor's perceptions of the processes, and the analysis of the material will additionally draw on other strands of literature, which will be briefly summarised below.

1.2. Policy politicisation literature

As shown above, the ICA Framework highlights some political aspects of inter-municipal collaboration. However, other strands of literature identify a variety of other means through which political factors can influence the design and implementation of public policy. Several of these are relevant to the implementation of integrated policies based on inter-municipal cooperation. Drawing on the broader policy literature, this paper explores other political aspects that are potentially valuable in explaining and solving collective action dilemmas.

The majority of politicisation literature is based on the administrative-political dichotomy. However, some researchers have visualised the interplay between administrative and political actors in the concept of the 'purple zone', the domain where the spheres of influence of two rationalities meet: political (blue) and administrative (red) (Bhatta, 2015; Matheson, 1998).

Literature from a range of these theoretical fields, identify this ‘purple zone’ as the location of politicisation processes. The concept has been visualised in the Figure 5. It will be used in empirical analysis to highlight the political (blue), administrative (red) and mixed (purple) aspects of inter-municipal collaboration.

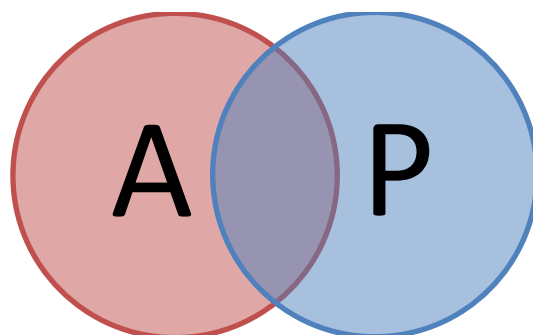


Figure 4 Visualisation of the ‘purple zone’ concept. A – Administrative influences, P – Political influences. Source: elaborated by the author on the basis of (Bhatta, 2015; Matheson, 1998)

Traditionally, researchers have used the term ‘politicisation’ in a structural way. As defined by Peters (2013, p. 16), it is often understood as “the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewards and disciplining of members of the public service”. This structural aspect of politicisation has been extended by other authors (Bellò & Spano, 2015, p. 354; Mulgan, 1998, p. 3; Weller, 1989, p. 371; Williams, 1985, p. 48). Having acknowledged the traditional perspective based on structural politicisation through politicised civil service appointments, they emphasise a process-related dimension of politicisation, associating it with the: “use of public service for political purposes”. Eichbaum and Shaw (2008, p. 343) have defined this phenomenon as ‘administrative politicisation’. They point out various means of exerting political influence or control over administrative processes, for example surrounding the circulation of information, influencing operating objectives, and the replacement of managers in decision-making.

Drawing on the literature review, the key patterns that can be observed in the literature regarding different types of politicisation are:

- Structural politicisation, (including party patronage of civil service appointments);
- Administrative politicisation, including the use of civil service for political purposes;
- Resource (re)distribution politicisation, including pork barrel politics, clientelistic and corruptive behaviours; politicisation of project selection etc.
- Interactions between various levels of administrators and politicians within the multi-level policy structure.

These types of politicisation are set out in more detail and explored alongside the political factors identified in the case studies. The paper will use the basic concepts typical for this strand of literature in the empirical analysis. The concepts were the main inspiration for formulating the analytical nodes capturing the political factors emerging from field work, but not fitting in the ICA Framework elements.

2. Methodology

This study draws on the constructivist-interpretivist research design in order to explore the process of inter-municipal collaboration from the perspective of local actors collectively implementing a particular policy.

2.1. Case studies: Integrated Territorial Investments in Poland

The paper takes the case of a new instrument introduced in 2014 by the European Union through its Cohesion Policy: Integrated Territorial Investments. It is the first instrument that allows investing EU funds crossing the typical boundaries – administrative, financial, geographic etc. The instrument was voluntary and has various ways of implementation, but a few EU countries decided to implement it in functional urban areas – territories beyond a single municipality. One of these countries is Poland, where never before has been any instrument of metropolitan governance. Before introducing ITI any governmental initiative to introduce legislation on metropolis was not successful. The only legal possibilities of collaboration for Polish local government units were bilateral contracts or voluntary inter-municipal associations or informal initiatives, which did not have any dedicated budget or prerogatives, and therefore great majority of them had low activity. Polish government therefore saw in ITI an opportunity to provide an, external, financial incentive for the municipalities to collaborate and coordinate their investments without the necessity to introduce a new level of administration or allocating domestic funding. They perceived it an experiment of how local actors will be able to collaborate when given a joint pot of money that can be used only collectively. This creates an interesting case in the context of the ICA Framework: the creation of collective bodies in Poland was to some extent imposed, but also to some extent voluntary – the government suggested delimitation of urban areas that it was willing to fund, but the form and scope of collaboration depended on local actors.

In Poland there were two available forms of collaboration for the purpose of ITI implementation: Inter-municipal association and Inter-municipal agreement. These forms can be mapped onto the ICA Framework’s adaptation to the European context (see Figure 6).

Enforcement method / Scope of collaboration	Embeddedness	Contracts	Delegated Authority	Imposed Authority
Encompassing Complex Collective	City-regions/ Network cities	Multi-Purpose Municipal Associations	Regional/ Metropolitan Governments	Forced Municipal Merges
Intermediate Multilateral	Social Welfare Networks	Single-Purpose Municipal Associations	Inter-municipal Corporations	Metropolitan Transportation Authorities
Narrow Single Purpose Bilateral	Informal Working Groups	Interlocal Agreements	Municipal Corporations	Cynsorcios and Syndicats Mixtes

---Autonomy Costs+++

Figure 5 Policy instruments for mitigating ICA dilemmas in European countries. Adapted from: (Tavarez, Feiock 2017, p. 15).

One of the criteria of case study choice for this study was the legal form of collaboration. The paper analyses two cases of ITI implementation in Poland – one association and one agreement. The analysed functional urban areas are located in two different regions in Poland. There are substantial differences between the two cases, what allows capturing the differences between the process of solving collective action dilemmas in various ways, but in a similar context. The key characteristics of the analysed functional urban areas were summarised in the Table 2.

Table 2 Case study comparison

Case study	Central Subregion of the Silesia Voivodship	Lublin Functional Area
Legal form	Association	Agreement
The core ITI city	Katowice/Gliwice ³	Lublin
Number of local government units	81	16
Number of inhabitants	2.76 mln	0.55 mln
ITI budget	739.1 mln €	105.4 mln €
ITI budget per capita	286 €	192 €
ITI budget per local government unit	9.12 mln €	6.6 mln €
Project selection mode	Competitive	Preselection

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of ITI strategies and (Ferry & Borkowska-Waszak, 2018, p. 49)

2.2. Data collection

Data were collected between September and December 2017. Methods of data collection are rooted in a broader methodology of organizational ethnography and include 3 months of participatory observation, 45 expert interviews and desk research.

Participatory observation was performed in each region – 6 weeks in Śląskie and 5 weeks in Lubelskie. It involved researcher's participation in day-to-day work and activities of the local ITI office, internal and external meetings of the employees and ITI municipal coordinators, ITI Board and Assembly, ITI-associated events, training for ITI experts and project beneficiaries, social consulting processes, conferences, study visits in the member municipalities, etc. In total, 9 municipalities in each functional area were visited during the field research. The observational data was systematically collected in the following ways: hand written and digital field notes, audio recordings and photos. They involve the content of formal meetings and informal conversations between the study subjects and with the researcher, as well as, separately noted, researcher's observations and insights, e.g. on the atmosphere, the character of interpersonal relations, and matters directly connected to the research merit. Moreover, additional notes regarded researcher's reflexivity and positionality, to capture the influence of these aspects on the access to and perception of collected data.

The wide majority of interviews were individual-in-depth, while some were conducted as dyads. They had patterns of elite and expert interviews due to the specific kind of respondents

³ The official regional capital is Katowice, while the headcounter of the ITI association is Gliwice;

including high-level politicians and civil servants. On the administrative side, among the interviewees there were: ITI office employees, ITI coordinators in member municipalities, and regional authority employees. Interviewed politicians included local mayors and deputy mayors – the latter not elected, but performing mainly political functions. Among the other sectors, interviews were conducted with experts assessing ITI projects and representatives of non-government organisations being beneficiaries of ITI projects. The character of interviews was semi-structure and in-depth, which means that there was a set of questions, but each time they were modified depending on the scope of interviewee's experience and expertise. The base interview questionnaire included 18 questions within the following broader topics: the past process of ITI formation, the present process of ITI implementation and the future plans for ITI continuation. In total, 25 interviews were conducted in Lubelskie, and 20 in Śląskie.

Desk research involved searching relevant ITI policy documents, rules of implementation, and collaboration issues. It also involved online media resources about particular ITI actors, events and information.

2.3. Data analysis

Collected data involve interview transcripts, field notes, and relevant documents, which were prepared for further analysis. All interviews were transcribed in Polish based on audio recordings. Data from participatory observation from multiple sources were integrated chronologically into a single textual document for each region, divided along particular weeks and days. All notes were categorised into three parts: notes, reflexivity and researcher's insights, in order to distinguish facts from interpretations and self-reflective observations, which could influence that collected data. After each week the researcher prepared a summary of current merit and self-reflective emerging conclusions, in order to keep the track of changes in observations after experiencing particular events and acquiring new information. Documents collected during desk research were categorised and selected in terms of relevance for further analysis.

Interview transcripts, field work diary and documents were uploaded to the MAXQDA software in order to conduct systematic qualitative analysis. The material was coded along the two node groups: 1. Following the ICA framework, and 2. Following the themes and patterns that emerged from the fieldwork as relevant for the research question, and did not fit within the ICA Framework. The list of nodes has been presented in the Table 3. Coded content was then comparatively analysed regarding particular themes in both case studies.

This article contains preliminary results, as it has been based on the initial analysis of partial empirical material: a full set of field notes and a number of interview transcripts.

Table 3 The coding scheme for empirical data analysis

	Category	Subcategory	Coding nodes	No. of coded segments
ICA Framework elements	Potential collective benefit	None	1. Potential collective benefit	9
	Sources of collaboration risks	Nature of the ICA dilemma	2. Coordination gains	9
			3. Economies of scale	3
			4. Common-pool resources	0
			5. Internalising externalities	0
		Preference diversity	6. Divergence of participants	63
			7. Community homophily	14
		Existing institutions	8. Higher-level rules	5
			9. Political structure	3
	10. Existing ICA mechanisms		20	
	Collaboration risks	Division	11. Incoordination	9
		Division	12. Division	17
		Defection	13. Defection	18
	Transaction costs	Information	14. Information	9
		Negotiation & Bargaining	15. Negotiation & Bargaining	31
		Enforcement	16. Enforcement	11
	Integration mechanism	Association	17. Association	5
		Agreement	18. Agreement	9
Other elements	Strategic approach to collaboration	19. Leader's role	22	
		20. Understanding of integration	71	
		21. ITI identification	13	
	Projects and resources politicisation	22. Project politicisation	38	
		23. Project selection mode	27	
		24. Proportional allocation	16	
		25. Recommendation system	8	
		26. Resources trade	14	
	Administration's dual role	27. Civil service politicisation	17	
		28. ITI office role	161	
	Higher level politics	29. Higher level politics	42	
Miscellaneous	30. Miscellaneous	119		
TOTAL				783

Source: Own elaboration

3. Analysis and results

This section will discuss political factors in solving collective action dilemmas from the perspective of local actors participating in ITI implementation. Analysis of the local actors' perception confirms the elements highlighted in the ICA framework, including those related to political factors. However, the empirical research also identifies other arenas in the process

of inter-municipal collaboration where the political dimension affects their actions and decisions. Both groups – within and beyond the ICA framework are discussed below. The analysis and results section follows the structure of the nodes presented in the Table 3.

3.1. Political factors within ICA Framework

Below the process of solving collective action problems in ITI implementation will be described within all of the ICA Framework elements. This section presents how local actors perceived each aspect of collaboration, and within this, how the role of politics and political actors was perceived.

Potential collective benefit

The main benefit of collaboration within ITI implementation perceived by the local actors in both regions is the additional pot of money allocated to each urban functional area. The municipalities were instructed by the national government that they would be able to invest a reserved sum of EU funds under the condition of forming a collaborative structure and distributing the allocation within it, to ensure that it will be allocated in an integrated, strategic way. Consequently, the direct motivation for the municipalities to participate in integration processes in both regions was accessing the reserved investment funds (Field note L, 14.11.2017, Interview S ITI IB 31.10.2017). In Poland, EU funds are the key source of regional and local investments. Consequently, they have an important political meaning and they gain substantial attention from regional and local politicians as they provide crucial support for investment opportunities that are often part of political pledges to attract voters before elections. This can be associated with another potential benefit acknowledged by the local actors in both regions: improving the transport system in the functional urban area. This, however, had a different meaning in each case: in Lubelskie the key aspect was to improve the accessibility of the regional capital from smaller surrounding municipalities (Field note L, 27.11.2017, Interview L Mayor 17.11.2017), while in Śląskie the highlighted factor was the overall connectivity between various parts of the Subregion. This can be explained by the bigger size of the latter urban area, and the coexistence of multiple cities of similar size and potential, while the Lublin area is clearly smaller and monocentric. Crucially, in Śląskie the ITI members acknowledged the overall interdependence of municipalities in the functional area, and understood the consequent need of collaboration and the value of other municipalities' development:

We can be an oasis of prosperity here, but you cannot be happy if there is poverty around you, and therefore these are 'connected vessels', we will not have a great time here, if these other cities will plummet (Interview S Mayor M5, 31.10.2017)

This has not been perceived similarly in Lubelskie, where motivations to establish the ITI collaboration mechanism were exclusively individualistic and short-term:

'True collaboration would be to sit together, discuss and analyse collectively, and co-decide on joint investments and full allocation distribution' I asked what was missing to achieve this. 'No one had any interest in it, everyone wanted as much as possible for themselves'. (Field note L, 7.12.2017)

This difference suggests that political factors matter in the context of the collective benefit – it is the local mayors who define it, and their perception can influence the scope and form of the subsequent collaborative mechanism.

Sources of collaboration risks

Nature of ICA dilemma

- The main nature of the ICA dilemma emerging in the implementation of ITI in both regions was the coordination gains. Here, the local actors provided examples including coordination of investment by neighbouring municipalities in the area of transport (complementary investments close to municipal boundaries), education (optimal localisation of kindergartens and vocational schools), and economic specialisation (diversification within the functional area). In all cases, the key first step of collaboration was exchanging information between municipalities about each other's plans regarding particular investments. According to local actors, this avoided duplication of similar investments within a small proximity, improved coherence between interventions in neighbouring municipalities, and ultimately channelled insights and mutual learning of effective approaches to a similar type of interventions.
- Economies of scale were mentioned rarely by ITI actors. One of the limited number of examples concerns a partnership project developing ICT tools in 5 municipalities in Lubelskie. In order to achieve savings from scale effects, partners not only planned the joint project together, but also used a joint public procurement procedure to employ a single company to conduct works in the whole area. In Śląskie ITI, actors highlighted issues connected to integrating the transport system across the whole urban area, which currently is operated by a few competing companies. In order to achieve economies of scale and create a coherent and functional transport system there would be a need to agree on a single operator.
- Common pooling of resources and internalising externalities were not addressed within ITI policy. Some local actors in Śląskie mentioned issues regarding air pollution, which is a big problem in the region in Poland. Many municipalities realised individual projects addressing the causes of pollution on their area, however no collaboration was identified towards solving this problem collectively.

Preference diversity

Divergence of participants mattered for ITI actors in multiple dimensions, depending on which actors were involved in collaboration: mayors, local ITI coordinators, and ITI office employees. Differences between the mayors of partnering municipalities had a different meaning before launching the integration mechanism and during the delivery of joint projects. In Śląskie, the beginnings of collaboration were difficult from the political point of view, as the new association had to form a board, which was meant to exercise the key decision-making responsibilities. The solution was to divide the territory into 5 smaller subregions, each of which appointed three representatives (mayors of chosen municipalities) to the ITI board. Thus, the division that mattered the most was territorial rather than partisan. In Lubelskie, the divergence was much simpler, as all mayors of small municipalities regardless of partisan affiliation positioned themselves against Lublin, the regional capital.

There was also no need to form a board because of the decision to sign a simple agreement of collaboration in ITI implementation, without creating an independent body and delegating any decision-making power. However, local actors highlighted that if a more advanced form of collaboration was to be created, the partisan differences could occur as a boundary.

Then it will be politics: who enters the board, while there [in other ITI associations] everything is already sorted out. Now everyone is on the one side of the barricade against Lublin, but in an association they will fight (Field note L, 13.12.2017)

In both regions, at the stage of ITI implementation the most visible division between mayors concerned speed and efficiency in delivering the joint projects. Regardless of partisanship, municipality size or geographical localisation, mayors of efficient units had clearly conflicting interests with those who did not comply with the common plan and timetable. This particularly mattered in Lubelskie, where because of the partnership projects the municipalities were to a greater extent interdependent in delivering their individual investments. Failure of one municipality to deliver their contribution efficiently could have financial and political consequences for all partner municipalities.

In Śląskie ITI, coordinators were employed in the municipalities represented on the ITI board, and their task was to coordinate the investments of all municipalities from a particular subregion. In Lubelskie ITI, coordinators worked for every partnering municipality. The relations among them in both regions were very friendly and positive, regardless of political views, municipal size or geographical localisation.

Another important dimension of participants' divergence were the ITI office employees. There was a significant difference in how the employees were appointed, which could affect their relationship with mayors and local ITI coordinators. In Śląskie it was important for the ITI leader that the ITI employees came from various municipalities belonging to the Association, in order to build trust and assure the partners that the office was impartial and did not support particular interests. This mattered for collaboration, as ITI employees have important prerogatives in the implementation process, for example assessing and monitoring joint projects, creating project selection criteria etc. – and their personal views and opinions can influence joint projects. In Lubelskie, the ITI office is built into the Lublin City Office, and the majority of its employees were appointed from within the same institution. This was negatively assessed by the other ITI members, who highlighted that the ITI office employees were directly accountable to the Mayor of Lublin and, therefore, could not be fully objective and would always favour Lublin in the case of conflict of interests. This perception was particularly apparent during the launch of the ITI when the basic rules for collaboration were agreed. For instance, the fact that the capital city did not enter any partnership project, although it was compulsory for all other municipalities, was seen as a signal of differentiation in favour of the capital city.

In terms of community homophily, the biggest differences that mattered for collaboration according to ITI actors was the size of municipal population. In both regions there is a clear divergence between the interests of big and small local government units. The power distribution differs among the regions as in Śląskie there are 14 cities of relatively substantial size (200-300 thousand inhabitants), while in Lubelskie there is one main city of ~400

thousand inhabitants, while all other partnering municipalities are by far smaller (between 7 and 15 thousand inhabitants). Thus, the most frequent clashes among partners emerged between the big and small units, not only because of differing interests but also due to variation in administrative capacity and expertise. Small municipalities anticipated that they would be excluded from the allocation due to their weaker position. This aspect is clearly of political character.

In the beginning, small municipalities were afraid that they would not gain anything again. The municipality of Ciasna sneaked into the ITI Board for this purpose, now they are friends. There was a large role of the ITI office director to make everyone feel taken care of and to build trust. (Field note S; 17.11.2017)

At the same time, bigger cities doubted that the smaller municipalities had enough administrative capacity to effectively plan and deliver joint actions. This was especially visible at the project level, where partners have similar scope of responsibilities. While some municipalities could allocate only one civil servant to tasks associated with an ITI project, others with bigger budgets and stronger administrative capacity could delegate a team of personnel specialised in particular parts of the task. This often created delays and misunderstandings among municipalities of different capacity. These differences decreased in the course of collaboration due to more collective experiences and the building of trust. However, they continued to be present in the discussions around the joint implementation process.

Municipalities and Lublin will not find a common language, because of a different scale of activity: 20 people to several thousand, and the same requirements (Field note L, 27.11.2017)

Another difference in terms of community homophily that local actors pointed out in Śląskie was the division of the Subregion into two geographical areas: Górny Śląsk (majority of the Subregion) and Zagłębie (north-west from Katowice). Local actors referred to the inhabitants of Zagłębie 'górole', which in the Silesian dialect means that they have come to Śląsk recently and are not locals, while the inhabitants of Górny Śląsk felt autochthons and pointed out cultural differences. These differences, in their opinion shaped both organisational cultures and personal characteristics. The key aspect here is the issue of identity and local patriotism, which shaped the configuration of interests and potential coalitions among partners. These clearly political (but not partisan) clashes on this issue mattered especially during ITI Board formulation and the division of resources⁴, but not so much for the realisation of particular collective projects.

Existing institutions

- Higher-level rules influencing the collaboration in the analysed cases can be divided into two groups: 1. European and national laws and guidelines common for both

⁴ This has even a more visible effect in the recently created Metropolis, which includes 41 out of 73 municipalities belonging to the Subregion. The name of the metropolis is Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolia, which highlights the union of these two territories. The association created for the purpose of ITI implementation has the name The Association of Municipalities and Counties of the Central Subregion of the Śląskie Voivodship.

Polish regions, and 2. regional interpretations of higher laws and guidelines, as well as the region's own procedures and guidelines that ITI partners had to comply with (these were in many cases different in the two analysed cases). Moreover, it should be pointed that some of the rules in both categories were formal, while others were imposed on an informal basis. As collective actions around ITI took place as a separate, new policy instrument, there were multiple formal and informal rules that defined the plausible scope of interventions, the list of involved actors and their position and role in the implementation process. Here, only the rules that gained the most attention by the local ITI actors will be discussed. From the European level, the most important for further collaboration were the rules that defined the practical scope of joint projects. For example, the European Commission placed limits on the use of EU funds for road construction and renovation, as well as big infrastructure investments e.g. swimming pools, concert halls, airports etc. This had a direct political effect, as these kinds of projects had received most attention from mayors in the previous period 2007-2013. Consequently, in this period the politically attractive areas of intervention were low-emission transport systems, kindergartens, thermo-modernisation and revitalisation.

National rules directly influenced the available integration mechanisms, as the ministry required formalisation of collaboration either in a form of an inter-municipal association or agreement. National government also created guidelines for ITI offices functioning in every ITI. These were then interpreted and adjusted in region in a form of formal contract between the regional and local organisations, defining procedures of collaboration between them in ITI implementation, the scope of delegated tasks and the thematic areas that the ITI should fulfil to be complementary with the other investments in the region. The differences between these regional rules had the biggest influence on the character and success of the collaboration within an ITI. For instance, in Lublin the region created multiple additional internal rules that the collaborating municipalities were required to comply with, making collective action more formalised and complicated, and often creating frustrations among the ITI office employees and partners. On the other hand, some rules, for example the requirement of merging individual projects into partnerships, stimulated coordination at the project level, which would not have happened naturally. Nevertheless, the extent to which this aim was achieved in reality rather than formally is still to be researched. Another aspect is that the rules applied at each level were usually delayed and they changed multiple times during the process of collaboration, which often created a chaotic atmosphere and the feeling of misinformation among partnering municipalities. Against a background of limited trust, this did not help efforts to establish a collaborative approach.

- Political structure was not a major issue influencing collaboration in the case of Polish ITI. This can be explained by the unitary local government electoral system in the country. In this system, every 4 years mayors are elected by a popular vote, and local councils are elected in a general (not-district-divided) vote. This creates a strong mayor-council model, which is additionally empowered by a deep level of decentralisation, including relatively strong fiscal independence at local level.

According to existing literature, these characteristics should stimulate inter-municipal collaboration in Poland due to high mayors' decision-making power. Indeed, in a few cases this aspect was underlined as an asset, e.g. in relations with regional government marshals or county-level leaders, whose positions are weaker due to the fact that they are elected by councillors rather than in a popular vote.

The most important aspect associated with the political structure concerned Poland's electoral law. Currently there is no limit for local mayors in terms of re-election, which enables relative political stability (in some Polish municipalities mayors have not changed since first free local elections after post-communist transformation in 1990). The current national government intends to change this law, limiting the maximum number to two terms. Local ITI actors in both regions expressed that such a change in electoral ordination would diminish political stability after upcoming elections in the Autumn of 2018. They expect that this would significantly influence future collective actions, as a substantial number of mayors would change and networks elaborated over the years would be broken. As a consequence, collaboration culture and trust would need to be built almost 'from scratch'.

- The regions differed substantially in terms of existing ICA mechanisms. In the functional area of Lublin, the main inter-governmental collaboration happened in the form of bilateral contracts between Lublin and chosen neighbouring municipalities, which in many cases perceived the terms of this collaboration as unfair and did not feel treated by Lublin as partners, e.g. regarding extending Lublin's public transport system over the borders (Interviews L 10.12.2017). Moreover there were single other initiatives. One of the ITI members – the city of Nałęczów had a long tradition of collaboration with two other tourist-oriented cities in the same region. Although none of the two belong to the ITI agreement, Nałęczów's experiences in inter-municipal collaboration were visible in a proactive attitude as well as more positive and long-term understanding of the collective action in the Lublin functional area (Interview L Mayor M2, 17.11.2017, Field note L 24.11.2017). There were also a few partnership projects co-funded by the EU, in which chosen smaller municipalities from the area participated. However, before the ITI never before had there been any form of institutionalised, strategic, long-term collaboration between Lublin and all municipalities from the functional area.

On the contrary, in Śląskie there was a long history of collaboration. Before the ITI, the municipalities in various configurations participated in the: Metropolitan Union of the Upper Silesia (smaller than the ITI association), Silesian Union of Municipalities and Counties (bigger than the ITI Association), Subregional Development Programme (similar to the ITI Association). Moreover, in 2017 an official metropolis was constituted (smaller than ITI Association), as a separate level of public administration with independent budget and prerogatives. This has never happened before in Poland, and a particular act of law was created at the national level to enable this. Clearly, there is a strong tradition of collaboration in the area. Local ITI actors, however, highlighted that majority of previous collaborative initiatives failed or had a major problems with efficient functioning, i.e. due to not enough available joint funding, insufficient trust among partners and political battles between partners, as well as

ineffective leadership (Interview S, Mayor M4 10.11.2017, Field note S, 4.10.2017). They also did not provide the municipalities such a strong institutional collaboration structure, substantial collective budget, and day-today administrative and political contact, as ITI did. Nevertheless, local actors drew conclusions from the previous experiences and amended the collaboration rules of the ITI Association. Here, it is important highlight that the previous experiences were brought by various actors:

- The ITI leader, who played an active role in previous ICA institutions, in which he managed to build trust and among other municipalities' representatives, limit the opportunistic behaviour risk in the partners' eyes, and elaborate a clear vision of how the ITI collaboration should be shaped in order to function more effectively;
- The ITI office director, who had coordinated a partnership project among multiple municipalities in the Subregion, which allowed him to get to know majority of the ITI partners, build initial trust and equipped him with partnership brokering skills;
- Many mayors and civil servants in particular municipalities had previous experiences with collective actions projects, which allowed them to get to know each other personally, which smoothed communication. They also increased the particular aspect of administrative capacity, as municipal employees who experienced inter-municipal collaboration learned how to deal with specific problems, and potentially became less risk averse.

Altogether, pre-existing ICA mechanisms provided a strong basis for developing collaboration in the ITI implementation in Śląskie, while in Lubelskie the multi-partner integration mechanisms had to be built almost from scratch.

The main results concerning political factors related to sources of collaboration risks within ITI implementation have been summarised in the Figure 6.

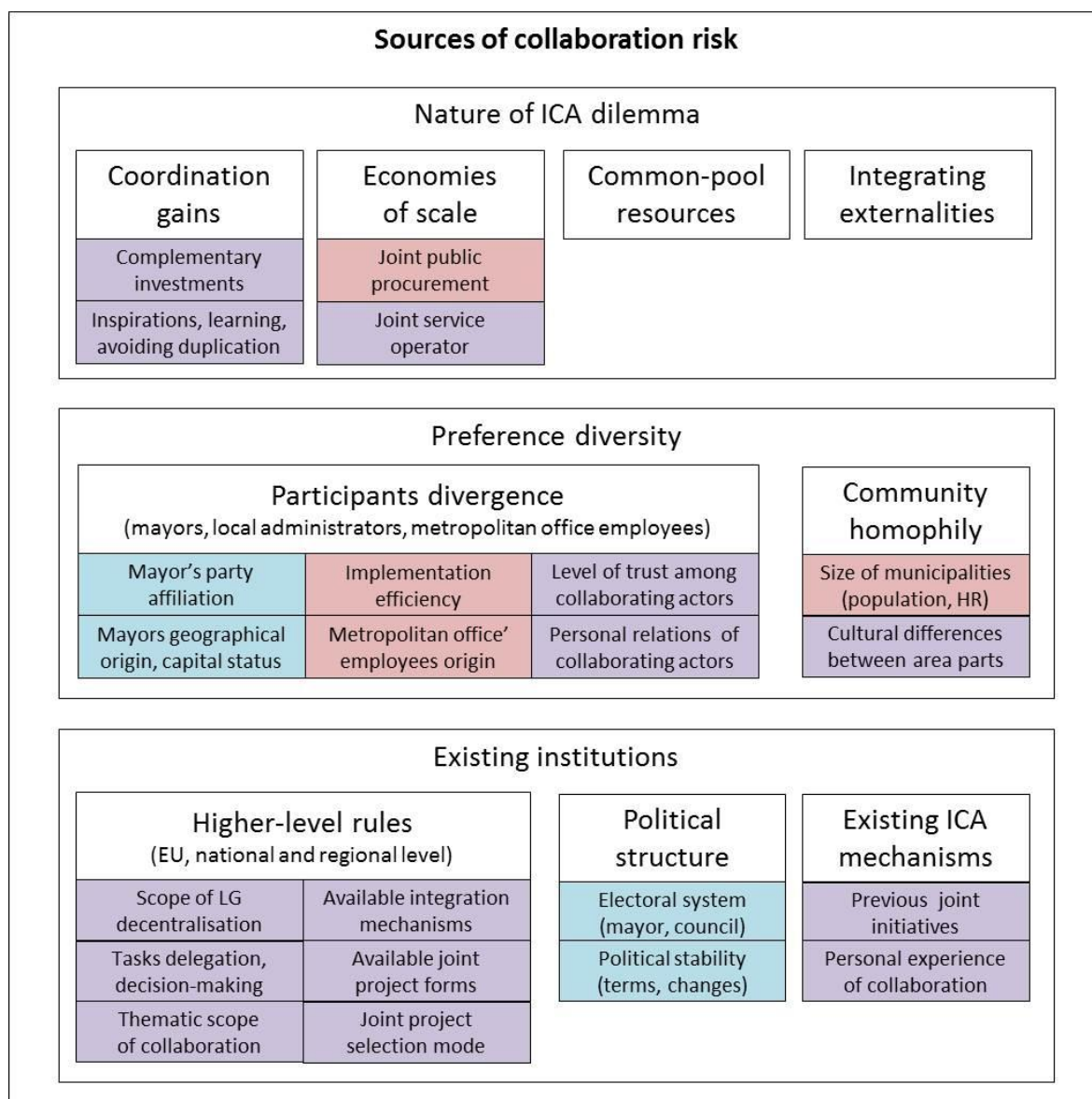


Figure 6 Political factors within the sources of collaboration risks.
Source: Own elaboration within the ICA Framework

Collaboration risks and transaction costs

Incoordination risks and information costs

As the nature of the majority of ICA dilemmas in the ITI implementation are the coordination gains, the incoordination risks should be relatively low (Feiock, 2013, p. 406). However, the character of the ITI policy and joint projects increases the complexity and interconnectedness of interventions funded by this instrument. In Lubelskie it is particularly visible in the formal dimension, because numerous investments are realised in partnership projects including between 5 and 9 municipalities. This adds substantially more interdependence at the implementation stage, as the contract to fund investments in all municipalities can only be signed when all partners are ready with a full documentation to pursue their part of investments. In this way partners are inter-dependent in an operational, administrative way. Moreover, substantial part of these interventions is interdependent functionally, as

investments in one municipality have to be coherent and complementary with those in neighbouring territories, e.g. when a few municipalities build parts of a longer bicycle path or pieces of a transport hub.

In Śląskie, projects are rarely realised in a formal partnership, which was a conscious decision in order to limit the operational incoordination risk that could cause delays in these investments that could be implemented efficiently but might be held up by the delayed input from slower partners. The speed of investment is a serious issue in the case of ITI, as they depend on the EU financial perspective calendar, and there is strong administrative and political pressure for efficient absorption of the funds. However, the functional incoordination risks remained the same in Śląskie, as individual projects had to be coherent and complementary in order to meet the requirements of the joint strategy. Moreover, the operational incoordination risk was only moved to the informal level, as the municipalities created an informal system of fund allocation division (see next section), which was an ongoing, changing agreement that had to be constantly amended and coordinated in order to use the joint funds effectively. Moreover, as the project selection mode in Śląskie is competitive and open for external organisations, sometimes there was a need to coordinate projects realised by the local government units with non-governmental and private initiatives. For these reasons, information exchange in both regions was one of the main activities during the collaboration process.

The majority of the incoordination risks had a clear administrative, operational nature. However, resolving some of them required political intervention. For example in Śląskie, for the purpose of coordination between municipal and external projects a special recommendation mechanism was established. It guaranteed extra points during project assessment for proposals which achieved a formal recommendation from the municipality where the project is meant to be realised, and even more extra points if the recommendation was given by the ITI Board. This creates an incentive for external organisations to consult on their planned projects with municipal authorities, and for municipal authorities to consult with each other when recommending a particular project. In this way, the recommendation mechanism stimulates information exchange and limits incoordination risks.

Division risks and negotiation & bargaining costs

The issues of division were extremely vital in both analysed cases. Although all partners saw a potential benefit of acquiring additional, reserved EU funds and understood the need to form a collaborative body for this purpose, it was not obvious how to divide the resources. There are multiple layers of this issue:

1. Division of financial allocation of EU funds
2. Division of available thematic interventions
3. Division of decision-making power
4. The number of partners among which the division is made

In one of the regions the initial lack of common agreement on the resource distribution endangered formalisation of the collaborative arrangement. This was because the main city expected that the whole allocation will be invested on its territory, arguing that the planned

interventions will have a strategic influence on the whole area. This did not encounter understanding among the other municipalities, which stated that the ITI funds have been allocated for the whole functional area, and if they don't get a fair share, they do not agree to participate. Because the funds allocation depended on the creation of a collaborative arrangement, Lublin had to compromise and the agreement was formed. The document analysis showed that Lublin's preselected projects have 64% allocation, while it also has 63% of population share of the whole area. This directed researcher to further investigate the resource division method, and both the informal conversations as well as formal interviews confirmed that each municipality obtained a proportional funds allocation depending on the population share. According to local actors, this solution was suggested by one of the deputy mayors and was accepted as all other partners as a fair division method. This is an informal agreement and does not appear in the official collaboration rules. It also did not appear clearly in the documents (apart from the Lublin's projects), as smaller municipalities are involved in partnerships projects, and only total numbers of the project value are publicly available. This was also not an easy topic to discuss during field research, as some actors considered this method of division as an issue that could be perceived negatively by the national government, but all of them admitted that this is the case and that it was a fair resource division, and that it was the only way to achieve a consensus and start collaboration.

Interestingly, the same resource division method was elaborated in Śląskie, despite a different integration mechanism and project selection mode. Although officially the projects to be funded by the ITI instrument are chosen in an open, competitive procedure, the municipalities informally divided the available funds among each other, assuming that all the money will be allocated among them. Similarly, in the beginning of the collaborative talks the small municipalities were afraid that Katowice – the regional capital – will absorb majority if not all the available funds. Again, the fair a generally accepted way was allocation proportionally to population share. Here, the difference was that the projects were not preselected, but in order to gain the funding each municipality had to participate in an open project call. However, the municipalities decided not to compete with each other and agree beforehand on who is preparing projects for which call. Moreover, the difference was that other organisations had all the right to start in the project calls and absorb some of the funds that the municipalities planned to use. The solution was that the municipality, from which an external organisation got the funding, gets adequately less funding for the projects in the future. Moreover, the project selection criteria were defined in a way that gives a substantial number of additional points to ITI association members. Because the funding is not guaranteed, however, there are municipalities that do not use their part of the resources, and this is the matter of ongoing, constant negotiation process when and who can start applying for funds above the pre-agreed limit. Again, here also matters the pressure for timely absorption due to EU financial perspective calendar, which gives an argument to the more efficient municipalities to negotiate absorbing more funding, in order not to lose the allocation in case other partners have troubles with realising their investments. Obviously, this division rules in Śląskie have also purely informal character.

The second step of division risks in both regions included the decision, who gets to invest in which areas. The limits were created partly by EU, national and regional rules – all of them

defined which share of available funding should be invested in transport, environment, social issues, entrepreneurship, revitalisation etc. In the joint ITI strategy it was strictly defined which indicators should be improved by ITI investments – and it was to be decided which municipalities will contribute to which indicators. It means that not all municipalities could build transport hubs, renovate parks or build kindergartens. Among the available thematic areas some were more suitable and strategic for particular units, and not relevant for others, so the agreement on the division of the funding was easier. However, in the case of the politically attractive investments, e.g. related to road building and renovation or thermo-modernisation, the negotiations had a political character. This was the case for both regions. In Śląskie in addition the once accepted thematic division is not a final one, and the negotiations are constantly ongoing. The municipalities often contact each other in order to exchange a particular allocation from one thematic objective to another – within the agreed financial limit. There is even a rule to such exchanges – if it happens within one of the 5 subregions, it can be done without any restrictions, and the ITI office only should be notified. However, if an exchange is done between municipalities from two different subregions, it has to be officially approved by the ITI Board.

The decision-making power was divided differently in each region. In Lubelskie the official agreement points out the city of Lublin as a leader, who represents the municipalities in issues regarding ITI, and has to agree with any matter voted by the ITI Council that meets twice a year, and consists of all the ITI members. It means that Lublin can veto each motion, while any other municipality has this power. In Śląskie the ITI board consist of 15 municipal representatives, 3 coming from each of the 5 subregions. All the key matters are voted by the ITI Board that meets once a month, and the majority of 13 votes has to be achieved. The city of Gliwice is the Board chairman and the ITI leader, however it has no special rights during the voting procedure. The city of Katowice as the regional capital has a role of the chairman of the ITI Assembly, which meets twice a year and consists of all the ITI members.

The number of partners matters for division risks, as more collaborating units means less individual proportional allocation per each municipality, because the total amount of funds does not change. However, it didn't seem to be a big issue in the ITI beginnings, as both regions decided to increase the number of members than was suggested by the national government on the basis of an academic expertise, delimitating the urban areas after analysing functional connections between municipalities (Kaczmarek & Kociuba, 2017) Lubelskie increased the number by 1 municipality, while Śląskie added 43 additional units. In both cases this was a consequence of political lobbying, bargaining and negotiation processes between the local, regional and national levels.

This is the proof of solidarity, because the remaining thirty municipalities are free riders, they get money that were accrued to those that are in the center. I had the need and the ability to persuade that the number of people in these excess communes is so small that it will not burden us much, but we will keep solidarity. We formed a relationship among 81 entities, it was based on some delimitation proving that there are connections between them, and it's all running smoothly, everybody agreed, and there was no slightest opposition in this matter (Interview S Mayor M5, 31.10.2017).

Defection risks and enforcement costs

The defection risks were the most active before launching the integration mechanisms and in the beginning of collaboration. They arose due to limited trust that the municipal representatives had towards each other and towards the newly created ITI office and its employees. First of all, the small municipalities were afraid that the capital cities will absorb all the funds. After agreeing on the division method, in each region the defection risks were different due to different implementation mechanisms. In Śląskie the competitive project selection mode and the informality of the resource division created the risk that some partners might not comply with this rule, and apply for more funding in an open project call. Indeed, it was not clear in the beginning why the municipalities did not do that. It was reported by local ITI actors that a few times a few municipalities exceeded the agreed allocation either by applying for more funds or by recommending an external organisation's project on their territory above the municipal limit without consulting with other ITI partners, but these were exceptions from the rule that municipalities in general respect the agreement. Still, informal, political sanctions were created for the cases of the opportunistic behaviour. In such a situation, a municipality that exceeded a limit in one thematic area will have a limited another area. Moreover, the voice of such a municipality will not be supported during ITI Board meetings.

It appeared from the relationships observed during the field research, that the bonds between mayors were so strong, that if they wanted exceed the proportional limit, they called each other asking for agreeing to increasing it, and wait until get an ITI Board approval. In the beginning of collaboration during the ITI Board meetings mutual accusations happened 'who stole my allocation?', assuming that either the ITI office made a conscious mistake and tries to help a particular municipality, or one of the partners behaved opportunistically. According to local actors and personal observations, such situations do not happen currently, which shows that the informal rules are obeyed, trust increased, and the defection risks diminished. On the other hand, there is not yet the feeling of solidarity that would encourage municipal actors to voluntarily resign from their share if they are unable to use it themselves. It is expected that the defection risks may increase closer to the end of the financial perspective, when either the funds will be used or will be lost. This time pressure might motivate more efficient municipalities to break the agreement rules in order to absorb more funds, unless the less efficient municipalities will resign on their own. This can be avoided if additional rules will be created of how to redefine the initial division method after the circumstances change.

In Lubelskie the opportunistic behaviour was visible already in the beginning of joint project planning, when all municipalities were required to form project partnerships, and Lublin denied to join them. Instead, it created individual projects, which emphasised the feeling of unequal relationships among the partnering municipalities. In the project partnerships defection risks arose following varying speed of project preparation among partners. A few mayors expressed doubts and disapproval concerning the fact that they have to wait for less efficient partners, which among others cause the rise of services prices, and consequent increase in costs for each municipality. Such doubts could lead to opportunistic behaviour, however because of the formal partnership and the preselected, non-competitive project

selection mode the individual municipalities are interdependent and cannot apply for ITI funding individually. The only opportunistic behaviour possible would be to resign from participation in the project, which at this stage would cause fail of the whole project, including other partners' investments.

The main results concerning political factors related to collaboration risks and transaction costs within ITI implementation have been summarised below.

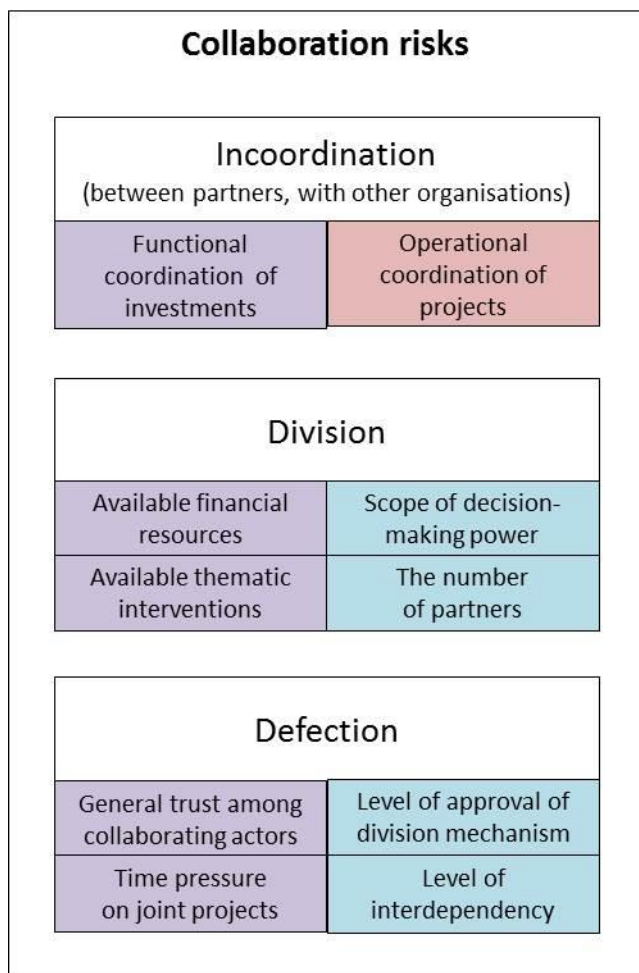


Figure 7 Political factors in collaboration risks. Source: Own elaboration within the ICA Framework

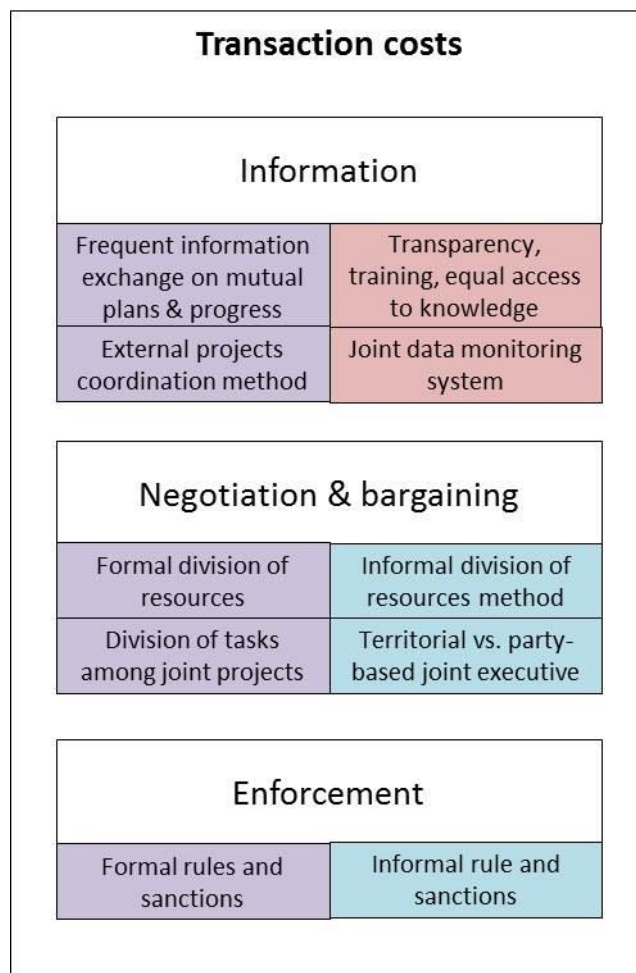


Figure 8 Political factors in transaction costs. Source: Own elaboration within the ICA Framework

Integration mechanism

Association is perceived by local actors in both regions as a more advanced form of collaboration. They highlighted that it requires from municipalities more commitments, e.g. member fees and delegation of some decision-making power to ITI board.

'Agreements were created where there was no need for an association, it was just easier. The association has to be created from the beginning, new structures and a new way of cooperation' (Field note L 13.12.2017)

The added value is that association allows more freedom in terms of form and scope of collective action than agreement, as the rules typical for public sector are not applicable.

At the same time, a lot of administrative costs are higher than in agreements (i.e. HR, legal and accountancy services), as in the latter this is covered by the city office structure. Moreover, civil servants pointed out that legal form of collaboration changes the accountability relation, as all associated mayors become a collective principle, while in agreement the ITI office is accountable directly to the main city's mayor. This changes not only the relationship between civil servants and politicians, but also overall power relations between collaborating partners.

3.2. Political factors beyond ICA Framework

In this section it will be analysed which political factors mattered for solving collective action dilemmas in the case of ITI implementation in Poland, but which cannot be fitted in any of the ICA elements.

Strategic approach to collaboration

Leader's role

One of the key aspects within this category is the role of ITI leader. In Lubelskie this function was officially given to the mayor of Lublin, the main city in the functional area, while in Śląskie the ITI board elected the mayor of Gliwice, which is one of the 14 biggest cities in the area, but is not the regional capital. During the field research it became clear that the two leaders play two different roles and have quite opposite personal attitudes towards other partners and ITI collaboration as such. This was visible in three ways:

1. by their physical presence in ITI-related meetings,
2. by how they were perceived by ITI employees and other municipalities' representatives,
3. by their statements expressed during individual interviews.

The mayor of Lublin clearly saw less value in the ITI implementation and potential extending of collaboration with its partners: he did not appear in the official ITI meetings despite the chairman role, and no other municipal representatives seemed to be willing to take the lead. Other municipalities clearly expected Lublin's leadership, and were disappointed by the experiences so far in this regard. During the interview it became clear that the mayor does not see in the ITI other value than the additional funding for Lublin's investments. At the same time, he highlighted that inter-municipal collaboration in the functional area would be very much needed, but the key areas of needed collaboration are neither not included by the European Commission to the possible scope of ITI investments, nor permitted by current Polish legal system. As an example of a needed, yet impossible area of collaboration he provided spatial planning issue, as each municipality is pursuing its own investments that often contradicting or blocking each other.

The mayor of Gliwice participated in all ITI events and played an active leading role in them, including facilitating consensus achievement among other members. He was perceived by others as a trust-worthy and fair person, who supports the interests of smaller local government units, creates a respectful atmosphere around him and values common good rather than only safeguards interests of his own municipality. He actively supported shaping

the ITI office and ITI collaboration rules following these principles. He had a clear vision of the subregion's development and a strong feeling of interdependences between municipalities, which in his view made the collaboration in ITI implementation only one of many instruments helpful in achieving a bigger aim.

Political leaders' attitude towards ITI and other partners directly influenced solving collective action problems in multiple ways:

- the perception of the potential collective benefit by other partners (short- or long-term),
- perception of risks among other partners (by promoting fair division of resources, facilitating conflicts resolution among partners, and limiting the uncertainty of opportunistic behaviour),
- the integration mechanism choice (advocating for a more or less advanced form and scope of collaboration, as well as specific power relations among municipalities).

Apart from the leadership in shaping collaboration, there is also an important role of local politicians at the project level. In both regions they were often the initiators of strategic, collective projects that enhance the development of the whole functional area. Some of them became official leaders of partnership projects, while some ensure collaborative approach in other ways, e.g. by involving the ITI office in the process or by coordinating the issue informally. Another aspect is politicians' role in giving a priority to particular investments of strategic importance, which can ensure their effective and timely implementation. Overall, leadership can substantially influence the scope of collaboration and its strategic effect, regardless of the chosen formal integration mechanism.

Understanding of integration

An important and at least partially political element influencing solving collective action problems in ITI implementation was how the 'integration' was interpreted in each region. This directly shaped the form and scope of collaboration, especially at the project level. The ITI instrument was created with the aim to make EU funds investments in urban areas more integrated and sustainable, and Poland interpreted this in a mainly territorial way – that the implementation should be at least partially managed at the local level, and the decision on the investments should be taken collectively by partnering municipalities, in order to avoid fragmentation. However, further interpretation and operationalisation was within the decision of each region. This aspect shows how the political understanding shapes the scope of collective action and the extent to which joint projects are truly coordinated and contribute to the development of functional urban area.

In both regions integration was interpreted through the following ways: coordination and complementarity of investments, partnership form, and collective preselection⁵ of projects to be funded from the joint allocation of funds. Moreover, both regions elaborated a proportional resource division system (per capita), which was associated with the

⁵ Later on the European Commission disapproved the preselection mode in Śląskie due to very substantial resources distributed in this particular ITI. However, it limited the preselection only to a certain extent, as the municipalities kept the collectively agreed lists of projects and applied for funds in project calls following them.

understanding that integrated investments should take place in each partnering municipality. In practice there were some differences in operationalising this interpretation.

In Lubelskie integration was operationalised as formal project partnerships that were required to form by municipalities. The problematic issue was that at this point the municipalities already had individual lists of projects that they wanted to realise, and formal partnerships were created afterwards. Consequently, only in a few cases the projects were complementary and modified to achieve more coherence or strategic value. These assets according to local actors were mostly achieved by personal interactions of municipal representatives rather than formal partnership. Another issue was that Lublin's projects were not involved into partnerships, which was argued that their scale is too different. Nevertheless, in a few cases Lublin's investments were coordinated with other municipalities' plans and modified on both sides.

Śląskie operationalised integration in a different way: although formal partnerships were planned in the beginning, the decision was withdrawn due to expected delays and substantial scale of planned investments. Coordination happened on the basis of informal contacts between municipalities, however the scope of it was limited and majority of the projects have purely individual character. Nevertheless, the project selection criteria had an important role in operationalising the integration of projects: a few criteria awarded promoted various types of complementarity with other projects realised in the Subregion (territorial, thematic, fund-mixing), others awarded extra points to partnership projects. A separate set of criteria additionally supported projects that were realised by the ITI municipalities or were recommended by them, which was expected to mean that such projects are coordinated with each other and had a strategic value for the subregion's development. Another set of criteria promoted projects realised by small municipalities – which naturally would be disadvantaged in the project selection procedure, but following the political vision agreed by the ITI partners in Silesia, small municipalities get extra support.

ITI identification

This aspect highlights that it matters to what extent the municipal representatives are engaged in collaboration and its mission, believe in its potential benefit and motivated to achieve it, and perceive themselves as a part of bigger whole. Clear differences in this regard were observed in both regions, which could affect the process and effects of joint actions in each region. It was visible in multiple ways:

- The specific language that local actors used to describe projects funded through the ITI instrument. There was a clear division into 'our' and 'external' projects, where the first were all investments of the ITI partners, while the latter meant all initiatives of other non-governmental, public or private organisations that applied for the ITI funds. In normal conditions, there would be strong competition between municipalities and the language of belonging would only include the projects of a particular municipality, while in this context the ownership and identification was extended to the whole subregions. This was visible e.g. by the positive approval when 'our' projects were contracted and dissatisfaction if 'external' projects were ranked higher

and got partial allocation, at the cost of one of the partners. There was definitely a sort of a team solidarity and happiness when anybody from the team wins;

- The attitude of ITI employees in one region was relatively enthusiastic and committed to the ITI mission, while in the other the office was demotivated and cynical. Here, the ITI office director's role was important to define the ITI office role. In the first case it was proactive and supportive towards the partners, while in the latter the office had mostly monitoring and controlling functions, which shaped the relationships differently. The ITI office in the first region was respected by other institutions, and their opinions were valued among partners – this was for example visible by inviting them to key strategic events regarding the future of the development of the area. This was quite the opposite in the other region, where the ITI employees were not taking active part in strategic meetings beyond ITI, and directly expressed frustration *Nobody likes us, nobody needs us* (Field note L, 22.11.2017). They also had a clearly weaker identity with the local area – in the first region many ITI office employees came from other cities, and even if they were from the same one, they were much more critical about it. In the other region it was easy to spot strong regional identity, pride and local patriotism in majority of ITI employees, which could have influence on their motivation and commitment to work for its development.
- The identification of mayors with a broader territory is crucial for extending the scope and benefit for collaboration. In Śląskie it was highlighted that in the past everybody only cared about individual interests, while currently they understand that they are perceived collective from outside. It seemed that in Lubelskie there is still a limited understanding of common interests with the functional urban area. The small municipalities perceive Lublin as a competition - i.e. in gaining more inhabitants, while Lublin's representatives admit that they collaborate more with international cities and with other municipalities in the region than with their neighbours.

Now we have a partnership for common goals - earlier unimaginable, there was much more competition. Now we are more aware of the common image outside. Individual goals are still important, but the fight ceases to be so intense, it is easier to find a solution. We have stopped playing for minor needs, there is regularly fulfilled so there is no need for that. (Field note S, 30.10.2017)

Projects and resources politicisation

Project politicisation

Political actors have an influence on solving collective action problems at the level of project preparation and localisation. Once the resources are divided, there is still a decision to be taken of how each municipality will use them: what and where they will be invested in, and consequently to what extent the intervention will be complementary with other municipalities' plans. At this point, the political influence can be both very positive or very negative, but any case it is crucial. Negative influence could mean corruptive, clientelistic or pork-barrel behaviours, however this study's aim was not to detect them. This study shows how ITI blocked the pork-barrel politics by introducing the proportional allocation system – regardless of the party affiliation the municipalities get a fair share of the resources, while it

was reported that in other EU funds allocation pork-barrel politics is often a problem. This does not mean, however, that proportional distribution is a strategic method of investing resources in an urban functional area.

Nevertheless, a few examples were discovered of investments nearby mayor's houses, or these which local actors could not explain from the strategic point of view, or these which had a hidden agenda, as their real aim was different than the one stated in official documentation. Overall, some investments appeared as not strategic for municipal and broader development, and were clearly influenced by a political decision or motivation. Other examples included changing localisation of investments last minute because of political reasons – for example straight after local elections. Such examples can affect solving collective action problems, because this kind of behaviour has a particularly individualistic, non-strategic character and causes the usage of joint resources for a singular, often political purpose. This limits the collective benefit achieved through collaboration and undermines trust among partners, which can change the scope and form of integration mechanism. The particular mechanisms allowing formal and informal influence of politicians on the project selection in ITI implementation in the two analysed regions are: project preselection, project selection criteria, proportional allocation, recommendation system. They were described in the context of division risks earlier in the paper.

Administration's dual role

ITI office role

Field research showed a crucial role of the ITI office in solving collective action dilemmas in all of the three main stages:

- In the beginning of the process the ITI office facilitated the process of collaboration rules creation, integration mechanism formalisation, joint strategy preparation, relations between partners, was the key provider of information and training, and moderated the process of negotiations and bargaining, i.e. delivering data needed for effective, transparent and fair coordination and division.
- In the process of joint policy implementation they kept the information and training responsibilities, and were the main partnership brokers by facilitating ongoing operational collaboration. In Śląskie they were the key centre of constant negotiation and exchanging resource allocation between partners. They also participated in preparing procedures that shape the project selection criteria, strategic project assessment, timing of the project calls and ITI meetings. ITI office role also involves public relations and lobbying: representing the ITI partners' interests in front of higher levels of administration, contact with media, and contact with external organisation.
- With regards to the future of the collaboration among ITI partners (after the end of the EU financial perspective in 2020), the ITI office employees' role is not clear due to an early of post-2020 perspective planning stage. However, in Śląskie the ITI office was involved in planning the rules of newly created metropolis.

Crucially, the analysis of the tasks above includes both administrative and political aspects, and suggests that the ITI office has a dual role. For example, the field research in Śląskie showed that in many situations the ITI office employees have a crucial, strategic role in collaboration – for example it matters whether their personal opinions on which municipalities should be supported – the big or small cities, because they are the key actor creating selection criteria that can promote either of them. In Lubelskie the ITI office political role was mainly visible in the public relations and representation of interests of all the ITI partners in front of higher level administration. When asked if there are any political pressures on the ITI office employees (as they have influence on project assessment and other strategic issues), the answer was that it just would not pay off for both sides and so it does not happen.

It does not occur to mayors to try to pressure our office: You will help 1 and 80 want to kill you, so it does not pay off. We were wondering about it, but the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau comes to everyone. That's why we have experts – so we are not blamed for favouring someone. But within the criteria little can be manipulated, maybe there is 1 in 30 that is discretionary. We decided to go for training, and to help in preparing applications, and in this way help everyone. Normally, local governments cannot spend so much on other municipalities, so this additional knowledge gave them more than political pressure.

It is worth mentioning that party politics was not an issue in either region, in Śląskie it even was a sort of taboo, a shadow of the past that they preferred to be not associated with and they are happy that currently it is not important in ITI relations. They also actively avoided association with any party, and one of the strategies was to criticise each of them. In Lubelskie, the ITI administration often referred to party affiliation, but only regarding relations between different levels of administration, not between them and the partners.

Civil service politicisation

Another political aspect influencing the way of solving collective action problems is civil service politicisation. Local ITI actors in both regions pointed out that in the Marshal's office and in municipal offices there are substantial changes after elections, mainly among departmental heads, but often also lower level administrators. This can affect collaboration in two ways: the change of managers can affect the rules and scope of collaboration, while the change of local ITI coordinators affects collaborative networks between municipalities. This was a particularly frequent observation in Lubelskie, where ITI coordinators in some municipalities changed multiple times within 2 years, and so they had to learn both the collaboration and implementation rules from the beginning. This caused delays in project preparation in the municipal part, which affected also the whole partnership and endangered realisation of the collective aim.

In Slaskie, elections in 2014 brought a few examples of relatively positive civil service politicisation. Former deputy Marshall became a mayor in one of the municipalities, and employed a former head of EU projects as his deputy mayor. She was followed by her former team and therefore this municipality gained a substantial number of specialists. According to local actors, this is the main reason why this municipality is currently one of the most

efficient fund recipients among all the ITI partners. Another case shows that the change of mayor brought a PhD student to the position of ITI coordinator, which brought new expertise and fresh and strategic approach to municipal investments.

Moreover, the appointment of the ITI office director was commented by local actors, as according to many their choice was political. Considering that it was already shown that the ITI office has some political functions, this is quite logical that the ITI leaders, who are elected politicians, wanted to have in this position a person that shared their personal views and will realise their strategy. However, if political motivations were behind these appointments, they were only informal as formally the procedure involved a merit-based appointment.

Higher level politics

The ICA Framework also did not include any influence on solving collective action dilemmas of higher level politicians. In the case of ITI implementation in Poland, local actors often highlighted both the national and regional politics interfering in the joint local actions. While at the local level the party affiliation did not interrupt joint projects and more general collaboration in ITI implementation, in the vertical dimension it was quite an issue.

National level

The national level politics influences ITI implementation in multiple ways:

- Current relations between the Polish government and the EU have delayed the negotiations on policies and programmes, which determine how the joint ITI funds can be spent;
- The recent educational reform in Poland resulted in a changed school system, so some joint projects had to be relocated and redefined. This cause some children of not obtaining planned support, and endangered potential coordination effects between particular projects;
- The current government started a clear trend of centralisation of local government, including the role of regional and local authorities in the EU Cohesion Policy implementation system. This is visible, for instance, by including a regional government's representative (Voivode) in all the possible bodies associated with implementation. This goes against the relative independence of local government in Poland, and could affect the scope of inter-municipal collaboration.
- The ITI system was planned and approved by the government ruling in 2013, while after elections 2015 changed the ruling party and consequently the strategy of regional development. Previous government supported big cities and regions creating the most GDP as development hubs, while current government's strategy is to invest in the poorer East of Poland and support small cities, from where majority of their electorate comes from. The ITI funds were allocated to the biggest cities in Poland, but the current government might want to move the funds to other localities. This is limited by EU-Poland agreements and regional strategic documents, however there are some possibilities of changes and interventions.

A notable example of such an intervention is the project ‘The Integrated Communication Centre’ in Lublin (ICC). It involves building a new main Bus Station adjacent to the existing Train Station in Lublin. Currently, Lublin’s bus station is located around 8 km from the train station. Communication between the two systems and coordination between their timetables is poor. This creates a huge communication problem for the citizens of the functional urban area, especially these who want to merge a long-distance with shorter routes. The project has a strategic meaning for the whole urban area and a lot of media and public attention, and so its political importance is substantial. It was the only project that had a press conference with a personal attendance of Lublin’s mayor, which also shows the project scale and priority. However, the project requires a lot of documentation and therefore it was planned for the very end of EU financial perspective. The government started an official audit of the project to check whether the project is possible to be realised within the planned time. This plan was approved by the previous national government, but the currently ruling party is the main competitor of the party with which Lublin’s mayor is affiliated. Many local actors interpreted the audit as a political battle, as the project would help the current mayor to win the local elections in 2014, and the national ruling party wants to block it, although for the development of the functional urban area the project would be very strategic. Nevertheless, the ministry uses administrative arguments to run the audit because if Lublin is unable to absorb the allocation on time, these funds will be moved to other ITI organisations that could realise other projects instead.

Regional level

Regional level politics also influences ITI implementation in the view of local actors. They highlighted however, that usually the Marshal has much more influence on EU funds distribution than it is the case of ITI. This is because the authority responsible for assessing and selecting the projects is located within the structure of Marshal’s office, while majority of ITI projects are preselected in a non-competitive procedure and agreed by the mayors. Nevertheless, the actors pointed out the following political influence:

- The managing authority still formally performs majority of the formal assessment even in the case of preselected projects. It is a political decision on the timing and order of assessment – especially closer to the date of elections. It matters which of the projects will be contracted and realised, as some of them could help mayors in winning local elections;
- Also the appointment of experts assessing the projects can be political. While in Slaskie there is a procedure on how to randomly select experts from a list of candidates, in Lubelskie it is marshal who chooses them. Even if a project is assessed to low, the appeal time can take so long that there will be no funds available left and so the project will not be contracted.
- The regional Marshal’s party affiliation influences the relationship with the regional capital – in Lubelskie they come from currently competing parties, and although Lublin should be the key development hub in the region, the Marshal’s main attention goes to smaller municipalities. This motivated him to create a competing ITI system

for smaller city and he was actively promoting moving some of ITI's funds to the other area. In this way politics directly influences the scope of collective action.

Miscellaneous

Apart from the elements above local actors mentioned other political aspects influencing solving collective action problems. Among many, here will be discussed one that appeared as the most important in the analysis.

Local elections calendar

The timing of local elections was one of the most often political aspects mentioned by ITI actors. The highlighted that they can influence the collaboration and joint actions in the following ways:

- before elections nobody will make long-term commitments of collaboration
- before elections less projects as public procurement increases risk of making mistakes which could be used against the mayor applying for re-election. Contrast with administrative calendar, which tries to buy time – sometimes the calendars contradict, like in Autumn 2018
- Change of partners, need to build relationships from scratch
- Change the scope/localisation of projects
- Instability endangers the budget and collective projects in particular municipalities (Bytom, referendum)

Figure 9 summarises the main results concerning political factors within ITI implementation, which have emerged from the field research, but cannot be fitted into the ICA Framework.

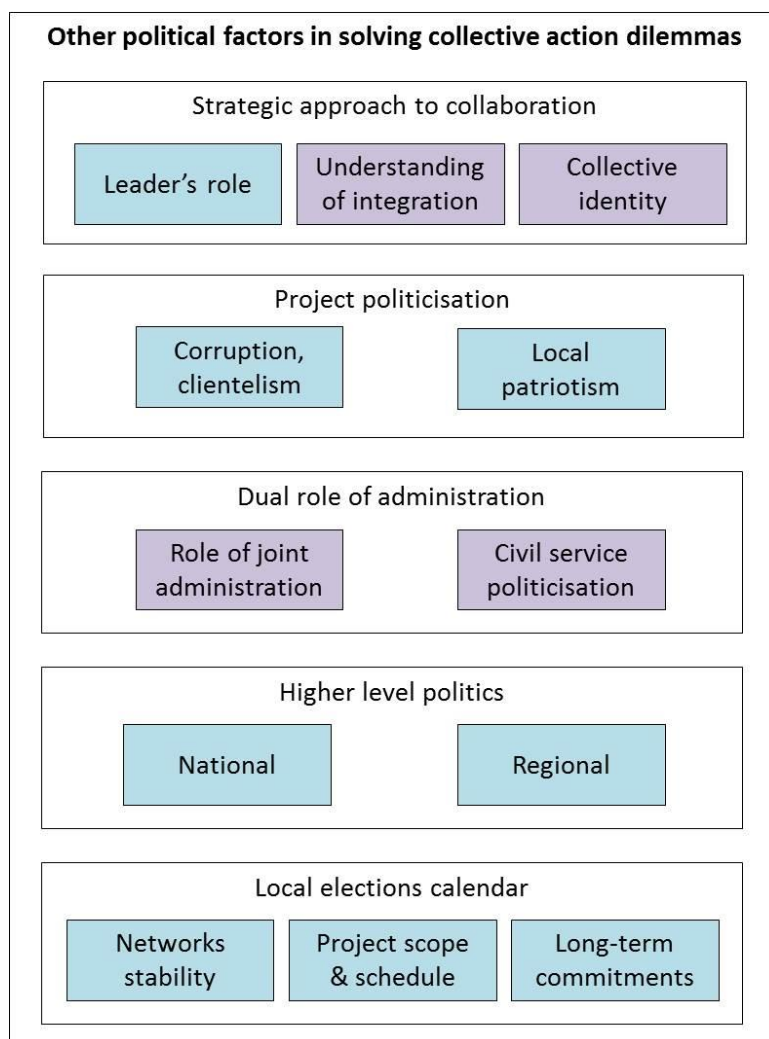


Figure 9 Political factors in solving collective action dilemmas beyond the ICA Framework.
Source: Own elaboration

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the ICA literature in the following ways: it introduces methodological innovation to explore the process of inter-municipal collaboration from the local actors' perspective thanks to ethnographic methods; it suggests a theoretical extension of the framework by developing more political dimensions to the ICA elements; and, it provides empirical evidence from inter-municipal collaboration in Poland.

It should be highlighted that the paper presents the results of an initial analysis of the empirical material gathered during the field research. Therefore, it involves tentative results that are expected to evolve after completing the analysis. Nevertheless, some emerging messages from the field can already be identified.

The paper confirmed that key elements of the ICA Framework are relevant for analysing the process of inter-municipal collaboration in the specific Polish context. It also demonstrated that the measures of political factors analysed within the Framework are relevant in assessing the case of ITI in Poland. The research has shown the role of politicians in defining the

potential collective benefit, shaping preference diversity and community homophily (in the Polish case rarely party-based, more often political interests were shaped based on other aspects, i.e. size of municipality), and learning from existing ICA mechanisms. Moreover, the paper elaborated on the political process of defining the division and defection risks, and the consequent negotiation and bargaining as well as enforcement costs. The paper provides in-depth, thick description of the processes from the perspective of local actors, highlighting the role of politicians in each element.

However, these factors are in themselves insufficient in explaining fully the role of political influence in identifying and solving collective action problems. The field research showed that political influence is much broader, and this is acknowledged by local actors in multiple collective action situations. The paper suggests new elements of the ICA Framework that should be considered when analysing the political factors influencing the choice of integration mechanisms. In doing so, the paper draws on insights from the politicisation literature. First, it shows the importance of politicians in defining the strategic collaboration aspects, with a special role of political leaders' vision, trust building and partnership brokering functions. Second, it suggests how particular project politicisation can influence collective action, drawing on clientelistic or corruptive behaviours. Third, it highlights the civil service politicisation aspect, drawing attention to political appointments, but also the dual role of metropolitan authorities – which realise both administrative and political functions. Fourth, it distinguishes local political relations with national and regional politics, which can have a particular and substantial influence on solving collective action problems. Lastly, the paper shows how the political calendar matters for shaping collaboration, especially in the context of local and regional elections.

Looking forward, on the basis of the analysis a suggestion of deepening the Framework is formulated, offering new dimensions of analysis of political factors within the framework which could be explored in future studies. As a cross-cutting conclusion, the paper highlights that the ICA Framework should include the cyclical aspect, as the process of collaboration is dynamic, and evolves through implementation process. The research showed how ongoing resource allocation changes dynamics of the rules of the game, relations between partners, and consequent risks and costs, as well as achieved and expected benefit. This indicates that ICA Framework's elements are relevant not only for explaining the process of choosing the integration mechanism, but also the implementation of joint policies and shaping the ongoing collaboration mechanism at the project level. It is also useful in evaluating such initiatives, verifying if the chosen integration mechanism is worthwhile in terms of the achieved collective benefit, and informing decisions on potential continuation, revisions etc. For this, the paper draws on insights from the policy cycle literature. This is particularly pertinent in the case of ITI in EU Cohesion policy, as assessment of the value of these new territorial instruments are crucial in informing decisions on their continuation in the new CP financial perspective after 2020. The political aspects of solving collective action dilemmas, as well as suggested extensions of the ICA framework have been visualised in the Figure 10.

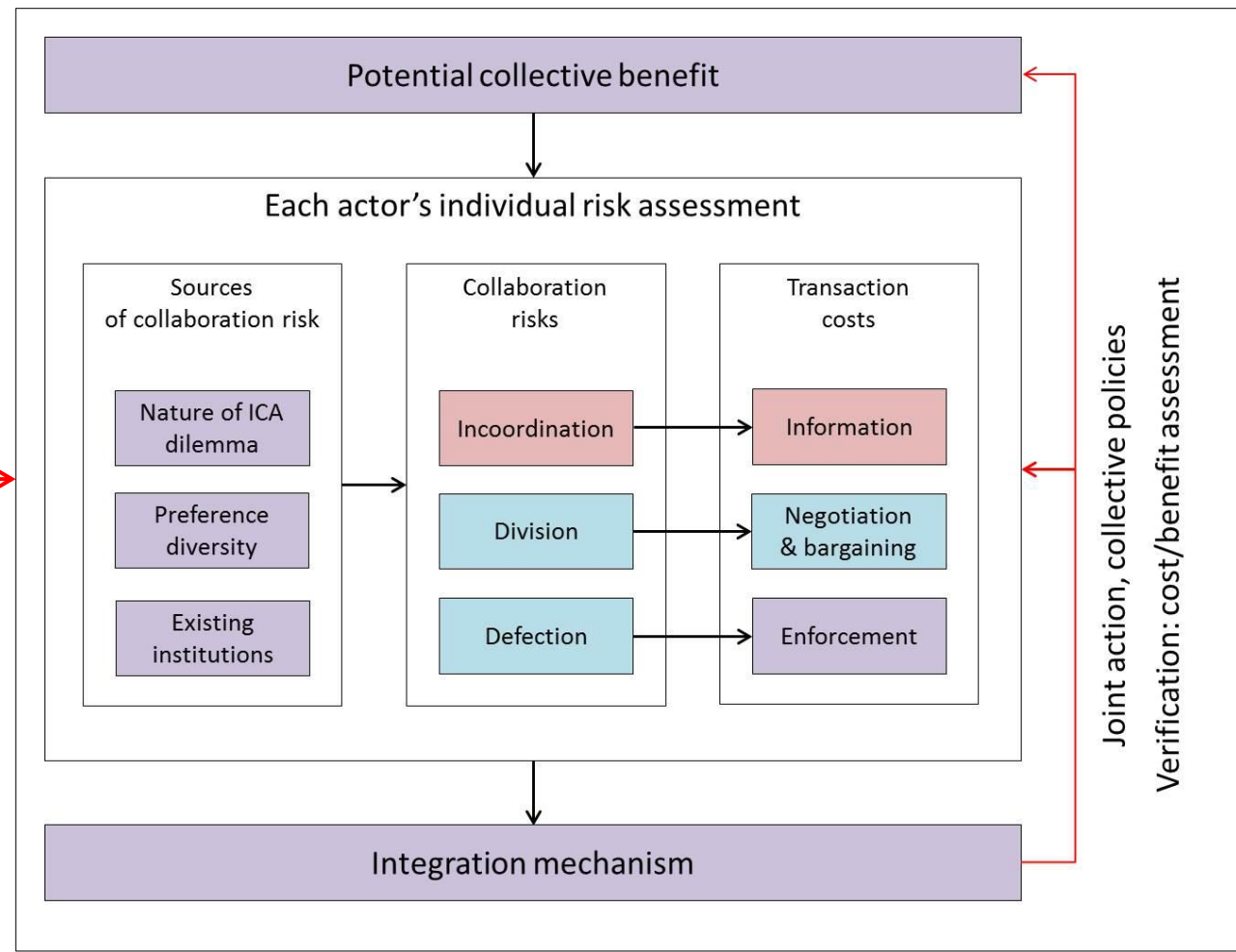
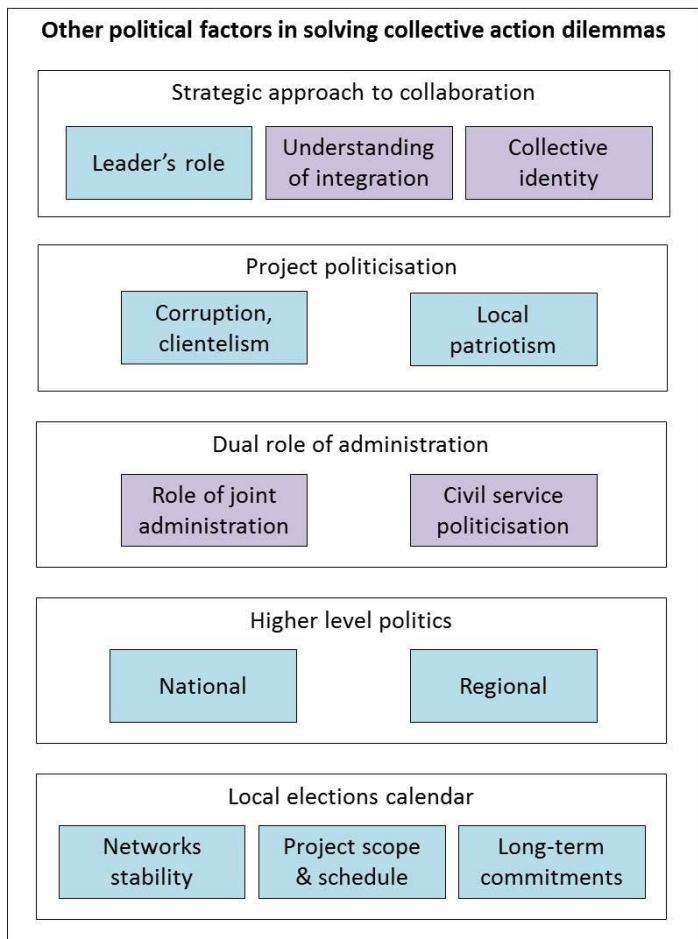


Figure 10 Political factors in solving collective action dilemmas: suggested extension of the ICA Framework. Source: Own elaboration within the ICA Framework

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