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## Inter-communal associations : the future of metropolitan area management?

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**INTER-COMMUNAL ASSOCIATIONS  
– THE FUTURE OF METROPOLITAN AREA MANAGEMENT?**

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**Abstract**

A metropolitan area is a special form of territorial organisation composed of many territorial units. To ensure their development it is necessary to introduce an appropriate system of management based on the concept of governance which requires that all stakeholders (local authorities, central government, business, researchers, NGOs, citizens etc.) are involved in the management process. The article aims to ascertain whether inter-communal associations can become the first step on the way to implementation of the concept of governance in metropolitan areas in Poland. The article describes features of inter-communal associations as a form of management of territorial systems. The second part of the article analyses existing inter-communal associations in Polish metropolitan areas. The article concludes that the current state of affairs does not justify a statement that inter-communal associations are or will become, in the immediate future, a dominant form of managing public affairs in metropolitan areas.

**Keywords:** metropolitan governance, inter-communal associations.

**JEL classification:** H77, R51, R58.

## **Introduction**

A metropolitan area may be defined as a functionally coherent area of socio-economic activity for a number of public, private and social entities<sup>1</sup>. Development processes in metropolitan areas thus derive from activities of individual entities functioning therein. Importantly, their interests and objectives are often divergent, leading to numerous conflicts within metropolitan areas. The public authorities which aim at safeguarding the interests of particular groups of actors, while striving for development of the entire metropolitan area, require new and unconventional management methods, new institutions and instruments to succeed.

International experiences show that the concept of governance may be the right approach to managing the development of metropolitan areas. Governance is a mode of government based on partnership and cooperation between various levels of administration on the one hand and other regional stakeholders on the other hand<sup>2</sup>. Local, regional as well as national authorities play a prominent role amongst stakeholders as their involvement in managing the process of development is key for harmonious growth and development of these areas. In order to function well governance requires appropriate institutional structures which currently do not exist in Polish metropolitan areas. Current legislation envisages cooperation between public authorities on the same administrative level in a form of task-related associations. This paper aims at assessing whether the authorities of communes belonging to metropolitan areas willingly use this opportunity and to what degree do the inter-communal associations suffice for managing metropolitan area development.

The research questions which this paper attempts to answer are as follows:

- do Polish communes in metropolitan areas undertake efforts to create inter-communal associations?
- what is the territorial scope and objectives of existing inter-communal associations?
- are inter-communal associations the future of metropolitan area management?

### **1. Metropolitan areas as specific objects of development management**

The first definition of a metropolitan area in Polish legislation appeared in the Spatial Planning and Development Act of March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2003. This law provides that a metropolitan area is defined as a large city together with its immediate, and functionally related, surroundings which has been highlighted in the national spatial development concept<sup>3</sup>. The Council of the Union of Polish Metropolises extended the definition, adding that a metropolitan area<sup>4</sup>:

- should be delimited in line with territorial division on the district (county) level,

- should be inhabited by at least half a million inhabitants,
- should group institutions of international cooperation.

The National Spatial Development Concept identifies twelve metropolitan centres which together with surrounding and functionally related communes create metropolitan areas. These include: Warsaw, the Silesian conurbation, Cracow, Tri-City, Lodz, Wroclaw, Poznan, Szczecin, Lublin as well as two cities which form a duopoly – Bydgoszcz and Torun<sup>5</sup>. All these are centres of activity, where economic, political, administrative, social and cultural functions are concentrated. The remaining two, namely Bialystok and Rzeszow, are considered to have a lesser impact on the surrounding space, yet they remain significant for economic and social development in the respective regions.

A metropolitan area is composed of numerous communes and/or districts (counties) which are formally autonomous and free of any sort of hierarchical subordination to higher level local, regional or central government(s). There are however issues and problems which go beyond formal administrative boundaries and apply to some or all territorial units in metropolitan area. Single centre of authority on metropolitan level which would be capable of making administrative decisions and “enforcing” them, i.e. ensuring that the individual communes which make up a metropolitan area comply with such decisions, would allow dealing with problems caused by spatial fragmentation. The communes however tend to compete for inhabitants and mobile capital (for example by adopting tax competition strategies) rather than to cooperate which sustains and deepens problems<sup>6</sup>. Experiences of various OECD countries show clearly that it is necessary to create a coordinating agency which would take over some tasks and competences which are currently assigned to autonomous local governments (both communes as well as districts)<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, the current legal, organizational and financial set up of Poland – which directly and indirectly determines the division of both assets and competences which relate to management processes – is not fine tuned to the contemporary requirements and world trends. Inter-communal and inter-district associations are an example of the few existing institutionalised forms of cooperation between communes/districts.

None of the national documents includes a delimitation of individual metropolitan areas. That is why the authors assumed that the delimitations prepared by regional planning bureaus and/or agencies, drafted for the purpose of preparation of a spatial development plan for each of the delimited metropolitan areas which are considered part of regional spatial development plans<sup>8</sup>, shall be the reference point for research on inter-communal associations in metropolitan areas.

## 2. Inter-communal associations as a form of governance

Regulations which are currently in force in Poland allow local governments to cooperate in accordance with public law (in form of inter-communal associations) or with civil law (by means of creating autonomous economic entities, associations or civil law contracts).

This paper concentrates on inter-communal associations. The Act on Communes provides that communes may create inter-communal associations in order to jointly perform public tasks<sup>9</sup>. The decision on creation of an association needs to be backed by the councils of all communes in question. Once established, the association takes over the rights as well as duties of communes insofar as performing the tasks for which the association has been set up is concerned. Similarly to communes themselves, the association performs its tasks in its own name and is responsible for these tasks. It is also equipped with legal personality and receives financial resources which are adequate and necessary for performing its tasks. The association's council, which serves as a regulatory and controlling body, is made up of mayors and/or presidents of all member communes. The board, which serves as an executive body, is nominated and dismissed by the council from amongst its members<sup>10</sup>.

Inter-communal associations are a simple form of cooperation between local governments, one which allows for creation of partnerships with clearly defined rules. It provides member communes with a transparent set up of responsibilities, financing and sharing of duties which supports effective achievement of objectives and tasks which the statute specifies<sup>11</sup>.

## 3. Analysis of inter-communal association in Polish metropolitan areas

There were 300 inter-communal associations and 2 inter-district associations registered in Poland in mid-2012 (on June 30<sup>st</sup>, 2012). The paper analyses inter-communal associations created by communes in seven metropolitan areas: Lodz, Wroclaw, Cracow, Upper Silesian, Poznan, Tri-City and Bydgoszcz-Torun. The research concentrates only on those inter-communal association which were created after 1990 (when such possibility appeared) and which still exist.

The **Agglomeration (Metropolitan Area) of Wroclaw** is composed of 18 communes. There are 4 inter-communal association in that area as Figure 1 shows.

The associations which exist in this area are predominantly concerned with improving infrastructure (mainly waterworks infrastructure), waste management and natural environment protection. One of these associations also includes an additional task which relates to promoting the development of culture. Wroclaw, as the metropolitan city, participates in an association



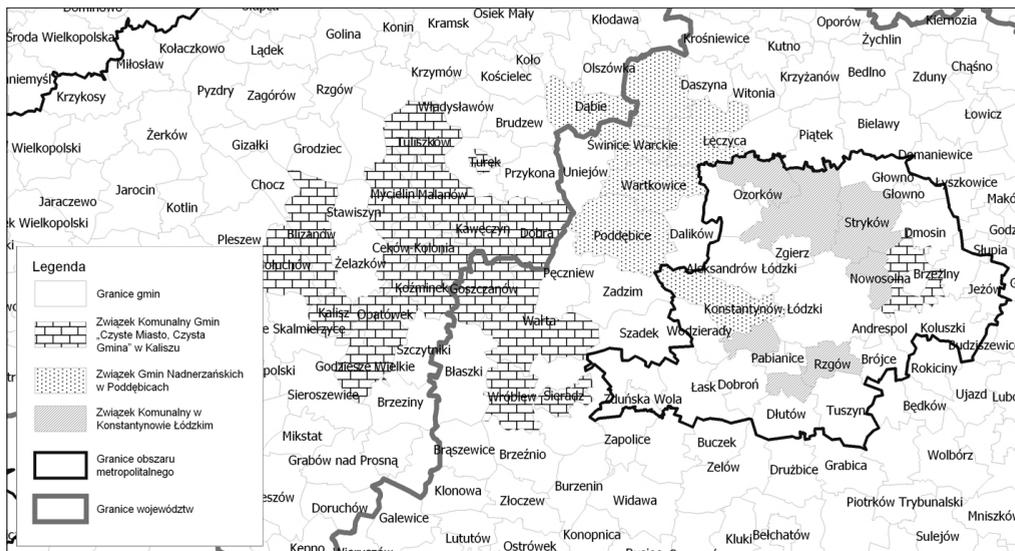


Fig. 2a. Inter-communal associations in Lodz Metropolitan Area (part 1)

Source: prepared by the authors.

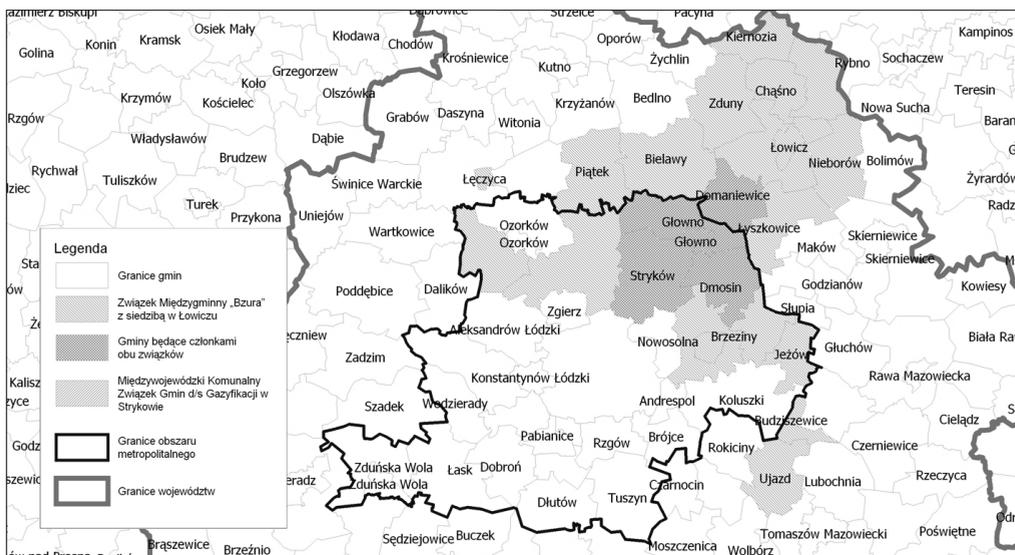


Fig. 2b. Inter-communal associations in Lodz Metropolitan Area (part 2)

Source: prepared by the authors.



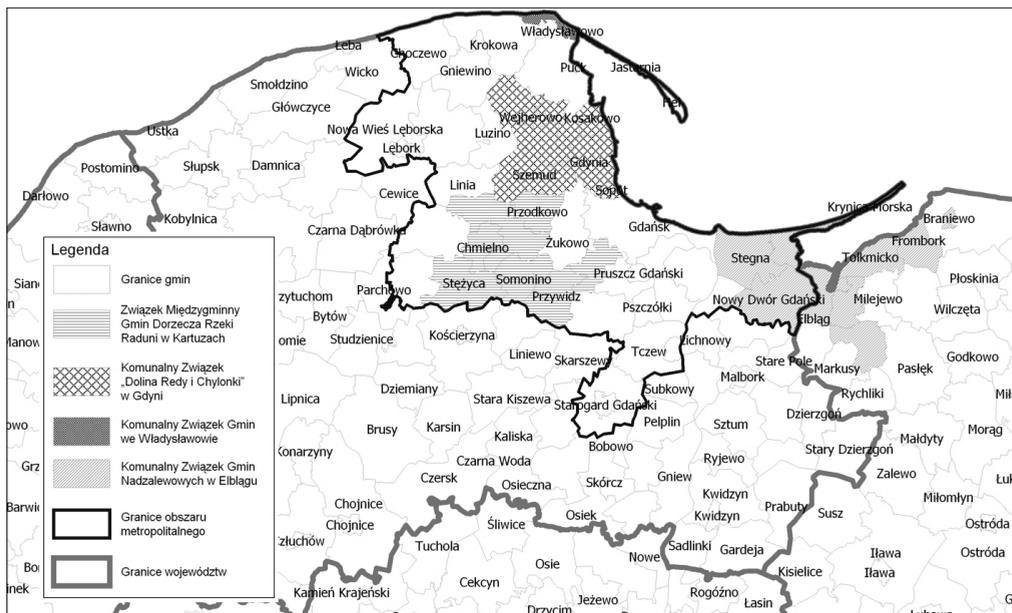


Fig. 4a. Inter-communal associations in Tri-City Metropolitan Area (part 1)

Source: prepared by the authors.

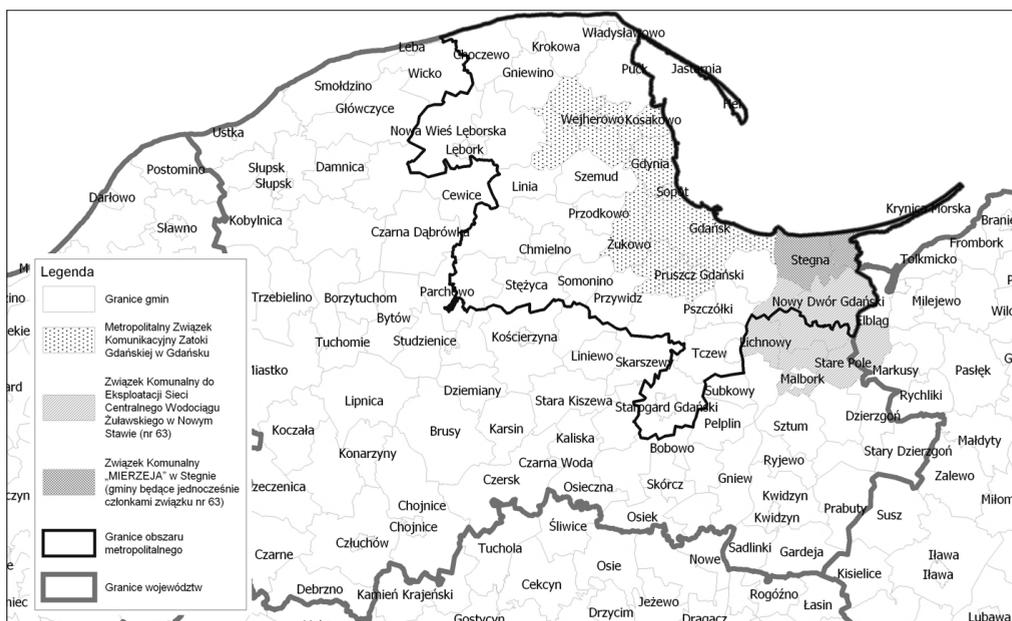


Fig. 4b. Inter-communal associations in Tri-City Metropolitan Area (part 2)

Source: prepared by the authors.

many communes which lie outside the area's boundaries. The common denominator in terms of objectives for all these associations is environmental protection, especially in terms of river purification. Cracow is a member of one such association.

**Tri-City Metropolitan Area** is composed of 45 communes. Some of them cooperate within 7 inter-communal associations shown in Figures 4a and 4b.

The largest of these association is made up of 13 communes which are at the same time the core of the metropolitan area. The overriding objective there is to integrate public transport management within the agglomeration. The remaining associations, rather typically, concentrate their activities on waterworks, sewage and environmental protection.

The **Upper Silesian Metropolitan Area** is composed of 73 communes, including 14 urban districts (large cities). The urban districts have created an Upper Silesian Metropolitan Union (shown in Figure 5a) with the objective of preparing a joint development strategy, managing roads, supporting public education as well as supporting labour markets, including joint preparation of analyses and reports on the labour market<sup>13</sup>. Apart from this union there exist 6 more association within the analysed metropolitan area (shown in Figures 5a and 5b). Their tasks concentrate on organising and coordinating public transport, water and sewage related services and environmental protection.

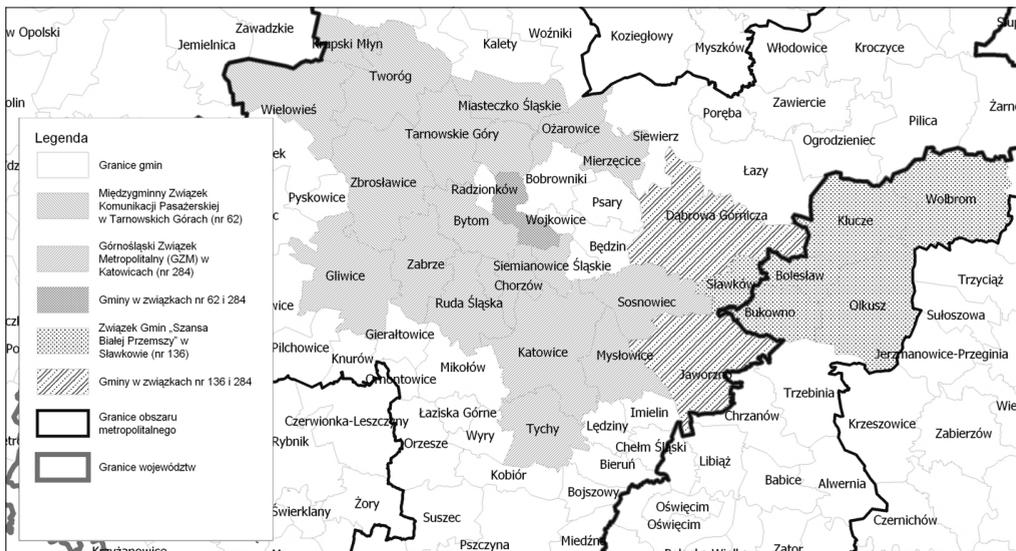


Fig. 5a. Inter-communal associations in Upper Silesian Metropolitan Area (part 1)

Source: prepared by the authors.



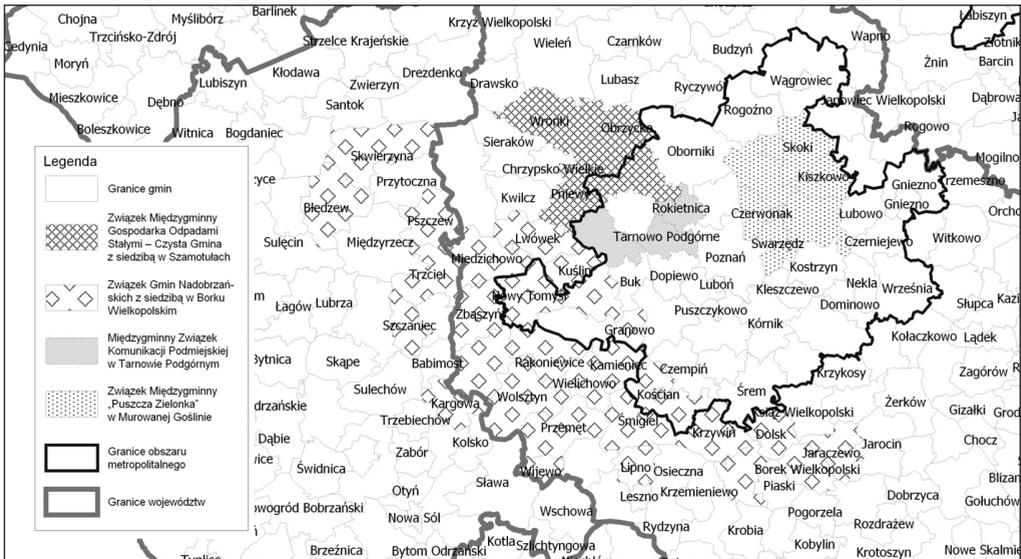


Fig. 6a. Inter-communal associations in Poznan Metropolitan Area (part 1)

Source: prepared by the authors.

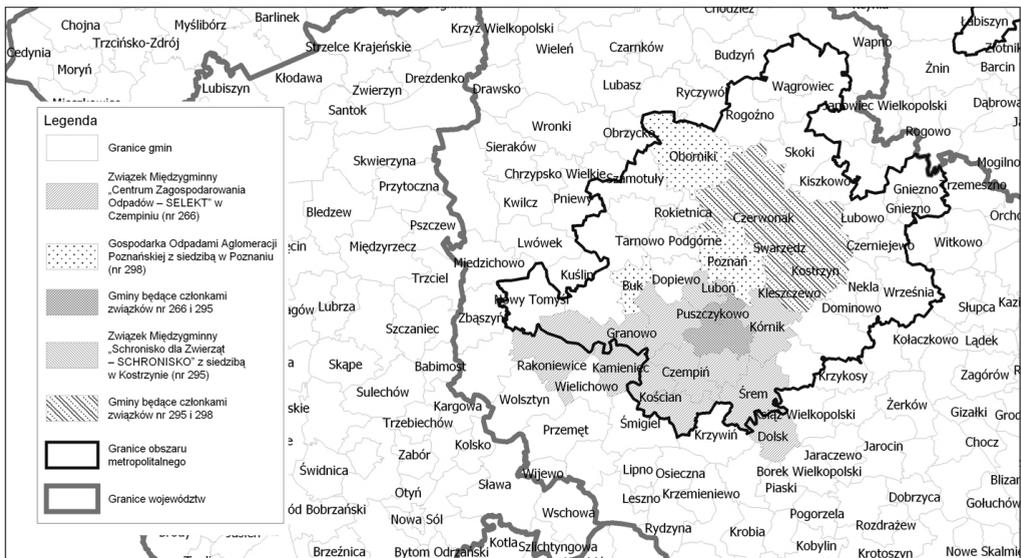


Fig. 6b. Inter-communal associations in Poznan Metropolitan Area (part 2)

Source: prepared by the authors.

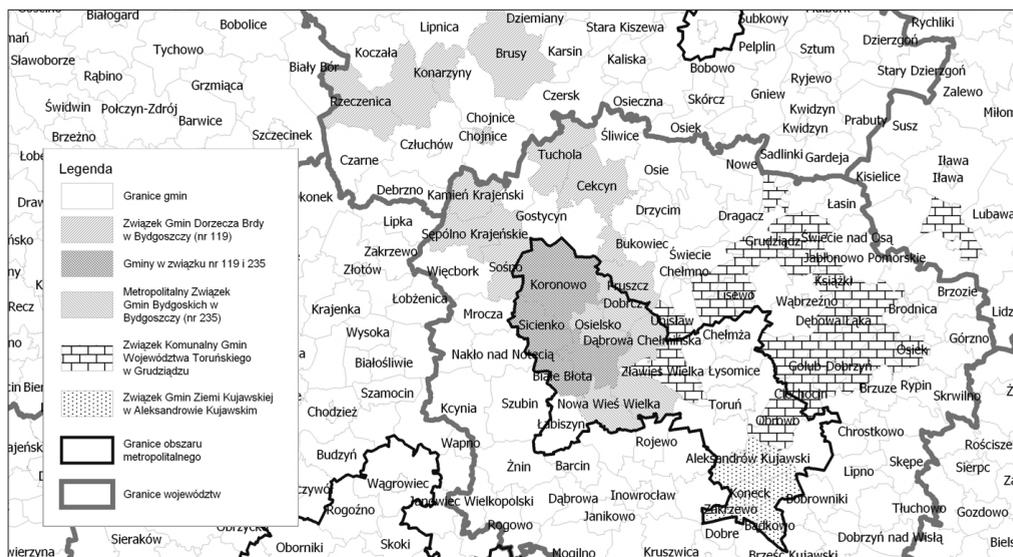


Fig. 7. Inter-communal associations in Bydgoszcz and Torun Metropolitan Area

Source: prepared by the authors.

## Conclusions

The analysis of inter-communal associations presented in this paper supports a conclusion that such form of cooperation is not used for managing development within metropolitan areas. None of the presented associations covered all communes belonging to a given metropolitan area. What is more, the metropolitan cities do not participate in inter-communal associations in most cases.

The currently existing inter-communal associations are characterised by large variety of cooperation forms as well as by territorial scopes which are not matching to the theoretical delimitations of metropolitan areas. Interestingly, the communes which are peripheral with regards to metropolitan centres are more willing to enter into various forms of cooperation than the said central cities and the communes which are their direct neighbours. In many cases the cooperation extends also to communes which lie outside the metropolitan area, at times even beyond the region's administrative border.

This suggests that benefits of cooperation may be local and dependent on the need to jointly solve specific problems, such as environmental protection or waste management, or that the supra-local nature of communication, waterworks or sewage infrastructure requires

such cooperation. Furthermore, the evidence suggests also that central cities are omitted, indeed ostracised when it comes to creation of inter-communal associations within metropolitan areas. The reason for this being that the smaller communes may be wary of the metropolis benefitting at their expense.

On the other hand, many local governments are withholding their involvement in any sort of formalised cooperation aimed at solving the problems and issues of the entire metropolitan area as they anticipate a Metropolitan Act – which is widely expected to regulate the issue of metropolitan area management – to be approved soon by the government and, later, by Parliament. A draft of such an act envisages that an obligatory metropolitan union shall be created<sup>14</sup>, yet there is no precise information available with regards to the legal and formal nature of such a union, financial consequences of its existence for member communes, election procedures for metropolitan authorities and their relations with individual communes, etc. This general uncertainty surely deters local governments from cooperating.

Concluding, it needs to be emphasised that, insofar as creation of institutionalized forms of metropolitan governance in Poland is concerned, Poland is at an early stage of development and that voluntary inter-communal associations are by no means an effective instrument which could speed up this process.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> OECD.

<sup>2</sup> Stoker (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Act on Spatial Planning and Development of March 27th, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Świetlik, Lubiowski (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Regional Development (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Lyytikainen (2012).

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see *Metropolitan Governance...* (2003); Shaffer (2004); *Public Management...* (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Act on Spatial Planning and Development of March 27th, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Act on Communes of March 8th, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Kogucik (2010).

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Administration and Digitalization (2012).

<sup>13</sup> *Statut Górnośląskiego Związku Metropolitalnego*.

<sup>14</sup> Mironowicz (2007).

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