

MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AS A PLANNING DOCUMENT THAT SETS THE DIRECTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES

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Purpose: The purpose of the article was to show the importance of the municipal development strategy in the functioning of a local government unit. At the time of publication of the article, it was a programmatic legal act optionally adopted by municipal councils. As of July 1, 2026, it will become mandatory throughout Poland. Using the example of Zabrze, a city with administrative district rights, where three successive strategies have been adopted since 1999, the genesis, assumptions and conditions of their creation, implementation, updating and revision are presented.

Design/methodology/approach: For the purpose of the article, planning documents, legal acts, reports and reports of local government administration and scientific literature on issues related to the realization of development policy were analyzed.

Findings: The analyses conducted confirmed the effectiveness of the municipal development strategy as a planning basis for the implementation of tactical activities by the field administration.

Research limitations/implications: The implementation of the development strategy can apply to all 2479 municipalities in the country, but the study focused on a city with administrative district rights (one of the 66 largest Polish urban centers), which limits the universality of the issues addressed especially in the area of financial management.

Practical implications: The presented experience of preparing, enacting, implementing and reporting the municipal development strategy may prove to be a source of information for use by theoreticians and practitioners of development management.

Originality/Value: This work addresses legal issues that have not yet entered into force in Poland. It presents a new approach to development planning and identifies innovative aspects that may impact the implementation of these regulations.

Keywords: development strategy, spatial planning, sustainability, local government, development policy management.

Category of the paper: research paper. Case study.

1. Introduction

According to the law in force in Poland, development policy is carried out by public administration, specifically by the government and local government. In the case of local government, this refers to the provincial, administrative district and municipal levels, as well as associations of districts and municipalities or metropolitan associations. Each of these entities creates development strategies. When embarking on the development of such a document, it must realize the so-called diagnosis of the social, economic, spatial and climate-environmental situation, taking into account functional areas. The Act of December 6, 2006 *on the principles of development policy* in Article 10a (2) also stipulates that prior evaluation of the relevance, anticipated effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the development strategy must be carried out before its adoption.

At the time of the preparation of this article, the elaboration of development strategies by municipalities was still optional. *The Law on Municipal Self-Government*, in Article 10e (1), stipulated that a municipality "may" undertake such a challenge. However, Article 6(1) of *the Law of July 7, 2023, amending the Law on Land Use Planning and Development and certain other laws*, introduced an important innovation. As of July 1, 2026, the task will be mandatory, and exemption from the obligation will only be possible if the municipal area has already been covered by a supra-local development strategy.

2. Municipal development strategy as an obligatory planning document

Regulations aimed at organizing the planning sphere of local government units cover the most important aspects of the functioning of each municipality, namely social and economic development, land use planning or care for nature protection. Of key importance in the construction of the strategy should be to ensure that the municipality is able to develop sustainably, that is, to use resources rationally in a way that will not limit opportunities and possibilities for future generations of residents. It is worth noting that Article 3 point 50 of the Law of April 27, 2001. - *Environmental Protection Law* further specifies that "sustainability" is "such socio-economic development in which there is a process of integrating political, economic and social activities, while maintaining natural balance and sustainability of basic natural processes, in order to ensure the possibility of satisfying the basic needs of individual communities or citizens of both the present and future generations".

Each municipal development strategy must be consistent with the planning document describing the development formula for (1) provincial and (2) supra-local development.

2.1. Principles for creating a municipal development strategy

The amended Law of March 8, 1990 *on Municipal Self-Government*, in Article 10e (3), contains a detailed characterization of the requirements for development scenarios of local government units. Planners must therefore formulate strategic goals for the development of the municipality in social, economic, spatial and climate-environmental terms. The next step is to determine the courses of action to be taken in pursuit of them.

To optimize the implementation of the strategy, the expected results of these activities are to be determined in the previously appointed areas and indicators of their achievement are to be given, which is to ensure the measurability of the developed effects. An important component of the strategy must be a model of the functional and spatial structure of the municipality in accordance with Article 10e paragraph 3 item 4 specifying the target layout of such elements as the structure of the settlement network forming a coherent whole in a given area, the system of natural connections, the main corridors and elements of transport networks (including pedestrian and bicycle), and the main elements of technical and social infrastructure.

A socially important part of the development strategy are recommendations relating to the formation of spatial policy. This includes the principles of environmental protection and respect for resources (the law lists "air, nature and landscape"), as well as cultural heritage and monuments and modern cultural assets. The spatial policy is also concerned with specifying the directions of changes in the structure of land use planning with the determination of the needs for new development, the location of supermarkets and shopping malls (understood as large-format trade facilities, i.e., according to Article 2, paragraph 27 of the Law *on Planning and Spatial Development* of March 27, 2003, with a sales area of more than 2000 m²), the location of energy-generating equipment with installed capacity exceeding 500 kW, and projects that may have a significant environmental impact. The discussed part of the strategy is also to include directions for the development of communication, technical and social infrastructure systems, as well as the location of so-called key public purpose investments. Public purposes may include public roads, bicycle and waterways, rail tracks, airports, public transportation, communications and signaling equipment, infrastructure for the transmission or distribution of liquids, steam, gases and energy, facilities for the supply of water to the public or for the collection, transmission, treatment and disposal of wastewater and the recovery and disposal of waste, as well as premises for offices, courts and prosecutors' offices, public universities or schools or cultural institutions. A detailed list of public purposes is given in Article 6 of the Law of August 21, 1997 *on Real Estate Management*. This part of the strategy should also include the principles of shaping "productive space" for agriculture and forestry, as well as the management of degraded land and land requiring environmental remediation.

Another thematic scope of the municipal development strategy is "areas of strategic intervention defined in the provincial development strategy". *The National Strategy for Regional Development 2030* enumerates that these include sub-regions, urban functional areas,

border areas, post-industrial areas, degraded areas or the so-called inner periphery - as (NSRD, 2019, p. 41), and then defines them as "a response to development problems, as long as this will involve the provision of specific support instruments or agreement mechanisms" (NSRD, 2019, p. 46). The next point of the strategy is a list of areas of strategic intervention, but this time key areas for a specific municipality, if, of course, they are identified and labeled. The authors of the strategy must also state the scope of activities that the municipal government intends to carry out in connection with the establishment of the listed areas.

In addition, the regulations require that part of the municipal development strategy drawn up in textual and graphical form should be a system for its implementation, including, among other things, guidelines for the preparation of implementing documents, as well as the designated funding framework and sources.

2.2. Method of adoption and updating of the municipal development strategy

The cited Law of March 8, 1990 *on Municipal Self-Government* in Article 10f. Sec. 1 states that the municipal council shall adopt a resolution specifying the detailed procedure and schedule for developing the draft municipal development strategy. This also applies to the consultations provided for in Article 6 (3) of the Act of December 6, 2006 *on the principles of development policy*, i.e. primarily with residents and local social partners and economic partners, but also with neighboring municipalities and their associations, as well as with the competent director of the regional water management board of the State Water Management Authority Wody Polskie.

After the draft strategy is drawn up by the single-member executive authority (commune head, mayor or city president), the document is submitted to the provincial board for an opinion on how to take into account the findings and recommendations for the formation and conduct of spatial policy. After 30 days at the latest, the applicable opinion must be issued. Failure to respond results in automatic recognition that the municipal development strategy is consistent with the provincial development strategy. The planning document then goes to the municipal council, which adopts it in the form of a resolution.

When changes occur in the social, economic, spatial or climate-environmental conditions in the area covered by the strategy, the document must undergo a process of updating. As in the case of the need for consistency with higher-level planning documents (supra-local or provincial strategy).

The regulations provide for the possibility of consolidating the efforts of neighboring municipalities, which can jointly develop a development strategy of a supra-local nature, and relating to the area of these localities. The county level government may participate in such activities, or join obligatorily if all the constituent municipalities participate in the work. To facilitate the implementation of such a task, the local government units involved may form a union: inter-municipal or county-municipal (for joint performance of public tasks in

accordance with Article 72a of the Act of June 5, 1998 *on county self-government*), association (to promote the idea of local self-government and defend common interests in accordance with Article 84 of the cited Act *on Municipal Self-Government*) or conclude an inter-municipal agreement (on entrusting one of the municipalities with the performance of public tasks, when it takes over the rights and obligations of the other municipalities in this regard in accordance with Article 74 of the cited Act *on Municipal Self-Government*).

3. Analysis of the formulation and verification of the municipal development strategy on the example of Zabrze

From the work of researchers analyzing the situation in cities with administrative district rights before the aforementioned introduction of the obligation to adopt a strategy for municipal development, the conclusion was that its possession was "clearly correlated with the number of residents and the level of income per capita, i.e. the more both indicators increase, the greater the probability of preparing such a plan" (Sieklucki, 2022, p. 159). Studies of the development strategies of even the largest urban centers in Poland, however, indicated that "models of the functional and spatial structure of cities were most often incomplete, the deficiencies concerned especially elements of infrastructure of various types, land use or natural connections. There was a lack of mapping of many planned strategic goals and activities (Maleszyk, 2024, p. 46). Therefore, for the purpose of this article, the planning documents of Zabrze, a city with administrative district rights in the Silesian province, whose local government not only created three development strategies, but before the expiration of the second one recognized that the established goals had been achieved and implemented a new document specifying further challenges, were reviewed.

3.1. Planning directions for changing the nature of coal and steel monoculture after the liquidation of heavy industry

As Europe's largest village before more than two hundred years ago, Zabrze was the center of coal mining and processing, as well as the center of heavy industry. It was not until 1922 that the municipality of Hindenburg was granted municipal rights, becoming a city (Koman, 2017, p. 154). After World War II, too, employment for residents was provided primarily by coal mines, coking plants, a steel mill, mechanic plants, transportation companies and others affiliated with the mining industry. Economic difficulties after 1989 related to the transition period and subsequent turnaround of the mining industry resulted in the elimination of thousands of jobs, permanent unemployment and the expansion of the poverty zone, and a degraded working environment was left behind after the closed mines and coking plants.

A systemic change in the face of the city required conceptual work involving deputy representatives of all the municipality's stakeholders. First, the "Development Strategy of the City of Zabrze" was created, adopted by Resolution No. XIII/166/99 of the Zabrze City Council on September 13, 1999. The document set six development directions and basic strategic goals: (1) supporting the establishment and development of small and medium-sized enterprises, (2) Zabrze a center for various forms of housing and modern construction technologies, (3) shaping the city's new image, (4) Zabrze as a center for culture, (5) Zabrze as a center for medical care, and (6) Zabrze as a center for science.

A comprehensive report on the implementation of the strategy was drawn up eight years later, when Małgorzata Mańka-Szulik was elected president following the 2006 local elections. The document described as: "Materials collected and compiled by the Department of Strategy, City Development and European Integration - 12.02.2007" has been placed in the Public Information Bulletin. It contains a precise reference to each of the points of the strategy, although some of the findings have a laconic form similar to the description of the effects in item 6 "Zabrze as a city of science": "N.2.4 Promotion at home and abroad of the scientific, research and technological potential of institutions operating in Zabrze. Implementation of the project is not the responsibility of the Education Department" (Report, 2007, p. 58). The report on the implementation of the entire strategy in 2007 was 62 pages long. In comparison, the annual summary of the effects achieved in 2023 alone was 237 pages (Report, 2024, p. 237). The completion of the activities described in the 1999 document was the starting point for the creation of the next strategy. Therefore, with the participation of researchers from the Academy of Economics in Katowice: Małgorzata Czornik, Adam Drobnik, Maciej Baranowski and Piotr Gibas, a planning document "Development Strategy of the City of Zabrze for the years 2008-2020" was created, which was adopted by Resolution No. XXII/284/08 of the Zabrze City Council on March 17, 2008.

The strategy characterized, among other things, external and internal factors of a political-legal, economic, social and infrastructural-environmental nature affecting the situation of the municipality. It also formulated the vision of Zabrze in the adopted time perspective, priorities of development, directions of activities and ways to supervise their implementation. The strategy specified a new vision for the city based on sustainability and revitalization of degraded areas, as well as changing its image. It is worth noting that the concepts analyzed by the researchers "address the idea of urban sustainability to varying degrees. Some of them emphasize the need for more thoughtful urban planning (e.g. compact city, smart growth), while others focus on improving ecological conditions in urban space (e.g. ecocity). Smart cities promote development through technology, while creative cities give preference to the ingenuity of their residents" (Rożałowska, 2016, p. 99). The authors of the document assumed in the formulated vision that Zabrze will be: "a city creating its development based on a balance between history and modernity, Silesian identity and metropolitan context, as well as residential and investment attractiveness" (Strategy, 2008, p. 57).

The development strategy appoints four development priorities: (P1) "Economic Environment", (P2) "Modern Urban Society", (P3) "Attractive Public Spaces", and (P4) "Metropolitan Services".

The researchers evaluating the "Development Strategy of the City of Zabrze for 2008-2020" found that the established development priorities, strategic challenges and strategic and horizontal objectives of the strategy "form a coherent whole - it is no coincidence that the economic environment (P1), modern urban society (P2) and attractive spaces (P3) and metropolitan services (P4) were indicated. All of them are expected to contribute to the effective promotion of Zabrze on the regional, national and international arena (CH1), its revitalization (CH2), better aesthetics of public spaces (CH3), better quality of the environment (CH4) and multi-sector, multi-stakeholder cooperation of city users (CH5). The city's economic competitiveness is strengthened in Zabrze through activities aimed at: improving the city's investment attractiveness and increasing employment potential (C1); stimulating the development of local entrepreneurial spirit (C2); strengthening the city's economic profile (C3); transfer of new technologies and access to economic information (C4). Zabrze should participate more intensively in civilization development through: greater security of living and staying in the city (C5); higher intellectual capital - better trained residents (C6); higher cultural capital of residents (C7); greater sports and recreational activities of residents (C8); higher standard of municipal housing infrastructure (C9); rational social policy (C10); providing conditions for the development of the information society (C11). The city should be "comfortable to live and stay in", so the following challenges were identified in the area of improving functionality: spatial order (C12); higher standard of municipal infrastructure facilities (C13); better transportation accessibility of the city (C14); developed housing (C15)" (Koszembar-Wiklik, Macelko, 2015, pp. 237-238).

After ten years of implementing the assumptions of the strategy envisaged for 2008-2020, Zabrze was already increasingly recognized in the mass media as a city of medicine, science, sports, industrial tourism, new investments and culture. The transformation of the reputation and the creation of a new brand was possible thanks to the skillful use of national and EU funds, which allowed the implementation of many projects important for the development of the city, aimed at improving the living conditions of the residents and the environment (e.g., improving water and sewage management, reducing low pollutant emissions, remediation of degraded post-industrial areas, etc.) and economic reconstruction based on small and medium-sized enterprises and the implementation of modern technologies in their operation. Two years before the expected completion of the activities planned in the "City Development Strategy 2008-2020", due to the fulfillment of most of the goals set therein, the need to update the municipality's main planning document arose.

3.2. Updating the development strategy and adapting to changing conditions

On August 27, 2018, during the session of the City Council, the "Development Strategy of the City of Zabrze 2030" was adopted. The document was prepared by experts from the University of Economics after performing the necessary research and conducting workshops and consultations. The moderators of the work on the preparation of the "Development Strategy of the City of Zabrze 2030" and editors of the document were Adam Drobniak (team leader), Marcin Baron, Małgorzata Czornik and Piotr Gibas.

The strategic document for the municipality defines the directions of the city's development, taking into account the socio-cultural, economic-technological and infrastructural-environmental conditions. It also specifies a modified vision of development - based on improving the broadly understood attractiveness of the city in all areas of its functioning - which reads: "Zabrze is a city creating its development based on the pursuit of: popularize and consolidate active social attitudes and conscious participation in contemporary cultural processes, create competitive specializations of various industries, including an innovative economy, create friendly urban spaces and achieve a significant position in the Metropolis" (Strategy, 2018, p. 27).

The authors of the document adopted four development priorities: "P1. Active urban society" - with the challenge "Actively participate in social development", "P2. Development and innovation of the economy" with the challenge "Strengthen the city's economic competitiveness", "P3. Friendliness of city space" with the challenge "Domesticate space in the city" and "P4. Significant metropolitan position" with the challenge "To stand out in the Upper Silesian and Zagłębie Metropolis". The established priorities "are accompanied by corresponding strategic challenges, understood as a clarification of their leading idea. They indicate the sense of engaging municipal resources and external opportunities in the process of implementing Zabrze's strategic goals, development directions and undertakings" (Strategy, 2018, p. 28).

Strategic goals were appointed, expressed in 20 assumptions about specific priorities. Horizontal goals were also created, relating to all the appointed priorities, namely: "CH1. Creating conditions for the development of the family", "CH2. Shaping conditions for the development of the smart city", "CH3. Revitalization of the city", as well as "CH4. Effective promotion of the city". The next step in the planning cycle was the appointment of selected development directions for the strategic and horizontal goals, and then the assignment to them of thematically selected undertakings (projects, activities, programs, etc.) that organize investment policy and facilitate the management of the city in the period designated by the document. A system was also created for implementing the given recommendations, monitoring their implementation and evaluating the whole process.

In formulating the strategy, the model of integrated planning was taken into account, "in which each of the documents prepared is part of a coordinated and integrated system of planning documents of the city, linked to the national and regional system. At the level of local planning, two elements of this system perform basic coordination functions: the assumptions of city development, linked to spatial management, and an organized system of data collection and analysis, which should also play an important role in integrating local and regional planning" (Korzeniak, 2012, p. 69). Therefore, it is necessary to point out the consistency of the "Development Strategy of the City of Zabrze 2030" prepared in 2018 with the regulations in force at that time at the national and regional level such as the "Long-term Strategy of National Development. Poland 2030", "Concept for Spatial Management of the Country 2030", "National Urban Policy 2023" or "Strategy for the Development of Southern Poland in the area of the Małopolska and Silesian Voivodeships until 2020" and "Strategy for the Development of the Silesian Voivodeship ŚLĄSKIE 2020+".

Among other strategic documents for specific areas of the municipality's functioning, it should be indicated, for example: "Strategy for building an information society" adopted by Resolution No. XXXVII/412/17 of the Zabrze City Council on February 13, 2017 on amending Resolution No. XXI/211/16 of January 18, 2016 on adopting for implementation a document called "E-Zabrze strategy for building an information society of the city of Zabrze until 2020+", "Strategy for solving social problems for the City of Zabrze" adopted by Resolution No. LIX/766/10 of the Zabrze City Council on October 11, 2010. on "Strategy for Solving Social Problems for the City of Zabrze for 2010-2020" or "Local entrepreneurial spirit development plan for the City of Zabrze for 2016-2020" adopted during the session on June 6, 2016 by Resolution No. XXVI/278/16 of the Zabrze City Council.

Thanks to the preparation of the planning instrumentation, it was possible to conduct consistent activities in individual areas of activity of the local government unit in an integrated manner with the overall transformation program. Individual investments, events or undertakings resulted from the adopted assumptions relating to individual stakeholder groups. Thus, taking into account - for example - the issue of support for people with disabilities, researchers studying this issue were able to find that "undoubtedly the city of Zabrze cares about people with disabilities, because both the city development strategy and the strategy for solving social problems take into account the needs of people with a disability, and the actions taken translate into the implementation of the goals formulated in both strategies. In the city, measures are being implemented to facilitate access to information, remove architectural barriers, and projects for the reconstruction and adaptation of individual public buildings are being implemented to adapt these buildings to the needs of persons with a disability. Activities are also implemented in the field of nursing, caring, educational assistance, equalization of opportunities for persons with a disability and counteracting their social exclusion" (Sorychta-Wojczyk, 2011, p. 288).

3.3. Zabrze in the planning perspective - a smart city for sustainability?

In accordance with the current strategy, the local government intends to continue adapting modern and innovative solutions to continue optimizing the city's functioning in a manner consistent with the expectations of stakeholders (e.g. residents, investors, tourists, etc.). A smart city of sustainability, requires combining the requirements of social life, with the challenges of the economy, taking into account respect for the environment. One important aspect, in this regard, is the improvement of ambient air quality. Researchers emphasize that "in the smart city management plan, measures to reduce urban air pollution and environmental prevention can and should place greater emphasis on: projects to raise awareness of environmental activities among residents, reliable monitoring of the city's air, taking into account measurements in individual city districts with information provided to city residents, and enforcement among air polluters (burning garbage). Long-term action accepted by residents in the form of replacing stoves is also of great importance (Ignac-Nowicka, 2019, p. 70). In addition to the state of the environment, important conditions for improving living conditions in the city include providing access to public services, medical and social care, education, culture, sports, recreation, housing or an extensive transportation system (including sidewalks, paths and bike lanes).

It is also important to take into account the assumptions of the 2007 Leipzig Charter and its modified version of the "New Leipzig Charter" adopted in November 2020, which upholds "the ever-present demands of the concept of sustainability strongly emphasizing the need for transformation towards just, green and productive cities" (NLC, 2020, p. 7).

4. Determinants of Zabrze's development - from medicine through innovative economy to post-industrial heritage tourism

The basis for creating the concept of transformation is the proper determination of the actual state of affairs. Therefore, it is necessary to assume that still "Zabrze is a city with a difficult process of economic and social turnaround. The city, where the most coal was mined in Europe, no longer has any large, state-owned mine. Over the past 30 years, tens of thousands of jobs in the mining industry have been eliminated" (2020 Report, 3). The turnaround of the mining industry and the liquidation of many heavy industry plants carried out since the beginning of the transition period have changed the character of the city. The place of the coal and steel monoculture had to be taken by other areas of economic activity. The goal of the transformation was to create a city of medicine, science, culture, sports, innovative economy and industrial heritage tourism, which turned out to be a new urban product, responding to demand at home and abroad.

4.1. Urban tourism product

In 2007, a decision was made to establish an independent cultural institution: Historic Coal Mine "Guido". The process of transformation of an important sphere of the city's activity was then initiated. Over time, Zabrze developed a strong position on the European Route of Industrial Heritage. The facilities of the Coal Mining Museum are now the most recognizable landmarks of the city and the region.

Unique in Europe, places like the "Guido" mine and the "Królowa Luiza Adit" - a combination of the historic "Królowa Luiza" mine and the "Main Key Heritage Adit" - nurture the history and tradition of the region, while showing visitors its uniqueness. Since the establishment of the Coal Mining Museum in 2013, the scope of its activities has increasingly increased and has gained not only national, but also international significance. Every year there are also more and more tourists who want to visit the deepest coal mine tour in Europe. The concerts and artistic performances taking place underground are very popular. Worth noting is the cooperation with European industrial heritage tourism sites. The mine also successfully plays the role of a conference center and an attractive venue for business meetings. A continuation of the "Guido" project is the "Queen Louise Adit", a unique mining and hydrological art object in Europe, which has survived for more than 200 years, and after revitalization, restoration and adaptation to tourism, offers more than a kilometer-long boat ride under the city center. Recognition of Zabrze's programs for preserving, adapting and making post-industrial monuments accessible to tourists was also expressed at the European Union forum, when the city was rewarded with the European Commission's prestigious "EUROPA NOSTRA" award in Paris on October 29, 2019. The Grand Prix of the award went to the Queen Louise Adit, about which the organizers wrote: "it is the largest tourist and cultural complex related to the heritage of hard coal mining in Poland and an absolute rarity throughout Europe" (UNESCO, 2019). Zabrze was awarded for the effective measures implemented by the Coal Mining Museum to preserve post-industrial sites, revitalize them and make them available for tourism. The complex, which consists of, among other things, the underground workings of a former mine, a water tower and an adit offering boat rafting under the city center, was visited by more than 300,000 people in 2023. In 2024, the number of visitors reached half a million, and Zabrze's monuments, as the "Historic Complex of Coal Mining", are applying for entry on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

4.2. Investments improving the attractiveness and functionality of the city

Among the investment projects described in the municipality's development strategy, the thorough replacement of water and sewage systems, the expansion of the transportation system, the spread of post-industrial tourism, the activation of the Special Economic Zone, the commissioning of numerous facilities after modernization (such as the City Hospital), thermal modernization (such as dozens of educational institutions and public facilities) or

thorough renovation (such as the New Theater) were of lasting and significant importance. The creation of new conditions for the city's development includes environmental remediation projects such as "Environmental remediation of land in the area of the Bytomka River", when 183 hectares degraded and devastated by industrial activity were recovered. As reported at the November 18, 2019 City Council session, among other things: "removed 8000 tons of waste, including 500 tons of tar and pitch, remediated 100,000 m³ of land contaminated mainly with aromatic and aliphatic hydrocarbons, planted 1800 trees and 29,000 shrubs". Another project that improves the quality of life in the city is, for example, the Low Emission Reduction Program, which has been consistently implemented since 2009 (residents can obtain funding for up to 80% of the cost of ongoing investments related to replacing heat sources, thermal modernization of buildings and installation of renewable energy sources in single-family homes). In addition to environmental protection, further development impulses for Zabrze are created by housing construction (e.g., housing estates on Trocera and Żywiecka Streets and developer investments) or the formation of a thriving academic center (e.g., the city's creation of a campus for the Silesian University of Technology).

The investment policy of cities would certainly not be possible without effective application, acquisition and settlement of funds from external sources. During the period of validity of the development strategy, Zabrze tried to obtain funding "from the European Union and other external sources for infrastructure, environmental and social projects. As a result, the municipality's assets increased from less than PLN 900 million in 2006 to more than PLN 3.5 billion in 2019" (A Year in Zabrze, 2020).

Zabrze's advantage is its favorable location near the junction of the A1 and A4 highways and access to the Central Highway of the Silesian Metropolitan Area, which is an important argument in assessing the municipality's investment attractiveness. There are 3 international airports within a 100 km radius: Katowice-Pyrzowice (approx. 30 km), Kraków-Balice (approx. 90 km) and Ostrava (approx. 100 km), while "green areas occupy about 62% of the city's area" (Waryś, Hodor, 2015, p. 105). Therefore, the planning documents assumed attracting business activities by "equipping investment areas with technical infrastructure, creating new investment areas and preparing investment offers" (Report, 2017, p. 19). An example of a successful venture is the Zabrze part of the Katowice Special Economic Zone, where all investment areas have been sold.

4.3. Education and raising the functional competencies of residents

The local government, when implementing the assumptions contained in the adopted planning documents that define the directions of development of the municipality, should take into account the situation of the local community in terms of readiness to participate about the projects made available to it. It also matters to strive to improve the level of approval towards innovative solutions, because "without the formation of attitudes of openness and the ability to acquire new competencies, both technological and social, residents will not only be unable to

take full advantage of modern solutions, but will be exposed to the disappearance of social ties and the resulting loss of social capital, which is the basis for the development of any city" (Kuzior, Sobotka, 2019, p. 116).

The issue of education is extremely important in the creation of a smart city, in which the modern formula of public service provision is accompanied by concern for the elimination of areas of digital exclusion. In order to effectively implement innovative developments resulting from technological advances, it is necessary to monitor and then optimize the competence level of the recipients of these projects, reducing the scale of existing or emerging barriers. For this reason, internal training programs involving local government employees were implemented, as well as external courses offered to those with business activities, or by the NGO Center, aimed at associations operating in the city. The local government must therefore ensure the highest quality of personnel involved in serving the city's residents. The researchers note that in Zabrze such measures were undertaken as a pilot nationwide: "despite the fact that in the past human resource management in local government administration was often not an important aspect of its functioning, the Zabrze City Hall was one of the first in Poland to note that there are important arguments for the need to turn to this issue" (Kuzior, Smółka-Franke, Tokar, 2017, p. 235). Not only people employed in the field administration and its subordinate units must meet the criteria of the modern labor market. The higher the competence level of those employed, the more a city's position as a center of highly skilled personnel increases. This also results in increased interest in the city from potential investors. The hallmarks of modernity in economic terms are "computers, automations and robots, complemented by the entire technical infrastructure and extensive IT tools. These tools are necessary to build a new type of organization, highly flexible, intelligent, capable of self-optimization, continuously monitoring its own needs and those of its organizational environment, skillfully communicating with diverse entities" (Kuzior 2017, p. 36). The conditions cited by the researchers confirm the validity of the local authorities' efforts to prioritize the education of children and young people in Zabrze, as well as interaction with higher education institutions. Examples include the creation and successive expansion of the campus of the Silesian University of Technology, the local government's joint ventures with the Silesian Center for Heart Diseases (e.g., the Silesian Medical Technology Park Kardio.Med Silesia), or cooperation with the Silesian Medical University, which has launched a modern Medical Simulation Center at Dworcowa Street.

4.4. Dialogue with the municipality's stakeholders – the importance of social communication

For the effectiveness of the implementation of the municipality's development strategy, the communication activity of the local government to integrate and activate the local community is important, as well as promotional activities that enable the implementation of the assumptions of territorial marketing. "This is because on the effectiveness of the dissemination

of news on matters important to the local community depends the scale of participation of residents in the functioning of the municipality or administrative district. This applies both to knowledge about cultural, sports, recreational, educational or entertainment projects organized for the city's community and individual neighborhoods and settlements that increase the comfort of life, as well as about investment, infrastructural, preventive, medical projects or widely understood development plans addressed to the local government community" (Krawczyk, 2019, p. 107). In Zabrze, there is a Cultural Information Center that publishes the local government periodical "Our Zabrze Local Government", is the broadcaster of the program "Zabrze TVZ Television" and provides profiles of a municipal nature on social media. The institution provides residents with access to up-to-date, reliable and credible information that allows the formation of civic awareness. Of course, as in the case of any medium belonging to a local government unit, it is excluded to perform control functions, which can be performed by commercial editorial offices operating in the city or region.

The implementation of the assumptions of the "Development Strategy of the City of Zabrze 2030" is also aimed at generating the involvement of residents around self-government at all levels, including district and neighborhood councils, and "on the example of the city of Zabrze, we can see that district councilors want to change the perception of their role, as they declare high enough competence to play the role of partners in relations with the city, which would be served by changing the way city employees communicate with councilors, greater cooperation and support for the processes carried out by neighborhood councils, especially in the area of necessary investments" (Pyszka, 2014, p. 104). The influence of residents on the directions of development and decisions made is a key element in the creation of civil society.

5. Summary

In Zabrze, the first strategy was adopted in 1999, when Roman Urbańczyk was president of the city. Work on the next document began in 2007 after the election of President Małgorzata Mańka-Szulik. During her subsequent terms of office, an update was prepared and the next strategy, developed with a 2030 perspective, was implemented. The 2024 local elections were profitably won by Agnieszka Rupniewska, who was recalled by referendum on May 11, 2025, and in the early elections of August 24, 2025, the mandate was given to President Kamil Żbikowski. However, it can be assessed that during the period of validity of the "Development Strategy of the City of Zabrze", a lot of measures were taken for the sustainability of the city. Local authorities took care to remember Silesian traditions (e.g. renovation adaptation of post-industrial buildings for tourism purposes) to create a smart space for economic (e.g. attracting investors) and social development (e.g. providing a rich educational, cultural, sports and recreational offer). Consistent implementation of the assumptions of the planning documents

translated into the implementation of successive investments and programs that improve the quality of life of residents and increase the attractiveness of Zabrze for entrepreneurs and tourists visiting the city in increasing numbers. Applying for funds from the European Union and other external sources for infrastructural projects provided a developmental impulse, the scale and potential of which should also pay off in the future. Modernization projects such as the replacement of water and sewage systems, thermo-renovation of public facilities, environmental remediation of areas degraded by heavy industry have helped build the foundation for further development. Proper communication of the transformations made in the city remains an important challenge, as "the evaluation results show emphatically that the stereotype of a highly industrialized area with the dominance of mining and the nuisances caused by heavy industry, especially the degradation of the natural environment, still strongly affects the image of the conurbation's cities" (Żemła, Szubert, 2019, p. 74). The unfavorable and already outdated conviction of the city's character must be effectively transformed. To this end, it is necessary to implement and communicate measures within the framework of "so-called integrated urban development plans (ger. Integrierte Stadtentwicklungskonzepte), which combine the tasks of urban planning with socio-economic planning" (Billert, 2019, p. 37). With the investment policy carried out in the following years must correspond to attention to social issues in the educational, health, housing, environmental dimensions, etc. In this way, it will be possible to strengthen Zabrze's position as a center of medicine, science, culture, innovative economy and tourism of post-industrial heritage. A position that is defined by the adopted planning documents headed by the "Development Strategy of the City of Zabrze" discussed in this article. A huge challenge in this regard faces the local authorities, as "any goal set by a development policy entity can be achieved by different methods. There is always an alternative way to achieve the goal. It is the task of public authorities to make the optimal choice of goal achievement, that is, the one that will ensure the fastest possible achievement of the goal, the least costly and the most consistent with the values preferred by the local community" (Nowakowska, 2016, p. 49).

Planning documents are intended to help local authorities choose the optimal way to achieve tactical and strategic goals in the process of creating a smart city that is friendly to residents and attractive to the economic and social environment. Starting in the second half of 2026, this will simultaneously be the responsibility of local government units nationwide.

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