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INTEGRATED PROJECTS AS THE INSTRUMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUNCTIONAL AREAS USING THE EXAMPLE OF BIALYSTOK FUNCTIONAL AREA

Summary

Goal – The objective of the paper is to identify the character of the integration of projects realized using EU funds in Bialystok Functional Area (BFA). There was formulated hypothesis which implies that integrated projects constitute the majority of undertakings realized within the instrument of integrated territorial investments (ITI) in BFA.

Research methodology – The analysis was based both on the subject literature and data from the institution responsible for the policy of BFA development, i.e. The Association of Bialystok Functional Area on the basis of information included in the SL 2014 system within the research conducted from 20th to 31stJuly 2018.

Score – The conducted analysis of integrated projects in BFA showed that they constitute an essential instrument in implementing the adopted development strategy of the functional area when considerable amount of funds is necessary to finance such enterprises.

Originality/value – The paper's value lies in the description and assessment of integrated projects using the example of BFA. It is a new way of conducting the development policy of these areas, which may be the basis for planning the strategy for the subsequent years.

Keywords: functional areas, integrated projects

JEL classification: O18, O21

1. Introduction

When a new financial instrument, i.e. integrated territorial investments (ITI), emerged in the cohesion policy of the European Union (EU), functional areas became more important in planning and conducting the development policy. In particular. The policy aims at ensuring the comprehensive view at mutual socio-economic, environmental, demographic and other problems of the functional area and

at removing and minimizing these negative phenomena. The implementation of development plans is possible thanks to realizing projects. Together with the integrated approach to solving territorial problems, larger importance is attached to the idea of integrated projects. This concept is not new, but in the present financial perspective of the EU it gained a new, broader dimension and larger importance in the development policy of mainly functional areas.

The paper aims at identifying the character of integrating the projects realized from EU funds in Bialystok Functional Area (BFA). There was formulated the hypothesis which implies that integrated projects constitute the vast majority of the undertakings realized within the instrument of integrated territorial investments (ITI) in BFA. The analysis conducted in the paper was based both on the subject literature and on data from the institution responsible for the development policy of BFA – i.e. from the Association of Bialystok Functional Area in the research conducted from 20th to 31st July 2018.

2. Functional areas in Poland in the theoretical perspective

Functional areas became particularly interesting and important in development policy when the integrated territorial investments (ITI) were introduced. It is a new instrument of support that is applied for solving certain territorial problems of urban centers (functional areas). The essence of this instrument lies in ensuring the mechanism of integrated answers to diverse needs formulated within the development strategy of functional areas. In particular, the integrated activities ought to be directed at solving economic, environmental, climatic, demographic and social problems of urban functional areas [*The Resolution of the European Parliament and of Council (EU)* no. 1301/2013]. Additionally, the character and the possible way of this integrated approach are specified in article 36 of "The Resolution of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) No 1303/2013 of 17 December 2013", which points at "the investments using funds from ESF, ERDF or the Cohesion Fund within more than one priority axis or several operational programs" [*The Resolution of the European Parliament and of Council (EU)* no. 1303/2013].

The concept of a functional area is characterized in detail in "The Act of 27 March 2003 on spatial planning and land development" in art. 2, item 6a, as the "area of a special phenomenon related to spatial planning or to the occurrence of spatial conflicts which constitutes the consistent spatial system composed of functionally combined areas characterized by mutual conditionings and expected uniform objectives of development" [Ustawa 2003]. Furthermore, there is isolated the concept of urban functional area of the district centre as the territory comprising the town being the headquarters of the district authorities or the governor and its direct surrounding connected with it in functional terms [Ustawa 2003]. Similar view may be observed in the definition of urban functional areas in the "Concept of spatial development of the country 2030" (KPZK) [2011, pp. 187-194]. The document specifies the urban functional area as the settlement arrangement that in spatial

terms is consistent and composed of units that are separate in administrative terms. It means that apart from the town area in functional terms it includes the urbanized area, which in administrative terms may comprise other urban, rural and both urban and rural areas.

The aforementioned approach to the essence and delimitation of functional areas is one of the basic principles of the urban policy. During the realization of the integrated territorial approach it refers to functional areas, not the administrative ones. It means the realization of undertakings in a coordinated and complementary way that aims at synergy, enables better usage of hidden or previously wrongly used and widely perceived resources and specific potentials [*Krajowa Polityka Miejska*, 2015, p. 11].

With regards to the theory of economics a functional area is connected with the theory of node areas which implies that it is the area shaped around the substantial urban center that has mutual links and burdens regarding the exchange of people, goods, services, capital and information. The limits of this area are set on the basis of the impact of its center. The theory is also connected with the concept of growth poles around which the functionally integrated development sphere ought to be shaped [quoted after: Szafranek, 2017, p. 116].

The importance of functional areas as the territorial unit being the subject of the policy of regional development is emphasized mainly in the "Strategy for Responsible Development up to 2020". In particular, the activities directed at functional areas are supposed to be characterized by [*Wytyczne w zakresie* ..., 2017, p. 183]:

- The provision of more sustainable development of the country by means of integrated interventions oriented especially at problematic and sub-regional functional areas with accumulated negative socio-economic phenomena and medium-sized towns losing their socio-economic functions.
- The dependence of the scope and manner of offering support on the specific type of a certain territory. Main emphasis will be laid upon the usage of endogenic resources and potentials of particular territories and on the provision of proper resources for initiating stable growth and working positions.
- The selectivity and increased concentration of support instruments during the creation of conditions for increasing competitiveness, innovation and investments in selected sectors that have major importance for regional economies.

In terms of the types of functional areas there are isolated 3 basic types of functional areas [Ustawa 2003]:

- Functional areas of cross-regional importance – important for the national spatial policy; the types of these areas include: an urban functional area of the district center; a rural functional area; a functional area being a particular phenomenon at the macro regional scale (e.g. in the mountains) and border functional area;
- Functional areas of regional importance – crucial for the spatial policy of the district;

– Functional areas of local importance – crucial for the spatial policy of the municipality.

Slightly more detailed division was introduced by KPZK [2011, pp. 187-194] that isolates four basic types of UFA. These are centers of district (including metropolitan), regional, sub-regional and local type. The main criterion for making this division is the number of inhabitants in an urban centre around which a certain functional area is concentrated.

The basis for the delimitation of such areas ought to be the premises specified by the Act of 27 March 2003 [Ustawa 2003]:

– The maintenance of continuity and consistency of a certain area by demarcating a closed area using a common border;
– The usage of indicator data enabling the designation of the area within the frameworks of which the spatial range enables the solution of problems and enhances the creation of a new functions of such areas.

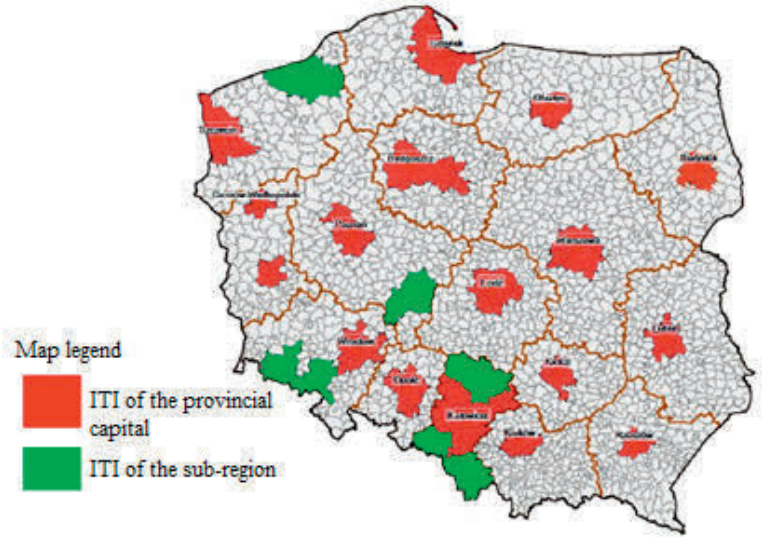
In relation to provincial capitals implementing ITI, there was specified compulsory delimitation of functional areas and spatial strategies and plans were prepared. The basis for setting limits for these areas was the document *The criteria of delimitation of urban functional areas in district centres (Kryteria delimitacji miejskich obszarów funkcjonalnych ośrodków wojewódzkich)* [2013, pp. 7-9]. The division was based on several indicators:

– functional – i.e.: F1 – the number of people commuting to a contract work to MFA core per 1000 working age inhabitants: more than 50 (2006); F2 – the number of residence permits from the MFA core per 1000 inhabitants: above 3 (2009);
– socio-economic – i.e.: S1 – the share of employees of non-farming professions as the relation to the average district value: above 75% (2002); S2 – the number of economic entities per 1000 inhabitants as the relation to the average district value: above 75% (2011); S3 – the number of economic entities per 1000 inhabitants as the relation to the average district value: above 75% (2011);
– morphological – i.e.: M1 – population density (with the exception of forests and water reservoirs) in relation to the average district value: above 50% (2011); M2 – the number of flats put into service per 1000 inhabitants as the relation to the average district value: above 75%.

The functioning of functional areas in Poland is closely linked with the implementation of the cohesion policy of the European Union in the programming period 2014-2020 within ITI. Owing to this there were formed 24 such areas: 17 among them are urban areas of district centers and 7 – of sub-regional areas. Their position is illustrated in chart 1.

CHART 1

Urban functional areas realizing ITI in Poland



Source: [*Monitorowanie strategiczne* ..., 2016, p. 10].

In Podlaskie distict there was established Bialystok Functional Area (BFA) [Uchwała 2015]. It includes 10 municipalities: Białystok, Choroszcz, Czarna Białostocka, Dobrzyniewo Duże, Juchnowiec Kościelny, Łapy, Supraśl, Turośń Kościelna, Wasilków and Zabłudów. BFA occupies the area of approx. 1,728 km² (i.e. approx. 9% of the area of Podlaskie district) and it is inhabited by approx. 411,5 thousand people. It constitutes slightly more than 34% of the inhabitants of Podlaskie district, while approx. 72% of BFA population live in Białystok [*Strategia*…, 2016, pp. 12-17]. In terms of the number of inhabitants and the area, BFA occupies 14th and 15th position among 24 functional areas. At the same time it is clearly below the average value (55% and 77%) of the average for all the UFA respectively [*Monitorowanie strategiczne* ..., 2016, p. 209].

3. Integrated approach in the light of the definition and characteristics of the project

The project is defined in a variety of ways. It is emphasized that a project is a complex and temporary activity of one-off type and it is directed at the achievement of certain objectives [Nasalski, Wierzejski, Szczubelek, 2014, p. 10; Karbownik, 2017, p. 12; Walczak, 2014, p. 11]. Project Management Institute defines the project as a temporary undertaking made in order to create a unique product, service or result. The aim will be achieved when the project objectives have been achieved or when the project has been completed because its objectives are either not achieved or may not be achieved or because there is already no demand for the project

[PMBOK, p. 3]. Meanwhile, in accordance with the methodology of Project Cycle Management (PCM, the project is a series of certain activities directed at the achievement of certain aims within a particular time period and while having adequate budget [*Project Cycle Management* ...]. Adversely, Trocki [2012, p. 19] emphasizes that these undertakings are unrepeatable and particularly complex and they require the usage of limited funds.

Despite various definition approaches available in the subject literature the most important parameters of the project include its costs, the quality of the tasks' realization, people and the duration of the performance. The primary indicator of the projects' rationality are the effects (of production, social, economic and financial type, etc.), which may be achieved as the result of its realization. Another indicator is the importance of the project in creating the added value of an organization or a certain territorial area. Therefore, the project "creates" certain products and contributes to the achievement of certain results. Other important characteristics of projects (which are mentioned in literature) include, among others: the novelty, time limits, the completeness and complexity connected with the involvement of many organizational units of a company, the limited character of resources, including the financial ones, the specific interdisciplinary character of the project organization, etc. [Trocki, 2012, pp. 19-20; Karbownik, 2017, p. 13].

Since the paper concerns the projects that are partly financed by the EU, there is adopted the project description presented in the "Act of 11 July 2014 on the principles of realizing programs concerning the cohesion policy financed in the financial perspective of the years 2014-2020" as "the undertaking directed at the achievement of a certain objective specified using indicators, with a specific realization beginning and endinng, either expecting the funding from the EU or already financed from either structural funds or the Cohesion Fund within the operational program". [Ustawa 2014, p. 4]. The aforementioned factors have impact on the main role of these projects: their realization is the measure for achieving the objectives of operational programs and thus achieving the aim of the EU cohesion policy. These projects may be selected for financing in the procedure of the competition type or of non-competition type. Hence they may be subjected to evaluation in terms of whether the criteria of selecting projects have been met. The adequate institution responsible for making choice must perform this task in a transparent, reliable and unbiased way that ensures the applicants equal access to information on the conditions and manner of selecting projects for financing [Ustawa 2014, p. 4].

How to define integrated projects in the light of this theory? Both the subject literature and rather intuitive understanding of the word "integrated" enables the formulation of the definition of such undertakings as a certain group of projects realizing common objective and comprising a certain geographical area or particular beneficiaries. An important aspect regards joining forces of certain entities, ranges or other features that could not be combined in ordinary projects. Such type of activities has already been used in research projects in the EU Framework Programs. These projects usually involved a large number of participants, a large variety of tasks and considerable funding (from several to several dozen mln Euro)

[*Przygotowanie* ..., 2012, p. 21]. In the present programming period (2014-2020) integrated projects became the instruments of implementing ITI instrument in functional areas. An integrated project is defined in the Act of 11 July 2014 in [Ustawa 2014, art. 32] as "at least two projects combined with one another within a common objective (that ought to be achieved by means of their realization), the selection of which for financing or realization is coordinated by proper institutions. The coordination concerns especially the specification of the mutual relations of projects in terms of the conditions of their selection and evaluation or in terms of the bequests of the agreements concerning the financing of a project or the decision regarding the financing of a project" [Ustawa 2014, p. 38]. On the basis of the aforementioned definitions it is possible to isolate several characteristic features of integrated projects in the present financial perspective of the EU:

- they are implemented in order to ensure the consistency of the realized activities,
- they concern the integration of at least two various undertakings (subprojects) within a common aim,
- undertakings (subprojects) creating the integrated project may concern more than one priority axis, one or more operational programs, various funds or various investment priorities.

Taking the aforementioned factors into consideration it must be noted that in the light of this paper an integrated project will be considered as a temporary undertaking that within more than one priority axis, one or more operational programs, various funds or diverse investment priorities realizes the common objectives and contributes to the achievement of effects that would be impossible or considerably hampered when these undertakings were realized separately. In other words, an integrated project is a more complex undertaking than an "ordinary" project in terms of their scope, realization area and/or the number of beneficiaries. Such approach to solving socio-economic problems is a considerable advantage and chance for increasing the success of the development policy. It results from many circumstances, particularly from the increasing complexity and diversity of problems that need to be solved. Specific examples and possibilities of integrating activities serving the improvement of socio-economic situation of urban functional areas will be presented on the basis of the experiences in BFA.

4. Integrated projects in Bialystok Functional Area

The basic planning document setting the directions and objectives of BFA development is "The Strategy of Integrated Territorial Investments of Bialystok Functional Area for the years 2014-2020" which was adopted in 2016 (ITI Strategy of BFA). There was presented a vision of development till 2020 that was formulated as follows: "Bialystok Functional Area in 2020 is the key center in the Eastern part of the European Union and Poland that is attractive in investment terms and is open to both internal and external cooperation, has dynamically developing economy that

is based primarily on human capital with high specialized competences for work, ensuring the conditions for comprehensive development of all inhabitants and social inclusion as well as high living standard and clean environment. BFA is the integrated and uniform organism formed of economic, communicative and social links and having institutions, structures and procedures ensuring stable and efficient cooperation" [*Strategia*…, 2016, p. 158]. The realization of these premises will be possible thanks to the realization of 7 basic aims, i.e.: [*Strategia*…, 2016, p. 159]:

1. Investment attractiveness.
2. Working competences.
3. Access to culture.
4. Active social integration.
5. Low-emissions economy and environmental protection.
6. Communication accessibility.
7. Integration of strategic management of BFA development.

The aforementioned elements indicate a complex and holistic character of the development of Bialystok Functional Area that constitutes the basis for implementing the specified undertakings within integrated projects. In general, in order to support these objectives the sum of €76 mln was allocated from the Regional Operational Program of Podlaskie Voivodship for the years 2014-2020 (ROPPV). The financing of undertakings is possible thanks to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (amounting to approx. €67.1 mln) and the European Social Fund (ESF) – amounting to approx. €8.9 mln. The funding for the realization of integrated projects constitutes approx. 70% of the available allocation of ITI, which is the evidence of the holistic approach to the development policy of BFA [*Strategia*…, 2016, pp. 304-305]. At the same time it should be noted that these projects are implemented in various forms of integrating activities, beneficiaries or EU funds.

Firstly, integrated projects realized in BFA combine the financing from two EU funds – the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (EFS) as well as from various investment priorities. It should be distinguished from cross-financing, where the costs which may be incurred from another fund, are subject to the limit of 10% of the EU funding [*Wytyczne* …, 2017, p. 61] In this case an integrated project means two different undertakings (having "hard" results of ERDF and "soft" ones – ESF) that have a common objective and the added value resulting from the combination of two various actions. This approach was used during the realization of objective 2 and 4 of the ITI Strategy of BFA and concerns the development of education at the kindergarten level and occupational education as well as social services. Such integrated projects are selected in the procedure based on competition. In order to realize tasks in these subject areas there was offered financial support amounting to approx. €30 mln (more than 132 mln PLN), which constitutes approx. 40% of the total allocation of ITI.

TABLE 1

Integrated projects combining ESF and ERDF in BFA

Fund	Sub-measure ROPPV	Investment priority	Estimated allocation (in €)	Estimated allocation (in PLN)[1]	Contracting – agreements and confirmed integrated projects (in PLN)	Integration with ROPPV sub-measure
ESF	7.2.2	PI 9iv	2 989 950,00	13 045 450,85[2]	0,00	8.4.2
ERDF	8.4.2	PI 9a	2 776 382,00	12 113 632,30	0,00	7.2.2
ESF	3.1.3	PI 10i	1 554 888,00	6 784 131,83	4 615 471,89	8.2.2
ESF	3.3.1	PI 10iv	4 271 357,00	18 636 357,73	13 607 735,75	8.2.2
ERDF	8.2.2	PI 10a (kindergartens)	4 779 221,00	20 852 219,15	11 354 928,30	3.1.3
ERDF	8.2.2	PI 10a (occupational schools)	13 939 699,00	60 820 300,71	18 545 910,09	3.3.1
In total			**30 311 497,00**	**132 252 092,57**	**51 043 349,12**	**x**

[1] Calculated in accordance with the monthly accounting exchange rate used by EC in July 2018 (1 EUR = 4,3631 PLN).
[2] Column "Estimated allocation" in EUR and PLN takes into consideration sums in the non-integrated procedure. It amounts to approx. 5.5 mln PLN.

Source: [Data from BFA Association, state on 24.07.2018].

Integrated projects regarding education in kindergartens (Sub-measures 3.1.3/ 8.2.2) and occupational education (Sub-measures 3.3.1/8.2.2) are among the most frequently implemented projects. The contracting degree for the projects regarding education in kindergartens amounted to approx. 68% of funds from the ESF and approx. 55% from ERDF. In the sphere of occupational education these indicators oscillate at approx. 73% and 30%. In accordance with the state on 24 July 2018 12 agreements were signed in 5 BFA municipalities for the development of kindergartens and 6 agreements were signed with two beneficiaries in terms of occupational education (successive 10 applications are being assessed). This type of support is used by the following municipalities: Białystok, Supraśl, Czarna Białostocka, Juchnowiec Kościelny, Zabłudów and Choroszcz. The realization of integrated projects in the sphere of social services realizing the Sub-measure 7.2.2/8.4.2 ROPPV. There are no projects realized within the integrated formula. On the one hand, there is particularly little interest in competitions of this type from the institutions providing social services. On the other hand, a complicated and long procedure discourages potential applicants and contributes to the fact that they have problem with meeting all the criteria of selection [Data from BFA Association, state on 24 April 2018].

Another (second) form of implementing integrated undertakings in BFA are support projects that come from one fund, but realize their mutual objective within two various investment priorities. In the area of BFA this type regards Objective

1 and 6 of the ITI Strategy of BFA and realizes the Sub-measure 1.4.2 and 4.1.2 ROPPV.

TABLE 2

Integrated projects in BFA combining two investment priorities

Fund	Sub-measure RPOWP	Investment priority	Estimated allocation (in EUR)	Estimated allocation (in PLN)[1]	Contracting – agreements and confirmed integrated projects (in PLN)	Integration with Sub-measure RPOWP
ERDF	1.4.2	PI 3a	12 146 051,00	52 994 435,12	9 275 556,81	4.1.2
ERDF	4.1.2	PI 7b	1 570 183,00	6 850 865,45	6 604 909,12	1.4.2

[1] Column "Estimated allocation" in EUR and PLN takes into consideration sums in the non-integrated procedure. It amounts to 35.4 mln PLN.

Source: [Data from BFA Association, state on 24 July 2018].

The concentration of activities is focused on the improvement of the investment attractiveness of municipal areas by means of improving such lands (PI 3a) and ensuring proper commute by means of the reconstruction/renovation of roads (PI 7b). The realization of undertakings connected with this objective ought to be assessed positively. The selection of projects took place in the non-competition procedure and the allocation on integrated projects was finished, which is visible in the high degree of using funds in the Sub-measure 4.1.2 – approx. 96%, whereas in Sub-measure 1.4.2 (where there are realized also projects in the non-integrated formula) the degree to which funds are used is low – approx. 84% (including all the projects). In case of integrated projects there were signed three agreements in each sub-measure with three municipalities of BFA (Łapy, Supraśl and Zabludów) [Data from BFA Association, state on 24 April 2018].

Another form of integrating activities in BFA area are the projects receiving support from one fund and within the same investment priority, but the territorial area of the project comprises more than one self-government (many beneficiaries). The example of this type of undertaking is the non-competition "Partnership project: The development of low-emission public transport and cycling in BFA". The project involves 9 self-governments in BFA and the District Office in Bialystok and realizes the objective of 5 ITI Strategy in BFA and concerns the Sub-measure 5.4.2. ROPPV. The project including the funding of approx. €22 mln (€96 mln) uses approx. 28% of ITI allocations. The main objective of this project is the improvement of the living standard of inhabitants by means of developing environment-friendly systems of public and transport and cycling in BFA. Apart from investments in road infrastructure and cycling the project implies chiefly the purchase of modern buses for public transport [Data from BFA Association, state on 24 April 2018].

To conclude, it needs to be noted that integrated projects constitute an important instrument supporting the development of BFA, especially owing to a variety of possibilities of conducting integrated activities. The objectives of ITI strategy of BFA are realized in a holistic way by means of integrated projects. It should be assessed in a positive way because in a faster and broader way it contributes to solving particular problems of this area. On the other hand, such approach has certain limitations connected with slight flexibility and complex two-stage procedure of selecting projects in the competition procedure.

5. Conclusions

The paper aimed at assessing integrated projects in the development of functional areas using the example of BFA. There was formulated hypothesis implying that these projects constitute an efficient instrument of support. On the basis of the conducted analysis this hypothesis may be verified positively. It is illustrated by the scope to which the development policy of BFA is realized by integrated projects. In total, approx. 70% of the allocations of ITI within BFA is used for the projects characterized by a certain form of integration: within various funds, investment priorities or the impact area. The analysis of projects adopted for financing also enables drawing conclusions regarding their efficiency in the realization of expected strategic indicators. The synchronizing of the realization of integrated undertakings enables faster achievement of effects than in the situation where they would be realized in different time period and is more beneficial for more effective and rational planning of activities. However, the implementation of integrated projects is not flawless. In particular a large barrier in their implementation is the complex selection procedure which is composed of the stage of pre-selection and the assessment of two complete applications for financial support. In fact, this process may last even more than one year, from the day the application is submitted to the day of signing the agreement. This is burdened by large risk for the project and, in particular, for other institutions than self-governments and it constitutes a considerable barrier during the application for funds. The evidence of it is the zero indicator for integrated projects in the sphere of social services. In case of smaller organizations the barrier may be the lack of institutional or financial skills to realize integrated undertakings at the same time.

Therefore, especially as regards recommendations it is possible to include the postulate to simplify the procedure of selecting projects while preserving their idea of integrated and comprehensive approach in the development policy of functional areas. A particularly beneficial solution would be the non-competition procedure of selecting such projects, which would substantially reduce the duration of the formal and substantial assessment of projects and enable the elaboration of solutions that would be most efficient in solving specific problems.

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