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#### BARBARA KUTKOWSKA\*, DOMINIKA MAŃKOWSKA\*, DAVID E. KALISZ\*\*

\*Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland,

\*\*Paris School of Business, France

## IMPLEMENTATION OF REGIONAL POLICY IN RURAL AREAS ON THE EXAMPLE OF VILLAGE RENEWAL IN LOWER SILESIA COMPETITION

Key words: regional policy, regional development, territorial self-government, village renewal, aid programs, rural areas

ABSTRACT. The aim of the research is to assess the targeting of financial resources granted by the Lower Silesia province self-government as part of Village Renewal in a Lower Silesia competition based on types and categories of projects implemented in 2008-2018. A properly directed management of local communities can have a positive impact on the development of the entire region. Not only do large EU funds have a real impact on improving the quality of life of rural residents, through cooperation initiatives, but small grants financed from the funds of province self-governments also do. An example is the Village Renewal programme – the longest-running regional programme for activating local communities. Activities in the field of village renewal implemented in Lower Silesia since 2008 indicate the dynamic progress of social participation. The analysis of projects co-financed from the province self-government proved that they were mainly directed at supporting the development of socio-cultural infrastructure as well as sports and recreation and leisure infrastructure. The experience of the self-government of the Lower Silesia province shows that external intervention in local systems through targeted regional projects opens new possibilities for shaping the socio-economic policy of rural areas.

#### INTRODUCTION

The development and effectiveness of both civil, bottom-up basic mechanisms and advanced tools depends on a conscious and participatory local government policy. Local authorities are key decision-makers in the field of development policy of a given community, and their activity contributes to an increase in the quality of life of local society [Hübner 2009]. The quality of self-government's functioning is an expression of subsidiarity, according to which decision-making processes should be located as low as possible, where the problem is best understood [Ganowicz 2016]. The importance of the principle of subsidiarity is expressed in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which stresses that regions should apply the principle of subsidiarity in their relations with local authorities [Kieres 1999]. The principle of subsidiarity underlines the role of territorial self-government as a beneficiary of Community actions in the socio-economic

and infrastructural dimension, and, in practice, means that the commune, which is the host in its area, is the most competent institution to fulfill tasks satisfying the needs of the local community, creating conditions for the development of the local economy and, as a consequence, indicating the directions of socio-economic development.

The development of regions is determined by environmental conditions, historical and socio-political factors. It has been shown, however, that despite help from the EU budget, focused on territorial cohesion, regional development is still uneven [Stanny 2009]. Interregional development inequalities in Poland are higher than on average in the OECD [OECD 2018]. Report of the Civil Development Forum Regional development, regional policy points out that the most important issues – apart from regional and local development programming and the management of regional development – are the problem of regional disparities and ways of reducing them [Gorzelak, Smetkowski 2018]. In light of the above findings, the notion of regionalization – the activities of the government related to the reorganization of the territory of the state – is becoming of key importance in order to diversify, level out, stimulate and harmonize development processes, taking into account the specificity of local identity. Regionalization, positively influencing the processes of communication and cooperation of the community, also through the creation of regional organizations, becomes a symmetrical phenomenon of regional policy [Woś 2005]. Province self-governments are, in many respects, leading entities in the development of rural areas. They are responsible for the development of province development strategies, and thus for regional economic development, the labour market and infrastructure at a regional level. At a local self-government level – i.e. districts and communes – citizens are provided with infrastructure and services that support the development of the local economy and the quality of life in local communities [OECD 2018]. Numerous internal connections, a strong sense of local identity and developed social communication are a source of activity of the rural community and an expression of partnership - a relationship created for the implementation of certain tasks, in which cooperation is based on the principle of complementarity [Prawelska-Skrzypek 1997]. Considering the existence of informal social ties, traditions of self-organization and a sense of solidarity, the need to strengthen the relationship between the province board, the commune and the village council was used in the provincial programmes of Village Renewal. By increasing the participation of citizens in solving local problems, these programmes create conditions for local development based on principles of participation and cooperation. Village renewal is a very broad concept in contemporary conditions, including the revitalization of various types of facilities, the development of public space, infrastructure investments, strengthening of social capital and the identity of places [Kłodziński et al. 2007, Wójcik 2010, Wilczyński 2012, Idziak, Wilczyński 2013]. In Poland, village renewal is the largest and longest-running regional programme for the activation of local communities, and the Opolskie province was the first to implement it [Wilczyński 2003]. The important role of endogenous factors in shaping the socio-economic development of rural areas is emphasized by, among others Marta Głaz and Władysław Hasiński [2010] and Gabriela Czapiewska [2011], who see a significant link between village renewal, local resources and social involvement. Village Renewal is the first programme that used the long-term strategic planning method at a village level. Increasing the share of village councils in

decision-making processes creates favourable conditions for the development of entrepreneurship among inhabitants of rural areas, and opens up new opportunities in shaping the social and economic policy of the commune. Several studies, mainly based on case studies, as well as the evaluation of the implementation of Village Renewal Programmes from the Opolskie, Pomorskie and Śląskie provinces [Wilczyński 2009] have proved that such undertakings increase the activity of rural communities and initiate the process of partnership cooperation between the village and commune, thus becoming an impulse for the sustainable development of the village. In order to ensure the proper functioning of Village Renewal in the Lower Silesia Programme, the principles of participation of villages and communes in the programme together with the support system from the Marshal Office have been elaborated [UMWD 2009]. The dynamization of regional development depends on exogenous and endogenous factors. Among those second, those that have social character play an important role. Social development factors include the cooperation of residents and their widest possible participation in undertakings for local development. The Renewal of the Lower Silesia Village programme is an example of activity that contributes to this development.

The considerations taken up in this article will focus on an analysis of the use of funds of Village Renewal in a Lower Silesia competition launched under Village Renewal in the Lower Silesia Programme, implemented and financed in whole by the Lower Silesia province self-government. The aim of the research is to assess the targeting of financial resources granted by the Lower Silesia province self-government within this competition, by types and categories of projects implemented in 2008-2018, and an indication of leading beneficiaries.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article is based on studies of Polish and foreign literature as well as programme documents, analyses and reports of institutions and programme documentation made available by the Marshal Office of the Lower Silesia province (reports, reports on the use of financial resources, province development strategies). For the implementation of the above-stated objective, a detailed analysis of identified project, from the point of view of their thematic and material scope, was made. An overview of lists of project co-financing amounts in individual communes made it possible to determine the spatial distribution of implemented projects. The time range of the studies covers the period from 2008 (the beginning of programme implementation) to 2018. The spatial range concerns 134 rural and urban-rural communes located in the Lower Silesia province, beneficiaries of Village Renewal in a Lower Silesia competition. The choice of the research area results mainly from the fact that the Lower Silesia province, as one of the first in Poland, officially adopted village renewal as a programme implemented by the province Board. In addition, the Lower Silesia province, as the second region in the country, joined the European Association for Rural Development and Village Renewal of ARGE in Vienna [KSOW 2009]. The work uses the descriptive method and comparative analysis. The results obtained are presented in tables and graphically.

#### STUDY RESULTS

The analysis covered projects co-financed from the funds of the Lower Silesia regional government, the so-called small grants, supporting the process of village renewal. As part of the «Village Renewal in Lower Silesia» programme, the Board of the Lower Silesia province announces a subsidy competition every year for investment projects entitled «Village Renewal in Lower Silesia". The purpose of this competition is to create opportunities to improve conditions for the social and economic development of rural towns and encourage residents to work for their localities. The competition co-finances projects related to social infrastructure, i.e. regarding the renovation and furnishing of public facilities, construction, the reconstruction of bicycle lanes and walking trails as well as the purchase of folk costumes and musical instruments for bands associated with cultivating the traditions of local communities. The beneficiaries of the competition are rural and urban-rural communes up to 5,000 residents. Financial assistance takes the form of a refund of up to 50% of eligible costs of the project and can amount to a maximum of PLN 30,000. In the years 2008-2018, as part of the investment competition entitled Village Renewal in Lower Silesia, support was received by 1208 local projects for a total of over PLN 27 million. The summary of the number of projects co-financed in 2008-2018, divided into districts, is shown in Figure 1.

The largest number of implemented projects, on a district scale, is distinguished by the Kłodzko district (83 projects), Trzebnicki district (73 projects) and Świdnik district (64 projects), while the least active was the Oławski district (19 projects). The number of projects implemented in other districts is evenly distributed (50-30 projects). Referring to the number of projects implemented in municipalities in the years 2008-2018, significant diversification should be indicated. The leader, in this respect, is the commune of Dzierżoniów, in which 16 projects were implemented, followed by Oborniki Śląskie and Przeworno (15 projects) and Kotle, Wądroże Wielkie and Pielgrzymka (14 projects). In most communes, funds for the implementation of 5-10 projects were received. The com-

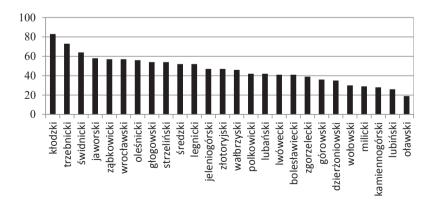


Figure 1. The number of applications submitted and co-financed in Village Renewal in the Lower Silesia competition according to districts of the Lower Silesia province (2008-2018)

munes with the lowest project implementation rate are: Pieszyce, Święta Katarzyna, Oława, Syców and Platerówka (1-2 projects during the analysed period). The spatial diversity of the use of financial resources for individual municipalities and the percentage share of the use of funds according to specific funding bands is shown in Figures 2 and 3. Attention is drawn to considerable spatial differentiation in the use of grant funds. The commune with the highest utilization rate is Dzierżoniów, which was the only one to obtain financing in the amount of over PLN 400,000. In the range of PLN 300,000-400,000, there are 14 communes (10%), while almost half of communes (47%) obtained funds in the range of PLN 100,000-300,000, using 85% of the total amount of competition funds. About 14% of communes used funds in the amount below PLN 100,000.

A higher concentration of obtaining financial support took place around the main economic centres of the region (Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Głogów) and in the Kłodzko Basin. This is explained by the accumulation of other factors described as "attractive", i.e. a higher standard of living understood as employment opportunities, upgrading professional qualifications, a high level of health care, social functions, and extensive infrastructure. The activity of communes in obtaining funds may be related to endogenous factors of the region's development, i.e. geographical location in the system of regions or the European Union, natural environment conditions, local and regional market resources, local entrepreneurship and internal structure of the economy, accumulated material resources in the long development process, access to investment capital, skills and readiness to undertake strategic activities

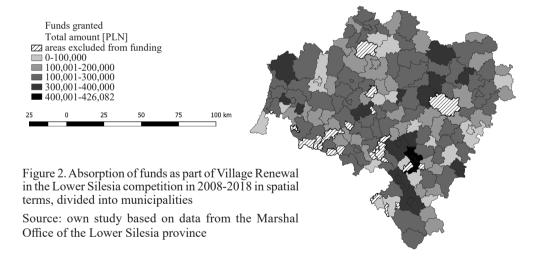


Figure 3. Percentage share of the use of funds of Village Renewal in the Lower Silesia competition, in the years 2008-2018, according to specific funding intervals

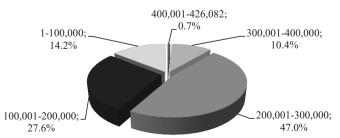


Table 1. Number and value of projects implemented as part of Village Renewal in Lower Silesia in 2008-2018 by project category

Project categories	Number of projects	Funds granted
	[pcs.]	[PLN]
Infrastructure of education and upbringing	3	70,769
Social and cultural infrastructure	575	13,155.287
Sports and recreational infrastructure	373	8,583.946
Tourist infrastructure	13	276,876
Protection of historical and cultural heritage	53	632,924
Investment projects	58	1,576.334
Development of public space	133	3,143.127
Total	1,208	27,438.263

Source: own study based on data from the Marshal Office of the Lower Silesia province

by the local government and inclusion in the decision-making processes of the local community. Understanding the real causes of this state of affairs is a challenge for further research.

In order to learn about the specifics of Village Renewal in Lower Silesia projects, and thus determine the directions of the main activities under the programme in the Lower Silesia province, a detailed analysis of identified projects, from the point of view of their material and thematic scope, was made. Thanks to this, the main categories of undertakings were distinguished. The structure of projects, in terms of quantity and value, is presented in Table 1, while a comparison of the number of projects with the granted amount of aid in percent in Figure 4.

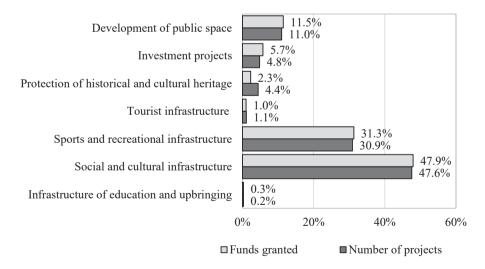


Figure 4. Percentage of the number and value of projects of Village Renewal in the Lower Silesia competition by project category

The socio-cultural infrastructure was a distinctive category (47.6%), including the renovation and furnishing of rural centres, communal libraries along with the purchase of books and other objects performing cultural functions (cinemas, community centres). The second category is sport and recreational infrastructure (30.9%), under which the construction and equipment of sports fields, playgrounds, stadiums, stands, gyms and swimming pools was subsidized, while 11% of projects were related to the development of public space – this category included development space for a place of recreation or the construction of small architecture (gazebos, benches, squares). Investment projects accounted for 4.8% of the number of projects and included the construction, reconstruction and modernization of fire stations, the repair and construction of street lighting, the construction of pedestrian walkways, thermo-modernization of administrative facilities, etc. The protection of cultural and historical heritage constituted 4.4% of the number of projects. This category includes the purchase of folk costumes and musical instruments for teams associated with cultivating the traditions of local communities. Relatively low expenditure was earmarked for the tourist infrastructure (1.1%), under which the creation of tourist information points, the construction and renovation of tourist routes (walking, cycling, water, cross-country skiing trails) was supported, along with their marking. The infrastructure of education and upbringing is a category with the lowest project implementation rate (0.2%) – expenses incurred for equipping training facilities are included here. The percentage of particular topics of projects implemented within the above categories has been presented in Figure 5.

The largest expenditure was incurred for the implementation of projects related to the renovation and furnishing of day-care centres (45%), and almost a quarter of municipalities applied for funds for the construction and equipment of playgrounds (22%). 9-10% of shares were projects intended for land development for a place of recreation and the construction of sports facilities. Projects regarding the construction, reconstruction and modernization of public places together with other types of projects accounted for 5% of the total number of projects. These are the least popular projects for financing the mod-

Renovation and furnishing of day-care centres

Construction and equipment of playgrounds

Land development for a place of recreation

Construction of sports facilities

Construction, reconstruction and modernization of public places

Purchase of folk costumes and musical instruments

Other types of projects

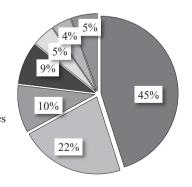


Figure 5. Percentage of topics of the projects of Village Renewal in the Lower Silesia competition in 2008-2018

ernization of fire stations, boiler rooms, sanitary facilities or training facilities. Projects for the purchase of folk costumes and musical instruments accounted for 4% of all projects implemented by Lower Silesia communes in 2008-2018.

#### SUMMARY

The improvement of the economic situation of Polish rural areas requires an integrated approach of national and regional authorities to invest in factors conducive to the growth of productivity: infrastructure, skills and innovation. Currently, there are a number of positive changes in rural areas in Poland, such as an increase in the level of education of residents, the development of technical infrastructure networks and more intensive activities at a local community level. The high interest of communes in the Village Renewal competition in Lower Silesia indicates that what is most important is the implementation of investment projects that meet the needs of residents in socio-cultural and sports and recreation areas. Increasing access to cultural and recreational infrastructure, sports and leisure facilities affects the improvement of the quality of life of residents, thanks to which the village gains importance in the eyes of its residents. An important question is whether the newly created, modernized infrastructure is properly used (cultural centres, community centres, libraries, sports facilities). Also, the issue of such low interest in projects for tourist infrastructure is worth considering, as it indicates that communes are focused on meeting the internal needs of residents, not external recipients. On the basis of the conducted research, it can be stated that Village Renewal in the Lower Silesia competition, in spite of its infrastructural character, brought added value in the form of improved management at a local level, helped to discover local leaders – commune coordinators of Village Renewal in the Lower Silesia programme and create projects that meet the needs of the local community. Particular attention shall be given to the spatially uneven involvement of residents and authorities in this programme. Its largest beneficiaries are rural communities of the following counties: Kłodzki, Trzebnicki and Świdnicki.

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#### REALIZACJA POLITYKI REGIONALNEJ NA OBSZARACH WIEJSKICH NA PRZYKŁADZIE KONKURSU ODNOWA DOLNOŚLASKIEJ WSI

Słowa kluczowe: polityka regionalna, rozwój regionalny, samorząd terytorialny, odnowa wsi, programy pomocowe, obszary wiejskie

#### ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest ocena ukierunkowania środków finansowych przyznanych przez samorząd województwa dolnośląskiego w ramach konkursu Odnowa Dolnośląskiej Wsi na podstawie rodzajów oraz kategorii przedsięwzięć realizowanych w latach 2008-2018. Odpowiednio ukierunkowane zarządzanie lokalnymi społecznościami może korzystnie oddziaływać na rozwój całego regionu. Realny wpływ na poprawę jakości życia mieszkańców wsi, również przez inicjatywy współpracy, mają nie tylko duże unijne fundusze, ale i małe granty finansowane ze środków samorządów województw. Przykładem jest program Odnowy Wsi – najdłużej działający regionalny program aktywizacji społeczności lokalnych. Działania z zakresu odnowy wsi realizowane na Dolnym Śląsku od 2008 roku wskazują na dynamiczny postęp partycypacji społecznej. Analiza projektów dofinansowanych z samorządu województwa wykazała zainteresowanie przede wszystkim wsparciem w zakresie rozbudowy infrastruktury społeczno-kulturalnej oraz sportowej i rekreacyjno-wypoczynkowej. Doświadczenie samorządu województwa dolnośląskiego pokazuje, że zewnętrzna interwencja w układy lokalne przez celowe projekty regionalne otwiera nowe możliwości kształtowania polityki społeczno-gospodarczej obszarów wiejskich.

**AUTHORS** 

BARBARA KUTKOWSKA, PROF. DR HAB. ORCID: 0000-0002-3024-9435 Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences Institute of Economic Sciences Faculty of Life Sciences and Technology 25 C.K..Norwida St., 50-375 Wrocław, Poland

DOMINIKA MAŃKOWSKA, MA ORCID: 0000-0002-9977-1379 Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences Institute of Economic Sciences Faculty of Life Sciences and Technology 25 C.K..Norwida St., 50-375 Wrocław, Poland

> DAVID E. KALISZ, PHD ORCID: 0000-0001-5839-8507 PSB Paris School of Business Management & Strategy Department 59 Rue Nationale, 75013 Paris, France