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Edited by:

Viktorie KLÍMOVÁ

Vladimír ŽÍTEK

(Masarykova univerzita / Masaryk University, Czech Republic)

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CO-PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS – THE POLISH WAY?

Koprodukce veřejných služeb ve venkovských oblastech – Polský způsob?

JAROSŁAW OLEJNICZAK ¹

DOROTA BEDNARSKA-OLEJNICZAK ²

¹ Katedra Finansów	¹ Department of Finance
² Katedra Zarządzania Marketingowego	² Department of Marketing Management
Wydział Nauk Ekonomicznych	Faculty of Economic Sciences
Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny we Wrocławiu	Wrocław University of Economics
✉ Komandorska 118/120, 53-345 Wrocław, Poland	
E-mail: jaroslaw.olejniczak@ue.wroc.pl, dorota.olejniczak@ue.wroc.pl	

Annotation

The purpose of this article is to present the structure of solecki fund as a solution that promotes governance and co-production of public services, as well as to analyse the use of this tool by urban-rural communes in Poland in the years 2014-2017. The basic research method consisted of statistical analysis of the data made available in the Central Statistic Office Local Data Bank concerning the scale and directions of expenses of the examined 621 communes within solecki funds. The vast majority of communes, in which the solecki funds functioned, implemented within their framework the tasks in the scope of transport and communication, municipal management and environmental protection, culture and protection of national heritage (in above 80% of all). It can be noticed that there is a strong diversification of directions of the solecki funds' expenses between the regions, also it can be noticed in 2014, in some regions the percentage of communes with solecki funds constituted approx. 50%, while in 2017 in most of them it exceeded 70%.

Key words

co-production, civil society, public services, Poland, solecki fund

Anotace

Cílem tohoto článku je představit strukturu Solecki fondu jakožto řešení, které podporuje správu a koprodukcí veřejných služeb, a analyzovat využití tohoto nástroje městskými a venkovskými komunami v Polsku v letech 2014–2017. Základní metoda výzkumu spočívala ve statistické analýze dat z Lokální databanky Ústředního statistického úřadu. Data byla zaměřena rozsah a směřování výdajů v rámci Solecki fondu v 621 zkoumaných komunách. Převážná většina komun, ve kterých fungovaly Solecki fondy, realizovala v jejich rámci úkoly v oblasti dopravy a spojů, řízení měst a ochrany životního prostředí, kultury a ochrany národního dědictví (více než 80 % z nich). Je možné konstatovat, že existuje silná diverzifikace ve směřování výdajů Solecki fondy 50 %, zatímco v roce 2017 to ve většině regionů bylo přes 70 %.

Klíčová slova

koprodukce, občanská společnost, veřejné služby, Polsko, Solecki fond

JEL classification: G38, H40, H83

1. Introduction

The problem concerning evolution of the approach to the method of providing public services by public administration has been noticeable in the economic literature for a long time. Osborne (Osborne 2006, p. 377) indicated “that Public Administration and Management has actually passed through three dominant modes: a longer, pre-eminent one of Public Administration, from the late nineteenth century through to the late 1970s/early 1980s; a second mode, of the New Public Management, through to the start of the twenty-first century; and an emergent third one, of the New Public Governance, since then”. The term "governance" appears here, which in

the source literature is understood in various ways. For example, according to Rosenau (Rosenau 1992, p. 4) “governance refers to purposive behaviour, to goal oriented activities (...) backed by the shared goals that may or may not derive from legal and formally prescribed responsibilities”. In turn, Salamon (Salamon, Elliott 2002, p. vii) associates governance with “the collaborative nature of modern efforts to meet human needs, the widespread use of tools of action that engage complex networks of public and private actors, and the resulting need for a different style of public management, and a different type of public sector, emphasizing collaboration and enablement rather than hierarchy and control”. Stoker (Stoker 1998, p. 18) indicates five aspects of governance: (1) refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government, (2) identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues, (3) identifies the power dependence involved in the relationships between institutions involved in collective action, (4) is about autonomous self-governing networks of actors, (5) recognizes the capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority. It sees government as able to use new tools and techniques to steer and guide.” Rhodes defines governance as “self-organizing, interorganizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state” (Rhodes 1997, p. 15). While analysing the concept of governance, Kooiman (Kooiman 1999, p. 70) indicates that it is possible to understand it as “all those interactive arrangements in which public as well as private actors participate aimed at solving societal problems, or creating societal opportunities, and attending to the institutions within which these governing activities take place”. Therefore, it should be noted that one of the elements of governance should be public participation, the essence of which is co-management of public matters by the residents (see more: Arnstein 1969). However, the forms of public participation indicated by Arnstein focus mainly on co-management, while in theory of finance and in practice, there is a noticeable pursuit of co-creation (co-production) of public services. Pestoff (Pestoff 2012, p. 1170) notes that “sometimes co-production is used as a general term to cover many different types of citizen participation in public service provision, and it also includes various ways citizens and/or the third sector participate both in policy making and policy implementation.” However, he indicates the need to distinguish between co-production (where citizens at least in some part produce services for themselves), co-management (understood as provision of services by the third sector, along with the public sector and the for-profit sector) and co-governance (as participation of all sectors in the processes of public service planning and decision-making). Similarly, Bovaird and Löffler distinguish several areas of cooperation of the government agencies with the users (Bovaird, Bovaird, & Löffler, 2009, p. 225): “public agencies have to: co-design their services and policies together with their users and other key stakeholders; co-manage their resources with other partners; co-deliver their services with users and their communities; co-assess their services with their key stakeholders.” Therefore, it can be indicated that participation of citizens in the provision of public services can be implemented in various forms, while the participatory budgeting is one of the most frequently described and analysed in the literature (Baiocchi 2003; Bingham, Nabatchi, O’Leary 2005; Boulding, Wampler 2010; Cabannes 2004; Sintomer, Herzberg, Rocke 2008). This results from the fact that the idea of participatory budgeting is widespread around the world (Dias 2018). However, when considering the concept of co-production of public services, it can be concluded that usually the form of participatory budgeting mainly includes co-deciding on the directions of spending funds, while marginalising citizens’ participation in provision of services, and therefore their co-production. The problem of co-production of public services is usually associated with the characteristics of services as such. Based on the literature analysis, Osborne and Brown (Osborne, Brown 2011, p. 1343) indicate that four unquestionable characteristics of public services are: (1) Intangibility (that services are processes rather than concrete goods and so cannot be stocked or demonstrated and where transfer of ownership is uncommon); (2) Inseparability (that the production and consumption of services occur simultaneously and cannot be separated, unlike for manufactured goods); (3) Perishability (as a consequence of the above, that services must be consumed at the point at which they are produced and cannot be stored for future use in the way that manufactured goods can be); (4) Co-production (that services are produced through the interaction between service providers and their consumers, the latter being an active participant in the production process and not solely a consumer, as for most manufactured goods). In the context of the last of the above-mentioned characteristics, it should be noted that the trend associated with NPG appears in the literature and it raises the necessity of the participation of recipients in the provision of public services - co-production. Ostrom (Ostrom 1996, p. 1077) indicates that “coproduction (is) the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not “in” the same organization. (...) Coproduction implies that citizens can play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to them”. In turn, Alford (Alford 2009, p. 23) equates co-production with “any active behaviour by anyone outside the government agency which: (1) is conjoint with agency production, or is independent of it but prompted, (2) by some action of the agency, (3) is at least partly voluntary; and either intentionally or unintentionally creates private and/or public, (4) value, in the form of either outputs or outcomes.”

According to OECD’s definition, co-production is “a way of planning, designing, delivering and evaluating public services which draws on direct input from citizens, service users and civil society organisations”. It can be noticed

that co-production can include both "simple input into service delivery (e.g. feedback on services)" and "extensive and enduring relationships with service users" (OECD 2011, p. 32). The literature contains analyses that link the participatory budgeting with co-production of public services at the local level (Barbera, Sicilia, Steccolini 2016; Dzinic, Svidronova, Markowska-Bzducha 2016; Gondasova, Murray Svidronova 2016), however this area is relatively new. In Poland, the problem of participation of the residents in public management is usually raised in the context of social participation and the participatory budgeting concerning the cities (Dewalska–Opitek 2014; Olejniczak, Bednarska-Olejniczak 2015; Bednarska-Olejniczak, Olejniczak 2018a; Bednarska-Olejniczak, Olejniczak, Svobodova 2019; Gulińska, Składanek 2017). Few studies undertake the problem of solutions that take into account the elements of co-production of public services in the form of sołecki funds (Bednarska-Olejniczak, Olejniczak 2018b; Heffner, Klemens 2017; Ptak 2015; Wójcik 2014). The purpose of this article is to present the structure of sołecki fund as a solution that promotes governance and co-production of public services, as well as to analyse the use of this tool by urban-rural communes in Poland in the years 2014-2017.

2. The state of art

The administrative division of Poland separates commune as the basic unit of territorial division and its authorities implement the majority of public tasks of a local nature. The legislator envisaged the possibility of creating auxiliary units in the form of sołectwo, in the areas of rural communes. Sołectwo is a non-obligatory auxiliary unit of the urban-rural or rural commune that is created in order to implement this part of own tasks of the commune, which due to the limited territorial scope (usually several villages within the commune) are specific for the given sołectwo. In practice, this means that it is possible to match some of the activities carried out with the commune's resources (as own tasks) to the specificity (preferences of the residents) of the given village. However, this does not mean that sołectwo is independent and separate from the commune. The governing and controlling body is a village meeting, in which all residents of the sołectwo can participate, however the commune council exercises control over spending funds of the sołectwo. The sołecki fund solution was originally introduced in 2009 (*Sołecki Fund Act of 20 February 2009* 2009), however it was modified in 2014 with the provisions of the new Sołecki Fund (*Sołecki Fund Act of 21 February 2014* 2014). In accordance with legal regulations, the sołecki fund means a pool of funds guaranteed in the commune budget for the sołectwo, for the implementation of undertakings that are aimed at improvement of the living conditions of its residents. In accordance with art. 1, section 3 of the Act, in order for the funds to be allocated for the implementation of undertakings included in the sołectwo's application, three conditions must be fulfilled cumulatively: (1) the submitted task must be own task of the commune, (2) it must be conducive to the improvement of the living conditions of the residents, (3) it must be compliant with the commune's development strategy. The commune's own tasks, which can be financed in the framework of sołecki funds, include among others: firstly the organization of celebrations, meetings and integration events (harvest festivals, state and local holidays, village meetings), secondly the implementation of promotional activities (trade fairs, presentations, promotion of the commune), thirdly the tasks in the scope of shaping the image and aesthetics of the village (planting trees and shrubs, as well as care of greenery, purchase and assembly of garbage bins, containers for used batteries, etc., creating new lawns, ponds, rock gardens, etc.), fourthly the tasks associated with recreational and cultural infrastructure (construction, renovation and setting up sports fields, e.g. small sports fields at the day-care centres, construction of stages and roofings for the organization of artistic performances, purchase of devices that improve sports infrastructure, purchase of equipment and setting up playgrounds for children), fifthly the tasks associated with municipal infrastructure, construction and renovation of small sections of the communal roads and sidewalks, maintenance of roads and sidewalks, as well as performance of small renovations, construction of lighting points for roads and squares, renovation of historic buildings). Although it is not a full list of tasks, which can be implemented in the scope of sołecki funds, it should be noted that this is a form of the co-production of public services, because the residents themselves, in addition to participation in the consultation process (participation, co-governance), can participate in the co-production of public services thanks to the direct engagement in their creation (own work, co-creation). After 2014, due to changes in legal regulations, an increase of the interest in using the mechanism of sołecki funds by communes in Poland can be observed.

3. Research method

Implementation of the purpose of this article required the analysis of quantitative data concerning the use of the possibility to establish sołectwo and to separate sołecki funds, by all urban-rural communes. The years 2014-2017 were assumed as the research period, which results from the above-mentioned changes in the legal regulations concerning the functioning of sołecki funds. The research included all communes with urban-rural status in 2017 - 621 units (commune that covered the area of at least one city and surrounding villages). The time range covered the years 2014-2017 and the communes for which data was available in the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office (CSO)(Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2019). The basic research method consisted of statistical analysis of the data made available in the Local Data Bank (CSO) concerning the scale and directions of expenses of the examined communes within sołecki funds. The first stage of research included an analysis of quantitative

changes in the use of sołecki funds in urban-rural communes in Poland. The second stage included the analysis of the structure of expenses within sołecki funds, according to the main directions of expenses. The data analysis conducted in the last stage of research concerned the structure of the main groups of expenses within sołecki funds in the territorial system.

4. Results and discussion

Increase of the interest of auxiliary units in urban-rural communes (sołectwo) in the possibility of using sołecki funds (SF), is visible in the analysed period. In 2014, the SF were used by 412 communes (66,34% of all examined communes), while in subsequent years, this level reached approx. 493 (79,3%). During assessment of the significance of communal expenses in the national scale, it is necessary to point out that the share of expenses of the SF in current expenses fluctuates at the level of 0.7% (2014) to 0.68% (2017). Reference to the level of current expenses seems to be more justified here, firstly due to specific nature of fund expenses and, on the other hand, due to the relative stability (apart from the increase in communal expenses resulting from changes in the scale and structure of tasks after 2015) of current expenses of the communes. Having in mind that the purpose of creating the SF is to finance own tasks of communes leading to the improvement of the quality of life of residents, it would be necessary to indicate the main areas of expenses occurring within the framework of activities of the SF. The analysis of section classification of communal expenses within the sołecki funds demonstrates that these expenses can be assigned to five main sections (table 1). The vast majority of communes, in which the sołecki funds functioned, implemented within their framework the tasks in the scope of transport and communication, municipal management and environmental protection, culture and protection of national heritage, public safety and fire protection, as well as physical culture. There is a visible tendency to increase the percentage of communes that implement more and more wider spectrum of tasks.

Tab. 1: Percentage of communes that implemented expenses within the framework of SF in the years 2014-2017 and percentage of communes that implemented expenses from the SF in the main sections of budgetary classification

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total	66.34%	72.30%	76.17%	79.39%
Transport and communication	88.11%	87.97%	88.79%	90.47%
Housing	18.69%	21.83%	27.70%	24.14%
Public safety and fire protection	54.37%	57.91%	60.89%	64.50%
Educational services	31.55%	32.29%	31.71%	32.25%
Municipal management and environmental protection	80.58%	83.52%	85.84%	88.24%
Culture and protection of national heritage	85.19%	86.64%	87.32%	86.41%
Physical culture	69.66%	72.61%	71.67%	74.44%

Source: own calculations based on BDL data

It is necessary to emphasize that the occurrence of the given section of budgetary classification within the expenses of sołecki fund does not have to translate into a high share of this type of expenses in the structure of the fund. It is visible based on the analysis of amount of funds spent in individual sections (table 2). Compared to the percentage of communes implementing tasks in individual areas (table 1), it should be concluded that the main directions of expenses cover three out of the five above-mentioned areas - transport and communication, culture and protection of national heritage, municipal management and environmental protection. In total, they cover approx. 75% of the total expenses of sołecki funds in the researched period. A large share of expenses on transport and communication, as well as on municipal management and environmental protection is caused by relatively higher costs of task implementation (construction of bike paths, repairs of streets, pavements or activities associated with planting greenery), however in this case, the value added by the residents, in the form of their contribution of work during implementation of the tasks may be significant (the commune provides materials and technical facilities, while the residents carry out part of the works for free). This is an example of the co-production of public services (contribution of own work), combined with the co-management (co-deciding on directions of expenses). Of course, other activities within the sołecki funds (participation in the organization of cultural events, activities of cultural centres, participation in trade fairs and promotion of the commune, etc.) are also a part of the concept of the co-production of public services. The biggest problem is to determine the scale of engagement of the residents in these activities, due to the lack of a monitoring system of such activities (the problem is even assessing the scale of engagement in decision making at village meetings, during which each resident of the given sołectwo may propose an area of action and discuss the proposals of others, because there is no universal standardised access to information regarding such meetings).

Tab. 2: Share of expenses by the sections of budget in the total amount of expenses within the SF

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017
Transport and communication	30.70%	29.40%	28.60%	28.60%
Housing	2.50%	2.60%	2.90%	2.60%
Public safety and fire protection	4.40%	4.60%	4.20%	4.40%
Educational services	1.80%	2.00%	1.70%	1.90%
Municipal management and environmental protection	15.30%	15.80%	17.00%	17.80%
Culture and protection of national heritage	29.80%	29.70%	29.70%	28.20%
Physical culture	8.10%	8.90%	9.70%	10.30%

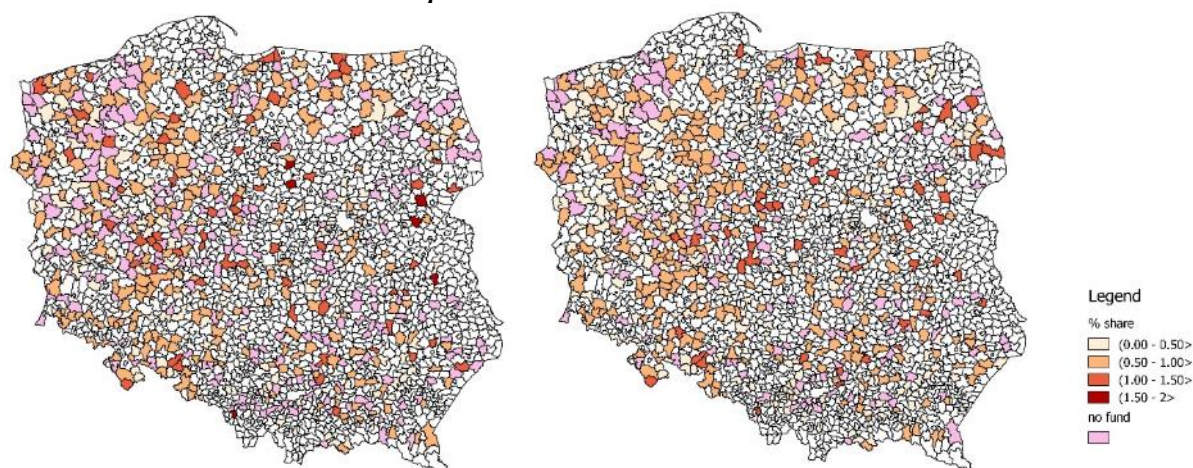
Source: own calculations based on BDL data

While analysing the tendency to use the mechanism of sołecki fund in individual regions (table 3), there is a visible significant increase in the percentage of communes, in which the sołecki fund functioned in 2017 compared to 2014. As it can be noticed in 2014, in some regions the percentage of communes with sołecki funds constituted approx. 50%, while in 2017 in most of them it exceeded 70%. The regions, in which the largest percentage of urban-rural communes used sołecki funds included: kujawsko-pomorskie, dolnośląskie, warmińsko-mazurskie, opolskie, lubuskie.

Tab. 3: Percentage of urban-rural communes in individual provinces, which implement expenses within sołecki funds (%)

Year	dolnośląskie	kujawsko-pomorskie	lubelskie	lubuskie	łódzkie	małopolskie	mazowieckie	opolskie	podkarpackie	podlaskie	pomorskie	śląskie	świętokrzyskie	warmińsko-mazurskie	wielkopolskie	zachodniopomorskie
2014	75	80	54	68	77	54	66	82	66	52	70	45	37	79	67	56
2015	84	86	61	76	77	60	72	82	80	56	70	59	47	79	71	60
2016	88	86	61	76	77	65	77	82	77	78	80	68	47	82	78	62
2017	88	89	68	85	77	71	83	85	86	70	85	77	47	85	79	64

Source: own calculations based on BDL data

Fig. 1: Share of expenses within the sołecki funds in 2014 (left) and 2017 (right) in the researched communes in the total current expenses

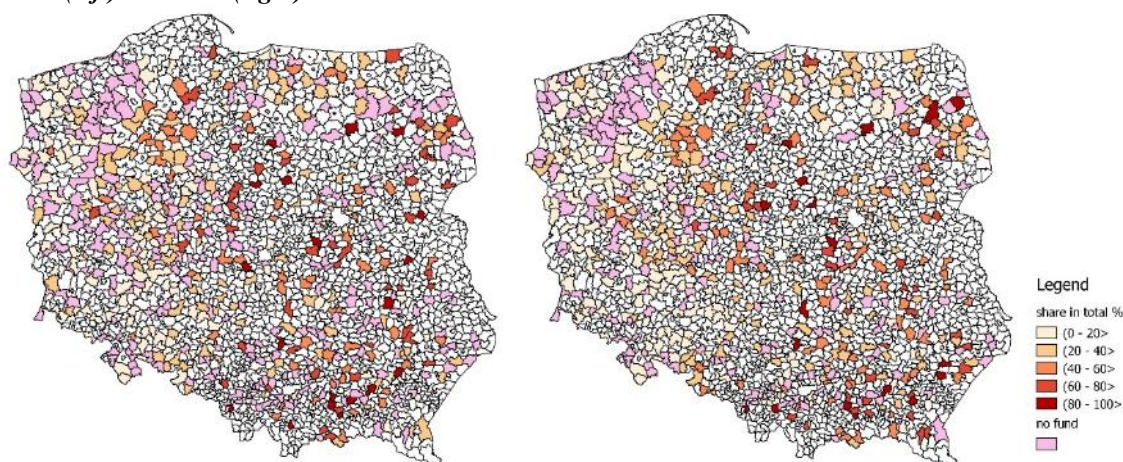
Source: own calculations based on BDL data

Comparison of the share of sołecki funds' expenses in the current expenses of urban-rural communes reveals changes in the territorial distribution and relative level of expenses implemented within the funds. While in 2014, there was a large diversification of the share of these expenses (left part of the figure 1) between the regions - higher values in western Poland - between 0.5 and 1.5% of current expenses, in 2017 (right part of the figure 1)

there was a decrease in the share of these expenses to the levels of 0.5% -1% in the western part and below 0.5% in the remaining part of the country.

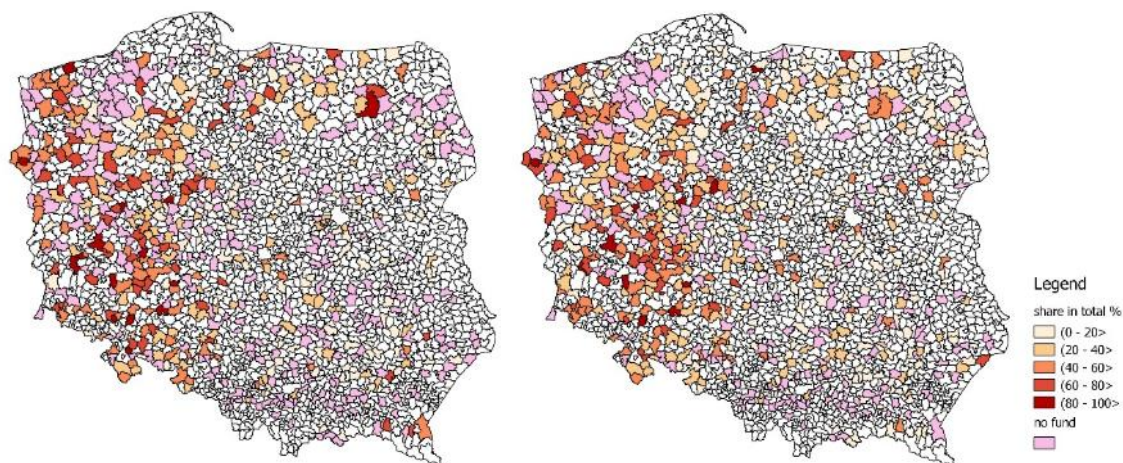
Analysis of expenses within the sołecki fund in the area of transport and communication (figure 2) indicates that in the communes of central and eastern Poland, they played a very significant role, because their share ranged from 40 to 100% of total expenses within the sołecki funds (mainly expenses associated with the public commune roads). On the other hand, in urban-rural communes of western Poland, these expenses occurred as a small percentage (less than 20% of total expenses) or, despite the existence of sołecki funds, they did not occur at all.

Fig. 2: Share of expenses in the section of transport and communication within the sołecki funds in 2014 (left) and 2017 (right) in the researched communes



Source: own calculations based on BDL data

Fig. 3: Share of expenses in the section of culture and protection of national heritage within the sołecki funds in 2014 (left) and 2017 (right) in the researched communes



Source: own calculations based on BDL data

The third significant section was the area of expenses on municipal management and environmental protection (mainly the lighting of roads, streets and squares, as well as maintenance of greenery). There is a noticeable engagement of funds in the communes of western Poland visible here, with a simultaneous very low spending for these purposes in the communes of central and eastern Poland. A similar situation occurred in the case of expenses of the sołecki funds in the area of culture and protection of national heritage. The dominance of this type of expenses can be observed on the "western wall" of Poland (regions: dolnośląskie, lubuskie, wielkopolskie, zachodniopomorskie). Usually, the expenses were mainly focused on co-financing of the activities of cultural centres (fig. 3).

5. Conclusion

Taking up the topic of the co-production of public services in Poland on the example of sołecki funds in urban-rural communes was caused by a limited number of publications devoted to this issue, as well as the scale of occurrence and characteristics that significantly differentiate the sołecki funds from participatory budgets, which are the main examples of public participation of residents indicated in the source literature. Due to the relatively common functioning of the sołecki funds, their regulation by provisions of the law, as well as wide spectrum of possible spending, a comparative analysis of all urban-rural communes in Poland, which introduced the sołecki funds into their budgets, was necessary. It should be noted that after 2014, the scale of the use of sołecki funds in Poland significantly increased and as much as 80% of communes started (or continued) to use the sołecki funds. In the context of main areas of spending, five can be distinguished, which reflect the main needs of residents reported to communes in the area of improving the quality of life within the individual communes. Due to the scale of expenses, three of the above-mentioned directions of spending dominate here. This usually results from relatively high cost effectiveness of this type of expenses compared to expenses on culture, physical culture or education. It can be noticed that there is a strong diversification of directions of the sołecki funds' expenses between the regions. These discrepancies may in part result from differences in the level of development and the condition of road network between the regions (greater saturation of areas with modern road infrastructure, bike paths, better condition of roads in the western part of Poland), which is often conditioned by the level of communes' wealth (western Poland is characterized by higher than average GDP per capita compared to the average GDP in the country). However, it is not possible to indicate the reasons for such differences between the regions without further in-depth research. Another issue is the lack of possibility to assess the degree of co-production of public services, due to the lack of a system for monitoring and collecting data regarding this topic. It can be concluded that a certain part of the residents of local communities participate in the provision of public services (e.g. participation in the activities of voluntary fire brigades, farmers' wives associations, activities in the cultural centres), however the collection of data regarding this topic would only be possible through direct examination of individual sołectwo. Consequently, it can be assumed that studies concerning the co-production processes within the sołecki funds may constitute a significant contribution to the development of new public governance theory, however this will require the research on the scope of citizens' participation in decision making, provision of public services, as well as reasons that they are guided by. Moreover, it is also necessary to consider the possibility of assessing or measuring the benefits resulting from the engagement of residents in the co-management.

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