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## Revitalization as a tool of local development on the example of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship

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**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to try to answer the question of whether local government units use the tools resulting from the Revitalization Act of 9 October 2015 (Ustawa o rewitalizacji..., 2017), i.e. whether they use renewal activities to create local development. The article presents the results of research, which consisted of query of 122 revitalization programs from the area of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. The analysis showed that the vast majority of local government authorities decided to expand the catalogue of development planning tools to include Local and Municipal Revitalization Programmes. The results of the study covering the scope of undertaken interventions indicate that this tool was mainly used to counteract infrastructure deficits.

**Keywords:** renewal activities, rural and urban-rural communes, local development, planning tool, Lower Silesia

### 1. Introduction

Revitalization, understood as the process of bringing degraded areas back to life, can be an effective tool for the development of local government units. Its successful implementation requires a comprehensive approach and the involvement of various entities, including the local government, local communities and investors. The interventions typically address social, economic, technical, and spatial issues, aiming to improve living conditions and the quality of public space through, for example, building renovation, development of green and recreational areas, or improvements in safety. One factor contributing to the effective implementation of revitalization is involving the local community in planning and implementing projects. This promotes community activation, integration, and building interpersonal bonds.

Revitalization can stimulate the development of the local economy through the modernisation of infrastructure, support for entrepreneurship and the creation of new jobs. In spatial terms, this can entail activities focused on preserving and adapting historic buildings and spaces, thereby contributing to the preservation of local identity and heritage. If carried out sustainably, revitalization can contribute to environmental protection and reduce the negative effects of urbanisation.

Taking into account the above catalogue of possible activities that could be implemented, the aim of the article was to provide a comprehensive analysis of interventions that were implemented as part of revitalization programmes in municipalities in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship in the period 2014-2023. The study aimed to identify the

key assumptions, financing mechanisms and challenges of these interventions. Based on the collected data from the Central Statistical Office and revitalization documents (Municipal and Local Revitalization Programs), the article analyzes the material

## 2. Revitalization as a tool for local development

The issue of revitalization is an important element of the contemporary discourse combining the area of science and practice of spatial planning. Its original use was closely related to urban, urbanized, post-industrial or post-military areas, where the focus was on reviving deserted city centers, improving the quality of life in housing estates or developing degraded industrial areas (Noworól, 2010; Przygodzka, 2010; Parysek, 2016). Revitalization was mainly identified with the renewal of the urban fabric, including historic and residential buildings, and was often associated with the concept of urban gentrification (London and Palen, 1984; Lubecka, 2010). This historical orientation towards urban space has been the dominant paradigm in the understanding and application of the concept of revitalization. In Western Europe, in countries such as Germany, France and England, discussions on urban renewal began as early as the 1960s and 1970s. In Poland, this issue appeared in the discourse in the mid-1990s and was initially used mainly by urban planners (Dąbrowski, 2013). Drawing on the European experience, it was possible to instill the concept of revitalization in Poland as an excellent tool for the social and economic revival of degraded areas (Guzik, 2009; Kazimierczak, 2014; Wojnarska, 2011). Revitalization was identified primarily with investments for infrastructure and improvement of the quality of public spaces in degraded urban centers. For a very long time, activities related to the restoration of historic spaces, historical buildings or post-industrial spaces could count on support from government programs (Jadach-Sepiolo, 2010).

scope, structure of tasks and planned expenditures, identified social and non-social problems, as well as the structure of revitalization projects in terms of their type and sources of financing.

Access to European Union funds has played a key role in shaping revitalization policy in Poland. After 2007, funds for revitalization projects were secured under the Regional Operational Programs (ROPs) (Biczowska and Ciarczyńska, 2017). In the EU programming period 2007-2013, the funds allocated to revitalization projects amounted to PLN 11 billion, while in the years 2014-2020 it was slightly less, i.e. PLN 7 billion (Kołsut, 2017). This was a significant impulse for local governments and allowed them to focus their attention on the implementation of projects in the area of aesthetics of public space or renovation of public and residential buildings (Muzioł-Węclawowicz, 2009). Since 2015, the conduct of revitalization activities has been regulated by the Revitalization Act of 9 October 2015 (Ustawa o rewitalizacji..., 2017)). This act established the legal framework for the entire process, sorting out conceptual and procedural issues. Its primary objective was to encourage local governments to undertake comprehensive programs aimed at addressing crisis conditions in degraded areas, addressing the previous lack of coherent guidelines. According to the Act, revitalization is the commune's own task, but it is not obligatory, but it extends the concept of renewal to rural areas. Thus, it has become a key impulse for local governments to take greater interest in the new tool for local development. Previously, rural communes could only use the instrument implemented under the Rural Development Programme (RDP), which was less attractive than the revitalization programmes implemented under the ROP. This concerned both the scope of

activities that could be implemented, and especially the financial possibilities, because

The Act defines revitalization as a comprehensive process of restoring degraded areas through integrated activities for the benefit of the local community, space, and economy, carried out by stakeholders according to a revitalization programme (Article 2(1)). This definition contains several fundamental principles:

- **comprehensiveness:** The revitalization process should integrate activities from various spheres – social, economic, spatial and functional, technical and environmental – with a priority for the social sphere. The aim is to counteract fragmented interventions, emphasizing that true revitalization is always holistic;

- **needs diagnosis:** Actions must result directly from the needs diagnosed in a given area, determined on the basis of objective and verifiable indicators. This highlights the importance of evidence-based planning;

- **territorial concentration:** The process should focus exclusively on the designated regeneration area, i.e. the degraded area. However, support is allowed for projects located outside this area, if they serve the implementation of the programme's objectives. This is to ensure targeted intervention and spatial complementarity for synergies;

- **active cooperation of stakeholders:** Revitalization must be based on active cooperation of various entities: public, non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurs, residents, etc. This principle underpins the participatory nature of the process;

- **active participation of beneficiaries:** The active participation of all beneficiaries of regeneration should be ensured in the development and monitoring phase of the action plan. Social participation is treated as the foundation of activities at every stage of the process (Biczkowski and Biczowska, 2017).

Local government units choosing to coordinate revitalization under the Act were

the funds allocated for the renewal of the village were many times lower.

required to develop a Municipal Revitalization Program (GPR), while others followed the 1990 Local Government Act (Ustawa z dnia...,1990). Until 31 December 2023, municipalities could choose the revitalization path; from 2024, all must follow the Act. . The Municipal and Local Revitalization Program have a dual function, i.e. a strategic and executive document for the planned activities. Thus, combining a long-term vision with concrete actions streamlines the process and reduces the risk of strategic plans remaining unimplemented. Revitalization programs have become an additional tool for creating development directions in territorial units, and thus have consolidated their position as an important tool for local development.

Local administrative units undertaking revitalization activities financed from EU funds in 2014–2020 had to comply with the national “Guidelines on revitalization in operational programs” (Wytyczne w zakresie rewitalizacji..., 2016) and the “Program guidelines for preparing local revitalization programs” (Wytyczne programowe..., 2016), issued separately by each voivodeship. Revitalization programs have to meet a number of requirements (Biczowska and Ciarczyńska 2017, Jadach-Sepiolo et al. 2018), hence they have become a specific challenge for local governments, which previously based their planning on standard development strategies developed in accordance with the Act on Local Government or other identical documents. Nevertheless, it is the local authorities, when undertaking revitalization, who take on the burden of initiating, coordinating and then monitoring the individual stages of the process (Parysek, 2016). A catalogue of instruments that can be chosen by a local government unit as a tool for local development that meets its expectations, together with the most important features of each of them, is presented in Table 1.

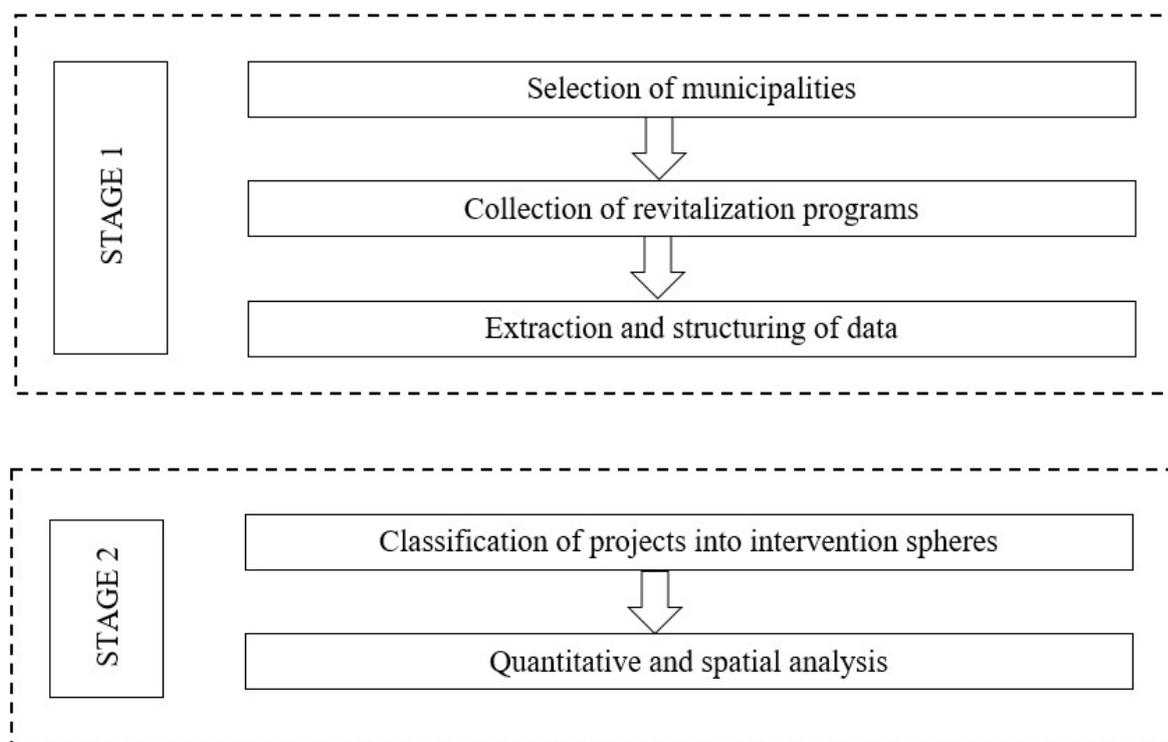
**Table 1.** Main features of local development instruments. Source: own study

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Planning based on development strategies or village renewal plans</b>	<b>Planning based on Municipal and Local Revitalization Programs</b>
<b>Experience</b>	A proven and well-known planning tool; extensive experience in implementing measures.	New instrument to support the development of areas, lack of experience in implementation.
<b>Legal stability</b>	Constant guidelines guaranteeing the invariability of the rules for the development of strategic documents.	Difficulties and differences in interpretation depending on the Marshal's Office.
<b>Initiative</b>	Bottom-up initiative and involvement of local communities; leaders from local communities.	A more institutionalized instrument; The initiative and the role of the leader falls to the local authorities.
<b>Community Engagement</b>	Significant involvement of residents – positive activation; bottom-up activation of development factors.	Activation to a large extent forced by the procedure of creating documents; Participation after the creation of the framework of the program, at the stage of consultation of the territorial scope of the revitalization area and submission of project proposals.
<b>Document processing process</b>	Development strategies and plans for the renewal of villages created with a large participation of the local community.	Local and/or Municipal Revitalization Programme (LPR/GPR) – requires large institutional support (delimitation of the area based on statistical indicators limits the participation of residents at the stage of indicating the area of support).
<b>Identify needs</b>	Projects respond to the real (and not declarative), grassroots needs of a given community.	Projects created according to the needs of local institutions and according to top-down priorities/activities of local authorities.
<b>Institutional support</b>	Documents prepared both by employees of a given local government unit and commissioned to external contractors.	It requires a lot of institutional support in order to carry out the delimitation of the area.
<b>Challenges</b>	Smaller scale, potentially less ability to solve complex problems comprehensively.	Lack of experience, differences in interpretation, dissonance between indicators and feelings, fatigue with consultations.

### 3. Data sources and research assumptions

The area of study was considered to be rural and urban-rural communes of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. In order to determine the list of surveyed municipalities, data from the Central Statistical Office (<http://stat.gov.pl/>), which maintains a database on regeneration projects in Poland, were used. Out of 169 municipalities in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship, 122 units (Fig.1) that developed and implemented the revitalization program in 2014-2023 were finally included in the study. The research procedure consisted of two stages. The first step was to verify the CSO database in terms of aggregated data. Due to the incomplete data published by the Central

Statistical Office, they have been supplemented on the basis of a query of revitalization programs available on the websites of local government units and on the platform of the Marshal's Office of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship (<https://geoportal.dolnyslask.pl/app/mapa/admindip/rewitalizacja-gmin-vz7sg/>). This made it possible to develop a matrix of information including data on: the area of the degraded area, the area of the renewal, the population living in the revitalization area, the number and type of projects, and sources of financing.



**Figure 1.** Research process. Source: own study

At the next stage, a detailed analysis of the projects implemented under the Municipal and Local Revitalization Programs was carried out in terms of their material scope, the structure of tasks and the planned expenditures. For this purpose, five spheres

were distinguished (infrastructural, spatial and functional, social, economic and environmental), to which all activities (5610 projects in total) carried out in local government units as part of revitalization programs were assigned.

## 4. Results

In the Lower Silesian Voivodeship, the vast majority of municipalities developed and implemented a revitalization programme in 2014-2023. Out of 169 municipalities, as many as 122 units decided to implement regeneration activities, of which 107 based on the provisions of the Local, 22 based on the Municipal Revitalization Program<sup>1</sup>. The revitalization programming indicator is therefore very high, as many as 72.2% of local governments have developed appropriate programs, with the national average at 52.1%. It should be noted that most of the adopted programs were developed and implemented in

2014/2018-2023/2024. After the formal period of validity, most municipalities have not taken automatic steps to update the program or develop a new one, and in some units work on new revitalization programs is still in progress.

According to the guidelines, municipalities commencing work on a revitalization program are obliged to designate degraded areas and revitalization areas, with the latter not constituting more than 20% of the commune's area and being inhabited by no more than 30% of the commune's population. In addition, an important factor that had to be taken into account in the delimitation of these

<sup>1</sup> In several local government units in 2014-2023, revitalization was implemented on the basis of two strategic documents, e.g. in 2014-2020, the adopted

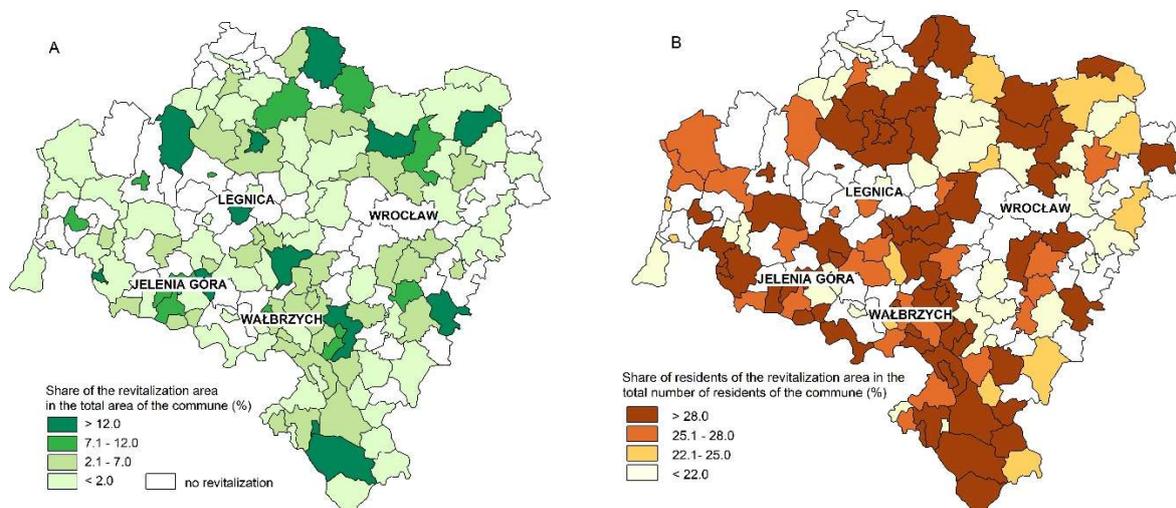
Municipal Revitalization Program was in force, while since 2020 its continuation in the form of the Revitalization Program has been adopted.

areas was the role of areas designated as revitalization areas, as they should constitute an area of significant importance for local development.

According to the Revitalization Act, an area indicated as degraded is an area in a state of crisis, characterised by a concentration of negative social phenomena, in particular unemployment, poverty, crime, low level of education or social capital, as well as an insufficient level of participation in public and cultural life. In addition, at least one of the other negative phenomena from the economic, environmental, spatial-functional or technical spheres must have occurred in such an area. The degraded areas designated in the programs cover a total of 11.1% of the area (236.913 ha), and the inhabitants constitute 22.5% of the total population of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship (656.575 people). It should be noted, however, that in individual local government units these proportions were quite diverse. The share of degraded area ranged from 0.1% in the Jelcz-Laskowice municipality to 90.6% in Świerzawa. The average share of the degraded area per commune was 13.6%. In the case of 11 municipalities, the area indicated as requiring corrective actions constituted more than half of their area.

Another category of areas are revitalization areas, i.e. de facto accepted for

activities and implementation of projects. They can be divided into sub-areas, including sub-areas that do not have common boundaries with each other. As a rule, renewal activities concern inhabited areas. However, the revitalization area may also include uninhabited post-industrial, post-military or post-railway areas with negative economic, environmental, spatial-functional or technical issues, if activities there help counteract negative social phenomena. This is also the case in many municipalities in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. In total, the revitalization areas constitute 3.0% of the voivodeship's area (60.073ha) and are inhabited by 16.0% of the total population (466.003 people). With regard to the first of the key parameters (maximum share of 20% of the commune's area), the maximum permissible share of designated revitalization areas is in the municipalities of Dzierżoniów – rural commune and Krotoszyce (20% each, respectively). The highest share is concentrated in the belt of foothill communes of the Kłodzko Valley and the Eastern Sudetes and units that are part of the former mining and industrial centre (Wałbrzych). The smallest share (< 2%) covers mainly highly urbanized municipalities in the Wrocław catchment zone, as well as some agricultural municipalities in the west and north-east of the voivodeship (Fig. 2A).



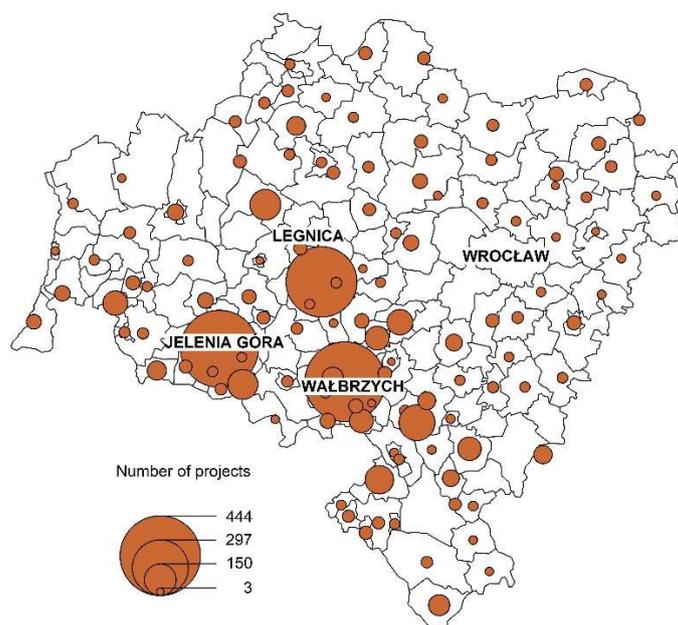
**Figure 2.** Share of the revitalized area in the total area of the commune (A) and share of people living in the revitalization area in the population of municipalities carrying out revitalization processes (B). Source: In-house analysis based on CSO data.

It is worth noting that in terms of absolute values, the largest revitalization areas were designated in the urban-rural commune of Góra (5210 ha), Bystrzyca Kłodzka (4396 ha), rural Gromadka (3503 ha) and Krośnice (3246 ha). The designated revitalization areas have a diverse location in the settlement network of individual municipalities. Some areas are characterized by a central location in a given settlement unit or are part of a commune town, while others are located very peripherally both in terms of geographical and communication location. The areas are dominated by inhabited areas with a residential and service function, including rural areas. This is also the result of the guidelines on revitalization, set out in the conditions for applying for funding from the European Union, as well as in the Revitalization Act. They promote housing areas for regeneration where social problems have been diagnosed, along with which other types of problems coexist.

The analysis of the second key parameter, i.e. the share of the population living in the revitalization area (maximum threshold of 30%) showed that the size of the area does not directly correlate with its population. On average, 25.1% of inhabitants lived in the revitalization area, and in 48

territorial units, 29–30% of the commune's population resided in the designated area. The lowest share of the indicator was recorded in the following communes: Długołęka (1.1%), Polanica-Zdrój (4.6%), Jelcz-Laskowice (5.7%), Zawonia (7.0%), Oleśnica (7.3%) and Legnica (8.7%) (Fig. 2B). As a result of the delimitation of areas requiring corrective actions, an area inhabited by 466 thousand people, which is 16.0% of the total population of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship, has been designated.

Leading the delimited area out of a crisis situation is carried out through the implementation of renewal projects responding to the diagnosed problems. It should be a process carried out by various stakeholders in a comprehensive manner, through integrated activities for the benefit of the local community, space and economy. The revitalization needs in the analyzed documents were aggregated in the form of a list of basic and supplementary tasks. In total, 5,610 initiatives aimed at addressing diagnosed crisis situations are planned in 122 municipalities, averaging 346 per commune. The spatial distribution shows significant intra-regional disproportions (Fig. 3).

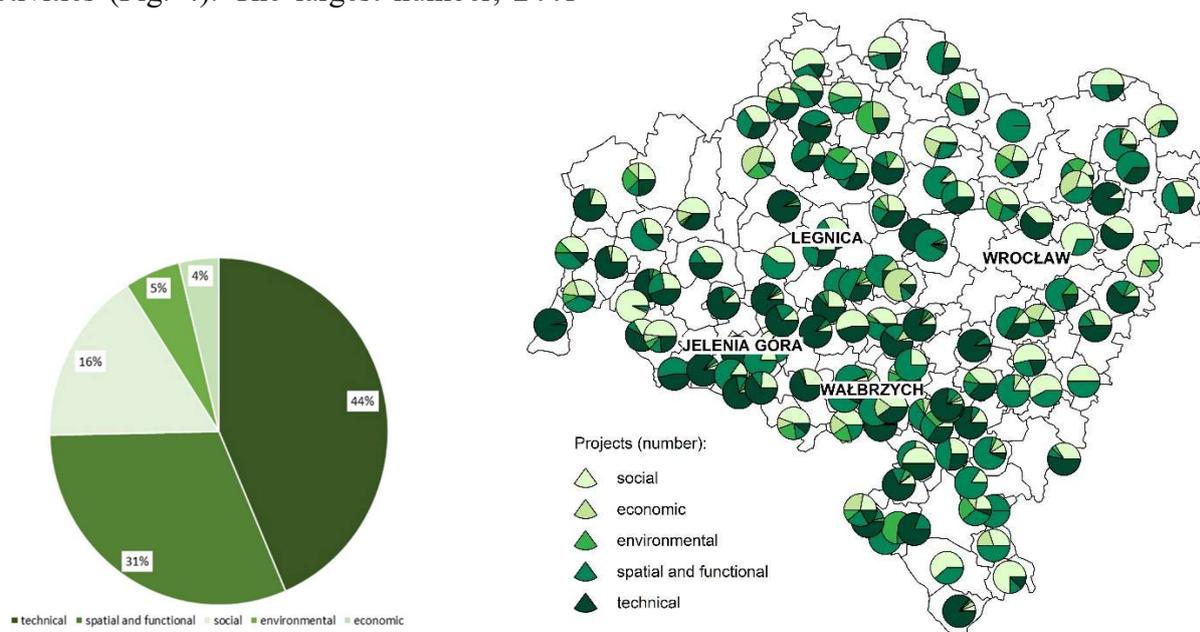


**Figure 3.** Number of revitalization projects in municipalities in 2014-2023. Source: own study based on the Central Statistical Office

In most municipalities, the number of projects oscillated between 30 and 40. While in 12 municipalities it exceeded 100. Three urban municipalities: Wałbrzych, Jelenia Góra and Jawor, in which 444, 429 and 387 projects are planned to be implemented, respectively, are significantly above the average. The fewest tasks were included in the revitalization programs of Oleśnica, Walim, Zawonia, Złotoryja (5 each), Świebodzice (4) and Janowice Wielkie (3).

The structure of revitalization projects due to the dominant thematic area shows significant spatial diversity of the voivodeship. The analysis of activities indicated the advantage of infrastructure projects. Out of a total of 5610 tasks, over 74% were fit into a wide spectrum of technical and spatial activities (Fig. 4). The largest number, 2441

tasks (43.5% of all) were assigned to the technical sphere. Such a large number of projects of this type is the result of different methodologies adopted in revitalization programs in relation to the tasks submitted by stakeholders. In some documents, infrastructural tasks related to the thermal modernization of residential buildings were aggregated into one large project. On the one hand, in some municipalities, each project related to a single facility was recognized separately, which affected both the number of projects and their structure (e.g. Wałbrzych). On the other hand this approach reflects scale of basic needs reported by residents, such as poor technical condition of buildings, their low energy efficiency and, consequently, low quality of life.



**Figure 4.** Structure of the number of revitalization projects by area. Source: own study

Projects aimed at the implementation of corrective actions in the spatial and functional area accounted for 31% of all planned projects (1744 tasks). They mainly concerned investments in the area of improving the aesthetics of public spaces, their accessibility and functional cohesion of areas. The largest number of such interventions was included in documents for the municipalities of the Sudetes belt and the Sudetes Foothills, including the largest number in the municipalities: Jawor (382), Szczawno-Zdrój

(75), Wałbrzych (71), Kłodzko (66) (Fig. 4). The region's historical development and high project costs caused significant investment delays. Moreover, rural communes—and rural areas of urban-rural communes—were ineligible for EU revitalization support in 2007–2013. If it was necessary to make an investment decision, local governments first chose activities related to the improvement of the technical condition of roads or the modernization or construction of water and

sewage infrastructure. Thus, other activities were postponed.

The analysis of the implemented documents showed that projects primarily addressing social interventions accounted for 16% of all initiatives (908 tasks). Most of the activities were carried out in the urban-rural municipality of Leśna (99) and the city of Wałbrzych (52). A wide spectrum of activities planned for implementation included the organization of festivals, competitions, extracurricular activities, trainings, workshops, sports events, festivals, etc. These activities were primarily aimed at activating and integrating the inhabitants of the areas indicated for revitalization, and to a lesser extent counteracting unemployment and other social problems. In many cases, these interventions have been included in revitalization programmes, mainly due to the need to meet the requirements of project complementarity as part of regeneration activities. Although the Revitalization Act prioritizes social issues, some Lower Silesian municipalities have not implemented any social intervention projects. There were 12 such units in the province, i.e. 9.8% of all those with revitalization programs. These are the communes of Żmigród, Złoty Stok, Wądroże Wielkie, Twardogóra, Szklarska Poręba, Siechnice, Rudna, Polanica-Zdrój, Malczyce, Lewin Kłodzki, Głuszyca and Bogatynia.

The fewest projects represented the economic (213) and environmental (299) areas. Activities in these categories accounted for a total of 9.1% of all revitalization projects implemented in the region. Such a low share is due to the actually diagnosed needs of the residents, which focus much more on the immediate environment, its aesthetics and on solving the most pressing social problems. Strictly economic projects are relatively evenly represented. Much greater spatial disproportions can be seen in the distribution of environmental projects. They constitute a significant part of the activities undertaken in municipalities of high natural value (the

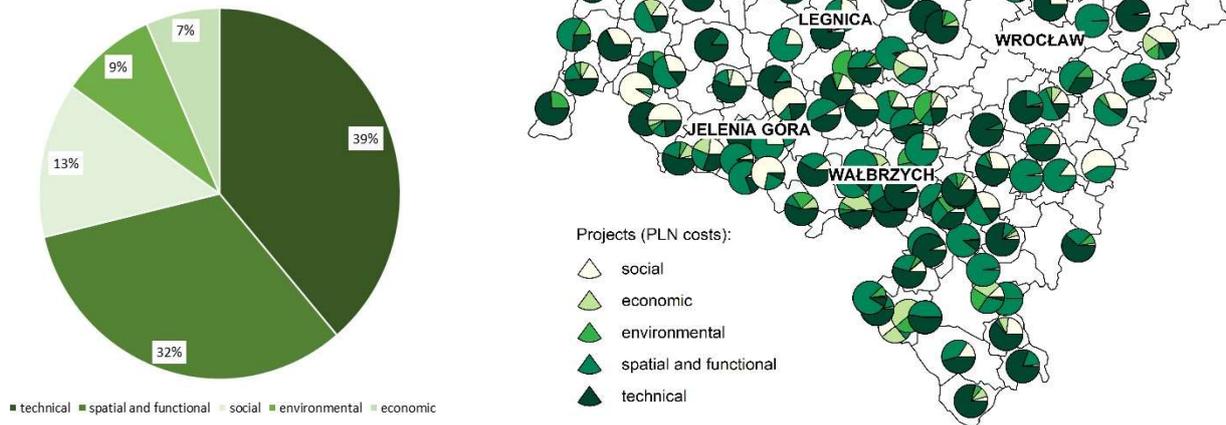
Karkonosze Mountains, the Kaczawskie Foothills), which may indicate environmental awareness and the need for environmental protection in these regions.

The total estimated cost of the renewal projects undertaken as part of the plans included in the revitalization programs amounted to PLN 6.5 million. The largest share in this pool were funds from the European Union budget – PLN 42 million, which accounted for 62.2% of the total planned expenditure. The next item was funds from the budgets of local government units, the total amount of which reached PLN 1.8 million (27.0%), and the whole was complemented by funds from private sources – PLN 716 million (10.8%). The largest amount of funds is planned to be spent in the municipalities: Jelenia Góra (PLN 412.3 million), Wałbrzych (PLN 254.1 million) and Głuszyca (PLN 248.7 million). The high estimated costs in the case of Jelenia Góra and Głuszyca result from the fact that in the period covered by the analysis two successive revitalization programs with separate budgets were implemented. In the case of Wałbrzych, the high costs result from the specificity of the city, which is still struggling with significant problems resulting from the liquidation of the mining industry. The closure of coal mines and economic changes have caused a particular accumulation of crisis situations in the social and technical area.

The analysis of spatial data on the distribution of expenditures planned for revitalization projects indicates a clear spatial diversity of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. The cost structure by thematic area largely reflects the structure of activities by number. There is a noticeable slight difference between the number of completed projects in individual areas and the amount of financial outlays. This is due to the difference in the cost intensity of activities in individual areas. Social initiatives usually generate lower costs than technical or spatial-functional tasks (Fig. 5). Therefore, there is a greater likelihood that they will be

financed from the commune's own funds. On the other hand, infrastructural activities (technical, functional and spatial, environmental) require significant financial outlays, which is a heavy burden on municipal

budgets. Including this type of project in a document of strategic importance, such as revitalization programs, often opens the way to increasing the chances of obtaining external financing.



**Figure 5.** Structure of expenditure planned for projects by area. Source: own study

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of revitalization programs implemented in the municipalities of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship in 2014–2023 indicates that revitalization has become a widely used instrument of local development in the region. As many as 72.2% of municipalities adopted revitalization programs, which demonstrates the broad institutional acceptance of this tool. The findings show, however, that revitalization activities were predominantly oriented toward infrastructure improvements, especially the modernization of buildings, enhancement of public spaces, and functional restructuring of urban and rural areas. Although these interventions contributed to improving the physical environment, they were not always accompanied by equally strong engagement in social activities, despite the fact that the Revitalization Act emphasizes the primacy of the social dimension. These findings align with recent research on the determinants of revitalization in Lower Silesia. The studies

indicate that while the achievement of quantitative targets—such as the area of revitalized sites and the number of revitalized facilities—can be regarded as a success, it does not adequately capture the complexity of underlying social processes. As emphasized by Biały (2025), drawing on the evaluation results of the Regional Operational Programme for the Lower Silesian Voivodeship 2014–2020 (*Wpływ działań rewitalizacyjnych....*, 2022), the principal challenge lay in the insufficient integration of projects, stemming from the absence of a comprehensive approach to revitalization.

The results also highlight the significant role of European Union funds as the main financial driver of revitalization. The dependence on external funding makes revitalization processes vulnerable to discontinuity, as many municipalities undertake interventions primarily during EU programming periods. As a result, revitalization may become fragmented and

oriented toward short-term goals, rather than long-term social and economic transformation. These conclusions are further supported by the findings of Ciarczyńska and Drzewicki (2025), who demonstrate that, as a result of regional authorities allocating dedicated funds for revitalization within their regional programmes, only selected municipalities decide to develop formal revitalization programmes. Moreover, Mróz et al. (2024) highlight that local governments with lower levels of socio-economic development and weaker financial standing tend to make the implementation of investment projects conditional upon the availability of external transfers.

A key challenge that emerges from the analysis is the need to strengthen the social dimension of revitalization. In many cases, social activation, integration of residents, and

local capacity building were secondary to infrastructure-oriented interventions. Szaja (2018) emphasizes that local authorities often focus on the anticipated outcomes of revitalization; however, without engaging communities in substantive decision-making processes, such an approach may limit the durability and social acceptance of these interventions. Ensuring the active participation of local communities at all stages of the revitalization process, from diagnosis to planning, implementation, and monitoring, remains essential for creating durable development outcomes. Without sustained stakeholder involvement, there is a risk that revitalization will focus on the aesthetic and technical transformation of space, rather than on improving social cohesion and quality of life.

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