

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS OF PORK-BARREL: A CASE STUDY OF A CZECH DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the study of parliamentary grants (also known as “pork barrel”) through a case study focusing on the grant application process from the perspective of municipal representatives and the perception of the grants’ development potential by inhabitants of such municipalities. Existing studies have considered the topic of parliamentary grant allocations at the national level. This article represents the first attempt to consider the issue of parliamentary grants in the regional context research concentrating on a sample of small municipalities with up to 1500 inhabitants within the Czech district of Žďár nad Sázavou. The study analyses the outputs of the author’s survey of local mayors and ordinary inhabitants conducted within these municipalities in September 2013. The results of this research will contribute not only to the study of parliamentary grants, but also to the broader debate on various forms of subsidies. Furthermore, the study can generate insights into the larger issue of subsidies in Czechia, the distribution of which is often influenced by national politicians. It can also contribute to the broader discussion about the purpose and challenges to the current system of subsidies. The conclusion of this article offers possible solutions to some of these challenges.

Keywords: pork barrel, public subsidies, municipal budgets, regional development

1. Introduction

Parliamentary grants (a form of redistribution of public finances by MPs during the parliamentary negotiations over the national budget; known in international literature, along with subsidies provided by the individual ministries, by the term “pork barrel”) have only marginal impacts on regional development when compared to large-scale processes such as globalisation and European integration (Blažek 2012), or institutional arrangements such as the system redistributing funds from the national budget (collected via taxation) to individual municipalities (Blažek 1996, 2002). However, all public funds need to be considered in order to gain a more complex insight into the issue of local and regional development (Martin, Minns 1995). The parliamentary grants represent a sizeable financial resource (approx. CZK 3.5 billion annually over the period of 2003–2009), which used to be distributed according to unclear and personal or political criteria, rather than according to transparent rules reflective of some form of public interest (for more details, see Hána, Feřtřová 2014). Even though the distribution of parliamentary grants concluded in 2009, research of this issue remains highly relevant. The real impacts of the projects financed by the parliamentary grants can only really be observed and evaluated after a certain amount of time has passed. Moreover, the tendency of some MPs to politically influence the allocations of parliamentary grants may have continued in the current systems for the distribution of funds from ministerial subsidy programs. These funds then frequently end up being allocated to regions

which used to be previously strongly supported by parliamentary grants (Hána 2013). The outputs of this research will therefore be useful for the study of other subsidies susceptible to political influences with similar purpose and comparable financial volumes (e.g. programs of the Ministry of Regional Development).

The topic of parliamentary grants has been addressed by several research papers written by Czech authors (Hána, Macešková 2010; Hána 2013; Hána, Feřtřová 2014) and also by a larger number of international studies (e.g. Johnston 1979, 1983; Fukui, Fukai 1996; Drazen, Eslava 2005; Golden, Picci 2006; Grossman, Helpman 2006; Finnigan 2007; Bardes et al. 2008). However, these research efforts are limited in certain regards and neglect several important aspects of the subject matter. This article intends to bring attention to one of the more neglected approaches to the study of parliamentary grants. It concerns the analysis of the views and opinions of municipal mayors on the application process of the parliamentary grants and the local inhabitants’ (sometimes including the mayors as well) perceptions of the developmental impacts of the projects financed by parliamentary grants on their municipalities. The conducted analyses will answer the following questions: Was it reasonable to apply for a parliamentary grant? What were the advantages of parliamentary grants when compared to other forms of subsidies? What were their disadvantages? The analysis will also focus on the parliamentary grants’ application process. Was the allocation of parliamentary grants the result of independent activity on the part of the MPs, or was the process primarily influenced by the acumen of

local actors regardless of their political affiliations, or further still, did the allocation of the parliamentary grants mostly come down to personal connections between local mayors and national politicians? The article also includes a discussion of the impacts of the parliamentary grants on the development of the concerned municipalities, which will answer the following set of questions: Was it meaningful to invest public resources into these grants, could they really contribute to the development of the recipient municipalities, for example by improving their visual character or by creating conditions conducive to further development?

The research took the form of a case study focused on the parliamentary grants distributed to municipalities within the district of Žďár nad Sázavou over the period of 2003–2009. This area was chosen for its peripheral character (Musil, Müller 2008), which promises observable impacts of the parliamentary grants on the development of the municipalities, which tend to operate with only limited financial resources. The regional quarters of parliamentary parties, located in the district (e.g. in the town of Žďár nad Sázavou), serve as political bases for several highly influential MPs. The study therefore comprises an in-depth analysis of a specific case featuring potential influence of these party bureaus on the activities of local mayors, which does not necessarily need to be fully generalizable (considering the current state of research on the given topic, this is a legitimate approach (Ženka, Kofroň 2012)).

The structure of this article reflects the declared objectives and the current state of research on the studied issue. The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework which forms the basis of this research. The next chapter introduces the regional context of the issue of parliamentary grants and presents the methodology of the research. The most extensive section of the article than analyses and interprets the acquired outputs in order to present the main research findings and provide a discussion of the results. The research is subsequently summarised in the final chapter.

2. Discussion of available literature on the topic of parliamentary grants

Parliamentary grants (and all forms of pork barrel in general) as a geographic, political, and economic topic have been frequently covered within both international (např. Johnston 1979, 1983; Fukui, Fukai 1996; Drazen, Eslava 2005; Golden, Picci 2006; Grossman, Helpman 2006; Finnigan 2007; Bardes et al. 2008) and Czech (Hána, Macešková 2010; Hána 2013; Hána, Feřtřová 2014) academia. In the majority of cases, however, these studies analyse the allocation of the financial resources distributed through these grants on the national level, while occasionally including a search for causal mechanisms (e.g. Johnston 1979; Golden, Picci 2006; Grossman,

Helpman 2006; Hána, Feřtřová 2014) or the impacts of the grants on voter behaviour (Fukui, Fukai 1996; Drazen, Eslava 2005). Research conducted by Fukui and Fukai (1996), who employ several case studies of Japanese prefectures to document the entire system of grant applications starting at the local level all the way to the distribution of grants taking place at the national level, represents a notable exception.

The studies of Czech parliamentary grants have proved the significant role of these grants in the broader field regional politics (Hána, Macešková 2010), which includes all public policies with a regional dimension. However, their effects on regional development have not been explicitly addressed (Blažek 2003, 2006; Macešková 2009). Within this broader understanding of regional politics, the impacts of financial allocations might turn out to be much more significant than the stricter definition of regional politics (comprising “official” regional politics) would reveal (European Commission 2004; Macešková 2007; Sunley et al. 2005). The spatial pattern of the allocation of parliamentary grants has a distinct northwest-southeast gradient, with most funds being awarded to regions in the south eastern half of Czechia, such as the Žďár nad Sázavou district (Hána, Feřtřová 2014).

However, the study of selected cases of parliamentary grants and their impacts on municipal development should not be neglected. Unlike studies carried out on the national level, this approach enables a more detailed insight into the issue and a better understanding of some of significant spatial phenomena involved (Drulák 2008; Loučková 2010; Ženka, Kofroň 2013). Within the research on parliamentary grants, such case studies can bring attention to the views and perceptions their applicants and recipients have of the application process and the development potential of these grants. Currently, such information is hard to obtain and often merely filters through the media (e.g. Šašek 2009; Kedroň 2010). Nevertheless, this perception is significant, not only in relation to the parliamentary grants but to all subsidies distributed via political channels (Hána 2013). In order to fully grasp the role of public finances in the development of municipalities, it is necessary to understand the allocation of all public finances (Martin, Minns 1995), including the parliamentary grants, and the processes and political influences involved in their allocation.

In order to accurately select the type of parliamentary grants most suitable for in-depth analysis, it is necessary to subject them to a detailed classification based on their purpose (Hána 2010). This is achieved through a delineation of sectoral categories, which is partially based on methodology used by the IMF (2001). This categorization is summarized in Table 1.

The individual grants were then divided into the aforementioned categories on the basis of an expert analysis. For the study of the impact of parliamentary grants on municipal development, an evaluation of business infrastructure and business projects financed by the

Tab. 1 Parliamentary grant categories defined by purpose/sectoral classification.

categories	project type
education – nursery, primary	schools managed by the municipalities, including primary art schools and special schools; building repairs, repairs of facilities, including refectories and sports fields, utilised exclusively by the school
education – secondary, higher, further education	constructions or repairs of buildings and facilities used by secondary schools, vocational schools, colleges, universities, institutions of further education; congressional buildings, research facilities, sports fields, utilised exclusively by the institution
sport facilities, holiday and leisure activities	public sport facilities, holiday resorts, multifunctional buildings and facilities, playgrounds, tourist facilities, information centres
church and cultural buildings	cultural and church landmarks and facilities; reconstruction of churches, castles, chateaus, communal centres, memorials, cemeteries, libraries, theatres, cinemas
social services	reconstruction of senior homes, care homes, maternity centres
healthcare	construction and repairs of hospitals and other medical facilities, emergency and health service equipment
municipal facilities and visual character	construction and repairs of municipal buildings or other municipal property, such as municipal halls, municipal flats, furniture; equipment of firefighting squads and communal police, constructions or repairs of their buildings; investments into industrial zones, financial support for land-use planning
transport and technical infrastructure	construction of transport and technical infrastructure, pedestrian and cycling routes
environment and agriculture	management of public spaces, including parks, squares; landscape management, flood-protection measures; investments into agricultural facilities, refuse management
operating subsidies	non-investment expenditures, including subsidies provided to local clubs and organisations, co-financing of cultural and sports events
other	specific projects (e.g. reconstruction of a local courthouse), insufficient project description

Source: Based on IMF 2001: 83. Adjusted according to Hána 2010.

parliamentary grants would be the most obvious category of interest. However, these represent only a marginal (and not indicative) fraction of the set of allocated grants. The category of municipal facilities and visual character, which includes grants provided for business projects and business infrastructure, represented only 4.4% of the overall volume of parliamentary grants during the observed period (Figure 1). Moreover, such projects might have even been significantly financed from other sources, which would make the analysis of the development potential of parliamentary grants highly problematic.

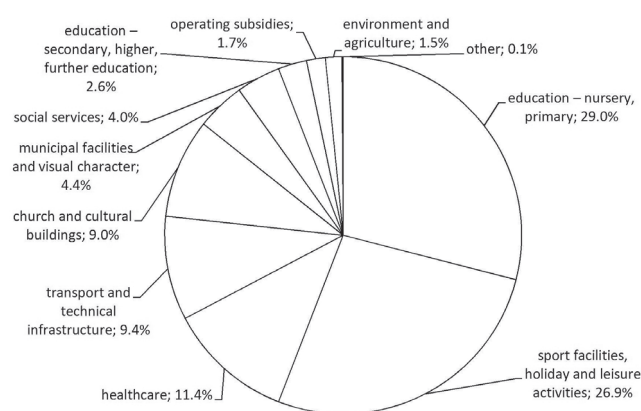


Fig. 1 Parliamentary grant categories in Czechia defined by sectors (2003–2009, in %).

Note: The categories are explained in more detail in Table 1.

Source: Chamber of Deputies 2002–2008. The author's calculations. Adjusted according to Hána 2010.

The figure reveals that two categories – nursery and primary education, and sport, holiday, and leisure facilities, make up almost 60% of all the parliamentary grants allocated in the given period. An analysis of the development impacts of grants provided within these dominant categories therefore plays the most significant role in answering the postulated research questions.

3. The development impacts of parliamentary grants in the Žďár nad Sázavou district

The objective of this article had laid out clear requirements which needed to be reflected in the research methodology. The methodology was selected according to relevant literature (Druhlák 2008; Loučková 2010; Ženka, Kofroň 2013) in order to comply with the methodological approaches appropriate for the analysis of case studies. Data files on the successful amendments to national budget passed within the Chamber of Deputies, and henceforth available of its website (Chamber of Deputies 2002–2008), served as the primary data source. In order to successfully serve this purpose, however, they had to be converted into a convenient database of parliamentary grants (for more details, see Hána 2010; Hána, Macešková 2010; Hána, Feřtřová 2014). The district of Žďár nad Sázavou was selected as the primary region of interest, since it emerged as one of the most heavily subsidised regions (in respect to parliamentary grants) in the country (Hána, Feřtřová 2014), while also being considered a

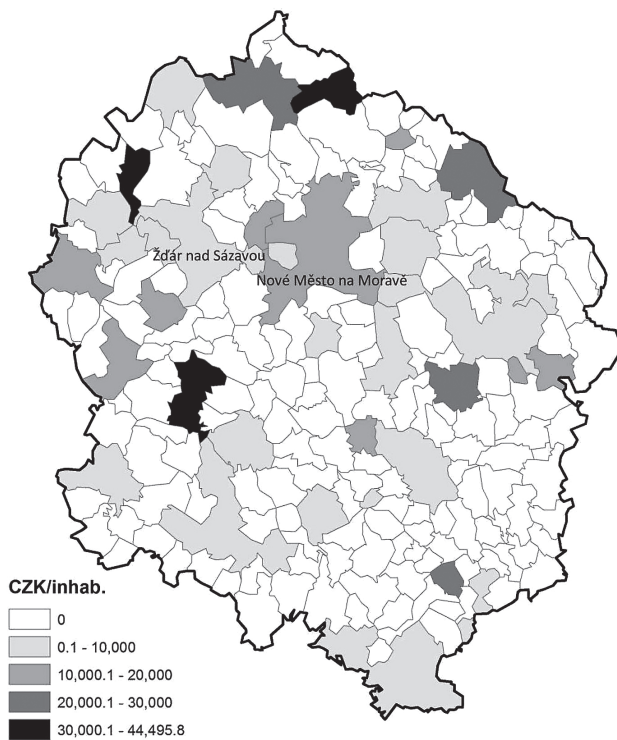


Fig. 2 The volume of parliamentary grants per capita received by municipalities of the Žďár nad Sázavou district (2003–2009, in CZK/inhab.).

Source: Chamber of Deputies 2002–2008; Czech Statistical Office 2009a,b. The author's calculations.

largely peripheral district (Musil, Müller 2008). Even relatively minor volumes of financial subsidies can therefore be expected to potentially trigger significant changes. At the same time, the district is home to certain local party organisations which gave rise to some very prominent MPs serving in the Chamber of Deputies. These organisations are primarily located in the town of Žďár nad Sázavou (comparison of MPs permanent residences, Hána, Feřtřová 2014). Figure 2 presents the financial resources (per capita) received by individual municipalities from the parliamentary grants.

During the observed period, 35 municipalities of the Žďár nad Sázavou district received a total of 77 grants ranging from CZK 250,000 to 22 million. The average financial volume of these grants reached CZK 6.2 million. The largest number of recipient municipalities, as well as the largest financial volumes, is concentrated in the northern part of the district. This area includes the towns of Žďár nad Sázavou and Nové Město na Moravě, which house the only party bureaus with active MPs within the district during the observed period. The extent to which this represents a decisive factor in the allocation of financial resources through the parliamentary grants therefore remains a legitimate subject for discussion.

A set of specific municipalities, mostly located in the vicinity of Žďár nad Sázavou, was selected for further analysis. Their selection was also guided by a limit on maximum population size (established at 1500

inhabitants), in order to make the potential impact of the grants on municipal development as visible as possible. This increased the relative impact of the grant when compared to the municipal budgets, primarily composed of financial resources provided by the national budget, which are allocated on the basis of population size. The budgets of smaller municipalities are therefore potentially strongly affected even by relatively small subsidies. However, close proximity to the town of Žďár nad Sázavou also entails a particular disadvantage, which needs to be respected during the formulation of conclusions. This drawback consists in the possibility that the levels of relative satisfaction with the municipalities' facilities on the part of their inhabitants might be affected by their easy access to the regional centre.

Figure 3 offers information on the volumes of parliamentary subsidies and the population size of the municipalities selected for further analysis. During the survey, respondents were assured of anonymity throughout the research, in regards to both the names and characteristics of the mayors and other respondents, and the names of the concerned municipalities. For this reason, no names are included in this study.

The sample comprises municipalities of different population sizes in order to adequately cover the scale all the way up to the limit of 1500 inhabitants. The sample mostly includes municipalities who received parliamentary grants worth less than CZK 10 million, it does, however, also include some municipalities which received significantly more generous subsidies. Therefore, the research operated with a sample of municipalities which allowed for a complex insight into the grant application process and for a detailed analysis of the development impacts of parliamentary grants on the studied municipalities. Figure 4 illustrates the sectoral distribution of the parliamentary grants received by the selected municipalities over the observed period.

In this figure, the category of nursery and primary education clearly dominates. Its share is larger than in

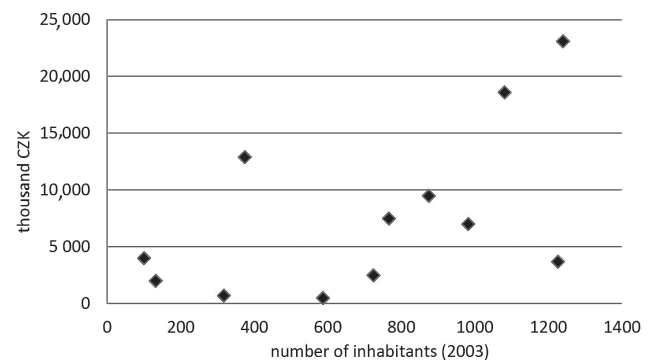


Fig. 3 The volumes of parliamentary subsidies matched with the population size of the selected municipalities in the district of Žďár nad Sázavou (2003–2009).

Source: Chamber of Deputies 2002–2008; Czech Statistical Office 2009a,b. The author's calculations.

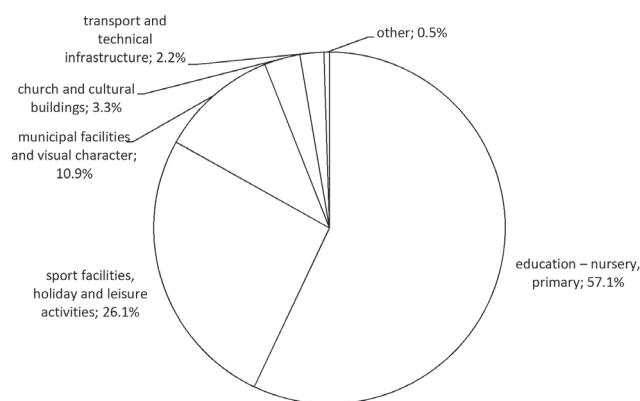


Fig. 4 Sectoral distribution of the parliamentary grants received by the selected municipalities of the Žďár nad Sázavou district (2003–2009, in %).

Note: The categories are explained in more detail in Table 1.

Source: Chamber of Deputies 2002–2008. The author's calculations.

the case of the national total. The sample therefore reasserts the importance of this category, as well as the importance of the category of sport, holiday, and leisure facilities, which remains in second place. The selected sample also shows a noticeable proportion of grants dedicated to municipal facilities and visual character, cultural and church buildings, and the construction of technical and transport infrastructure, which also largely corresponds to the general trends identified at the national level. Despite some (for the purposes of this article) rather insignificant differences, this classification enables us to analyse the benefits of the two largest categories of grants – nursery and primary education; and sport, holiday, and leisure facilities.

The empirical research which followed reflected two component objectives. The answers pertaining to the application process were obtained through the survey conducted among the mayors. The surveys asked the mayors to compare the institute of parliamentary grants with other sources of subsidies, including the administrative difficulty of the application process, and to provide an assessment of the importance of the activity and knowledge of the local actors in regards to the grant program and other forms of subsidies. Due to the pitfalls associated with any attempts at an objective assessment of the development impacts of the parliament subsidies, the impact was primarily studied through a survey among the inhabitants of the concerned municipalities. The survey asked them to state their satisfaction with public investments undertaken by their municipality, with emphasis placed on projects financed via parliamentary grants. In the case of these kinds of projects, perception of satisfaction serves as a suitable indicator of development. Some of these questions were also included in the survey conducted among mayors, in order to ascertain the views of such significant local actors on the development impacts of the projects financed through parliamentary grants, especially when compared to other municipal projects.

The structure of the survey was largely influenced by available articles, dissertation and diploma theses (which include more detailed sections on research methodology) concerned with the outputs of similar research efforts (Susová 2009; Heřmanová 2010; Radová 2010; Ouředníček et al. 2011; Temelová et al. 2011; Vinterová 2011; Čejková 2012).

The survey was conducted in September 2013. It does not include a fully representative sample of local mayors or municipal populations across the entire region, it is, however, methodologically quite sufficient for the purposes and objectives of this article. The respondents were selected on the basis of the willingness of local inhabitants to participate and answer the postulated questions. The research took place in 12 municipalities, which received a total of 20 parliamentary grants over the course of the observed period. In order to provide useful comparison, the survey also included mayors from 7 municipalities which had not received any parliamentary grants.

10 questionnaires were completed by mayors from municipalities which had received parliamentary grants. 4 of these were members of local political parties or ran as independents, while 6 mayors belonged to a political party with parliamentary presence. 7 of the mayors had been holding the mayoral office when the municipalities received their parliamentary grants (a total of 14 grants), 5 of them had not and 2 of them have not answered the relevant questions, wherefore this information could not be ascertained. In terms of the 14 parliamentary grants received during the respondents' mandate, in 13 cases, the municipal board included members of some parliamentary party. Only one case involved a successful application made by a board comprised completely of independents or members of local initiatives. As for the municipalities which had not received parliamentary grants, 7 mayors completed the survey, all of whom are either independents or members of local political initiatives.

The survey of municipal inhabitants was completed by 81 respondents from municipalities which had received parliamentary grants. Women form the majority of these respondents (roughly 60%). The sample's age distribution roughly corresponds with the population structure of the municipalities, while it features a slightly higher share of inhabitants aged between 16 and 40. The survey was mostly completed by inhabitants who had been born in the municipality (about 40%), followed by persons who moved to the municipality with their families or through marriage (both groups reach about 15%). A similar portion of the respondents cited the attractive environment in the municipality as the principal reason for moving there, while a smaller portion cited employment or some other "urgent" cause. The article does not intend to generalise the outputs of this survey, it does, however, seek to provide an insight into the perceptions and opinions present among the inhabitants of the analysed municipalities, even though these might not necessarily represent the dominant opinions. Even so, the gathered views and

opinions are valuable for the study of the development potential of parliamentary grants and contribute to the discussion.

4. Parliamentary grants from the perspective of local mayors and inhabitants of the selected municipalities

Firstly, the analysis considered the responses of local mayors related to the grant application process. Among other things, the mayors compared the parliamentary grants with alternative forms of subsidies on the regional, state and European levels in terms of the administrative difficulty of the application process and their benefits to municipal development. The survey included mayors from municipalities which had received parliamentary grants, as well as from those which had not. The summary of the responses is outlined in Table 2. For the municipalities which had received parliamentary grants, responses were recorded separately for mayors who are members of local political initiatives and those who are members of parties represented in parliament. This is reflected in the structure of the following table. Initially, the analysis also distinguished the responses of mayors who had served in the mayoral office when the municipality received the grant from those who entered the office afterwards. Additionally, we also observed possible differences between the responses of mayors from municipalities whose boards did or did not include members of parties represented in parliament. However, in these two later instances, the responses differed to a very minor extent only.

Strikingly, the number of municipalities which have received a parliamentary grant is not matched by the number indicating the use of parliamentary grants provided by the mayors. From the 10 municipalities which had in fact received parliamentary grants by the time the survey was conducted, only 7 mayors confirmed

the reception of these grants. Even though the survey included several mayors who had not been in office when the grant was applied for and received (wherefore they could have objectively argued that they had not used the given grant during their tenure), this does not satisfactorily explain such occurrence. Some of the mayors who attested that their municipality had not received a parliamentary grant had in fact already been in the mayoral office when the parliamentary grant was received. The possible reasons for not confirming the successful use of a parliamentary grant can include the somewhat controversial nature of these grants (which could have made the mayors unwilling to admit that they received them), or perhaps a low level of awareness of all the sources of municipal finances in case the grant application was managed by another member of the board. Mayors from both groups of municipalities (those who received parliamentary grants and who did not) appeared relatively unbothered by the specific administrative challenges of the grant application process. To the mayors of municipalities without parliamentary grants, the perceived difficulty of the application process seemed similar as in the case of subsidies distributed by the relevant ministries.

All responses indicate that regardless of whether they had also received parliamentary grants or not, all municipalities were most likely to succeed at obtaining the subsidies offered by the Vysočina region. The mayors attributed this mostly to the smaller administrative burdens (praised by all mayors without exception) this program entails when compared to state or European subsidies. In addition, the Vysočina region intentionally supports smaller municipalities (Kraj Vysočina 2013). This makes obtaining the subsidy a relatively easy task. The municipalities also frequently managed to secure subsidies from the Ministry of Regional Development, which, according to the mayors' testimony, have clear application requirements. However, when compared to the regional subsidies, the ministerial program is administratively much

Tab. 2 The share of affirmative responses to questions relating to the application for parliamentary grants, difficulty thereof, and the average rankings given to the individual subsidy programs by the mayors of selected municipalities in the Žďár nad Sázavou district.

	EU	MZ	MMR	PG	Region
used the program (municipalities with PG, %)	60.0	70.0	80.0	70.0	90.0
used the program (mun. without PG, %)	43.0	43.0	86.0	0.0	100.0
challenging procedure (mun. with PG, %)	60.0	30.0	30.0	10.0	0.0
challenging procedure (mun. without PG, %)	43.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	0.0
average rank (municipalities with PG)	3.6	4.1	3.3	3.8	3.0
– mayors from local parties	2.5	4.8	3.5	4.5	3.8
– mayors from parliamentary parties	4.3	3.7	3.2	3.3	2.5
average rank (municipalities without PG)	3.7	4.6	3.1	5.0	3.0

Note: EU = Structural Funds of the European Union, MZ = Ministerstvo zemědělství (The Ministry of Agriculture), MMR = Ministerstvo pro místní rozvoj (The Ministry of Regional Development), PG = parliamentary grants, region = subsidies provided by the Vysočina administrative region. Number of municipalities with PG = 10; without PG = 7. In the case that a mayor failed to rank any one of the sources of subsidies, it was assigned the value of 5.

Source: The survey and the author's calculations.

more challenging. The municipalities have also made use of the subsidies offered by the Ministry of Agriculture. A large group of municipalities had applied for subsidies from the EU Structural Funds; however, their mayors agreed that this is by far the most difficult subsidy to obtain. The application requirements and administrative procedures associated with the structural funds represent significant obstacles for the smaller municipalities who wish to apply for this form of subsidy. This serves to illustrate some of the problem Czechia seems to generally have with the use of EU Structural Funds. One of the mayors explicitly states that “the media report that Czechia is unable to successfully draw the European subsidies, yet they fail to inform that this is not fault of municipalities, which have prepared a large volumes of projects; the problem lies with the bureaucrats who make the subsidy programs so complicated that the finances become inaccessible” (translated by the author).

The rankings given to the individual forms of subsidies (Table 2) show that a surprisingly negative score (a high numerical value represents relative unwillingness to apply for them) was assigned to the parliamentary grants by mayors whose municipalities had received this form of subsidy. This implies that the mayors favoured other programs, be they regional, ministerial (Ministry of Regional Development), and even European, even though they consider them to be more difficult to secure. If, however, we separate the responses of mayors belonging to parliamentary parties from the answers provided by mayors backed by local political initiatives, we can observe a difference in attitudes. The mayors with affiliations to local parties assigned lower ranks (higher numerical value) to the parliamentary grants (they would choose to apply for them after they have exploited other options). Same holds true for subsidies provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and regional subsidies. On the other hand, mayors affiliated with local parties were much more inclined (expressed through a better ranking) to apply for subsidies from the Structural Funds of the EU. A question arises, whether mayors backed by parliamentary parties are perhaps more favourably disposed towards the programs to which they assigned higher priorities simply because their political connections (on both the regional and the state level) make it potentially easier for them to secure the subsidies they prioritised, either due to some direct political involvement of their acquaintances in the selection process or by an improved access to valuable information. One of the mayors whose municipality had not received the parliamentary grant it applied for offered his rather blunt account of the situation: “In small municipalities, the mayor’s office is likely to go independent candidates, who have no political power, and no MPs, backing them up during the process” (translated by the author). The European funds are less likely to be influenced by Czech political connections, wherefore their subsidies are less sought after (than the available alternatives) by mayors with strong political connections, and more favoured by

mayors from local parties, who are attracted by the potentially higher financial benefits to their municipalities.

The mayors of municipalities which had not received the parliamentary grants have resoundingly designated the parliamentary grants as their least attractive option. It is therefore likely that they have never even applied for them. The rank these respondents assigned to the subsidies provided by the Ministry of Agriculture is very close to the value given to these subsidies by the mayors who are members of local parties and come from municipalities which have received parliamentary grants. What exactly caused such convergence (perhaps a large degree of influenced exerted on these programs by national politicians) is a matter for further discussion.

It appears that the “reliance on personal contacts and political involvement of the mayor or other board members” (translated by the author), mentioned by one of the respondent mayors, is not limited to the allocation of parliamentary subsidies. Connections to regional or national politicians are crucial during most attempts to secure subsidies for small municipalities. These politicians can either directly help to secure the subsidy (especially in the case of parliamentary subsidies, but apparently also in the case of some ministerial subsidy programs (Hána 2013)), or they can provide the applicants with valuable information on the options and requirements of the given program. Except for one mayor, whose municipality managed to secure a parliamentary grant, all respondents emphasised the importance of the knowledge of the application procedures and the significant role of acquaintances who can help throughout the process. Even if it only benefits from a “mere” informational advantage, the municipality finds itself in a much more favourable position. The municipality is therefore largely dependent on contacts who can, according to one of the mayors, “provide timely information on the character of anticipated subsidy programs. The preparation of larger projects is a long-term process and requires the knowledge of the anticipated subsidy programs in order to effectively determine where to concentrate efforts” (translated by the author).

From the responses provided by the mayors, it appears that whoever had been given the chance to acquire parliamentary grants made use of it. Other forms of subsidies present the municipalities with ever increasing administrative burdens (this was asserted by all of the approached mayors, except for one respondent from a municipality without a parliamentary grant); moreover, there is no guarantee that an application will be successful, even though the municipality may incur considerable expenses in the process (about 30% of respondents voiced this concern). In order to tailor their projects according to the given requirements and to administer the application process, municipalities often find it necessary to hire external consultants, who tend to be rather expensive. Some mayors even mentioned the danger that municipalities might find themselves in debt while applying for subsidies. Ironically, subsidies might just be too expensive

for small municipalities. In contrast to this, parliamentary grants often came down to simply lobbying specific MPs with sufficient influence, and the only requirements placed on the municipality was that they comply with an inspection from the Ministry of Finance which inquired whether the relevant working permit had been secured (Slonková, Holub 2007; Pokorný 2009). Moreover, no institutionalised mechanism existed which would monitor the compliance of the project with the provided grant's original purpose (e.g. Kedroň 2010).

The close proximity to the town of Žďár nad Sázavou with the local party bureaus and permanent residences of several influential MPs (Hána, Feřtřová 2014) likely plays a significant role in this state of affairs. One inhabitant assessed the potential importance of this factor through her assertion: "I think that the fact that representative [...] is a resident here confers a certain advantage" (translated and name removed by the author). The possible relevance of this factor must be taken into account during the discussion of outputs, since the information provided by respondents could have been different if we had chosen a different geographic area where to conduct the survey. The proximity to Žďár nad Sázavou might also prove to be a factor during the study of the impacts of parliamentary grants on the development of small municipalities.

The following section of this article concentrates on the comparison of the financial volumes received through parliamentary grants and the yearly budgets of the concerned municipalities, after which it analyses the responses provided by the inhabitants of the selected municipalities during the survey. For certain questions, these responses were supplemented by the responses provided by the mayors, who are also particularly noteworthy inhabitants. Figure 5 provides the comparison of annual

municipal budgets and the financial resources provided by the parliamentary grants. In order to avoid distortions caused by exceptionally large budgets recorded in certain specific years (actually primarily caused by extraordinary revenues from subsidies), the parliamentary grants are compared to average yearly budgets of the given municipality over the period of 2003–2009. The data reflect the actual extent of municipal expenditures (not planned expenditures) without financial transfers to municipal funds or other accounts. These transfers would have unnecessarily inflated the values of the annual budgets, even though they are not in fact real expenditures (Rozpočet veřejně 2013).

The expenditures of the selected municipalities largely reflect their population size, which is the main criterion for the distribution of financial resources they receive from shared taxation (Act no. 243/2000). These allocations make up most of the municipal budget. Yet, outliers exist, which are caused by sudden increases in investments made by some municipalities in certain years. These investments are mostly financed by financial subsidies, which also include parliamentary grants. These tend to serve as major components of the municipal budgets. In certain cases, they even managed to exceed the size of the average annual budgets of the given municipality. In such cases, the parliamentary grants could have significantly contributed to the improvement of the municipality's situation (when compared to similar municipalities without this additional resource) by providing financial resources for some of the investments which would have otherwise remained unaffordable. Such boost can positively influence the relative satisfaction of the inhabitants with their municipal environment and provide the municipality with further advantages. The increase in relative satisfaction can in turn trigger other processes which positively affect communal life, such as increased micro-regional immigration (Ouředníček et al. 2011; Temelová et al. 2011), which eventually translates into increased population size and increased financial allocations from the national budget (Act no. 243/2000). How then, do the mayors and ordinary inhabitants perceive the buildings and facilities financed by the parliamentary grants?

One of the questions included in the survey did not explicitly ask about the parliamentary grants, but rather asked the respondents to identify all significant public constructions over the past 10 years, which they believed had had most positively improved the living standard of the municipality's inhabitants. Table 3 presents the types of constructions highlighted by the respondents (the share of the surveys which mention the given type). The public constructions highlighted by the respondents were categorised according to the sectoral classification of parliamentary grants introduced in Table 1. Table 3 then indicates the share of responses which acknowledged one of the 14 constructions financed through parliamentary grants.

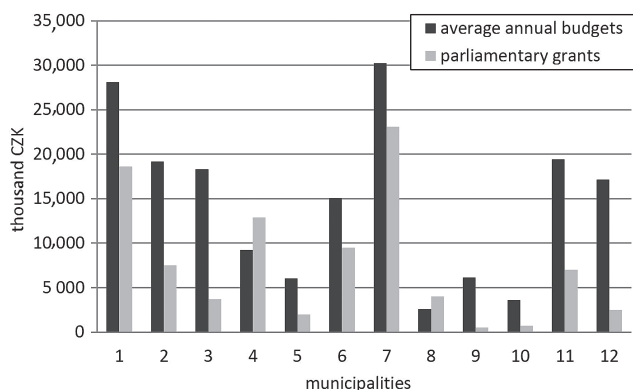


Fig. 5 The volumes of parliamentary grants contrasted with the average annual budgets of the selected municipalities in the district of Žďár nad Sázavou (2003–2009, in thsd. CZK).

Note: The average annual budget represents the average value of actual yearly expenditures, not including account transfers, made by the municipalities during the period of 2003–2009.

Source: Chamber of Deputies 2002–2008; Rozpočet veřejně 2013. The author's calculations.

Tab. 3 The types of constructions identified by the respondents as most positively contributing to the living standard in the selected municipalities of the Žďár nad Sázavou district over the period of 2003–2013 (in %).

	mayors	inhabitants
education – nursery, primary	55	61
sport facilities, holiday and leisure activities	55	47
church and cultural buildings	27	15
social services	0	3
healthcare	18	14
municipal facilities and visual character	36	35
transport and technical infrastructure	82	56
environment and agriculture	18	10
identified all parliamentary grants	86	59
identified at least one parliamentary grant	80	72

Note: See Table 1 for a more detailed description of the applied categories. Categories which did not feature any of the identified construction were removed from the table. Number of mayors = 10; number of inhabitants = 81.

Source: The survey and the author's calculations.

Not all types of public constructions took place in all of the municipalities during the observed period (e.g. social and care facilities, but also educational facilities). However, the surveys did not always include all of the constructions the municipality had procured. Many surveys of local inhabitants, as well as one survey completed by a mayor, did not include certain social facilities which had, in fact, been constructed in the respective municipalities. The share of responses identifying the specific types of public constructions can provide valuable insight into the relative importance of the individual types in terms of public satisfaction with life in the municipality. The table displays a strong convergence of opinion between the mayors and the other inhabitants. Both groups mostly highlighted educational, and sports facilities and constructions related to municipal infrastructure. This convergence could be due to a relatively small separation of municipal inhabitants from their political representatives, who very much engage in the municipality's daily affairs. The inhabitants then put slightly higher emphasis on the role of educational facilities than their mayors, who in turn show a higher preference for infrastructural facilities, which are vital for the improvement of living standards, yet have only a marginal impact on the municipality's exterior character.

It is worthy of note that the types of constructions identified as most valuable to the living standard by both the mayors and the inhabitants correspond with the types of parliamentary grants allocated to the municipalities during the relevant period (Figure 4). Furthermore, it reflects the general sectoral distribution of parliamentary

grants throughout all of Czechia over the same period (Figure 1). A question arises, whether perhaps the parliamentary grants were intentionally dedicated to projects most popular among the inhabitants in order to secure voter support for the involved MPs. However, it is necessary to reassert that the data acquired during the research project are only fully applicable to the territory under observation and the selected sample of respondents, wherefore any projection of the results onto the national scale is somewhat speculative.

The share of responses identifying the constructions financed through parliamentary grants (or at least one of them) as positively contributing to the living standard clearly indicates the importance of such constructions to small municipalities. Mayors were more likely than other inhabitants to highlight these buildings as significant, which implies that they recognise the constructions financed through parliamentary grants as an important factor in improving the living standard in their municipalities. Undoubtedly, the mayors recognise the importance of these construction not only in terms of their direct impact on the wellbeing of the inhabitants, but also from a political perspective, since such popular construction projects are likely to increase their popularity. As an exception to the rule, mayors of two municipalities did not mention the projects financed by the parliamentary grants received by their municipalities. One of these municipalities received a grant which does not clearly specify its purpose, while the other municipality used its parliamentary grant for the reconstruction of its municipal hall, as well as for the reconstruction of other objects not included in the grant's description. These discrepancies might be the reason for not mentioning the projects in the survey.

Ordinary inhabitants were less likely to include the projects financed by parliamentary grants among the most significant municipal constructions. Nevertheless, 59% included all of them in their list and 72% of inhabitants mentioned at least one of them. This share is still relatively high. Ordinary citizens therefore also seem to consider the constructions financed through parliamentary grants as important elements of municipal life, although they sometimes have critical comments. In some cases, the inhabitants are dissatisfied with their implementation ("Surely, every construction benefits the municipality, however, some of them are not devoid of problems" (translated by the author).), in exceptional cases, they outright disagree with the construction altogether ("Instead of the hall, we could have had a new school" (translated by the author).). Table 4 records the responses provided by inhabitants regarding their satisfaction with the specific construction projects financed by the parliamentary grants. They indicated their level of satisfaction on a scale from 1 (completely satisfied) to 5 (absolutely dissatisfied). The results were separated for the individual types of constructions corresponding to the sectoral classification used in Table 1.

Tab. 4 Recorded satisfaction of the inhabitants of selected municipalities in the Žďár nad Sázavou district with the construction projects financed by parliamentary grants over the period of 2003–2009.

	average	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	No response (%)
education – nursery, primary	2.0	42	31	18	6	3	0
sport facilities, holiday and leisure activities	1.6	33	25	9	0	0	33
church and cultural buildings	2.3	18	46	27	9	0	0
municipal facilities and visual character	1.5	64	18	18	0	0	0
total	1.9	40	31	18	5	2	4

Note: See Table 1 for a more detailed description of the applied categories. The scale from 1 to 5 represents the relative satisfaction with the construction projects, when 1 is the most positive value and 5 the most negative.

Source: The survey and the author's calculations.

The overall level of satisfaction with the constructions financed by the parliamentary grants is relatively high. The inhabitants were most satisfied with the constructions contributing to the municipality's facilities and visual character and with constructed sports facilities (in this case, however, the survey is 4 expected responses short, since what an original grant document (Chamber of Deputies 2002–2008) described as a local "Youth centre" (translated by the author) apparently failed to register among the local inhabitants). On the other hand, the inhabitants were rather critical towards cultural and church (re)constructions (such as the reconstruction of a local community centre in one of the municipalities) and towards construction projects related to educational buildings, which the inhabitants consider among the most important municipal buildings (see Table 3). This importance is reflected in the attention the inhabitants give to these buildings and the expectations they have, resulting in more severe criticisms. Even in this instance, however, the level of dissatisfaction does not reach very high values, since most respondents rated the projects with marks ranging from 1–3, indicating their relative satisfaction.

Importantly, many inhabitants expressed their satisfaction with the construction projects financed by the parliamentary grants although they seldom used the produced facilities themselves: "I am glad that these building exist in the municipality, however I don't really frequent them myself" (translated by the author). The inhabitants often appreciate the reconstruction works because they improve the municipality's image, environment, and the public space in which they live: "It has not really affected my life personally, but I am satisfied with the renovation taking place in the municipality" (translated by the author). The inhabitants also frequently express their satisfaction with the existence of facilities which can be used by other members of the municipality. It can therefore be argued that the inhabitants are often pleased with the role the grants have played in the improvement of the communal environment and life, irrespective of any direct personal benefits to themselves: "A general reconstruction of the school took place, which improved the lives of the students and the teachers and helped the municipality to save money on energy" (translated by the author).

Moreover, the respondents often allude to the fact that while they may not be using the concerned facilities themselves, their children probably will: "In the future, I plan to send my children here, wherefore I welcome any efforts at renovation" (translated by the author).

However, although positive perception of the parliamentary grants predominates, critical opinions have also been voiced. Frequently, the inhabitants are more favourably disposed towards projects with more immediate effects on their daily lives than is the case with the projects financed by the parliamentary grants. For this reason, the inhabitants of one municipality might end up valuing the construction of pavements and cycle tracks along busy roads above the constructions of a community centre or a playground, paid for by the parliamentary grants. Another example when the parliamentary grant failed to address the most desirable investments can be found in one municipality where the grant was used to finance the construction of a new sports hall and the reconstruction of an old elementary school. The inhabitants expressed criticism towards the reconstruction of the old school building, since they would have rather seen the construction on a new school: "The school building has been repaired adequately, however, if the municipality had decided to build a new school building instead or enlarging the old one, it would have been better" (translated by the author). They are even more critical towards the construction of the new sports hall, since the hall has only limited uses which do not quite justify the enormous expenses tied with its construction: "The hall primarily benefits the [...] handball club. The municipality pours a lot of money in it" (translated and name of the municipality removed by the author). In some other cases, the inhabitants point out what they see as the ineffectiveness of parliamentary grants or the insufficient quality of some of the constructed buildings. An extension of a local nursery, constructed as part of a project financed by a parliamentary grant in 2007, for which the municipality hasn't yet found any use, can serve as an example: "Considering the reconstruction, the building should be used more effectively" (translated by the author). As another example, one respondent criticises what he sees as excessive costs of the reconstruction of a school refectory,

citing “very large reconstruction expenses relative to the number of lunches cooked in the refectory” (translated by the author). Criticisms also pertain to an insufficient insulation of the school building during the reconstruction. Some inhabitants even responded that the most significant municipal buildings were all built in the 1980s.

The collected data indicates that parliamentary grants can positively contribute to the character of the municipalities by improving the living standard of their inhabitants. The grants do not directly contribute to the economic development of the given municipalities, although they surely indirectly impact on the size of their financial allocations from the national budget by improving their image and fostering micro-regional immigration (thus increasing their population and revenues). Nevertheless, the type of development facilitated by the parliamentary grants has an impact on the relative levels of satisfaction the inhabitants feel in regards to life in their municipalities (at this point, it is necessary to reiterate the possible influence of the proximity to the town of Žďár nad Sázavou, since this regional centre can provide the surrounding municipalities with all necessary facilities in case they lack them themselves. As a result, inhabitants of the selected municipalities might be disproportionately concerned with other features of municipal life, such as improvements to the public space). Therefore, the parliamentary grants served a legitimate role and the inhabitants of the affected municipalities were, with the exception of some critical opinions, largely satisfied with the construction projects the grants helped to finance. The interviewed mayors attributed greater significance to the parliamentary grants than ordinary citizens, since they might also see them as political instruments. Political connections emerged as a key requirement for the acquisition of parliamentary grants. The mayors who had such connections at their disposal made use of them during the application process. In comparison to the parliamentary grants, other subsidies provided on the national or the European level turned out to involve excessive administrative burdens (from the perspective of the small municipalities). However, this system reveals itself to be quite unfair. In this manner, connections to national or regional politicians, who either help secure the grants or at least provide information on the application process, become the decisive factor in municipal development. This system seems to have lingered on even after the institute of parliamentary grants was discontinued, for example within the practice of certain ministries (Hána 2013). It therefore still applies that whoever does not possess such political resources finds himself/herself at a disadvantage.

5. Conclusion

Unlike previous studies, both international and Czech, which investigate the allocation of parliamentary grants on the national scale only; this article endeavoured to

introduce the perspective of mayors and inhabitants of smaller municipalities and their views on the developmental impact of parliamentary grants. The article therefore serves as a first attempt to use such approach towards this issue which stands at a significant intersection of the fields of geography, politics, and economics.

The research took the form of a case study of the Žďár nad Sázavou district. In terms of spatial distribution, most funds were concentrated in the vicinity of the towns of Žďár nad Sázavou and Nové Město na Moravě. This later finding also triggered the discussion of the presence of local party organisations which are home to some influential politicians and their possible influence on the grant allocation process. The survey among mayors and inhabitants of municipalities took place in 12 municipalities with under 1500 inhabitants, which had received parliamentary grants (and in 7 municipalities without parliamentary grants), across a number of population size categories. It is necessary to assert that in light of the current lack of research done on this topic, this study does not aspire to complete generalizability, but rather represents a significant analysis of a specific case of the local impacts of parliamentary grants and the way they are perceived by local actors.

The survey produced a number of interesting outputs, which can be summarized by a set of several propositions. The results of the survey among mayors indicate that personal acquaintance of local politicians with politicians at the national level is the primary factor in the process of grant allocation, supplemented by a possible influence of the political membership of the mayor and of significant members of the executive board. If the municipal representatives had a line of access to politicians, it was meaningful to apply for parliamentary grants, if this was not the case, municipalities would be better off looking for other sources of subsidies. For small municipalities, however, other forms of grants tend to be difficult to obtain, often even expensive (in case they have to hire external experts), and there is no certainty of success. Parliamentary grants are free of most of these difficulties. An application for a parliamentary grant also has the potential positive impact of galvanising the local actors. Experience with the grant application process can improve the confidence of the local representatives and their capacity to succeed with any further applications in the future. However, during the application process, local representatives were primarily guided by their political acquaintances, who either secured them the grants outright, or provided them with information on the running grant initiatives. This interconnection between local actors and politicians on the national level, however, could also have led to the creation of clientelist networks (see Dvořáková 2012a,b), which can be used by the local actors in order to secure further grants or to promote their interests. A question arises, whether this reflects the very purpose of local administration, since municipal representatives become dependent on politicians operating on the state

level. We could discuss that the clientelism among state and local politicians can also disproportionately alter voter behaviour during communal election. In this case, such elections would be favourably disposed towards people with connections to state politicians, not to those who might have the best capacity to promote the development of the municipality, manage its affairs, and unite the community.

The parliamentary grants turned out to have significant effects on the development of individual municipalities, since they often exceeded their yearly budgets and were frequently used to finance some of the public buildings deemed essential to public well-being by the local mayors. In addition, aside from a few exceptions, the buildings whose construction was financed by the parliamentary grants were perceived very positively by the local inhabitants. The parliamentary grants had a large impact on a general improvement of the environment and the image of the affected municipality. In some instances, they even helped the municipalities to save money, which they would have otherwise had to spend on the same constructions or reconstruction, and which therefore could have been devoted to other projects. The municipalities further benefit and save money in the long run through improved technologies frequently used during such reconstructions (e.g. new thermal insulation of the local school). The fact that these benefits have been provided to only a small selection of municipalities, chosen primarily due to personal or political connections of their mayors and not according to some generally acceptable criteria, however, remains highly contentious.

Even after the practice of parliamentary grants has been concluded, research on this topic can still provide valuable insights. The presented research should be followed by a series of further case studies in different regions, which could offer different outputs or point towards regularities occurring in typologically different territories. Research continued in such manner could then attempt to generalise some of the achieved outputs. The issue of the development potential of the parliamentary grants could be then discussed within the field of cultural geography. One of the interesting questions arising from this study is whether the relative satisfaction of the inhabitants with the public buildings financed by the parliamentary grants, even though many of them do not use these buildings themselves, is influenced by their identification with the municipality and its community. The outputs of this research can also be potentially used in an analysis of some ministerial subsidies (e.g. those distributed by the Ministry of Regional Development), which also seem to be influenced by political factors (Hána 2013). The parliamentary grants had significant development potential in the form of an improved public environment of the targeted municipalities. It can therefore be argued that the similarly oriented ministerial subsidies could have meaningful effects, however, only in the case that do not overwhelm small municipalities with

administration and application requirements beyond the personal and financial capacities of such municipalities. Such overload forces the municipal representatives to exploit all alternative avenues in order to secure these subsidies, or at least to obtain some form of informational advantage, including the personal-political channels. Any system which distributes grants and subsidies on the bases of personal political connections is essentially unjust.

The outputs of this article can also contribute to the general discussion on subsidies, their purpose, advantages and drawbacks, as well as their significant vulnerability to political pressures and the creation of clientelist networks within Czech politics. The Czech system of (both state and European) subsidies suffers from some serious problems. Some of them could be remedied by a general simplification of the grant application process (inspiration could be taken from the system of subsidies provided by the Vysočina region, which is praised by local mayors for its administrative simplicity). Alternatively, many municipal representatives (including some of those who completed this survey) call either for a complete abolishment of the system of state subsidies and transfer of resources into the pool of shared taxes which is used to finance local governments, or its replacement by a system of local taxes administered by the municipalities themselves. This way, municipalities would receive smaller financial benefits than if they were granted the previously available subsidies; however, they would still obtain additional financial resources they could use for the improvement of their communal environment and public well-being. Municipal officials would no longer be burdened by excessive administration associated with the majority of the subsidy programs, which is often beyond their capacity. They would also become fully independent from national politicians, which is more conducive to the proper function of local government. Technically, such solution would be relatively simple; however, it would require a complex social and political agreement and commitment.

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RESUMÉ

Porcování medvěda z pohledu procesu žádosti o poslanecké dotace a jejich rozvojového potenciálu: případová studie okresu Žďár nad Sázavou

Cílem článku je přispění ke studiu poslaneckých dotací (známé jako porcování medvěda) případovou studií, která je zaměřená na výzkum procesu žádosti z pohledu představitelů obcí a jejich lokálního rozvojového potenciálu z pohledu obyvatel obcí. Dosavadní studie se zabývaly především celostátní perspektivou na alokaci prostředků z poslaneckých dotací (doplňných o hledání podmiňujících faktorů či důsledků ve volebním chování obyvatel), tento článek tak představuje první pokus o studium poslaneckých dotací v lokální perspektivě. Pro tuto případovou studii byly vybrány obce okresu Žďár nad Sázavou do 1500 obyvatel, ve kterých byl pohled představitelů a obyvatel obcí zjišťován dotazníkovým šetřením v září 2013. Výsledky této studie jsou v odborné diskuzi významné nejen z hlediska studia poslaneckých dotací, ale také studia dalších (např. ministerských) dotací. Mohou však také přispět do celospolečenské diskuze o smyslu a problémech dotačního systému v Česku, jehož prostředky jsou rozdělovány pod vlivem celostátních politiků. Závěr článku pak nabízí možnosti, jak těmto problémům předejít.

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