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ESTABLISHING DEVELOPMENT TEAMS – ENGINES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

USPOSTAVLJANJE RAZVOJNIH TIMOVA, KAO POKRETAČA GOSPODARSKOG RAZVOJA I REGIONALNE SURADNJE

SUMMARY

European Union is known for having programmes accompanying every strategy which support achievement of defined objectives. The programmes further contain sets of measures for implementation and financial frameworks sustaining activities of the foreseen measures.

In order to realize any of the strategies it is necessary to create prerequisites for development of human resources, for support of entrepreneurship, incentives for SME-s and innovation.

Instead of limited means available through Instrument of pre-accession assistance (IPA⁹⁴), once Croatia reaches full membership a whole new perspective will be open through funding available within Structural and Cohesion Fund. In this light the period of pre-accession and related funds have to be used for the purpose of learning and adjustment but due to lack of infrastructure and necessary knowledge Croatia seems to have questionable success in utilisation of the available funds.

Human potentials represent a basis on which strategy of economic development is built upon. All other resources: economic resources, geo-strategic position, level of technological development, in comparison to human resources seem to be less important.

One of the reasons for insufficient usage of available EU funds is lack of human resources with specific knowledge and skills for preparation of projects according to EU standards.

Implementation of a model for establishment of Development teams within local self-government units, institutions and civil sector will enhance absorption of available funds and influence economic development of the region. Furthermore it will contribute to quality preparations for application procedures related to utilisation of funds that will open upon Croatian EU-accession.

Key words: *Research, analysis, regional and local development, development team, development strategy*

SAŽETAK

Europska Unija je poznata po tome što iza svake strategije postoji prateći program koji podržava ostvarenje ciljeva iz donesenih strategija. Unutar pojedinih programa definirane su mjere provedbe i financijski okvir koji podržava pojedine aktivnosti unutar predviđenih mjera.

⁹⁴ Preparations for full EU membership and utilization of significant funds as the Member State

Da bi se ostvarila bilo koja strategija potrebno je stvoriti pretpostavke za razvoj ljudskih potencijala; poticanje poduzetništva; poticanje malih i srednjih poduzeća i poticanje inovativnosti.

Umjesto prilično ograničenih sredstava koja su dostupna kroz Instrument za pretpristupnu pomoć (program IPA⁹⁵), Hrvatskoj će nakon članstva biti na raspolaganju puno veća sredstava iz Strukturnih fondova i Kohezijskog fonda. U tom razdoblju prilagođavanja otvoreni su predpristupni fondovi EU-a kako bi se ostvarile potrebne prilagodbe. Iako su sredstva značajna, Hrvatska zbog nedostatka infrastrukture i potrebnih znanja ne uspijeva povući većinu predviđenih sredstava.

Ljudski potencijali su osnovica na kojoj se gradi strategija gospodarskog razvoja, strategija suradnje, a svi resursi u smislu gospodarskih potencijala, geo strateškog položaja, razine tehnološke opremljenosti su u odnosu na ljudske potencijale manje važni.

Jedan od razloga za nedovoljno povlačenje sredstava iz dosad dostupnih EU fondova u odnosu na očekivanja je nedovoljno ljudskih resursa koji posjeduju specifična znanja i vještine za pripremu projekata po EU standardima.

Primjena modela Razvojnih timova unutar jedinica lokalne samouprave, institucija i civilnog sektora poboljšat će apsorpciju raspoloživih fondova, utjecati na gospodarski razvoj regije i kvalitetno iste pripremiti na kriterije i procedure prijave na buduće fondove ulaskom Republike Hrvatske u članstvo EU.

Ključne riječi: *Istraživanje, Analiza, Regionalni i lokalni razvoj, Razvojni tim, Strategija razvoja*

1. Introduction

In the pre-accession period Republic of Croatia needs to adjust its legal, economic and administration system to the standards of European Union in order to be able to apply for funding through the Structural Funds once it reaches full membership. In this period of adjustment Croatia receives assistance through the pre-accession funds for quality preparation and adaptation to the requirements of EU membership. Even though the funds are significant, due to lack of infrastructure and relevant knowledge Croatia is not able to use the means put to its disposal. Implementing mechanisms on national level undergo permanent changes and adjustments resulting in restructuring and establishing new national, regional and local agencies. New stakeholders appear in form of international consortiums awarded with tasks to implement EU programmes which introduces more confusion in implementation of approved projects.

In Croatia there is relatively small number of people having understanding or expertise in the field of project development and implementation according to EU requirements which results in questionable quality of project implementation. Development of human potentials gains in momentum. Creation of conditions for economic development and regional cooperation requires skills in the field of analyses of needs in the community, preparation and development of projects according to PCM and in line with the local and national strategies.

⁹⁵Priprema se za funkcioniranje u EU i korištenje znatno većih sredstava u trenutku kad RH postane zemlja članica

2. The main results of the research conducted within the paper: Capacities and activities of stakeholders in the County related to implementation of policy of economic development and regional cooperation

For better understanding of regional development and cross-border cooperation in the context of readiness of local self-governments and other key stakeholders in regional development, a field research has been conducted with following objectives:

- to analyse existing situation in Osijek-Baranja County in regard to usage of available funds
- to analyse the most common reasons for non-participation on available EU calls for proposals
- to conduct at least 20 interviews with key decision makers within institutions in the city of Osijek and Osijek-Baranja County on possible solutions for better absorption of available funds
- to conduct at least 20 interviews with municipality mayors

The target group of the research was:

- a) Representatives of 42 local self-government units in Osijek-Baranja County
- b) Mayors of 20 „smaller“⁹⁶ municipalities in OBC
- c) 10 organisations whose projects have been approved within one of the IPA components and which have signed a Grant contract for EU funding (NGO, educational institutions, regional development agencies, municipalities, companies)
- d) Decision makers, 20 of them, (10 heads of departments in the city of Osijek and Osijek-Baranja County, 6 school masters, and 4 mayors)

The research plan included local self-government units in Osijek-Baranja County, NGOs, educational institutions, publicly owned companies. All planned stakeholders have answered the research invitation. The representatives of smaller municipalities and decision makers have also gladly participated in the research.

2.1. Results of the research

Target group: Representatives of 42 local authorities in the County

Question No. 1 of the Questionnaire filled by the representative of 42 local self-government units was: What are your experiences in preparation of project proposals in the period from 2007 to 2010?

Objective of this question was to gain a clear picture of the issue: in what extent have the local governments in Osijek-Baranja County participated in application of project proposals, what are their capacities and their knowledge of application procedures for EU funding.

⁹⁶ Municipalities with population up to 3,500: (Census 2001) Donja Motičina, Draž, Drenje, Gorjani, Jagodnjak, Levanjska Varoš, Magadenovac, Marjanci, Petlovac, Čeminac, Petrijevc, Podgorač, Podravska Moslavina, Popovac, Punitovci, Satnica Đakovačka; Strizivojna, Šodolovci, Trnava, Vuka

Table 1. Previous experience in independent application of project proposals in the period 2007 - 2010

	No experience	Up to 5 prepared project proposals	Up to 10 prepared project proposals	More than 10 prepared project proposals
a) local funding resources (County)	12,5%	51,78%	21,43%	14,29%
b) national funding resources (Ministries)	7,41%	53,7%	20,37%	18,52%
c) EU sources of funding (CARDS; PHARE; IPA; Transnational programmes; Community programmes)	43,53%	18,82%	37,65%	-
d) Other international sources of funding (Embassies, Foundations, USAid, OSCE, UN)	81,48%	16,67%	-	1,85%

Source: Author

It is visible that there is least experience in preparation of project proposals which require knowledge of PCM methodology. The most project proposals have applied for funding from domestic sources.

In the question: which are the most common reasons for insufficient usage of available funds, the participants had the opportunity to define reasons and grade them from 1 to 6: 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important reason.

Table 2. Reasons for insufficient usage of available funds

	1	2	3	4	5	6
a) Lack of information on available funding opportunities	9,43%	24,53%	16,98%	20,76%	9,43%	18,87%
b) Lack of adequate human resources (skills)	47,17%	28,3%	7,55%	1,89%	5,66%	9,43%
c) Project documentation not ready (due to formal and legal reasons)	14,82%	20,37%	38,89%	18,52%	3,7%	3,7%
d) Co-financing not available	21,82%	20%	16,36%	23,64%	14,54%	3,64%
e) Undefined strategic priorities on local level	7,55%	-	7,55%	20,76%	47,17%	16,98%
f) Lack of motivation for cross-border cooperation	1,89%	7,55%	11,32%	13,2%	18,87%	47,17%

Source: Author

The results show that the most important reason for insufficient usage of available funds is lack of human resources (47, 17 %), and the least important reason is lack of motivation for cross-border cooperation (47, 17%).

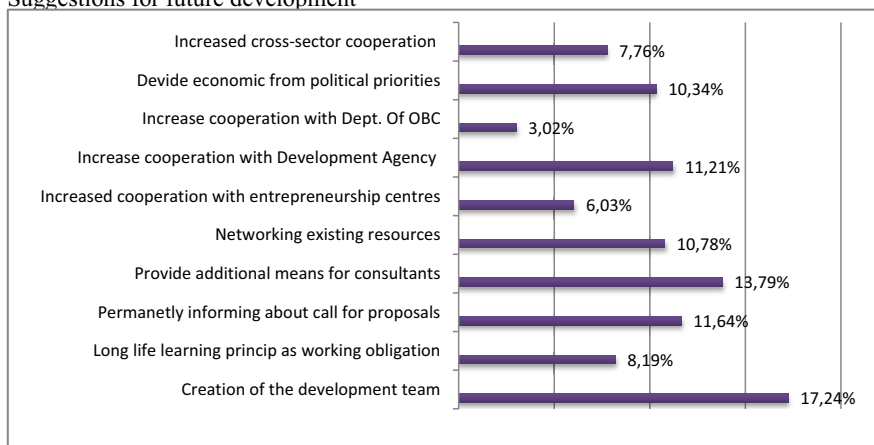
Every of the above mentioned reasons have been further analysed. Since the lack of human resources was defined as the most important reason for insufficient usage of available funds, the participants in the research had 8 possible replies for the question: Which are the three most common reasons for lack of human resources, the examinees chose three answers. It is interesting that 3 reasons have been chosen to be equally important for the lack of human resources:

- Non-existing team for project preparation (17, 86%)
- Insufficient number of available co-workers (17, 86%)
- Limited or non-existing means for consulting services (17, 26%)

In the territory of Osijek-Baranja County the results show that the least important problem is inadequate computer literacy.

The last question that implies the importance of developing skills of human resources was: „Your suggestions for future development“. For this question 10 possible answers were offered and the participants had to choose at least 3 and maximum 5 answers.

Graph 1. Suggestions for future development



Source: Author

Creation of the a development team (17, 24%) has been recognized by all 42 local self-government units as very important factor of the future development, but a real concern arises from the fact that 13, 79% of participants chose the answer: provide additional means for consultants thus we still have a pattern which says that it is easier to pay the consultants than to invest in own human resources.

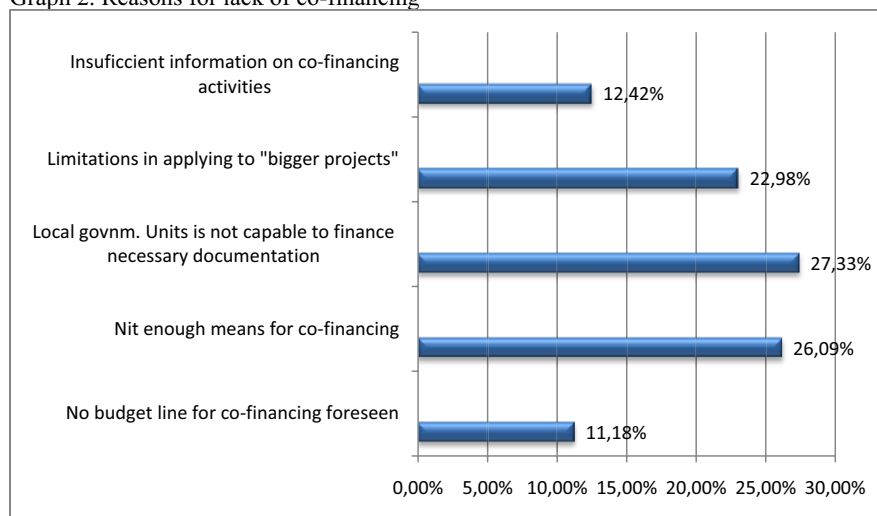
Financial and absorption capacities imply capability to financially support activities of the projects. Cross-border programmes offer different model of financial support to projects on

the part of the Contracting authority. Every call for proposals/grant scheme defines rules and criteria in its Guidelines for Applicants. The amount of own contribution for the applicants is not always the same. This also applies to the dynamics of financial follow up for the planned activities.

Experiences of calls for proposals in cross-border programmes with Slovenia, Italy and Hungary have so far shown that slow administration, especially related to cash flow, represents a significant obstacle in implementation of project activities. This resulted with many difficulties in finding cross-border partners in the last call for proposals - IPA CBC Hungary – Croatia accompanied with insufficient financial and absorption capacities. Motivation for cooperation and partnership with non-EU-member states in joint cross-border programmes is higher thanks to different financing model: funds are being transferred to the applicant after signing of grant contract. This reduces the risk of difficulties in the process of project implementation caused by insufficient financial capacities.

One of the questions for the local self-government units related to insufficient utilization of available funds was about their capacity to co-finance project implementation. The question was: which are the three most common reasons for lack of capacity to co-finance EU projects? They were offered 5 answers, three of which they were supposed to chose.

Graph 2. Reasons for lack of co-financing



Source: Author

Target group: Mayors of 20 „smaller“⁹⁷ municipalities in the territory of Osijek-Baranja county

This target group was chosen because municipalities with less than 3500 inhabitants tend to be less developed in regard to communal and social infrastructure. It was established during

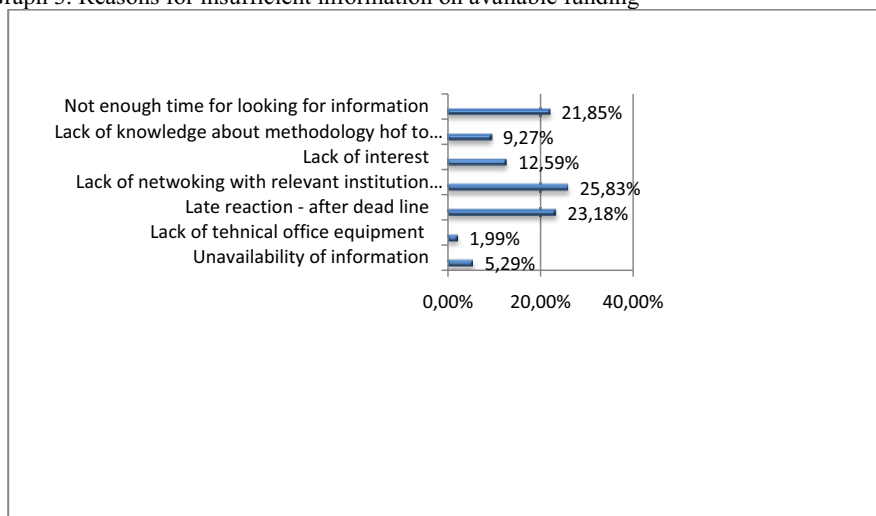
⁹⁷ Municipalities with population up to 3.500: (Census 2001) Donja Motičina, Draž, Drenje, Gorjani, Jagodnjak, Levanjska Varoš, Magadenovac, Marjanci, Petlovac, Čeminac, Petrijevc, Podgorač; Podravska Moslavina, Popovac, Punitovci, Satnica Đakovačka; Strizivojna, Šodolovci, Trnava, Vuka

regular visits to municipalities in Osijek-Baranja County. General remark made by the mayors of these municipalities was that the population was decreasing.

In the time of research a very recent issue was the possibility of reform in the sphere of local government. It caused mayors of „smaller“ municipalities to show more interest in possibilities offered by EU funds than it was the case before.⁹⁸

One of the questions asked was related to the reason for not using the opportunity to participate on available and open calls for proposals for EU grants. Most of the mayors said that there was no sufficient relevant information on available funding. Following are the results from answers, the question being: which are the most common reasons for lack of information on available funds and open calls for proposals:

Graph 3. Reasons for insufficient information on available funding



Source: Author

The highest percentage of answers relates to lack of networking with other stakeholders which could provide relevant information (25.83%) and to late reaction to information. These two answers are somewhat contradictory. The experience shows that all local self-governments in Osijek-Baranja County regularly received information on open calls for proposals and available funding from Regional Development Agency of Slavonia and Baranja.⁹⁹

Target group: 10 organisations that have implemented approved projects within some of the IPA components and have signed Grant contracts for awarded EU funds

Since the whole research started with the hypothesis: Development teams in local self-governments are essential in order to improve absorption of EU funds from various IPA components, especially in regard to cross-border cooperation and regional

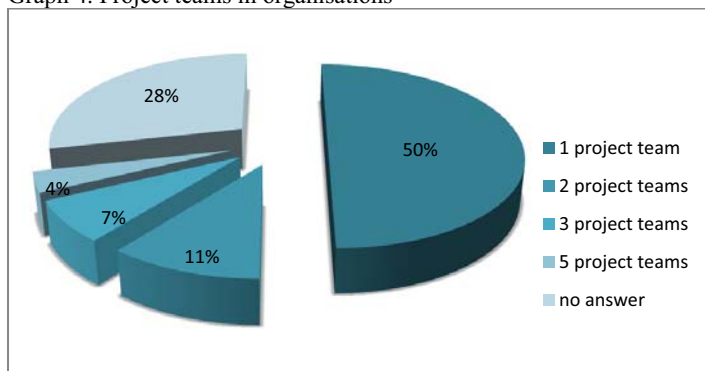
⁹⁸ Author of this paper is employed in the Regional Development Agency of Slavonia and Baranja. Communication with representatives of local governments is a regular activity.

⁹⁹ Record on sent e-mails 2008 - 2011

development/regional competitiveness, it was important to gain information on good practices from successful applicants.

Following answers were obtained on question: What is your position in your organisation? 32% - project managers, 36% members of project teams, 25% undefined position and 7% gave no answer. Furthermore, personnel working as project manager were also involved in development of the project proposals according to set standards which implies knowledge of PCM methodology. Not one of the interviewed people declared he/she was the only person involved in project development. Projects were for the most part developed by teams. The question: How many project teams are there in your organisation, the participants were supposed to give the number of teams.

Graph 4. Project teams in organisations

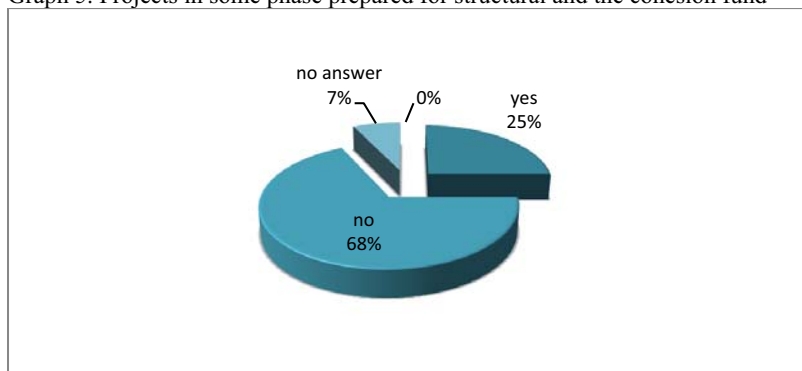


Source: Author

Most of the answers showed that there is 1 project team in the organisation (50 %), 2 project teams in 11% of cases; 3 project teams in 7 %; 5 project teams in 4% of organisation and 28 % of interviewed organisation gave no answer.

The next question relates to Croatian membership in EU and availability of Structural funds and the Cohesion fund. Has your organisation prepared a project proposal for some of the before mentioned funds?

Graph 5. Projects in some phase prepared for structural and the cohesion fund



Source: Author

Although the interviewed representatives of the organisations have experience in implementation of EU projects, the fact that even they gave the answer NO to this answer in a very high percentage (68%) shows that organisations are not ready for the oncoming period of full membership, let alone those organisations which had no experience so far. The issue of how is Croatia going to utilize 600 mil. Euro of due „membership fee“ still stays open.

Target group: Decision makers - 20 (10 heads of departments in cities and in the county, 6 school masters and 4 mayors)

Following are the results of interviews conducted in April and May 2011 with heads of departments within city and county administrations, school masters of primary and secondary schools and mayors of Valpovo, Belišće, Našice and Beli Manastir. The objective of the interviews was to suggest the best solutions which would contribute to better absorption of available funds and to better preparation for application and implementation of projects within programmes and funds that will be available upon accession.

Heads of departments in administrations of municipalities and cities and of the County.

All of them identified lack of human resources to be the most important problem and the second most important is definitely lack of financial capacities for co-financing and pre-financing of projects. Even though there were all kinds of education about how to prepare project proposals according to EU standards in the past few years, among the employed in public sector there were only few co-workers motivated for attending those educations and even if there were representatives of certain departments present, heads of departments were rarely among them due to their many obligations, especially if the education was organised in two or more days. There were even more problems if education was organised during weekend. Heads of departments in local and regional governments have often pointed out that they were overwhelmed with administrative work which left no space for education and training.¹⁰⁰. Possible solution lies in better coordination of departments, identification and definition of priority projects that would be jointly applied by the city and the County, in accordance with Development Strategy of the County.

Problem of pre-financing and co-financing of projects is definitely present but solutions are being searched for. If a project proposal is approved for financing by the EU, there still hasn't been a case where the applicant resigns from implementation due to lack of co- or pre-financing. Possible solution would also be so called purpose oriented financing through special budget lines. At present heads of departments have to come up with solutions and transfer funds from one budget line to another in order to finance project activities. Departments within city and County administration express their readiness to find the best solutions for successful implementation of approved projects.¹⁰¹. When it comes to application for funding within IPA Programme, most of the departments usually refers to IPA II component for cross-border programmes Hungary – Croatia and Croatia – Serbia, and component IIIC – regional competitiveness (regional development).

School masters have been predominantly focused on IPA II component, cross-border programme Hungary – Croatia and Croatia – Serbia as well as on the IPA IV programme dealing with development of human resources. The biggest problem was to motivate teachers to participate in project development and project implementation in their free time for which

¹⁰⁰ Ministries often ask for different data from the county level. There is no common data base or common methodology for follow up or update of various data, whether on local or national level. There is also lack of coordination and exchange of information between the ministries. Providing required data is often time consuming.

¹⁰¹ OBC is presently in the process of defining models of co-financing and pre-financing of EU projects on county level

they could not receive additional remuneration or to integrate those activities into their always busy schedules.¹⁰² According to school masters, reason for lack of motivation was different treatment of teachers in the same programme when it comes to Hungarian and Croatian side. I.e. teachers in Hungary and their salaries can be financed through projects. One part of their salary is financed through regular sources, and the part for the time they spend on project implementation can be financed the project. In the Cross-border Programme Croatia – Serbia, the rules are the same on both sides of the border – budgetary clients cannot receive reimbursement for their salary through the project unless they are newly employed.

Possible solution could be a change in the next Operational Programme for Development of Human Resources in Croatia – to create conditions for employment on projects and use the Hungarian model which enables a certain percentage of salary to be financed through the project for implementation of activities as defined in the Grant contract. Since the component IPA IV Development of Human Resources actually represents good possibility to practice for ESF, it is necessary to provide both financial and operational capacities for utilization of this Fund which is foreseen to finance projects in the field of employment, education, training, labour market competitiveness of long-term unemployed persons etc.

Mayors of Beli Manastir, Valpovo, Belišće and Našice had very similar opinion as heads of the departments in cities' and county administrations. Every mayor has his own team that supports him/her in everyday operational activities, but none of the cities (except city of Osijek which is co-founder of the Regional Development Agency) have a team for technical support in preparation and implementation of project financed through EU funds. City of Beli Manastir relies on its Centre for Entrepreneurship but also hopes for support from RDA in aspects such as education, preparation and support to project teams. The mayor alongside with his deputies has initiated education for 20 young people who volunteer in city's companies in order to acquire at least basic knowledge on PCM methodology. At present the city of Beli Manastir is partner in one of the cross-border projects with Hungary related to development of local action groups.

City of Belišće has experience in PHARE programme¹⁰³ – project for construction of bicycle roads. It is interesting that their future strategy of application for EU funding also relates to construction of bicycle infrastructure. The city mayor is very much aware of the need for development of human potentials for development and implementation of EU projects so he is trying to establish his own project team, solely for the purposes of the city. He also expects assistance from the County especially in financing but he has some restraints in regard to political decisions.¹⁰⁴

Mayor of Valpovo expects the Centre for Entrepreneurship to provide technical support in preparation of projects for application in Cross-border programmes and regional development. The city invested in education of its employees in the field of PCM – two of them attended programme of specialized training organised by the Faculty of Economy in Osijek. It is now their obligation to apply acquired knowledge in preparation of project proposals. There is still a big problem of co-financing and fear that he will not get support from the County due to different political orientation.¹⁰⁵

City of Našice has the least experience in preparation and implementation of projects according to EU standards. Up to now all of their projects were in the field of infrastructure

¹⁰² Guidelines for applicants are very clear about involvement of budgetary clients in projects and their salaries, unless a new person is being employed and paid from the project budget.

¹⁰³ Project approved within Phare Interreg SLO-HU-HR programme – building of bicycle roads

¹⁰⁴ Different political option in charge in the County than it is in the city of Belišće

¹⁰⁵ Different political option in charge in the County than it is in the city of Valpovo

financed by their own budget and supported by assistance from the national budget. There is no project team or centre for entrepreneurship that would provide systematic analysis of trends, calls for proposals or prepare project proposals for EU grants. They expect excessive assistance from RDA but they still haven't established some model in the city administration that would create conditions for a project team to work. Following that fact there are no planned funds in the city budget that would provide employment for persons with necessary education and skills.

2.2. Conclusions about research results

During the research and analysis of results following problem was identified: insufficient knowledge about development and implementation of projects funded by EU funds. Numerous, everyday inquiries show that great number of organisations in Osijek-Baranja County have incomplete and insufficient information about functioning of pre-accession funds, their significance, role and possibilities they offer. On the other hand, Osijek-Baranja County is often claimed to be one of the positive examples. On the territory of the County there are a lot of applied, approved and implemented projects funded by EU, which is certainly a very good quality indicator for the organisations involved in implementation but also of the supporting institutions in charge of technical support, consult and expertise. The existing knowledge and acquired experience needs to be transferred to other organisations which have the opportunity to develop and implement projects but at present have no capacity to do it on their own. This refers foremost to many associations (NGO), institutions, local self-government entities, public bodies and public companies, since the most of the funds is still aimed for the non-profit sector. After the accession and Croatian full membership in EU available funds will be more than doubled with opportunities that will open also for the private, business sector. This will have even greater direct impact on economic and social development of the region. It is essential to prepare human and financial resources and focus on following funds:

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) offers financial support to infrastructural investments, creation of new jobs, support to local development and assistance to SME aiming at strengthening economic and social cohesion and reduction of development disparities of EU regions

European Social Fund (ESF) aims at supporting employment, acquiring new skills, training and education, reduction of differences in life standard and welfare of the citizens in EU regions.

Cohesion Fund provides support to projects in the field of environment protection and transportation, communication that connect more member states and projects of renewable energy sources

All of the mentioned funds will only be available and utilized if we give our contribution in strengthening organisation and education of individuals that will be engaged in development and implementation of projects.

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