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**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AUTHORITIES' ACTIVITY
FOR THE ABSORPTION OF THE EU FUNDS
AND ITS INFLUENCE ON A LOCAL DEVELOPMENT.
THE EXAMPLE OF THE SZAMOCIN COMMUNE**

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Abstract. The article is aimed at presenting the authorities' activity when applying for the EU funds and the influence of gained aid on a local development. The Szamocin Commune is the subject of research. The authorities' activity is the commune's strength. Despite their mediocre financial situation, approximately 1/4 of their spending is on investments. The commune's weaknesses include mainly poor quality of the roads in the commune and few sanitary sewage systems. In order to improve the level of a local development and the quality of the inhabitant's life, investments in these areas have been realized thanks to gained EU funds for several years now. The commune could carry out more EU projects does not have its own sufficient resources required in case of financial engineering. It is one of the two barriers to absorb the EU funds, except for an inefficient system of funds allocation.

Key words: the EU funds, commune, local development, Wielkopolska Province

INTRODUCTION

The accession of Poland to the EU has enabled the local self-government units to obtain the funds supporting the socio-economic development and increasing their competitiveness. Polish beneficiaries have already had an opportunity to use the EU aid in the pre-accession period but it was on a smaller scale than after the accession. Previously gained experience in applying for the aid has facilitated the preparation of further

application forms and has contributed to the success of communes in gaining other EU funds [Standar i Puślecki 2011]. Therefore, the authorities' activity is crucial when searching for new investment funding sources (e.g. the EU grants), including infrastructural ones, which are characterised by significant capital intensity. It is a major problem, especially when the commune's needs are considerable, whereas budgetary means are insufficient as in the case of the Szamocin Commune.

Kłodziński [2008] states that in the current conditions the biggest chance for the rural development lies in the so called bottom-up way of development. Communities that can oppose any negative phenomena are ones that chose for their self-governments educated people who understand the principles of market economy and who can win the competition for different types of funds, investors, and tourists. Kłodziński [2008] adds that the right choice of local authorities is the issue determining the future of the commune.

The article presents the activity of the Szamocin Commune authorities when applying for the EU funds. In order to do this, the primary data on the EU project that are being realised have been acquired from, inter alia, the Town and Commune Council in Szamocin¹. Moreover, a statistical survey has been carried out. It was based on a questionnaire concerning two time spans: 2008² and 2012³, which enabled to comparison of the results regarding the barriers to absorbing the EU funds. Methods of descriptive statistics and comparative analysis were adopted in order to conduct the study of source material. A time span of the study covered the period from 2004 to 2010.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNE

The Szamocin Commune is an urban-rural commune situated in the northern part of the Wielkopolska Province. The commune covers an area of 125.5 sq km, out of which the area of the town of Szamocin amounts to 4.7 sq km. The commune contains the following villages: Atanazyn, Borowo, Heliodorowo, Laskowo, Lipa, Lipia Góra, Nałęczka, Nowy Dwór, Raczyn, Swoboda i Szamoty [Strategia rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego... 2001, p. 25]. The commune is inhabited by 7,429 people, out of which the population of Szamocin amounts to 4,291 (58%), whereas the population of the rural part of the commune is 3,138 (42%). The population density of the commune amounts to 58 people per sq km [www.stat.gov.pl].

¹ The data has been acquired by M. Zagrodnik who used it in her Master's thesis entitled "Gaining the EU funds by local self-governments, illustrated with an example of the Szamocin Commune".

² The results of this study have been included in Ph.D. thesis by Aldona Standar entitled "Evaluation of the implementation of the regional policy EU funds by the commune's authorities in the Wielkopolska Province". The defence of Ph.D. thesis took place on October 13, 2009 in Faculty of Economic Sciences, Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW. All communes of the Wielkopolska Province were examined then, with the exception of towns with the rights of counties. After the questionnaire had been sent, the process of its filling was monitored by phoning commune councils (town councils). As a result, the response rate amounted to 92% (204 questionnaires). All of them were included in the study at the time.

³ The survey was conducted by Milena Zagrodnik and an employee who deals with gaining the EU funds.

When taking the natural environment into consideration, it should be stressed that approximately 55% of Szamocin area is under the nature conservation programmes. The commune is characterised by a lush vegetation (over 59% of the area) as well as the diversity of uncommon flora and fauna. The commune is attractive as regards recreation, landscape, and tourism. However, soil in the Szamocin Commune is of low classification (73% fifth and sixth class), and the commune's location, on the outskirts of the province, is suburban to Poznań. Despite this fact, the commune is characterised by positive values of net migration rate, population growth rate, and relatively young society (the percentage of people in the pre-working age amounts to 23.4% and in the working age 62.9%). This commune is, however, affected by a high unemployment (37.1%) and additionally by unemployment hidden in agricultural holdings, which is caused, inter alia, by a low level of education among the citizens. The most crucial and difficult problems to overcome include rural unemployment and limited possibilities of employment in the rural areas [Strategia rozwoju obszarów... 2005]. On the other hand, Szamocin's weaknesses eliminate the entrepreneurship of inhabitants and local authorities' activity, as evidenced by its 20th place in the rankings in terms of the most attractive areas to investors [Strategia rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego... 2001]. Also, Szamocin is the leader as regards the aid absorption per capita. The trade is expanding and many prosperous households are located in the area of the commune. Unfortunately, craft services are disappearing. In the Szamocin Commune the level of infrastructure provision is provision varies. The commune is characterised by a high education quality, which results, inter alia, from a high level of educational infrastructure. Moreover, the commune has got a well-developed road network, though its quality is low (the percentage of dirt roads amounts to 62.8%). The infrastructure regarding roads in the commune is critically evaluated. On one hand, Szamocin has got numerous water-line systems and a modern wastewater treatment plant but on the other hand, the sanitary sewage network is poorly-developed. It is a typical feature of rural communes, especially peripherally located ones. The development of a basic infrastructure in recent years have been causing a gradual evening out of spatial differences [Bański and Czapiewski 2008]. The other weaknesses include: poorly-developed gas network, a bad condition of the electrical grid and public buildings [Strategia Rozwoju Miasta... 2011].

On the basis of the strengths and weaknesses analysis, it can be stated that both supporting human capital and investments in the infrastructure in the commune are essential. The commune is able to finance some of them using generated operating surplus – a positive difference from the difference between current revenue and current expenditure. The value of operating surplus indicates the investment possibilities of the commune or the need for getting into debts even further [Wskaźniki... 2011]. In the case of Szamocin, operating surplus is on a high and stable level compared to the average in the province, which amounts to approximately 45-66 zł per capita. These numbers show the ability to realise investments or further indebtedness of the commune at the moment but they also determine the possibility of incurring debts in the future. From 2014 debt limits will be determined by the average value of operating surplus from the past three years [Ustawa... 2009, art. 246]. The commune is also characterised by a low share of its own revenue in total revenue, which may hinder the possibility to realise the investment due to a limited freedom of allocating the financial resources of the commune. This result indicates mediocre investment possibilities of the Szamocin Commune and its dependence on transfers from the state budget. However, it does not differ from the

average of rural communes, which are characterised by a lower independence than urban communes [Standar 2013]. Their own revenue mainly consists of taxes and local fees as well as the share of PIT and CIT taxes. Since Szamocin is a peripherally located commune, it may have difficulties with a further gaining of new inhabitants or investors. Additionally, it may obtain lower income from local fees [Duś 2011]. It should be stressed that according to Bański and Czapiewski [2008] the location of the commune is one of the most significant factors determining its success. The only attractive factors are natural assets, which have been promoted, and an active policy of the commune's authorities, which is now being carried out. Pro-investment attitude of the commune's authorities is reflected in the share of financial resources for investments, which is growing despite the general recession. Consequently, in order to ensure further increase in the development level, the commune's authorities are forced to use debt instruments. It should be noted that indebtedness of the commune and its service are at a safe level, however it is half of the maximum limit (60%) that was established under Public Finance Act in 2005 [Ustawa... 2005]. It is worth noting that such a great number of projects, realized thanks to the EU aid, influenced the increase of indebtedness by 10 percentage points, which is half of this indicator's value excluding liabilities for such projects in 2010 (Table 1).

Table 1. Selected financial factors of the Szamocin Commune in the period from 2006 to 2010.
Tabela 1. Wybrane wskaźniki finansowe gminy Szamocin w latach 2006-2010

| Factor – Czynniki | Years – Lata | | | | |
|---|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
| The share of own revenue in total revenue (%) Udział dochodów własnych w dochodach ogółem (%) | 26.3 | 26.8 | 27.0 | 23.0 | 21.3 |
| The share of property expenditure in total expenditure (%) Udział wydatków majątkowych w wydatkach ogółem (%) | 20.8 | 20.5 | 25.3 | 24.5 | 25.8 |
| Operating surplus per capita (zł) Nadwyżka operacyjna na mieszkańca (zł) | 261.8 | 309.5 | 366.3 | 242.6 | 216.6 |
| The share of total liabilities in total revenue (%) Udział zobowiązań ogółem w dochodach ogółem (%) | 26.0 | 28.2 | 19.0 | 21.5 | 31.2 |
| The share of liabilities excluding liabilities for the EU projects in total revenue (%) Udział zobowiązań bez zobowiązań na projekty unijne w dochodach ogółem (%) | 26.0 | 28.2 | 19.0 | 21.5 | 21.7 |
| Charge on total revenue with expenditure on debt service (%) Obciążenie dochodów ogółem wydatkami na obsługę zadłużenia (%) | 7.1 | 7.3 | 6.5 | 6.8 | 5.4 |
| Charge on total revenue with debt service, except for a principal instalment for the EU projects (%) Obciążenie dochodów ogółem obsługą zadłużenia bez rat kapitałowych na projekty unijne (%) | 7.1 | 7.3 | 6.5 | 6.8 | 5.4 |

Source: own work on the basis of the Ministry of Finance report on budget implementation in the Szamocin Commune.

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie sprawozdań Ministerstwa Finansów z wykonania budżetów gminy Szamocin.

THE FIRST EXPERIENCE OF GAINING THE EU FUNDS

In the pre-accession period, the Szamocin Commune demonstrated an exceptional use of the EU funds as well as 100% effectiveness in gaining the EU funds. The majority of the communes in the Wielkopolska Province generally used two programmes at the time: Rural Development Programme (PAOW) and Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD⁴). PAOW was the programme that used foreign resources (funds from the World Bank) and supported the development of rural areas up to 15,000 inhabitants in the time period 2001-2004 [Pomajda 2002]. Its main aim was financial help for the local self-government units: counties and communes. The aid was distributed according to some components, out of which C-Rural Infrastructure and subcomponent B2-Education were used by the communes in the Wielkopolska Province. Szamocin used both components, launching three projects of total value 1,978,793 (the part of PAOW amounts to 444,364). The averages were very similar among the communes of the Wielkopolska Province (1 project and 241,013,56; the part of PAOW is 89,168,60) and *urban-rural* communes (1 project and 266,286,63; the part of PAOW is 95,753,23). The investments regarding roads, sanitary sewage system, and education were supported by the grant (Marshal Office in Poznań).

SAPARD, on the other hand, supported the activities in the pre-accession period in the East-Central European countries that were then candidates for accession to the European Union. It was done in order to adjust the agricultural sector and rural areas to the level of the EU countries. The communes of the Wielkopolska Province generally used schemes included in Actions 3 and 4⁵. Also in that case, Szamocin turned out to be a successful beneficiary, since it implemented 7 projects, 3 concerning wastewater management and 4 dealing with roads. Their total value amounted to 4.9 million zł, out of which the EU aid was 3.4 million zł. The average for the communes of the Wielkopolska Province (3 projects, total cost of projects 2.2 million zł, with the EU aid of 0.9 million zł) and *urban-rural* communes (3 projects, total cost of projects 2.1 million zł, with the EU aid of 0.8 million zł) was much worse (ARMA and the Town and Commune Council in Szamocin). It is worth noting that it was the first programme entirely modeled on support programmes for agriculture and rural areas functioning in the EU [Czykier-Wierzba 2003, Głębicka and Grewiński 2003, <http://euro.pap.com.pl>]. The commune had earlier benefited 15 thousand zł from the aid provided by Foundation for

⁴ Apart from these programmes, communes also used PHARE and ISPA. In the period 1997-1998, some of the communes, from those located in the Wielkopolska Province since 1999, gained the aid to finance their investments thanks to their location in the areas supported by PHARE CBC. They were: Chodzież, Drawsko, Kościan, Krzyż Wielkopolski, Międzychód, Pakosław, Trzcianka and Włoszakowice. The technical infrastructure was aided. Under the PHARE programme 2003, two investments in roads were financed in the Wielkopolska Province: a bypass in Nowy Tomyśl in the length of 4.33 km, costing 2.3 million euro and financed from the PHARE funds. The second investment concerned the reconstruction of the 305 road that connected the ring road in Nowy Tomyśl with the A2 motorway. It costed 245 thousand euro and was financed from the PHARE funds. ISPA was, in turn, set up on the model of the Cohesion Fund and financed only big projects. Poznań, Piła and Kalisz used the aid.

⁵ Included: 3.1. Water supply for agricultural holdings including water purification; 3.2. Disposal and purification of municipal waste water; 3.3. Solid waste management; 3.4. Commune and county roads in rural areas; 4.3 Public tourist infrastructure in rural areas.

Polish-German Cooperation in order to build the sanitary sewer, a total cost of which amounted to 907 thousand zł (the Town and Commune Council in Szamocin). Projects discussed above enabled the realisation of many essential investments in the commune and to gain the experience, which facilitated the obtaining of the EU aid in the subsequent years. According to Nurzyńska [2008], the pre-accession aid programmes have established new legal and financial frameworks for functioning of public aid programmes in Poland.

OBTAINING THE EU FUNDS IN THE TIME PERIOD 2004-2006 IN THE FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE OF 2007-2013

Since Poland was granted the membership of the EU, Polish beneficiaries have been given an opportunity to apply for even greater aid. Local self-government units, including communes, were one of the most active groups in this respect. The communes of the Wielkopolska Province (with the exception of towns with the rights of counties) gained 269 million zł from the funds provided in the period 2004-2006, realising 324 projects. *Urban-rural* communes implemented 44% of projects, which were being realised by the examined group of communes. The cost amounted to over 56% of the total EU aid. Compared to other parts of the province, Szamocin was not in the leading position when it comes to absorbing the aid at the time. Despite the experience gained in the pre-accession period, the commune's effectiveness was then 50%, out of 4 projects 2 were rejected at the formal evaluation stage because of errors. It was possible to obtain the aid for the development of social and technical infrastructure respectively: "Erecting the school building in Szamocin Group of Schools" and "Building the water-line and sewerage networks in Kusztelak Street in Szamocin". 75% of both projects were financed from ERDF under the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (Action 2.2. Evening out the educational opportunities for children and teenagers at all educational levels and 3.2. Areas under restructuring). It should be noted that it was the most important programme for the local self-government units and the Wielkopolska Communes gained from it up to 79% of the EU funds at the time [Standar and Puślecki 2011] (Table 2).

An even bigger aid will be provided for the local self-government units in the next financial perspective. The examined commune even became a more successful beneficiary. The application forms were submitted for the following programmes: PAOW (Action, Rural renewal and development: The expansion of water-line station in the village of Heliodorowo, Borowo area, Reconstruction of the Szamocin Cultural Centre, reconstruction of the promenade, walking lanes, car park and playground in the Szamocin Public Park, Reconstruction of the sports facility including land management and the renewal of walking trails and small architecture in the Public Park) financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EFRROW) and Wielkopolska Regional Operational Programme (WROP) (Action 3.2. water and wastewater management – The construction of the sanitary sewage system in the Szamocin agglomeration) financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). All of them obtained the grant, thus the commune can be proud of 100% effectiveness. Despite the fact that under WROP the commune realized only one project, its total value was the greatest – over 2.2 million zł and is nearly 1/3 of the total EU aid gained in the period 2007-2013. That was the project concerning sewerage infrastructure that was 85% maximally aided.

Table 2. The value of EU funds obtained from the period 2004-2006 and 2007-2013, and the number of projects implemented by the Szamocin commune by the fund, the program and the field of application

Tabela 2. Wartość pozyskanych środków UE z okresu 2004-2006 i 2007-2013 oraz liczba projektów realizowanych przez gminę Szamocin według funduszu, programu i kierunku przeznaczenia

| Financial perspective Perspektywa finansowa | EU funds Fundusz UE | Operational program Program operacyjny | Value of project Wartość projektów | Number of project Liczba projektów | Field of application Kierunek przeznaczenia |
|--|------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 2004-2006 | EFRR | ZPORR | 1 984 336 | 2 | water supply system and sewage system, educational infrastructure sieć wodno-kanalizacyjna, infrastruktura edukacyjna |
| 2007-2013 | EFROW | PROW | 5 035 035 | 4 | cultural, tourism, sport and recreation infrastructure; water supply system infrastruktura kultury, turystyczna, sportowo-rekreacyjna; sieć wodociągowa |
| | EFRR | WRPO | 2 263 475 | 1 | sewage system sieć kanalizacyjna |

Source: own elaboration based on data from surveys.
Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badania ankietowego.

It is also worth noting that the commune was not realising any project under the programmes that supported human capital. It preferred to obtain the EU aid for infrastructural project. One project concerned social infrastructure (educational), whereas the other one regarded technical infrastructure (water and sewerage) in the period 2004-2006. In the period 2007-2013, on the other hand, there were only single projects connected with social infrastructure: educational, cultural, tourist, sport and leisure (4 in total), and water and sewerage (only 1) (Table 2).

The structure of gained aid was different in both programming periods, according to the aim. In the first period, 2004-2006, the project concerning social infrastructure was nearly 6.5 times bigger than the project on technical infrastructure. In the period 2007-2013, on the other hand, the total value of projects in terms of two aims was similar. However, it is worth noting that this proportion would have been different if Szamocin had gained the aid for two rejected projects on utilities and on building the commune road. The total cost of the first project was estimated at 1.5 million zł (the Town and Commune Council in Szamocin).

It should be added that the projects on social infrastructure are generally less expensive than those on technical infrastructure, which can be confirmed by an example of realizing the projects with the aid of the EU funds by the Szamocin Commune, e.g. the value of the project on sewerage infrastructure was the highest (Fig. 1). It results from a capital intensive character of this kind of projects. Apart from that, it is worth noting that the share of the EU funds in total value in case of projects on social infrastructure was lower (33%, 50%, 55%) than in case of technical infrastructure (85% and 61%) (Fig. 2).

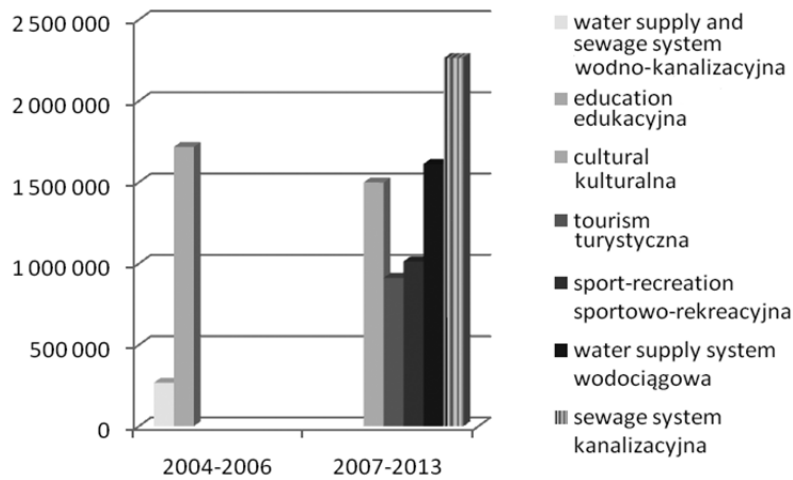


Fig. 1. The value of EU projects in the period 2004-2006 and 2007-2013 carried out by the commune Szamocin by the field of application

Source: own elaboration based on data from surveys.

Rys. 1. Wartość projektów UE z okresu 2004-2006 i 2007-2013, realizowanych przez gminę Szamocin według kierunku zastosowania

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badania ankietowego.

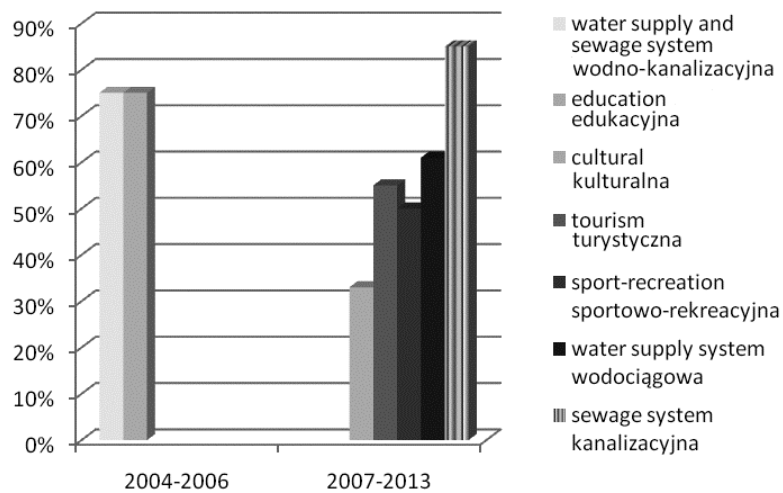


Fig. 2. Shares of EU funding in the total value of projects in the period 2004-2006 and 2007-2013 carried out by the Szamocin Commune by the field of application

Source: own elaboration based on data from surveys.

Rys. 2. Udziały dofinansowania UE w całkowitej wartości projektów z okresu 2004-2006 i 2007-2013, realizowanych przez gminę Szamocin według kierunku zastosowania

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badania ankietowego.

It should be added that the funding source of projects realized under Integrated Regional Operational Programme (ZPORR) also included funds from The Ministry of Economy, Labour and Social Policy, representing 10% of the total value of the project. In the case of Wielkopolska Regional Operational Programme (WRPO), concerning water and wastewater management, they were funds from Provincial Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, representing 13% of the total value of the project. In order to complete one project, the commune took a 500 thousand zł loan. The statistical survey indicates that in 2008 and in 2012 the employees who dealt with gaining the EU funds in the Szamocin Commune preferred loan and own resources as the most important sources of co-financing of the EU projects.

BARRIERS TO ABSORB THE EU FUNDS

The opinion of the Szamocin Commune Council employees, who deals with gaining the EU funds, about the barriers to obtain the EU aid, is extremely valuable because of a considerable number of prepared applications and a little smaller number of implemented projects. Since the process of gaining the EU funds has been going on for many years (including the pre-accession period), many years of experience pay off and the number as well as the scale of barriers is smaller. In 2008 barriers connected with the change of documentation and required attachments were largely indicated. Short deadlines, complicated language or determining the qualifying costs were indicated to a medium extent. After 4 years the changes of documentation still make it significantly difficult to prepare the applications. In turn, after few years of the EU aid implementation one could get used to a complicated language and the difficulty in determining the qualifying costs (Fig. 3). It is also worth stressing that when the evaluation of Szamocin

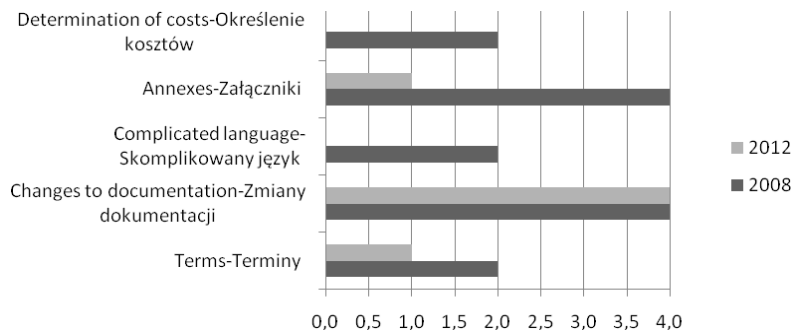


Fig. 3. Assessment of Barriers to completing the application form issued by the Szamocin Commune. Scale: from 0 (no barrier given) to 4 (formidable barrier)

Source: own elaboration based on data from surveys.

Rys. 3. Ocena barier występujących podczas wypełniania wniosku aplikacyjnego wystawiona przez gminę Szamocin. Skala: od 0 (brak danej bariery) do 4 (bardzo duża bariera)

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badania ankietowego.

in 2008 is compared with an average evaluation given by all examined communes in the Wielkopolska Province in 2008 [Standar and Puślecki 2011], it can be noticed that the results are similar.

Experience gained in the process of obtaining the EU funds also generally influences the number and scale of barriers indicated by the commune. In 2008 the commune indicated 8 out of 10 barriers, mentioned in the questionnaire, whereas 4 years later only 2 were indicated. The lack of clear criteria for gaining funds and an inappropriate system of funds allocation were considered as formidable barriers in 2008, whereas the lack of own resources for co-financing was recognized as a significant one. Moreover, disadvantageous location of the commune, the scope of offer that does not meet the commune's needs, insufficient information and complicated procedures were also noted. These answers, especially for the three most crucial barriers, coincide with the average results shown by all examined communes in the Wielkopolska Province [Standar and

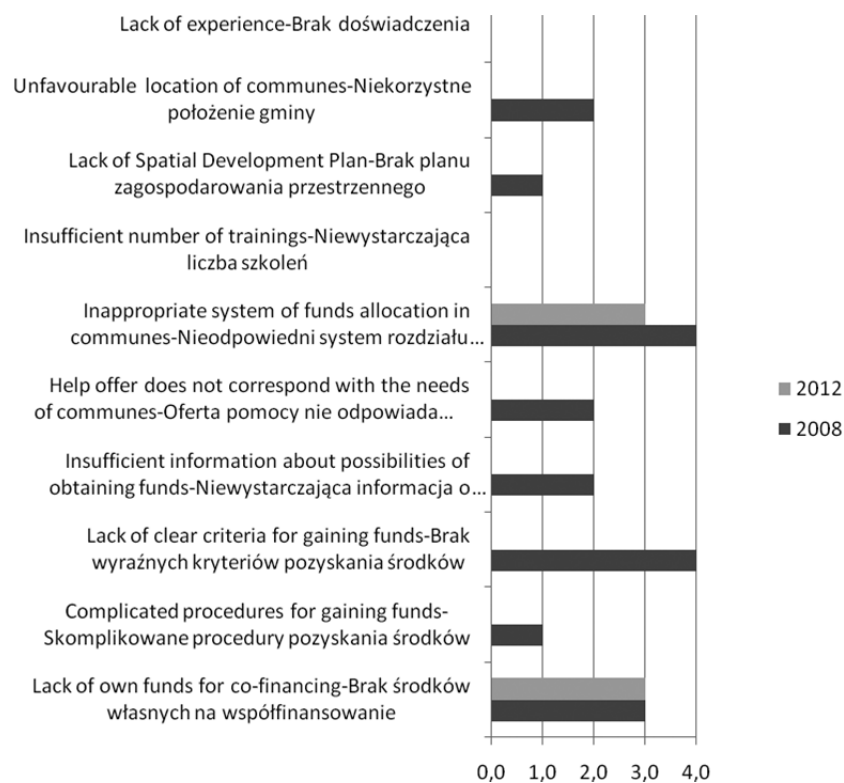


Fig. 4. Evaluation of the barriers affecting the limitation of obtaining the EU funds according to Szamocin Commune. Scale: from 0 (no barrier given) to 4 (formidable barrier)

Source: own elaboration based on data from surveys.

Rys. 4. Ocena barier ograniczających pozyskiwanie środków UE wystawiona przez gminę Szamocin. Skala: od 0 (brak danej bariery) do 4 (bardzo duża bariera)

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badania ankietowego.

Puślecki 2011]. On this basis, Szamocin can be considered as a representative commune. According to the Szamocin Commune, after 4 years the barriers that concern the organising of the system of gaining the EU funds (e.g. complicated procedures) stopped hindering the absorption, which was obviously influenced by a long period of learning the system of funds allocation and experience that was gained thanks to that. The employees, who deal with gaining the EU funds in the Szamocin Commune assessed the lack of own resources for co-financing and inappropriate allocation of the funds between communes as significant barriers. Due to the fact that the commune does not show a high operating surplus (Table 1), it is difficult for it to collect necessary means for co-financing, which is reflected in the answers given in 2012. As far as the barrier: an inappropriate system of funds allocation is concerned, over 3/4 of examined communes were in favor of its change in 2008, and the choice of system, e.g. the preference of the communes in an unfavourable financial situation, was dictated by the situation in a particular commune. When assessing that barrier as significant in 2012 (3.0 on a scale to 4.0), respondents undoubtedly were opting for a change that would facilitate the commune to gain even greater EU funds, which cannot be afforded by the commune when the financial means are limited and a significant part of the funds is invested in projects that are being realized (Fig. 4). The Szamocin Commune authorities had to quit the implementation of some projects, although the grant for their realisation had been given.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE EU FUNDS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SZAMOCIN COMMUNE

According to Kłodziński [2008], rural areas have undergone significant positive changes for past few years thanks to the pre-accession funds, the funds granted to member states, and funds from other countries. The implementation of the projects financed by the EU has also assisted the Szamocin Commune development. Gained EU funds represented from 1.27 to 5.86% of total revenue⁶ in the period 2009-2012 (Regional Chamber of Audit; RIO). They enabled the development of both social and technical infrastructure. The number of schools was sufficient but buildings were not accessible for disabled people and required a general modernisation of 1 building (5800 sq m). Thanks to the implementation of one of the projects, the disabled were provided with an unlimited access to a full educational, social and rehabilitation offer by equipping the building with the lift and 2 exercise rooms of 120 sq m. The commune also rebuilt the sports facility, promenade, and walking lanes around the lake, it built the car park and the playground. The EU fund also allowed raising the standard of cultural services by expanding the Szamocin Cultural Centre. According to Nurzyńska [2010], the importance of these facilities for the life of the rural communities cannot be overestimated, since they fulfil different functions that meet social needs.

⁶ The implementation of projects co-financed by the EU takes place thanks to the commune's funds. After the project or its stage has been completed, the commune receives the money back, thus an actual receipt of the EU funds to the budget occurs later.

A necessary and sufficient condition for achieving economic success is a properly developed infrastructure. Dolaty's research [2011] showed that the water-line network was the best developed and the least spatially diverse element of ecological infrastructure, whereas a great dispersion occurs in case of the access to the sewerage network and the wastewater treatment plant. A significant development of water and sewerage network was noted in the Szamocin Commune, especially in its rural areas where the difference between the lengths of the water-line network and the sewerage network is formidable (water-line network is 7.6 times longer) and thus requires the implementation of further investments. This uneven development of two networks is a common phenomenon and results from the commune's investment policy that is based on equipping new areas and the disposal of some old devices [Myna 2003, Rakowska and Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska 2010, Dolata 2011]. This result is reflected in the quality of life in the countryside where the share of population using the sewerage network is nearly half of that using the water-line network. This disproportion is a barrier to the socio-economic development and may pose a threat to environmental degradation. Only an even development of both networks and the third element – the wastewater treatment plant will contribute to the improvement of the living conditions and the natural environment condition [Bański and Czapiewski 2008]. The urban part of the commune is much better equipped with both networks. In the period 2004–2010 both networks were being developed. Despite the fact that the network's length itself increased only slightly (the sewerage network by 4% and the water-line network by 0.5%), the number of people using both networks significantly increased (the water-line network by 3% and the sewerage network by 12%). The projects implemented thanks to the EU aid contributed to a remarkable growth in the number of people using the sewerage network in the villages (by 38%), which is a very positive phenomenon since these areas are underdeveloped in terms of this type of infrastructure (Table 3).

Table 3. The development of water supply and sewerage system in the Szamocin commune in 2004–2010

Tabela 3. Rozwój sieci wodociągowej i kanalizacyjnej w gminie Szamocin w latach 2004–2010

| Specification Wyszczególnienie | Unit Jednostka | Years – Lata | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Users of the system in % of total population – Korzystający z instalacji w % ogółu ludności | | | | | | | | |
| Summary – Ogółem | | | | | | | | |
| Water supply system Sieć wodociągowa | % | 79.6 | 80.4 | 80.5 | 80.7 | 82.2 | 82.2 | 82.2 |
| Sewage system Sieć kanalizacyjna | % | 59.6 | 61.3 | 61.2 | 61.3 | 66.6 | 66.6 | 66.6 |
| In cities – W miastach | | | | | | | | |
| Water supply system Sieć wodociągowa | % | 75.2 | 75.5 | 75.6 | 75.8 | 78.1 | 78.1 | 78.1 |
| Sewage system Sieć kanalizacyjna | % | 77.6 | 80.3 | 80.3 | 80.4 | 80.6 | 80.7 | 80.7 |

Table 3 – cont. / Tabela 3 – cd.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Country – Na wsi | | | | | | | | |
| Water supply system Sieć wodociągowa | % | 85.7 | 87.3 | 87.4 | 87.5 | 87.7 | 87.7 | 87.7 |
| Sewage system Sieć kanalizacyjna | % | 34.4 | 34.4 | 34.4 | 34.6 | 47.3 | 47.5 | 47.5 |
| Distribution network of 100 km ² – Sieć rozdzielcza na 100 km ² | | | | | | | | |
| Summary – Ogółem | | | | | | | | |
| Water supply system Sieć wodociągowa | km | 77.2 | 77.9 | 76.9 | 78.2 | 80.2 | 80.2 | 80.2 |
| Sewage system Sieć kanalizacyjna | km | 21.8 | 21.8 | 21.5 | 21.9 | 21.9 | 21.9 | 21.9 |
| In cities – W miastach | | | | | | | | |
| Water supply system Sieć wodociągowa | km | 454.0 | 454.0 | 454.0 | 458.2 | 458.2 | 458.2 | 458.2 |
| Sewage system Sieć kanalizacyjna | km | 357.6 | 357.6 | 357.6 | 368.3 | 368.3 | 368.3 | 368.3 |
| Country – Na wsi | | | | | | | | |
| Water supply system Sieć wodociągowa | km | 62.7 | 63.3 | 62.5 | 63.7 | 65.7 | 65.7 | 65.7 |
| Sewage system Sieć kanalizacyjna | km | 8.8 | 8.8 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 8.7 |

Source: own elaboration based on BDL GUS.
Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie Banku Danych Lokalnych GUS.

SUMMARY

The authorities' activity is one of the most important factors that determine the local development. Previously gained experience in terms of obtaining the EU funds is reflected in a more successful absorption of the EU aid which was granted even on a bigger scale after the accession of Poland to the EU. The authorities of Szamocin Commune, which is suburban to the capital of the province, are forced to search for off-budget financial resources for local investments since they do not have so considerable own revenue as communes surrounding Poznań, for instance.

Thanks to gained EU funds the commune realised many investments concerning technical infrastructure (sewerage, water-line systems, roads) and social infrastructure (educational, cultural, and recreation centres). The commune would not be able to implement these investments on its own due to its financial situation. When taking the results of the commune's weaknesses analysis into account, it should be concluded that these projects were necessary. Despite a considerable investment effort in terms of sewerage and road infrastructure, their development level is still unsatisfactory.

The commune's authorities generally describe the mechanism of gaining the EU funds as complicated. The organizational barriers and the problem of guaranteeing the financial means for the so called own contribution mostly hindered the obtaining of the grant. For communes such as Szamocin, which have already been beneficiaries of the EU grants many times, the importance of the organizational barriers has declined but the importance of guaranteeing the financial own contribution as one of the most important barriers is increasing nowadays. It is an especially vital problem at a time of crisis, when the investment possibilities are declining and communes are already engaged in the implementation of many capital intensive investments that require longer time perspective. Although the commune's authorities have got the vision of the commune's development and are enterprising, they cannot realise further projects due to the lack of own resources, as in the case of the Szamocin Commune, where the implementation of the applications already accepted for funding were abandoned.

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ZNACZENIE AKTYWNOŚCI WŁADZ GMIN DLA ABSORPCJI FUNDUSZY UE ORAZ JEJ WPLYW NA ROZWÓJ LOKALNY. PRZYKŁAD GMINY SZAMOCIN

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie aktywności władz gminy w ubieganiu się o dofinansowanie unijne oraz wpływ pozyskanego wsparcia z UE na rozwój lokalny na przykładzie gminy Szamocin. W pierwszej części scharakteryzowano gminę w celu zidentyfikowania jej mocnych i słabych stron. Następnie ukazano poziom pozyskanych przez gminę unijnych środków i liczbę realizowanych projektów w różnym czasie; w okresie przedakcesyjnym, 2004-2006 oraz 2007-2013. Wyniki gminy Szamocin zestawiono ze średnią obliczoną dla województwa. W końcowej części opracowania przedstawiono opinie pracowników ds. pozyskiwania środków UE dotyczące barier skutecznej absorpcji. Porównano wyniki badań ankietowych wykonanych w dwóch różnych okresach. Na podstawie badań można stwierdzić, że gmina realizowała unijne projekty zgodnie ze swoimi potrzebami, niwelując słabe strony. Gmina Szamocin mogłaby realizować więcej projektów UE, jednak nie posiada wystarczających środków własnych wymaganych w montażu finansowym. Jest to jedna z dwóch, oprócz nieodpowiedniego systemu rozdziału środków, barier ograniczających absorpcję środków unijnych.

Słowa kluczowe: fundusze UE, gmina, rozwój lokalny, województwo wielkopolskie

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