

SUMMARY

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The aim and scope of the research

The main objective of the research was to elaborate improvements aimed at upgrading quality of applications submitted within the Regional Operational Programme for Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship (ROP WK-P) and programming documents prepared by the Managing Authority (MA) of ROP WK-P.

The specific objectives included:

- quality assessment of documents prepared by MA of ROP WK-P, aimed at helping project promoters in correctly filling in project applications,
- quality assessment of projects applications presented for financing under ROP WK-P,
- identification of barriers and difficulties in preparation of project documentation,
- formulation of relevant countermeasures, proposed modifications and supplements in guidelines on preparation of project applications and other programme documents.

The first phase of the research consisted of desk research of documents related to the process of assessment and selection of projects. Then 97 interviews were carried on with the use of CATI technique, with project promoters who applied for financing within the competitions organized under ROP WK-P (divided between those who received financing and those whose applications were rejected), 5 IDI's with staff members of the ROP WK-P Intermediary Body and experts assessing project applications, 2 IDI's with staff members of consulting firms providing services concerning preparation of applications. At the end of the research, 5 participant observations and a FGI, which allowed to formulate final recommendations concerning removal of barriers related to the present programme documentation (*more on the pages 13-15*).

Direct and indirect factors influencing the quality of application submitted

Factors directly impacting on the quality of project applications are those depending on key actors participating in the ROP WK-P implementation: project promoters and MA. Indirect factors are defined as those which do not depend on the key actors, such as the legal environment, socio-economic situation etc.

Directs factors dependent on project promoters include in particular: their human resources and institutional capacities as well as experience in submitting projects, and maturity of the project itself. Factors dependent on MA include i.e.: quality of the documentation concerning the competition for projects, transparency of procedures, advance planning of competitions.

An important problem proved to be linked to the project promoters attitude of non reading of relevant documents and providing consulting firms with wide authorization to act on their behalf.

Additionally, the quality of applications is affected by the frequency of modifications introduced by MA in the documentation of competitions and availability of trainings as well as proper functioning of information centres (*more on the pages 17-18*).

The quality assessment of documents prepared by ROP WK-P MA

Ability of efficient and effective implementation of ROP WK-P

The results of the research indicate that the ability to effectively and efficiently implement ROP WK-P has been achieved. MA ensured that each aspect of the implementation of projects and the Programme as a whole was precisely defined and described in relevant documents.

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The Beneficiary Vademecum is worth of very positive assessment. It includes large quantity of information presented in a rather accessible language, which enables potential beneficiaries to use a single source to gain an insight in the implementation system of ROP WK-P. Still, it is worth to further improve this document by adding practical clues and examples.

The analysis has not identified any inconsistency between the project application form and any of the Measures within ROP WK-P (*more on the pages 19-20*).

Conformity of programme documents with the Polish and Community laws and regulations

The documents prepared by MA are fully compliant with the relevant provisions of the Polish and the Community law. No discrepancy has been traced with the Ministry of Regional Development guidelines, and no need for any supplements has been identified (*more on the pages 20-21*).

Cohesion of the documents, their structure and planning

The research proved that the programme documents are consistent. Repetition of information occurs, and in the opinion of evaluators it results in their better readability and helps in understanding the content (a project promoter does not have to draw on different documents during the reading).

When analysing the structure of the application form, the evaluators noted some inconsistencies. Some sections overlap partially or unnecessarily fragment a given element, and some sections are not straightened up. Therefore modifications of the application format should be considered, so as to group relevant sections and points and to straighten up the sequence of subjects covered (*more on the pages 21-24*).

Usefulness of documents during preparation of project applications

It is worth noting that the documents are being constantly improved by MA, and beneficiaries will most probably notice these modifications with time, when next competitions are announced.

In this case, non-reading of documents by project promoters may become a problem. It turns out that project promoters read carefully only 3 documents: application form, instruction on filling in the application form and instruction on preparation of annexes to the project application. Only 2 out of 3 project promoters get acquainted with eligibility of expenditures rules, and a little over 50% read in detail the Beneficiary Vademecum.

These analyses show that usefulness of a given document during preparation of an application is defined through the necessity of reading it, and not through its utility and added value it represents. Therefore attention should be concentrated on improvement of these documents, which are really read by project promoters (*more on the pages 26-27*).

Assessment of comprehensiveness of the document language

Assessment of the instruction on filling in the application form is positive in all aspects – first of all, it is really helpful in filling in the application. In particular, the setup and structure of the instruction have been very highly assessed, as it explains step by step how to fill in each part of the application, which is an optimal setup in the opinion of the evaluators.

Quantity of information included in the instruction and accessibility of its language have obtained a bit lower score. The weakest aspect of the instruction is its precision – project promoters complained on too large number of cross-references to relevant regulations and not enough examples provided

(although in the last case the evaluators do not share this opinion as the subsequent versions of the instruction have been enriched by a quite high number of different examples). A number of minor shortages, deficiencies and elements needing some modifications have been identified as well.

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As concerns the instruction on preparation of annexes, its assessment is a little lower. A project promoter is obliged to refer to a number of annexes, even in the case of his/her specific project they are not relevant. Therefore it will be useful to include in the instruction, at its beginning, a table helping a project promoter to identify these annexes which are applicable in this case, and in what situations they have to be prepared – it can take a form of a check-list. It will enable the reader to look at these parts of the instruction only which are relevant for him/her (*more on the pages 36-37*).

Usefulness of documents during assessment of project applications

In general, usefulness of documents during the process of project assessment is high, and the persons participating in the assessment process have not expressed any reservations concerning their utility. Excel spreadsheets with set formulas are highly useful, as they help in project assessment and provide a common model of analysis, which highly increases their usefulness during the assessment process. It can be treated as a good practice to be used in other programmes (*more on the page 38*).

Quality assessment of documents prepared by ROP WK-P MA

The analysis of project applications presented for financing under ROP WK-M indicates that applications were rejected mostly during the formal assessment. Rejection of as high number of applications as possible at this phase of the assessment process is a reasonable solution, since the earlier a project is rejected, the less time is needed for its assessment (costly technical assessment is not needed), and moreover rejection of a project on formal grounds (even minor ones) is much easier to justify than its rejection on technical grounds, when strong arguments have to be provided (*more on the pages 40-42*).

Most frequently project applications were rejected due to noncompliance with the criterion A.4 – completeness of the application, A.5 – completeness of annexes and A.6 – formal eligibility of project. The highest number of rejections was caused by among others incorrect indicators, arithmetical errors, incorrect date formats, lack of signatures required, no indication of equipment parameters, errors in annex 3.1 (*more on the pages 42-49*).

Evaluators have paid attention to formulation of official letters and method of processing protests. MA letters were not precise, protests were rejected on the basis of 'non-compliance with the instruction', and justifications of protest rejections were in fact repetitions of justifications included in letters rejecting a given project application (*more on the pages 51-52*).

Barriers and difficulties in successful applying for financing under ROP WK-P

The biggest barriers have been noted in the area of procedures – they were indicated by respondents most frequently and their number was the highest. Barriers concerning lack of knowledge and financial barriers proved to be important as well. Barriers created by project promoters and administrative barriers turned out to be the least important (*more on the pages 55-57*).

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As concerns procedural barriers, project promoters who decide to apply for financing under ROP WK-P encounter the biggest problems during preparation of necessary documents. Project application forms include a high number of pages, and additionally a high number of annexes is required. Whenever possible, instead of certificates, declarations should be required, with certificates presented only at the grant agreement stage. Additionally, the number of annexes should be reduced (*more on the pages 57-61*).

Financial barriers are created mainly due to high costs of preparation of project documentation, which are too high for some project promoters and some of them are not ready to undertake a risk of bearing them (*more on the pages 61-62*).

Among barriers related to knowledge, project promoters indicated non publication of most frequent errors in project applications, low level of knowledge among the staff of information centres and providing incorrect information to project promoters. They also indicated insufficient number of trainings and information meetings. In this last case, the initiative of Open Days initiated in September this year is especially valuable (*more on the pages 63-65*).

Among administrative barriers, project promoters indicated mostly restrictive attitude towards them and lack of possibility to verify modifications introduced before an amended application is formally presented. A long waiting time for a grant (at present about 6 months) is also an important problem for project promoters (*more on the pages 65-68*).

Other barriers – legal ones and those caused by project promoters themselves, were not significant for project promoters or otherwise are external to the ROP WK-P implementation system (e.g. problems related to the public procurement law).

Generally, high ability of MA to learn and to improve their functioning should be underlined. Significant improvements have been noted during analysis of modifications introduced to the documents such as the project application form, instruction etc. In cases when some provisions of documents were not clear for project promoters, in subsequent versions of a given documents they were amended. The Generator of applications is an instrument eliminating many barriers in correct preparation of an application.

It should be stressed that the process of programme management is a new task for the Region and some difficulties resulting from lack of experience in the initial phase of the programme implementation could not be avoided. The others hopefully can be overcome, with the help of a present report.