



Utilization of ESI funds in the Republic of Croatia for the development of high-tech projects

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Abstract

The subject of research work of this manuscript is to show Croatia's ability to withdraw funds from ESI funds, and the aim of the research is to prove profitability and possibility of using funds from ESI funds to finance projects. In order for the economy of a particular country to be successful, projects are needed, especially high-tech projects. Croatia had a total of 10.676 billion euros, in the period from 2014 to 2021, available from the ESI funds, and it managed to withdraw 63.60% or 6.79 billion euros. Croatia uses funds from EU for the development of high-tech projects and other European structural and investment funds to improve the quality of life of its citizens through various projects. The mentioned projects are in the field of environmental protection, raising awareness of equality and human rights, democratization of society and large infrastructure projects. Available literature will be used to create the paper: books, magazines, publications. When creating the paper, the authors will use generally accepted qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis, classification, description and comparison.

Keywords: ESI funds, project, Small Tehnopolis Samobor.

1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) finances a wide range of different projects and programs through its funds. The forms of financing projects and programs are grants, loans and guarantees. The objective of each funded program or project must be in line with the five main strategic objectives of the EU:

- Employment increase;
- Increasing investment in research and innovation;
- Mitigating climate change, reducing Carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and increasing energy efficiency;
- Better education;
- Fight against poverty.

For the budget period 2021-2027, as part of EU Horizon Europe, the EU has prepared the most generous amount so far, 100 billion euros in grants intended for research and innovation. The goal of the program is to strengthen the technological and scientific base of the EU, and to encourage all EU member states to increase investment in innovation capacities and competitiveness. It is evident from the database of financed projects that so far hundreds of thousands of projects across the EU have benefited from financial investment through EU programs and funds. Also from this database, it is possible to see a wide range of projects from different fields of application. "EU funds are one of the main wheels of regional development in a region. The ability of a region to adapt to the demands of competition depends on its development and the prosperity of its inhabitants. Quality ideas translated into quality projects are a prerequisite for the absorption of EU funds for the purpose of sustainable regional development" (Šostar, 2021, 196) If we look at the Republic of Croatia, the largest percentage of financed projects, from EU funds, fall on projects that have an impact on the everyday life of citizens. As a rule, these projects are large infrastructure projects, most represented in the areas of transport and environmental protection, they are projects that support the construction of the institutional and legislative foundations of the Republic

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of Croatia. In addition to the mentioned projects, there are also projects that help build civil society, encourage democratization and raise awareness of human rights, etc.

Today, there are many definitions of the term projects by different authors. One of them is: "Projects are traditionally defined as tasks with specific features that are reflected in the complexity of the content, relative uniqueness, high risk and great strategic significance for the company and other organizations" (Hauc, 2007, 24).

A project can be said to be the planning of a series of interconnected initiatives and activities that must be carried out in a coordinated manner within a given period and with a given budget, in order to achieve the goal. The goal must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound. The project must be completed within the planned deadlines. In order for the project to be completed within the planned deadlines, it is necessary to form an expert team that monitors and supervises the project from beginning to end, and continuously monitors whether certain phases of the project are completed within the planned deadlines. After the completion of the project, it is necessary to carry out an evaluation - checking the achievement of all initially set goals in order to be able to evaluate the success of the project and reach a conclusion on possibly necessary additional activities in order to provide the highest quality final service.

2. EU funds

European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI funds) are one of financial instruments responsible for implementation of European Union certain public policies in all member countries. EU public policies, member states and candidate states are the basis for determining goals, the achievement which will be supported by financing from EU funds (Structural funds, n.d.). Public policies in the EU are adopted for a period of 7 years. European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds), consist of:

- Cohesion Fund;
- European Regional Development Fund;
- European Social Fund;
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development;
- European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund.

Government body responsible for managing ESI funds, also central coordinating body of Croatia, is Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds. Budget envelope of European Union in the financial period 2021-2027. is the largest so far and amounts to 1,824.3 billion euros, and more than 25 billion euros are available for the Republic of Croatia in current prices (Structural funds, n.d. b).

Cohesion funds

The Cohesion Fund (CF) main goal is to finance projects in EU countries where the gross national income (GNI) per inhabitant is less than 90% of the EU average. In the period from 2014 to 2020, member states had at their disposal resources from the cohesion fund in the amount of 63.4 billion euros for projects that are an EU priority, such as trans-European transport networks, infrastructure projects that are under the initiative of the Connecting Europe Program (Connecting Europe Facility), then projects related to the environmental issue (Structural funds, n.d. c).

European Regional Development Fund

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) helps to strengthen the economic and social cohesion of the member states of the European Union. The fund strengthens less developed member states or regions of the Union. Funds are available to member states for investments in the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as for production, innovation and research, regional and local infrastructure. The goals of the program are to strengthen economic and social cohesion, reduce differences between regions within the European Union through support in the development and structural adjustment of regional economies and cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Potential beneficiaries of funds from the state administration body fund are small and medium-sized enterprises and the scientific and research sector. Eligible users of fund are research centers, then regional and local self-administration, corporations, schools, universities, state administration, training centers, small and medium-sized enterprises, non-governmental organizations, associations and volunteers. Acceptable activities within in the project, and those activities are financed through direct grants, are productive investments that contribute to sustainable jobs preservation and creation and investments in medium-sized and small enterprises, Also acceptable are investments in infrastructure that is providing, to citizens, basic services in the fields such as environment, energy, transport, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). In addition, the activities that will be carried out are investments in social, health and educational infrastructure and development of internal potential that supports local and regional development and innovation research (Leskovec and authors, 2019).

European Social Fund

One of the most important and one of the most represented sources of financing for civil society organizations is European Social Fund (ESF). It is one of structural and investment funds. ESF is the European Union's main financial instrument for investing in people, and it is also contributing to economic, social and territorial cohesion. ESF promotes better education, improves situation of most vulnerable people such as those on the verge of poverty, and increases employment opportunities (European Commission, n.d. a). Main thematic goals of ESF are:

- promotion of social inclusion;
- investments in education;
- fight against poverty;
- promotion of employment;
- skills and lifelong learning;
- support of labor mobility.

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) wants to simplify and strengthen the implementation of European rural development policy. Program users, i.e. its funds, are agricultural business entities, agricultural organizations, then unions and associations, environmental protection associations, organizations that provide community culture services which include media, women's associations, farmers, foresters and young people (Ministry of Agriculture of Republic of Croatia, 2020). The encouraging activities are knowledge transfer and innovations in agriculture, rural areas and forestry, increase the sustainable economy, strengthen the competitiveness of agriculture, and promote organization of food chain and agriculture risk management. Also promoted is resources efficiency, low levels carbon dioxide and climate-adaptable agriculture and forestry. Poverty reduction, economic development and social inclusion of rural areas will also be promoted. EAFRD support can be provided through grants and financial instruments. Grants are also available through tenders announced on the basis of the rural development program (Leskovec and authors, 2019).

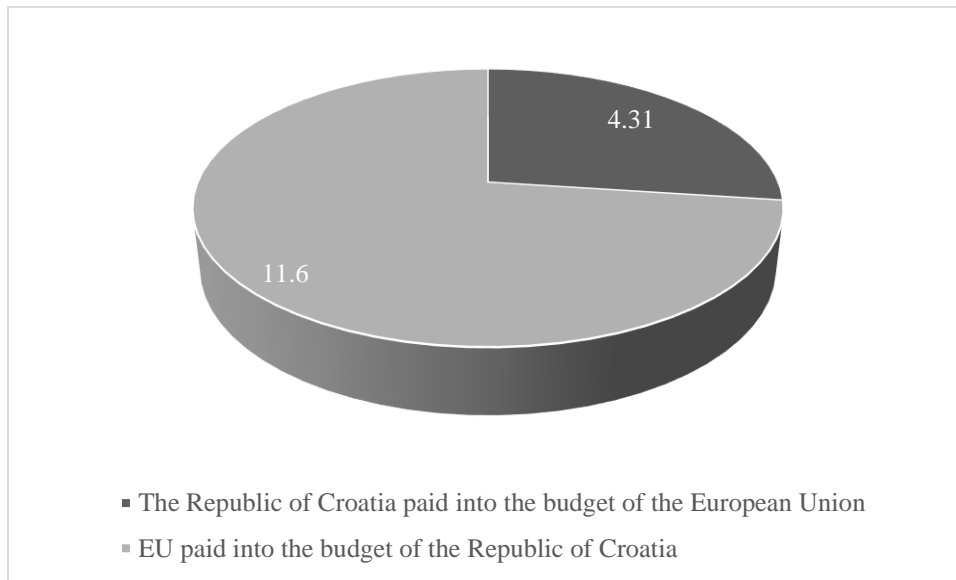
European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund

European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) is a fund for maritime and fisheries policy of EU in the period 2021 - 2027. The money from the Fund help fishermen in their transition to sustainable fishing, then support coastal communities in the diversification of their economies. Projects are financed to create new jobs and improve the quality of life along European coast population, sustainable development in the aquaculture sector and the implementation of maritime policy are also supported. The new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund supports small-scale fishing, young fishermen and the most remote regions, as well as the promotion of sustainable aquaculture. The goal is to make it easier for applicants to access funds and improve results. A total of 6.1 billion euros is allocated to sustainable fisheries and the preservation of fishing communities in the period from 2021 to 2027. 5.3 billion euros have been provided for the management of fishing fleets as well as aquaculture fleets, while the rest of the funds will be used to finance health consulting, control and verification, market data, and maritime surveillance and security. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many fishing communities, and the Fund will provide compensation to fishermen whose activities have permanently or temporarily ceased. In particular, funds are allocated to young fishermen (under 40 years old), who register a vessel in the EU fishing fleet for the first time. Member States with the outermost regions are preparing an action plan to ensure support for vulnerable fishing communities. In accordance with the Green Plan, 30% of the funds should be earmarked for climate measures. The proposal also takes into account the EU's international obligations regarding safe and clean managed oceans. The fund will contribute to the cleanliness and health of the seas and oceans by providing support for the collection of lost fishing gear and marine waste. Plastic waste is increasingly polluting the oceans, so that according to one estimate, by 2050 there could be more plastic than fish in the oceans by mass. Plastics is one of the seven areas that the European Commission considers crucial in order to achieve a circular economy in the European Union by 2050. The aim of the European strategy for plastics in the circular economy is to gradually abolish the use of micro plastics (Operational Programme for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the Republic of Croatia, n.d.).

3. Utilization of EU funds

"By joining the European Union, Croatia has been enabled to use the European investment funds analyzed so far in this paper, which also have complementary goals to help member states, in order to increase their growth and development, as well as securing jobs, ensuring sustainable development that is in accordance with the cohesion policy" (Knežević, 2016, 12). According to data from the Ministry of Finance, from 2013 until May 2022, Croatia paid 4.31 billion euros into the budget of the European Union, while 11.6 billion euros was paid into the budget of Croatia from the EU budget, including funds from of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). The difference between funds paid from the European Union budget to the budget of Croatia and funds paid from the budget of Croatia to the budget of the European Union amounted to 7.32 billion euros with NRRP or 6.51 billion euros without NRRP in favor of the budget of Croatia (Structural funds, n.d. d).

Chart 1. Ratio of paid-in and withdrawn funds in the period 2013-2022 in euros.

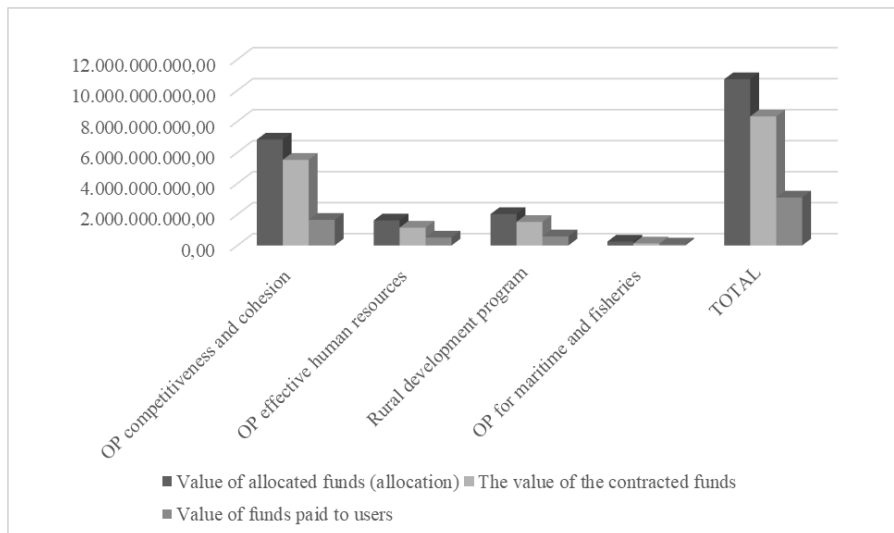


Source: Author's analysis according to European Structural and Investment Funds (2023).

Analysis of the utilization of EU funds

According to the data of the Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds (MRRFEU) of the coordinating body, as of October 31, 2019, a total of 78% of the allocation under the Program was contracted with applicants from Croatia, but only 37% of the funds were paid out in the end. Within the Operational Program (OP) of Competitiveness and Cohesion, 81% of the allocated funds were contracted (total allocation), and only 30% were paid, while within the Operational Program (OP) of Effective Human Resources, 71% of the funds were contracted, and 45% were paid. Within the Rural Development Program, 75% of the allocated funds were contracted and 57% were paid, while within the Operational Program (OP) for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, 52% of the funds were contracted and 50% were paid. The following figure shows a graphic representation of the total allocation, contracted and paid funds for the Operational Programs of the Republic of Croatia (Grba, 2022).

Chart 2. Payment of funds within the Operational Programs for the Republic of Croatia 2014 - 2020 in Euros.



Source: Author's work in accordance with the Structural funds (n.d. e).

Comparison of financial resources availability for the periods 2014-2020. and 2021-2027.

It is already known that in financial period for 2021-2027 approximately 9.888 billion euros will Croatia have available from European Union for cohesion policy, which is actually 1.851 billion euros more than was available in the current period (European commission, n.d. b). Croatia's total budget for financial period 2014-2020 was 12.653 euros, which included:

- Cohesion Fund (CF)
- European Social Fund (ESF)
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD)
- European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)
- Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)

As of December 2017, Croatia had contracted 40% of anticipated amount (selection decisions), while 9% was paid to end users (European Commission, n.d. c).

4. Utilization of EU funds for development on the example –city of Samobor

For the purposes of this manuscript, an interview was conducted with prof. Marinko Džepina, head of the administrative department for economy, development and EU projects, and Martina Delišimunović, senior expert for economy and development projects and the manager of the Small Tehnopolis Samobor (MTS) project. Although the focus of interview was on Small Technopolis Samobor, the topics of other projects in the area of the city of Samobor that were realized from EU funds were also highlighted.

Projects in which the City of Samobor is the holder:

1. Renovation of non-hazardous waste landfill Trebež; - realized

Professor Džepina points out that the "Trebež" Non-Hazardous Waste Remediation Project is extremely important for the city of Samobor, because its implementation has improved the state of the environment, the state of underground and surface waters, and thus has a great impact on the health of the population. The rehabilitation project of the "Trebež" non-hazardous waste disposal site was carried out as part of the project Operational Program "Environmental Protection" 2007-2013, Priority axis 1 - Development of infrastructure for waste management in order to establish a complete system of waste management, Measure 1.2 - Rehabilitation of locations with high polluted by waste. The project contributed to the fulfillment of the goals of the operational program because the rehabilitation of the unorganized landfill improved the condition of underground and surface water, human health and the environment as a whole. The project lasted 24 months, completed in July 2016 by obtaining a use permit for the landfill. The value of the project was 13.1 million euros funds of the Ministry of Environmental Protection obtained from the Cohesion Fund covered - 85% of the costs, and the Fund for Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency - 15% (City of Samobor, n.d. a). The project included the activities of works, expert supervision, project management and administration, as well as promotion and visibility activities.

2. WiFi4EU project - realized

The City of Samobor obtained co-financing in the amount of 15.0 thousand euros for the construction of "hot spots" - procurement and installation of WiFi wireless infrastructure in the area of the city of Samobor, the contract was concluded on 23. December 2019. with Hrvatski Telekom for the execution of works (City of Samobor, n.d. b). Professor Džepina states that the project activity was the procurement of works and equipment. The works were completed, "hot spots" were installed and the entire system was put into operation in March 2021.

3. Project Rudnik St. Barbara - phase III – interpretation polygons; - realized

Professor Džepina points out that the project relates to the construction of an outdoor interpretation polygon - a simulation of a 30-meter long mining trench and multimedia equipment of the existing underground interpretation polygon with a hologram representation of the mythical mining dwarf Bergman the trademark of Rudnik Sveta Barbara and that it is of great importance for the culture and tourism of the city of Samobor. Total value of the project is approximately 128.7 thousand euros, co-financing by the Ministry of Tourism in the amount of 41.1 thousand euros was achieved. The contract was signed on October 11, 2019, 20.5 thousand euros was paid (the remaining 50% was paid upon completion of the project). The activities of procurement of services and works in the project have been launched. A hologram was created, all works on the construction of the interpretation polygon were completed, and on November 3rd, 2020, a use permit was obtained, thereby completing the project (City of Samobor, n.d. c).

4. Samobor bicycle path project – realized

The project of building a bicycle path (bicycle route and bridge) to Sveta Nedelja in the value of 360.7 thousand euros was financed from the EU fund in the amount of 85%. The grant agreement was signed on September 29th, 2020. The implementation of the project began on October 1st, 2021, and the expected duration was until January 1st, 2022. year, and included the activities of building and equipping the bicycle path, publicity and visibility, and project management.

The project planned the construction of a bicycle-pedestrian path at the location from Katančičeva street in Samobor to the administrative border towards Sveta Nedelja, on a section of the existing Polish road, which is still used by cyclists, and in order to avoid the dangerous Svetonedeljska street for cyclists. The goal of the Project was the construction of cycling infrastructure, intended for public use. The end users of the Project are the residents of the cities of Samobor and Sveta Nedelja, who will use the infrastructure in question for the needs of daily migrations, and cycle tourists, who visit the area of the cities of Samobor and Sveta Nedelja (City of Samobor, n.d. d). The works include the construction and equipping of a new section of bicycle infrastructure and the construction of the accompanying infrastructure - a bridge for the purpose of improving safety and increasing the use of bicycle roads.

5. The Project of Equipping the Kindergarten "Grigor Vitez" Galgovo - realized

Professor Đepina points out that the project was submitted to the competition for support for the development of general social infrastructure and the improvement of living conditions in the rural areas of LRS. The project was submitted for tender on November 27, 2018. and included the activities of purchasing equipment and furniture for the kindergarten. The goal of the project was to restore and decorate the children's playground in the kindergarten branch and furnish the interior of the building with new furniture and equipment necessary for the high-quality work of the kindergarten. The total value of the project was 36.8 thousand euros, and the City of Samobor provided co-financing in the amount of 27.8 thousand euros, which was the maximum possible amount of support.

6. The "Wind in your back" - realized

The project was carried out within the framework of the competition "Provision of teaching assistants and professional communication mediators for students with developmental disabilities in primary and secondary educational institutions", that is, it refers to the first year of project implementation. The City of Samobor participated in the project with partners Bogumil Tonija Elementary School, Samobor Elementary School, Milan Lang Elementary School, and Mihael Šilobod Elementary School, and the total amount of the project for the first year of implementation was 155.7 thousand euros. After the aforementioned project, the Wind in Your Back – Phase II project was reported as a continuation of the first year of implementation with the same partners as the previous year and was implemented in the 2016/2017 school year and it was successfully implemented (City of Samobor, n.d. e). At the moment, the Wind in the Back – Phase III project is ongoing as a continuation of Phase II, that is, it is the third year of project implementation. The value of the project for phase III is 745.6 thousand euros and it is a Grant Agreement covering the period until 2021 (signed for 4 years). - in implementation.

7. "Croatian Foundation for Children" - realized

Prof. Đepina points out that they are proud that the City of Samobor successfully participated in the project of providing school meals in elementary schools "Croatian Foundation for Children"; the value of the project is 15.8 thousand euros.

8. "Together we can move forward"- realized

The City also completed the implementation of the Project "Together we can move forward" through Support for Social Inclusion and Employment of Marginalized Groups in cooperation with partners (Centre for Social Welfare Samobor, Public Open University Samobor and Association for Sustainable Development of Positive Samobor). The project was approved in the maximum amount of 157.98 thousand euros and lasted for two years, and was financed from the European Social Fund (City of Samobor, n.d. f).

9. "School Scheme" - realized

The City of Samobor is also the holder of the "School Scheme" project, which it reported to the Agency for Payments in Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development. The project was approved in the total amount of 73.97 thousand euros, for fruits and vegetables and for milk and dairy products in school year 2018/2019, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 (City of Samobor, n.d. g).

10. Small Technopolis Samobor - realized

Martina Delišimunović highlights the Small Tehnopolis Samobor project, which was implemented from November 1, 2017 to August 25, 2020. The Small Tehnopolis Samobor project was implemented from November 1, 2017, to August 25, 2020. The project was financed from the Operational Program Competitiveness and Cohesion. The total value of the project is 2.87 million euros, of which the City of Samobor received 90% co-financing from the EU fund, or 2.58 million euros. The project included the reconstruction, extension and furnishing of two buildings on the former barracks in Samobor, as well as their conversion into a business incubator and a center for additive technologies. The project activities were the reconstruction and extension of two buildings, expert and design supervision, procurement of equipment and furniture, and promotion and visibility. Upon completion of the project, two fully equipped buildings were obtained, consisting of 19 business premises that are leased to economic entities, a multimedia hall, an IT and ordinary classroom, spaces for co-working, spaces for specialist equipment (3D printers and scanners) and administrative spaces. for employees (arrange those meeting rooms). Of the acquired equipment, two of the most advanced 3D printers with a corresponding 3D scanner should be highlighted. The entrepreneurial center/incubator has been in operation since spring 2020 (City of Samobor, n.d. h).

Utilization of EU funds for the development of high-tech projects on the example of MTS

Small Tehnopolis Samobor is an entrepreneurial incubator for beginning entrepreneurs. It provides a space rental service, allows users to use common halls, various educations and, most importantly, the possibility of using 3D printers and 3D scanners of the latest generation of industrial use. When we talk about technology, it is interesting that this term was first mentioned way back in 1777 in the book *Introduction to Technology* by the German philosopher Johann Beckmann, in which he "considers the intertwining of technology, economy and society and systematically presents an overview of various technological knowledge" (Goluža, 2017, 5). Nowadays, when we talk about technology, it is considered to be related to scientific knowledge and engineering, however, the most accurate definition of the term would be that technology is any concept that can facilitate life in society i.e. that enables the satisfaction of individual or collective demands or needs, adapted to the needs of a certain times.

From the conducted research, it is possible to determine the following facts: SmallTehnopolis Samobor will have several functions, and the most important function is the business incubator for beginning entrepreneurs, and their education. The project included the reconstruction, extension and furnishing of two buildings on the former barracks in Samobor, as well as their conversion into a business incubator and a center for additive technologies. The Small Tehnopolis Samobor project was financed from the Operational Program Competitiveness and Cohesion. The total value of the project is 2.87 million euros, of which the City of Samobor received 90% co-financing from the EU fund, or 2.58 million euros. Currently, 18 users operate in the incubator, of which three are entrepreneurs in the growth and development phase and 15 are beginner entrepreneurs. In May 2022 and after the fifth Public Call for the lease of business premises, the MTS incubator is fully occupied. The rental price per m² of space is 8,76 euros without value added tax (VAT). The rental price includes the cost of utilities (water, electricity, gas and communal fees), in accordance with point VI. Regulations on the use of the services of Small Tehnopolis Samobor. The City of Samobor co-finances the commercial prices of basic incubation services for entrepreneurs who have their registered office in Samobor, 70% in the first year, 50% in the second year, and 30% in the third year (Small tehnopolis Samobor, n.d. a). Supporting incubation (including pre-incubation and post-incubation, real and virtual) services provided by MTS are:

- Infrastructural support (subsidized lease of office space, sophisticated 3D equipment, common space, conference hall, meeting room);
- Technical support (Internet access, virtual address, photocopying services);
- Advisory support (consulting, information, education, competitions, networking, mentoring).

Users of the incubator, as well as external users, have the possibility of using additive technologies in their business, given that MTS is equipped with the latest generation of 3D printers and 3D scanners. Users fully use the contents of the incubator and support services. The average occupancy of the seminars is 18 participants, and the overall rating of the held seminars is 4.8. Users who use innovative solutions for the development of their products use 3D printing and scanning services. For example, it is about smart houses, drones, the automotive industry. The 3D printer and scanner is used for developing prototypes, making specific parts or when making tools or parts for machines. Activities that are represented are: computer programming, digital production, development of video games, production of parts for the automotive industry (modular solar vehicle), fiscalization of self-service devices, digital printing on textiles, assembly of unmanned aerial vehicles, development of smart houses and development of fitness equipment, nutrition, architectural and design services and consulting services. MTS users employ over 35 people (Small tehnopolis Samobor, n.d. b).

Table 1. List of users of Small Tehnopolis Samobor

Company	Activity	Employees
AUTOMATION DESIGN SOLUTION d.o.o.	Design and automation systems	1
BLACK SUN d.o.o.	Solar vehicle/ modules for the auto industry	3
DRAGANA MOSTAREC BARNES	Business advisory	2
ELPROMS TEAM j.d.o.o.	Home automation / smart city	2
FAIR SERVICES d.o.o.	Organization of fairs	2
FITNESS CONSULTING	Development of device prototypes	0
FRESH UP BE j.d.o.o.	Business advisory	0
HAKUNA MATATA j.d.o.o.	Digital printing / souvenirs	2
PAULA FRANCEKOVIĆ	Diagnostics development and nutritional therapy	0
PINE STUDIO d.o.o.	Computer programming - games	13
PROBOT d.o.o.	Computer programming	1
SPARKY SOLUTIONS d.o.o.	Computer programming	1
STUDIO GOODIE d.o.o.	Architectural activities	0
TECHNOLOGIC INDUSTRY D.O.O.	Development of unmanned aerial vehicles	2
UNILINK MEDIJA d.o.o.	Computer programming	1
VENDING CONNECTION SYSTEMS d.o.o.	Computer programming of fiscalization systems	3
VOID STAR TECH	Computer programming	1
ZiD obrt	Programming	1

Source: Author's work in accordance with the Small tehnopolis Samobor (n.d. c).

The City of Samobor applies for and implements projects financed from European Union funds, which are of general interest and on real estate owned by the City of Samobor. The City of Samobor cannot apply for or implement projects for/on behalf of private individuals and/or business entities (project consulting is not an activity of the City of Samobor permitted by law). Samobor entrepreneurs have direct and indirect benefits from the projects implemented by the City of Samobor; for example, the Small Tehnopolis Samobor Entrepreneurship Center was built exclusively for the needs of Samobor entrepreneurship (rental of business premises, use of additive technologies, administrative and technical assistance in business, seminars, trainings, etc.) - the interest in the center is huge, which is confirmed by the full occupancy of the center within two years of opening. All other projects have an indirect impact on Samobor entrepreneurs because all citizens as well as entrepreneurs use their benefits. The City of Samobor has been supporting entrepreneurship for the past few years, with budget funds and other means, aware that it generates significant financial income from the economy, and it continuously does so through its Administrative Department for the Economy, Development and EU Funds and the Samobor Entrepreneurship Center.

Support to the economy is provided through the following programs:

- Support to the Entrepreneurial Center Samobor;
- Support for incubated entrepreneurs in MTS;
- Model of support for capital investments;
- Employment subsidies in the private sector;
- Subsidy to the Association of Craftsmen Samobor for performances at fairs and professional gatherings in the country and abroad;
- Support program for innovators;
- Support program for artistic and traditional crafts;
- Entrepreneurial zone Samobor;
- "Guarantee fund" project for entrepreneurs in cooperation with Zagreb County and the Development Agency of Zagreb County.

Although the City of Samobor does not specifically keep records on the activities of trades and companies in the City area, we can conclude from the list of MTS users that although the City has developed tourism and is full of service activities, as far as subsidies are concerned, production activities still have priority. The period of implementation of the MTS project was from November 1, 2017 to August 25, 2020, after which the MTS was put into operation. The space is divided according to the needs and interests of the users. The usable area of the infrastructure is 1,431.05 m². The total capacity is 28 units, of which 23 are for entrepreneurs. Incubation units for permanent users with an average area of 28.10 m² for beginning entrepreneurs, and an average area of 91.30 m for entrepreneurs in the growth and development phase. The Rulebook on the use of MTS services defines the rental conditions. In the area of MTS, various educational activities are organized with the aim of developing entrepreneurial skills, knowledge and competences, both for users of MTS and for other entrepreneurs (Small tehnopolis Samobor, n.d. d).

5. Conclusion

In 2003, Croatia submitted an application for full membership to the European Union and thus achieved the possibility of using funds from various programs intended for candidate countries such as OBNOVA (in the period from 1996 to 2000, the EU aid for the return of refugees and the realization of the conditions for their normal life was redirected through OBNOVA program), Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization (CARDS), Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies (PHARE), Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (ISPA), Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD). By becoming a full member of the EU, it enters the single market where the free movement of people, goods, services and capital is enabled, and the provision of services is easier, more efficient and cheaper. Funds from the European Structural and Investment Funds are even more available, which the Republic of Croatia uses for projects that have an impact on the everyday life of citizens. As already mentioned in the paper, these are projects that help build civil society, encourage democratization, and educate the world about human rights, projects that deal with environmental protection and large infrastructure projects. It is interesting to see that in all counties, there are projects that have been implemented or are being implemented, and there is great interest in new projects. In the financial perspective 2014-2021. Croatia had a total of 10.676 billion euros at its disposal and managed to withdraw 6.79 billion euros or 63.24%. In 2021, we entered a new financial perspective based on the development of a green and digital Europe, and we have around 24.5 billion euros at our disposal. It is necessary to encourage people and point out that every project can be realized if we dedicate ourselves to it completely. Unfortunately, the City of Samobor has only now focused on funds from EU funds and in 2022 emphasized the withdrawal of as many funds as possible. So far, the city has implemented a dozen projects, the largest of which was "Rehabilitation of the non-hazardous waste landfill Trebež", and the most significant project was Mali Tehnopolis Samobor. The project of the City of Samobor - MTS represents an entrepreneurial incubator and a center for additive technologies. With their equipment of the latest generation, 3D scanner and 3D printer, they attract quality and innovative entrepreneurs. By investing in this project, the City has proven to be a

good partner to the private sector, and with additional benefits and subsidies, it creates a favorable climate for the further growth of businesses in its area.

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SESSION
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