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**STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT:
THE ROLE OF TRAININGS IN BUILDING THE
ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES OF THE
MUNICIPALITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH
MACEDONIA¹**

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is analysis of the strategic development of the Association of Local Self-Government for a 2011-2016 time period by pointing out the system of trainings of the employees in municipal administrations under the official responsibility of the Association. In the paper are applied different methodology approaches of research depending on the subject of research i.e. historical method, content analysis and comparative analysis. The research results point out to a fully accepted and satisfying level of planned and implemented scope of planned and

¹ professional paper

implemented training activities in different thematic units and areas of the administrative life for a 2011-2016 timeframe. In any case, there is a different variability of the planned and implemented trainings during different years from the abovementioned time period. The conclusions of the research offer a number of answers but, also, propose a number of certain answers as recommendations for a new research considering the future development of the trainings as part of the general strategic development of the Association of Local Self-Government.

Key words: Association of Local Self-Government, municipality, administration, trainings, capacities

INTRODUCTION

Founded as a non-profit organization as well as Association in which all 80 Macedonian municipalities and the City of Skopje as a separate unit of the local self-government are volunteers or members on voluntary basis, the Association of Local Self-Government (in the following text ZELS- *Zaednica na edinicite na lokalnata samouprava*) serves as an “epicenter” of the overall mutual coordination between the Macedonian municipalities in order to strengthen the local values, the further development of the local communities and the permanent mention of developing or the building of the democratic capacities of the municipalities during the process of decision-making on local level and of local meaning. The “birth” of ZELS on 26th of April, 1972 is a date that at the same time is officially announced as a day that is widely celebrated by all local-self governments in the Republic of North Macedonia as their own national holiday or the national municipal day.²

During the years, ZELS strongly confirmed its own existence by growing up in one dynamic and flexible organization that fully supports the decentralization processes and who signed the Memorandum for cooperation with the central government realizing the process of future mutual cooperation of the process of decentralization and for further protection and promotion of the local vs national interests.

²ZELS. *Zaednica na edinicite na lokalnata samouprava*, 2009, available on <http://www.zels.org.mk/Default.aspx?id=ef0a2aa1-28c2-4114-bd7a-9e1d023faa03>

The strategic development of ZELS during the years is an extremely important approach for detail analysis of the development approaches of ZELS. Until today, the strategic development of ZELS goes through the development of a 5 year annual strategic plans. As a result, from 2001 until 2020 there are prepared four five-year plans (Strategic Plan 2001-2006; 2006-2011; 2011-2015 and Strategic plan for 2016-2020). As an exception, in 2014 was adopted another so-called intervention plan for the 2014-2015 period of time. Additionally, the strategist plans of ZELS are further strengthened with an annual Action Plans with the purpose of successful implementation of the Strategic Plans or the overall strategic development of ZELS.

The goal in this paper is an analysis of the strategic development of ZELS for the 2011-2020 period of time by putting an accent on trainings for the overall improvement of the administrative capacities of the municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF ZELS (2011-2020): STRENGTHENING OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES

During the period of the strategic development of ZELS are being kept the basic values and principles of ZELS that are condition sine qua non for every undertaken activity for the future development of ZELS. The basic democratic values that are mutually dependent and on which ZELS bases its strategic development for the period 2011-2020 are: loyalty to municipalities, professionalism, service availability, efficiency, nonpoliteness, independence, international standards and innovation.³

The Strategic development of ZELS for the period 2011-2015 was going through a total of 8 strategic goals through appropriately defined strategic directions. Those were the following strategic goals presented below in Table 1:

³ZELS. *Strategic Plan of ZELS 2011-2015*. Zaednica na edinicite na lokalnata samouprava na Republika Severna Makedonija, pp. 8-23, 2011.

Table 1. ZELS Strategic Plan (2011-2015): Strategic Components and Objectives of Each Component

Strategic component / Description of strategic objectives
Strategic Objective 1: Lobbying and capacity building for lobbying
Strategic goal 2: Current problem solving
Strategic goal 3: Financial stability of the municipalities
Strategic goal 4: Establish a training system for LSGU representatives
Strategic goal 5: Support for the use of pre-accession EU funds
Strategic goal 6: Commitment of commissions
Strategic objective 7: Ensuring financial sustainability of ZELS
Strategic goal 8: Strengthened capacities of the professional service of ZELS

Source: ZELS, available on www.zels.org.mk.

From the abovementioned goals it can be point out that building capacities and further strengthening the capacity skills of the employees for the period 2011-2015 was defined within several strategic objectives i.e. Strategic objectives 1, 4, 5 and 8. In the strategic direction of each of these goals, directly or indirectly the accent is put on strengthening the administrative and professional capacities of ZELS and the municipal administrations during the process of lobbying, trainings, support for applying and receiving pre-accession EU funds as well as strengthening the capacities of the professional service of ZELS. In order to achieve the first strategic goal there were assumed two strategic activities from the area of staffing and further strengthening. First, direct involvement of certain representatives of the municipal administration where by advocating the interests of ZELS, they would directly participate in the processes of lobbying. Second, conducting mandatory training for these administrators by ZELS. Furthermore, in order to achieve the fourth strategic goal, a total of 11 strategic activities were envisaged of which more significant are the following: plan and analysis, analysis of the needs for trainings of the municipal administrations, adopting a plan for trainings and their presentation in front of municipal administrations, implementation of the trainings according well defined timeframe, creating a database of qualified trainers, further strengthening of the ZELS TRAINING- CENTER (ZTC) for professional knowledges and trainings, defining the system for knowledge certification and exchange or mutual sharing experiences with other countries. Within the framework of the fifth strategic objective, the trainings were directed to providing immediate assistance of municipal employees in the preparation of applications for EU funds and the establishment of a professional network of experts from municipal administrations. Finally, within the eighth strategic goal, building professional capacities is

particularly addressed through the definition or establishment of a continuous training system for the professional services of ZELS, as well as its completion.

Also, for the period 2014-2015, certain amendments were adopted, whereupon an Interim Strategic Plan for the period 2014-2015 was adopted. In this plan a new strategic direction has been introduced within the strategic goal "Provision and maintenance of a system of services for the municipalities", through which additional funds have been invested in strengthening the administrative capacities of the municipalities by creating and maintaining a system of services for the municipalities⁴

**STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF ZELS (2016-2020):
STRENGTHENING THE ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITIES**

The strategic development of ZELS for the period 2016-2020 is a logical extension of the strategic plan 2011-2015. The Table 2 below outlines the strategic objectives and strategic directions within each of the objectives. As can be noted, within the framework of the second strategic goal, a total of 5 strategic activities are listed of which the first one or the strengthening of the capacities of the municipalities encompasses a series of measures and activities aimed at further improving the administrative functionality in the municipalities. But unlike the strategic activities for the previous period 2011-2015 the strategic activities of ZELS for the period 2016-2020 do not put much emphasis on training but on improving the legal regulations, financial questions, reducing disparity between municipalities, the development and application of information technology and communications, local economic development and project activity in the area of application and support for obtaining and using EU funds.⁵

Table 2. ZELS Strategic Plan (2016-2020): Strategic Components, Goals and Guidelines for Each Component

Strategic component / Description of strategic objectives	Strategic direction
Strategic goal 1: Advocacy and lobbying	Strategic goal 1: /

⁴ZELS. *Strategic Plan 2011-2015*- Revised Document. Zaednica na edinicite na lokalnata samouprava, pp. 3-5, 2013.

⁵ZELS. *Strategic Plan 2016-2020*. Zaednica na edinicite na lokalnata samouprava, pp. 8-23, 2013.

Strategic objective 2: Provision and maintenance of a service system for municipalities Strategic goal 3: Ensuring sustainability and professionalism of the executive office of ZELS	Strategic goal 2: 2.1 Strengthening the capacities of the municipalities; 2.2 Support for the use of EU funds; 2.3 Creating and maintaining e-services for municipalities; 2.4. Services for encouraging local economic development; 2.5 Informing members.
	Strategic goal 3: /

Source: ZELS, available on www.zels.org.mk.

THE ZELS TRAINING SYSTEM (2011-2016)

The ZELS training system each year consists of two components and this are Plan and Report of the implemented activities according the plan on annual level. Unfortunately, we did not manage to get data on the planned and realized activities for 2017 in this research while the reporting year 2018 is not yet complete. ZELS for the period 2011-2016 has invested enormous financial resources, time and energy in organization of trainings in order to strengthen the administrative capacities of the municipalities. The trainings are realized in special areas by different thematic units by qualified trainers. Participants in the trainings are representatives of the municipal administrations throughout the Republic of North Macedonia.⁶

Analyzes of official data show variability in the number of participants over the years. As shown below in Table 3, in the period 2011-2016, a total of nearly 9500 participated (more precisely 9454) employees in municipal administrations throughout the Republic of North Macedonia or calculated by years, 1575.66 employees averaged over a year.

Table 3. Total number of participants of conducted trainings, exams, workshops, consultations, conferences and study visits for strengthening the administrative capacities of the municipalities (2011-2016)

⁶ ZELS. *Training Report*. 2011-2016, available on <http://www.zels.org.mk/Default.aspx?id=3f06e574-0e2b-48e5-8674-e276d299ccd9>

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2011-2016
Number of Participants	1560	1393	2374	1606	1202	1319	
Total							9454
Annual Average							1575.66

Source: ZELS, available on www.zels.org.mk.

From the Chart 1 shown below, the trend or the dynamics of participation in the trainings can be determined. The mass of the trainings shows that in the period 2012-2013 there is an upward trend in the attendance of the trainings while in the period 2013-2014 there is a drastically declining trend. The dynamics of the mass of the trainings is highly variable and probably depends on a number of factors, the most important of which are the financial power of ZELS for the relevant year, the need for additional trainings etc.

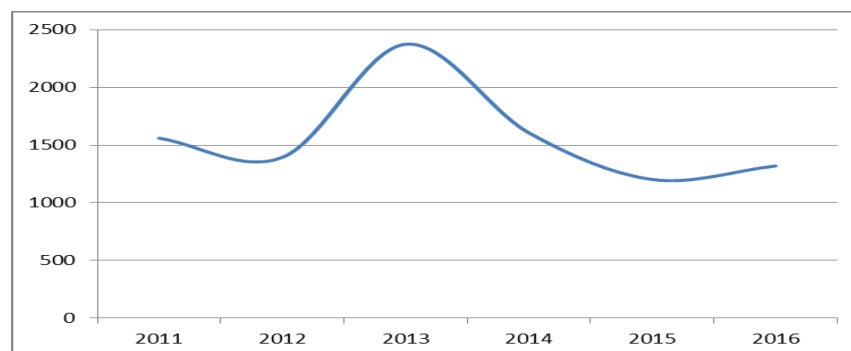


Chart 1. Dynamics of attendance of the total activities for building administrative capacities in the municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Source: Author's calculations

Table 4 below shows all or the total of 24 thematic areas in which municipal administrators were trained in the period 2011-2016. Also, the number of participants in the thematic areas is quite variable. In other words, drastically the most participants in the trainings were in the areas of "Urbanism", "Environment", "Public cleanliness", "Human Resources" and "LED". On the other hand, the least participants were in the so-called "Certification training", "project trainings", "Fire protection" and "Traffic".

Table 4. Thematic areas of training and number of participants by areas (2011-2016): Calculation of the absolute and relative participation by topic areas

R. Number	Thematic area	Number of Participants	% of participants by areas
1.	Urbanism	2763	40.50
2.	Law	267	3.91
3.	Finances	272	3.98
4.	Human resources	390	5.71
5.	Public relations	128	1.87
6.	Education	320	4.69
7.	LED	373	5.46
8.	Environment	511	7.49
9.	Public cleanliness	395	5.79
10.	Traffic	31	0.45
11.	Fire protection	39	0.57
12.	TPPE	22	0.32
13.	EU Funds	353	5.17
14.	EE	114	1.67
15.	Certificated forum moderators	12	0.17
16.	Project trainings-POB	56	0.82
17.	Certified trainings-BFC JIE	18	0.26
18.	BFC CEE Certification	15	0.21
19.	Certified trainings - Law on Construction Land	272	3.98
20.	Certified training - Community Forums	37	0.54
21.	Project trainings - Local Leaders in SEE	66	0.96
22.	Project training - Collection of solid waste data in the SEE countries	25	0.36
23.	Project trainings - Gender responsive budgeting	102	1.49

24.	ICT	241	3.53
	Total	6822	100%

Source: ZELS, available on www.zels.org.mk.

In Chart 2 below, it can be noted that there is a huge disparity between the number of participants in "Urbanism" and the remaining 23 thematic areas. However, besides the huge mass of municipal administrators as participants of "Urbanism", between the mass in the other 23 thematic areas there is a less disparity. This is probably due to the fact that the thematic area "Urbanism" may have been the most painful issue in the municipalities, and therefore there was a much greater need for additional trainings to increase the knowledge of municipal administrators in order to effectively and effectively address the problems of urban planning in the municipality.

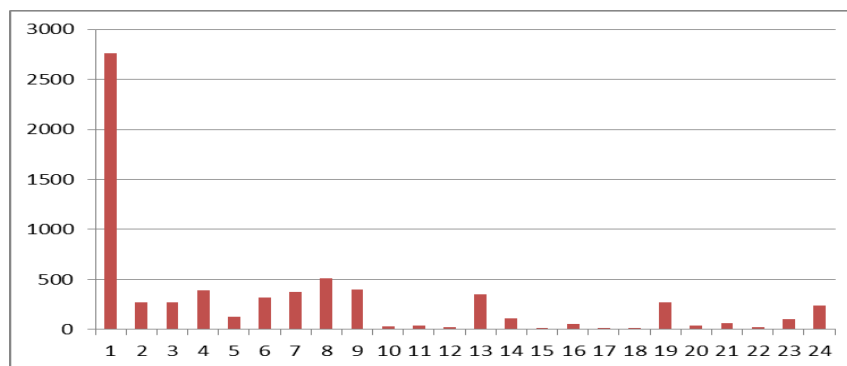


Chart 2. Overview of the relative participation of the thematic areas according to the number of participants in the activities for strengthening the administrative capacities of the municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Source: Author's calculations

CONCLUSION

From the analyzis carried out in this paper, more conclusions and recommendations can be drawn for future more or less similar research. In general, in order to obtain information which employee should be subject to training, it is necessary to start from the expectations and goals of the

training.⁷ In any case, as there are numerous examples from developed countries, trainings should not only be directed at the municipal administration, but also to the elected municipal representatives who daily make decisions about the lives of the local population.⁸

The trainings aim not only to strengthen the administrative capacities of the municipalities by improving the knowledge of the employees, but also raising their awareness of the dangers of unethical or corrupt behavior at the local level.⁹

For the period 2011-2016, the activities of ZELS are for real greetings. The number of nearly 9500 municipal administrators involved in the trainings and the large number of thematic areas (a total of 24) is a good indicator of the successful operation of ZELS for this period. In any case, it is necessary to undertake additional research on the effect of these activities on the practical operation of municipal administrations in terms of strengthening administrative capacities through a number of indicators, for example: effectiveness, efficiency, number of applied and received EU funds, degree of corruption, etc. In that, it is essential that there is a single and fully integrated system that will permanently record all trainings and other activities for improving the administrative capacities of the municipalities in the Republic of North Macedonia.¹⁰

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⁷Kurth, B. *Safety Training Required for Municipal Employees*. IMLRMA TODAY, pp. 11-12, 2012. достапно на <http://iml.org/file.cfm?key=6383>

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