

ROLE OF ECOLOGICAL EARMARKED FUNDS IN FINANCING OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS IN POLAND ON THE EXAMPLE OF VOIVODSHIP FUND FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND WATER MANAGEMENT IN LUBLIN

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Abstract

The subject of the study is the financing of environmental education in Poland from the resources originating from ecological earmarked funds. The scope of these funds encompasses among other voivodship funds for environmental protection and water management. The purpose of each fund is to support various initiatives in the scope of natural resource protection in the territory of specified voivodship. The issues discussed in this case relate to the Voivodship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management with the range covering Lubelskie Voivodship situated in south – east part of Poland.

The principal goal of this article is to emphasize the role of the fund in case of financing of undertakings extending widely understood ecological knowledge. The conclusions have been expressed on the basis of annual reports on fund activity as well as on the basis of questionnaire based research. The analysis of reports encompassing the years 2011-2015 leads to the conclusion that co-financing relates to various types of activity, appears in various forms and is addressed to various groups of beneficiaries. Recently, the fund resources have been used particularly to support the complex and coordinated education programs assuming the following types of activity: workshops, seminaries, trainings, exhibitions, information campaigns or fetes. This financing source is mainly used by self-governments. Basically, the fund is the basic supplier of resources used by them for financing of pro-environmental education projects. This state of things is indicated by the results of questionnaire distributed among commune heads managing the smallest administrative entities administered by self-governments i.e. communes. Furthermore, from the answers given by the respondents it appears that the organizational and financial support for campaigns informing about the need and methods of taking care for the environment, among other initiated in schools, is the most frequent form of self-governments engagement in the environmental protection.

Keywords: education, ecological fund, sustainable development

1 INTRODUCTION

Environmental protection requires long term actions to be taken, inter alia, in order to permanently change human attitudes towards the surrounding world and nature's goods. The broadening of knowledge in the scope of ecology, environment friendly behaviours and the methods of neutralization of negative effects of

anthropocentrism should be a broadly understood goal, the achievement of which requires sufficient funds. Recently, in connection with the very popular concept of sustainable development assuming better understanding of environment needs, the governments of individual countries, self-government authorities as well as private entities are more and more inclined to expend significant amounts of money on financing of ecological education which obviously translates into the number and positive momentum of undertakings to that end.

Extensive educational activity would be impossible without the support of institutions rendering financial services and treating the aiding of pro-ecological activity as their mission.

The ecological earmarked funds play the role of such entities in Poland. The subject of this article is the activity of one of these funds and its importance for the promotion of ecological knowledge in regional scale. The conclusions will be drawn on the basis annual reports on the activity of the Voivodship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Lublin as well as on the basis of the results obtained from questionnaire based research covering the members managing the communes situated in the fund activity area i.e. in the territory of Lubelskie Voivodship situated in south – east part of Poland.

2 ESSENTIAL FINANCING SOURCES FOR UNDERTAKING IN THE SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN POLAND

Accession of Poland to the European Union significantly increased the opportunities of external funds raising for development of educational activity, including also its part aiming at promoting of knowledge in the scope of natural environment and ecology. Several large operational programmes have been initiated in the framework of the National Cohesion Strategy being implemented. These programmes are specific channels transferring EU support from structural funds. Considering the guiding objective of the present study, two of the above mentioned programmes should be specified i.e. “Human Capital” and “Infrastructure and Environment”.

Among other things, the implementation of two following priorities is anticipated in the framework of Human Capital programme, i.e.:

- Development of human resources and adaptation potential of enterprises (priority II)
- High quality of education (priority III)

In the framework of aforesaid priorities, it is possible to apply for funds for training sessions, consulting, promotion, popularization of research and development activities or direct introduction of education programs.

“Infrastructure and Environment” programme is the largest operational programme addressed mainly to the beneficiaries planning the large infrastructure projects. Nevertheless, one of its priorities (priority V) has been defined as follows: “Nature protection and creating of ecological attitudes”. Therefore it is possible to apply for co-financing also for “soft” projects e.g. implementation of national and supra-regional training and education projects, information campaigns, mass events, competitions etc.

As regards the foreign funds available thanks to EU membership, it should be also mentioned about Norway grants and European Economic Area grants addressed to member states in order to reduce the economic and social gaps. Some grants are available to the Polish entities willing to take up the projects in the scope of environmental protection and renewable energy.

Obviously, there are also national financial instruments available to institutions willing to engage in activity in the scope of ecological education. The ecological earmarked funds gathering funds out of central budget play an important role in the environmental protection financing system in Poland. Their scope encompasses the following funds: National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (NFOŚiGW) and sixteen voivodship funds for environmental protection and water management (WFOŚiGW). The activity of aforesaid funds is governed by several legal acts and documents. However, the act of 27th April 2001 – Environmental Protection Law (Journal of Laws No 62 Item 627 as amended). Article art. 401a. determines the proceeds from fees for an allocation of allowances and for entry into relevant register as well as the proceeds from penalty payments for improper use of environment.

Local self-government entities and entrepreneurs can be the beneficiaries of aid granted by the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (NFOŚiGW) in the form of subsidized loan interests, partial repayment of bank credits, subsidized interests or price of bonds redemption and subsidized collection of abandoned end-of life vehicles. Planned ecological effect is the most important criterion taken into account when making the grant award decision. Only the projects bring such effect are processed

(Guide for beneficiary, 2013, p. 7). The common action strategy is implemented jointly by the National Fund and voivodship funds as determined in the provisions included in the Act issued in 2001. In this case, the common priorities are conforming with national strategy "Energy Security and Environment" and corresponding to the objectives determined on EU level (Common strategy, 2015, p. 5).

However, it is worth mentioning that the projects in the scope of ecological education should not be financed by more than one ecological fund. In accordance with established principles, the projects with national coverage or the projects concerning the problems occurring in the whole territory of Poland are supported by the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (NFOŚiGW) except of key projects implemented in specified region where the engagement of the National Fund limited to financing of information and promotion activities. The projects financed by voivodship funds are essential for specified region and cover with their range its area (Environmental Education Strategy, 2013, p. 22).

3 SCALE AND DIRECTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT OF THE VOIVODSHIP FUND FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND WATER MANAGEMENT IN LUBLIN IN THE SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The Voivodship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management covers with its range the territory of Lubelskie Voivodship. This area is has been more lately industrialized, and its economy is mainly based on agriculture. The potential represented by natural environment is characterized by the presence of numerous natural values; some of them are legally protected. Among others, there are two national parks, more than eighty reservations as well as significant number of the areas protected in the framework of ecological network - Natura 2000.

As appears from the reports, during the period 2011-2015, the Voivodship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Lublin was engaged in various undertakings in the framework of environmental education. Table 1 illustrates the number of contracts concluded by the fund with various partners and the value of amounts handed over to beneficiaries.

Table 1. The number of contracts concluded with the partners and the value of total amounts handed over in the form of financial support in the years 2011-2015

Years	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of contracts	150	142	134	139	139
Value of funds (PLN)	1.013.255	1.119.553	1.104.236	1.267.859	1.196.517

Source: WFOŚiGW in Lublin

Throughout the entire relevant period, the value of aid was maintained on a stable level at similar average co-financing level (average value of funds per contract). It should be added that the allocation of the overwhelming majority of funds to beneficiaries representing non-budgetary sector was a stable trend (maximum two contracts on funds handover were concluded with budgetary entities every year).

Various forms of environmental education are possible, e.g.:

- coordinated educational programs assuming the following activities: field works hops, trainings, natural excursions, thematic exhibitions, local festivals, subscription of ecological journals, purchase of didactical aid;
- organization of competitions and Olympic games in primary and secondary schools,
- organization of conferences,
- co-financing of publishers popularizing the natural values and other issues in the scope of environmental protection.

From data published by the fund it appears that significant part of total funds every year was spent on the implementation of educational programs in the form of activities taken in pre-schools and schools going beyond standard teaching programs as well as the programs addressed to all inhabitants e.g. programs in

the scope of selective waste collection or programs targeted to information of local communities about objects of high natural value. Relevant index mostly fluctuated around 75%, except of the year 2013 with as much as 85% of total financial aid of the fund spent on the support of educational programs. Other types of undertakings were co-financed far fewer and amounts spent were much lower, particularly in case of conferences and publishers (Fig. 1).

Self-government entities permanently were the main beneficiaries of the aid provided by WFOŚiGW in Lublin in the years 2011-2015. However their participation in the whole group of contract partners was systematically reduced (Fig. 2). This reduction was accompanied by growing participation of entities which are not the part of public sector. It should be read as a positive trend undoubtedly reflecting the increasing interest of private entities in the environment and nature protection but also possibly the effectiveness of the process consisting in the promotion of knowledge on natural environment and on environment needs which translates into aiming at broadening of knowledge in this scope. The self-governments representing the public sector mainly applied for funds to be spent for larger projects in the scope of waste management, selective waste collection as well in the scope of renewable energy sources and co-financed competitions and Olympic Games in schools. Specifically, such programs were often implemented cyclically or their implementation period was longer than one year and they were frequently enforced through a cooperation of greater number of communes being the members of so called communes associations. The local authorities also engaged themselves in tasks consisting in information about protected areas and their values e.g. installation of information boards, setting out of nature trails, creation of forest education stations and marking of tourist and natural trails.

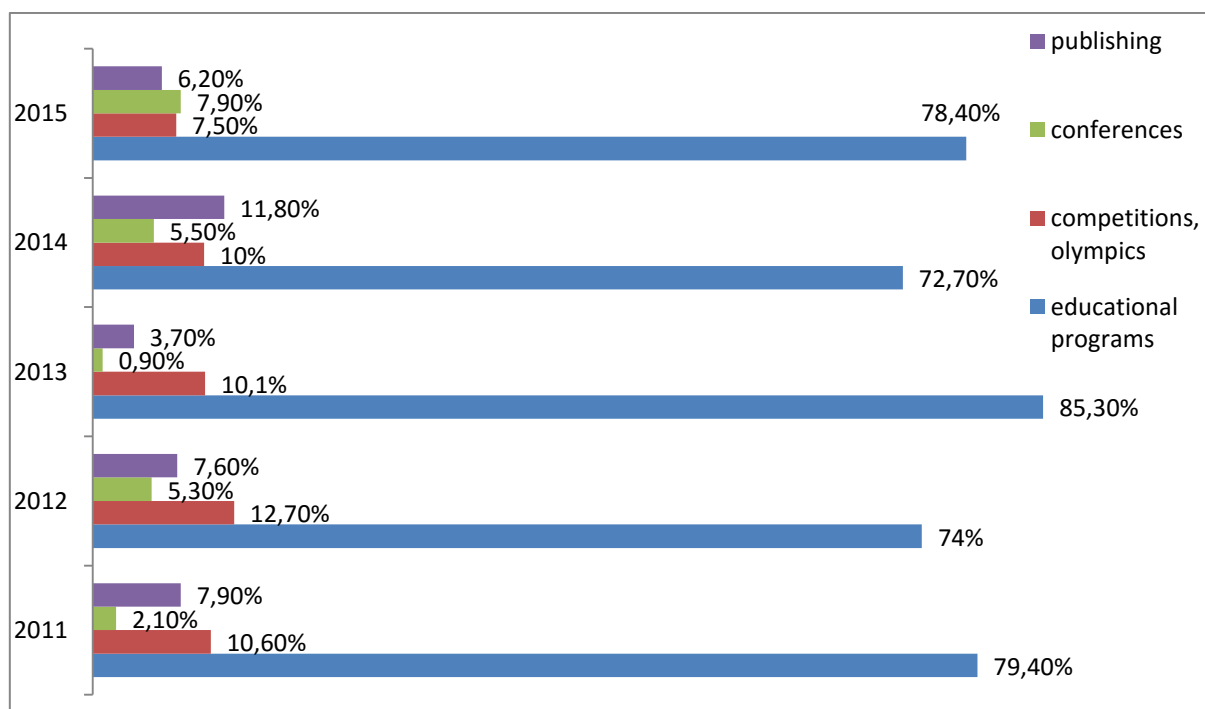


Fig. 1. Structure of expenditures of WFOŚiGW in Lublin for environmental education showing the financing directions (in %)

Source: WFOŚiGW in Lublin.

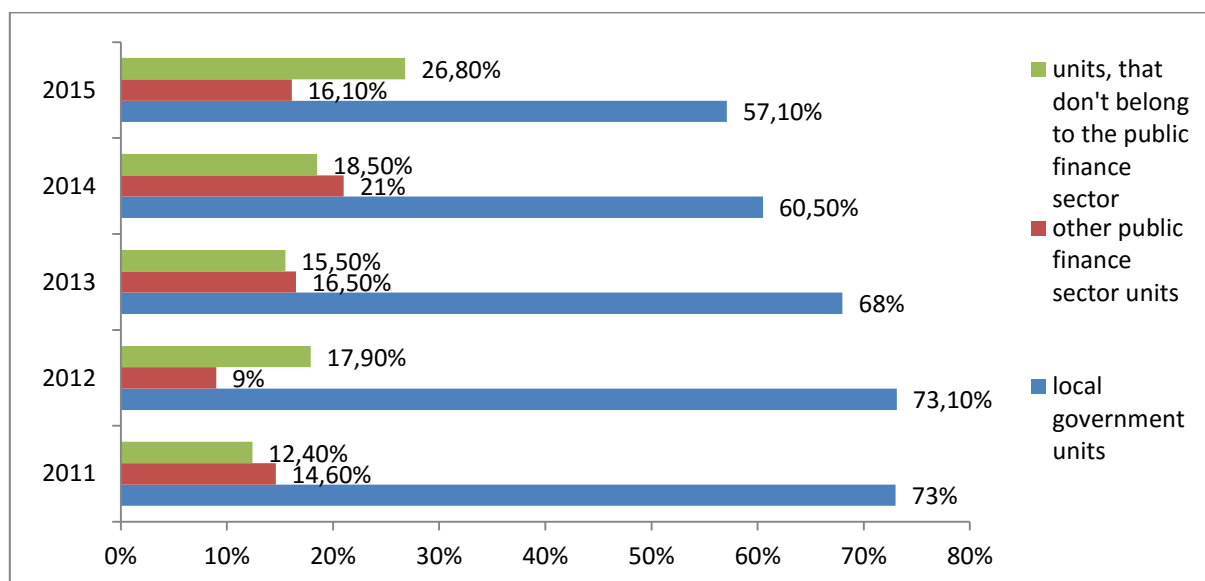


Fig. 2. Structure of financial aid of WFOŚiGW in Lublin showing the contract partners (in %)

Source: WFOŚiGW in Lublin

The undertakings in the framework of environmental education are carried out by social and educational institutions as well as by local authorities but also by pro-ecological organizations and even by entities acting as specialized services in the scope of environmental protection performing preservation measures as everyday duties. The effects of cooperation between one of two national parks situated in the territory of Lubelskie Voivodship (Roztoczański National Park) with WFOŚiGW in the form of several educational initiatives are presented below (Table 2). From this summary it appears that, in the years 2003 -2016, the total amount of the fund aid was equal of almost 300.000 PLN without taking into account for example typical infrastructure projects. Their educational objective was not the primary aim but their implementation undoubtedly increased the opportunity to acquire knowledge on the nature and its protection methods.

Table 2. List of tasks associated with environmental education performed by the authorities of Roztoczański National Park in the years 2003 -2016 and financed by WFOŚiGW in Lublin including co-financing amounts.

Year	Task title	Co-financing amount (PLN)
2003	Co-financing for publishing of the book: „Roztoczański National Park – nature and mankind” circulation of 3000 copies	20.000
2003	Production of nature film „In the land of firs, beaches and tarpan horse - Roztoczański National Park	40.000
2004	The state of recognition and perspectives for research of natural environment of Roztoczański National Park and jubileum exhibition" Roztoczański National Park "	18.000
2005	Co-financing of published lectures on environmental protection arranged by RPN	30.000
2008	RPN publishers "Published lectures on environmental protection arranged by RPN	18.000
2008	Film " In the land of firs, beaches and tarpan horse " on DVD disc	7.000
2009	35 years of the protection of RPN natural and cultural heritage	30.000
2009	RPN publishers "Published lectures on environmental protection arranged by RPN in the years 2006-2007"	20.000
2009	Active forms of education in OEM RPN in the jubileum year of 35 th anniversary of RPN and 15 th anniversary of Education and Museum Centre (OEM)	9.200
2010	Environmental education of local community using extended educational base of OEM RPN	5.000

2010	Selected educational forms in OEM RPN as the tool used for promoting creative works of talented youth	5.000
2010	Development and modernization of RPN educational base- phase II	20.000
2013	Development and extension of RPN educational and touristic package	60.000
2015	Expansion of publishing and educational offer of Roztoczański National Park through the implementation of the project of cooperation between Education and Museum Centre (OEM) with teachers working in Lubelskie Voivodship.	14.800

Source: <http://roztoczanski.pn.pl/pl/zestawienie-zadan-finansowanych-z-wfosiqw>

4 ROLE OF WFOŚIGW IN LUBLIN AS THE FUNDING SOURCE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR SELF – GOVERNMENTS – DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OBTAINED FROM QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

The campaigns associated with environmental education always were most popular and most often financed initiatives by the communes offices from among pro-ecological undertakings. From the questionnaire survey carried out in 2012 among 110 communes administrators (heads of communes) in Lubelskie Voivodship it appears that almost three-quarters (72%) of offices covered by this survey engage themselves in educational projects on ecological issues (Fig. 3).

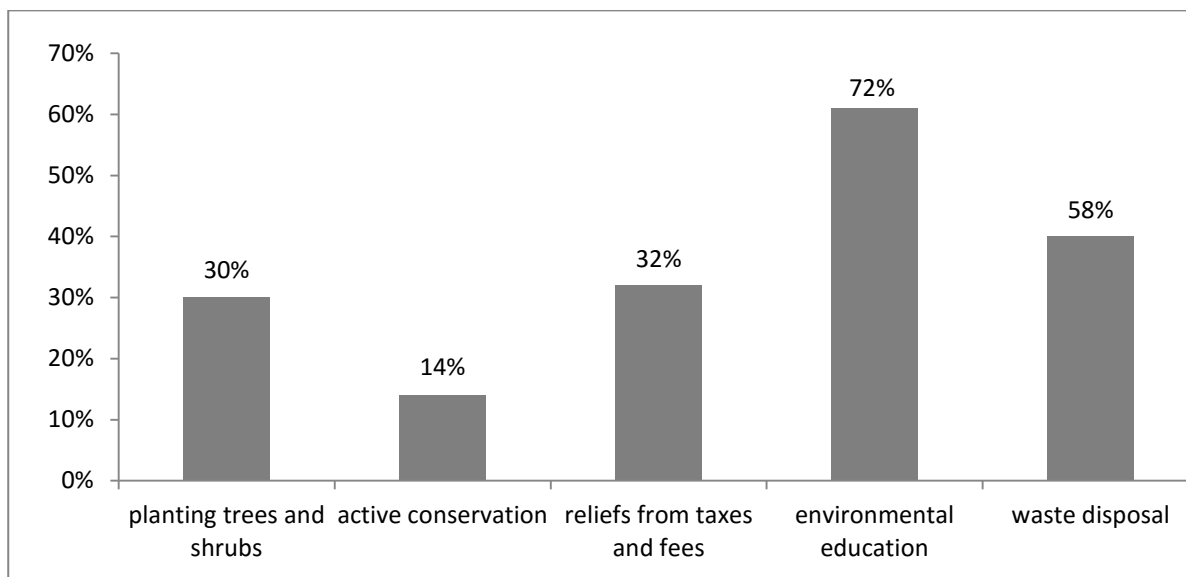


Fig. 3. Percentage of communes financially and / or organizationally engaged in determined types of pro – ecological activity.

Source: Witkowski, 2015, p. 576.

The opportunity of aid available from WFOŚiGW was and still is very important for communes authorities regardless of other options existing in this scope, referred to above. We should remember that co-financing principle is applicable in this case. Therefore the self – governments willing to acquire external funds are required to furnish their own contribution. Usually this contribution originates directly from the budget and consequently the local officials submitting their offers for individual competitions (most frequently, the list of ultimate beneficiaries of aid available from WFOŚiGW) is created in this manner) have to ensure relevant amounts entering them into the list of commune expenditures. One of the paragraphs included in questionnaire handed over to respondents for completion in the year 2012 contained the request to indicate financing sources for environmental education. The voivodship fund was indicated by 42 respondents i.e. by about 38% of total number of answers given in this paragraph. Therefore the fund appeared to be the second most important (after municipal budget) source of money for implementation of educational projects (Fig. 4). As a side note, it's worth mentioning that the interest in EU funds directed to the promotion of pro-ecological behaviours is relatively low (15% of indications).

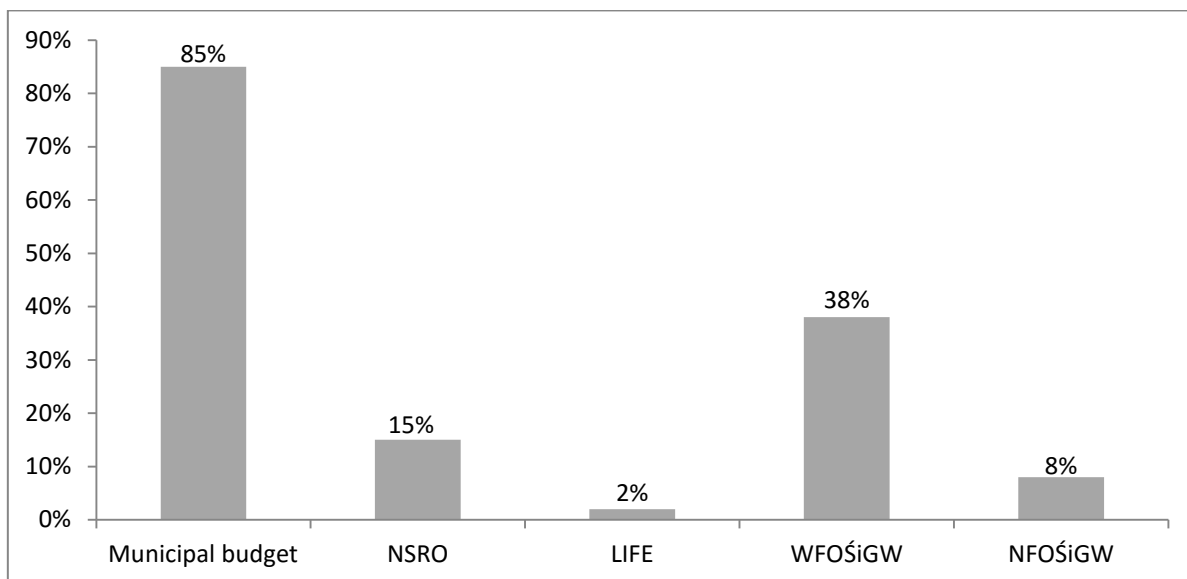


Fig. 4. Percentage of communes financing the environmental education from individual sources

Source: Witkowski, 2015, p. 577

5 SUMMARY

The environmental education makes an important contribution to effectiveness of environment and nature protection being in line with sustainable development idea. Many opportunities in the scope of funds raising for execution of pro-ecological initiatives occurred currently in Poland and the ecological earmarked funds belong to the most interesting options in this field.

The Voivodship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Lublin is an extremely important source of funds for various groups of entities willing to actively broaden the knowledge on environment. Comprehensive educational programs anticipating various didactic methods are financed most frequently. Except of typical educational programs implemented among others in schools, the actions and activities initiated by nature protection practitioners are also supported. An important group of beneficiaries are self-government commune authorities raising external funds and seeing the fund as potentially most important external financial partner. Use as many sections and subsections as you need (e.g. Introduction, Methodology, Results, Conclusions, etc.) and end the paper with the list of references.

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