

# Projectification of economy in a smaller country: A case from Croatia

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**Abstract:** *This research deals with an insight and analysis of the economy projectification in a smaller country, here represented by Croatia. The study was inspired by similar research conducted in Germany, Island and Norway and it is based on similar but partly adapted methodology. The objective of this study is to measure level of economy projectification in a smaller country, and to provide relevant data related for the level of project work. The random sample of 250 companies, from both public and private sectors, was selected across nine sectors of the economy. A stratified random sampling was drawn and interviews were conducted via telephone, so as on-line survey. While analysing collected data and considering the objectives of this paper, only basic statistical analyses were applied for calculating averages and mean values. This study confirmed that projectification trends and figures in a smaller country are similar to those in larger or developed countries. During the period of last five years, the projectification level of the Croatian economy was increased from 27% (in 2013.) to 33% (in 2018.). The results show significant difference in projectification among the different sectors of economy, so as changes and trends over the recent time period.*

**Key words:** *Economy, Projectification, Project work, Small country,*

## I. INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT AND PROJECTIFICATION

Today's human world can be seen as the world of projects, since there is no individual, organization, company, nor community, which do not practice many projects in parallel. In modern world project is tool for changing everything and going to the next level, so increasing number of projects gained for measure of their presence in human life [1]. Therefore, term projectification became one of hottest topic in project management research [2]. It is not only about numbers or business and industry only, but rather about community or society at large because degree of projectification shows dynamism, adaptability and implementation of changes for better future. Also, it is not only about project-oriented sectors, but rather about economy at large, because projects spread within all sectors of economy and all domains of human life.

The term projectification was originally introduced by Midler while analyzing the evolution of working procedures. In his study "*Projectification of the Firm: the Renault Case*" [3], he analysed phases of a product development towards projectification of the firm, and concluded that in the first three phases, the project manager became more important and gained more power in the organization. The structure around the manager and cross-professional communication also became increasingly important, on all levels of the organization. Recently, term "projectification" was tackled by Wald and German team of researchers [4]. German researchers focused their research to the share of the project work in a sample of 500 randomly selected companies from different economic sectors. Firstly, the share of project work was determined for each company, afterwards an average share was calculated per economic sectors classified by WZ 2008 code, and finally the share of project work to the total gross value added (GVA) was calculated [4]. Collected data for eleven sectors and sample of 500 companies confirmed the share of total project working hours like 34,7%, which is equal to EUR 877 billion for the year 2013. Following the same research methodology, Schoper et al. [5] carried out international research and compared differences among German (sample 500 companies), Norway (sample 1412 companies) and Iceland (sample 142 companies) economies. The results from the study confirmed projectification in Germany for 34,7%, Norway 32,6% and Iceland 27,7%.

In 2018., International Project Management Association (IPMA) explored projectification research by supporting China, Croatia, Italy and Brazil, to continue, where each country represents particular pattern within the global perspective [2].

It is expected that in 2019 and 2020. Several other countries will conduct similar researches and announce the very first results. The study in China was based on responses from 1186 organizations. It confirmed actual projectification at the level of 42,7%, while in 2012. it was 30,5%, and in 2022., it might achieve level of 53% [6].

While projectification was initially focused to the increasing number of projects, it has also been argued that projectification is a central discursive theme in contemporary society, and “increasingly relevant for the understanding of almost any aspect of the contemporary economy” [7],[8], [9]. Obviously, term projectification, as shown in Midler’s Case study [3], can be divided into two independent dimensions, a qualitative and a quantitative [4]. The qualitative dimension focuses on how projectification influences the development in the organization. The quantitative dimension on the other hand, targets the organization's share of project work, which can be presented as a ratio of projectification.

**II. A BRIEF ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SMALLER COUNTRY**

As shown above, recent projectification studies were done for large or developed countries. There is question how projectification stands in smaller country or country under development, and if trends and numbers are similar or very different to those registered in developed or large countries. In one hand it could be expected that developed or large countries have much larger degree of projectification, but in another hand there are many evidences of project activities in a smaller countries. Following such open questions, a research was done in Croatia, like representative of smaller countries. The main characteristics of smaller countries could be described by numbers, which in general cannot compete with numbers associated to the large countries.

In general, smaller countries have population at the country level around 5 million, and around 20 % of population live in the capital. Some of them has population up to 10 million, which is comparable to population of one city in China. Usually such country has two strong leading and confronted political options, and some of those countries (in Central and South-East Europe) passed political and economic transitions, but still not developed as western countries. Each smaller country has several traditional sectors, like agriculture, transport, construction, ... and 2-3 leading and strong sectors of economy. Unemployment rate is usually high, could be even around 10%. Their industry is very much dependable on foreign investments, multinational companies and international financing institutions (IFIs) [10]. The economy is based on S&M enterprises, so as branches of global companies, while public sector is still main investor for large projects (i.e. infrastructures). In general, investment in research is below the global average, so no advanced or hi-tech industry. However, could be many start-ups like results of eager and very young entrepreneurs, especially within IT. Additionally, if such small country is also non developed, then there are strong activities by international financing institutions (IFI). Many of smaller and developing countries are still fighting against higher corruption rate [11], low transparency and too high spending in public sector, so as low labour productivity. Their comparative advantages are usually natural resources and low labour costs compared to developed countries. Most of IFI claim for needs to continuously modernizing public services, the judiciary, and the governance of state-owned enterprises [12], [13]. The information above characterize many smaller countries or developing countries, so selecting one from the list can provide initial finding about projectification, which could also be orientation for the many other of that kind.

In table 1., there is example of smaller country (Croatia)and comparison of few data against data in countries which already conducted projectification study. It can be seen that smaller country even can have high grow and investment rate, but GDP per capita is far from developed countries, and that is the main reason for the process of economic emigration, where part of younger population is moving towards western countries.

Table 1. Context of countries(example of Croatia like smaller country)

| Countries context |                             |                               |            |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| Country           | Total investment (% of GDP) | GDP per capita (current US\$) | GDP growth |
| Germany           | 19,20%                      | 44,469.9                      | 2,2%       |
| Norway            | 29,08%                      | 75,504.6                      | 1,9%       |
| Iceland           | 21,34%                      | 70,056.9                      | 3,6%       |
| Croatia           | 19,83%                      | 13,294.5                      | 2,8%       |

Source: The World Bank [10], [11].

However, beside similarities, there are many differences among smaller or developing countries, so it is difficult to make “one measure for all” which absolutely fits in. The key specific milestones in Croatian economy and society came from:

- Local war after collapse of ex-Yugoslavia (1991.-1995.)
- Global and local economic crisis (2007.-2012.)
- Joining to EU (2013.)

All those events have large impact on overall situation in the country, so as to number of projects, and projectification. While post war period and reconstruction initiated high number of projects, recent economic crisis significantly cut the number of projects. Following it, recent EU membership, starting in 2013., again changed trend and raised number of projects, due to strong EU co-funding of projects by different structural funds. Such trend was also recorded in other countries which join to EU earlier [14].

### III. METHODOLOGY

As IPMA supported projectification research in Croatia, four phases schedule was agreed. In the first phase (December 2017 - January 2018) researchers adapted German methodology [2] and made minor tailoring to the Croatian context. In the second phase (January 2018 - February 2018.) a concept of the questionnaire was developed. Third phase started early in March 2018, and finished by July 2018. In this phase data collection was conducted among companies across different sectors of economy. The study was carried out via telephone interview and on-line survey, where 250 companies successfully participated. In the fourth phase of the study collected data were analysed and first discussion on the results were prepared for presentation and publishing at 6<sup>th</sup> IPMA Research Conference [15].As we adopted the methodology, which was developed by Wald et al. [2] and carried out on an international level by Schoper et.al. [3] the results are comparable with those previously announced in other countries. However, although we used the same questionnaire as they had, part of the questionnaire should map the industry where respondents belong, so it was necessary to do some minor adaptation to fit the Croatian economy. Compared to the German version, we therefore formed sample which reflects Croatian specifics, i.e by adding important sectors in Croatia, like tourism (table 2.) [16], [17], [18]. We prepared the stratified random sample that included nine key sectors of Croatian economy represented by 250 public or private organization classified by NACE classification [16].

Table 2 Industry adaptation to the local context

|  |
|--|
| <b>Economic sector</b>   |
| <b>Agriculture, Forest, Fishing</b>  |
| <b>Manufacturing industry (excluding construction) of which manufacturing oil and gas activity</b> |
| <b>Finance and Insurance providers</b>   |
| <b>Information &amp; Communication</b>   |
| <b>Tourism and hospitality</b>   |
| <b>Other service providers</b>   |
| <b>Producing industry (without construction)</b>   |
| <b>Public Admin, Education, Health</b>   |
| <b>Trade and traffic (missing hospitality)</b>   |

Source: authors, adopted from Wald et al. (2015)

In order to get a representative sample from the chosen industries, we collected data from both small and large companies within each industry sectors. The size of the companies was marked by number of employees - where small companies are the ones with less than 250 employees, while large ones are those with 250 and more. This could be appropriate for a country with smaller population which Croatia represents [17]. Following the same German research methodology that was also used in comparative study [3] the sample of 250 public and private companies was composed which represent economy (table 3.). Two stratification criteria were applied: industry type and company size. Based on that, a phone interview and online survey were performed for data collection. Collection was done by trained personnel of a professional market research company. Training was necessary for communicating research objective, expectations, method, project-based mindset, key definitions like project, project management, project hours,... In that way we harmonized and standardized data collection process. So, their tasks were to collect data by following the strict prescribed procedure, which guarantee that later results of the research could be comparable with research done in Germany, Norway and Island. A list of questions was sent to the respondents in the companies by e-mail prior to a telephone interview, so as instructions. Communication to the companies was endorsed by cooperation with Croatian Chamber of Economy (CCE). CCE has the largest database of information within and covering the Croatian economy. The sample of data is synchronized with National Classification of Economic Activities. The National Classification of Economic Activities is a basic statistical standard used in presenting data on business entities, and its usage is regulated by the Act on National Classification of Economic Activities (NN, No. 98/94) and the Decision on National Classification

of Activities – NKD 2007. (NN, Nos 58/07 and 72/07) [16]. In general, the term "industry" is used in the whole chapter as a synonym for the industrial sector of the economy and is defined by the NKD 2007. sections B, C, D and E (only division 36) according to the harmonized EU definition [19].

Table 3 The structure of the random sample

| Economic sector   | Size (employees) |           |            |
|---|------------------|-----------|------------|
|   | Up to 250        | Over 250  | Overall    |
| Agriculture, Forest, Fishing  | 8                | 2         | 10         |
| Manufacturing industry (excluding construction) of which manufacturing oil and gas activity | 8                | 2         | 10         |
| Finance and Insurance providers   | 10               | 8         | 18         |
| Information & Communication   | 8                | 2         | 10         |
| Tourism and hospitality   | 15               | 10        | 25         |
| Other service providers   | 20               | 10        | 30         |
| Producing industry (without construction)   | 27               | 15        | 42         |
| Public Admin, Education, Health   | 30               | 25        | 55         |
| Trade and traffic (missing hospitality)   | 30               | 20        | 50         |
| <b>Overall</b>  | <b>156</b>       | <b>94</b> | <b>250</b> |

Source: authors

#### **IV. ANALYSIS OF COLLECTED DATA AND KEY RESULTS PRESENTATION**

Collected data provided spuriously promising platform for various and comprehensive statistical analyses. However, the aim of this research was primarily gathering information about economy projectification for smaller country and to compare results with larger countries, which already published their data. In that way we used basic statistical calculations for analyse of the sample, to get mean values, averages, or some specific information. The main research results could be summarized as follows:

The key research results are described by the following findings:

1. Based on the sample of 250 companies (table 3.), the projectification level in Croatia, which represents smaller country here, is found like 33%. It means that on average around 33% of working hours are spend for different project jobs.
2. The results obtained confirmed that projectification of the economy in a smaller country could be at the similar level like in larger and developed countries (above 30%). If we take in account possible error in respondent replies due to misunderstanding of project management terminology, result could be decreased by 10%, which mean could be around 30%.
3. The research confirmed the rising trend of projectification and increase from 27% in the year 2013, to 33% in 2018. The trend analyse show forecast where projectification could reach even 40% in the year 2023. (table 5). So, the future trend of projectification in a smaller country is increasing, similar like in larger or developed countries.
4. Share in project work significantly differs from sector to sector, and do not follow the rank of sector when considering contribution to the economy (table 4).
5. More detailed research showed that the most projectificated sectors are construction (74%) and IT (52%).
6. The lowest projectification is recorded at agriculture, forest and fishing (11%), so as at retail, hospitality and tourism (18%).
7. Despite of training and good preparation for informing all involved participants in survey, we found that many of them are practicing projects, but without being aligned to modern project management of 21<sup>st</sup> century. It especially goes for very small companies and family business, where business is based on traditional practices and organization models.
8. On the margins of this research we founded that internal project makes around 80% of total projects in the sample. However, most of internal projects are rather small in the terms of money, so as while observing consumption of working hours.

Table 4 Projectification – share of project work by industries in Croatia (2017.) – detailed sample

| NACE code | Sector  | Share of project work | Share on GVA* |
|-----------|---|-----------------------|---------------|
| A         | Agriculture, Forest, Fishing  | 11%                   | 5%            |
| B-E       | Manufacturing industry (excluding construction) of which manufacturing oil and gas activity | 38%                   | 18%           |
| F         | Construction  | 74%                   | 6%            |
| G-I       | Retail/transport/hospitality/tourism  | 18%                   | 24%           |
| J         | Information & Communication   | 52%                   | 4%            |
| K         | Finance and Insurance providers   | 24%                   | 6%            |
| L         | Real estate   | -                     | 9%            |
| M-N       | Corporate service providers   | -                     | 7%            |
| O-Q       | Public Admin, Education, Health   | 37%                   | 15%           |
| S         | Other service providers   | 40%                   | 10%           |
| S+F+L+M-N | Other service providers + construction + real estate + corporate service providers          | 29%                   | -             |
|           | <b>Total</b>  | <b>33%</b>            | <b>100%</b>   |

\*Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics [14]

Table 5 Projectification trend 2009-2022 comparison of the selected countries

| Projectification trends | Past  | Current | Future |
|-------------------------|-------|---------|--------|
| Croatia 2012-2022       | 27%   | 33%     | 40%    |
| Germany 2009-2019       | 29.3% | 34.7%   | 41.3%  |
| Norway 2010-2020        | 27.1% | 32.6%   | 33.8%  |
| Iceland 2009-2019       | 25.0% | 27.7%   | 31.5%  |

Source: authors

## V. DISCUSSION OF THE KEY RESEARCH RESULTS

In this paper, our objective is to present the findings of the projectification study in Croatia which represent smaller country, still not developed like western European countries. We present empirical results on the degree of projectification in Croatia, based on a research sample of 250 companies/organizations and on working hours spent on project job.

Firstly, while observing findings from the chapter 4., one could be surprised that projectification level in a smaller country could be so high, and comparable with larger and developed countries. However, it is not surprise because we live in a project world, and needs for changes are same, nevertheless is it small or large country, develop or not develop. So, the study confirmed that smaller country is also changing in its own way, with rather decent “speed” similar like in larger country. But, another view to the same number which marks projectification provides additional important explanation. In a large country projectification percent is taken from large scale numbers, while in a smaller country it is taken from much smaller numbers, so results are not comparable from such perspective. Basically, it means we practice similar percentages, but one is calculated from macro amount, while another from micro amount. Definitely, in smaller country, most of projects are not large scale or mega size like those in the developed and rich countries, since there is no extra large companies and strong financial institutions.

Secondly, growing projectification trend in smaller country, similar like in larger country, is good news for smaller ones. It means that they have positive trend of changes and possible innovations (i.e. in IT) structured in projects. However, in many smaller and non-developed countries such growth is very much dependable on investments from developed countries and IFIs, where they serve like labour and local resources provider.

Thirdly it is not surprise that there are significant differences among sectors of economy, regarding projectification. Some sectors, like construction and IT, are very much project oriented, and their business is set for project-oriented

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company. So, in terms of working hours spent of projects, they are leaders. However, if we change metrics and calculate on the base of number of projects itself, the results would change dramatically. Our research confirmed global trend that non project oriented sectors have much more projects, but those are internal and financially rather small projects, also small from perspective of working hours spent.

And fourthly, it is really surprising finding about rather small projectification numbers in some sectors, like tourism, agriculture, fishing.... Could be that it falls under finding 7. in the chapter 4., where fragmented and small SMEs do not have capacity for recognizing modern project management. Indeed, there is an overall impression that "project language" and awareness of project management profession is still not recognized at the adequate level, despite of increased interest for project business and funding. It could also go for public sector, because research confirmed that private sector is much more focused to project benefits and advanced project management. Therefore, in some sectors (i.e. Construction in Croatia) the Government introduced special regulation which obliges engagement of project management profession for all public construction projects, which value is above around 6 mil EUR [20].

Finally, there is key question what certain percentage of projectification means for the economy and country? At this point of the research we can state that projectification has positive impact to the society due to important role in transformation and adaptation of the economy sectors, which are necessary for alignment with the global trends. It is also driver of innovation process and internal changes implementation, while seeking for better effectiveness. Migration of projectification among the sectors of the economy has large impact on the society and citizens. Without projects, particular sector could stagnate, regress or even collapse.

Table 6 Shows comparison of smaller country projectification (Croatia) and mentioned EU [2]. It is not proper for comparison in all details, since there is time difference when data were collected. However, it shows interesting finding about share of project work in the public sector (Croatia, 37%, while 33.3% in Iceland, 17.8% in Germany and 14.2% in Norway).

Table 6. Table of projectification - share of project work by industries from Germany, Norway, Iceland (2013.) and Croatia (2017.)

| NA<br>CE<br>code  | Sector   | Germany                                |                             | Norway                                 |                              | Iceland                                 |                              | Croatia                                |                              |
|-------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|--|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
|                   |  | Share<br>of<br>project<br>work<br>2013 | Share<br>on<br>GVA<br>2013* | Share<br>of<br>project<br>work<br>2014 | Share<br>on<br>GVA<br>2014** | Share<br>of<br>projec<br>t work<br>2014 | Share<br>on<br>GVA<br>2014** | Share<br>of<br>project<br>work<br>2017 | Share<br>on<br>GVA<br>2017** |
| A                 | Agriculture, forestry and fishing  | 4.0%                                   | 0.9%                        | 28.6%                                  | 1.7%                         | 4.0%                                    | 7.0%                         | 11%                                    | 5%                           |
| B-E               | Manufacturing industry (excluding construction)                                    | 41.9%                                  | 26.1%                       | 47.2%                                  | 32.6%                        | 3.4%                                    | 8.9%                         | 38%                                    | 18%                          |
|                   | of which manufacturing   | —                                      | —                           | 37.6%                                  | 8.8%                         | —                                       | —                            | —                                      | —                            |
|                   | Oil and gas activity   | —                                      | —                           | 50.7%                                  | 23.9%                        | —                                       | —                            | —                                      | —                            |
| F                 | Construction   | 80.0%                                  | 4.6%                        | —                                      | —                            | 80.0%                                   | 6.3%                         | 74%                                    | 6%                           |
| G-I               | Retail/transport/hospitality/tourism   | 42.0%                                  | 15.6%                       | 13.4%                                  | 13.9%                        | 18.2%                                   | 20.3%                        | 18%                                    | 24%                          |
| J                 | Information and communication  | 37.7%                                  | 4.7%                        | 48.0%                                  | 3.8%                         | 47.8%                                   | 5.3%                         | 52%                                    | 4%                           |
| K                 | Financial services & insurance   | 23.0%                                  | 4.1%                        | 21.4%                                  | 5.1%                         | 34.2%                                   | 8.8%                         | 42%                                    | 6%                           |
| L                 | Real estate  | 2.0%                                   | 11.1%                       | —                                      | —                            | 2.0%                                    | 11.1%                        | —                                      | 9%                           |
| M-N               | Corporate service providers  | 60.0%                                  | 10.7%                       | —                                      | —                            | 60.0%                                   | 5.3%                         | —                                      | 7%                           |
| 0-Q               | Public sector, education, health   | 17.8%                                  | 18.1%                       | 14.2%                                  | 22.0%                        | 33.3%                                   | 22.1%                        | 37%                                    | 15%                          |
| S                 | Other service providers  | 23.0%                                  | 4.1%                        | —                                      | 42.7%                        | 42.7%                                   | 4.9%                         | 40%                                    | 10%                          |
| S+F<br>+L+<br>M-N | Other service providers + construction + real estate + corporate service providers | —                                      | —                           | 40.5%                                  | 20.9%                        | —                                       | —                            | 29%                                    | --                           |

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|  |          |       |            |       |        |       |            |     |      |
|--|----------|-------|------------|-------|--------|-------|------------|-----|------|
|  | Total*** | 34,7% | 100.0<br>% | 32,6% | 100.0% | 27,7% | 100.0<br>% | 33% | 100% |
|--|----------|-------|------------|-------|--------|-------|------------|-----|------|

\*Source: Statistisches Bundesamt

\*\*Source: Eurostat, statistics Norway

\*\*\*Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Croatia

\*\*\*\*Total value weighted by the proportion of economic sectors to gross value added(GVA)

Values printed in italics are estimated values

Source: authors

### VI. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTION FOR THE FUTURE RESEARCH

This research presents the preliminary findings about economy projectification in smaller countries, based on the sample of 250 companies within one country which is marked like possible initial benchmark for smaller countries having economies not developed like in western European countries. Therefore, findings should be taken like tentative and inspirational for the further researches in different smaller and developing countries. While conducting research, it might be expected that some respondents might choose not to participate, because they do not understand the topic, or do not consider themselves as knowledgeable enough to answer the questions. Therefore, a detailed preparation and training of all participants is recommended. Despite of pre-training session organized for understanding of the terms and topics, the poor knowledge of some respondent still could be source of misunderstanding, and might influence the final results. While testing it afterwards on the small separate sub-sample, we found that such influence could be below 10%, which means that projectification in the worst case could be about 30%, instead of 33%. Considering all above, so as actuality and significance of the topic, we plan to continue research, by taking next sample in coordination with Chamber of Economy, and to use lessons from the research done so far. In the next step of the research we also want to investigate impact of projectification on the economy, so as how projectification could influence development of the country, and support better life quality of people.

### VII. CONCLUSIONS

The projectification study in Croatia was conducted in 2018, based on selected sample of 250 companies and partly adapted methodology used in Germany and later in Island and Norway. The aim was to investigate how projectification stands in a smaller and dynamic country, which Croatia represents. The result shows that during the last five years, projectification increased from 27% to 33% nowadays, with positive trend for the future. Research confirmed that projectification trend is global and not dependable on a country size or population. The only differences are coming from type, size and complexity of projects where in larger and developed countries it goes to the megalevel. High projectification in a smaller country could be explained by needs for grow, change and development which is typical for country of any profile. It is also sure that globalisation, and latest EU membership also pushed projectification in many smaller countries due to EU project co-funding programs. However, average size of project in smaller country is rather small compared to world leading countries and their metrics, so large project in smaller country could be marked like a small or medium project in a large or developed country. Finally, despite knowing that successful projects bring benefits for stakeholders, there is key research question for future, about the cumulative benefits which all projects in total, so as high projectification bring to particular society. At the bottom line it is important how much you gain from something, rather than knowing what is the amount of something, and it also goes for projectification. Therefore, further research and qualitative analyses within the sample, could provide very significant findings at larger level.

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