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Sustainable development strategies in Poland

There is not any governmental sustainable development strategy in Poland.

This seems to be a quite shocking statement, quite unsatisfying for further discussions so I try to explain more detailed what the current situation in Poland is like and which are the reasons.

Development since 1989

In 1989 environmental topic belonged to the main topics of new democratic government. The pollution of air and water had received an unacceptable level, especially in Upper Silesia and along the Vistula River. According to this one of the first steps of new government was the closing of the aluminum production in Krakow, which quickly improved water quality in Vistula and a program of sulfur filtration in heavy industry chimneys. These measures led soon to improvement of environmental situation in urban areas. But since the most urgent problems have been solved, people did not urge further activity in ecology but focused on other problems of economies in transition.

From 1992 on most activity of the Ministry of Environment was directed on wastewater plants. Even big cities like Warsaw or Krakow did not yet dispose sufficient sewage potential. The rural surroundings have been in a even less developed state due to the lack of funds. These projects were supported by local society and, getting closer to EU access, cofinanced by EU funds. The results may be considered as satisfying, even when legal problems of landscape planning hamper some project realization.

At a much worse status is the waste problem. Coming from socialist economies where especially package waste did not exist, Poland is drowning in tons of plastic waste. A complete lack of citizens responsibility for common space leads still to lots of illegal waste disposals in forests and lakes. Execution of weak law in this topic is difficult. Waste segregation only slowly gained support, merely in tourist spots. There is not any legal incentive trying to reduce the volume or type of package waste.

Polish NGOs

Nevertheless, Ministerial and society incentives did not reach far to other topics. Although there are hundreds of ecological NGOs in Poland, they have not been able to form a countrywide coalition. Their awareness is focused to incidental problems, protesting against landscape planning on one spot and supporting a National Park at another. Sometimes ecological organizations are struggling with each other, e.g. evaluating the conflict between wind turbines and bird population.

Sustainability in Parties and Society

According to the low profile of Ecology and Sustainable Development in Polish society, statements of political parties to this topic are rare. Even if a few hundred intellectuals in larger cities claim to form a “Green Party”, few more results of this than press articles. A better chance for ecological approaches is on the community level, where local problems or projects are more understandable and connected with a precise benefit.

Sustainable Development communication

For a better understanding of aims and necessity of Sustainable Development it is crucial to decide whether we will try to communicate with “opinion leaders” or with local authorities. From political parties not much support will be gained in the next time.

According to this picture of sustainability development understandings in Poland, the Center for Environment and Development recommends to strengthen communication with local authorities at the basic level. We have to show and to prove that sustainable development is not a spleen of capitals white-collars but creates a chance for long-term ecological AND economical growth.

In Poland for this target we will have to consider to which extent this would be supported by the Catholic church, whose role and influence in Poland cannot be underestimated.

Cooperation projects with foreign partner communities in more developed countries could in a most credible way show the direct effects of a responsible sustainable development on environment as well as on economies. We will appreciate support of Heinrich Boell Stiftung in any form for working on these problems.

Warsaw, 19.07.2006
Stefan Taigner
Secretary General