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# EXAMPLE FOR THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

## PROJECT PROPOSAL ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

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*"Development that meets the needs of the present  
without compromising the ability of future generations  
to meet their own needs."*<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

#### **"Finding Nemo?" - Some Thoughts on Civil Society**

The activities of the Civil Society were very important during the transition process in Central Europe, Eastern Europe and South East Europe (SEE). Non-governmental organisations played and play a vital role in this respect<sup>2</sup>. The concept of "Civil Society" also leads to the current discussion on ethical values and the responsibility of everyone's own behaviour, e.g. in consumption. The European Commission underlined during Green Week 2003—an event organised by the DG Environment of the Commission—the concept "Changing our behaviour". With the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004, an international campaign by NGOs was launched in order to inform about the terrifying working conditions in sweatshops, where expensive sports-wear is produced by exploiting a labour force without access to basic human and working rights. The Rio World Summit in 1992 focused on the slogan "Think global, act local". Furthermore, through the phenomenon of globalisation, we have learned about, e.g. climate change, trafficking in human beings, the brain drain and sustainability, all of which cause certain regional effects.

In conclusion, everybody can be/is part of the Civil Society. Current global issues have an impact on local daily life. However, is it as difficult as "finding Nemo" to get involved in the activities of the Civil Society? Why is it difficult to

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/index.html>, download on 1 October 2004.

mobilize people? Is it possible to initiate projects on a local level without having e.g. appropriate financial resources or by overcoming other obstacles? To this end, the question arises if and how each citizen can influence our society.

### **Summary of the essay**

The following essay will give a brief introduction to a project proposal on sustainable development in Macedonia as an example of the role and involvement of Civil Society in regional co-operation. The concept of sustainable development has intensively been discussed on a wide, global level, especially during the 2002 Johannesburg “Summit on Sustainable Development” and its follow-up activities. The regional focus in Johannesburg has been set on developing countries.

The concept will be applied to South East Europe. Sustainable development in Macedonia—with a special focus on environmental issues—will be presented.

The DRC Summer School has acted as a think tank and future projects will emerge in the mid-term.

This essay will *not* summarise the current academic or scientific discussion on sustainability and its regional impact. This paper follows a more pragmatic approach. Therefore, the essay will introduce some specific ideas on how to implement a project proposal on sustainable development in South East Europe within the framework of a social network created through the DRC Summer School.

## **THE QUEST OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE**

The idea to carry out a project on sustainable development in Macedonia was born during a trip to Macedonia and Kosovo and after meetings with representatives of the international community, NGOs and young graduates in the region, as well as after gaining working experience in the field of renewable energy sources (RES) and climate change.

The concept of sustainable development might offer opportunities to enhance the socio-economic situation in, as an example, Macedonia. Renewable energy sources (including wind and solar energy) can offer local job opportunities.

The activities of International Organisations in Macedonia are mainly based on crisis management and on political issues (regarding the ethnical situation

between Macedonians and Albanians as well as approaching European regional structures such as EU accession). It was stated by several representatives of International Organisations that there is a lack of (and demand to enhance) environmental issues. The development of a strategy on sustainable development in Macedonia could be applied in other regions of South East Europe. Macedonia is getting closer to the European Union. Therefore, sustainability will play an important role for Macedonia's politics in the near future.

### **Definitions**

The concept of sustainable development is on the agenda of different stakeholders. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs has formed a Division for Sustainable Development. During the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, objectives and working projects were approved in the field of water, energy and sustainable development strategies. The European Union adopted a strategy for sustainable development in May 2001.

There are currently more than 70 definitions of sustainable development<sup>3</sup>. "Development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"<sup>4</sup> summarises the most important aspects of the concept. The European Union also states that sustainable development refers to a form of economic growth, which satisfies the needs of the society in terms of well-being in the short, medium and long-term<sup>5</sup>.

The idea of sustainability can be examined from different perspectives:

- from an environmental point of view (key aspects include the challenge of climate change, biodiversity, water and other natural resources; the concept and measurement of the ecological footprint)

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<sup>2</sup> For discussion on definition of Civil Society, e.g. "voluntary associations, organisations, movements and networks that live and work in the social space outside the state and the private sector", see World Watch Glossary, <http://www.iisd.org/didigest/glossary.htm#C>, download on 1 October 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Page 33, "Sustainable Development and the 2002 World Summit", Research Paper 2/55, 10 October 2002, Stephen McGinness, Patsy Richards, House of Commons Library.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/>, download on 10 June 2004.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/cig/g4000s.htm>, download on 30 July 2004.

- from an economic point of view (how we can achieve sustainable production and consumption; furthermore the question of trade policy, energy issues and the increasing use of renewable energy sources)
- from a social point of view (is it possible to generate a development, which is not comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own future needs?)

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, the focal point was set on developing countries, especially regions without access to clean water and an electricity supply. The European Union has developed measures to integrate environmental concerns in other policies, which is essential to achieve sustainable development. The Cardiff Process in 1998 laid the foundations for these co-ordinated actions. Besides the strategies for sustainable development in May 2001, the European Commission adopted a global partnership for sustainable development in 2002.

### Project proposal

This project on sustainable development in Southeast Europe aims to bring together young people from the region<sup>6</sup> in order to discuss and develop a strategy on sustainable development in Macedonia<sup>7</sup>.



The concept and the conclusions of this meeting might be transferred to other regions in South East Europe. Before the meeting, a feasibility study on sustainable development (e.g. sustainability in South East Europe; environmental

<sup>6</sup> As well as participants who are interested in the topic and already working in this field.

<sup>7</sup> Map, see <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/mk.html>, download on 1 October 2004.

problems in Macedonia; the activities of Civil Society in Macedonia; the ecological footprint; the use of renewable energy sources in the region) will be carried out in order to examine the current status of sustainability and to develop certain tools of assessment<sup>8</sup>. The current political, socio-economic and ethnical situation will be examined (e.g. the unemployment rate is one-third of the workforce with an estimated 40% of the GDP as the grey economy). This study can be done with the support of academic institutions.

During the workshop, which will be held in Ohrid/Macedonia, the following questions and topics will be raised and discussed:

- The feasibility study on sustainable development in South East Europe/Macedonia will be summarised and evaluated.
- Examples of projects (best-practise) on sustainable development will be introduced.
- The following question will be raised: what can we do (each of us) in order to minimise the effects of our ecological footprint and to enhance the awareness of sustainability? How can these issues be communicated in a creative way?
- How can we overcome spatial or political obstacles in the region, which might harm sustainability?
- During the workshop, the participants might work on a scenario “sustainable development in the Balkans in 2010”. This creative approach could be chosen in order to show the outcome of the project and follow-up activities are possible (dissemination of information to other initiatives or institutions, creation of an internet-site, follow-up meetings).
- The town of Ohrid is part of the Unesco World Heritage. Lake Ohrid is a vulnerable ecosystem. Excursions planned in order to learn more about the region will be offered as well as field work, in order to discover the landscape.
- The participants will be able to establish their own network and can exchange their experience, e.g. on fund-raising or experience how to start an NGO.

How can the workshop be financed? The project can be funded by regional organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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<sup>8</sup> Referring to the discussion on the ecological footprint.

(referring to the environmental dimension of the OSCE), by EU-funding schemes (e.g. the CARDS programme) or political foundations.

It is of utmost importance to have the support of an academic institution or other institution in order to benefit from the academic support and facilities.

Which obstacles might arise? There are several possible problems which will have to be taken into consideration. There might be a lack of appropriate funding. The organisational timeframe could be very tense. Reliable partners in Macedonia as well as an academic institution or “VIP”, e.g. MP or MEP, are needed for the preparation or marketing of the project. It might be difficult to get in touch with participants. The aims of the projects might be too broad. In order to overcome these potential problems, an evaluation of each step of organisation needs to be taken.

## CONCLUSION

### **Think global – act local – the challenge of regional co-operation**

Regional co-operation has different aspects on different hierarchical levels:

- regional co-operation between states (e.g. EU-member states), regional organisations (e.g. International Organisations) or regional initiatives
- regional co-operation between border-regions (e.g. cross-border co-operation)
- co-operation between the civil society or co-operation in the field of education.

The project proposal provides an example for the involvement of citizens in Civil Society and for the prospect to learn more about regional co-operation and local consequences of world-wide problems.

### **Future perspectives of the DRC Summer School**

The first DRC Summer School was held in Pécs in August 2004. It is vital to bring together young scholars, who are—almost inevitably—active members of the Civil Society and who are engaged in projects having a certain regional impact. Which perspectives can be concluded by the Summer School? It is very important to work together internationally, to exchange ideas and to create a social network.

Finally, it seems that “Nemo was discovered” in the “sea of potential regional activities” and that future ideas are developed and are going to be implemented. The first DRC Summer School was a useful starting point for projects.

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<sup>9</sup> Most of the information can be found in the internet.

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