

Summary of recommendations

Civic Observers for Health and Environment: Initiative for Responsibility and Sustainability COHEIRS

Within the framework of the project COHEIRS, three workshops took place in Novo mesto, namely the Health and Environment situation in Novo mesto on 24.10.2013, Civic responsibility and sustainable development on 21.11.2013 and Civil society, the economic development of the city and environment on 16.1.2014. The workshops were attended by both individuals and representatives of many associations from Novo mesto, we are particularly pleased by the participation of professors and students from the College of Environment and Communal and Higher professional school Grm Novo mesto. Social benefits and environmental efforts of NGOs and civil society observers in the project COHEIRS was recognized by the Municipality of Novo mesto with the participation of the Deputy Mayor Ms Mojca Špec Potočar, at the last workshop in Novo mesto, who gave the recognition and support of the municipality for the objectives of the project and the contribution of non-governmental organizations. Representatives of non-governmental organizations in the role of civilian observers attended many events before, during and after the workshop, such as: viewing and discussion on the safety of the nuclear power plant in Krško, the conference on the pressing environmental issues with the Ombudsman and the Minister for Agriculture and the Environment in Ljubljana, and participating in the preparation of the municipal environmental protection program. The results of the project COHEIRS will be presented on 18.3.2014 to the local community and representatives of the State Agency for the Environment; they make comments and suggestions on the draft of the laws on nature and water protection, etc.

Workshop participants in Novo mesto were confined to addressing pressing environmental problems in the city and a narrower region around it and the role of NGOs in their identification and solving of issues. In Novo mesto, we have witnessed the following sources of pollution:

1. Air pollution from traffic, individual stores and industries with high CO₂ emissions, particles PM₁₀, SO₂, CO, PM₂₅ particles and ozone. Novo mesto is one of the most polluted Slovenian cities, according to environmental indicators, which are based on the results of measurements of the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia. We can search the reasons in the city for the unenviable environmental and ecological situation in unfavorable topographic conditions (the city is located in a valley compressed between the river Krka and the surrounding hills), inadequate transport infrastructure, large industrial complexes (pharmaceutical and automotive industries) and the predominance of heating solid and fossil fuels. The municipal environmental protection program, where the civilian observers of project COHEIRS are involved in the



- preparation, provides a more accurate measurement of hard particles in the atmosphere with carefully placed monitoring stations in urban areas in order to cover most of the main sources of pollution.
2. Noise (highway, city road, the problem of placing the third development axis in the urban section of the city) - Chaotic traffic arrangements in the local and wider city area, including the historic city centre, is the cause for exceeding the noise levels, the situation will be exacerbated in the case of construction of a state highway in an urban area of Novo mesto. The civil society strongly opposes this and that is why it appealed to the European Commission to defend the interests of the affected population for a healthier environment.
 3. Illegal waste dumps and underdeveloped separation and recycling of waste. In Slovenia, as well as near Novo mesto, we are faced with the problem of illegal waste dumps. Some time ago, the civil society organized a one-day campaign "Let's clean Slovenia", which was extremely successful, but the problem has not been fully resolved. In Novo mesto is also the problem of the unsuccessful effort of the Municipality and south-eastern region at the competent ministry level after the construction of the landfill centre, in which the waste would be separated in accordance with technological and environmental standards. In Novo mesto we currently separate and reprocess only 12% of the waste, which is below the Slovenian average.
 4. Radiation (base stations and transmission lines) and light pollution. The main sources of radiation are base stations and power lines in the urban area, resulting in occasional disputes between state institutions and the affected public.
 5. Poor quality of drinking water. One of the biggest problems in Novo mesto is a decrepit water system with inadequate drinking water wells and that is why the water is not drinkable in periods of major rainfall and dry periods. The Municipality of Novo mesto is preparing for the reconstruction of the hydraulic system and the construction of additional pumping stations, due to the increased demand for drinking water by industry in Novo mesto.
 6. Pollution of the rivers Krka and Temenica. The situation is slowly improving, due to increasingly sophisticated wastewater treatment. Beaver, otter and cancer jelševca are returning to the river Krka, but the conditions remain inadequate downstream from Novo mesto.

The workshop participants agreed that the civil society must become an equal interlocutor to the decision makers, such as government departments, Municipality of Novo mesto, Development Centre, professional institutions, etc. The civil society will become a respected interlocutor when it is sufficiently internally motivated, professionally qualified and when it knows the scope of its operation well enough and is able to take a connecting role between non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders. One of the main tasks of the NGO is the informing, education and environmental awareness of the affected public. As a result of this, it has a growing confidence and growing influence in everyday socio-spatial phenomena and



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processes, bringing together stakeholders and individuals and co-ordinating their efforts, as they are powerless as individuals in this respect.

Decision makers will only in this way recognize and take into account the professional qualifications of the civil society, if it is included early enough in the process of formulating policies and strategies so that it will eventually be able to assume the implementation of certain professional tasks. The effects will be reflected in the timely prevention of problems and disagreements, creating the conditions for mediation. At the same time, the civil society can pass notes on equal conditions for the project and participate in its preparation and implementation; for example in the context of national and regional development programs. On their part, decision-makers must learn to listen and recognize the proposals and ideas of the civil society and show willingness to engage with non-governmental organizations.

However, the workshop participants pointed out that cooperation between NGOs and decision-makers will not be possible until the decision makers are legally obliged to cooperate with non-governmental organizations. Thus, they suggested that the law prescribes who is a legitimate public in the process of strategic decision-making, by the criteria under which it may be considered that certain NGOs acting in the public interest and how they should cooperate with decision makers and vice versa. It is also necessary to enable NGOs to be involved in the development, strategic acts and in the initial stages, including the presentation of financial structures, as they are public purpose funds, in stages when all options are open, and that NGOs can also actively monitor the implementation of the solution and participate in their realization. The workshop participants also suggested that at the regional level a single contact NGO centre be founded which would be the single contact centre for NGOs, individuals, government, municipality and the media. The centre would employ competent people to gather suggestions and opinions (e.g. if approximately 50 individuals gave the initiative to solve the same problems, it would be perceived as a proposal for early action or approach to solving it). A single contact NGOs centre would evaluate the initiatives, develop them and propose innovative solutions, which would then be forwarded to decision makers.

Association for Developing Voluntary Work Novo mesto



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