SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

'Sustainable development accomplishes a balance between the requirement for improving the quality of life ...., by achieving social welfare and peace for all ... and the necessity for preservation of the components of the environment as a natural resource upon which the current as well as future generations depend. Respect for the principles of democracy, gender equality, social justice and solidarity, legality, respect for human rights and the preservation of natural resources, cultural heritage and the human environment contribute to the conservation of the Earth in order to maintain life in all its diversity. In this way, sustainable development is achieved through a dynamic economy with full employment, economic, social and territorial cohesion, a high level of education of citizens, high level of health and environmental protection.'

INTRODUCTION

Croatia has early joined the European and world-wide consultation processes on sustainable development. Already in 1972, shortly before the first UN conference dedicated to matters related to protection of the human environment in Stockholm, Croatia adopted the 'Resolution on the Protection of Human Environment'. Environmental impact evaluation is carried out since the mid 70's of the last century, and is prescribed by law since 1980. In the year of the World Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, 1992, despite the war, the 'Declaration on Environmental Protection' was adopted, through which Croatia commits to sustainable development. The concise and clear text of the Declaration, although not specifically elaborated for implementation, contained important determinants, such as:

- postulates of enrollment of the Republic of Croatia in international treaties in the field of environmental protection and on cooperation with international organizations,
- commitment to sustainable economic development based on sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine and tourism as well as economy and industry based on environmentally permissible technologies,
- energy policy directed towards energy efficiency and the gradual introduction of renewable energy sources,
- the individual's right to know about and to have access to information concerning the status of environment and natural resources, the right to be consulted and to participate in decision-making about activities that will have a significant impact on the environment, as well as the right on legal resources and compensation for those whose health or environment is or may be seriously compromised

Despite this early issued document for sustainable development, the systematic relating of the protection of living space and environment to development and social issues has stopped at the principle commitments that are repeated in a series of individual legal and programmatic documents. Although the protection of the environment, as a separate legislative area that

requires integrity and inter-sectional coordination, is developing strongly since the mid nineties, it has not managed to integrate into developmental decision-making.

The Republic of Croatia supported the Agenda 21 and the Action Plan adopted at the 1992 conference in Rio, and assumed responsibilities arising from the *Millennium Declaration* and the *Millennium Development Goals* adopted at the United Nations General Assembly 2000. The national reports on implementation of the Millennium Declaration’s goals were created in 2004 and 2006.

In the Principles of Development of the Republic of Croatia, which were adopted in June 2001, the Government has again determined that the development of Croatia in the 21st century will be based on the concept of sustainable development. Authors of the Principles state that the condition Croatia was in was not sustainable, neither in social, nor in economic sense, so that the successful transformation into a society of the 21st century requires the continuance of large, comprehensive and immediate changes and the laying out of foundations of a European Croatia, as a civil, economically successful and democratic society. That infers building an effective legal state, active acceptance of the global integration processes, changing of the relationship between the individual and society, changing of mentality and the building-up of a recognizable identity, as well as ensuring the standards that will allow full membership in the European Union. The process of preparation and adoption of the strategy 'Croatia in the 21st century', which consists of 19 sectional strategies was not coordinated and never finished.

1. **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**

*Preparation and Adoption of the Strategy*

With the Law on Protection of the Environment from 2007, the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia (hereinafter: Strategy) is settled upon as the document that directs long-term economic and social development as well as environmental protection towards sustainable development. According to this Law, a new strategy is issued every ten years, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction is responsible for the coordination.

The Strategy, adopted in February 2009 by the Croatian Parliament, contains fundamental principles², sets the basic objectives and measures for sustainable development of economy, sustainable social development and environmental protection, and identifies key challenges in their implementation. It is focused on long-term action in eight key areas / challenges of sustainable development on which the strategic directions of development of the Republic of Croatia base: 1st stimulating population growth, 2nd environment and natural resources, 3rd focus on sustainable production and consumption, 4th realization of social and territorial cohesion and justice, 5th achieving energy independence and increase in efficiency of energy usage, 6th strengthening of the public health system; 7th regional interconnection; 8th protection of the Adriatic sea, coasts and islands. The thematic indicators are a critical part of the Strategy and were chosen to display the realization of the main objectives for the eight fundamental challenges.

In the Strategy it is emphasized that in each of the eight key challenges it is important, among other things, to implement reforms and continue to build an effective state, to raise the educational level of all citizens and build a knowledge-based society, to support the culture of research and investment into development as well as to adapt to climate change.

The strategy emphasizes the need for intensive and continuous information of the public in order to raise awareness and encourage citizens' participation, plus assuming the process of

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² The movement of the Republic of Croatia towards sustainable development will be led by the following general principles: (a) the protection of human health; (b) the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights; (c) solidarity within generations and among generations; (d) realization of an open and democratic society; (e) citizen involvement; (f) inclusion of social partners; (g) social responsibility of employers; (h) integration of economic, social and environmental components in the development of policies (guidelines); (i) education for sustainable development; (j) compliance of policy at all levels of government and local administration; (k) usage of the best available technology; (l) renewal (e.g., re-use or recycling) of natural resources; (m) promotion of sustainable production and consumption; (n) precaution and prevention; (o) "polluter pays" for pollution he causes to the environment.
agreement in order to determine the main economic, social and environmental challenges and measures. Unfortunately, it must be noted that extensive information of the public on preparation and adoption of the Strategy has not been conducted, and that key stakeholders from professional, business and civil groups have not been adequately involved in the process. The result is that many of the key stakeholders of sustainable development are not informed that the Croatian Parliament has adopted this Strategy.

Implementation and monitoring of the Strategy
It is provided that the implementation of the Strategy will be conducted through action plans (AP), which should be developed in cooperation with all stakeholders, including organizations of the civil society and the business sector. In the Strategy, the creation of national indicators of sustainable development is envisioned, that will be identified-created during the elaboration of the APs.

So far done: Actively working on one of the eight key areas/challenges - Sustainable consumption and production. In collaboration with UNEP the first workshop for the development of APs is launched, whose holders are the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Physical Planning and Construction and the Ministry of Economy, Labor and Entrepreneurship. A Board of Directors has been established for development of APs, which consists of representatives of ministries and associations, and the establishing of a Work Group for the Development is in process, whose members are proposed by the Board.

2. CONTRIBUTIONS OF RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

Central Administration
In Croatia, the central government is still the most powerful social force, stronger than the business sector and therefore it has the chief responsibility in matters of overall development. So far it has not proven to be the coordinator of the process of decision-making on integrated, sustainable development. Preparation, adoption and implementation of regulations and developmental documents are left to departments - ministries and other governmental organizations, and interdepartmental coordination in general comes down to the final part of the adoption process of documents. Such an action framework for the government does not benefit the complete, systematic and long-term development decision-making.

Despite the preference, representatives of other groups can only to a limited extent affect the fabrication of developmental documents and regulations. Participation is limited to consultation with selected individuals or state councils and committees, who have the opportunity to present or submit their opinions and suggestions. With social partners the Government negotiates mostly on issues of social policy. The economy does not participate in decision-making on development, environment and governance, although these are just the questions on which it can and must take crucial influence.

The Government has established a Council for Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection. Nine Council members come from the lines of scientific and professional workers, as well as representatives of civil society organizations, but there are no representatives of the economy. The Council, in comparison with most EU countries, has few members, no own budget or administrative/technical support so that its action is limited to giving advice on the documents prepared by ministries and other bodies.

Since the mid 90's of the last century, the public has facilitated access via the Internet to information on the tasks of the Government, ministries and other bodies, regulations and other documents. The practice of publishing draft documents on web sites open to comments is rarely present.

The Fund for Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency, which operates since 2004, finances with substantial funds3 the construction of facilities and equipment for improvement of the condition of the environment. Ministries and other public bodies (including the National

3 In 2008 the Fund has provided approximately 147 million Euro for projects dealing with environmental protection and energy efficiency. The largest part of the funds was allocated for the renovation of existing landfills.
Foundation for Civil Society Development) grant financial support to civil society organizations for projects in the field of environmental protection, sustainable rural development, encouragement of rural tourism, offering of social services by non-profit organizations, enhancement of knowledge and skills, etc.

**What the Government should do:**

- Ensure the implementation of the Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Croatia in all ministries and other governmental bodies, especially those responsible for long-term action in the eight key areas
- Establish a committee for coordination of governmental bodies and various sectors for effective implementation of the Strategy
- Take responsibility for making and implementing policies for sustainable development
- Ensure effective coordination between sectional policies and align them with the requirements of sustainability
- Plan sustainable development as a process of long-term changes, into which favorable measures of previous policies are gradually transmitted while the harmful and unfavorable are left out
- Care for better communication and creative dialogue with all concerned parts of society
- Encourage economy to greater participation and contribution to sustainable development.

**Counties, cities and municipalities**

The declaratively accepted *principle of subsidiarity* does not mean that the implementation takes place as it should:

- The central government often prescribes and implements measures and procedures, not sufficiently considering the diversity of local conditions, especially economic ones. Long-term incentives are missing, together with favorable conditions for the realization of local initiatives beneficial to the state, etc. No attention is paid to the local capabilities to fulfill various tasks (of the local administration, but also of the entire community)
- Counties have low power and resources and cannot perform the role of the mediator between national and local levels
- Local authorities are accustomed to wait for orders and funds from 'above'. They share the responsibility for ineffective implementation of the principle of subsidiarity.

Few communities and cities have decided to choose their own development path and select the form of sustainable development. There is no exact data on how many of the local Agenda 21 have been prepared and adopted in Croatia, nor is there any assessment of their value and feasibility. The field of rural development according to the EU LEADER approach offers new hope, encouraging communities to associate, using their own resources, as well as reflecting on sustainable development through the participation of all sectors. In recent years counties have adopted regional operational plans while a significant number of local administrative units have even adopted overall development plans. The process was based on wide public participation, but the once reached level of motivation was not sustained due to absence of implementation and lack of the basic document - the Strategy for Regional Development, which has not yet been made.

**What must be done:**

- The central government as well as the local authorities must change the way important decisions are made, even those that most directly affect the local level, in a way to change the method of decision-making 'from above' and adopt the principle of consultation
- Local authorities should interest, gather and motivate all available human resources in joint actions directed towards sustainable development.

**Civil society organizations**

Associations provide valuable contributions to sustainable development in several areas: their projects (ever more frequently together with the local government) contribute to the protection of certain areas or to improvement of the quality of life in their communities; campaigns and/or protests against intended action in the area indicate the need to stop some activities; they advocate and suggest the need for implementation of some activities, and are often themselves...
the initiators of specific actions. Associations have an important role in informal education – they
educate and encourage public participation in decision-making procedures, contribute to rising
awareness of citizens towards the importance of environment protection, nature and heritage,
energy efficiency, etc. Their contribution is particularly significant in regions that are lagging
behind in development (mountain, rural, islands, displaced areas, etc.).

In addition to them, associations dealing with youth, minorities, persons with special needs or
social position of women are also essential for sustainable development. However, this second
group of associations is typically poorly informed about principles of sustainable development
and Agenda 21, and their representatives are not invited to the debates on sustainable
development and associated issues. This does not mean that these associations with their
actions do not contribute to the implementation of the ideas and concepts of sustainable
development, but that they are not recognized and valued in this role, or do not recognize
themselves in this context.

But in general, professional and organizational abilities along with material conditions do not
allow most associations the implementation of major activities and equal partnership with other
groups.

What must be done:
- The associations must establish effective communication and cooperation, in order to be
able to reclaim the creation and implementation of more demanding projects of sustainable
development. They must be enabled to propose realistic and enforceable alternatives, not
only to be critics
- Sustainable development of the local community seeks the partnership of government,
economy and associations - associations should prove to be a relevant partner to local
administration, which should recognize the benefits of the cooperation with the civil sector
- Development of the ability of local communities for sustainable development should be
included among the topics for which the central, regional and local authorities award
subsidies
- Government should support the actions of associations in areas without local initiatives.

Economy
The Croatian economy bears a great burden of recession and financing of the costly public
sector. Despite the general conditions in which the economic activity takes place, which are not
encouraging for sustainable development, changes are notable among leading companies,
which show an increase in interest and responsibility for the environment, community and overall
development.

Changes that the management of companies have initiated and implemented are:
- the establishment of the Croatian Business Council for Sustainable Development (1997);
- the establishment of the Croatian Center for Cleaner Production (2001);
- certification according to ISO 9000 and 14000 standards;
- increased investment in measures for alignment with the requirements of environmental
protection regulations;
- individual initiatives and examples of ecological effectiveness, creation of reports about the
environment and social responsibility, donations, cooperation with the community, support of
the realization of public interest, support of education, etc.

The domestic legal and financial framework does not encourage the commitment of the
economy to sustainable development. Fees and other monetary imbursements for pollution and
use of natural resources are not paid proportionally to the level of the environmental burden.
Reduction of adverse environmental impact, which can be achieved through high investment
from the economy, will not always be accompanied by the reduction of fees. This increases the
burden of a successful and responsible economy. In addition, recession and unemployment lead
the authority to leniency towards large polluters of the environment.
Representatives of the economy often point out the lack of a clear long-term development strategy of the Croatian economy and the need to harmonize the existing strategies as one of the important problems.

It is expected that convergence towards the EU's will affect desirable changes and motivate businesses to focus towards sustainable development. Current reasons for industries to engage in environmental issues primarily lie in the potential profits (savings in resources, energy), the improvement of the relations with the public, the export respectively the international economic integration, or the direct dependence on the quality of the environment (e.g., food and tourist industries).

3. MAJOR CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CROATIA

- **Coordination of public administration bodies**
  The distinct trend of ‘departmentalizing’ in the acting of the Government was mentioned repeatedly. Lack of coordination is characteristic not only for the relationship between ministries and other administrative bodies, but also for the administrations within the ministries. The Government should recognize the need and insist on better coordination and connectivity of state administration bodies.

- **Recognition of the role of stakeholders**
  The successful interaction of all interested parties implies recognition of the role of stakeholders, which is a precondition for effective arrangements and implementation. In this interaction a balance must be ensured between a strict professional approach and the participation of all interested parties: the problems of sustainable development are of such a nature that the representatives of different and often also conflicting interests that see and experience the same problem in different ways have to talk at the same table.

- **The mobilization of all forces, inter-sectional cooperation and public participation in decision-making procedures**
  Successful implementation of sustainable development in Croatia requires the mobilization of all forces and capabilities - multiple and complex cooperation at all levels, interdisciplinary action and connections, "horizontal" and "vertical" coordination and involvement of all social groups (governmental bodies, professional institutions, economy, financial sector, pollutants, providers of special services, civil society organizations, media, citizens) with negotiation, decision-making and implementation.

  Inter-sectional cooperation in all questions of common interest is the only way to the meaningful realization of sustainable development, the use of common resources and potentials as well as the avoidance of overlaps.

  Often we encounter the mutual position that the state must and will solve the problems of its citizens. The change of such attitude and the involvement of the professional public and the citizens into the development, implementation and monitoring of regulations and plans is a challenge that requires effort and time, but ultimately yields good results and saves money.

  It is expected that the role of the citizen in sustainable development will increasingly manifest also through the role of consumer/user who is directly interested in the "sustainability" of products and/or services.

- **Motivating the economy**
  The economy should become an essential participant in the process of sustainable development. This involves economic incentives, the application of the most appropriate legal measures as well as the willingness of authorities to negotiate with the economy on the choice of the most effective solutions. On the other hand, independently of the government, a self-confident and successful economy is needed, able to publicly express and argue its goals and needs.

- **Sustainable development at local level**
It can be expected that the integrated approach, which involves active participation of all relevant actors in decision-making on issues of development, environment and social conditions, could be simplest and most effectively achieved in the small communities.

A special challenge is to devise the development in areas without sufficient vitality and initiative, and without economic prospects if searching for a traditional generator of development. Approaches that include restoration and preservation of tradition, care for natural resources, use of local resources and support of local capabilities, along with activation of specific incentives and international support could become a development model for such areas (e.g. approach LEADER).

- **Education and development of capacity for sustainable development**
  Although we often refer to the principles of sustainable development, fact is that these principles are little known to the general public as well as to experts, politicians, business people and teachers. Therefore, programs for strengthening the awareness and understanding of sustainable development should be developed at all levels, through formal and informal education.

- **International cooperation**
  Croatia has a long tradition of international cooperation in environmental protection and sustainable development. Additional progress is expected through the process of EU accession and adoption of the legal heritage and framework, but the real challenge will be the implementation of these regulations. Solving the problem of environmental protection and advocacy for sustainable development with other countries, for Croatia has a practical and immediate significance through the fact that external pollution significantly affects the state of its own environment.