

Our Common Present: Current Challenges of Central Europe

Conference abstracts

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<http://www.ecoology.org/nase-spolecna-pritomnost-2013>
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Tibor László Csegődi

Some additions to sustainable development in Visegrad countries – comparative analysis using HDI and environmental-energetic data

Many elements of Human Development Index of V4 Countries have been showing an upward trend since 1990s. In spite of this mostly positive tendency in human development, the sustainability of our development in V4 Countries is rather questionable. The imported fossil fuels play very important role in our everyday life (93.8% of total primary energy supply is from fossil fuels in Poland and almost 80 % in Hungary).

Firstly, it is a problem because naturally there is a statistically significant relationship between producing and using more and more energy and producing even greater greenhouse gas emission. According to Human Development Report 2011 in years 2001–2010 the population affected by natural disasters (annual average per million people) was 2098 in the Czech Republic, and 467 in Hungary. Some studies show that most of the news (about natural disasters) do not trace the connection between natural disasters and climate change. That is why in some Central European countries only half (or less) of the population feel that their overall life satisfaction is affected by global warming threat.

Secondly, energetic self-preservation is a growing problem in Hungary, also for households and local governments even though energy waste and poverty both typical for them. In recent years – as a result of governmental savings – a start of a strong debt spiral can be observed in local governments. This is just one reason to state that rural areas and local governments will have an important role in spreading environmentally conscious and energy efficient development methods. Rural development should contribute to the development of sustainable systems; it should rely on efficient use of local socio - economic - environmental resources. Only few Hungarian local governments employ energy and climate experts. They should also contact with authorities, and non-governmental organizations, residents, coordinate the work on climate change, monitor climate protection tender opportunities, prepare tender documents, and finally participate in the implementation of the projects. In order to the local governments are increasingly able to meet energy efficiency requirements during everyday management creating energy efficient operation of public buildings is essential. That is why it would be necessary to insert energy efficiency requirements into local governmental (relevant) legal provisions, so this important requirement appears in everyday practice too.

Bio

Csegődi Tibor László is Hungarian lawyer and economist working in Institute of Economic Law and Public Administration and doing his PhD at Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of Szent István University in Gödöllő. He is interested in regional economics and rural development.

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Eva Cudlínová

Green New Deal Strategy from Central European Perspective

A Green New Deal Report appeared as a response of economists and politicians to the global economic crises after the 2008. Gary Gardner and Michael Renner, senior researchers with the environmental research organization Worldwatch Institute, issued a detailed proposal what they are calling a "Global Green Deal." They presented their idea to the leaders of the G20 countries gather in Washington 2008. The Green New Deal includes policies and novel funding mechanisms and promise emissions contributing to climate change decline. Green New deal together with green economy seems to be the exclusive way for the future supporting green growth within the limits of our planet. A global green New Deal finally gained a worldwide support. We can find A Green New Deal for Europe as same as the Green New Deal for America. This paper will focus on the strategy of Green New Deal from the perspective of Central European countries. It will try to find the specific and common features of this part of Europe in comparison with the rest of EU countries.

Bio

Eva Cudlínová is Czech economist from Faculty of Economy, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. Her work is mostly focused on environmental and ecological economics, regional development and changes of rural landscape.

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Jana Dlouhá, Andrew Barton

Higher education and the challenge of sustainability – the Central European case

Higher education institutions in the countries of Central Europe over the past 23 years have faced multiple challenges associated with the transition to a post-communist society: liberalisation, the transformation to a market economy, growing numbers of students, and deep systemic changes related to the Bologna Process and inclusion within the European Higher Education Area. The driving force behind this development is the notion of a knowledge society in which the role of knowledge is supposed to bring about innovation in many fields and hence also economic benefits. SD-oriented requirements were introduced into the (higher) education system through the intervention of the global ESD community as well as bottom-up; and they were expressed in numerous general (European level) commitments, and national initiatives and strategies. SD in the education system represents a transitional force of similar strategic importance as economic stimuli, but with less effective measures taken at the national and international levels; since a systemic approach is still lacking, its incorporation depends mainly on personal commitment and other individual or institutional leadership factors. The article demonstrates the main principles of the SD-oriented HE transition and the trends in this field over the past 23 years as part of a comparative analysis of CE countries; it focuses on sustainability changes in HE and identifies predominantly similar tendencies in relation to the recent shared history of the region. It analyses obstacles towards SD, especially as a consequence of the incremental evolution of the role of authority, on-going communication patterns (related to interdisciplinary or multistakeholder perspective) and perception of quality in HE which is institutionalized by standardized criteria and governed by the state. The authors discuss these barriers towards the SD transition with regard to (the lack of) attention paid to participatory and democratic decision-making processes outside academia which provides an insufficient framework for the involvement of science in societal processes.

Bio

Jana Dlouhá is Czech researcher working in the Environment Centre of Charles University in Prague. She deals with environmental education, participatory methods in decision making and interdisciplinary approaches towards environmental issues.

Andrew Barton from New Zealand currently works as a researcher at the Environment Centre of Charles University in Prague. He has recently been involved in attempts to establish a Regional Centre for Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development in the Czech Republic.

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Anna Kalinowska

Biodiversity loss and public opinion – what is the pattern for Central Europe?

The increasing loss of biodiversity is one of the main challenges for Europe. It has serious consequences both for ethical reasons as well as economic and social stability. Are the EU citizens conscious of it? Is the level of knowledge about biodiversity and Natura 2000 in Central European countries different than in other EU countries? If so, what are the reasons for the differences? The presentation will try to answer these questions.

Bio

Anna Kalinowska is Polish researcher and Director of the Centre for Environmental Study of University of Warsaw for teaching and research on sustainable development. Her professional career covered also governmental appointments and positions, e.g. in the Ministry of Environment. She has been actively involved in several national and international institutions, advisory committees and NGOs, like REC, CCMS/ NATO, or The World Conservation Union (IUCN).

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Agriculture and rural areas, and their role in modern society – some critical questions

Is agriculture an economic sector like any other? What is the role of agriculture in rural development, and in modern society? What is the meaning of 'agricultural development' and 'farm modernization' in a world of increasing demands and finite resources? There is an increased need to explore the future of (European) agriculture at a time when it must respond to increasing scarcity and distributional questions e.g. related to natural resources and public finances, while facing deep uncertainty regarding future developments, such as those related to climate change.

The last decades have seen a concentration of agricultural production and polarisation of agricultural structures in Europe. Given the increasing demands for a more balanced regional development, both the intensification of agriculture in favourable areas and the simultaneous desertification of marginal areas are problematic (e.g. abandonment of cattle farming in mountainous grassland areas, desertification of vast farming areas in southern European countries). Factors that will influence the future of European agriculture include likely demographic changes, the further development of food (value) chains, anticipated trends and perspectives in biotechnology, biomass energy and bio-based products, and issues revolving around the environmental impacts of farming systems. This all happens in a context of climatic change with changing preconditions for agriculture. Other challenges are the declining resources of critical input factors for contemporary industrialized agriculture. Deteriorating soil fertility, dropping groundwater tables and degradation of biological diversity in intensive arable farming areas reduce the resilience of high input agriculture. 'Business as usual' is no longer an option.

How can we advance the relationships between rural areas, agriculture and urban centres in a way that increases overall resilience? Why does agriculture provide a unique entry point into the idea of system resilience? Using a systems approach, and resilience thinking, one can analyse sustainable farming in terms of the interdependence of social and ecological systems. Biological diversity, for example, is crucial for rural viability and agricultural activities. The presentation will emphasize the multifunctionality of rural areas, the central role of farming in the provision of public goods and the transformation of public goods in the rural economy – making the connection with the wider societal and policy goal of vibrant rural areas. The idea of the so-called Knowledge-Based-Bio-Economy goes far beyond that. It could support very significantly the greening of economies – if we get it right.

Future research needs to help address conflicting societal goals and to help realize synergies in more integrative development strategies. Researchers need to adopt a 'wider' view, explicitly recognizing the complexity of challenges, the diversity in situations and the multidimensionality of strategies and ways forward. Policy frameworks need to address the context-dependency and diversity of development trajectories both at farm and at regional level. Simplification and blue-prints won't work. Interrelationships and understanding interrelated change dynamics are critically important. Researchers will need to push methodological boundaries in order to help overcome long-established, simplistic viewpoints – for example of the 'development' of agriculture. There is a lot to be learned from

practitioners as well as alternative grassroots movements. The social sciences and transdisciplinary approaches are very important in this respect.

Bio

Karlheinz Knickel is an independent analyst and consultant with more than twenty years' experience working with major institutions and decision-makers at national and international levels. Key focus areas in his work are the sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas, the transition towards resource-efficient low carbon economies and the related networks, policies and innovation processes. Karlheinz enjoys constructive dialogue, connecting different agendas, crossing disciplinary boundaries and cross-cutting analysis.

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Katarína Kohányiová

Complementary currencies – Hungarian experience

In the context of economic crises, the topic of complementary currencies is discussed in the academic literature, as well as in the media. To date, well over 5000 complementary currency systems have been established worldwide ranging from small neighbour exchange circles to large-scale systems. The major distinctive features of these currency systems are: their civil society implementation, geographical bounding, democratic operation, citizen engagement, and intention to redefine money in a participative process. There are various aspects of their operation to be examined: context of their development, their classifications, operation and examples. The concept itself is familiar in the Central European context as well. There are many ongoing initiatives. The Hungarian project of the town of Sopron – Kékfrank complementary currency – has arisen from the same historical and political context, so it has been picked as a relevant example to demonstrate the wider impact of complementary currency operation in the Central Europe. Kékfrank has been set up as a tool to boost the local economy. Its operation and consequences of its establishment will be presented, with a focus on identifying its successes and challenges in order to explore whether it brings expected results.

Bio

Katarina Kohanyiová is an Environmental Humanities graduate with an experience with community projects in Slovakia, Czech Republic and the UK. She is a co-founder of a community garden in Olomouc aiming to get people growing herbs and vegetables in their local community, and develop understanding of the broader environmental, cultural and economic aspects of sustainable food production.

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Peter Morée

The image of religion in the public discourse in the Czech Republic

In this paper we examine the reasons why religion has such a problematical image in the current public discourse in the Czech Republic. A comparison to neighbouring countries shows, that the Czech situation is rather an anomaly. Where does this negative image come from and why is it presented as a part of Czech identity, which has its focal point in priest Jan Hus? What are the societal consequences of this low public status of religion? And what can be done to change this situation?

Bio

Peter Morée was born in the Netherlands, but lives for many years in the Czech Republic, where he teaches at Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague and Council on International Educational Exchange. He focuses on the history of religion and nationalism.

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Bernhard Schneider

**Particularities of the Central European scientific community in a nutshell –
from the viewpoint of a project evaluator**

Particularities of the CE scientific community are presented and described in a SWOT matrix in a nutshell – from the viewpoint of a project evaluator with 7 years of ex-ante evaluation of more than 220 trans-national research and development proposals, most of them designed by teams made up of partners from various CE countries. These projects covered the range of energy, transportation & climate policy, sustainable regional development, nature & landscape preservation, disaster prevention, and exchange of excellent individual scientists. In a second part, there will be some reflection on experience from practical work in expert teams from all across CE, including perceptions on the efficiency of work, ethics, social climate, discussion culture, gender issues, work-life balance, brain drain, fluctuation & staff recruitment, coping with growing degree of legal regulation, tension between growing market orientation and islands of imperial heritage.

The third issue of this contribution is the author's perception of a change in the selection of elites within CE. The current Central European climate is not very suitable for the growth and the support of outstanding personalities. This is astounding, because Central Europe used to be a globally meaningful net exporter of intellectual brilliance. The hypothesis that the area of CE is on its way from intellectual to economic elites will be presented for discussion.

Bio

Bernhard Schneider is an Austrian consulting engineer for spatial planning and development with an expertise on technology, ecology and economy, planning and consultancy for regional development projects, project manager of European projects, evaluator for European grant programs and teacher at the University of Applied Science Joanneum Graz.

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