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"ECOLOGISATION OF THE DANUBE REGION"

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1 INTRODUCTION

The longest river of Europe, the Danube, connects within it's neighbouring states, different cultures, religions and languages. The Danube region is a political and geographical definition which includes cultural and ecological dimensions. The metaphoric aspect of the Danube region is most of all an ecological one as *F. Schindegger* points out and he suggests that regional development could help to connect these various dimensions. (SCHINDEGGER: 1999a)

Since the fall of the Iron curtain in 1990 the regional development of Eastern Austria was forced to change in relation to the new circumstances. After a euphoric beginning the cooperation between countries weakened. These changes were described in various studies. (SCHREMMER: 1992, PELINKA: 1996) They pointed out political, administrative and economical differences between east and west. On the other hand we find a much more optimistic view of the future within the reform countries. (IVANICKA: 1995)

From the very beginning, after the silent revolution, good contacts in central Europe started on behalf of ecological reasons. The political transformation in 1989 offered the chance to make the growing of a common multicultural identity, which includes the protection of nature and sustainable development of the Central Danube Region. (POLITISCHE ÖKOLOGIE: 1990)

2 WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS

The list of environmental damage is endless, from the depleted soils of the cornbelt to the vast industrial disaster zones. Our cities, built on only two percent of the world's land surface, use 75 per cent of the world's resources and discharge similar amounts of waste. Cities sprawl outwards along urban motorways, whilst their centre is often devoided. For cities to be ecologically viable their functioning needs to be rethought and reorganized. But in cities with a circular metabolism every output can also be used as an input into the production system. (SCHARMER: 1996)

We believe that most of the outstanding problems in our time are problems caused by our thinking. This leads us to the central question of what learning really is? It is not only gaining knowledge, much more important is obtaining a better quality to use this knowledge. The creation of knowledge certainly involves interaction between two kinds of learning.

The first kind of learning is obtaining "**know how**" in order to solve specific problems based upon existing premises. This kind of learning has helped us to survive.
The second kind of learning is establishing **new premises** (paradigms, schemata, mental models, or perspectives) to override the existing ones. Of course its a necessity to know about both kinds of knowledge.

This includes the process of constant communication, learning together with others, developing key qualities, like systems approach and project management, to create optimistic visions of the future in a constant team dialog.

3 ECOLOGISATION OF THE DANUBE REGION

The program Ecologisation of the Danube region offers the chance to realize a transdisciplinary approach within social economic, technological and human science structures, to implement it within the political- administrative system. An elaboration of strategies for improving cooperation of city councils and universities will be established to improve landscape managing and open space issues along the Danube. Ecologisation means to establish sustainable development issues as a progressive task within all political levels.

The ecologisation of the social development means to introduce principles of ecology, environmental protection and education into all areas of social progression. Consequently a verbal formulation of an independent ecological policy has to be established and has to be accepted by the entire society. Ruzicka suggested that “the expert of ecology and environmentalistics must have a broad interdisciplinary education and the ability to think creatively. This problem requires changing the system of passive receiving knowledge to active access in its gaining and appropriation” (RUZICKA: 1995, p.145-151).

From a systematic view, it can be said that ecological policy must guide the level of ecological awareness of society, enforce ecological ideas in legislation and economics, guide the strategy of space organization and land-use, as well as influence the technological activities. MIKLOS: 1995, p.201) “Condensed to one sentence, ecologisation means shaping our interaction with the environment in an intellectual, material, spatial, social and emotional sense to achieve a lasting/sustainable quality of living for all.” (POSCH:1997)

4 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The word sustainability has become a kind of a mantra for the 1990s. The sustainability movement offers a holistic response to the environmental crisis that makes connections between nature, culture, values, power relationships and technology. The World Commission on Environment and Development presented the highly influential report “Our Common Future” in 1987. According to the report “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (VAN DER RYN: 1996)

On reading “Our Common Future” more carefully, we find that sustainability is to be attained by more rapid economic growth, freer market access, lower interest rates, and greater technology transfer. On the one hand, sustainability is the province of global

policy makers and environmental experts, flying at thirty-five thousand feet from conference to conference. On the other hand, sustainability is also the domain of people committed to changing their own communities or indigenous people preserving traditional practices. In contrast ecological sustainability requires limits to technology, limits to the stress (factors) placed on the biosphere and reducing material flows.

If we define **design** as a hinge that inevitably connects culture and nature through exchanges of materials, flows of energy etc., we can see the architect building a skyscraper counts as valid knowledge, while the equally sophisticated information needed to grow food without pesticides is signified as an idealistic grass root philosophy.

5 STRATEGIES FOR OUR COMMON FUTURE

Planning is a decision making process of making choices among the options that appear open to the future. In this political process we have to make people aware of the consequences of certain actions. “From socio-psychological research on attitudes it has long been recognized that there is often a very weak correlation between values and attitudes on the one hand and actual behaviour on the other.” (ANNUAL EXPERTISE, 1993, pp. 181-182) Any change has to have a deep insight as a basis of changing needs. If we convince people within this process, that any positive change achieves a higher quality of life for the region and the people, we will gain a transformation.

Planning tries to intervene in this complex process so that it comes to changes in our environment. These can be reached by developing strategies that lead to a change in behaviour. All process orientated changes require a principal understanding of the necessity for the changes. Only if mankind understands that these changes have a positive effect on the quality of their own lives as well a on their regions, changes will be possible.

6 GOOD PRACTICES FOR A SUSTAINABLE LIVING

The crisis of the present could have an effect for the turning point of our old ways of thinking in science, economy and policy. This means that mental models of the future depend not only on one paradigm, it could be a dialog between different paradigms. Society as a “learning organisation” is based on discovering “common ground” and imagining ideal futures, to improve planning within all sectors of business, government, education and labour. (WEISBORD: 1993)

But that means we have to adjust a program for a comprehensive project management according to “planning for real”, research management at our universities including more practical issues for a “learning for real” and finally transforming the results within an economy of the quaternary sector by “working for real”.

Society and economy can develop positively in the long term only if the surrounding natural environment is taken into consideration.

First “**Planning for real**” means, that all the participants are involved within this ever changing process to protect the old remains of the natural landscape and to nurture the land under cultivation.

The Territorial System of Ecological Stability in the Slovak republic gives an example as to how nature and environmental interests can find their way into regional planning. Environmental protection is taken into account by the country-wide network of bio-corridors and islands. While the Territorial System of Ecological Stability does not prevent the planning of new industrial or residential areas, it makes it possible to choose a site that will be as environmentally-friendly as possible.

In accordance with the Slovak system some transdisciplinary projects should be worked out under the title “Ecologisation of the Danube Region”.

The application of nature and environmental measures (integral water management) demands concrete action and application on the project level, with intense community involvement and the development of environmental consciousness on the part of the population.

Second “**Learning for real**“ means, the university will be the heart of a learning organisation, as a dialog arena and research laboratory for all actors within our society. This kind of communication will generate new qualities within the planning process.

The entire Danube basin has been analysed in a research project spanning several years under the aegis of the United nations Development Programme. This study has highlighted individual “hot spots” –areas with a particularly negative effect on adjoining rivers – as well as areas in the entire Danube basin that are worthy of protection.

Finally “**Working for real**“ is pointing out agriculture as a future orientated discipline, which enables an ecological sustainable development in economy. The development of a sustainable agriculture is also a declared goal of the EU policy.

That means: “Replacement of the production- or mass related subsidies by paying quality achievements in nature- and landscape protection. This kind of change over would lead subsidies to where they belong, the landlords, would give ecologically sensible incentives, and the problem of the surplus millions, that have been bought and stored would be off the table almost by itself.” (SCHARMER: 1996, p.378)

To expose the initial meaning of economy and ecology Scharmer suggests the ecology of the “**quaternary Sectors**“ as a means for sustainability. Compared to production and circulation related services of the tertiary sectors, the “quaternary Sector” includes all those measures that deal with landscape protection and -management, reproduction and education of man and nature.
The University of Agricultural Sciences, Institute of Landscape Architecture and Landscape management is currently working out some transdisciplinary projects under the program title “Ecologisation of the Danube region”. The idea of the BRIDGE project “Lifeline Danube” is to intensify city partnership for cities along the Danube and to initiate this co-operative spatial planning process among the universities and city planning departments. Expected results are to initiate a common language for spatial planning from an organisational and political point of view between universities and city councils.

7 LITERATURE

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