

## COURSE NEWS

### *In Gear* goes online

This will be the last issue of our alumni newsletter, *In Gear*. We would like to thank all our readers for their interest and contributions. In the 12 issues we have covered regional sustainability-related news, shared updates from course graduates and kept readers informed about course developments. *In Gear* has addressed an expanding network of sustainability experts in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. We now invite readers to keep in touch through the new Course for Sustainability website <[www.sustainabilityseminars.info](http://www.sustainabilityseminars.info)> and through the REC's new on-line magazine, *Green Horizon Online* <[www.greenhorizon-online.com](http://www.greenhorizon-online.com)>.

### REC magazine online

*Green Horizon Online*, the environmental magazine of the Regional Environmental Center, provides regional environmental news, in-depth analysis of topical issues, and interviews revealing fresh perspectives on the region's environmental concerns. Course for Sustainability alumni will receive complementary subscriptions to [www.greenhorizon-online.com](http://www.greenhorizon-online.com) enabling them to keep abreast of sustainable development and environmental issues in the region.

## Is this sustainable development?



**GOOD NAVIGATION:** Parts of the Course for Sustainability are held in Venice.

By **Stefania Romano**

Sustainable development and environmental protection are priority goals for governments worldwide. The concept of sustainable development embraces a number of interrelated global issues such as poverty, inequality, hunger and environmental degradation. According to the Brundtland Report (1987), "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

In our turbulent, high-speed world, how can we contribute to meeting today's economic needs without jeopardising the wellbeing of future generations?

While improved energy efficiency and the increased use of renewable energy sources are essential to the achievement of these goals at governmental level, raising public awareness of the importance of sound resources management is also indispensable.

Since 2003, the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), in partnership with the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS) and with academic institutions and representatives of the private sector, has organised the Course for Sustainability, an educational programme for senior officials and business representatives in Central and Eastern Europe and in Central Asia.

The Course for Sustainability programme was established in response to a clear need for capacity building through education. Its aim is to raise awareness of how to achieve development while respecting the environment and ensuring social justice.

Countries acting individually are unable to tackle global threats — they must learn from each other's experiences and practice, and raise the level of understanding, expertise and cooperation in the international community.

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## COURSE NEWS



## Launch of Local Sustainability and Action Course

With the support of the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS), the first Course for Local Sustainability and Action was held at the Venice International University on San Servolo island between November 2 and 9, 2008. It drew 35 representatives from local communities, national governments, municipal associations, regional authorities, international organisations, NGOs and the business community from South East Europe (SEE), the Visegrad countries and Central Asia. This was the first capacity- and skills-building programme providing assistance not just at national level but to local communities and a variety of stakeholder groups.

## Central Asia participants

In addition to participants from SEE and EU countries, the Course for Local Sustainability and Action welcomed three Central Asian participants from local and regional governments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Issyk-Kul oblast administration; Sogd regional financial department, Khujant city; and Astana municipality), who valued the opportunity to exchange experience with their European colleagues.

## Course website

The Course for Sustainability website will host news and information on forthcoming courses, application procedures and other related events. Please add this to your bookmarks: <[www.sustainabilityseminars.info](http://www.sustainabilityseminars.info)>.

## Is this sustainable development? (continued from previous page)

The mission of the programme is to develop capacity building into a global tool that reaches wider geographical and social target groups. During the first few years, the Course for Sustainability targeted senior government officials from a range of ministries and institutions in Central and Eastern Europe. Over the years, the programme has evolved and sustainability courses have also been developed for businesses and local authorities. The course has now had seven iterations and the geographical area has expanded from Central and Eastern Europe to the Black Sea countries, South East Europe (SEE) and Kazakhstan.

The most recent course, the Course for Local Sustainability and Action, focused on sustainable development and environmental planning and investments and was designed specifically for local and national stakeholders from the capital cities of beneficiary countries — Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia and Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244). The training course took place between November 2 and 9, 2008 at the Venice International University (VIU), an international centre of higher education and research. The 35 participants were selected from local communities, national governments, associations of municipalities and towns, regional authorities, NGOs and the business community. Also, representatives of local authorities from Central Asia (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) were invited and had the opportunity to exchange experiences and practices as well as to network with their European colleagues.

The course was built on the idea of encouraging the sharing of experiences, particularly from representatives of EU member states to their colleagues from SEE countries, providing useful curricula and offering high-level lectures delivered by renowned experts and professors. Platforms for discussion were created paving the way for future cooperation through the alumni network.

Since many of the South Eastern and Central European countries joined the EU, international support has weakened, although environmental problems demand

recognition and need to be placed high on the political agenda. Moreover, corruption in the administration, political inefficiency and social injustice remain fundamental challenges; the negative effects of 50 years of planned economy in the former communist bloc are still apparent, and the countries face difficulties in ensuring democratic growth and development.

The participation of citizens and communities in sustainable development is central. Local authorities play a key role in getting communities more involved by encouraging debate and by including citizens in local decision making. The integration of social, economic and environmental objectives into action at the local level helps communities avoid conflict and maximise benefits. National associations of local authorities are pivotal in communicating and disseminating information among municipalities, interlinking international processes and partners.

This is the result of the Course for Local Sustainability and Action, which was characterised by lively interactions among participants. Participants were genuinely inspired: on their own initiative they drafted a letter from Friends for Sustainable Development, committing themselves to cooperation in this field.

This example illustrates how the sustainability courses are a truly international effort to help train key stakeholders (public and private) to tackle environmental problems in the region, in their own countries and globally.

However, much remains to be done. Closer international cooperation is needed in order to solve environmental and social problems and tackle the impacts of natural and human-made disasters. The actions, behaviour and policies of today will determine the world of tomorrow. Governments need to reaffirm their joint commitment to reducing pollution and ending the overexploitation of the planet's natural resources. The international community needs to contribute effectively and in a coordinated manner in guiding the future towards sustainable development. Local communities need to see for themselves how their efforts can facilitate the common task to be undertaken. Sharing responsibility is harder than apportioning blame. Yet with concerted effort, the beauty and wealth of our planet will remain to be enjoyed by both present and future generations.



# Time for reflection

By Kliment Mindjov

To conclude the series of Course for Sustainability alumni magazines, I would like to ask you to take a moment to reflect on your country's awareness of environmental protection and sustainable development. The way people think of sustainability challenges can be grouped under four main headings, listed below and elaborated in bullet points. Your level of agreement with the bullet-point statements will give you a picture of which camp you identify with most closely. It will also give an indication of the current status of your country and the needs for policy development and awareness raising on certain sustainability development issues. It is hoped that the following four themes will inspire input to further thinking and action planning.

## Pollution and degradation

- Environmental problems are believed to consist mainly of pollution and environmental degradation that threaten human health and welfare.
- Each problem can be solved by waiting until it becomes big enough, then using legal, technological and economic means either to control or clean up the pollution, or to prevent further environmental degradation.

- It is assumed that growth-orientated technological societies can continue indefinitely.

## Population and consumption

- The causes of pollution, environmental degradation and resource depletion are seen as a combination of overpopulation in poor countries and overconsumption in rich countries.
- The most environmentally damaging populations live in industrialised societies with high rates of resource consumption and waste generation.
- A solution to these problems can be found by: a) stabilising, then reducing populations in all countries; and b) by reducing the wasteful consumption of raw materials and energy resources (rich countries consume 80 percent of the world's resources).

## Global management

- New technologies and existing economic and political systems have to be used to control population growth, pollution and resource depletion in order to prevent

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## Hristina Brogli

Course alumnus Hristina Brogli, formerly of Bulgaria's Ministry of Finance, has moved to Dargaville, New Zealand. She works at the Kaipara District Council as a policy planner.

Hristina says, "Kaipara is a great place to live and work — alive with culture, character, charm and beauty. The fabulous coastlines, rolling hills and picturesque towns create a wonderful lifestyle."

Hristina is working as a project manager on the Long-Term Council Community Plan 2009-2019 and says she is proud to be involved with such a hard-working council and to be making a difference in the district. More information about the plan can be found on [www.kaipara.govt.nz](http://www.kaipara.govt.nz).

She is eager to stay in contact with other course alumni, and to find a way to work or study together. Her email is [hbrogli@kaipara.govt.nz](mailto:hbrogli@kaipara.govt.nz).



## CLASS SNAPS



## Desanka Ugrinovska

Desanka attended the Course for Sustainability in 2006 and now works at the Science Department of the Macedonian Ministry of Education and Science on a few European Environmental Education projects.

She has concluded her PhD at the Institute of Pedagogy at St. Cyrillus and Methodius University in Skopje. The title of her dissertation is "Sustainable Development of the Eco-pedagogical Aspect of Primary Education."

For her research, Desanka compared primary school curricula of Norway, Finland and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as well as the strategic development and implementation of education for sustainable development in the countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Baltic region, and in Finland and Norway. Among the highlights of the research were interviews with 82 primary school teachers from five primary schools in Skopje on sustainable development in primary education.



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## A time for reflection (continued from previous page)

environmental overload. This should be done in a synchronised way throughout the world.

- The Earth is viewed as a system that we have the capacity and duty to control and manage, mostly in the interests of the human population, by the use of advanced technologies.
- There are no limits either to the Earth's resources or to our ability to overcome any environmental or resource problem by technological innovations.

## Earth wisdom

- Our survival and our economies are viewed as being totally dependent on the Earth's natural processes driven by inputs of energy from the sun.
- To have sustainable human societies, we must learn as much as we can about how the Earth sustains itself.
- Based on this knowledge, we should work with the planet's natural

processes so as not to degrade or destroy Earth's biodiversity and ecological integrity.

Each of these views has different sorts of adherents. The "Pollution and Degradation" statements describe the prevailing view in developing countries facing basic environmental problems such as poor sanitation and scarcity of potable water.

The "Population and Consumption" view guides the work of the world's main global environmental and development organisations and NGOs.

The "Global Management" outlook is more technocratic in nature and espoused by decision makers in industrialised countries such as the United States.

The "Earth Wisdom" view has roots in a philosophy described by the Native American leader, Chief Seattle, and shared by other indigenous people around the world as well as ecology-focussed scientists. It's a view that sees humankind as an interdependent part of nature, not as its center.

## IN GEAR

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**IN GEAR**, the alumni newsletter of the Course for Sustainability, seeks to build and nurture a network of civil servants and other experts dedicated to implementing the principles of sustainable development in Central and Eastern Europe. It does this by covering

regionally relevant news in the field of sustainable development, reporting on how course graduates put their expertise in sustainability to use, and carrying updates on current and future sessions of the course.

The Course for Sustainability project

team wishes to thank the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea for their continued commitment to both the Course for Sustainability and its alumni network.

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