Course on Local Sustainability and Action II

The two-phase Course on Local Sustainability and Action will be held at Venice International University (VIU), San Servolo, Venice, Italy from Sept. 27–Oct. 3, 2009, and at the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) in Szentendre, Hungary (Oct. 4–7, 2009).

Participants will include about 40 representatives from national governments, local and regional administrations, local and regional development organisations, and NGOs from 11 beneficiary countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo (as defined under UNSCR 1244), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia.

The Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS) funds the course and the REC, VIU and Agroinnova present it.

With lectures, workshops and interactive seminars, the course is divided into two segments: the first (Italy) will cover sustainable cities (urban waste- and water management and climate change), while the second (Hungary) will focus on practical approaches to sustainable development.

Participants will discuss a number of selected topics, and have the opportunity to present local case studies. Interaction with lecturers will be encouraged. Plenary sessions at the beginning and end of this course will sum up round-up discussions.

Course staff members have been selected for their research-intensive backgrounds and extensive practical experience. The various experts will share practical case studies covering a wide range of thematic areas.

For further information, contact Tamara Nikolic at tnikolic@rec.org.

Course participants put actions into words

By Nathan Johnson

Those who participated in the May 2009 Course for Sustainability in Montenegro were asked to share their written thoughts on how best to apply sustainable development principles in their everyday professional practice. The responses — generous, detailed and overwhelmingly positive — come from a wide variety of disciplines covering a broad range of issues. Multiplicity of engagement is an important clue to understanding the integrative nature of the sustainable development concept, as the few examples offered below will hopefully make clear.

Education and tourism

Tkon, a town of just over 700 inhabitants, lies on the Croatian island of Pasman. The population derives most of its income from fishing, fish farming and tourism. Danijel Katicin is working to establish a “sustainable development library and school” in the small island community.

The specific objective of the project is to “improve living conditions for the local population by enriching their social life, to support the tourist development initiative, and to attract environmental studies researchers,” writes Katicin.

“The school will host approximately 240 students during the three-month summer season,” Katicin explains. “During the off-season, the school and library will offer one class per month with a slightly different programme.”

Katicin claims that the municipality has the means “to finance, operate, monitor and promote the project during its whole life,” and believes in the need to draft “a monitoring and sustainable development plan detailing initial and ongoing activities needed to promote the project.”

Building Momentum: The concept of sustainability is crucial in striking a balance between developmental demand and environmental needs.
Illegal construction poses challenge for Albanian alumnus

While the world faces an oil challenge today, one of tomorrow’s greatest challenges will involve meeting water-related needs. Water is already a round-the-clock concern in Vlora, Albania, where illegally constructed houses around the “cold water” reservoir threaten the quality of water supply to more than 1 million people.

This presents a major professional challenge to Course for Sustainability alumnus Klārīda Tāflāj, an environmental specialist for Vlora Municipality. One of her ongoing tasks is to supervise the implementation of a EUR 26 million, Dutch government-funded water supply rehabilitation project. “One of my key concerns is the proximity of illegal constructions to reservoir springheads,” she said. “This construction — much of it involving houses built shortly after the collapse of Albania’s communist regime — has the potential to seriously undermine the project’s effectiveness.”

Unregulated discharges of septic-tank waste and contaminated water into the springhead zone are a serious threat for many people, and Tāflāj meets regularly with local government institutions, particularly with the Vlora Public Health Directorate, to address this issue.

“In order to tackle this and other urban problems, my city needs a sustainable-development programme,” Tāflāj said.

Course participants put words into action (continued from previous page)

Renewables and energy efficiency

“If the irrational use of fossil fuels continues, the world will face enormous environmental problems — primarily drastic changes in climate,” writes Edin Zahirović from the Centre for Development and Support, based in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. “The energy needs of mankind can be met with renewable energy sources and by utilising energy efficiency.”

Outdated industry, congested traffic and other factors combine to make Tuzla one of the most polluted cities in the country. Zahirović’s organisation is currently implementing sustainable-development activities to “reduce urban pollution and create better living conditions.” The Centre facilitates the use of waste oil for driving fuel and bio-diesel fuel for the public transport system, and also collects waste oil that would otherwise be dumped illegally.

Vast forest reserves offer Bosnia and Herzegovina enormous biomass potential, and some estimates put the country’s solar energy production potential at 70 million gigawatt hours, according to Zahirović. And while there is reason to be optimistic about the future of renewables, Bosnian homes are among Europe’s least energy-efficient, as many of them lack thermal insulation. The Centre’s project aims at “promoting energy efficiency in individual homes to decrease CO₂ emissions” and to bring them up to the European average.

“Renewable energy sources and energy efficiency are ideal examples of application of the sustainable development concept,” Zahirović concludes.

Urban development and politics

Csilla Cserti is a trained economist and works as an urban planner for Nagykanizsa Municipality, Hungary. She is mostly involved with preparing and realising projects financed by the EU or national government.

Acknowledging “huge competition among towns nowadays for capital,” Cserti asserts that “urban development should always be based on a strategy which reflects long-term goals.” She also believes that “sustainability is a way of thinking which can determine your life, your decisions and your behaviour.”

One of the greatest obstacles to progressive urban planning, however, is the political cycle. “Politicians often think that life starts all over again every four years — that is, after elections,” says Cserti. “The situation is even worse when there is a change of government, because former decisions are always called into question. Considering the importance of sustainability, my responsibility is to explain that development strategies are not groundless ideas, but well-thought-out visions of the future.”

Cserti understands that it’s not her job to monitor CO₂ emissions or take water samples, but takes on the equally important role of “explaining to decision makers or colleagues how our job meets sustainable development principles, and how our decisions can influence the overall well-being of our common world.”

Economic development and corporate social responsibility

“Market mechanisms do not operate effectively to conserve natural capital, but tend to deplete and degrade it,” writes Violeta Jovanovic, executive director of the Belgrade-based National Alliance for Local Economic Development (NALED). Established in 2006, as a non-profit organisation, NALED brings together all three sectors of society and supports the development of local communities and “enables its members to understand the essence of good governance as a prerequisite to sustainable development,” Jovanovic explains.

Looking to avoid sector imbalances and overexploitation of renewable resources, NALED endeavours to establish and advance the corporate social responsibility concept in Serbia.

“Local communities and stakeholders must offer a high standard of products and services in order to preserve current values for future generations,” Jovanovic concludes. “Social equity, the fulfillment of basic health and educational needs, and participatory democracy are crucial elements of development, and are interrelated with environmental sustainability.”
Montenegro hosts Course

May training links economy, society & environment

By Tamara Nikolic

With generous support from the Netherlands Ministry for Development Cooperation, the REC organised the Course on Sustainable Development: Good Governance, held in Budva, Montenegro on May 24–31. During the week-long event, 79 mid-level officials representing national, local and regional administrative bodies, as well as NGOs, given an opportunity to discuss principles and pillars of sustainable development and good governance.

Targeted invitees were officials from South-Eastern Europe (SEE) — primarily those from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244). The REC also attracted representatives from Croatia and other participants from Visegrad Group countries (i.e. Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

The main goal of the course was to build capacities of national and local stakeholders from partner countries to achieve good environmental governance and sustainable development in a cross-border context. The course curriculum focused on theoretical concepts of the sustainable development paradigm, and also on existing policy and regulatory conditions in the home countries of training recipients.

Also introduced were the three main pillars of sustainable development: economy, society and the environment. Participants learned that linking these pillars must be carried out through sustainable development strategies at international, national and local levels of governance. These ideas reflect the fact that countries need to implement a great deal of work at both national and local levels — regardless of whether the country in question is deemed to be ‘developing,’ ‘in transition’ or ‘developed’.

The Course on Sustainable Development: Good Governance aimed at providing useful curricula and offering high-level lectures delivered by professors, experts and professionals from renowned institutions and universities such as the OECD, ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), Sustainable Society Foundation, Paris Institute of Political Sciences, NALAS (Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-Eastern Europe), Development Organisation from the Hague, the OSCE, University of Nis, University of Pennsylvania, and many others.

CLASS SNAPS

Dragana Atanaskovic

Having long held great interest in developing local-level sustainable development policies and strategies, Course for Sustainability alumnus Dragana Atanaskovic now works in Cuprija Municipality for the Department for Strategic and Economic Development.

An expert in economic development, Atanaskovic believes that the most effective way to solve environmental problems in central Serbia and the greater region as a whole is “to work on self-education, to acquire new knowledge and experience, and to educate others.”

Dragana would like to stay in touch with other course participants, and can be reached at either <kler@cuprija.rs> or <dragana_atanaskovic@yahoo.com>.

Vera Mirkovic

Course for Sustainability alumnus Vera Mirkovic is keeping very busy these days. The Niksic, Montenegr resident heads the Service for the Protection of Environment in her hometown, and is also pursuing postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Biology in the Montenegrin capital of Podgorica.

In addition to looking after the natural surroundings, Vera divides remaining time between collaborating with citizens and NGOs in the field of environment protection, and cooperating with other local and national services and organisations.

Vera prefers to put her solid organisational skills to work in a team setting, and has participated in or been a member of LEAP Niksic, Council for Protection and Environment (Niksic); CEHAP Montenegro, Agency for Protection of Environment and the Green Agenda project’s Cultural and Historical Values component.

Get in touch with Vera at either: <mirkovicvera@yahoo.com> or <eko_opstinank@cg.yu>.

A WEEK TO REMEMBER: The ‘Good Governance’ course provided valuable tools for enhancing cross-border cooperation.
**Daniela Kostadinova Petrovic**

Course alumnus Daniela Kostadinova Petrovic had the honor of speaking in August at the Fourth Annual Conference of the Green Economics Institute, held at Oxford University. There, she stressed the importance of undertaking local actions in order to achieve a global green transformation. Petrovic, a native of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, works for GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) in Belgrade as a manager of the Municipal Economic Development in the Danube Region project. She supports economic planning for four partner municipalities in eastern Serbia. "Economic growth makes sense only if natural resources are preserved, as well," she says.

Contact Dani at: daniela.kostadinova@gtz.de

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**On the autumn horizon**

For more news on sustainable development and other items of regional import, visit **Green Horizon Online**, the REC’s flagship news and information website.

Look for articles this fall on the revived nuclear energy debate in Europe, living with day-to-day industrial pollution in Kosovo (under UNSCR 1244), and efforts to draft progressive packaging waste legislation in Hungary.

These and regular features, columns, interviews, and REC bulletins, are at <greenhorizon-online.com>.

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**Pioneering principles**

In May, Zumreta Jahic of the Dutch Embassy in Belgrade opened the Course for Sustainability: Good Governance, in Montenegro. Here are some excerpts from her speech.

We live in an age of rapid change that is having a major impact on our daily lives. Globalisation is making the world both smaller and richer. People, companies and countries are seizing the opportunities presented to them by new technologies, the division of labour, and demand for new products. Global wealth has grown to unknown proportions, but not everyone has an equal chance of sharing in that wealth or of making their voice heard.

And not all growth is equally sustainable. The guiding principles of sustainable development could be summed up in the simple sentence: “We want to achieve our goals of living within environmental limits and a just society, and we will do it by means of a sustainable economy, good governance, and sound science.” We should recognise that people and the environment come first, but we need other principles too if we are to achieve our goals. Not just the familiar “third pillar” of a strong and sustainable economy, but also good governance — both at national and local levels. And sound science: basing things like the planning system and, indeed, our own policy processes ever more firmly on an evidence-based approach.

It is also important to address the “four E’s” as a way of securing change: Enable, Engage, Exemplify, Encourage. This introduces a broader concept than traditional regulatory approaches by themselves. Partnerships, long-term strategy, incentives, regulatory frameworks, support for technology and information: all of the four E’s are vital and part of our work in this area.

The Netherlands’ development policy has been focused on fleshing out and translating policies into action concerning all of the previous, both towards guiding principles of sustainable development and securing change in South-Eastern Europe.

I have had the privilege of visiting numerous institutions and communities across South Eastern Europe and meeting dedicated professionals who incorporate principles of sustainable development in their daily work. These women and men are pioneering the process of bringing about much-needed developmental change in the countries of the Balkan Peninsula.

The aim of this training is to produce more such people. I hope that this important regional training on sustainable development will be another success story in working together for a common cause.

Jahic is first secretary and coordinator of the Regional Programme on Environment for the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Belgrade, Serbia