

Name of Exercise: Programme of Environmental Protection for the City of Chelm for the years 2000-2010

Location: The City of Chelm

Participation Exercise under which Article? *Article 7 and Capacity Building*

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

To develop an environmental protection programme for the city, involving its inhabitants in the planning and decision-making processes at the local level.

Background:

The exercise had a number of elements to it:

- raising public awareness and understanding of environmental problems of the city, and encouraging higher public participation in decision making;
- identifying environmental priorities with reference to the relevant risk rates for human health, ecosystems and quality of life, which would enable the local community to use limited financial resources for the elimination of the problems involving the highest risks;
- developing a Local Environmental Action Plan (LEAP) which would indicate the measures to address the environmental problems identified as the most important in terms of infrastructure, strategic and institutional solutions;
- facilitating investments, by identifying cost-effective solutions and using expert advice in preparing projects for financing; and
- building the capacity of municipalities in problem solving through training on environmental management instruments, such as comparative risk analysis.

Participation Techniques Used:

The LEAP was implemented under the project named "Local Action for the Environment" as a pilot environmental management project on local level. It was carried out in the cities of Chelm and Starogard Gdanski, which had been selected in a contest from among 60 interested municipalities. The main objective of the project was to develop methods and procedures which could be used by other municipalities in Poland to develop similar projects based on new planning and risk assessment methods. The local communities also had to be active in identifying problems and selecting solutions.

"The Local Action for the Environment" was financed by US AID in co-operation with US EPA and implemented in consultation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources and Forestry and the National Fund of Environmental Protection and Water Management. The project was implemented jointly by COWI Co. Ltd. and the National Foundation of Environmental Protection, selected in a tender.

In order to ensure as broad and active public participation in the process as possible, everyone interested in the process was invited to take part in the opening meeting organised in March 1998. They were invited through local media and personal invitations sent by mail. The local programme committee, formed by 36 volunteers relied on the voluntary commitment of its members.

The committee held regular meetings and presented the results of its work through local media. A survey of environmental awareness was conducted among city inhabitants with the help from the secondary school.

Who participated?

The programme committee brought together Chelm citizens: representatives of the major groups of the society, industry, education, health service, professional environmental services, school youth, inhabitants with non-environmental professional backgrounds interested in the topic as well as representatives of the City Board and City Council.

The composition of the committee changed during the first workshop meetings. Some new people joined the committee already during the implementation of the project, some of the original volunteers resigned due to the lack of time or insufficient interest. As a result, the committee reached the final number of 20 members who actively participated in further work. Some adult members were a bit discouraged by the first workshops which had the form of lectures, though necessary to gain indispensable knowledge for further work. However in the subsequent phases the committee assumed an active role drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations which were often adopted by majority vote.

Stage(s) at which public participated in the process:

The guiding principle in developing the LEAP was current public participation at each stage of the work, i.e. from March 1998 till June 1999.

At the First Stage the Programme Committee worked on identifying environmental priorities by:

- identifying environmental problems of the city which pose a threat to human health, natural ecosystems and quality of life
- assessing the weight of the problems using comparative risk analysis, in which, supported by technical experts, the Programme Committee assessed the risks posed by the problems identified based on the existing and available data
- setting a list of environmental priorities on the basis of the comparative risk analysis results.

At the Second Stage measures to solve highly ranked environmental problems were identified. The most effective measures were looked for. The solutions proposed by experts were evaluated in terms of their technical feasibility, practicality and cost-effectiveness. Before the choice was made, consultations with the local community were held to find the most acceptable option from the point of view of the public. In the final phase of that stage the Programme Committee determined the plan of environmental activities for the city.

At the Third Stage the plan of environmental activities developed in the previous stage was elaborated into an implementation plan including:

- description of the necessary measures;
- names of the bodies responsible for each measure;
- cost estimation for each task;
- suggested sources of funding;
- implementation deadlines; and
- indicators to be used in monitoring the progress of strategy implementation.

What information was made available?

The municipality gave the Committee and the consultants access to all available data necessary to make the diagnosis and develop the environmental action plan. Also the environmental data from other bodies, such as the environmental inspection, sanitary inspection, and the Chelm Landscape Parks Board were used. Strategies developed by the former Provincial Office of Chelm (which ceased to exist after the administrative reform of 1999) were referred to in their environmental components. The information was public (members could get access to it).

What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?

The Committee, in co-operation and current consultation with the municipal authorities and other institutions and organisations acting in the environmental field (consultants) developed a two year environmental action plan taking into account the problems of most concern to the local community.

The experience gained during the development of the plan and the practical ability to reach common agreement and understanding of environmental problems by the local community and municipal authorities has resulted in the decision to continue the common work for the environment. This idea will be carried out in the framework of an association called "Local Action for the Environment – Chelm". It will be an organisation open to all city inhabitants interested in being actively involved in solving the problems of the Chelm community.

Contact:	Mr. Miroslaw Mysiak, Environmental Protection Division, Chelm City Office
Address:	ul. Reformacka 24a, 22-100 Chelm
Phone:	(48-82)565 68 48
Fax:	(48-82) 565 22 54
E-mail:	info@um.chelm.pl
Website:	www.um.chelm.pl

REC view on participation exercise:

This case seems to be a good example of public participation in development of plans and programs relating to the environment. It included adequate notification, information and participation procedures, and appears to have taken comments received into account.

It should be noted that the particular exercise was supported through international assistance and as such was a demonstration or pilot project. It could be expected that this example would be a positive one, as it necessarily received much attention. It would be interesting to determine whether this case example was followed in further local planning, not closely related to international assistance.

Significant omissions from requirements of Article 7:

None, from the example given.