



Good examples of Polish sustainable development

New research has collated case studies of sustainable development in Poland. These indicate that there are a range of sustainability drivers and barriers, some of which are specific to transition economies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). It is hoped that the collection will trigger the development of a CEE database of good sustainability practices.

Sustainability practices vary significantly across the EU. A large number of case studies of sustainable development exist, but these are mainly from countries with well established market economies. Poland, along with many other CEE countries, has only recently undergone a transition from a centrally planned to a market economy. As such, it may be difficult to apply best practices for sustainability from the existing case studies as they occurred in a different economic and social context.

The study outlines the state of sustainable development in Poland through a review of previous studies and the presentation of 11 case studies. The review identified several drivers and barriers to sustainable development. EU funding and EU legislative pressure are significant drivers, alongside national institutions of environmental policy, technical support from abroad and competition, both internally and with companies from abroad. There were also a number of factors that could potentially promote sustainability but were currently limiting the impact of the drivers. These include little social capital and trust, lower environmental awareness of citizens and decision makers, a lack of sustainability 'know how' in Polish organisations, and few known examples of Polish good practice.

In order to identify examples of good practice in Poland, the study examined a number of case studies. The case studies were selected only if they referred to all three pillars of sustainable development, i.e. social, economic and environmental. The cases were sourced from a range of sectors, and included a wood processing company, an oil and gas mining company, a fair trade programme and public libraries.

The researchers clearly identified that good case studies in Poland are already available and it recognised several trends amongst these case studies. The use of social licences in order to operate are an important factor, as well as the involvement of Polish companies in international supply chains that require certain sustainability standards. The motivation to use life cycle analysis as a tool to improve sustainability reporting on products has mainly been motivated by EU integrated product policy.

It appears that state-owned companies are less eager to engage in sustainability, perhaps because of the legacy from the Communist past when companies had not been exposed to competition and had fewer drivers to which they had to respond. Compared to non-transition countries, there are few examples of public-private partnerships and, when they do occur, they are most often initiated by local or regional authorities and not companies. The research suggests that there is significant potential to take this partnership approach more often, and that it should be promoted. Certain sustainability initiatives, such as fair trade, are not considered to be the domain of companies and are run by NGOs.

The collection of these Polish case studies can be seen as an invitation for CEE countries to share their experiences and popularise good examples of sustainability. Alongside this, it is suggested that there needs to be more research on the involvement of citizens in environmental decision-making and on the role of SMEs in sustainable development.

Source: Kronenberg, J. & Bergier, T. (2012) Sustainable development in a transition economy: business case studies from Poland. *Journal of Cleaner Production*. 26:18-27. Doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2011.12.010.

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