

# PROJECT FOR EMPOWERMENT AND MOBILIZATION OF LOCAL CONDITIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN STARA KAMIENICA, POLAND

The district of Stara Kamienica is situated in the foothills of the Sudete mountains (Karkonosze / Giants' Mountains and Góry Izerskie / Iron Mountains) of the province Lower Silesia in the south-west of Poland, near the Czech and German border. This district is an extreme example in Poland having the best and most suitable opportunities and resources for rural tourism, and being threatened by economical depression, social problems, destruction of local culture and nature by mining plans and neglect of social resources for sustainable development. This project offers a feasible route map to sustainable development by empowerment and mobilization of local conditions for rural tourism.

The keywords of this project are: awareness raising; tailor made; based on local conditions and possibilities; international exchange; connected to existing development plans; concrete and practicable projects.

## *Motivation for the project*

*Why a project for sustainable tourism and rural development in Stara Kamienica, Poland?*

*Apart from the well-known areas of natural beauty, Poland can offer tourists an agricultural landscape with high natural values, that is very attractive and often completely unknown. Moreover the regions around the Karkonosze and Izerskie Mountains offer a landscape and culture that could easily attract extensive nature oriented recreation and rural tourism next to the sufficient possibilities for intensive recreation nearby in places such as Jelenia Góra/Cieplice and Szklarska Poreba/Karpacz. Both types of recreation complement and strengthen each other. Recently these areas of natural beauty in Stara Kamienica are threatened by mining plans which will destroy this landscape and stop all activities for sustainable development in this area. This project aims to be an alternative to the mining plans. The project involves the building of tourist facilities closely related to conservation of nature and culture initiatives and agricultural activities in the area. This integral approach suits to much needed regional development. The project offers a perspective on the development of new means of existence and new means of production. Furthermore it benefits the local populations directly.*

*The idea is guided by local development plans such as “ Strategy for sustainable development of Stara Kamienica district (Stara Kamienica December 2000)” drawn according to Agenda 21 recommendations. Polish people themselves want co-operation and exchange on the basis of equality and are very resourceful. This project offers a pragmatic base for diverse form of participation. It is also in line with current EU policy especially in linking tourism to rural development. There is a specific interest in regions near borders (Euregions). This project also joins up with other initiatives present in the Euregion of Neisse to which it belongs (Czech North-Bohemia, German/Polish Lower Silesia). Co-operation with German and Czech partners is part of the project. The project focuses on integration and exchange. For that reason local non-profit organisations, private enterprises, artists, schools and authorities are invited to participate. Although the region is distinctly Polish, the project gains a character that goes beyond borders because of the proximity of the German and Czech borders. Stara Kamienica is in fact situated in the heart of Europe, between Prague, Warsaw, Dresden and Berlin. The project can contribute to contacts and an exchange between East and West.*

## **1. Aims**

Project-aims are: economic development, employment creation, innovation of tourism programs, empowerment of local NGO's and interregional and international cooperation. The project strives to realize this by creating local conditions for sustainable tourism through:

1. Empowerment and community building activities, like consultancy, events, cultural exchange, new economic activities targeted at the local inhabitants.
2. Appreciation, upgrading and preservation of the local ecological, cultural and historical heritage, emphasizing the value of local culture, landscape, traditions and crafts.
3. Building understanding and awareness of different cross border cultures.
4. Generating new concepts and trends for promotion and corporate identity of sustainable tourism.
5. Promoting sustainable economic activity, offering alternatives for the Pol Skal mining plans.

## **2. Target groups**

Locals, inhabitants of the Polish, Czech and German Euregio, German heritage tourists, students, disabled people, nature and culture oriented tourists from Poland and abroad.

# PLAN OF ACTION

## **Provision of conditions (2004/2005)**

1. Setting up coordination structure for the project for planning and finding funds, subsidizers and private investors (coordination team, office, training).
2. Research on:
  - a. soil/water/climate and local social/economic conditions.
  - b. policies aimed at the region and European laws, Polish agricultural policies and legal frameworks
  - c. market research for sustainable tourism and new agrarian activities.
3. Empowerment of local NGO's and municipality of Stara Kamienica focused on sustainable tourism
4. Cooperation in the preparation of landscape and spatial plan to protect the historical landscape and the monumental village
5. Developing and organizing programs for tourists and visitors
6. Employment creation projects in and around Nemoland
7. Finding participants and partners

## **1. Coordination of the project**

A local steering-committee consisting of representatives of the participating organizations will coordinate this project.

## **2. Research**

Fundacja Nemo identified Dutch students from different disciplines who will perform the research to the preconditions of this project. Conditions for research are 1. Products and methods must be well defined. 2. Products must contribute to the project. 3. Working in project teams, exchange of information, regular evaluation. 4. Identifying Polish students and partners. The aim is to form a project team of students who could do research in different fields of the project, regarding preconditions and facilities, a marketing plan, business plan, finding partners and finance for:

1. landscape protection, land use and land planning
2. health/care tourism, reintegration activities, therapeutic activities
3. educational tourism, volunteer activities, school exchange, courses
4. new agrarian activities, product development, transport and sale
5. attraction park for local legends and history, visitors' centre, tourist programs
6. PR and Internet outreach (web page)

## **3. Empowerment of local NGO's and municipality of Stara Kamienica focused on sustainable tourism**

Finding financial and legal support for the Board and District council of Stara Kamienica as well as local non governmental organizations (Stowarzyszenie Kopaniec, Stowarzyszenie Izery, Sudeckie Towarzystwo Turystyki Wiejskiej), local protest committees against the Pol Skal mining plans, institutions which coordinate archaeological research in the region (Muzeum Karkonoskie), local schools for cultural programs.

## **4. Developing and organizing programs for tourists and visitors**

1. Education programs for school exchange, tourists, students, locals (green school)
2. Reintegration activities for youth with social or mental problems (learning by experience)
3. Programs focused on local culture and artists (workshops)

## **5. Employment creation projects in the area between Chromiec and Mala Kamienica**

1. Attraction park, village museum and cultural centre for local legends and history. Theme is "continuity in history", with a focus on the local history and legends which are specific to the landscape and the inhabitants. The attraction park will present the whole county of Stara Kamienica, its landscape and attractions, as 'land of stories and legends'. The park will develop tourist arrangements and tourist conditions as part of the existing program 'Izerska Wies'.
2. Model farm with production unit for agrarian products run by local women, offering facilities and training, developing regional products and practical support for new private initiative. Aim is the introduction of effective and sustainable agricultural activities, selling and exporting of regional dairy products, cultivation of traditional crops that suit the landscape such as buckwheat, extending the orchards and to production and export of fruit products. This farm is integrated in the activities of the attraction park.

## **Possibilities and opportunities of the region Stara Kamienica**

1. Strategic location in the Euregio Neisse/Nysa, between the main cities in Middle Europe and in proximity of motorways to Wrocław, Dresden, Görlitz, Prague, Berlin.
2. The asset of its valuable landscape, cultivated and still intact.
3. Added natural value through important biodiversity due to the proximity of natural parks (Karkonosze and three local natural parks).
4. A dramatic historical background, (changing borders, a history that is Polish but also Bohemian, Austrian and German), as shown by many monuments and landscape structure.
5. Great potential for rural tourism as well as intensive tourism (spas, skiing) in the region.
6. Great economic potential for good quality regional products and ecological agriculture and horticulture thanks to excellent soil conditions, limited use of fertilizers and a healthy environment.
7. The shared Polish-Bohemian-German history could form the basis of German-Bohemian-Polish exchange activities and friendship around the theme of continuity in (rural) history.
8. The region offers excellent conditions for new trends in tourism. These new trends should be the guiding principles for developing sustainable tourism in the region, following the dialectics of progress.

## **Problems and obstacles of the region**

1. In the era of communism the region has suffered greatly from air pollution (The Black Triangle) and little was invested in employment and tourist infrastructure.
2. The landscape is marked by a double negative identification. The Germans suffered a traumatic exodus in 1946, the Poles a forced transmigration in 1945/46.
3. Agrarian enterprises were dominated and suppressed by traditional communist economy since the end of II world war. Therefore farmers hardly dare to take risks and the concept of cooperation is suspicious and has a negative connotation.
4. After the fall of communism free market economy and the expansion of big scale farming in the middle of Poland has all but pushed aside traditional small-scale agriculture in the region.
5. Because the area is situated in a hilly transitional zone close to natural parks, it is economically isolated, most fields are untilled and farms stop their agricultural activities.
6. Many people are unemployed and there are hardly sufficient social facilities to cope with the problems. Community feeling is weak after the forced transmigrations and 45 years of communism and grows even weaker.
7. Now tourism mainly focuses on some monumental towns, the Karkonosze and the spas. There is hardly any rural tourism around these tourist areas. That is why they are often threatened by mining industry.
8. Western influence grows at the cost of the cultural identity of the region.
9. There is hardly any development of tourism or other regional products that could procure protection of the typical character of the region and to insure new income.
10. There is an absence of sufficient regional instruments to bring about positive development: there are no possibilities for education and practical training focusing on rural development. Local organizations and authorities don't know how to fund and put into use possibilities of development (expertise, marketing, subsidies etc.) The opportunities the EU could offer in the form of subsidies are one more cause of fatalism and passivity whereas in the current situation investment is necessary.
11. Existing initiatives and (subsidized) development projects do not take into account the character of the region; the Polish context and the way the local population experience and see their region and its potential. Most projects are based on West European concepts of rural development and sustainable development. Because of the Polish context their intentions and effects are not in line.

## **Project strategy**

1. Step by step approach, using the Polish way of doing things (the process is as important as the final result!)
2. Local approach: starting from the own community, oriented towards the local economy and specific problems.
3. Investing in good relations with the population, NGOs, schools and local authorities/religious community making visible international exchange through educational exchange, cultural manifestations, multilingual publications, mutual visits, festivities.
4. Getting expertise and training from abroad.
5. Supporting initiatives from motivated and reliable groups, for example women, artists, teachers, local associations and committees.
6. Gathering relevant knowledge about the region, from Poles who live here and Germans who lived there until 1946.
7. Acquiring knowledge about the local market, local possibilities of production, opportunities for marketing and distribution.
8. Trying out the market by means of pilots; new products, gaining local experience, choice of an attractive brand/logo.

## **The district of Stara Kamienica**

The district of Stara Kamienica is situated in South West Poland in the Sudete area of Lower Silesia, not far from the German and Czech border close to the monumental Jelenia Góra and the winter resort of Szklarska Poreba, in the foothills of the Karkonosze Mountains (Giants' Mountains) and the Góry Izerskie. The district covers an area of 11.050 hectares, has approximately 8000 inhabitants who live in the villages of Stara-, Nowa- and Mala Kamienica, Chromiec, Antoniów, Kopaniec, Miedzylesie, Rybnica, Barcinek and Wojcieszycze. The district lies on the outer limits of an extensive mountainous area with a lot of forest, and an old, small-scale, agricultural landscape with many small fields, woods and villages with monumental farms. There are walkways everywhere. Apart from cultivated fields and grassy areas, the area consists of densely forested valleys. Wooded banks, millstreams, fords, walls and terraces testify to agricultural patterns of cultivation dating from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century that are still in a remarkably perfect condition. Before the World War II the district was a very popular "Luftkurort" (health resort). Most inhabitants rented out rooms to tourists. After the war this "village tourism" disappeared completely. As in other European transitional areas the land is not cultivated any more and forest slowly takes over. There are still many possibilities to maintain the old small-scale agricultural landscape and conserve its natural and cultural values.

Recently the area is threatened by a mining company who wanted to explore a 75 ha. open granite mine in Mala Kamienica. The mining plans are directed towards exploitation of natural resources with inevitable destruction of landscape. Thus the issue of landscape conservation becomes vital for the local community. In this situation it is necessary to develop a vision of sustainable economic development integrated with the environment and community friendly measures as alternative to short-term profit-oriented solutions like mining. The vision needs to offer a wider scope of economic perspectives for the local community rather than just exploitation of earth resources with consequent environmental damage to be paid by the next generation. The present project can be part of this vision for the area offering development with long-term profit approach in which also the future generations can enjoy unspoiled qualities of local landscape and environment. Within the district there is a lot of support for plans to protect the landscape and develop the district. The local authorities and political leaders support the principles of sustainable development. There are also many local artists, new entrepreneurs, ecological farmers, teachers, historians, designers of exhibitions and others who would like to get involved.

## **The region**

From the beginning of the Polish nation in the 10th century the region has been Polish under the rule of the Silesian Piast dukes. The ruins of a Piast stronghold in Stara Kamienica testify to this. From the twelfth century onwards the Silesian dukes invited German colonists to the area. Under the rule of the Schaffgotsch family these colonists founded towns and villages around the Karkonosze and Izer Mountains. In the 14th century the Piast dukes came under Bohemian rule and Austria inherited the region in 1526. In 1741 the Prussian Frederick the Great conquered the area and the protestant majority gained freedom of religion. Until 1945 Stara Kamienica was part of Germany, known as Alt Kemnitz. After the war the Germans had to leave the area, as a result of the Yalta Conference in 1945. Most Poles who now live here originate from former East Poland that is now a part of the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Lithuania. There have been few recent investments in employment and (tourist) infrastructure because of the fear that Germany would reclaim the area. In 1991 both countries have fixed the borders in a final treaty. After the collapse of communism unemployment has even increased because many large industries and agricultural enterprises shut down. In the cities there is relative prosperity but the rural areas hardly benefit from this. There are many problems with unemployment and social services are insufficient. Large-scale tourism is limited to some monumental cities, the Karkonosze Mountains and the health resorts in Cieplice and Swieradów Zdrój; there is almost no rural tourism. There is no recognition of the typical cultural-historical and ecological value of regions like Stara Kamienica. This neglect lessens its attraction to tourists. Furthermore there is substantial environmental damage caused by surrounding heavy industry. Not long ago the area was known as the "black triangle". In the meantime there has been a lot of investment in cleaning up polluting factories and reforestation.

Polish authorities as well as the European Union are of the opinion that sustainable development of the region should be approached integrally. Also social, ecological and economic problems should be solved in a coherent way. Therefore there should be support for "sustainable" recreation and tourism in which the tourist as well as local people contribute to preservation of nature and culture and benefit from these efforts. A specific project such as this one sets an example and provides the necessary instruments for facilitation of a profitable development. Sustainable tourism is an amorphous term that is difficult to define. In short, sustainable tourism shows rather than describes; it allows the tourist to be an active participant in the experience. Nature tourism, resource-based tourism, adventure tourism, eco tourism, agro tourism, educational, health and heritage tourism have all been applied to this field. People want to "experience" nature and culture as an active, not an idle, participant on their adventure. Personal health, enrichment, enlightenment, stimulation, and engagement are among the primary motivators for these travelers. The top five motivations for them are: To be outdoors. To experience the sights, smells and sounds of nature and culture. To see something new. To learn new skills.

If the Polish community and the local authorities are able to stop the landscape destroying mining plans, and invest in sustainable tourism, the region of Stara Kamienica will soon have profit of this development by new economic activities and employment.