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## The Role of Local Authorities in Education for Sustainable Development in Poland

**Abstract.** Educational activities are the foundation of sustainable development. Educating the public in the field of ecological behaviour makes it possible to change the behaviour perceived as negative by other members of society and then slowly replace it with one that is acceptable and well regarded. Developing the correct attitudes in a society means that such attitudes will be obvious and natural for the next generations. This would lead to changes in the behaviour of residents and, thereby, help reduce their negative impact on the environment. A special role is played by local government units in this process, including primarily, the municipality. In carrying out their own tasks they fulfil the demands of education for sustainable development directly and indirectly. A direct impact manifests itself in educational activities, promotions, and other activities affecting the environmental awareness of residents. Indirect activities arise from the fact that local government units fulfil their own tasks in the field of environmental protection, urban planning, or investments. Using these channels, the authorities at the municipal level can influence residents and other stakeholders through encouraging them to present desired behaviours through moulding appropriate attitudes and promoting specific patterns. The main purpose of this article is to point out the role of local authorities in education for sustainable development (ESD) and give a few examples of individual activities. At the same time, an attempt is made to distinguish the main areas of activities in ESD at the local level.

**Keywords:** education for sustainable development, local government, effectiveness, management

### 1. Introduction

The tasks of a local government at the municipal level in Poland mainly result from legal regulations. The Act on Municipal Government defines a catalogue of

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the basic activities of the municipal authorities, while detailed provisions state how these activities should be performed. These regulations are very specific as regards activities related with investments or urban planning. Procedures are described, as well as protocols and task hierarchy. However, no specific operating guidelines exist for promotional and educational activities. Consequently, their scope and nature are much diverse in individual local government units. Municipalities show extremely different levels of activity in the area of the so-called soft actions. Some local authorities take a stand that these tasks are fulfilled by educational centres within each municipality, and the municipality office itself is not obliged to perform any activities in this area. Often, this is also linked with personnel limitations, which can be observed particularly in small local government units. Other offices confine themselves to distributing information materials and posting announcements on websites. On the other hand, there are local governments that comprehensively pursue the philosophy of sustainable development. They implement environmental management in municipality offices and also units subordinate to a local government. They address the issues related with environmental solutions to be encompassed in investment processes. They also optimize the application of resources and proactively strive to maintain and improve the condition of nature and landscape assets. Thus, the activities of local authorities in ESD can be described as multi-dimensional. Apart from direct actions related with improving the competencies of employees, educating the local community members, promoting predefined attitudes, there is a number of actions which give the educational effect indirectly. The major purpose of this article is to define the role of local authorities in ESD activities and to provide specific examples of such activities. Thus, an attempt is made to distinguish and systematize the main areas of possible activity.

## **2. Environmental education and education for sustainable development**

In describing ESD related issues it is most important to specify the subject of the description. The notion of ESD in the Polish nomenclature is used definitely less frequently than, for instance, environmental education, particularly in administrative practice. However, the semantic scope of these two terms is different and the results achieved through these two types of education are also distinct (Table 1). The primary distinction refers to the manner and the scope of the description of reality. ESD can be characterized by a holistic approach. The key target area is not environmental protection as such, but a systemic and dynamic approach to phenomena and processes taking place in the world. Thus, ESD covers social,

environmental and economic spheres. It emphasizes mutual relations of these spheres and an existing causal nexus between them. In practice, ESD re-orientates educational tasks undertaken in various areas at different levels. Re-orientation is meant to enhance social awareness of sustainable development issues and to provide different social groups with appropriate training [Jutvik & Liepina 2007: 19].

As regards means of expression, ESD does not confine itself to description. It uses tools that stimulate a specific behaviour driving a change in conduct. With the tasks it fulfils ESD moulds attitudes and integrates various spheres of human activity. It also improves such abilities as communication, systemic thinking, critical thinking and cooperation [Hopkins & McKeown 2002: 19].

The major differences between environmental education and education for sustainable development were compared by Jutvik and Liepina, among others

Table 1. Differences between environmental education and education for sustainable development

Environmental education	Education for sustainable development
Talks about the problems of the natural environment.	Talks about integrated problems of environment, efficient use of natural resources, maintaining proper functioning of ecosystems and a good functioning of society and economy.
Deals with environmental problems resulting from human activity and its impact on the environment.	Recognizes that the problems are caused by the conflict between the various objectives of human activities: environmental, social, cultural and economic.
Emphasizes biodiversity.	Emphasizes biological, cultural, social and economic diversity.
Aims at healthy environment.	Aims at good life for the current and future generations.
Promotes actions for the protection of the environment.	Motivates a change in a lifestyle and relies on compelling arguments regarding personal life.
Moulds responsibility for the environment.	Moulds responsibility for the environment and people's lives.
Talks about the behaviour of the individual.	Focuses on increasing competencies for action, including a competence to develop new moral principles and stimulate public participation in a decision-making process.
Is aimed both globally and locally.	Should be based on the local economic, social, cultural and environmental systems and then introduced to the regional, national and global systems.
Includes some school subjects.	Is integrated with all school subjects and with all aspects of school life.

Source: Jutvik & Liepina 2005.

(Table 1). They demonstrated that the communication levels and methods, contents presented, goals set and tools applied were distinct.

It is worth noting that although ESD is by definition an activity that is carried out in educational centres, it may also be widely used by other entities. Moulding proper attitudes, increasing the level of knowledge and enhancing environmental awareness are also included in the activities of cultural and sport centres, extra-governmental organizations and societies, as well as local authorities.

### **3. The role of local authorities at the local level in education for sustainable development**

Due to the fact that the catalogue of ESD functions is extensive and the spectrum of possible activities in ESD is broad, it seems that each action by authorities at the local level can be transposed to ESD. Even those activities that are seemingly unrelated with environmental issues, such as organization of the system of cooperation between local governments, activities of cultural centres, public security or social welfare, can be transposed to ESD. In Poland, additionally, legal regulations impose an obligation on local authorities to carry out activities in environmental education. Pursuant to Art. 403, Clause 2 of the Act: Environmental Protection Law dated 27 April 2001 (consolidated text Journal of Laws of 2013, item 1232, as later amended), municipalities have their own tasks such as financing the environmental protection and water management programs in terms of environmental education and promotion of pro-environmental actions and sustainable development [Korolewska 2013: 258-259]. Moreover, Art. 79 of the aforementioned Act states that administrative bodies are one of the groups of entities that are obliged to incorporate research on environmental protection issues in their activities. There is also a number of detailed regulations which refer, among others, to social participation in the procedures related with arrangements regarding investment activities which might have a considerable impact on the environment or regarding planning works or developing local environmental protection strategies being defined by the Polish legislation as environmental protection programs [Environmental Protection Law, section III]. These activities directly and indirectly achieve ESD goals through influencing social awareness, promoting specific attitudes and fulfilling strictly educational tasks.

Therefore, it is possible to distinguish three major groups of specific types of tasks fulfilled by local authorities that can be transposed to ESD<sup>1</sup>. The first group

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<sup>1</sup> Such division is not meant to be classification, and, thus, it is not exhaustive and it is separable. It is rather applied to systematize the phenomenon being described and to group its manifestations such as specific activities performed by local governments.

Table 2. Areas of activity in ESD at the local level

Criterion of Division	Type of Activity	
Nature of impact	Direct	Indirect
Direction of impact	Internal	External
Impact time	Long-term	Short-term

Source: own elaboration.

includes activities categorized by nature of impact, the second group by direction of impact, while the third group by impact time reflected by the management level (Table 2).

The criterion of division for the first group is the nature of an impact instrument being used. A dichotomy is proposed within this group, so that activities can be divided into direct and indirect. Direct activities involve exerting a specific influence on an individual through establishing local laws or issuing administrative decisions. Such influence should be a practical implementation of the rule of sustainable development and it should be obligatory. It may both prescribe a particular behaviour and prohibit taking certain actions. The strength of impact can be severity and inevitability of sanctions related with failure to observe the adopted regulations. Indirect activities, in turn, are based on the use of the same type of instruments, i.e. local laws and administrative decisions. However, they have an optional impact. Indirect activities prefer a specific behaviour of individuals, offering them benefits in exchange. The activities give an opportunity to take any specific action and finally provide a system of incentives and facilitations in performing any such action. Failure to observe the said laws and decisions does not entail any sanction. However, if an individual follows them, he or she may be given benefits and privileges.

Another group was categorized by direction of impact. The impact being oriented at the local community, businesses, organizations and institutions existing within a given area is defined as the external impact. While the impact being oriented at local administration employees, who work in the municipality office and subordinate units, is defined as the internal impact. Activities performed in both of these areas can be obligatory or optional. Apart from the municipalities' own tasks, the external impact can incorporate participation in promotional or informative campaigns or any other activities preferring specific attitudes and behaviours. Activities oriented externally often show an organized form. They can involve the implementation of certain standards and rules or even a comprehensive re-orientation of the individual management system.

The last group includes activities categorized by impact time. It incorporates long- and short-term activities. Long-term activities are rather strategic and they

define the long-term course of action. They are aimed at achieving a certain level of development for a given area or a certain condition of a component. They can also be continuous long-term activities that affect awareness in a given area. Whereas short-term activities are activities of an ongoing nature. The activities are performed in the course of daily administrative practice. They are aimed at solving any specific operating problems. Being taken together, the activities can be treated as a cycle of organized long-term activities.

#### **4. Tools for ESD achievement in administrative practice by local authorities**

For the groups being distinguished specific examples of decisions, legal acts or practical activities can be given that can be noted at the local government level: ranging from comprehensive activities incorporating specific tasks such as educational campaigns, through strategic documents such as an analysis of conditions for and directions of area development or an environmental protection program, to organizational decisions (Table 3).

A special group in the proposed division is represented by internal activities that include the organization of the work performed by the municipality office

Table 3. Tools for the implementation of individual actions at local level

Criterion of division	Type of activity	Chosen specific tool
Nature of the instruments	Direct	Rules of maintaining cleanliness and order in the community The decision to accrue fees for the treatment and disposal of the waste
	Indirect	Grant for the replacement of boilers Grant for asbestos roofing exchange
Direction of impact	External	Educational campaigns Ecological competitions
	Internal	Implementation of environmental management systems Optimization of production and waste management in the municipality office
Level of management	Strategic	Environmental protection program The study of conditions and directions of spatial management
	Operational	Decision on the environmental conditions of the investment Decision on building conditions

Source: own elaboration.

and other municipal units. These are activities that can be recognized as good practices. The law does not directly impose any obligation to perform such activities, nor are any additional funds assigned for them from the central budget. The type and scope of the activities are each time determined on the initiative of local authorities and persons responsible for the management of the office (secretaries and directors of individual departments). The group being discussed covers implementations of environmental management systems and integrated management systems or activities aimed at minimizing the use of resources, selective collecting the waste or recycling [Giordano 2005]. These are widespread practices in the Polish local governments. What is interesting is the fact that they apply not only to the biggest cities such as Warsaw, Poznań, Kraków or Wrocław<sup>2</sup>. Similar activities being planned on a wide scale are also performed, among others, in Dzierżoniów in the Province of Dolnośląskie, in Racibórz or Bielsko-Biała [Batko 2009: 93].

An indirect impact is significant alike. The impact results from the activities that are targeted towards the general community of the municipality. Any forms of subsidies granted by or through administrative bodies are most popular. They practically enforce the provisions of strategic documents adopted at the national level, e.g. Asbestos Removal Program in Poland for Years 2009-2032 or National Program for Municipal Sewage Treatment, and also the documents at the level of a province, county or municipality (e.g. low emission reduction programs, municipal rules of maintaining cleanliness and order).<sup>3</sup> They form an effective system of economic incentives that prefers specific behaviours. Under the said documents subsidies are granted, for instance, for changing asbestos roofing or heating sources, and preference rates are applied for those individuals that collect waste selectively or exemption from parking fees is granted for the owners of electrically driven cars. As a result, the educational effect is indirect, but linked with a permanent change in attitude, e.g. with modernization of heating sources, commencement of selective waste collection, proper handling any liquid waste.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, in Poznań four departments of the City Hall (Municipal Management Department, Real Estate Management, Environmental Protection Department and Procurement and Office Service Department) and also Zakład Zagospodarowania Odpadów sp. z o.o. [Waste Management Company Pty] and Municipal Roads Administration hold an environmental protection management certificate compliant with ISO 14001:2004 and a quality management system certificate compliant with ISO 9001:2008. The first certification in this area was done in the Poznań City Hall in 2002. The quality management system certificate compliant with ISO 9001:2008 was issued for the entire Poznań City Hall and 12 other municipal units, e.g. The Raczyński Library, The Poznań Centres of Sports and Recreation or City Guard of Poznań, cf. <http://bip.poznan.pl/bip/system-zarzadzania,doc,737/certyfikaty-systemu-zarzadzania,47809.html> [9.12.2015].

<sup>3</sup> Asbestos Removal Program in Poland for Years 2009-2032 adopted by virtue of Resolution by the Council of Ministers on 14 July 2009, amended by Resolution dated 15 March 2010, and National Program for Municipal Sewage Treatment – Update 2015 (project).

The effectiveness of these activities is measurable as opposed to typical educational activities.

As regards those influences for which the time factor is crucial, long- and short-term influences can be distinguished. As discussed earlier, they are closely related with the management level. Long-term activities are strategic. These include plans, programs, policies and strategies that, directly or indirectly, refer to the issues of sustainable development. The municipal environmental protection program and the analysis of conditions for and directions of land development are most important in this area. Both of these documents are required by legal regulations, but they do not have the effect of a local legislation act. The documents are strictly related with any type of plans and sector programs such as low emission reduction program, sustainable development plan for transport, plan of environmental protection against noise, environmental education program or others. They describe the strategy of local governments in a given area and form a basis for taking operational decisions. Often, their component is an element concerning education in a given area<sup>4</sup>. As regards a short-term effect and operational nature, any activities within administrative practice can be seen as such. These activities primarily include issuing administrative decisions. The decisions define e.g. the conditions and methods of completing the investments, including any possible impact on the natural environment. An important component of the said activities is the evaluation of impact on the environment, according to the provisions of the Act on Availability of Information on Environment and Its Protection, Participation of Society in Environmental Protection and Evaluation of Impact on Environment<sup>5</sup>. One significant educational advantage is that the society can participate in ongoing administrative proceedings and that residents must be informed about the condition of the environment to the extent and on the terms defined by the aforementioned Act.

## 5. Conclusion

Activities for ESD can be performed not only through educational centres, but also local governments. The latter should exert a broad influence on the social at-

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<sup>4</sup> Program of Environmental Protection Against Noise for the Poznań City provided as Attachment to Resolution No. LX/927/VI/2013 by the Poznań City Council dated 10 December 2013, Chapter 5.4.3, or Program of Environmental Protection for the Poznań City for Years 2013-2016 with Prospects Until 2020, provided as Attachment No. LX/928/VI/2013 by the Poznań City Council dated 10 December 2013, Chapter 3.13.6.

<sup>5</sup> Act on Availability of Information on Environment and Its Protection, Participation of Society in Environmental Protection and Evaluation of Impact on Environment dated 3 October 2008 (consolidated text Journal of Laws of 2013, item 1235, as later amended).

titudes and awareness in the area of rules of sustainable development. Apart from fulfilling their own tasks in environmental education, local authorities formulate strategies, adopt local legal regulations and issue administrative decisions. In the majority of cases the educational effect is then a by-product which is permanent and connected with a change in attitudes and behaviours.

Local administration can also affect in a special way their own employees in the municipality office, city hall and subordinate units: public enterprises, municipal companies, educational centres. Implementing environmental management systems, optimizing the application of resources at the posts or fulfilling any specific projects can in real terms ensure appropriate training for such employees. The issues that would need further analysis include the effectiveness of the activities in relation to the condition of the environment within a given area and also funding such activities in the context of the results they bring.

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## **Rola władz lokalnych w edukacji na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju w Polsce**

**Streszczenie.** Działania edukacyjne są podstawą zrównoważonego rozwoju. Szczególną rolę w tym procesie odgrywają jednostki samorządu terytorialnego, a przede wszystkim gminy. Wykonując swoje zadania, bezpośrednio i pośrednio spełniają wymogi edukacji na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju. Bezpośredni wpływ przejawia się w działańach edukacyjnych, promocji i innych aktywnościach wpływających na oddziaływanie mieszkańców na środowisko. Działania pośrednie wynikają z realizacji zadań w zakresie ochrony środowiska, planowania przestrzennego lub inwestycji. Korzystając z tych kanałów, władze na poziomie lokalnym mogą wpływać na mieszkańców i inne zainteresowane strony, aby zachęcić ich do pożądanych zachowań, kształtować właściwe postawy i promować konkretne wzorce. Głównym celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na rolę administracji publicznej na poziomie lokalnym w zakresie edukacji na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju i wskazanie przykładów działań, jakie mogą być podejmowane w tym obszarze.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja dla zrównoważonego rozwoju, władze lokalne, efektywność, zarządzanie