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OBSTACLES TO AND CHALLENGES FOR A SUSTAINABLE AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM IN THE BABIA GÓRA REGION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOCIAL PARTICIPATION ISSUES

1. Introduction

An agro-food system can be described as a "food consumption model" from different perspectives: economic, social, cultural and environmental. This refers to a process with different stages, comprising of: how and where food is acquired, what is acquired, how food is prepared, how and where it is eaten, and how waste is disposed of. Provisioning of food is strictly linked to foodstuff availability and exchange capacity which, in turn, are linked to the food production system. This consumption model describes the demand side, while the agro-industry is the supply side of the food system. The agro-food system is defined as the set of interdependent elements that work together towards the end of satisfying the demand for food of a given population in a given space and time. This is illustrated by Table 1.

According to Fonseca [2002] the central elements of the dynamics of a food consumption model depend on technical and organizational changes (computer science, biotechnology, quality control of food production and circulation); changes in the international context (formation of regional blocks); changes in consumers' habits (new food consumption patterns, new purchase habits and consumption time); new actors and strategic sectors in these systems (large scale retail food distribution, logistics as a competitive strategy); the dynamics of an expanding system (dynamics stimulated by demand and supply, increasing concentration and centralization of production and retail); changes in legal regulation

Table 1. Social actors, economic processes and objects in the agro-food system

Economic processes	Social actors	Objects
Land cultivation/animal breeding	Families/Farmers	Agricultural goods
Agricultural product transformation	Families/Agro-food companies	Industrially transformed products
Conservation/distribution	Families/Distribution firms	Agricultural products and industrial food
Food preparation	Families/catering firms/restaurants/food preparation firms	Service food (convenience food)
Consumption	Families/Restaurants	Served food
Waste management	Families/Public and/or private disposal systems	Organic waste and residuals

Source: Bass et al., 1995.

(deregulation of economic activities, new conditions of entrepreneurial competitiveness after economic liberalization).

In this article a local agro-food system will be understood, as a part of local sustainable development, which requires social participation and partnership between local communities and local authorities.

2. Social participation in strategies developing a local sustainable agro-food system

We are living in an unsustainable world, which calls for the practical implementation of sustainable development strategies. Sustainable development can be simply defined as a better quality of life for everyone, both living now and generations to come. It is a vision of progress that links economic development, environmental protection and social justice. But on the other hand, sustainable development is a more complicated challenging social process. The various objectives of society – social, economic and environmental – need to be integrated, when possible, and compromises made when they are incompatible. Institutional and individual roles and responsibilities have to change, so that new patterns of behaviour will foster sustainable development. Hence, a truly sustainable system includes economic, social and natural systems, which are maintained in healthy relationships. Additionally, sustainable means the capacity to continue.

Implementation of sustainable development is especially important at local level [Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002; Dalal-Clayton, 2004]. Accord-

ing to Agenda 21, *sustainable development at the local level requires that local economical development supports community life and power, using the talents and resources of local residents* [ICLEI, 1996]. When implementation of an agro-food system at the local level is considered as a part of local sustainable development, the importance of social participation in this process should be underlined.

According to Table 1, an agro-food system involves social actors and understanding any kind of development without taking social actors (social participation) into account would be impossible. So not only the practical implementation of sustainable development requires the participation of civil society in this process, but also the agro-food system, a part of a sustainable development strategy, needs it as well.

According to Keane, civil society refers to the contemporary thickening and stretching of networks of social-economical institutions across borders to all four corners of the earth, such that the peaceful or civil effects of these non-governmental networks are felt everywhere, here and there, far and wide, to and from local areas, through wider regions to the planetary level itself [Falk and Strauss, 2001]. Civil society and social participation are closely linked, and they are symbiotic. *Civil society made up of non-profit organizations and voluntary associations dedicated to civil, cultural, humanitarian, and social causes, has begun to act as an independent international force*, and that would not be possible without social participation. According to Bass et al. [1995] there are several types of participation (Table 2). At each level, participation may be narrow (few actors present) or broad (covering all major groups, as well as the government).

Table 2. Typology of participation in policy-making

1 <i>Participants only listening</i> (e.g. receiving information from a government PR campaign or open database).
2 <i>Participants listening and giving information</i> (e.g. through public inquiries, media activities, "hot-lines").
3 <i>Participants being consulted</i> (e.g. through working groups and meetings held to discuss policy).
4 <i>Participation in analysis and agenda-setting</i> (e.g. through multistakeholder groups, roundtables and commissions).
5 <i>Participation in reaching consensus on the main elements of strategy</i> (e.g. through national roundtables, parliamentary/select committees, and conflict mediation).
6 <i>Participants involved in decision-making on policy, strategy or its components.</i>

To measure social participation the following tools need to be used [Wróbel, 2000]:

- membership in non-governmental or social organizations,
- participation in elections,
- participation in public meetings.

Civil society is based on social capital, which is defined as an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals. The norms that constitute social capital can range from a norm of reciprocity between two friends, all the way up to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Confucianism. They must be instantiated in real human relationships: the norm of reciprocity exists in potentia in my dealings with all people, but is realized only in my dealings with my friends. By this definition, trust, networks, civil society, and the like which have been associated with social capital are all epiphenomenal, arising as a result of social capital, but not constituting social capital itself.

3. Specifics of the Babia Góra Region

The Babia Góra region is situated in the southern part of Poland, in the Malopolskie Voivodeship, close to the border with the Slovak Republic. The region is unique, because of its localization. Zawoja, Stryszawa and Bystra-Sidzina are communities which surround Babia Góra mountain. Additionally, Babia Góra National Park is situated in this area. It encompasses the northern part of the Babia Góra range with its highest peak, Diablak (1725 m a.s.l). The area of the park is 3,392 ha, including 3,198 ha of forests. 1,062 ha are placed under strict protection. The history of the park goes back to the period between World Wars I and II, when the "Nature Reserve on Babia Góra" was established in 1933, by the ruling of the General Assembly of the Polish Academy of Skills. The area of this reserve amounted to 650 ha. On the 30th October 1954 the national park was established, encompassing an area of 1,704 ha. In 1977 the Park was included in the UNESCO Programme of "Man and Biosphere" Reserves.

In the past this region was inhabited by various ethnical groups and even now this historical diversity can still be felt strongly. According to local communities, maintaining tradition is a very important part of present life and future development strategies. This is expressed not only in wearing traditional dress, but also in maintaining rural traditions, which are result of the difficult geological conditions. Farmers using traditional methods have developed environmental protection systems that lead to harmonious coexistence, such as shepherds sleeping

with their flocks at night, deer and boar populations are maintained in the forests as prey, inhabited villages mark the limits of carnivores' ranges. To prevent erosion of the soil, which is a major problem in this area, machines are still used in a very limited way in the local system. Soil erosion is also a result of using natural fertilizers, so use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides is limited in the area. Small quantities are used mainly in the lower part of the community where crop farming has traditionally prevailed, while pastoral agriculture and livestock farming have been prominent on the upper slopes. This diversification has been maintained in principle to the present time as an important factor in the development of agro-tourism. In addition, there is a high level of fragmentation of farmland. The structure of the plots is called chess-board. The average area of farm plots is 0,1–0,2 ha. In this region great importance is given to the development of sustainable forms of land use. This is seen as an opportunity for economic growth by the local population. Agro-tourism, one of whose essential requirements is healthy food served by hosts and hostesses, is widely offered in the area. Home-cooked meals are prepared using the produce of farms which have an ecological certificate.

Of course as always, there are two sides of the coin. On one hand, the traditional rural system is not as efficient as modern rural systems, but on the other hand ecological farming can be a very positive move towards achieving sustainable development. Moreover, development strategies clearly indicate that agro-tourism is a major direction of future development. Agro-tourism can be supported by the agro-food system, for example by local products like traditional food.

4. Social participation in the Babia Góra region

According to the research, which was carried out by the author of this paper in the Babia Góra Region, regarding social participation in the process of the implementation of its agro-food system. The following results were noted (Table 3). 48.6% of the respondents in the Babia Góra Region stated that they attended public meetings. When national results are taken into consideration [Social Diagnosis, 2003] 18.57% of respondents stated that they attended public meetings. This indicates that the local community of the Babia Góra region is more active than the rest of Poland. Additionally, during such public meetings problems regarding sustainable development are very often undertaken. This could be very helpful in the practical implementation of a sustainable agro-food system in the region.

Table 3. Participation in public meetings according to gender, age and education [% of subgroup]

Total	48.6
Sex	
Male	59.0
Female	42.6
Age	
<24	23.5
24-34	30.4
35-44	62.1
45-59	60.0
60-64	60.0
> 65	62.5
Education	
Primary	66.7
Secondary	52.9
Higher	39.6
Univ. grad.	57.1

Source: Author's own research.

Table 4. Membership of a non-government or social organization according to gender, age and education [% of subgroup]

Total	29.8
Sex	
Male	28.2
Female	29.4
Age	
<24	23.5
24-34	13.0
35-44	48.3
45-59	32.0
60-64	0.0
> 65	25.0
Education	
Primary	11.1
Secondary	29.4
Higher	22.6
Univ. grad.	42.9

Source: Author's own research.

29.8% of respondents in the Babia Góra region stated they were members of a non-government or social organization (Table 4). The analogous figure from a recent national survey [Czapiński and Panek, 2003] is only 12.23%. This clearly indicates that the local community of the Babia Góra region is more involved in building civil society than the rest of Poland. Moreover, the local community is aware of the fact that practical implementation of sustainable development requires a strong network of NGOs, which cooperate with each other. In the Babia Góra region there are practical examples of this kind of cooperation, not only between local organizations, but also international cooperation.

Table 5. Membership of NGOs or social organizations according to gender, age and education [% of subgroup]

	Social	Ecological	Church	Feminist	Charity	Hobby	Other
Total	29.0	45.2	16.1	9.7	29.0	3.2	22.6
Sex							
Male	5.1	15.4	5.1	0.0	10.3	2.6	5.1
Female	10.3	11.8	4.4	4.4	7.4	0.0	7.4
Age							
< 24	0.0	5.9	0.0	5.9	11.8	5.9	0.0
24–34	13.0	4.3	4.3	0.0	4.3	0.0	4.3
35–44	10.3	27.6	3.4	3.4	3.4	0.0	17.2
45–59	12.0	8.0	8.0	4.0	12.0	0.0	4.0
60–64	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
> 65	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0
Education							
Primary	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	11.1	0.0	0.0
Secondary	5.9	11.8	0.0	5.9	11.8	0.0	0.0
Higher	11.3	9.4	3.8	0.0	7.5	1.9	3.8
Univ. grad	7.1	21.4	3.6	7.1	3.6	0.0	17.9

Source: Author's own research.

The largest proportion of respondents (45.2%) belong to ecological groups (Table 5). This indicates that the local community focuses its activity around the ecological aspects of every day life, which could be very helpful in the implementation of a sustainable agro-food system.

61.7% of the respondents stated that agro-tourism is a necessary direction of development and 53.3% that tourism is a necessary direction

Table 6. Opinion on what are the most necessary directions of future development in the Babia Góra region according to gender, age and education [% of subgroup]

	Agri- culture	Indus- trial	Agro- tourism	Tourism	Agro- industrial	Industrial- agriculture	Other
Total	5.6	3.7	61.7	53.3	4.7	4.7	4.7
Sex							
Male	2.6	5.1	64.1	48.7	7.7	5.1	5.1
Female	7.4	2.9	60.3	55.9	2.9	4.4	4.4
Age							
< 24	5.9	5.9	70.6	64.7	0.0	0.0	5.9
24-34	8.7	4.3	60.9	69.6	4.3	0.0	0.0
35-44	3.4	0.0	65.5	44.8	10.3	10.3	3.4
45-59	4.0	8.0	68.0	44.0	8.0	0.0	8.0
60-64	0.0	0.0	60.0	40.0	0.0	20.0	20.0
> 65	12.5	0.0	25.0	37.5	0.0	12.5	0.0
Education							
Primary	11.1	0.0	33.3	33.3	0.0	0.0	11.1
Secondary	11.8	5.9	58.8	23.5	11.8	11.8	5.9
Higher	1.9	3.8	64.2	60.4	5.7	1.9	3.8
Univ. grad	7.1	0.0	67.9	60.7	3.6	7.1	0.0

Source: Author's own research.

of development (Table 6). This indicates that the implementation of a sustainable agro-food system could be a very useful element in a development strategy for the Babia Góra region.

5. Conclusions

In the Babia Góra region social participation in the local sustainable agro-food system is achieved by:

- the existence of a large number of social, non-government organizations, especially ecological ones. The Activity of local communities, not only focuses on participation in NGOs, but also on cooperation between different organizations, which enables the practical implementation of sustainable development and a sustainable agro-food system,
- participation in public meetings, where problems regarding the practical implementation of local sustainable development can be discussed,

- very good organization of waste segregation,
- ecological education,
- rural traditions.

The Babia Góra region is a part of Poland, where the level of social participation is higher compared to the rest of country¹. Additionally, both the local authorities and local community perceive agro-tourism as a major direction of future development. All these factors indicate that the implementation of a sustainable agro-food system in the Babia Góra region could be a significant part of local sustainable development and, at the same time, a great challenge for the local community.

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¹ Conclusion made by the comparing analyzes between results of my research and The Social Diagnosis 2003.