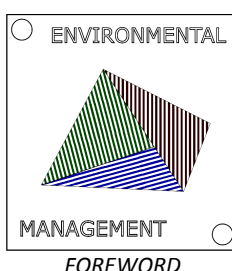



THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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It is inevitable for people who care for the planet to raise awareness about climate change. If we want to protect the Earth, we need everyone's participation. There are several ways to raise awareness of the impacts, often negative, on the environment.

The importance of protecting the environment and the complex nature of its components, as well as the benefits that could accrue to humanity based on its awareness, stimulated the emergence of the discipline called environmental education. The enormous importance of the message of environmental education for human survival has caused the relatively new academic discipline to attract a lot of attention.

Environmental policy focuses on the careful and rational use of natural resources and contributes to the promotion of measures at the international level aimed at combating regional or global environmental problems such as climate change and biodiversity loss. It is based on precautionary and preventative measures, remediation at source and „the polluter pays principle“.

The protection of natural resources (protected species and habitats, water and land) and the ecosystem services that these resources provide is generally considered an important factor in the functioning of a healthy economy and a healthy society. Due to the unprecedented pressure on the environment that has occurred in the past decades, including large losses of biodiversity, the priority has become the provision of incentives and guarantees aimed at preventing environmental damage by human activity. National environmental liability regimes in the EU member states differed in terms of the extent of environmental damage covered and the requirements for remediation.

EU environmental policies are designed to accelerate the transition to a sustainable, innovative and circular economy in which biodiversity is protected, valued and restored and environmental health risks are minimised.

The importance of environmental and safety issues is constantly growing today. In addition to the impact of human activities on the environment, we are increasingly paying attention not only to the quality of life, but also to the cultural and social environment.

European environmental policy is based on the precautionary principle, the prevention and elimination of pollution at source, as well as the 'polluter pays' principle. The framework for future action in all areas of environmental policy sets out multiannual environmental action programs. They are integrated into horizontal strategies and taken into account in international environmental negotiations. Environmental policy came to the forefront of EU policy-making when the European Commission introduced the European Green Agreement as the main driver of its economic growth strategy.

The issue of sustainable development has been part of international politics already for several decades. Achieving sustainable development has been a major goal of the international community since 1992, when the UN Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro. Despite the efforts of several international organizations and the governments of many countries, the implementation of the sustainable development strategy is still insufficient. To support the ideas of sustainable development, a new development agenda, Transforming Our World: Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, was developed, consisting of 17 sustainable development goals. It was adopted by UN member states at the organization's summit in September 2015 in New York.

The unfavorable state of the environment has been compounded by the global energy, food and financial crisis and the warnings of scientists and researchers about the scarcity of natural resources as well as climate change. This is also the reason why a large number of initiatives have emerged in recent years to find new ways, methods, models, incentives and tools to achieve the strategic goals of sustainable development.

Thanks to the approved new environmental policy Greener Slovakia - Strategy of the Environmental Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 (Envirostratégia 2030 – The 2030 Envirostrategy), Slovakia has established a procedure on how to face the greatest environmental challenges and to solve the most serious environmental problems.

The Environmental Strategy is the basic strategic document for the environment with long-term goals aimed at the transition to a green, low-carbon and inclusive economy. The 2030 Envirostrategy defines a vision for the yr. 2030 (achieving a better quality of the environment and a sustainable circular economy using as few non-renewable natural resources and hazardous substances as possible), identifies basic systemic problems, sets targets for the yr. 2030, and proposes framework measures to improve the current situation.

The precautionary principle is a risk management tool that can be applied, when there is scientific uncertainty about the perceived risk to human health or the environment as a result of some certain actions or policies.

For example, in case of doubts about the potential negative effects of a product, and if uncertainty persists even after an objective scientific assessment, instructions may be issued to stop the distribution of the product or to withdraw it from the market. Such measures shall be non-discriminatory and proportionate and shall be re-evaluated as soon as further scientific information becomes available.

Raising public awareness of environmental issues leads the public not only to a greater understanding of the environmental context of society's economic and social life, but also to increase

the quality of consumer decision-making, citizens' legal awareness and, consequently, environmental protection and quality of life.

In the field of environmental policy enforcement, the application of a range of voluntary environmental approaches has expanded significantly in recent days. There is a tendency to increase the diversity of instruments, based to a large extent on the voluntary activities of producers and the growing awareness of all those involved in the field of environmental protection and creation. Several procedures are gradually standardized. Simultaneously with their practical expansion, their research began, focusing not only on the study of theoretical aspects, but also the generalization of practical experience gained from individual studies.

In line with this approach, there are some efforts gradually being made to move from solving environmental problems following their emergence to some technically preventive and sustainable solutions throughout the technology and product life cycle. The behavior of producers and consumers is gradually changing and the principles of precaution, the principle of voluntariness and public participation in solving environmental problems are increasingly being applied.

Environmental management is a set of voluntary environmental policy tools that enable the implementation of a systemic approach to solving problems in the field of environmental care and the continuous improvement of the behavior of organizations. In the field of industrial production and services, there is one of the most effective tools for achieving the priority goal - minimizing the negative effects of production activities on individual components of the environment.

The application of voluntary environmental policy instruments, such as environmental management systems, environmental product labelling, green public procurement and environmental technology verification, plays an important role.

By applying environmental responsibility, organizations benefit from reducing the negative environmental impacts resulting from their activities. Environmentally sound behavior is considered a business advantage, while poor environmental performance becomes a disadvantage. The aim of the international scientific conference "Environmental Management '2023" was to provide a suitable platform for informing the professional and scientific public, representatives of local government and state administration, exchanging experiences and presenting new results in the field of environmental management.