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PHARE PROGRAMME  
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN POLAND  
ROZWÓJ TURYSTYKI W POLSCE

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PHARE TOURISM PROJECT:  
CONSTRAINTS UPON  
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# PHARE TOURISM PROJECT: CONSTRAINTS UPON SUSTAINABILITY

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by

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# THE CEC PHARE TOURISM PROJECT IN POLAND: CONSTRAINTS UPON SUSTAINABILITY:

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## 1) Introduction

In the 4th year of rapid change in Poland, the notions of sustainable development, and of sustainable tourism, are still affected by the mixed 45 year inheritance from the communist period. The privatisation of industry, commerce, and agriculture (ie the former State part of it), moves ahead, and the processes of democratisation, decentralisation, and modernisation, are generally evident. Nevertheless, the long period in the past, when a command economy fixed a view of economic development, in which environmental wellbeing and community health, paradoxically, suffered from these central plans. Though Poland is cited as having 'stable transition' to a market economy, with no ethnic minority problems to bedevil the changeover period, past approaches still colour ways of tackling new short-term projects.

Poland is seen as a key test case for PHARE in many fields, for it is the largest of the former European communist countries outside the USSR, having a population of some 38.3 million, and an area of nearly 313,000 sq. kms. Its economic growth rate (i.e. GDP) for 1992 was 1 %. CEC spent over ECU1,000 million on all the PHARE countries in 1992, and of this ECU200 million was spent in Poland. "70% of the West's aid to the East is via PHARE & TACIS" stated the Economist on April 10, 93. The PHARE Aid to Poland for the Development of Tourism, relates to a 2 year Programme, started in January 93, and valued at ECU4.5 million, which is under 2.5% of the total PHARE Aid Programme to Poland.

## 2) Programme Aims

The aims of the PHARE Tourism Programme are spelt out in the agreement signed between the CEC & the Polish Government.

They relate to a 4-part agenda, focussed upon:

- Institutional Strengthening, relating to legislation,



restructuring, organisation & management;

-Product Development guidance, strategies for investment and development;

-Marketing and market research; plus

-Manpower development (ie vocational education and training for tourism).

The Programme is cognizant of the 1990 National Environmental Policy of Poland, which states that:

"..the policy of sustainable development will be implemented through enforcement of environmental requirements in every economic and public activity.."

Furthermore, the foreign experts advising the programme, firmly hold the view that clean & pure natural resources, plus protected & renovated built resources must be the basis on which to build a sustainable tourism for Poland.

However, in a time when Poland experiences the new phenomenon of large-scale unemployment, tourism is for the first time here being seen as an industry, and one with the potential to generate additional employment. Criteria of environmental protection and longterm sustainability thus are not seen as critical as job generation, in such a time.

The fact that larger PHARE programmes in Poland are addressing environmental policy, agriculture & private sector development, complements our work, and aids a longer term perspective. The notion of sustainable development influences the approach to a range of such programmes. Mainstream Polish perspectives are strongly economic, thus Zbiec wrote in 1992, that:

"..the main reason behind Poland's association with the European Community in the sphere of tourism, should be to utilise rich tourist markets of those countries in order to increase hard currency revenues.."

but there is recognition of some of the other dimensions involved, as shown in Bosiacki's 1992 views that:

"transformations under way in Poland now and the requirements set in other countries to the tourist industry, make that also in Poland, there a great demand for people with managerial skills, able to make decisions and applying elements of marketing in their day-to-day work. In other words, this is the time of professionals who know how to adjust them-selves to



the International and European order in tourism and to the changes to the domestic market of tourist services.....It is worth stressing that the current system of education of staff for the tourist industry.....leaves much to be desired". "...limitations stemming from inadequate professional skills of the staff working in the tourist industry may have a less negative impact on tourism than the degradation of the natural environment".

3) Examples of on going work that fit with sustainable tourism intentions:

I should like to refer briefly to some eight examples of work which is currently on going in Poland, at levels ranging from the International and national, down to the local levels:

a) The Institute for Sustainable Development - a lively Polish Foundation in Warsaw, has been promoting a major programme for integrated environmental and wildlife protection in Poland, linked to ecotourism and agrotourism. This project relating to the North East quarter of Poland is know as the "Green lungs of Poland" project, and its further development is associated with the Environmental Fund, of the U.K. Knowhow Fund.

b) Through the work of the France-Pologne Foundation, French help is being given to Poland in a number of fields' two of which relate to sustainable tourism intentions:

- regional programme development, and marketing work by 'Gites de France' with rural groups in Poland;
- work on renovating historic health-spa resorts and services, to give them long-life possibilities.

c) Under the auspices of the Polish Ministry of Agriculture, and its regional agricultural advice centres/agricultural colleges, much practical aid and advice is being given to farmers, organic farmers and new rural attraction entrepreneurs, in the setting up of farm-tourism, sustainable rural attractions, and marketed regional agrotourism offers, in regions such as Gdańsk, Elbląg, and Olsztyn.

d) Voluntary sector bodies like the Polish Boy Scouts



Movement, has special subsections concerned with the promotion of a new ecologically-sensitised trekking (on foot, bike or canoe) in the first instance by scouts, and now this is being extended into commercial offers for non-scouts - whether Polish or foreign visitors to the Polish countryside.

e) P.T.T.K (The Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society) is the largest of some 13 organisations listed by the Institute of Environmental Protection, as non-Governmental bodies dealing with environmental protection. It marks tracks in mountains and forests, provides hostels, does environment protection, and provides opportunities for ecotourism in protected areas, with guidance from its qualified guides. The 13 bodies mentioned range from political bodies, like the Polish Green Party, to the Polish Friends of the Earth, to religious - based bodies like the St. Francis of Assisi' Ecological Movement, on to wider bodies like the League for Nature Protection, the Polish Scouting Association and the already mentioned P.T.T.K. Underpinning the Voluntary sector, is the work of over 50 Polish Scientific and Research Institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences and other similar bodies, concerned with natural environmental protection, ecology, and heritage protection.

f) Clean-up campaigns are underway trying to clean up the dirty air of some of the cities, the dirtied water resources of rivers, and some parts of the Baltic, but whilst new legislation actively helps this with proposed means of enforcing standards, the financial constraints, and inadequate enforcement to date, severely limits what is being achieved in efforts to purify the natural resources of air, water and land, in Poland.

g) In the emerging Commercial Sector in Poland, some impressive ventures in ecotourism are occurring, such as the emergence of:

- The Eko-tourist Travel Agency in Krakow, a Polish travel agency "organising specialized itineraries in Poland which deal with ecological tourism" in National Parks and protected areas, activity tours, historical and ethnographic tours, both for domestic and foreign



consumers.

- special commercial birdwatching agencies, such, as 2 set up in the North-East of Poland, and which are quickly establishing themselves in the international market place.

h) Environmental Protection bodies, National Parks and related agencies in Poland, also are major actors in sustainable tourism provision. The involvements of the Ministries of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Forestry as well as the State Sport and Tourism Administration, plus a National Institute of Environmental Protection with active national, regional, and local offices of the State Environmental Protection Inspectorate are notable. Two national advisory bodies back them up. Privatisation of former public or state provisions in such protected areas is imminent, and the commercialisation of former trade union and industry social-tourism provisions is taking place now.

#### 4) Longterm versus Short-term Approaches;

Given this range of encouraging initiatives, you may wonder why should there be questioning doubts, and reservations expressed. The reality is that these initiatives do not reflect the general norms, and in a changeover period there is a general tendency to go for short-term financial advantage, rather than pursue the best longterm and sustainable development goals. The battlefield for sustainability is thus both economic and environmental. Sustainable tourism depends on the adoption of a new and longerterm philosophy, in which good husbandry of natural and built heritage resources is the first policy requirement. Political commitments to such an approach, linked to necessary budgetary allocations are pre-requisites, or factors which constrain the achievement of sustainable tourism.

5) Changing of attitudes is thus both an essential need, and a constraint in achieving 'sustainable tourism'. Serious commitment, as already stated, is not just a matter of words, but also of financial allocation to back-up intention. In Poland most people still think of sport and tourism as social provisions, as a part of



welfare and of social rights. The idea of tourism as an industry, managed to achieve long-life, based on sustainable-resources, and giving rise to long-term economic returns is still new in Poland. Thus people in high places talk of "agrotourism and ecotourism....(being) marginal", and say that "a poor country cannot afford the high costs of cleaning-up dirtied natural resources, such as water, and air. "The fact that international tourism is a highly competitive industry, and that tourists are free to choose between which countries they select to visit, is not yet adequately appreciated. The fact that tourists go to healthier, cleaner and more interesting countries is not appreciated; natural pride distorts perception of what proportion of the international market will focus in future, upon Poland. The green agenda is not a primary factor in the current Election Campaign in Poland. The fact that Poland's competitive chances in International Tourism is partly dependent upon an environmental clean-up campaign, is not yet appreciated by most Polish politicians.

Other operational constraints, affect and limit the shiftover to a 'sustainable development' philosophy, as a permeating one:

- The Banking System in transition is cautious and discourages innovative approaches;
- Compared to West European societies, too much public spend is by Central Government and too little by the implementing level-of local government;
- Many of the decision-makers are still the same people who made decisions in the past, so though the system changes formally, the thinking processes and actions of decision-makers and takers remain unchanged;
- Foreign aid programmes, involve technical advice rather than control, and advice-systems need incentives to get acceptance.

#### 6) Best Options:

The PHARE Tourism Programme in part responds to Polish Govermental prorities, and in part involves a rethink of needs and policies resulting from the interactions of foreign advisers and local policy makers. Poland is enjoying a 'stable transition', but it is a difficult time economically for most Poles. Aid programmes need to produce results quickly, to retain credibility and to support Governments that adopt them. Exploratory programmes such as



"Towards Paradores for Poland" try to optimize on retained and renovated quality-built resources, in a tourism context. Pilot projects in product development are trying to encourage agrotourism in the working countryside, and 'ecotourism' in the National Parks and more importantly - in Poland's extensive Landscape-Parks. Sustainable-tourism, and long life products are being developed now, and skilful market research, market segmentation and quality targetted marketing are all being pursued to help these aims.

#### 7) Summing-up:

The Polish scene to day is a vital and encouraging one both in democratic and economic changeover terms. The Government is taking difficult decisions to restructure the economy and institutions and Polish tourism must be viewed in this wider context. Realistic policies for sustainable development and for sustainable tourism are emerging, and will require courage and vision, if they are to be tackled wholeheartedly. Poland's future is hopeful, but some of the very real practical constraints that limit the early achievement of strategies which will deliver sustainable tourism, have been set out here. In a new integrated Europe in which a widened CEC may take in both the current EFTA countries, and the PHARE countries as well, tourism competition will be greater, and complementarity difficult to achieve. The "poorer brother in the East" will be hard-pushed to take longterm views that do not maximise early economic returns. However, countries like Poland cannot afford not to take a longterm view, and must go for the sustainable-development, and sustainable-tourism option.



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