

Increasing Public Participation for the Purpose of Reducing Industrial Pollution in Elbasan

Ecological Club Elbasan, Albania (Elbasan, and Commune of Bradashesh)

Project Background

While Albania has laws that limit the release of industrial pollutants, heavy industry in the Municipality of Elbasan has seen their capacities rise to former levels without any improvement in filtering devices. The Municipality and smaller governing authorities including the Bradashesh Commune don't know if these laws are being met. Anecdotally, residents of the Elbasan Municipality complain of respiratory problems, particularly among youth. Given that the Albanian government is a signatory of the Aarhus Convention, and the Ministry of Environment has signaled its willingness to shift the measuring and control of such pollution hotspots to the local level, the Ecological Club Elbasan would like to develop an action plan to improve air quality using public participation methods and involving the Municipal and Commune authorities, the public, industrial operators, relevant NGOs, and elected federal representatives.

Goals and Overall Objectives

Increasing Transparency In Decision-Making Through Public Participation Mechanisms

With the support of a working group, and through a combination of solicitation and information gathering methods (roundtable, survey, querying administrative officials), Ecology Club Elbasan would like to open up the current decision-making process so as to find ways to include public input in the current context, and institutionalize it for future developments.

Raising Public Awareness and Building the Capacity of Local Authorities

Through a media campaign, survey, roundtable, and the distribution of leaflets, the public will become aware of issues surrounding air quality in terms of health concerns, and the means by which their input can be incorporated into decision-making thus striving to improve the local conditions. Concurrently, through workshops, local authorities will learn how to solicit public opinion and be more accessible to public requests for information. Such educational activities should have a lasting effect on decision-making over contentious issues in the future.

Drafting, Testing, and Formalizing an Action Plan to Improve Air Quality

Through public and expert consultation, an action plan to improve air quality will be drafted, vetted by the public and experts, and presented to local and central decision-makers for

formalization. It is hoped that such a method will devolve the monitoring of air quality to the local level, as well as make such information accessible to the public, and when the set levels are exceeded measures will be taken.

How to Get There – Specific Activities

- **Conducting a Questionnaire**

A questionnaire will be drafted to query the public on their understanding of pollution levels and consequences, their ideas on how to reduce these levels, and their thoughts on how they would like to contribute to the decision-making process.

- **Holding a Roundtable**

After signaling to local and central government-level decision-makers that the public requires space to voice their concerns about pollution levels, a roundtable will be held where participants from authorities, business, local schools, doctors, and NGOs will exchange ideas on air quality problems and begin to prepare an action plan to improve air quality. A working group will be formed to spearhead this plan and to produce a leaflet for public consumption regarding current pollution problems, steps to combat these problems, and the means by which the public can get involved.

- **Building the Capacity of Decision-Makers in Public Participation Methods**

To ensure that decision-makers craft the action plan using participatory methods, Ecological Club Elbasan will walk officials and civil society through such a process. As the drafting of the action plan gets underway, Ecological Club Elbasan will ensure that the environmental and health commissions of the Municipality have thoroughly engaged in public dialogue before moving the draft to the council level for approval.

- **Finalizing and Implementing An Action Plan**

A report – with adequate public feedback – will be sent not only to the Municipal Council, but also the Ministry of Environment, the Prefecture, and the Commune Council (as well as three industrial businesses). It is hoped that authorities from multiple levels will recognize the legitimacy of public input and demonstrate the political will to address pollution level issues in accordance with public concerns.

Outcomes

It is hoped that through a combination of public awareness raising, local authority capacity building, as well as impressing on decision-makers the significance of public input, that solutions to pollution problems – including local level monitoring – can be executed for the benefit of public health.