

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT IN SLOVENIA: A SHORT OVERVIEW

RAZVOJ EKOLOŠKE/OKOLIŠNE MISLI U SLOVENIJI: KRATKI PREGLED

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Summary

In the paper, we are shedding light on the course of development of environmental thought in Slovenia. The first nature protection (but not environmental protection) programme in Slovenia was written by the Museum Society in 1920. It is considered one of the most well-founded nature protection documents of that time in international context. Direct effects on the environment were not felt yet, with the exception of certain industrial plants. First aspirations for concerted environmental protection efforts occurred in early 1970's. This was the consequence of increasingly deteriorating state of the environment. In the 80's, concerted efforts were put into raising awareness among the people and the responsible state authorities about the importance of environmental protection. At that time, civil society movements started to emerge, pointing to the problems related to pollution of the Krupa river, operation of the Krško nuclear power plant, locations of nuclear waste disposal sites and pollution caused by the Šoštanj thermal power plant. Individual activists had been fostering the idea of becoming formally associated, which led to the establishment of the party Greens of Slovenia. In the first multi-party elections after the World War II in 1990, the party won as much as 8.8 % of votes which made it relatively the strongest green party in Europe. Significant shift in environmental protection in Slovenia occurred after the country became independent in 1991. Two years later, the first framework Environmental Protection Act was adopted, which was aimed at addressing environmental issues from the perspective of sustainability. Although the issue of the environment and its protection became somewhat marginal in the society until the outbreak of crisis, we have been witnessing significant positive changes also in this area, in legislation as well as in actual behaviour.

Key words: nature protection, environmental protection, state of the environment, pollution, Slovenia

Ključne riječi: zaštita prirode, zaštita okoliša, stanje okoliša, onečišćenje, Slovenija

1 INTRODUCTION

Ever since the end of World War II we have been living in a very dynamic period of human history, in the grip of rapid growth of the global population and economy, technological innovation, information revolution and environmental abuse of our planet (Plut 2004). The development paradigm after World War II has been based on rapid economic development. The environment has only been attributed economic or material value, while its non-material values, such as aesthetic, recreational, cultural and ambiental,

have been neglected. Environmental degradation was perceived as an inevitable side effect of economic development. Remediation of the consequences, however, was possible only within agreed mechanisms of the economic paradigm of that time, in such a way not to compromise or slow the economic development (Lukšič and Bahor 2007).

Only when the issue of the quality of life emerged in the public of the Western world in the 1960's due to environmental concerns, environmental protection was given wider support (Lukšič and Bahor 2007).

In the paper, we are shedding light on the course of development of environmental thought in Slovenia. It can roughly be divided into four development »waves«.

2 FIRST WAVE

At the global level, the first wave of environmental protection movement began at the end of the 19th or at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States of America. Movements emerged, such as the Sierra Club (1892) which was one of the first large environmental organisations and is still intensively involved in lobbying for the promotion of green policies (Internet 1). This was not a period of mass movements, it was limited to activities of small groups (Rüdiger, 1991, cit. after Fink Hafner 1991). This wave reached Europe and consequently Slovenia somewhat later, in the 1920's, when the Section for the protection of nature and natural monuments of the Museum Society submitted the Memorandum of the Section for the protection of nature and natural monuments (1920) to the provincial government. This was the first nature protection programme in Slovenia, which, according to its concrete and comprehensive nature, belongs among the most well-founded nature protection documents of that time in the international context. The memorandum includes the initiative to establish an Alpine, a sub-Alpine and a marshland conservation park, to prohibit destruction of rare and typical flora and fauna, to protect karst caves with interesting flora and fauna and to attract the attention of the wider public for nature protection. Despite the fact that the field of nature protection was entirely unregulated at that time in legal and organisational terms, the authorities seriously considered the Memorandum, which was reflected in the protection of the Triglav lakes valley in 1924 (Erhatic 2012). As opposed to the tendencies of environmental movements in the United States of America and Western Europe, where individuals already questioned the entire industrial development and its pollution, more emphasis was given to nature protection than to environmental protection in Slovenia at that time. Namely, individuals felt the need for nature protection due to its beauty and rarity. At that time, there was no widespread industrial development in Slovenia, so its direct effects were not felt yet. The exception were certain industrial plants, which already caused environmental pollution early on. Among them was the Cinkarna in Celje, in the vicinity of which people already warned in early 1930's that factory gasses were causing damage to basic elements of the environment. In particular, negative impacts of sulphur dioxide emissions on nearby forests were detected (Špes 1998).

3 SECOND WAVE

The most important milestone of the second wave of global environmental movement was the publication of the book *Silent Spring* (1962) in which the author Rachel Carson dared putting humans in front of a mirror and facing them with what they were causing to the environment and consequently to themselves. She tackled the issue of pesticides and supported all of her claims with proofs. Thanks to her, ordinary people learned for the first time about dangerously rapid and irreversible changes in their environment, which resulted in their claiming the right to live in a healthy living environment (Avčin 1972). With her work, the author considerably influenced the flourishing of environmental research, raising awareness among the general and professional public and, to a certain degree, the adoption of environmental legislation. She was the first to break with the blind belief in progress at any cost and to reveal the arrogance of the chemical lobby and the relentless push for profits. Her book initiated the sprouting of the environmental movement which stimulated the publication of scientific papers on environmental

degradation which threatens our lives and lives of other beings. Environmental issues were increasingly moving toward the forefront of professional and, in particular, public debate.

Publication of the article *The Tragedy of the Commons* by American biologist Gerrett Hardin in 1968 (Hardin 1968), which is considered the pioneer work in the field of issues related to exploitation of natural resources and the resulting pollution, received huge international public attention.

At the end of the 60's and the beginning of the 70's, environment-related topics started to appear in public opinion surveys, soon overflowing them (Dunlap 1991). One of the most important milestones of more widespread awareness raising about environmental issues is the beginning of the celebration of the Earth Day in 1970, the biggest awareness-raising event of that time, where approximately 20 million people participated at the events around the globe (Gardner and Stern 2002). On this day, individuals and environmental movements prepared various projects and events addressing vulnerability and uniqueness of the environment we live in.

After the emergence of environmental movement in the US, the wave expanded to Europe (Smrekar 2006). Among the first to write about the importance of environmental protection in Slovenia was Drago Kralj who wrote a series of articles titled »Poisons« for the *Tovariš* (The Comrade) magazine. In these articles, he mostly addressed the issues of polluted areas in the immediate vicinity of factories. At that time, very little was known about these issues. Due to the prevailing mentality, which was in favour of industry and urbanisation, mostly emphasising their positive effects on population and economy, the responses of influential representatives of economy and authorities were contemptuous (Kozinc 2008, cit. in Merljak Zdovc 2008). Even the editor of the *Tovariš* magazine was certain about their fabrications, but he was in favour of the topic due to the fact that people liked to read about the environment (Kralj 2009, cit. in Ščuka 2009) because the issues from their local environment were covered. Besides Kralj, Željko Kozinc also wrote about environmental issues. In 1966 he published the six-part series titled »Bread I Eat, Air I Breathe, Water I Drink,« also in the *Tovariš* magazine, which was practically the only one willing

to cover this topic at that time. In the series, he dealt with the state of soils and the pollution of water, air, plants, animals and people (Ščuka 2009).

First aspirations for concerted environmental protection efforts and its affirmation in the social system occurred in early 1970's. On one hand, these developments took place under the influence of environmental protection waves from abroad, while at the same time they were also a direct reaction to the deterioration of the state of the environment (Polajnar Horvat 2009). Namely, environmental conditions started to deteriorate after World War II and hit the bottom in the 70's. At that time, there was a visible shift in gradual opening of the Slovenian society and critical reflection on its system that was based on the conviction that economic growth is the



Photo 1: the example of the series of articles titled »Poisons« in *Tovariš* (The Comrade) magazine (Kralj 1964).

key to progress. The opinion started to prevail that current society model had no perspective, particularly the economy based on the exhaustion of natural resources and the economy where natural laws were insufficiently taken into consideration (Toš 2009). A particularly important role was played by individual societies, among them mountaineering and scout organisations and the Natural History Society. The representatives of the Slovenian Natural History Society participated in the European Nature Conservation Year for the first time in 1970. Within this participation, they addressed the state of the environment in Slovenia and prepared for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, which is today considered the beginning of institutionalisation of addressing environmental issues (Bahor 2009). Namely, the need to address environmental issues by integration of environmental protection in policies ripened at that time (Smrekar 2006).

Along with the event in Stockholm, the Green Book on Threats to the Environment in Slovenia (Peterlin 1972) was published. In the book, numerous experts wanted to present the environmental damage that was caused, pointing out the urgent need to change the inappropriate attitude towards the environment. A year earlier (in 1971), the Slovenian Environmental Protection Association was already established in which various environmental organisations were associated, while in 1972, the Environmental Commission of the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia was established. Main initiators for the foundation of the Slovenian Environmental Protection Association were Aleš Bebler, Vladimir Pavšič (Matej Bor) and Jelka Kraigher. Three years later, the Republic Committee for Environmental Protection was established within the Executive Council of the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. The predecessor of civil movements that were campaigning for environmental protection at that time was the Environmental Protection Council, while the more active role was later taken by the Association of Societies for Environmental Protection. It associated environmentally aware individuals who sought paragons for their actions in environmental movements in Western European countries, particularly Germany (Špes 2008).

At the global level, the publication of the Limits to Growth (Meadows et al. 1972) report to the Club of Rome is perceived as one of the most important milestones of environmental awareness in that period. In the report, the authors warned about limited availability of natural resources that represent the material basis of modern civilisation and provided an overall critical review of industrial growth and incapability of its permanent continuation. The mentioned concept was based on the introduction of systemic dynamics and quantitative analysis in the environmental science (Turner 2008), by which the entire addressed issue was raised to a higher theoretical level. The effect of the publication was surprising, since millions of copies of the report were sold in a book form, translated into more than 30 languages.

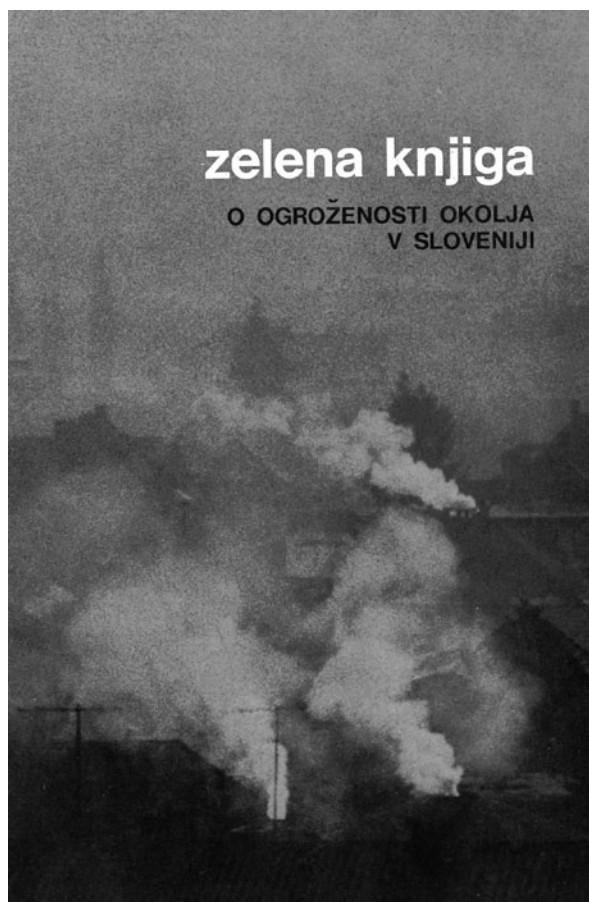


Photo 2: The Cover of the Green Book on Threats to the Environment in Slovenia (Peterlin 1972).

First formal steps toward the formation of European environmental policy were made in 1972, soon after the public started to show wider interest in environmental problems in late 60's. The first environmental action programme (Barnes and Barnes 1999) was adopted only a year later, in 1973, as a response to the challenges presented at the United Nations conference. It was already realised at that time that environmental problems cannot be solved without the inclusion of environmental protection in politics, which, however, took place somewhat later.

If the decade between the two globally resounding publications, i.e. between 1962 and 1972, is characterised by the raising of environmental awareness abroad as well as in Slovenia, the remaining 70's were hit by energy and economic crises as well as the crisis of environmental awareness. The awareness of environmental issues was increasing constantly, but was accompanied by the feeling of being helpless to successfully tackle the mentioned problems (Anko 2009). In Slovenia, the socialist social order additionally contributed to the environmental awareness crisis. Its representatives, with the exception of certain individuals, were not keen to include environmental protection in their vision. The largest ideological barrier they were faced with was the conviction that environmental problems are isolated problems of natural science – technical nature and do not penetrate into the very essence of social development and socialist vision (Pasti razvoja 1985). Nevertheless, environmental protection aspirations were gradually being integrated in the economy in early 70's. Environmental impact assessments were being carried out, representing one of the most important mechanisms of environmental protection and also part of the spatial planning procedure and building decision-making. The »Feasibility study to identify locations for the oil refinery in the Ljubljana area from the perspective of environmental protection, particularly nature protection« which was carried out by the Institute for the Protection and Study of Cultural and Natural Monuments in 1972, can be considered the first environmental impact assessment.

4 THIRD WAVE

Identified as the third wave of environmental protection movement is the period in which environmental organisations were reinforced in terms of quantity and quality, to the point that many of them became legitimate partners in environmental policy-making (Drevenšek 2002). In 1983, the United Nations established the World Commission on Environment and Development which warned in its report *Our Common Future* of 1987 (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) that the world must change its way of life and make a transition to environmentally sound economic development. The Commission pointed out the importance of sustainable development as *»development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.«* (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). In 1992, the most important environmental event organised by the UN, the Conference on Environment and Development, was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where all world leaders and experts from around the world convened. At the Conference, two important international agreements were adopted, as well as two principal statements and more measures for global sustainable development. Agenda 21 was adopted – the action plan to implement social, economic and environmental sustainable development, along with the Declaration on Environment and Development (Agenda 21 1992). In 1994, the Climate Change Convention was adopted as a response to increasing concentration of atmospheric greenhouse gasses and increasingly visible environmental consequences. The Convention represents a general framework of international measures in the area of addressing problems related to climate change. The objective of the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted in 1997 under the Climate Change Convention, is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to stop global warming. A year later, the Aarhus Convention was adopted, granting the public access to information, participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. It is the first legally binding document intended to promote the development of participatory democracy. The Convention is based on the sustainable development doctrine in which one of the fundamental premises is social consensus in environmental decision-making. It could be reached by the involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process (Mirković 2002; Kos and Marega 2002).

In Slovenia, which was still part of Yugoslavia in the 80's, individuals and various non-governmental organisations were also putting concerted efforts into raising awareness among the people and the responsible state authorities about the importance of environmental protection. Hubert Požarnik, as an environmentally conscious individual, published a book *Alternative (Alternatives)* in 1984. In his book he advocates the importance for environmental activists to establish themselves in politics. He emphasised the idea of awakening democracy that prioritises environmental issues. According to his opinion, economy of nature is the only alternative. In independent, more radical media, which were able to report about the topics that were not so interesting for the media at that time, environmental topics started to appear more frequently, attracting an increasingly large circle of people. The main purpose of such publications and broadcasts was to promote environmental ideas with the intention to generate changes in the society. At the same time, civil society movements were emerging, among which the environmental movement was also established. The reason for its establishment was pollution of the Krupa river in Bela krajina. Namely, the analyses of river water in 1983 revealed that the concentration of polychlorinated biphenyls in water was 400-times above the limit value (Plut 1988). This was caused by the disposal of waste condensers in karst dolines in the vicinity of the source of the Krupa river, which is the largest karst source in Bela krajina and is, besides the Kolpa river, the most important water source for that area. Awareness that inappropriate disposal of highly hazardous waste poses a serious health threat to the local population prompted Dušan Plut to publish an article about this issue in the Bela krajina youth bulletin *Razmerja* with editorial help of Božidar Flajšman and Zdenka Badovinac. Aside from warning about the environmental disaster unfolding in the area of Bela krajina, he particularly pointed to the fact that socialism as a system was destroying people's health and allowing environmental anomalies. For that period, such a publication was a brave act. Initially, other media didn't dare to report about it or even reported misleading information, for example that the Krupa was not being used for drinking water supply. Apart from *Razmerja*, the *Mladina* magazine and the Radio Študent radio station also reported about this issue, while in mainstream media, Radio Slovenia reporter Marjan Jerman was an exception (Plut 2009).

One of rare individuals who has been dealing with environmental issues more seriously since 1985 is Gregor Pucelj who warned about the pollution of water sources, air pollution around industrial areas, the issue of waste disposal and among other things also the issue of the uranium mine at Žirovski vrh, mostly in the Slovenian daily newspaper *Delo* (Pucelj 2009, cit. in Ščuka 2009).

An important milestone, influencing the shift in mentality globally as well as in Slovenia, was the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl in 1986. The disaster raised people's awareness about the risks nuclear power plants can pose, whereby the nuclear energy issue was not merely emotional but presented a complex problem of further development of industrial society (Drevenšek 2002). Anti-nuclear movement was established that warned about the gravity of the existence of the Krško nuclear power plant and the senselessness of constructing the planned nuclear power plant near Dol pri Ljubljani. In late 80's, the environmental activist Vane Gošnik organised an environmental gathering in Velenje against the nuclear waste disposal site in Velunski graben near Velenje. Besides, Leo Šešerko organised numerous round tables about this issue where he warned about the harmful effects of radioactive radiation. In printed media, Alenka Bizjak stood out with her articles about environmental pollution (Pesek 2009).

An important milestone was also the reaction to the pollution caused by the Šoštanj thermal power plant. Namely, forests in the area around the plant were apparently dying due to high pollution levels. The most important activist in public warning about threats to people's health in the Šalek valley was the above-mentioned Vane Gošnik (Pesek 2009), a local who, due to the above-mentioned pollution and the clearly apparent degradation of the environment, as well as due to the planned nuclear waste disposal site, organised a gathering attended by several thousand people.

Informing of the wider public about environmental issues or a shift in a wider social context took place through wider publication of articles pointing to social-political situation in the country and the national organisational confusion. One of the most influential magazines in the 80's and early 90's was the *Mladina* weekly. It was an opposition paper that freed itself from the influence of the politics. According to public opinion surveys, with the circulation of 22,000, more than 100,000 people read it in the early

80's. Among other things, it also covered the issues of freedom of press and freedom of speech, economy, privileges of socialist authoritarians, oppression of youth subcultures, human rights, environmental protection and other topics. By reading it, people were becoming aware of their rights and freedoms. They started to gather in streets and protest against violation of fundamental human rights that include the right to a healthy living environment. The Mladina weekly was particularly popular in the second half of 80's, reaching the circulation of over 50,000. At the end of the 80's, it was considered the enemy of the state due to its huge popularity. The authorities even prohibited and confiscated some of the most controversial issues. Due to its liberal stances, it was among the main driving forces of transformation of social mindset toward democratisation and human rights, also in relation to environmental protection (Mičič 2004). Apart from Mladina, Radio Študent also reported on environmental issues in Slovenia to a greater extent.

In order to provide an insight into the issue of environmental degradation and raise awareness of the public about the increasing gravity of environmental problems, the miscellany »Slovenia 88 – Environment and Development« that included more than 40 papers was published in 1988 by the Council for the Study and Protection of the Environment at the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Lah 1988). It provided the overall assessment of the state of the environment in Slovenia and the comparison with the findings of the »Green Book on Threats to the Environment in Slovenia (1972), which was published a decade and a half earlier. A year later, the first complex report on the state of the environment in Slovenia (Špes 2008) was prepared. Individual activists or environmentally conscious individuals had been fostering the idea of becoming formally associated and establishing a green party in Slovenia. Namely, the activists believed that changes in the field of environment can only be achieved through inclusion of environmental protection in politics. In the beginning of 1989, Dušan Plut published the draft »Green Manifesto« in which he emphasised that Slovenia needs a green party to fight against the multi-layered economic, technological, social-political and moral-ethical crisis and that further poisoning of the population and the country will no longer be passively and irresponsibly accepted (Pesek 2009). Therefore, the Greens of Slovenia (Zeleni Slovenije) political party was founded the same year. The party was created in the period in which the first democratic parties after World War II were emerging in Slovenia, and immediately got actively involved in the country's political life (Vodopivec 2007). Dušan Plut became the first president of the Greens of Slovenia. With their candidates and the programme, they participated in the first multi-party elections after World War II in 1990. Associated with other parties in the Democratic Opposition of Slovenia (Demos), they were elected into the Parliament. They won as many as 8.8 % of votes, thus becoming relatively the strongest green party in Europe (Pesek 2009). The result was later never repeated since they only operated independently until 1994 when they joined the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia. Later attempts of »green« parties to enter the Parliament were not successful, primarily due to their fragmentation and political weakness.

5 FOURTH WAVE

The notable shift in environmental protection in Slovenia occurred after Slovenia gained its independence, when economic, political and legislative context of addressing environmental issues also changed. With the establishment of democracy, the opportunity emerged to participate in environmental decision-making. Among other things, the right to a healthy living environment is written in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia 1991). People started to perceive the environment as a value (Polajnar Horvat 2008). They understood democracy as an opportunity for participation in decision-making and cooperative management of the society and the environment as one of its components (Smrekar 2006). This period can be characterised as the period of values in transition, when new social processes were taking place and the differentiation between social values, norms and ideological orientations was becoming increasingly pronounced. In 1993, the first framework Environmental Protection Act was adopted (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 32/1993) (The second Environmental Protection Act were adopted in 2004), which set the foundations of modern environmental protection in Slovenia. Addressing increasingly serious environmental problems, which had been based

on searching for technical solutions to reduce environmental load, was replaced by the concept of addressing problems from the perspective of sustainability (Smrekar 2006). The first Slovenian environmental protection act was adopted in 1993, only a year after the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. Therefore, it already includes findings and recommendations from the documents which were adopted at this conference. It is based on the standpoint that environmental protection is not merely or mainly cleaning up of the polluted environment, but instead preventive action is required as well as careful deliberation in decision-making about causing new environmental impacts and exploitation of natural resources. Among the most important fundamental principles of the Act, the principle of integrity needs to be pointed out. It is based on the proposition that environmental protection cannot be successfully implemented only partially, without consensus and cooperation (Špes 2008). After the adoption of the Act, the number of legal acts related to environmental protection increased rapidly. It further increased after Slovenia joined the European Union since Slovenia committed itself to systematically integrate environmental principles into politics, economy and everyday life (Plut 2004). In this way, through adjusting to legal requirements of the European Union, environmental protection became an indispensable part of political, economic as well as social decisions. Environmental issues were pushed to the forefront of public debates, they became subject of public policies, and concern for the environment became a positive value – however, all too often only at the declaratory level. Namely, while people in principle support environmental protection because it is also socially well-accepted, their enthusiasm quickly fades when they are faced with limitations interfering with their way of life (Smrekar 2006; Polajnar Horvat 2014). Thus, nominal support to environmental protection is not reflected in actual behaviour (Polajnar Horvat 2014), which indicates that the transition to environmentally oriented society is far from being completed (Toš 1997, 1999, 2012; Special Eurobarometer ... 2002, 2004, 2008, 2011).

6 CONCLUSION

At the end of the previous decade, Slovenia was also hit by the global financial crisis and the related economic recession. There were economic, political and social shocks and we were faced with the crisis of values. Unemployment, inability to repay debts and increasing distress and poverty of the people »awakened« the masses to once again initiate protests. People realised that the existing social order, which is based on constant economic growth, requires changes. Although the issue of the environment and its protection became somewhat marginal in the society until the outbreak of crisis, we have also been witnessing significant positive changes in this area, in legislation as well as in actual behaviour. It needs to be emphasised, though, that financial mechanisms can be more important for such strivings than environmental reasons. In face of these changes, a new era is doubtlessly coming in which actual care for the environment has a prominent role in the society. In a way, the period that started at the end of the previous decade can be characterised as the fifth environmental wave which, however, is still in the phase of developing. Unfortunately, it is still based on permanent economic growth, constant increase of material wealth and consumerism with the absence of care for social security and environmental balance. We can hope that within this wave, the society will realise the need for more appropriate socio-environmental system which will be oriented toward the efforts to pursue quality growth within the limits set by the environment, while achieving social justice (Plut 2014). If such a shift does not take place in a foreseeable future, we may be faced with even larger environmental problems and limitations which can thoroughly rock the foundations of modern civilisation (Kirn 2012).

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