

PROBLEMS AND REACTIONS OF PEOPLE LOCATED IN ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADED AREAS

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Abstract

Everyday we realize different activities which no doubt impact over the environment, contributing even in nature balance. People that live in areas where environment degradation is bigger, face multiple social, health and economical problems. Actually according to various studies carried by national and international organizations, in Albania are present many “Hot Spots zones”, where serious environments degradation is present. A considerable part of these areas years ago were industrial compounds, but nowadays they are residential zone and active economic areas. Exploitation and population of these areas has contributed in many social problems including health deterioration of population placed in these areas. However, despite the common concern regarding the effects the environment degradation has over human health and welfare, the environment problems and its effects vary from one to another. In the light of the above mentioned arguments, this paper presents and analyzes the attitudes and population reactions in these areas. Grown up residents of these focused areas make up the target of this study. The main purpose was to measure, reflect and analyze the attitudes and behaviors of residents towards provided services by the local and central government agencies through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. As a conclusion there were two attitudes of the interviewed people in regard to the above mentioned issues. For the majority of these residents results a lack of confidence towards the local institutions and thus they do not consider them as an institution to address their concerns, while the rest were indifferent, as a result of their previous experience in these or other similar problematic matters.

Keywords: *health, environment, social concerns, social service, social problems.*

Introduction

Environmental issues and climate change are demanding the attention of all individuals and society in developed countries and developing ones as they are seen as significantly associated with health and welfare of individuals but also by the way they affect the global economy (Huby, 1998).

Albania comes from a socialist system of the former Eastern Bloc. Economy as any other area of life was centralized, with a focus absent on environmental policy. Industry in Albania was characterized by the use of many hazardous substances and potentially toxic and there was a lack of measures of care of their isolation, treatment and disposal (UNEP, 2008). With the fall of communism regime in the 90', Albanian society spent a long period of transition associated with various social and demographic phenomena. Many of the factories or previous state run enterprises not being competitive with the new market conditions were closed by the state and were left at the mercy of fate, and together with them the elements of great danger to the environment and public health. No measures were taken to enable the elimination of hazardous substances but were left exposed to natural elements, which led to this turn into toxic waste, to circulate air, land being contaminated as well as the water. On the other hand being in a real socio-economic and demographic chaos, there were uncontrolled population movements towards the major cities, the new arrivals and massively populated the premises of state enterprises where these dangerous elements were stocked (UNEP, 2000).

In the following years, new conditions in the market and the emergence of new factors and economic actors, contributed to the emergence of some other social concerns. Growing needs of the construction industry, which saw an unexpected increase led to a very large demand for timber. Actually cement production, oil extraction and refining and metallurgical manufacturing are most of heavy industries operating in country. Localized areas of these industries result to be as hot spots from various studies carried out by UNEP or other organizations with a focus on the environment (UNEP, 2000). The biggest concern regarding industrial development is seen associated with lack of practice on controlling emissions of pollutants that produce and release into the atmosphere, the lack of continuous monitoring by the relevant institutions, the lack of continuous monitoring health of residents or legal gaps in their treatment. Cement and lime production industry (the latter by using burning tires), oil production industry with high rates of sulfur and the entry of a large number of very old vehicles are also big contributors to air pollution.

Recent years in Albania many laws are designed to approximate to the European legislation. Conventions are also signed to maintain control of degradation phenomena, protect, care and promote policies for further development of the environment. Also there are carried other special projects in collaboration with several EU and other non-EU neighbor countries for pilot projects for cleaning and rehabilitation of hot spots, preservation and protection of rivers and lakes but still remains a country where much remains to be done in this direction.

This study attempts to address some of the main problems faced by residents located in the hot spots area. Referred to above, the first objective of this study is to reflect on the level of information and awareness of residents of the target area about this level of pollution. The second objective is to show to measure, reflect and analyze the attitudes and behaviors of residents towards provided services by the local and central government agencies.

Methodology

In this study, for a better collection of the necessary information, the chosen methodology to be used is as follows: The survey contained closed and open questions. The survey consists of two basic elements.

The first element is based on the collection of data organized in categories. a) The first category aims to obtain data regarding the level of information on environmental pollution by its constituent elements such as air, water, soil and agricultural products and livestock. b) The second category relates to the collection of information regarding required and provided services and the local government and its institutions role.

The second element relates to the general population data, which are secondary data but very important for the interpretation of the data collected in the study area. The data collected are mainly quantitative.

This method allows a broad and concrete information gathering in relation to the field of study, problems and issues raised, legal and institutional support in new social schemes seen from the perspective of local government. Defining the survey questions has taken into account the social, economic and education level of persons tested, in order to facilitate the process of readability, understandability and completion. Completion of the survey was carried out by people in adulthood, as the nature of information requires a maturity and commitment on the part of respondents. The survey was completed by 378 residents of the four target area of study: Fushe - Kruja, Uznova - Berat, Bradashesh - Elbasan, Patos - Marinza.

Results

In order to meet its objectives, this study analyzes questions related to the level of information of residents, as well as the level the attitudes and behaviors of residents towards provided services by the local and central government agencies.

The results are presented on the level of information on environmental issues and specifically those related to pollution in their respective areas. Residents say that the media treats issues related to pollution in the areas where they live but almost of all of them feel this pollution every day when they wake up in the morning, during the day or by the night. About 85.7 % of residents declare that already this is the major problem they are facing. Similarly, 51.6 % say they have heard frequently in various television and chronicle information on pollution, 35.2 % said they often read the daily newspapers that come on the market as a means of informing and only 16.4 % of them cite radio as a source of information. According to the answers of residents, local institutions, seem not to provide information about pollution in the area and its protective measures, this according to 54.5 % of residents who said they had not received any information from the municipality where they belong.

Do ask for help and how often people seek help and support from local institutions on issues related to environmental pollution? This is a basic question of this study. Of course we are dealing with a people - institution relationship, where in one side is the exercise of the rights by the residents and the reaction function or institutional support services to residents (Aarhus, 2005). Results of this research show that there is no an organized and consistent response or support. About 78 % of respondents claim that they have not found support and 21.7 % of them claim to have institutions support in various forms like services, meetings or announcements. Regarding the level of support from institutions over the years to stay in the area shown here is a lack of statistical significance (sig. 0354 > 0:05). According to what they argue, this is due to lack of confidence in so called local or state structure and institutions.

According to them, the local government should take more initiatives to help the community, regardless of activities in the area are also an economic resource. More studies need to address and treat the issue of pollution and the health of habitants.

Referred to study areas, employment and localization in hot spots area, is another specific and institutional challenge observed in this study. For most of the residents of these areas the debate is related to the closing or not of the activities in the area. This is because of employment which is directly related to the existence of these activities themselves.

Provided answers are very significant for the study in question after they argue the demand for certain types of services that are not yet set in legislation.

As seen from the above results, it is clear that area resident respondents have a high level of information on pollution and its causes in the area. However, despite high level of pollution because of the high level of unemployment, the economic agent has served area residents as an important source of employment and income.

Conclusion

Albania has urgent need for a greater approximation about the measures that apply to EU countries on the way of what limits should be placed to the factors that cause environmental damage.

To assist local residents, local structures should carry out serious area inspections to identify cases directly affected by environmental problems. Local government rather than central government is responsible for service delivery. It's their institution obligation to insist on the implementation of the legislation by utilizing all the space needed and insist on finding alternative routes to assist residents who need supportive services.

On the other hand, individuals or communities should not rely on the government as the unique one to solve their problems. They can do a lot in response to the risks posed by cooperating to build an efficient man-environment relationship.

Residents in the area manifest health problems directly related to pollution of land, air or water. This is one of the main reasons that they appeal for intervention into cleaning the area. According to them local institutions have played no role in supporting and solving their problems. This mainly due to the lack of funds, competent structures, an adequate organization or willingness to resolve such issues affecting communities located in areas with environmental problems.

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