

SHORT PAPER OUTLINING KEY AREAS FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLAN FOR LIMASSOL

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Limassol's size and sudden surge of development, the huge influx of tourists each summer, and the pressure put by the locals and tourists alike on our environment, transport networks and waste and wastewater treatment systems are well known to most of us who have lived here. Unfortunately the environmental problems caused by the aforementioned are becoming more and more serious and their impacts on the quality of life in our city more and more evident.

The issues that need to be dealt with are many and varied and priorities need to be set.

One of the most basic priorities will probably need to be waste management. Most everyone in Cyprus is aware of the much flaunted figure of half a tonne of rubbish produced per person per annum. Many people are aware of what recycling is but perhaps few have participated in any part of the process, regardless of tireless attempts by local authorities and the Recyclers' Association. I have said 'part of the process' because what few members of the public seem to realize is that recycling does not simply require one to throw their glass or aluminium in a special container. Further more, little actual recycling is carried out in Cyprus, because the island lacks the infrastructure, and most collected materials are exported for recycling, often at a cost. By comparison, Leicester, a city just 2.5 times the population of Limassol has 100 recycling points around the city and recycled of 350 tonnes of steel per year, although it too is quite some way from reaching the EU Packaging Waste Directive targets. Limassol has a lot of work to do.

The European Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste will complicate things significantly and may mean that local authorities might need to incinerate some of their waste (producing energy in the process) in order to reach recycling targets. Such an event will require a fair degree of subtlety in dealing with the public, who are often feverishly opposed to incineration, despite some proven environmental pros (and several cons, let it be said).

The Landfill Directive, the Waste Incineration Directive and several others will need to be considered. A related issue is that of wastewater management and the efficient use of treated wastewater (as far as I understand this is now being wasted), the safe use or landfilling of post-treatment sludge and the need for a degree of primary treatment by industry prior to their wastewater being piped to the sewage treatment works.

On another note, the matters of landscape and the built environment (and the issue of reconciling the two) need also to be considered. A city has to be attractive, but liveable and practical- it needs to ensure that the aesthetic of natural beauty (trees, the sea, the view of mountains) nestles comfortably and is not disturbed by the more concrete (in more ways than one) reality of what it is essentially built of and for (road networks, private and public buildings, shops and other manmade structures, people themselves).

Limassol was unlucky enough to develop too far and too rapidly, without a proper plan, whereas most towns develop grow very slowly around their traditional centre. However, the preservation of the historic centre of the city, the protection of its landmarks, careful planning in the future, based on promoting environmentally conscious buildings, can help to keep and enhance Limassol's character in the long-term.

Other important environmental issues that need to be considered are those of transport and traffic management, inner city atmospheric pollution (the two are interwoven as the second is mostly a result of the first) and the issue of the Limassol zoo (Cypriot legislation on zoos is, supposedly in force, based on the recommendations of the European Association of Zoos and Aquariums. There exists a wealth of European legislation on all of the issues above, though it is not all legally binding. There is also the issue of sound environmental practice by the Municipality itself. Several local councils in Europe have gone as far as to carry out environmental audits on their own procedures and activities, sometimes with a view to ISO 14001 accreditation.

Finally, there are the interconnected matters of public involvement and awareness (and education), both of which are essential. The former provides a platform and a sense of belonging for the public, often some very useful feedback and, occasionally, some new ideas. The latter is essential for all the actions on all the issues mentioned already to run smoothly in the long-term. Household waste recycling, for example, requires a huge degree of public participation and therefore awareness. Teaching children about our environment will compel them to respect it when they are older.

All these issues need to be carefully considered before the formulation of any kind of Action Plan on the environment. And when considering environmental management plans or action plans for local authorities, one cannot ignore a something called 'Local Agenda 21'. LA 21, as it is often written for short, is not so much a policy or a document as an idea. Simply put, it is the application of Agenda 21, or A 21 for short, for local authorities- it is mentioned in the United Nation's Agenda 21 (the set of priority areas and policies decided upon at the Rio 1992 World Summit) in Chapter 28. Unfortunately, whilst A 21 is quite exhaustive in its ideas and suggestions, Chapter 28's requirements for a LA 21 are somewhat ambiguous and open to interpretation, especially given that no local authority could formulate an Action Plan comprising of every single item mentioned in A 21.

Thus, local authorities need to set their own priority areas based on those set out by A 21 and consistent with their own needs and concerns and those of their citizens and interest groups. Good examples of LA 21's can often be found, and sometimes they are incorporate into local Action Plans or Community Plans.

The City of Leicester in the UK is a good model to take. In 1990, Leicester became Britain's first Environment City. It is also recognised as a European Sustainable City. Leicester City Council incorporates LA 21 in its Community Plan, a kind of action plan with an overall aim of improving quality of life, which sets out certain, often very measurable, targets for environmental quality and improvement, such as: reducing car travel to the city centre, ensuring that national air quality guidelines are met, increasing recycling, protecting and promoting the understanding of Leicester's environment and culture and so on.

It is essential that the targets set are quantifiable. Targets should never be abstract. Leicester City Council has also identified a number of indicators which are measurable and which will allow it to know whether the targets it has set out to achieve are being met or not.

Another British pioneer is Oxford. Oxford City Council seems to be one of the frontrunners in the application of Local Agenda 21. Their commitment is set out in a six-step action plan, which is, simply put, as follows:

1. Managing and improving the local authority's own environmental performance
2. Integrating sustainable development aims into the local authority's policies and activities.
3. Awareness raising and education
4. Consulting and involving the wider members of the general public
5. Partnerships with groups within the local community
6. Measuring and monitoring and reporting progress

The first step is perhaps, technically the most complicated, and will involve improving energy and water use efficiency, reducing the use and wastage of paper by the Council itself, as well as finding ways to limit overall pollution within the city.

Three of the six steps above have everything to do with involving the general public and interested parties. Too much of our awareness raising activity in Cyprus is left to NGOs and professional organizations and too little is done by the authorities. Oxford City Council works with local community groups and local businesses to raise awareness, publicise its activities and to gain valuable feedback from interested members of the public, and it also organizes its own events such as an environment themed week each year.

Of course Oxford is an excellent city to model ourselves on, but it may be somewhat unrealistic to feel that we can emulate it anytime soon. Just as we in Limassol are looking

forward to the first study on atmospheric pollution of our city, Oxford City Council have up to date data on levels of pollution from sulphur and nitrous oxides, carbon monoxide and atmospheric ozone posted on the internet each day. Whenever I checked, the information was no more than one hour old.

Cities like Leicester and Oxford, and Aarhus in Denmark, Brno in the Czech Republic, Calvia in Mallorca, Tampere in Finland, and Wels in Austria to name but a few have already forged ahead with LA21-based plans of their own and can act as excellent examples of how Limassol should go ahead. However, each city has its own unique characteristics, and Limassol's environmental management and improvement, like all of the above, will require a long-term, full-time commitment if we are to have a city whose environmental attributes we can truly be proud of.

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