

BIO-ENVIRONMENT - GOVERNMENTAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL PLANNING

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Firstly I would like to thank my good friend Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, President of the Biopolitics International Organisation not only for the opportunity to participate in this symposium, but also for all the help she has afforded us in our effort to understand the importance of the bio-environment and the dangers which threaten it through our ignorance and negligence. She is an important citizen of Greece and of our planet, who fills us with pride and inspires us by her example.

This presentation will include some observations from my experience of two primary sectors of the Greek economy, tourism and the food industry. I will concentrate especially on distribution, and in the light of these experiences, express not only some questions and worries as an active citizen of this country, but also put forward some suggestions which might help in the common search for the formation of an effective business strategy for the bio-environment.

It is a worrying thought that last May the world population exceeded 5.5 billion and that according to estimates of the Population Reference Bureau in Washington, every 11 years another 1 billion are added, which is 250,000 souls every day. It is equally worrying that Greece has "conveniently" reached a population density of 80 inhabitants per square kilometer. If this is combined with the unrestrained consumerism of the average Greek, and the low social, and therefore environmental, awareness that characterizes him, the result is a synthesis which could be frightening.

From empirical observation, the paradoxical conclusion can be reached that the Greek people, who inside their homes are very clean, in places of public and common use they do not behave with equal responsibility. The seas, rivers, beaches, streets, squares are being polluted. The remaining forests are being burnt. Possible historical reasons which explain this behavior must be left to sociologists to explore. It is equally obvious that to proceed at this rate will soon mean that no one will be able to talk about quality of life. The consequences contained in this statement are foreseeable.

Western Europeans and the inhabitants of developed countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, etc., started to become conscious long ago of the dangers of various chemicals which have become an indispensable part of everyday life. They were also conscious of the fact that they could not enjoy the comforts afforded by such products as plastics, detergents or aerosols without paying a hidden price. With time, all these products will enter the water or the soil, via landfills, drains and sewage. Based on this understanding, dynamic initiatives have been undertaken in the form of coordinated efforts not only for the control of pollution but, above all, for its prevention at source. Consumers, retailers, producers, social and government bodies have cooperated in this endeavor. A first step has been the recognition of a common goal; to reduce the rate of this disastrous process and, in the long run, to reverse it.

The Greek public opinion is still not equally aware of the above dimensions. The results of a survey carried out by the Food Marketing Institute, FMI, in 1992 in 16 European countries has been referred to. Greece was among them, and I previously made a small contribution to it. Consumers were asked about their interest in food packaging and its consequences for the environment, and in this survey Greece unfortunately broke the 'anti'-record. In Europe, 73% of households recycle glass, 62%, newspapers (in Greece only 13%), 53%, fabrics, 46%, batteries, 32%, cans and 26%, plastic.

In Greece fewer than one in six households (16%) recycles one or more material types. In terms of the average of the types of all materials which each household recycles, Greece ranks lowest in relation to the other countries in Europe with 0.3. In top places are Austria (5.1), Switzerland (5), and Germany (4.8).

However, the same survey gave data which contains a spark of optimism. More than half of the Greek persons surveyed (56%), answered that they are very interested in food packaging and its environmental consequences, and 33% said that they are fairly interested. This poll seems to be confirmed by empirical observation in every day life. The average man is possessed by an intense anxiety, which he expresses by attributing responsibility to the authorities, without, however, offering many practical suggestions about what could be done, who can do it and, of course, what he himself will do. Greek people have been rendered sufficiently sensitive, either because they have realized the essence of the problem, or because the quality of their lives, especially in the big cities, has been sufficiently degraded as a result of corresponding environmental degradation, and they are ready to take steps in the right direction. However, the main difficulty in developing this climate is the lack of structured mechanisms. Such mechanisms will not only direct the effort for the protection of the bio-environment, inform businesses, social bodies and citizens, but will also coordinate the energies of all interested parties.

Even if the Greek citizen accepts the message of the times, and collects for recycling all the main categories of recyclable products (paper,

glass, aluminum, tin and plastic) there is no adequate collection mechanism or recycling industry. However, there has been a notable advance with regard to aluminum, because of the high value of aluminum scrap and the fact that instead of costly processing, it requires only melting and, therefore, has a relatively quick return on investment in the installations required.

It is also worth mentioning that many of the municipalities and rural communities in Greece have introduced pilot schemes for the recycling of aluminum cans. Among others are the municipalities of Neo Psychiko, Zakynthos, Spetses, Skyros, Daphni and Kordelio, with parallel efforts to inform and sensitize public opinion and schools. Similar efforts, though with less impressive results, are being made by some municipalities who have created collection networks for glass bottles. Efforts are also being made by the church, ecological organizations and a private company, to collect used papers, such as magazines, newspapers etc., along with voluntary offers of help from the public.

In these matters Greece is lagging behind, compared with the United States, where significant progress has been made, and with the rest of Europe which trails considerably behind the U.S. Unfortunately, the Greek central government is still not actively involved. One suggestion is that an organization should be set up, called, perhaps, the National Council for the Protection of the Bio-Environment, in which voluntary and active members would be the industrialist-producers of consumer goods, the distributors of these goods, wholesalers and retailers, the consumers, the mass media, social institutions, local government bodies etc. The council will be supported, not governed by, the state. The latter will not influence the council through delaying procedures, but will have only supervisory responsibility for the implementation of environmental policy.

This council, by adopting the accumulated experience of those countries and bodies which are advanced in these matters, with the support of the state and the European Union, will undertake the responsibility for putting in to motion, and co-ordinating, the actions of the members of the constituent organizations. It will inform as well as lead the Greek citizenry, through the media, schools and other means of communication. Through the forum of this National Council, social consent can be created and suggestions can be developed to put to the government for legislation which will be acceptable to all interested parties, and can therefore be carried out.

By collecting and classifying the results of already existing studies, or its own, the Council will be in a position to make suggestions for clean production and prevention of pollution at source. It will identify the need for the creation of industries for the treatment and recycling of waste material, as well as networks for their collection, by advising the government and the European Union about appropriate economic and legislative incentives.

Through simplified publications, videotapes and other supervisory means, it will convey the resulting information to the general public warning them about the danger of simply shifting the problem of waste material from hyper-consumption, to the dumps. It will promote the three-fold aim of:

- reduction of packaging material that becomes waste;
- reuse of as much packaging material as possible;
- recycling of as much packaging material as possible and the conversion of biodegradable material fertilizers or using them to produce energy.

Advice such as:

- avoiding unnecessary or excessive packaging;
- buying big packs;
- using concentrated forms of products, or products with double action;
- choosing products which can be used many times, such as rechargeable batteries etc.;
- choosing bags which can be used repeatedly, bags from recycled material or bags made of canvas or net;
- buying ecological products;
- not throwing away boxes, jars and plastic containers which are suitable for many uses at home;
- making careful selection of paper and glass packaging materials, aluminum, tin or plastic and taking to collection and recycling points if such centers operate in the area.

It is quite clear that once citizens realize the dead end to which the collective greed and indifference to the common good may lead them, they will be ready to respond to the positive initiatives which will be taken by leaders of the industrial sectors, trade, consumer organizations and public bodies. However, these initiatives must be taken without further delay.

I would like to add a few brief observations about the tourist industry in Greece in relation to today's theme. A six-year term of office in shaping and implementing tourist policies justifies an opinion. The importance of the role of tourism in economic development will have to be

evaluated in the light of its effect on Gross Domestic Product. This will be based on the gross production value of annual tourist consumption both at national and regional level, as well as its effect on investment and employment. Together with these factors, the importance of the environment, as well as environmental promotion, must also be taken into consideration in the procedure for forming policies for the development of the tourist industry.

Occasionally the view is expressed that the economic benefits derived from tourism have as an inevitable, negative counterbalance, the burdening of the environment, both natural and man-made with a consequent degradation of the quality of life. On the contrary, it is believed that for the long-term survival of the tourist industry as an economic activity, it is necessary to protect those resources on which it is based. This means that the development of the tourist industry must be inextricably linked with the protection and development of our cultural heritage; the natural and constructed environment, the preservation and promotion of traditions, and the Greek way of life itself. Basically the quality that is offered to visitors is the quality of life lived by Greek people.

The quality of the bio-environment, the forest and water wealth, the flora, the fauna, their habitat, the preservation of the ecological balance and the building of cities and housing settlements to a scale and esthetic value which respects man, are not simply factors which contribute to a better quality of tourist environment for the foreign visitor, while decisively affecting the quality of life of the Greek citizen; they are also conditions for the survival of human society in the next millennium.

Nikos Skoulas had been occupied with the trading and distribution of food products in Canada and Greece for a period of twenty-five years. Among others, his activities have included wholesales and retail sales of food products, as well as the supply of, and support to, aggregate feeding locations. For six years he has held various governmental positions in Greece such as Secretary of Problematic Enterprises; Secretary-General of the Hellenic National Tourism Organization; Alternate Minister of National Economy and Minister of Tourism. Today he acts as a business consultant, especially in the food sector and runs the "Leading Executives Workshop Group" which he founded in 1985 with the aim of the organization and execution of pilot management training programs for Greek companies' executives.