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**YOU HAVE
THE RIGHT**

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) **Aarhus Convention** was adopted on June 25th, 1998 in Aarhus, Denmark at the Fourth Ministerial Conference in the 'Environment for Europe' process. The draft of the Convention was developed during two years of negotiations. The representatives of a variety of non-governmental organizations took an active part in the discussions throughout that period, with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe making a major contribution to the debate. The Aarhus Convention entered into force on 30 October 2001. In order for the convention to enter into force, 90 days had to pass from the date of deposit of the 16th instrument of ratification.

By ratifying this agreement, on May 12th, 2009 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia - International Agreements, No. 38/09), the Republic of Serbia assumed the obligation to integrate the principles of the Aarhus Convention into the national legislation. Article 74 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 98/06) states that everyone has the right to a healthy environment and the right to timely and full information about the state of the environment, everyone, especially the Republic of Serbia and the autonomous province is accountable for the protection of the environment, as well as that everyone is obliged to preserve and improve the environment.

The urgency and necessity of taking action to prevent further devastation of the environment resulted in the UN developing a mechanism aimed at exerting a long-term comprehensive impact on the preservation of the environment. The Convention is an agreement that focuses not only on the protection of the environment, but also on the responsibility of governments and transparency in decision making. In the preamble to the Convention, a link is drawn between environmental protection and human rights norms and environmental rights are raised to the level of other human rights.

Whereas most multilateral environmental agreements define the obligations that the countries - parties to the Convention have to each other, the Aarhus Convention covers obligations that the parties have to the public. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the UN described it as "the most ambitious venture in the area of environmental democracy so far undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations".

The pillars of the Aarhus Convention make this document an instrument not just for the protection of the environment, but also for the promotion of democracy.

It focuses on:

- * ***access to information,***
- * ***the right of the public to participate in environmental decision making,***
- * ***access to justice when the two above-mentioned rights are violated.***



THE VOLUNTEER CENTRE KRAGUJEVAC ASSOCIATION

Volunteer Centre Kragujevac was established in 2002 in Kragujevac, the Republic of Serbia. We are the first volunteer organization in our town, fruit of enthusiasm of a group of citizens wishing to introduce European values to Serbia. We recognized our shared will to take action, the courage to take things into our own hands and the strength and determination to achieve the aims we set. We stand united but our professional backgrounds differ, our members are economists, medical doctors, political science specialists, sociologists, philologists, university students and secondary school pupils. We refuse to be victims of the problem facing the people living in Serbia, instead we want to employ our ideas and knowledge so as to contribute to the creation of a better future.

We have successfully carried out 47 projects, independently or in partnership with our friends. We helped bring back smiles back to the faces of children without paternal care and supported them to live out their dreams. Moreover, we provided assistance aimed at recognizing the talents and achievements of children with special needs and providing equal opportunities for the people with disabilities. We are dedicated to promoting a greater understanding of diversity, direct humanitarian action, improving the position of senior citizens in the society to a considerable extent, living in harmony with nature, preserving the symbols of the eco-system that has developed over thousands of years, fighting cancer and chronic diseases causing high mortality rate in the population in the Republic of Serbia, fighting anti-social behaviour and improving standards in all important segments of the state and the society. We have done everything in our power **TO BE OF SERVICE TO OUR FELLOW CITIZENS IN SOLVING THEIR BIGGEST PROBLEMS.**

We have been willing to hear what is troubling fellow residents of Kragujevac and had the courage to tackle the problems that others did not see, hear or want to face.

2011 was designated as the "European Year of Volunteering". This is an additional stimulus for us to make the first steps to fulfilling our ambitious aims, namely, helping vulnerable groups, children, the elderly, people with health problems, ethnic minorities; promoting healthy lifestyle, contributing to the preservation of natural, social, cultural and national heritage, educating the public, adopting European values and showing that volunteers are a major driving force of understanding social motivations and solving problems in the society. This year, we have been given an opportunity to further develop our knowledge, skills and work and realize our potential to the greatest extent possible. We are willing and ready to show that we can do more, that we want to do and will do many things for the benefit of our fellow residents of Kragujevac. We know that we can succeed and we will succeed in the name of higher aims. We will never back down. We will continue our mission.

Young people are ready to take on new challenges!!!

VOLUNTEER WORK FOR OUR PLANET

The creativity and the know-how of local communities are the corner stone of the approach to the challenges of global degradation of the environment.

Ensuring sustainability and protection of the environment requires ingenuity and solidarity on the part of every citizen, not just the government and the private sector.

Recognizing this fact, the first step SHOULD be focused on taking advantage of the potential of voluntary efforts made by individuals in the field of environmental protection.

The civil society has been gaining a new dimension in terms of its activities, both at the local and global level. Individual efforts made as part of well-developed and well-implemented activities that have a synergetic effect must have a positive impact on the strategy of environmental protection. The elements of solidarity and cohesion will certainly help to come up with quality solutions for the endangered environment. In terms of that, volunteering surpasses all the existing resources that the public sector has at its disposal. The power of citizens to actively participate in producing solutions that actively create the image of the environment is becoming impressive in its reach.

Volunteer work supports sustainability of the environment in a number of ways:

- * it raises the awareness of communities and mobilizes them to participate in the integrated environmental protection management practice of local importance,
- * it makes the participation of community members in active development of the environmental standards possible,
- * it stimulates planning, implementation and monitoring of the efforts focusing on the preservation of natural resources,
- * builds the togetherness of community members working to solve local environmental problems and promotes collaboration between community members regarding waste management and other topical issues in the domain of environmental protection.



✓ AIMS

Having all this in mind, Volunteer Centre Kragujevac designed this project in an attempt to:

- * raise the awareness of the civil society, civil society organizations, local authorities and the authorities in general about local environmental problems,
- * promote model legislation designed to facilitate system-wide participation of the public in decision making at the local level,
- * make it possible for the civil society to play a more active role in finding solutions to local environmental issues.

The project will also contribute to the development of a sustainable partnership between civil society organizations, the authorities and the media in the domain of environmental protection-related issues.

✓ START

The project was officially launched at Aarhus Centre Kragujevac, where the idea, planned activities, expected results and the route of the “volunteer tour” were presented. The project lasted for 6 weeks, from 22 August to 30 September, 2011.

✓ METHODS

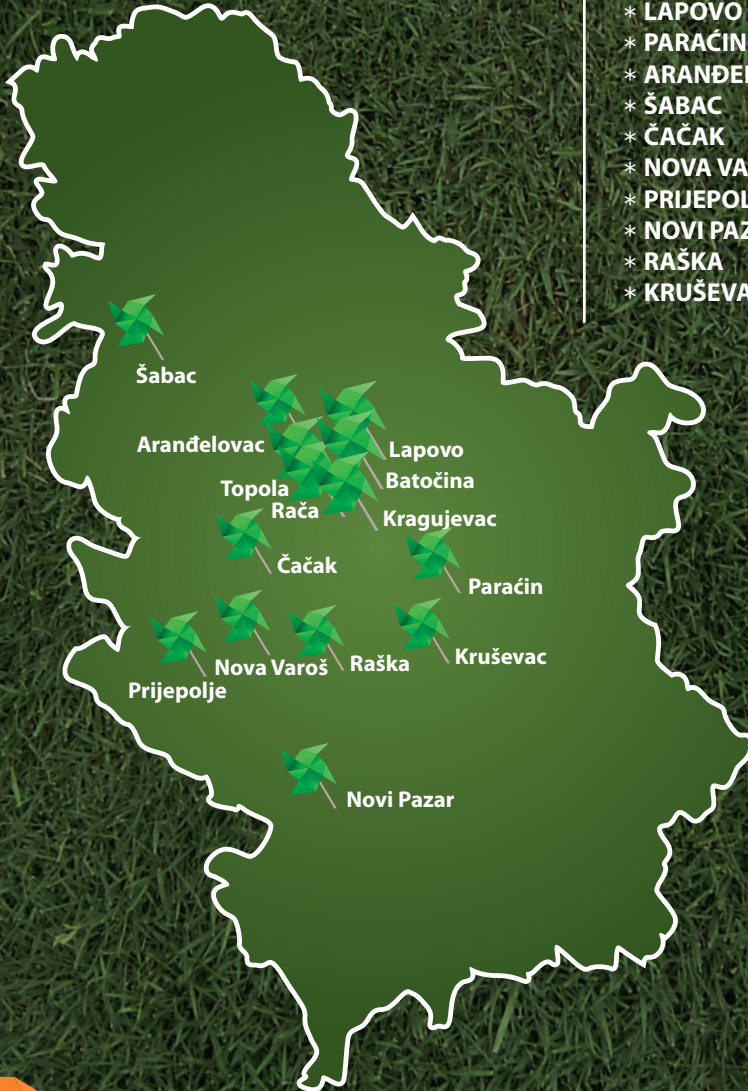
The main emphasis has been placed on carrying out promotional campaigns in the towns throughout the Šumadija region and South-Western Serbia. Before organizing campaigns in every town, project staff travelled to each of the places, so as to make arrangements with the local authorities and environmental non-governmental organizations on the most suitable dates and venues where to set up promotional booths to inform the public about the current topics in an as efficient and comprehensive manner as possible.



THE PROJECT INCLUDED ACTIVITIES IN 14 TOWNS IN ŠUMADIJA AND SOUTH – WEST SERBIA:



- * KRAGUJEVAC
- * RAČA
- * TOPOLA
- * BATOČINA
- * LAPOVO
- * PARAĆIN
- * ARANĐELOVAC
- * ŠABAC
- * ČAČAK
- * NOVA VAROŠ
- * PRIJEPOLJE
- * NOVI PAZAR
- * RAŠKA
- * KRUŠEVAC



The project activities had been promoted on the website of the regional Aarhus Centre, Volunteer Centre Kragujevac and in the local and national media.

ROUNDTABLES

Photo gallery



Kragujevac – Business Innovation Centre



Kruševac – Municipal Assembly



Aranđelovac - Municipal Assembly



Šabac – Cultural Centre



Čačak – Cultural Centre



Prijepolje – Cultural Centre



Raška - Municipal Assembly

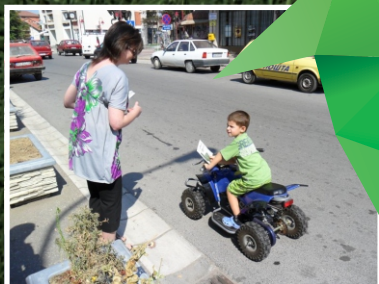


Paraćin - Municipal Assembly



PROMOTIONAL EVENTS

Informative conversations with citizens



PARTICIPANTS

ŠABAC

Representatives of local authorities
Ministry of Environment, Mining and Spatial
Planning, the Inspectorate
Šabac Public Health Institute
"Stari grad" utility company
Zorka Company – Non-Ferrous Metallurgy
Farmakom MB concern Šabac
Zorka – Research Centre
EXPERT INŽENJERING Company Šabac
UNEKO Podrinje, Šabac
Šabac Environmental Movement – ŠEP
Login Company
Votko export Company
Trgoauto, Šabac

ARANĐELOVAC

Representatives of local authorities
Arandelovac utility company
Environmental inspectors
Environmental Alliance Arandelovac

KRUŠEVAC

Representatives of local authorities
Kruševac Environmental Centre – KEC
Environmentalists' Union UNEKO – Kruševac
Environmental Movement "Bela breza, eko patrola"
"Eco Youth" - Kruševac Grammar School
Environmental Club

PRIJEPOLJE

Representatives of local authorities
Environmental team of the Prijepolje municipality
"Lim" utility company
NGO "Argument"
NGO "Mi možemo"
NGO "Limski darovi"
Mountain Climbers' Club "Kamena Gora"

PARAĆIN

Representatives of local authorities
Paraćin utility company
Environmental inspectors of the municipality of Paraćin
Rural Development Office

ČAČAK

Representatives of local authorities
Čačak utility company
Local Economic Development Department
Geographic Environmental Society association
Vocational School Specializing in Food and Catering Courses
"Radost" pre-school institution
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RAŠKA

Representatives of local authorities
Raška Tourism and Sports Organization
Raška utility company
Environmental club "Zeleni putokaz"
Environmental club "Raška"
NGO "Centre for alternative culture" Raška

KRAGUJEVAC

Representatives of local authorities
Town Tourism Organization
Ministry of Environment, Mining and Spatial
Planning, the Inspectorate
Aarhus Centre Kragujevac
Faculty of Sciences in Kragujevac
Faculty of Economics in Kragujevac
Regional Youth Office
Local Youth Office
Red Cross Kragujevac
Green Movement "Breza" Kragujevac
Roma Information Centre
Mountain Climbers' and Environmentalists' Club
"Gora" Kragujevac
Šumadija Fishing Society
Water Management Public Company "Erozija"
Mountain Climbers' Club "Žeželj"
ECO Nec
Eco Park
Scout's Unit "Bogoljub Buba Popović"
Kragujevac Scouts' Association
Young Enthusiasts' Association
Environmental Research Society "Mladen Karaman"
Women's Association "Kneginja Milica"
Student Parliament of the Law School in Kragujevac
Student Association Kragujevac
IFMSA Serbia

STAKEHOLDERS

HOLDER OF A M.Sc. DEGREE IN ENGINEERING / GEOGRAPHY TEACHER / HOLDER OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN ENGINEERING/ HOLDER OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN TECHNOLOGY/ HOLDER OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION/ JOURNALIST / HOLDER OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN LAW/ PHYSICS TEACHER / HOLDER OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN ECONOMICS/ UTILITY INSPECTOR / HOLDER OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN AGRICULTURE/ PENSIONER / CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER / ENTREPRENEUR / HOLDER OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN CHEMISTRY/ POLITICAL SCIENTIST / HOLDER OF A UNIVERSITY DEGREE IN ENGINEERING/ GEOLOGIST / STUDENT / MECHANICAL ENGINEER / PUPIL...

CONCLUSIONS



NECESSARY MEASURES:

- * forming a network of associations as a precondition for inter-regional cooperation in the domain of environmental protection,
 - * training of the staff of the relevant departments established by the local authorities on the implementation of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention,
 - * continually informing the public about its right to have access to information on the state of the environment,
 - * adopting local environmental action plans - LEAPs,
 - * application of the model of protection of the right to have access to information and actively participate in making decisions concerning environmental protection,
 - * more active participation of the media in the process of implementation of the idea of individual responsibility in the field of protection of natural resources.
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Project owners

The project was implemented by the Volunteer Centre Kragujevac association.

Partners: Aarhus Centre Kragujevac

The project was realised under the auspices of the OSCE Mission to Serbia,
The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC)