

Public Participation in Waste management in Croatia

Case studies

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Contents:

1. Croatian National Waste management plan for period 2007 -2015
2. Istra waste management system
3. Splitsko dalmatinska Županija waste management plan
4. Zagrebačka Županija waste management plan
5. Green Action's concerns regarding the waste-to-energy incinerator in Zagreb
6. Wastemanagement Centre in Zadar

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1. Croatian National Waste management plan for period 2007 - 2015

It is well known that the sudden entry of consumer society into Central and Eastern Europe has created a waste crisis for which the authorities have been unprepared, and that until now, insufficient action has been taken to address this issue. Waste is not only unsightly and foul smelling, but it also causes groundwater pollution. By addressing the waste problem and using materials more rationally, the problem of resource depletion and the negative environmental impacts of the mining, energy and manufacturing industries are also reduced, because when less waste is created, fewer new raw materials are needed to make new products.

Minimizing the amount of waste for treatment or landfilling needs a change in thinking and sometimes in approach, away from the idea that waste is inevitable and acceptable, towards a determination to phase it out. Croatian waste recycling statistics in 2005 were shamefully and pitifully low. Total municipal waste collected amounts to 1,344,830 t/a, of which 1,286,078 t/a was disposed of at waste disposal sites and 58,752 t/a was collected separately and recycled. In addition, 77,095 t/a of industrial waste was dumped at waste disposal sites together with municipal waste, which means that the collectors of municipal waste dumped a total of 1,363,173 t/a of waste at waste disposal sites.¹ To deal with this problem the Republic of Croatia prepared the National Waste management strategy in 2005. As the strategy has been brought without any serious public consultation and was available for comments only after being put in parliament voting procedure, Zelena akcija sent on 4th of October letter the Croatian Parliament asking the parliamentarians not to support this strategy because serious lack of recycling measures and public consultations.

The Waste Management Strategy will be implemented through a National Waste Management Implementation Plan, which was adopted on 19th July 2007 by the Government of the Republic of Croatia and will be valid for a period of 8 years. The following period until the end of 2008 is crucial for Croatian waste management because local waste management plans should be prepared, adopted and harmonized with national waste management plan.

The national plan itself **raised again the question of poor public participation understanding** by stating “that several public discussions have been organized”. Zelena akcija suspected that this statement was false and submitted information request to the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Physical Planning (MEPPPC) about public discussions details. State secretary Nikola Ružinski answered on 6th of September that there is no legal requirement for this plan to be publicly shown at all and that presentations have been held only for counties prefects.

The case gets even worse after The Environmental Protection Operational Programme 2007-2009 was published in September 2007. The development of this EPOP was parallel to the development of the National Waste Management Implementation Plan, which is the main planning document for the up-coming establishment of new waste

¹ Guidelines Development for starting implementation of Waste Management Plan in the Republic of Croatia LIFE04 TCY/CRO/000028 pg. 13.

management centres at county/regional levels, which is the prime measure under the EPOP's Priority axis 1. In that report Republic of Croatia, more precisely MEPPPC provided to European Commission a statement that consultation with county representatives took place on 11th April 2007 in Zagreb with a public presentation of the draft National Waste Management Implementation Plan by MEPPPC's Minister and State Secretary. Zelena akcija states that the MEPPPC has a really distorted interpretation of the meaning of public presentation and the whole Aarhus convention. **Statement in this report only confirmed that public participation is only used to fulfill requirements for possible European project financing.**

Concerning the contents of this draft Waste Management Plan, the following can be stated: The good fact in this draft Waste Management Plan is that no other "mass burn incinerators" in Croatia are planned for the period between 2007 and 2015. The other good point about it is that the unambitious binding targets for recycling presented in national strategy have been increased. The bad side of the new waste management plan is the serious lack of prevention and recycling measures and complete lack of kitchen biodegradable waste separate collection and composting. The lack of composting is more serious considering the fact that more than 40 percent of whole waste amount is kitchen biodegradable waste. While the plans for 21 regions in Croatia are quite clear and mechanical - biological treatment is chosen to prevent landfilling of biodegradable waste, City of Zagreb remained the only one to choose "mass burn" incinerator to be its waste management infrastructure investment. According to the latest available data from 2005, throughout Croatia currently has 160 000 containers of mixed municipal waste, and only 40 000 containers for separate material collection, and this will be changed by introducing at least 30 new containers on each 1000 people. With the exception of couple of cities throughout Croatia does not exist any system for separate waste collection by households, and waste fees are paid by households size, and not by the quantity of waste produced which would stimulate all the citizens for better recycling.

Summarizing Zelena Akcija came to the conclusion that the way of its adoption and presentation were not satisfactory, primarily because of the fact that MEPPPC never put any effort to present the plan to environmental NGOs and general public. The process of adopting the waste management plan and national waste management strategy was very closed and hidden eventhought the ministry of environment several times glorified its efforts and success in ratifying Aarhus convention. This problem seems to symptomatic for other processes concerning environmental planning.

2. Istra waste management system

With the implementation of Istra waste management system, currently used landfills in Istra will be closed and/or turned into collection/transfer stations while waste processing and disposal will be centralized at the Regional Waste Management Centre (RWMC). Next to Kastijun landfill (which will be closed) a RWMC will be built which will consist of a mechanical-biological waste pre-treatment, energy recovery biogas station and of sanitary landfill which will comply with national and EU environmental standards.

The first step for implementing Istrian waste management system was surprisingly not the Waste Management Plan but the EIA for the RWMC has been prepared and public information and consultation have been carried out according to national regulations – with additional 15 days extension of the consultation period. Weak national regulations – which at that time were not complying with EU regulation, allowed the project promoters to leave the public without chance to influence the process. On the public meeting held in December 2007, due to stipulating questions of Zelena akcija representatives, project promoters said publicly that no person of the public could influence the projects details but only propose potential new environmental protection measures. This statement was interpreted as really discouraging for public participation in this project. After attending 2 public meetings and reviewing the projects EIA Zelena akcija gave support to Zelena istra on sending comments on Environmental Impact Assessment for Istarska Županija landfill which is supposed to be financed by EU funds (IPA) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Prior to approval of the study, or before the last planning steps in the waste management hierarchy, it is necessary to establish a complete system of waste management. Because of differences in the quality of certain procedures of waste processing, strict hierarchical sequence defined by the European directives and the Croatian Law on waste has to be followed. Waste Management has to include measures to prevent the formation and reducing the amount of waste, without the use of procedures and / or ways of presenting risk by the environment, and measures to prevent harmful effects of waste on human health and the environment. We were aware that **Environmental Impact Assessment for the project of the Center for Waste Management Kaštijun** was not a plan for Waste Management of Istarska županija, but we feel that the measures and plans related to the area regarding Waste Management and the center for waste management are to be defined before the planning of a landfill project.

Suddenly after the project documentation for Kastijun finished the public participation procedure, Istrian waste management plan was published and the call for public participation was launched.

3. Splitsko dalmatinska Županija waste management plan

In case of Splitsko dalmatinska županija county, pure violations of either national environment protection law and Aarhus convention procedures have been noticed. In spite of regular NGO calls for involvement in the preparation of counties waste management plan, the plan has been prepared and adopted by counties assembly in February 2008. Serious letters and accusations of NGOs sent towards county authorities have been arrogantly answered that no public participation was even necessary. The case of Splitsko dalmatinska zupanija is even worse from the European Comission point of view because EU funds should cover a certain percentage of the central waste management facility. European Commision should refuse such financing due to nontransparent decision-making and serious lack of public participation in preparation of fundamental waste management document.

Characteristic for the planned regional centers is that they are actually centers for waste collection and manipulation, where mixed garbage is intended to be separated by mechanical-biological treatment (MBT) into a part which is used as a fuel for burning in cement and energetic plants or incinerator plants, and a “recycled” bio-waste part which is used as a semi-useful bio-compost. Building a MBT plant without optimistic recycling plans give the local opposition the full right that the plant will be used exclusively for RDF fuel preparation. Waste burning is a process exceptionally harmful for health, with very outstanding emissions of toxic and carcinogenic compounds and elements in the environment, as are dioxin, furan, mercury, lead, arsenic, etc. This can be proven with extremely low recycling figures planned. These figures are even smaller than the national waste management plan ones – and due to unknown system of plan approvalw it is still unknown how can bad plans be cancelled.

Some of the main comments towards the Splitsko dalmatinska zupanija County are:

Specificity of building waste management regional centers in the Dalmatian “karst” (rocky soil) represents a danger of the pollution of drinking water, as it is the case of the regional center Lećeveica (Marišćina and Badovinje rupe, soon). There is irrefutably proved interconnection of underground waters, in the region of the planned location of the waste landfill, with the water flaws which supply Split with drinking water.

The fact that must be understood when we talk about a waste management centers is that this centre is a place where the separately collected waste is transported to, and which is there processed in appropriate plants, for secondary raw material production or for transport to the other recycling centers. An example of the ecological waste treatment concept is the one implemented on the island of Krk where, after one year, the level of recycled waste was already 25%.

4. Zagrebačka Županija waste management plan

After a summer of avoiding the promised cancellation of the proposed ash landfill sites for the Zagreb incinerator project, the start of October awaits the renewal of the Zagreb County assembly work. At the coming meeting Green Action and the local initiative committees are expecting a cancellation of the illegal permissions for exploratory works for the potential ash landfill of proposed 100 000 tons per year, as the controversial issue was kept out of the assembly's agenda for two meetings in July.

Initiated in early 2002 the Zagreb Incinerator project promises to burn 385.000 tons of municipal waste per year, thus producing 100.000 tons of partly toxic ashes per year. The total necessary investment for infrastructural work on this project have been estimated around 180 million EUR, as EBRD and EIB are both seen as prospective financiers. The planning and preparation of the project was scandalous from the beginning breaching several legislative documents and approving environmental impact assessment without adequate public participation.

In late April of 2007 decisions have been made by heads of Gradec and Dubrava municipalities to give permissions for exploratory works for the potential ash landfill of proposed 385.000 tons per year Zagreb waste incinerator. Made without the approval of other council's members, these decisions were adopted in Zagrebačka županija assembly as legal ones even though both of the councils canceled them as illegal .

After finding out facts about the illegal decisions, in May and June and 2007, local NGO "SOS opcina gradec" organized 5 radio shows with public debate about future ash landfill in Vrbovec area. Local and national politicians promoting the waste management with incineration as treatment method made several clear statements about the awareness of illegal decisions and publicly promised to cancel the exploratory works in that area on the next Zagrebačka županija assembly which was held on 3rd of July in Zagreb. The decision for canceling Gradec/Dubrava site was on the meetings agenda but after 7 hours of debate just a vague compromised agreement was made, as the officials still didn't prepare papers for canceling the illegal decisions.

This agreement only freezes the illegal decisions until Zupanija makes its own waste management plan. The public was tricked again – and county prefect Kozic only bought some time till the next assembly (on July 17th) where he on purpose did not put the ash landfill topic in the agenda showing clearly that decision to clear the Gradec/Dubrava site from it's spatial planning was never even meant to be made.

The positive impact of NGOs coalition campaigning against the proposed incinerator and its ash landfill came visible through the media when most of the papers wrote articles that the agreement between Grad Zagreb and Zagrebacka Zupanija is seriously flawed. They recognized the fact that it is socially and environmentally irresponsible to accept 100.000 tons of ash whose one part is extremely toxic when Županija itself without any programs for reducing the waste quantity produces 80.000 tons of waste.

4.1 Zagrebačka županija Waste Management Plan preparation

The following period until the end of 2008 is crucial for Croatian waste management because National and local waste management plans should be made and adopted. The national plan itself raises again the question of poor public participation by stating that several public discussions have been organized.

Zelena akcija submitted an official request on 16th of July to be involved in process of preparing the waste management plan. So far Zelena akcija received no response from the Županija offices responsible for its preparation. In spite of calls for our involvement authorities started the process of waste management study without the NGOs in the process. Zelena akcija will follow up the development of the plan and will advocate for public participation procedure before this plan has been adopted by Zagrebačka Županija assembly.

5. Green Action's concerns regarding the proposed waste-to-energy incinerator in Zagreb, Croatia²

Green Action considers plans for a 385 000 tonnes per year waste-to-energy plant in Zagreb to be premature and dangerous, on environmental, economic and legal grounds. Our concerns include the lack of waste prevention and recycling measures in the city, the lack of disposal facilities for the disposal of hazardous ash and residues from the plant; air pollution increases; the unlikelihood of sufficient monitoring and enforcement; the inefficiency of burning resources; and the excessive cost of incineration. **Incineration is being pursued as a quick-fix solution for the city's waste problem rather than as a last resort.**

The second Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the project³ stipulated a number of important tasks needing to be undertaken before construction of the incinerator begins, most of which will take years to implement. Yet after discussions between the investor and the Ministry of Environmental Protection, **the third version of the EIA, which failed to address almost all of these points, was approved with no new public consultation, contrary to Croatian law, and is now being challenged in court.**

The long-overdue work on improvement of waste management in Zagreb must not be carried out hastily and the City Council must not be tempted by ready-made end-of-pipe solutions, but must adhere to the waste hierarchy and utilise the most effective solutions rather than the easiest.

5.1 Crowding out waste prevention and recycling and failing to follow the waste hierarchy

The plan for an incinerator was developed before waste statistics and predictions for Zagreb had been made, and the figures to support the idea were produced later. These predictions should have been carried out as the **first** step in developing a waste reduction and management strategy, not as an afterthought.

In 2006 Zagreb City Council passed a Waste Management Programme without any public consultation, in spite of repeated requests from Green Action to be involved in the process. This document, the inadequacy of which has been analysed in a separate document, predicted the future quantity of waste and the amount that would be prevented, recycled, and disposed of, but relies on outdated waste data that over-estimates both the total quantity of waste and its calorific value.

² These comments do not include our concerns about the project development process, which has been secretive and appears to have violated Croatian law on several occasions through withholding of information and failure to implement public participation provisions. Further information on this aspect of the project can be obtained from Green Action - za (at) zelena-akcija.hr

³ The 2nd EIA was rejected by the Ministry of the Environment, only for the third version to be approved without a public consultation or public disclosure, in violation of Croatian law and EBRD environmental policy.

The data were gathered before the implementation of the Ordinance on collecting recyclable beverage packaging, and do not take account of the recent increase in recycling that has taken place nor the decrease in plastic in municipal waste.

The plan predicts an increase of just below 80 percent in the quantity of waste generated between 2005 and 2020. However, the European Environment Agency predicts an increase of 25 per cent for the EU-25,⁴ and Eurostat data shows that between 1995 and 2005 the amount of municipal waste generated per capita in the new member states generally stabilised⁵, so there is no reason to expect that waste growth in Croatia would exceed the EU average so dramatically.

We are concerned that the planned incinerator is oversized, and that either recyclable waste or imported waste will be needed to fill it up. **With incorrect figures on the type and volume of waste, the lower calorific value may not be guaranteed**, with serious consequences for the efficiency of the combustion process and therefore emissions levels and amount of ash created.

5.2 Zagreb Waste management plan

After Zelena akcija received draft version of WMP for City of Zagreb and organized several protest against planned waste management City of Zagreb stopped the development of the plan which was never officially adopted. 2 years after, late august 2008, City still hasn't approved the plan and no public procedures were organized so far. Zelena akcija is monitoring the case and will ensure proper citizens involvement in the planning process.

⁴ European Environment Agency: The Road from Landfilling to Recycling: Common Destination, Different Routes, EEA, 2007, p.7

⁵ Eurostat: Municipal waste generated, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

6. Wastemanagement Centre in Zadar

The first contact with the newly established Wastemanagement Centre (WMC) was unpleasant for the NGO Eko-Zadar. The private entity chose the same name (Eko d.o.o. Zadar) as the charitable organisation. So now two institutions with totally different scope of working exist parallelly. The president of the NGO Atana Grbić – Martinović got in touch with the manager of the WMC and chose rather a cooperative way of dealing with the problem over conflict. Together a project was launched – “Eko na kvarat – Eko²” Together the two institutions will work on communication of the WMC – a brochure will be edited and public tribunes in all communities around the location of the WMC will be organised. A study trip to an existing WMC in Celje, Slovenia was organised, which will be identical to the one in Zadar. Thus the environmentalists could get more informations about the project.

Waste Management is one of the main issues the NGO Eko-Zadar is dealing with and so a broader cooperation with other actors, such as the Cistoca – the municipal services of the city of Zadar and the regional administration was appointed. The first joint activity was the printing and dissemination of a brochure on separate waste collection. The brochure was named “Stavi stvar na pravo mjesto” – “Put the thing in the right place” and disseminated to 30.000 households and the private sector. Public discussions on Mechanical biological treatment were appointed. Thus the technology chosen for the Waste Management Centre could be discussed with the inhabitants of the town. Further a roundtable was agreed on, in which representatives of the Zupanija, of the WMC, press and some individuals participated. Sadly the public interest for this event was low but media interest was rather high so the results were made available for the public.

The NGO still criticizes that a WMC is established, without having the Waste management plan for the Zupanija adopted. This chooses a technology before even having reliable statistics about waste production and reprocessing utilities. Further the public was not invited to give comments before the establishment of the WMC. The NGO now hopes that signals send, that NGOs are interested in that kind of decisions and are capable of providing useful expertise on that topic have been noticed and that in further processes they will be included.