



Women and Active Eco-Citizenship in Europe

Short portraits of "Eco-women"

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English version
June 2009



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
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Introduction

As part of the European program « Europe for its citizens », The Mediterranean Center for the Environment (CME) has developed the Women and Active Eco-citizenship in Europe project, in partnership with Greek, Bulgarian and Czech organizations. This project takes place in a history of almost 20 years of trying to implicate women in European cooperation actions by the CME. This organization promotes many EuroMediterranean programs concerning the environment and women's commitment.

European Campus for the Environment have been taking place since 1990 and welcomed hundreds of women. They are often majorly responsible for recruiting for these campuses as voluntary experts on local initiatives concerning the environment in more than 30 countries.

The same phenomenon can be observed in pilot projects of European youth volunteering that are co-financed by the European Union. Women are more willing to involve themselves in field operations connected to environmental issues.

The program « Mediterranean Workshops on Community life Initiatives » has also seen a great dynamic in projects led by women and has opened onto the program "Women and Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean Region". Eco-citizen initiatives taken by women have been supported during 3 years in France and Maghrebi countries.

The projet "Women and Ecocitizenship in Europe" enables us today to communicate and promote, through a movie and videos directed by the participants themselves, the strength and originality of field experiences in 4 European countries.

The important thing is not only the recognition of women's aptitude to get involved. It is also to show examples that should have a multiplier effect on other women's actions on environmental issues. This dynamic will be increasingly put forth in European policies, which involve us all.

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Women and Active Ecocitizenship in Europe - Synthesis

The **Women and Eco-citizenship in Europe** was born from the double assessment of women being under represented in local institutions that have an influence on environmental local policies, and of a dire lack of cooperation between elected local institutions and members of the community life, especially in newly joined countries and those in the south of the European Union. Its objective is to throw the light on a common involvement and shared paths in the European territory, and on the importance of environmental issues as a mean to involve citizens in the civic and political life.

Women and Active Eco-citizenship in Europe aims to promote women participation in the construction of local environmental policies, be it among local authorities' decisional organs or with civil organization members. To achieve this goal, it consists of the promotion of successful experiences by women in Greece, Bulgaria, France and the Czech Republic. These women have the chance to testify on their paths through interviews and video portraits of which they have themselves conceived the scenario. By setting forth their specific approach, their shortcomings and achievements, the Eco-citizens involved in this project wish to help and encourage other women to take part in the sustainable development process in Europe.

How do these Eco-citizen women define themselves?

An Eco-citizen is an informed person, who knows of his or her rights and duties, who can express his or her opinion and participate actively for a better consideration of the environment in society. Women presented in this compilation are perfectly aware of their role and as locally elected mayors or municipal counsellors, or as active members of non profit organisations (NGO) play an important part in favour of sustainable development.

Once elected, women find themselves at the heart of the decision process and can vastly influence the rise of awareness on the ecological issue in their community. Here and there, various projects take place that include the principles of sustainable development. Urban development will take the form of a sustainable district. Grassy areas will be saved from destruction and the construction of a mall. Public buildings will integrate ecological construction standards. Tourism will be replaced by eco-tourism respectful of the natural and cultural heritage and the promotion of local techniques.

As members of NGO, women have the possibility of a direct interaction with the public. Through the rise of consciousness, by awareness campaigns, forums or other field operations, they try to influence on the course of local projects, open the way for others to come and change the ways of thinking.

Environmental education takes a large part in the work of the participants of this project. Members of NGO convey knowledge to children, who are the future actors of society. Elected women build programs in schools or publicized operations.

Is there a feminine approach to environmental issues?

Only a few participants of the Women and Active Ecocitizenship in Europe program deny that there is a specific approach of environmental issues by women. Most interviews show that they feel moved by a natural need to preserve the environment on the long run. Many of them attribute this desire to motherhood and to the leading role women have always had as mother in the everyday family life. This would be why they have this almost instinctive sense of urgency, needing to protect their children of modern society's attacks, as pollution, over consumerism or biodiversity loss. In their homes, they teach their children the "eco-gestures" (recycling, reducing one's use of water and electricity). In their work, as elected

representatives or member of a community, this figure of family responsible would make them more receptive than men to the quality of their surroundings, of the interaction between health and pollution, and globally of the need for a global and long term approach on environmental issues. These ways do they make their own the definition given for sustainable development (by the name of a women Secretary!) in the Brundtland Report in 1987: "a development that fulfils the needs of the present without jeopardizing the chance for generations to come to fulfil their own".

Furthermore, being both working women and stay at home mothers would give them a pragmatic approach of everyday handling of environmental issues, based not only on economical standars, but also on a sum of social and cultural standards. They are not only focused on large scale projects, but also on small, concrete and local projects.

Lastly, some of these Eco-citizens credit women with a certain capacity for consultation and conciliation. This ability for dialogue drives them to implicate the population, by constituting groups of volunteers or organizing public debates, or to become the necessary link between various partitioned administrations or civil groups opposes. All of these steps are crucial for sustainable development.

Old prejudices die hard...

Certainly, some of the women involved in this project, especially in Bulgaria, think that nowadays women have the same possibility as men to intervene in local policies concerning the environment. Nonetheless, most of them mention the difficulties they have encountered, and sometimes do still, that dishearten women to become involved. Several factors have been put forth by the participants:

First of all, women lack of time to invest as much as they would like in dealing with these issues. They often still have to take charge of many aspects of domestic life. This responsibility weights more on women who raise their families alone, the number of single-parent families being on the rise through Europe. Handling their job, their family and possibly a voluntary involvement is for many women a real challenge. The women Eco-citizens of this project encourage other women, who want to get involved nonetheless, not to be discouraged and to try to find a balance between all these activities.

Furthermore, women find it difficult to access to positions with responsibilities. They still face a prejudice which relegates them to less prestigious positions, or ones that imply dealing with the public. Some of these Eco-citizens are active member of the public life in their country and denounce the real and established male dominance in most mentalities. On the other hand, some women state that maybe women have a responsibility in the persistence of this prejudice, because they lack self-confidence.

Finally, they all have insisted on the lack of visibility that women and their actions face in the environmental field. Broadcasting successful experiences should both give women confidence and defuse this prejudice, enabling women who do not dare do so to get involved. This is the objective of the **Women and Active Ecocitizenship in Europe** project.

Leads for Active Eco-citizenship for women

Women who took part in this project have found ways to circle these obstacles to women implication in favour of the environment. By participating, they want to share their knowledge.

Most of them call on public institutions to support women, their actions and their projects, and to take measures in order to do so. As an example, they want the Swedish "zipper system" to be adapted to their countries' legislation, which stipulates that on an electoral list, a woman should occupy the first or second position. They also wish that the work legislation be adapted to their situation as mothers and workers, for example through

the development of teleworking. They call on the European authorities to develop financial programs to support women's projects.

Women must contribute themselves to better their participation, by mutual support. They can create female cooperation networks to exchange on their experiences. These women Eco-citizens recommend them to get information, education, or better trainings on their technical knowledge. This way, they could escape from the themes to which they are often reduced, family, youth or social affairs, and impose themselves in the environmental field.

Another way to improve oneself is to work, voluntarily or not, in Non Governmental Organizations (NGO). This work seems to be an incomparable source of experience, notably for understanding who the local actors are and the workings of various projects. It is also a good way to enter the public life. Some of the elected representatives in this program are furthermore encouraging women to implicate themselves in the local political life. It is the only way for them to change things and mentalities around, and to have a real influence on the quality of the environment, today and in the future.

Conclusion

This project, which aims to build the foundations of a network for women acting in favour of the environment, will find its conclusion in a seminary in Sofia, Bulgaria. On this occasion, women who are active Eco-Citizen in southern Europe will have the chance to meet.

An 8 minutes film, a compilation of 16 video-portraits conceived by the participants themselves and directed by Maria Leonida, will be presented. It will illustrate the 34 portraits of the women who have taken part in this program, which are available on the web site of the program, in 5 different languages. This web site also houses a forum that will enable women to unite around a common care for the environment and the same desire to act. This **Women and Active Ecocitizenship in Europe** project is a way to pass on and promote the strength and originality of these field involved women's actions, in 4 different European countries.

Nonetheless, what matters most is not for their involvement to be out on the open. They mostly want to serve as examples of what can be accomplished, and hope to have a multiplying impact on women's action throughout Europe. Let's bet that this promotion of successful experiences will awaken many callings and bring other women to join this network. Together, they will join forces and make environmental a priority, as it is starting to be in European policies. Caring for the environment, and acting for its preservation is an issue that involves every one of us.

FRANCE

Virginie LOMBARD

Botanist gardener
CAIRN Relais Nature and Cosmos Kolej
Marseille

Virginie Lombard is a botanist gardener and landscape architect for whom interacting with the environment is more than simply a career. It is a philosophy of life. After working for ten years in the artistic world - she is an alumna of the prestigious Ecole du Louvre in Paris - she realized she wanted to be involved in the environmental field, to have a more concrete impact. Therefore, she decided to educate herself to ecological techniques, notably by creating Mediterranean gardens. Caring for the landscape and for the biodiversity is one and the same to her. She believes that eco-citizenship is a way to involve every protagonist, from the economic world to the local authorities, in order to lead an eco-friendly life. An increase of public awareness on sustainable development issues, through education, is necessary. This conviction is at work in her contribution to an ecological land settlement with sixth-graders, and in her effort to have a "soft" traffic itinerary realized in Marseille. She strongly wishes to include everyone in dealing appropriately with environmental issues, and continues to be committed through her various positions, before as a coordinator in Cairn Relais Nature, and nowadays by working for Cosmos Kolej, a theatre company. Striving for the environment can take many forms.

According to Virginie Lombard, women have a particular assessment of the living, a different sensitivity than men; although they are complementary. If women are usually more aware of education issues with children and may be more open to understanding what is at stake for the environment, they are denied "access to high decision-making positions especially in certain countries" hence the importance of supporting various projects led by them.



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FRANCE

Michèle PONCET-RAMADE

Town councillor - Marseille

Michèle Poncet-Ramade has this clear-cut way of talking physicians have for describing things. She has been working in hospitals since 1986 as a neurologist. But she also is a leading figure of Marseille, where she is Town councillor and the deputy mayor in charge of the issue of sustainable development.

She sums up her idea of sustainable development in one sentence: "to anticipate the future by laying out the present". When asked for her reasons for being involved in this cause, she answers that she is "certain that this world is over while humankind goes on". Also administrator of the regional observatory for health (*Observatoire Régional de Santé*) since 1985, Michèle Poncet-Ramade is aware of various health issues linked to the environment. For instance, she recently brought a lawsuit to denounce the pollution occasioned by mobile television antennas. She is also proud of having made failed a resort hotel project on a classified site, thus preserving the famous coves of Marseille. Her next steps are the ecological land settlement of the *Canal de Provence*, Marseille's source of water, "soft" traffic itineraries, or the opening of shared kitchen gardens.

Michèle Poncet-Ramade considers that women may have a more developed sense of practicality than men concerning actions in favour of the environment. In addition, she believes that equal opportunity policies may be the main tools for women to overcome what she describes as their "major obstacles" that is the lack of time and of exposure. She recommends that women be consistently chosen as associates and spokeswomen of value.

The physician, the elected representative and the woman are only one person acting for one same cause: sustainable development.



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FRANCE

Catherine LEGIER

Deputy-Mayor - L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue

Catherine Légier defines eco-citizenship as the “everyday involvement in the respect for others and the planet.” Her involvement begins being a mother. When she was President of her children’s school Parent-Teacher Association, she had participated in an environmental program, where pupils were taught some good practices. In her working life, Ms Légier is a geographer, town planner and a leading figure. As head of the Environment Department of the Luberon Regional Nature Park (*Parc Naturel Régional du Luberon*), she has notably developed land occupation plans and various other documents (charters, local plans...) which protect the environment.

In 2002, she created a federation of nine environmental associations acting on the territory of the Community of Cities of Pays de Sorgues and Monts de Vaucluse (*CCPSMV*), of which she recently became President. Ms Légier is also deputy-mayor of l’Isle-sur-la-Sorgue (South East of France) and President of the Urban Master Plans of this area. Thanks to all her duties, she has become a real scholar in sustainable development, with the development of waste reduction in her region, environmental management of the river Sorgue and the forests nearby.

She expects people at large to become aware of what is at stake in the issue of environmental protection. And she hopes that local authorities will take into account sustainable development in each and every project they undertake.

According to her, women may be more both motivated and practical than men when acting in favour of the environment. But they do lack of time. She believes that a solution would be for women to make their presence felt, especially in decision-making positions, but she recognises that it gets “harder and harder”.



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FRANCE

Laurence DOUVIN

Member of the Conseil Economique et Social
City councillor
Paris – Paris 17th district

Sustainable development is not only a modish expression for Laurence Douvin. It is more of an everyday way of life, at work as in her personal life.

As a leading figure, she is aware that local authorities have a role to play, "making the appropriate decisions in the fields of town planning, mobility and environment". These decisions must then "be immediately implemented in everyday life". The current 1st vice-president of the UMP group (right-wing) at the Council of Paris (which is both the Town Council and the Council of the *Département* of Paris) is a scholar in the field of public transport. Her various duties made her gain broad knowledge in this area. During her elective functions (past or current), she gained experience at the regional level, being representative of the public transport issue for the city of Paris and its region. She also carried out comparisons between various European examples in order to inform mayors and elected representatives about the "best practices".

Laurence Douvin now hopes to develop an "environmental citizenship common to every inhabitants of European metropolises". In order to do so, she would like to develop exchanges and links between associations and cities in favour of sustainable development.

As an involved woman, she knows that women have a particular role to play "in the realization of issues but also in the diffusion of such a realization". She is certain that women are efficient in this area as she has been president of several women associations since 2001. Although she noticed that locally elected women are often in charge of environmental issues, she wishes they were more specialised so as to be considered as a more legitimate and recognized authority. She aims to develop an "environmental citizenship common to every inhabitant of European metropolises" by constructing exchanges and links between associations and cities in favour of sustainable development.



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FRANCE

Elisabeth AUERBACHER Town councillor Saint-Ouen

Elisabeth Auerbacher thinks that "sustainable development encompasses biodiversity, life beings as well as the social balance and puts them all within an environment suited to everyone for a well-being." These words sound different pronounced by Elisabeth Auerbacher. Indeed, town councillor of Saint-Ouen (Seine-Saint-Denis, near Paris), lawyer (Bobigny Bar, Seine-Saint-Denis), Ms Auerbacher is also enlisted in urban development, with a particular vision. "As a disabled person, the environment is essential especially concerning public transport and movement of people", she says. With Elisabeth Auerbacher, we then came back to the basics: the environment is what surrounds us. Vegetation, animals, persons, public roads and transports...Ms Auerbacher has worked for years for the development of Saint-Ouen. She notably helped in the building of zones of slow traffic (30 km/h, i.e. around 18 m/h) and that of individual frame houses. She also worked on the development of photovoltaic in Saint-Ouen. Nonetheless, what she is the most proud of is the construction of public roads and transportation (bus and tram) suitable for disabled persons. And this is not the end! Indeed, her next plan for Saint-Ouen is the construction of a new district (100 hectares) of a high environmental and sustainable quality.

According to Ms Auerbacher, women are all potential mothers. That, combined with their inherent culture, gives them a peculiar sensitivity to the protection of the planet, which is "an essential asset" for more and better actions in favour of the Environment. But she acknowledges that in any political action, women do suffer from the leaders' mistrust, especially disabled women. This is why Ms Auerbacher upholds that it is necessary to make improvements at different levels such as homeworking for instance.



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FRANCE

Nadège PAGES

Artist and leader in the
Organization Ecologicart
Tourretes sur Loup

Nadège PAGES is an artist. Aware of the necessity to protect the environment since she was a child, touched by nature, she decided to take action from her awareness and express it in her own way. Self-employed in Ecologicart since 2005, she creates different kinds of sculptures (metal sculptures and wood carving), characters by recycling and collecting materials (waste). Her art work can be considered as up-cycling, thus sending out the message that recycling can be fun and creative. She thinks that being an eco-citizen is living in the respect of the environment in order to leave it intact to the future generations. Her current activities in favour of the environment consist in "reducing the rate of waste thrown away, in the nature and in our bins, by promoting recycling through the creation of works of art and all kind of objects". By exhibiting her creations and by leading workshops, she aims to share her techniques, of recycling and of assemblage, all the while participating in the rise of awareness on sustainable development issues. The positive reactions of the public, their recognition, encourage her to continue to do so.

In the artist's opinion, one of women's undeniable assets is their motherhood. By caring for their home, they can understand the need to protect their environment on a larger scale. Being also sensitive and communicative, they can play a major role in pro-environmental actions. They may however be taken less seriously than men. Nadège Pages believes that women should assert themselves more, even though she doesn't think that they lack confidence in themselves. Being self-employed, she works on her own, and confesses to certain loneliness. She therefore urges women to constitute solidarity networks, enabling them to find strength in unity.



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FRANCE

Diane de JUNNEMANN

Member of the *HEC au féminin* group
Member of FDS – Women – Debate – Society
Paris

Diane de Junnemann is highly committed in pro-environmental issues, both in her private, as in her professional life. She works for a group specialized in telecommunications called France Telecom and promotes the idea of using telecommunications in order to set forth sustainable development policies (such as video conference or telemedicine). She also devotes some of her time to two women associations. For the last three years, she has been a member of the management committee of "HEC au feminine", which is the women's committee of the High School of Business association. She coordinates various activities in the education and training fields, as well as exchange networks for graduates of this school. She aims to carry out the principles of sustainable development in all those projects.

This active woman believes that networking, as a way to share experiences, contacts or resources, can lead to a better quality of life. As such, she is a member of FDS (Women – Debates – Society), an association that brings together women who participate in public debates. Its members benefit from her professional experience and a work group on sustainable development has come to be created. It is a real asset enabling its members, women with high responsibility positions, to share their experiences.

To Diane de Junnemann women are more sensitive than men to environmental issues because they are responsible for their families' well being. Indeed, their major challenge is to find time to devote themselves to these ideas and ideals, without breaking up their household balance. Enabling women to work from home, for example through telecommuting, and assuring this work to be somehow fulfilling could be a solution.



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FRANCE

Nicole CABAL

President of the organization "Il Etait Une Fois La Terre"
Vallauris

Nicole Cabal is very active, though she has retired as a primary school teacher. Once she got retired, she never lost her liking of pedagogy and teaching skills. But she did not content herself with just a memory of what she did or was. Indeed, with some of her friends, she decided to constitute an association "*Il était une fois la Terre*" ("Once upon a time the Earth"). This poetic name for an association reflects Nicole Cabal's philosophy. When asked to give a definition of eco-citizenship, she explains that it is the "noblest form of citizenship". She considers that we become "citizen of the world" only when we realise the importance of our merest acts. The guiding thread of her soon to be seven-year-old association is to develop educational activities in favour of the environment. Through various workshops (for example cooking with a choice of seasonable vegetables and fruits cultivated with no fertilizer application) but also tutoring, she carries on what she did her whole life as a teacher. She also extends her instruction by including all generations in her effort to raise everyone's awareness to environmental issues. Nicole Cabal hopes to increase people's knowledge of their possibilities and powers to change things around.

Our former teacher believes that women are tough in that sense that they do have an instinct of giving and preserving Life. But the main obstacle they have to overcome is the non-recognition by male politicians, especially in the region where she lives, the South of France. In order to be recognised, their main tools may be education, culture and aesthetic. To improve the representation of women's pro-environmental actions she recommends an increase in financing, the development of CUCS (Urban Contracts of social Cohesion) and some improvement in communication.



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FRANCE

Pauline SAVARY

Head of « Toilettes du monde »
Town Councillor
Nyons

As head of the organisation « Toilettes du monde » (“toilets of the world”), Pauline Savary has promoted for the last 8 years the necessity to introduce ecological techniques to clean up used waters and excretas found in human excrements. Those dry toilets have two major benefits. Not only do they participate in the qualitative and quantitative protection of the natural resources that is water, they also enable a promotion of domestic and human disposal in agriculture.

These techniques are little developed in France and their setting up requires a complete evaluation of the regulation on those matters. The goal of “Toilettes du monde” is to accompany legislation change, by putting forth this issue with local authorities and decision-makers. At the same time, lectures are organised in professional training’s groups, as well as actions to sensitize a larger audience.

This organization also conducts solidarity work besides underprivileged populations in France and worldwide - mostly in Africa - to develop ecological alternatives to the traditional cleaning procedures.

“Women’s pugnacity is a major asset for projects to advance and that need a re-evaluation of their paradigm”. Therefore, it is important for women to have the possibility to participate in the development of environmental policies.

In this light, Pauline Savary has enlisted in March 2008 in Nyons’ political life, as a town councillor. She aims to set up a municipal plan for the environment and sustainable development.



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FRANCE

Sophie MAYEUX

Deputy-Mayor in charge of Education
Nancy

Sophie Mayeux is totally dedicated to helping children develop their knowledge about sustainable development and environmental issue. Deputy-Mayor of Nancy (East of France), in charge of Education since 2001, she became a scholar in educational matters. Therefore, when asked about her vision of what sustainable development is, she immediately shows concern for future generations. We need to "meet nowadays needs but without jeopardising the possibility of next generations to meet their own ones!" she stresses. Her very first involvement in sustainable development issues was with her own children. But as a leading figure, she wanted to have other children educated to such important questions as well. This is how, from 2005, the City of Nancy -together with the French Department of Education- provided a range of tools to schools staffs in order to improve their thoughts and actions in biodiversity, water, waste management, air or energy matters. Sophie Mayeux is quite proud of teachers and pupils' commitment to this program and of the fact that they apply the good practices they learnt in their everyday life.

The deputy mayor is aware that we urgently need to change our behaviours and mindsets, both locally and internationally. She refers to a quote of Mahatma Gandhi: "You must be the change you want to see in the world". According to her, in the coming decade, women will have a major role to play in the process of behaviour change. She perfectly knows the motivation of women as she is member of Femmes Débat Société (Women Debate Society), a woman association

In her opinion, women do have a different approach than men to sustainable development and environmental issues. Not only are women mothers, but they also are aware of their role of handing down a certain knowledge. The forms and names of obstacles women may face vary from country to country, but she believes that gender parity and equality rules as it exists in France are undeniable tools to overcome these obstacles.



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FRANCE

Catherine BERGIRON

"Build differently"
Meylan

Being an interior designer does not stop Catherine Bergiron from being aware of environmental problems and of the pressing need for action. On the contrary, working to arrange people's home, can be the first step to understanding the importance of healthy and eco-friendly surroundings in the quality of life. Currently self-employed in "Catherine Bergiron Créations", she also devotes time to research and development in the field of eco construction and renewable energies. She aims to impose "eco-design" as an important element of the "ecological approach of the housing field". She believes she can fulfil this goal by "using materials and techniques in respectful of the environment, and by creating objects that can purify the ambient air or even clarify [her client's] way of life".

Before setting up her own company, she was employed in the NGO "Acroterre" where she was in charge of developing activities in France by highlighting projects of sustainable development. She also founded an association in this field, called "Build differently." However, her participation in the rebuilding of a ruined mountain refuge is what she is most proud of. It was renovated in order to be completely self-sufficient energy wise.

To Catherine Bergiron, women have certain assets that they can put forth to act in favour of the environment, such as "their sensitivity and their ability to persevere in order to carry out projects until the end". Nonetheless, a woman often lacks "confidence in her ability to convince". The mental schemes concerning the female condition in those modern times have to evolve, in order to enable them to achieve an efficient organization. Furthermore, to attain a wider visibility, women need to make their actions attractive to the media or to organise meetings. Exchanging and sharing their experiences this way, can enable them to do so. This way, their actions could have positive effects on a local, national or even European level.



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France

Danièle LARCENA

Member of the organisation « Volubilis »
Avignon

Danièle Larcena is a member of many organizations, among which Volubilis, in the Pays des Sorgues which promote and defend its cultural and environmental heritage. She aims to publicize problems typical of the region, the Mediterranean basin. Her organizations denounce the malfunctioning between the environment and human activities, as well as the consequences of the climate change.

She considers that women overall may have more difficulties than men to express themselves in front of an audience, in public debates, due to lack of confidence. But this is a problem for women already involved in public affairs. Women with children have to learn to manage their time through "tight scheduling", which many seem to handle quite well. Nonetheless, Danièle Larcena admits that even if they achieve good time administration, women don't always obtain positions with responsibilities. Some social and economic elements are also likely to impeach women to engage in activities, be them environment friendly or not. The growing number of monoparental families in the past few years amount to many women having the responsibility that they cannot steal time from in order to get involved in any organization. Women from underprivileged backgrounds face the same problem. What's more, those situations often come in pair. On the contrary, women who don't have to support alone their family, or obtain recognition for their work, often from privileged classes, can easily participate in the decision making process. To Danièle Larcena, past measures, such as part-time employment, have only rendered women more vulnerable as well as more prone to going back to be only stay at home mothers. The actual economic crisis and the rise in unemployment that strike the whole society are as well reasons for her pessimistic approach of times to come. Her only hope lies in the growing numbers of people getting involved in benefit associations.



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GREECE

Yolanda ZIACA

Coordinator of projects in POLIS,
International Network in Environmental Education

Yolanda Ziaka believes that eco-citizenship consists in an understanding of "all the interdependencies between humankind and the biosphere". With that knowledge, people should try adopting "environmental friendly attitudes in everyday life and to participate in the decision-making process". Such a conviction can be found at work in her career. After her PhD in Environmental Education, she has worked in numerous organisations in France and Greece for almost 30 years, promoting pro-environmental actions through university works and networking. In 1994, she co-founded the association "POLIS-International Network in Environmental Education", of which she now coordinates the projects.

This dedicated eco-citizen nowadays supports the actions of local and regional Greek NGOs, active in the field of environment but also in international events. She participates in the planning of the 5th World Environmental Education Congress in Montreal, in May 2009. Yolanda Ziaka has also worked since 2004 on the "Charter of Human Responsibilities", which will be, in her own words, an "awareness-raising tool with a view to changing mentalities and behaviours".

According to her, women "tend to develop a higher sense of responsibility towards environment, due to their everyday responsibility for their family and children". Using this knowledge as a source of strength, they should dare to take action and express themselves, even if this course of action is not always easy to maintain. Everyone who acts in favour of the environment can be overwhelmed by a "feeling of powerlessness in front of the magnitude of the local and global environmental problems". What's more, women have a hard time finding a way to attain "equilibrium between a family life, a paid job and a voluntary action". To overcome these obstacles, people should try networking and sharing their experiences and supports through the medias.



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Secretary General of ANEZ,
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To Eleni Pangratiou, eco-citizenship is an eco-society which shows awareness to environmental issues and carries out ecological principles everyday. She always defended and promoted her region, the Zagori, since she started to work in 1979 for the Centre of Research of Zagori. In 1992, she became the secretary of ANEZ, Society for the Development of Zagori, which aims at "eco-developing the region". As an architect and geographer, her goal is to raise the awareness of the local population to the importance of the environment and that of the cultural inheritance of this region, the local architectural patrimony (dry stone constructions and crop terraces landscapes). These efforts are a success. Inhabitants of several villages ask public services and local authorities to respect such ancestral techniques as were used traditionally.

In order to do so, Eleni Pangratiou advocates networking. It can be at a local scale, between the population and the authorities, or European by organising meetings between the population and young European volunteers who work in favour of the environment. ANEZ also participates in European programs (Life, Leader, Interreg or Grundvig), and sets up young Europeans workshops - campuses - on the environment and the cultural inheritance.

Eleni Pantagriou considers that women can considerably help strengthening ecological awareness carrying out environmental practices in their everyday life. They can also, by educating their children, participate in increasing the support to the sustainable development causes. This is the reason why she advocates a stronger participation of women in the protection of the environment by communicating and exchanging their experiences. However, she admits that women suffer from sexist prejudices and that they lack of time. Offering them the possibility to have their children taken care of could be a political step in favour of women's role as eco-citizens.



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GREECE

Eleni DAROGLOU

EPO, Society for the Protection of Nature and
Eco-development

Eleni Daroglou has made of her will to act in favour of the environment a daily fight since 1993, when she started working in a pro-environmental NGO. In EPO (Society for the Protection of Nature and Eco-development, situated in Chryssoupoli, north of Greece), she helps strengthening the protected areas of the National Park Delta Nestos-Vistonida-Ismarida and putting into practice the protection of its natural biotopes. EPO's main methods in participation in the development of local environmental policy and its enforcement consist in cooperation with local authorities, submission of proposals of management and development plans that provide motives locally and ensure the protection and maintenance of biotopes and rare species. For EPO, she has been responsible for programs in the field of environment involving young people from many European countries. As a graduate in Enterprises management, she has also been a scientific research coordinator on ecotourism, organic farming or development of "soft" activities.

In her opinion, women could "easily influence environmental policies if they develop their maternal attribute and psychology and if they gain men's respect." She suggests women should be "informed as good and completely as possible in order to be able to support their roles with respect and objectivity, that is to say study, study, study... She considers that women should participate in informative programs and educative seminars. However, women actually face obstacles, which include the minute time left available by the familial obligations. Eleni Daroglou believes that authorities could give better support to women, especially mothers, notably by enabling them spare time. Women's participation in the matter of environment also face a lack of visibility. Exchange programs of experiences on a local, national or European scale could improve the situation.



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GREECE

Christelle LOUKITCH

Member of POLIS
International Network in Environmental Education

Christelle Loukitch is a French woman who, in 2002, decided to « start a new life in Greece », where she met Yolanda Ziaka, coordinator of POLIS (International Network in Environmental Education). Ever since then, she has become an active member of the organisation, where she works on a database for innovative experiences in the environmental field and she contributes to educational material such as an ecological tale illustrated by children. From the island of Syros where she is living now, she also participates to the actions of other local and regional Greek environmental non governmental organizations.

Her global objective is to find and disseminate some realistic alternatives in a local level to prove to children and adults that small individual and collective actions can have positive impact towards sustainable development. For this purpose, she would like to transfer a French experience: set up a camp for young children on environmental topics including recycling, natural energy, etc. Christelle Loukitch believes that the every day life of women is a necessity to be aware of the environmental problems. In the European way of life, women have the responsibility of their families and “with their daily actions, they determine a way to register themselves and their families in the social and ecological environment”. Therefore she is convinced that “the day where men will really participate in the daily life of their homes, ecology will quickly progress” because it will give women more time for real involvement and a concrete point of view to men.

As a French woman leaving on a Greek island, she encounters difficulties to get real time information, essentially due to the much partitioned characteristic of this small society (between natives of the island, the Greeks abroad and foreigners). Also, she observes that the political field and the decision-making process are left to men. But she adds that if this situation is very clear in the microcosm of an island, the same situation occurs elsewhere!



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GREECE

Alexandra-Marina SOTIRIADOU

Mayor – Paranesti

Since 2003, Alexandra-Marina Sotiriadou has been mayor of Paranesti. She is also president, vice-president and member of several local authority organisations, which mainly aim at developing her region. In her opinion, eco-citizenship can be defined as the “cooperation between social groups and decision-making bodies, in a harmonious way and in the respect of the environment”.

As a student, she participated in activities related to the protection of the environment in Paranesti, among other areas. This concern for this city naturally shows in her actions as mayor. Once elected, she started to develop and support organisations acting for the environment and sustainable development and undertook works of protection and promotion thereof. She believes that her desire to be involved comes from the beauty of the place she lives in and works for. The Paranesti Virgin Forest is one of the richest natural areas of Greece. Having never been influenced by human activities and declared “the most important one in Europe”, this virgin forest is said to be soon listed as a Unesco World Heritage site.

The need to protect and promote her region’s assets through various initiatives imposed itself to her. Alexandra-Marina Sotiriadou takes at heart projects that develop the area without jeopardizing its natural heritage and that involve local population. The development of eco-tourism, the organisation of sportive events, paths’ restoration for example, could not be possible without the help of the population who takes care of the environment “with love”. In her position, she tends to promote the Paranesti Virgin Forest, soon to be listed as a Unesco World Heritage site.

The mayoress believes that the environment is not a gender issue, but she nonetheless recognises that women may be more sensitive than men toward its protection. However, they have to face some obstacles: modern women have to conciliate their job with their daily family tasks within a limited time frame. In addition, they are prejudiced against in the access to decision-making positions. This is why they should work in group, participate in organisations and assert their ability to work as well as their rights.



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GREECE

Katerina XIOTELLI

Agency for the Management of the Pamvotis Lake

Katerina Xiotelli advises and works for the promotion and development of a Natura 2000 protected area, in the Agency for the Management of the Pamvotis Lake (Ioannina, Epirus Region). As such, she is notably in charge of sensitisation and training to the environment issues. In her opinion, an eco-citizen is someone who "harmoniously interacts with his or her environment aiming at a sustainable society or ecosystem". Therefore she is particularly involved in the environmental education program of the Agency which enables many children to participate and prepare them to become eco-citizen. Katerina Xiotelli is also preparing a PhD thesis on landscapes' ecology and forward planning. Through her knowledge on this topic and her involvement in the Pamvotis Lake destination, she hopes to help slowing down biodiversity loss and aims at promoting eco-tourism.

In her opinion, women do not solely operate within an economic logic. They have a long-term and a more global vision of problems. Katerina Xiotelli believes that compared to men, women have a sensitive temperament and a different perception of things, which allow them to "recognise the importance of the environment, for example the quality of their children's lives". Being mothers, women may "impart their children with an environmental consciousness", an effort supported by the programs set forth by the Agency she works for.

To Katerina Xiotelli, women should seek information to gain knowledge and try to participate in NGOs. Education can be the way around a society prejudiced to women, who often come to be isolated in small groups such as rural villages. Coordinated actions led both on a local and a national level could enable women to contribute accordingly to the environmental policy led by the national government and the European institutions, consequently increasing women's visibility.



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GREECE

Despina SPANOUDI

Advisor to the mayor for local development
Chaironia

Despina Spanoudi has been councillor to the Mayor of Chaironia since 2003. Her concern about local sustainable development started when she started to work for local authorities. Thus, the main part of her activities is in relation to the environment and sustainable development, fighting for the reduction of pollution, and in particular against that of industrial zones. Within her voluntary work, as an active member of a citizen's network (Beotia Coalition for the Environment), she aims to rescue the Gulf of Corinth, struggling against over-fishing as well as urban and industrial pollutions. She also participates in the development of local policies and their enforcement through various actions such as sensitisation (she is notably in charge of the website), contacts with authorities, denunciation to the media, networking, investigations... Professionally, at the mayor's side, she carries on her pro-environmental involvement and care by promoting interventions such as water saving, natural environment management, waste management, and the struggle against industrial pollution. Despina Spanoudi not only puts forth propositions, but she also controls whether there is an effective ecological consideration in the realisation.

In her opinion, women neither have a specific approach nor asset to contribute actively in pro-environmental actions. On the contrary, because of their numerous duties, they may have more difficulty than men in participating, in the public sphere especially. She therefore suggests that women should familiarise themselves with the public debate, so as not to be overwhelmed by their own lack of confidence. If women do face numerous obstacles, from the family tasks combined to their professional responsibilities, to the often individual and social prejudices which credit them with "less prestige" in their activities linked to the public affairs, women should count on each other and share their difficulties and achievements.



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GREECE

Anna LAVASA

Manager of the technical department
City of Elliniko

Anna Lavasa is in charge of the technical department of Elliniko, a city in the suburbs of Athens, close to the sea. She works on the configuration of public spaces. This town has the special feature of including on its soil sports amenities from the 2004 Olympics Games, Athens's former airport, which are both being reassigned. The trained architect therefore faces controversial projects, as the conversion of the disused airport in a park. At her level, she tries to impose her point of view in favour of the improvement of the quality of life. She is proud of her contribution against the disappearance of green spaces and against the transformation of sports spaces in sales complexes.

According to Anna Levas, the specific approach that women have concerning environmental issues comes from their concern of their children's future. She nonetheless thinks that women's involvement is somehow limited because they still lack time to both carry it and take care of their families. To remedy this unsteadiness, she suggests that women be offered information and training on environmental questions, notably through specialised seminars destined to working women, or international meetings.



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GREECE

Eleni ALEIFERI-KARATHANASI

Mayor - Meligala

Eleni Aleiferi is a lawyer and the mayoress of Meligala since 2000. Concerning environmental issues, she uses her position as a local representative to sensitize and rally all the local actors to change their behaviours and way of thinking, both on an individual and a collective level. The struggle she had to go through with public authorities and the inhabitants against the fire that devastated the Peloponnese in 2007 reinforced her beliefs. Only by knowing the local characteristics and intervening on close at hand problems, can one manage environmental risks. Her efforts to face this disaster both human and environmental have been rewarded when she was elected woman of the year 2007 by the Life&Style magazine. Since then, she established in the midst of the municipality a commission to prevent risks in cooperation with scientists. She also organized a volunteer group able to intervene in such emergency situations. Eleni Aleiferi is convinced that "we can all become aware that, instead of complaining about what is not done, we must and can do something ourselves".

To the mayoress, women have an immediate contact with the environment in their everyday lives. By nature, they feel a specific responsibility to maintain the quality of their surroundings. Nonetheless, she can only testify that leading positions are only too seldom occupied by women. In order to increase their engagement, women should not reduce their role to the observation or the denunciation of problems, but undertake any kind of actions. She also encourages them to seek to take up positions with responsibilities, without doubting their ability or availability to fulfil them. Eleni Aleiferi wishes that, in support of these efforts, "equal opportunities strategies" and "the recognition of women's ability to communicate on environment preservation" be developed.



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BULGARIA

Stefka GEORGIEVA

Environmental protection
City of Drjanovo

Stefka Georgieva works in the Municipality of Drjanovo, dealing with environmental issues. When she became a municipality ecologist, she got enthusiastic. She is, among other things, in charge of advertising her municipality activities in the environment and sustainable development fields, such as the programs "Preservation of the Environment", "Managing the scraps", "Environment and Health" or "Regional eco-tourism developing plan". However, what she is the most proud of is the organisation of a drawing, essay or poem competition for children, related to the Earth Day (on the 22nd of April). During her spare time, she supports two school groups who want to "develop and implement environmental small actions or projects for further development of their social skills and behaviour". Eco-citizenship is nothing short of taking an active and responsible part in the life of the community, and can start with the little steps. For example, Stefka Georgieva is launching within her municipality a collection of used batteries and luminescent lamps.

In her opinion, women are very strong and committed. For them, it is natural to promote environmental protection since they have passion and get only involved in long-term action with a cause. To her, women need to be active because their activeness gives them more visibility and impact. Nonetheless, she stresses the fact that people have difficulties sharing their opinions about the local policies concerning development, from lack of preparation and fluency in these matters. Apart from funding (both public and from the EU), there is also the need for information on local and European practices. These could occur by media presentations or debates staged in schools. If women have the potential to be more actively involved in both making and implementing environmental policies, they still need to acquire more confidence and tools in order to express themselves and start making a difference.



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BULGARIA

Nelly MITEVA

President of the managing committee of
Eco-mission – 21st century

Nelly Miteva is a chemist, and worked as an engineer in a purification factory. For six years now, she has been president of the managing committee of the association “Eco-mission – 21st century”, in the city of Lovech. This non-profit organisation “defends the rights of people to live in an ecological-friendly environment, undertaking measures to improve [its] quality” and giving information to increase public awareness on ecological issues. The association also aims at educating Bulgarian citizens on the importance of recycling and other environmentally-oriented practices. It also highlights the importance of working with the youth, through educational activities and cultural exchanges. To increase the knowledge of the community, by public meetings or advertising material, and with the cooperation of public institutions, is the way to achieve eco-citizenship and leave to the next generations enough available resources.

As president of the managing committee of her organization, she believes that women have specific assets to participate actively in actions in favour of the environment, among which flexibility, diplomacy as well as skills for good listening and talking. As such, women have real gifts for implementing. However, they need to be less prone to emotions if they want to be regarded as major actors. Nevertheless, she admits that women are prejudiced against. “Usually, the community does not accept the woman in a positive way on a leading position”. Although she recognises that it is hard to find a balance between professional and family lives, she considers that this difficulty is not an unconquerable obstacle. It might simply be a matter of time. The next generations of women-leaders may not face the same biased society. Raising the understanding of the community may thus be both the mean and the goal to an environment sympathetic to the guiding principles of sustainable development.



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BULGARIA

Ivanova DARINA

Expert councillor to the municipality of Varna
Member of « Friends of the Sea »

Ivona Darina is an expert who works for the Youth department in the Varna municipality. For the last 28 years, she has taken care of training the young, be it in formal or informal structures. Her activities, be it voluntary or professional, in the organisation "Friends of the sea" is oriented by her desire to "change the way the youth behave towards the environment". She believes that ecocitizenship is a behaviour that can be transmitted: "if every one of us strives to teach to respect nature to only one person in one's circle, then, with the domino effect, phenomenal results would be obtained".

The preservation of the environment is a compulsory theme in Bulgarian education. Therefore, Ivanova Darina has had the chance to develop many demonstrative projects and information campaigns. Among those are the "ravage inconnu" (the unknown shore) for the protection of the northern coast of the black sea, or the "Summer Academy for the Sea", a program for the youth to be informed of the sea and its preservation. The youth included in this program being unprivileged, this is a project that Ivanova Darina has taken much at heart.

She thinks that women can have an upfront influence on children and the young ones in general to carry out this handing down of environmental respect. Nonetheless, she deplors the lack of opportunity offered to women to assert themselves in this role. By participating in forums, and working in teams, women could benefit from financial support offered by Europe in favour of women's implication, and broadcast their experiences.



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BULGARIA

Kalina STANCHEVA

Sustainable development expert
Member of the YMCA's Scientific committee

Kalina Stancheva is an engineer in environment and works in a private enterprise. She also advises the YMCA on environmental projects.

According to her, the only efficient method to obtain results on environmental issues is to take direct action with a clear goal in mind, at any level. She therefore promotes pro-environmental actions in the every-day life as not to print documents unless it is absolutely necessary, try not to let the water run, waste recycling, energy savings (heat), etc. On a larger scale she developed a project for her town, called "Clean Gabrovo". It aims to encourage separate collection and recycling on paper waste, and to support the use of recycled paper. On the whole, more that 20 both private and publics buildings have been involved in this new system and 15 tons of paper recycled.

Kalina Stancheva believes that women have a specific approach on environmental issues. As for urban environment, for example, they tend to perceive immediately the impact of a polluted air, noise, or lack of green areas. All of which damage the quality of life, increase stress and harm the inhabitants' health. She nonetheless regrets that many women are too little informed of the tools that would enable them to participate in decision making concerning local policies and environmental improvement. She advises them come to grips with things and adopt a "proactive" attitude by getting information and advice. They will achieve progressive implication through action, in accordance with the principle that one learns while doing. But, as "many have no idea what citizenship is", what can be said about eco-citizenship...



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BULGARIA

Nadya NIKOLOVA

Founder and member of a non formal group
for the protection of Chehlevtzi Village

Nadya Nikolova has been a teacher in Bulgarian literature and language in high schools for over 20 years. In September 2008, she decided to volunteer in a non-formal group for the protection of Chehlevtzi. It has taken her time to become, what she calls herself, "an environmentalist woman". This happened through her involvement in a citizens' lobby against the project of a new highway in the south part of Gabrovo. As the other disputants, she wanted to express her disagreement on the project, and disappointment from the lack of concertation prior to the launch of the project. Through this experience, she met professionals as well as non-professionals of the ecology field, and is now very active in promoting sustainable development and protection of the environment. For instance, she or other volunteers are "almost every day on the local TV, radio, newspapers, trying to negotiate with the municipality and the Ministry for Regional Development for a new road map near Gabrovo".

Nadya Nikolova's participation in the development of local environmental policy is made of patience, exactitude and dialogue. Those qualities are inherent to women, and they should learn to use their intelligence, energy and great working capacity to participate actively in pro-environmental actions. Even though women lack free time and must too often face scepticism from other members of the community, they should never forget that "activeness will bring results", and therefore not remain indifferent to environmental issues. By cooperating in eco-organizations, be it at a local, regional, national or international scale, women can become active leaders in the development of local environmental policies, as history as shown. The concerns for a better quality of life, and for taking care of their surroundings, are noble causes that women need to be able to embrace, by participating in the decision-making process.



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BULGARIA

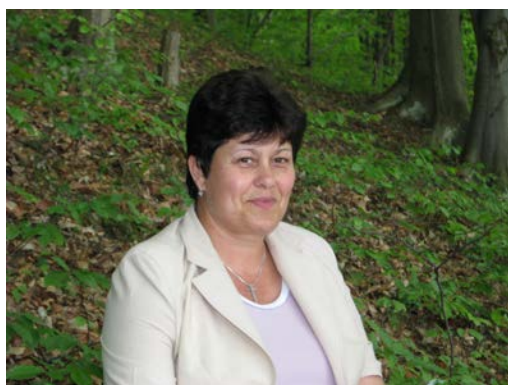
Maya MINCHEVA

Mayor - Obnova

Maya Mincheva has been mayor of Obnova for the last 5 years, but has shown her interest for public affairs by working in the field of education and for local authorities for many years before. To her, eco-citizenship is a way of life resulting from the awareness of the people's "inseparability from nature and the idea of living in a community". Acting for the environment is not only caring for the ecological issues, but takes also its source in educating the younger generations. "We should plant seeds during the first couple of years of our kids", she says. Her own commitment to pro-environmental actions started at an early age, when she

felt really threatened by the absence of clean water or by cut trees and dirty places. As a mayor, Maya Mincheva wishes she could participate in important environmental projects. But even with a lot of enthusiasm, it can sometimes be difficult to participate in projects, through lack of funding. Nonetheless, she is very proud of having been a member of the team who had Obnova declared a protected zone, part of Nature 2000.

As a tool, communication is a characteristic feminine quality. To her, women "are by nature more communicative and sociable" than men. Furthermore, they are able to "inspire trust, safety and attract other people in the sphere they are working in". To improve their actions in favour of the environment, women must gain self-confidence and trust good partners' intentions. Evidently, they need to put in a lot of work, which can be rendered difficult by their tasks of raising and educating children. But, to the mayoress, this "should not be separated from the role of women in the community". Education being one of the major solutions, Maya Mincheva encourages work with the youths, especially young girls to enable them both to fulfil themselves as individuals and act as responsible eco-citizen.



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BULGARIA

Reneta BONCHEVA KANCHEVA

Head expert in the Environment and Cleanliness Department – City of Gabrovo

Renata Boncheva Kancheva has worked for the last 10 years for the environment department of the Gabrovo municipality. She works on several projects at the same time to improve the quality of life in Gabrovo, and strengthen the respect of the new environmental legislation: a selective waste recollection and dumping system for domestic waste, the development of green spaces, environmental education and water, air, ground and biodiversity protection.

This dedicated expert uses every possible way available to her to act effectively in favour of her municipality's territory: informative campaigns, training, contributing to the local regulations and expanding field projects. She is therefore in immediate contact with hundreds of people faced by ecological issues, and tries to support them.

According to her, the Bulgarian society doesn't suffer from gender disparity. On the other hand, it fails on social, health (for example concerning the disabled) issues, which result in the marginalization of a large amount of the population. There is consequently no obstacle to women's involvement in environmental local policies. Acting in favour of the environment first depends on men's and women's sensitivity, on their skills and personal assets. Renata Boncheva Kancheva calls for less speeches and more clearly visible actions. She also demands that people take responsibility and make a personal commitment: "each person, man or woman, should think of his or hers action or inaction consequences". We should all be exemplary in order to improve the quality of life, at any level.



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CZECH REPUBLIC

Zuzana BENESOVA

Mayor - Ostopovice

Zuzana Benesova has always acted for the preservation of the environment, be it as a student when she took the time for waste separation or what she calls "conscious travelling", or during her career as a lawyer fighting for the recognition of women's, children's and mentally handicapped person's rights. Since 2006, as mayor of Ostopovice (in the south east of the Czech Republic, near Brno), she works on several projects. The reconstruction of a nursery, in a building satisfying the standards of low-energy consumption, a new waste management strategy, increasing the water retention in the landscape, or minimizing the pollution by selecting an appropriate system of public lighting, are the ones that she takes most at heart.

As for women's position in pro-environmental actions, she herself tries to implicate everyone. By keeping her colleagues closely informed of the projects and the organization of open meetings, the mayoress wants people to feel involved and to take part in the achievement of a healthy and environmentally conscious world. She nonetheless admits that "in the Czech Republic, the male environment is still predominant, so women must show much more preparedness to win recognition". In spite of their concerns for health and quality of life issues, women may find it difficult to participate. By establishing a system of quotas, women could be offered equal opportunities. The "zipper system" could be the first step. This system stipulates that one of the two first positions on the electoral roll must be occupied by a woman, and that there must be at least one third of women on the total of the list. But it needs to be accompanied by the modification of social, labour and educational laws, in order to enable active women to lead a personal as well as a fulfilling professional life, stresses Zuzana Benesova.



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CZECH REPUBLIC

Yvonna GAILLYOVA

Director of ZO ČSOP Veronica
Member of the Brno Centre City District Council

Yvonna Gaillyová has been director of ZO ČSOP Veronica (Local Chapter of the Czech Union for Nature Conservation – Veronica) since 1999, but she has been active in this organisation for Nature Conservation since 1991. In addition, she is member of the Brno Centre City District Council, works in advisory bodies for government departments and for the Cabinet, collaborates with Czech universities and keeps some activities in other Czech NGOs.

When retracing her career in favour of the environment, she talks about a coincidence. She realized the importance of doing something on a maternity leave in 1990, shortly after the regime changed in her country with the Velvet Revolution. She has always been an active woman, especially in the field of environmental protection. Her main activity at present in ZO ČSOP Veronica is related to climate protection. Of all the projects she participated in, she is especially proud of her role in banning the use of phosphates as detergent builders (1992-2004), as well as of her leading part in the construction of the first public building applying the Passive House standard in the Czech Republic. Those houses are not equipped with the traditional systems of heating and air-conditioning.

Yvonna Gaillyova favours working collectively and by networking, education and training. She wants to raise public and politicians concern and awareness in climate protection in order to change their attitudes and behaviours with a constant low-carbon perspective. This awareness may be typical of women's approach. They are "more concerned about the matter itself and the results, than with their self-assertion". This way of seeing, which could benefit environmental issues, is unfortunately met with an "inimical climate to women" in the Czech Republic's political circles. Facing the fact that too few women are engaged in the public life, she encourages them to support each other by using the medias, and to try to attain a greater determination and inner firmness.



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CZECH REPUBLIC

Marie MATUSKOVA

Mayor - Višňová

As mayor of Višňová (Liberec Region, North of Czech Republic) Marie Matušková has worked since 1990 on various projects in favour of the environment. Her concerns date back from the seventies and her being a schoolteacher. It was her struggle to preserve a streamside vegetation area that got her to "stand in local elections in 1990 and become mayor". As such, she compelled the Turow mine (Poland) to "carry out corrective actions to the mine dump, by putting permanent pressure and raising attention of nearby countries". Sadly, in august 2007, an enormous amount of rainfall hit the mine dump and flooded the city. In consequence, the town needs to develop its system of levees, among other projects, such as a sewage collection system, or the construction of social housing. The mayoress, being a member of the Clean River Nisa cross-boarder committee, also aims to obtain the status of Natura 2000 for this location.

Marie Matušková believes that women's knowledge of practical matters and real-life issues enable them to be good managers. Unfortunately, she also stresses that they meet the pressure of their families and husbands, and often don't have the confidence to act. As for herself, she is happy to say that she may have been an example to other women. Since she was first elected, more and more take part in municipal councils. She nonetheless insists that she is not using a specifically "female approach". Women need to learn that they can contribute in the preservation and development of the environment, through workshops or team-work. But they should also know that the joy of realized work may be long to come. She herself confesses a certain tiredness, and the need for new people to join in the effort.



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CZECH REPUBLIC

Jana DRAPALOVA

Mayor - Brno-Nový Lískovec city district

Jana Drápalová has been mayor of the Brno-Nový Lískovec city district since 2002. As an agricultural engineer, she worked in agriculture for 5 years, before joining a non-governmental organization. She was the regional manager of the Czech Union for Nature Conservation. Her concern for sustainable development issues shows both in her professional as in her political career. She has been a member of the City Council of Brno since 1994, as a representative of the Green Party. In this position, she participated in the development of low-energy consumption buildings, which effort she persists in by working as a mayor to increase the quality and life span of her city's housings. She also put forth projects of modernisation and reconstruction of a household waste incineration plant. She considers that eco-citizenship is "a consciously accepted responsibility", at the same time an awareness of everyone's role in the preservation of the environment and the acceptance of this responsibility. Creating healthy and eco-friendly public spaces can only be achieved through the consultation of the public. These co-operations, by enabling her to work with and meet many people, are Jana Drápalová's pride.

This ability to communicate with others, and her desire to meet women in similar positions, really motivates the mayoress. She believes that women "perceive quality of life issues more as multi-faceted", and are more "opened to debate the implications" of such issues than men, who tend to care only for a quick implementation of projects and often refuse to share their ideas. By building knowledge on the environmental field, women's determination can enable them to become important leaders. She insists that women don't have to give up their family or personal lives to take an active part in the preservation and restoration of the environment: "even a small contribution is important".



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CZECH REPUBLIC

Zuzana GUTHOVA JARKOVSKA

Executive Manager
of the Rose Society Local Action Group

Zuzana Guthová Jarkovská has been for the last year executive manager of the Rose Society Local Action Group, where she focuses on the “support for local economy development, local product market growth, and local communities”. She mainly aims at achieving regional self-sufficiency in food commodities, electricity and heat production as well as in the area of culture and welfare. For instance, she would like to initiate local processing and sales centres in collaboration with local farmers. As manager of the Local Action Group, she hopes to have a greater range of action in supporting various activities, as the development of local and macro regional strategies.

Zuzana Guthová Jarkovská is also a member of the municipal council of the town of České Budejovice, and is often surprised by the notoriety of the projects of the municipality, outside of its territory, testifying of the general growing awareness on sustainable environment issues. Her role in advocating community planning through open debates may contribute to this spreading of sustainable development concerns among the population.

In her opinion, women have a specific approach to actions in favour of the environment. They aim at “maintaining the environment for future generations”, maybe because of their role as mothers. This is why the executive manager is in favour of eco-feminism. Women should improve the way they interfere in environmental protection, by having “relevant arguments ready”, and should therefore acquire a good knowledge. However, she admits that the rural tradition of the country may be an obstacle to their participation in the development of local environmental policies. Furthermore, it is still difficult for women to harmonise their professional and family lives. For Zuzana Guthová Jarkovská, women could overcome this hardship if their efforts were met with recognition from other people.



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CZECH REPUBLIC

Zuzana DRHOVA

Member of the Prague City Council
Member of the Spatial Development Committee
Vice-chairwoman of the EU Funds Committee

Zuzana Drhova's actions throughout the years have undeniably made her a model eco-citizen. As a member of numerous groups collaborating with the EU for the last 10 years, counselling for NGOs or doing research for the Center for Social and Economic Strategies in Prague, she impersonates her own definition of what is eco-citizenship. Her involvement comes from her being "ready to contribute to the environment protection, to change [her] habits and behaviour". As vice-chairwoman of the EU Funds committee and leading figure of the environmental organisation "Zeleny Kruh" (Green Circle), she continues nowadays to take part in the preservation and development of a sustainable environment.

Currently a member of the Spatial Development Committee in the Prague City Council, elected from the Green Party, she fights to impose limits to the growth of the city, in order to protect nature and the environment, and to increase the number and space of urban green areas. These settlements aim to benefit the residents of the city, and should therefore be discussed with them, maybe through open debates on their destination.

Zuzana Drhova believes that women in politics need their work to be tangible and concrete results to be obtained. As a politician herself, she admits that politics are time consuming, and don't always match with a personal and family life. What's more, local political positions often don't offer financial compensation. This is clearly an obstacle to the participation of women in the public life, who in addition may find that the courage they need to act, their dedication, may not always benefit. If women should not get discouraged and work at supporting each other, Zuzana Drhova reminds us that it is after all the voters who chose their representatives. For women to obtain the positions of professional politicians, they need to develop their exposure, using the different medias.



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http://www.praha.eu/jnp/en/residents/city_hall/prague_city_council/index.html