

## **Social capital as a prerequisite for a culture of sustainability**

*Summary of a guest lecture given by Prof. Ernst Gehmacher to the EVN Advisory Board for the Environment and Social Responsibility on June 4, 2007*

### **Social capital as a sustainable tactic for survival**

*Social capital* means the cohesion demonstrated both internally and externally by any society, irrespective of its size. The basis for this cohesion, which guarantees social stability, is provided by trust and networking. Social capital is a prerequisite for the sustained function and survival of a society. For in a society shaken by crisis in which common bonds are broken, no strength remains for the shaping of the future.

*Sustainability* is understood as being a principle, which is targeted on long-term communal benefits and demands action that involves the assumption of responsibility for the future. Individuals perceive the related advantages as happiness and well-being, which are rooted in health and success. For the community, they take the form of success and profit, for society, prosperity, and for humankind as a whole, peace and progress. Moreover, on a private level, sustainability is expressed by lifestyle, on a communal level by social behaviour, at a social level by the appropriate politics and with respect to humanity, by a culture of sustainability.

In view of the threat of climatic disasters and growing, poverty-related social tensions, the development of a culture of sustainability would seem to be the only chance for social survival. However, the establishment of a culture of sustainability was always and still remains a difficult task. It can only evolve if it brings happiness to all those involved, i.e. sustainable behaviour should provide enjoyment, pride and prestige, easily become habitual and be simple to learn. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the scope and speed of improvements in the immediate environment, the extent to which these contribute to a healthy world and human race in the long-term, and how they can be promoted by society.

If, in order to secure a happy life, egoism is the driving force behind sustainable action on a private level, on a communal level it is solidarity, on a social level morality and at the level of humankind, humanity. On an individual level, a culture of sustainability is opened up and supported by autonomy factors, while on a communal level, these factors are innovative, in society alternative and in the human context, elitist.

## Approaches to establishing a culture of sustainability

- **E**nergy savings and renewal
- **R**esource conservation and retention
- **G**eneral social consolidation and renewal

*(ERG is a unit (ergon) in the GGS system, a seldom-used physical measurement method, which combines work, energy or heat in a single equation.*

- Humanise **a**ctivity
- Retain moderation with regard to **m**obility
- Use **p**roductivity with care

*(amp stands for ampere, the basic unit for electrical power)*

- Ensure **v**itality through preventive measures
- Ensure that **o**perations leave ecological cycles in tact
- Ensure that **l**ife is enjoyed to the full
- Ensure circumspection with regard to human **t**ransience

*(volt – the unit of electrical potential)*

## Subsequently, Prof. Gehmacher sketched out the following points for EVN's sustainability strategy:

- Adopt sustainability in a holistic manner and strengthen it actively through an image campaign.
- Initiate co-operation with organic farmers.
- Intensify efforts in the areas of renewable energies and innovative technologies.
- Identify social capital and add "social energy" to the existing energy terms.
- Cultivate social capital within the company, whereby EVN employees should be trained as presenters.

*Prof. Ernst Gehmacher (b. 1926) has dedicated the majority of his professional career to empirical social research. He spent 30 years at the Institute of Empirical Social Research and founded the offices of the Organisation of Applied Social Research and the abif – Analyse, Beratung und interdisziplinäre Forschung (analysis, consulting and interdisciplinary research). Prof. Gehmacher headed the Austrian Institute for Vocational Training Research, as well as the Paul Lazarsfeldgesellschaft. His research focused on the topics of social system modelling, policy research, survey methodology, educational and media research. He was also responsible for the social science support of numerous major projects such as the "Donauinsel", the Freudenu power station on the Danube, the Austrian EU plebiscite and the campaign against the petition for a referendum on immigration ("Sea of Light" demonstration). Prof. Gehmacher's research has resulted in a diversity of publications.*