

We Must Build Wisely

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The principle of sustainable development has stood the test well, and should continue to be pursued

The notion of geographical space encompasses the whole of the environment inhabited by human beings: not just the Earth we live and work on, but also the atmosphere we pollute, the underground resources we exploit, and even – for some time now – extraterrestrial space. Living within this geographical space, mankind, whether consciously or unconsciously, alters it and shapes it according to its needs. Proper management of this space is a skill we are still learning.

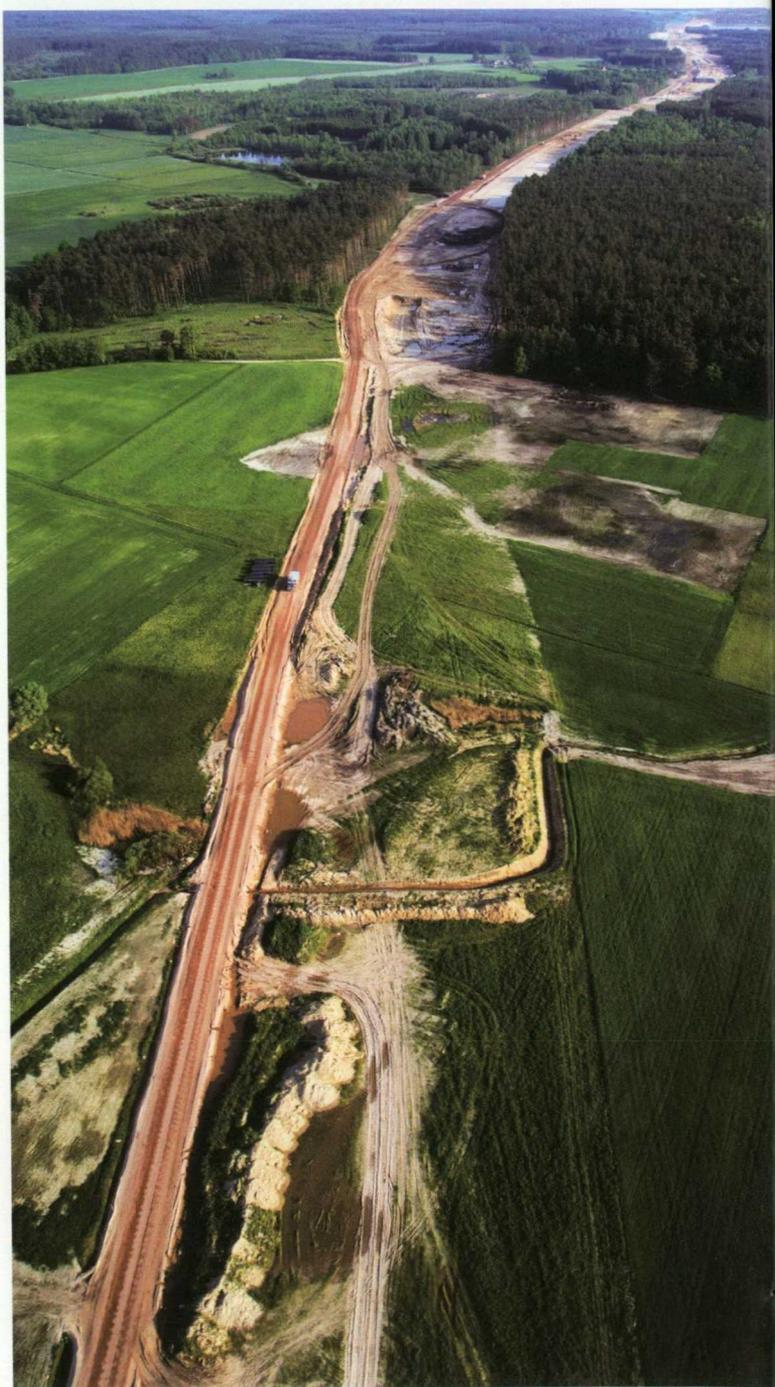
The natural environment is greatly influenced by man, who interferes with its quantitative and qualitative condition to a varying extent. The industrial era has led to drastic destruction of the environment, although it has also obviously yielded many advances of technology and civilization. Since the mid-20th century, efforts seeking to change human attitudes towards the environment have intensified considerably, supported by increasingly accurate and comprehensive scientific recognition of the environmental impact exerted by economic activity, especially industrial, transportation, and municipal undertakings.

Harmony in the landscape

The doctrine of sustainable development was officially announced at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol introduced the pioneering procedure of trading in unused greenhouse gas emission limits, and in 2002 another summit in Johannesburg evaluated the results of the decisions taken during the first summit ten years before and confirmed the legitimacy of sustainable development policy. The essence of this doctrine involves forging and implementing a compromise among the demands of economic development, environmental protection, and the welfare of future generations.

One important condition and simultaneously a factor of sustainable development is known as spatial order. This involves harmonizing the spatial arrangement of

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The planning of investments such as roads and railroads is difficult as it must reconcile the interests of local communities, transportation needs, and the demands of environmental protection

human constructions and natural elements to ensure their sensible use, eliminate conflicts of interest, optimize the communication and transportation network, provide optimum technological infrastructure (water and sewage management, energy supply, and telecommunications), minimize the negative impact on the natural environment, and adapt the architecture and location of buildings to the existing landscape. Spatial order stabilizes the real estate market and sensibly concentrates new buildings in areas already having service infrastructure. In general, spatial order lends a competitive advantage to areas where it is established and maintained.

Scientific research and everyday practice show that this compromise is usually not easy to achieve. One good example here is the flooding conundrum: on the one hand we have people who want to live next to rivers plus industry and agriculture needing water for production, while on the other we face the seasonal rises and wild nature of rivers. If we want to protect nature and avoid floods, while at the same time functioning efficiently in our civilized world, we have to exclude flooded areas from our development plans. The optimum choice of areas to be slated for development requires an in-depth analysis of the situation, via scientific research.

Cohesive strategy

The European Union, among its numerous cohesive policies, pursues a policy of spatial cohesion. Poland's spatial development policy has to be executed in accordance with this European strategy. This tendency is manifested in the spatial planning strategy for the years 2008-2033 currently being developed by the Ministry of Regional Development, in cooperation with representatives of other qualified agencies and scholars (some from the institutes, task-force and scientific committees of the Polish Academy of Sciences), meant to be ready by mid-2008.

The main vehicle for spatial development policy is national-level law, fleshed out on lower administrative tiers by legally binding resolutions passed by local and regional authorities. At a conference on the "Role of Polish Space in an Integrating Europe" held on 24 and 25 April 2007, the Committee on Spatial Economy and Regional Planning of the Polish Academy of Sciences deliberated how such regulations should be improved.

A plenary session of the General Assembly passed an official stance of the Polish Academy of Sciences regarding Poland's spatial development policy. This stance appeals to the public authorities in Poland to implement a consistent, long-term policy for sustainable development coordinated with the European Union. It calls upon the authorities to establish regulations effectively facilitating the creation and maintenance of spatial order while harnessing EU funds as efficiently as possible, to

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The overregulation of rivers leads to catastrophic floods – that can be prevented by excluding naturally flooded areas from development plans

cultivate sensible attitudes among local communities towards conflicts of interest stemming from the location of investment projects, particularly roads or railroads, and to implement new, computer-aided methods and techniques of spatial development planning and monitoring. Simultaneously, this stance emphasizes the crucial role of science, particularly fundamental research, for sensible spatial management. ■

Further reading:

http://www.pan.pl/images/stories/pliki/wydarzenia/2007/06/stanowisko_210607.pdf [in Polish].