

Sustainable Development on Poland's Baltic Coast: The Case of Ustka

Rafal Serafin

Progress & Business Foundation, Poland

Jerzy Zaleski

University of Gdansk, Poland

Eugeniusz Rydz

Higher School of Pedagogy, Poland

Ustka is a small harbor town located on the central Polish coast, a largely undeveloped region with high natural values characterized notably by an unspoiled coastline. In the post-war period, the Ustka economy has been dominated by tourism and recreation, shipbuilding, fishing and fish processing, a harbor and a military base. The collapse of the communist regime in 1989 has been followed by a succession of national governments committed to restructuring and privatizing the economy and democratizing political life. Their approach to reform has been rooted in liberal market economics and the decentralization of political power. Considerable success has been achieved at the macro or national level, notably with regard to the stabilization and convertibility of the Polish currency, the zloty. But as seen from Ustka, the past three years of reform have precipitated a crisis in the local economy, disrupted property rights, confused local and regional politics and prompted a wide range of development stresses that now threaten the natural values of the area.

In this context, what are the prospects for sustainable development for Ustka, the surrounding coastal region, and the Polish coast more generally? What are the implications of this situation for conservation and development in Poland and the perimeter of the Baltic Sea in general? Indeed, in this regard, what are the prospects for a Baltic Europe - a regionally-oriented economic development tied to the natural, ecological or life support values of the Baltic Sea basin?

These are some of the questions that are being addressed in an ongoing research project at the University of Gdansk, developed in conjunction with the City of Ustka, the Higher School of Pedagogy in Slkpsk, the Heritage Research Program at the Progress and Business Foundation in Krakow and the Heritage Resources Centre at the University of Waterloo (Canada). Based on research completed to date, the paper strives to offer some answers to the foregoing questions.