

Investing in young professionals and technologies promotes environmental awareness ■

Claudia Domel has been working as a research fellow at the Leipzig Fraunhofer Center since 2007. Since 2009, she has been responsible for the international funding activities of the German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU) in Central and Eastern Europe as its Special Representative for the region. Domel's research work also focuses on developing networks for environmental technology and knowledge transfer in this area.

Ms. Domel, what are the tasks and challenges in the region for which you are responsible as DBU's Special Representative?

I am responsible for the Baltic states, for Kaliningrad and for Bulgaria, Romania and the former Yugoslav countries. While these countries span a very large geographical area, they approach environmental issues in a similar way. Environmental conservation has taken a back seat as all these nations grapple with economic problems. The challenge is to show that, far from being a "luxury issue", environmental conservation is essential to maintaining and improving our health and quality of life. Environmental conservation does not only incur costs, but can also deliver savings for businesses and municipalities, for example through the use of resource-efficient technologies. In this context, we are working with a range of institutions in the target region, seeking to use start-up financing and bilateral cooperation to introduce innovative environmental technologies and a specialist knowledge transfer. Investment in young professionals is a key factor here.

Environmental awareness cannot be taken for granted; rather, it must be fostered.

Which one of the environmental projects that you have supported in recent years remains most vivid in your memory?

There are a lot of very good projects the DBU funded in Central and Eastern Europe. One project that I remember as a truly European experience with participants from all the Balkan countries was particularly helpful in avoiding mistakes that were made in the former GDR after the fall of the wall. EU regulations require all countries to connect their municipalities up to a sewage network. Some planners and sewage system builders are pursuing their own interests, using EU funding to build massive sewage works, even in places where there is no apparent demand. Smaller scale, local sewage plants are more cost-effective for smaller communities and easier for them to run. Because many decision-makers in the municipalities were overwhelmed by the decision, we concentrated our project work on knowledge transfer, put together

a handbook and trained engineers in the specialist planning of treatment works to enable them to pass on their knowledge to their own countries.

Your work as a research fellow at the Leipzig Fraunhofer Center also entails project activities in Central and Eastern European countries. What project experience has been particularly helpful to you in your work as the DBU's Special Representative?

I have worked on environmental issues at the Leipzig Fraunhofer Center from the outset, that is, since 2007. Of course, conducting a great deal of research and numerous analyses in the environmental field and collaborating on an ongoing basis with specialist institutions in the target countries as part of several projects is helpful in developing knowledge. Consequently, my DBU colleagues consult me on many matters concerning the environment, the innovative components of project applications, the relevance and expertise of project partners, options for placing project results on a sustainable footing in these countries, and the potential impact of these results in these nations.

How is the Leipzig Fraunhofer Center supporting you in your work as the DBU's Special Representative?

Working on projects and engaging in dialogue with colleagues at the institute never fails to provide me with fresh impetus for my role at the DBU. I also find it very helpful to be able to work with the scientific sources and databases of the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft and last but not least have the structure and generous support of our administrative team behind me whenever I need to make travel arrangements or deal with issues in projects. Most of all, I appreciate the working relationship I have with my three research assistants, who originally come from South-Eastern Europe or have close relations with those countries. In addition to supporting me with sound research, they afford me personal access to the cultures and unique features of their home countries.



Contact: Claudia Domel

Research Fellow Division Knowledge and Technology Transfer

Special Representative of the German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU) for Central and Eastern Europe

claudia.domel@moez.fraunhofer.de
+49 341 231039-131