

ABSTRACT

In the postmodern era, the industrial sector faces a number of pressures. These pressures include keeping within the new and stricter laws, avoiding the stricter penalties in terms of finances and legal penalties, avoiding bad publicity that occurs through bad environmental action and responding to pressure groups and public concern, including industry's own work force. (Stapleton, 1996). Industry can respond to these pressures to become involved in efforts to 'green' their activities, for example, introducing waste minimisation practices into production.

To this end, the Pollution Research Group of the University of Natal, Durban was instrumental in developing the Hammarsdale Waste Minimisation Club early in 1999. Since its inauguration, this Club has been active in two primary spheres, namely, the implementation of waste minimisation into the industrial processes of member companies and the building of capacity of a range of employees of member companies.

This thesis provides a case study of the Hammarsdale Waste Minimisation Club in an attempt to assess the role of voluntary participatory organisations in sustainable development.

This study of the role of voluntary participatory organisations in sustainable development has taken place within the context of waste minimisation, waste minimisation clubs, and the specific characteristics of the Hammarsdale Industrial Complex and the regulatory context of South Africa. A combination of geographical and social theory has been used to study the characteristics of the Hammarsdale Waste Minimisation Club. Four bodies of literature have been drawn together to form a conceptual framework through which the case study can be analysed and understood. These bodies of literature cover the characteristics of postmodernism, the paradigm of sustainable development, social theory regarding civil society and social movements (including the environmental movement) and the impact of locality on activities.

Primary data for this study has been gathered through the use of participant observation and semi-structured interviewing techniques. The theoretical framework has played an important role in a process of qualitative data analysis and interpretation that aimed to establish answers to the research questions generated in this study.

Analysis of the Hammarsdale Waste Minimisation Club as a voluntary participatory organisation has revealed that these organisations do play a role in the achievement of sustainable development in two ways. Firstly, through the way in which they are organised and secondly, through the activities in which members of the organisation engage.

The case of the Hammarsdale Waste Minimisation Club, the Club has been organised in such a way as to promote the implementation of waste minimisation and to provide capacity building as extensively as possible. One important characteristic of the Hammarsdale Waste Minimisation Club is the strong sense of mutual support and community that has developed. These relationships enable the organisation to contribute to sustainable development as they facilitate the participation and procedural equity necessary for the achievement of sustainable development. Despite this, the organisational structure of the Club can be seen to have some weaknesses. For example, the failure to develop a constitution and the high level of dependency on the groups of professionals in the Club which has led to the need for motivation and leadership. It is possible that these weaknesses may lead to the decline of activities in the organisation or demise of the Hammarsdale Waste Minimisation Club in the long-term, thus inhibiting the role of the Club in sustainable development.

By comparison, the waste minimisation implementation and capacity building activities of the Hammarsdale Waste Minimisation Club enable the Club to make a direct contribution to sustainable development. The implementation of waste minimisation enables industry to become more efficient thus reducing its impact on the environment. Furthermore, capacity building has created a greater awareness of environmental matters while equipping employees of member companies with the skills to carry out waste minimisation for the benefit of the environment. Thus these activities can contribute to sustainable development through the increased care of local ecosystems and a reduction of the impact of industry on this natural environment.

Through these findings, this study proposes that if voluntary participatory organisations can be organised to provide a long-term motivational and facilitative framework through which activities that contribute to sustainable development can take place, then these organisations have an important role to play in bringing about on-the ground- changes which can lead ultimately to the achievement of sustainable development. Contrary to this, if care is not taken to create a voluntary participatory organisation that will be sustainable itself, the potential role of the organisation in sustainable development is reduced.

Notably, these findings are reliant on the investigation of one case study. It is suggested that further examinations of a wide range of voluntary participatory organisations would enhance these findings by creating a more general picture.