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Adres redakcji

00-099 Warszawa, ul. Canaletta 4, p. 301
tel. (22) 827 80 01, w. 314
faks (22) 827 55 67

e-mail: mir@pwe.com.pl
strona internetowa:
www.marketingirynek.pl

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Wydawca

Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne S.A.
00-099 Warszawa, ul. Canaletta 4
<http://www.pwe.com.pl>

Recenzenci

prof. dr hab. inż. Ryszard Barcik
prof. AGH dr hab. inż. Jerzy Feliks
prof. ATH dr hab. Janusz Klisiński
prof. nadzw. dr hab. Jolanta Staszewska

Redakcja naukowa

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dr inż. Grzegorz Biesok
dr inż. Leszek Bylinko
dr Piotr Dziwiński
dr Marcin Jakubiec
dr inż. Mariusz Kubański
mgr inż. Dariusz Owsiak
dr inż. Jolanta Wyród-Wróbel

Redakcja techniczna i skład

dr inż. Grzegorz Biesok
dr inż. Leszek Bylinko

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Green Knesset: A new Paradigm for Greening of Parliaments and Societies

Zielony Kneset: nowy paradygmat ekologizacji parlamentów i społeczeństw

Samuel Chayen

the Sumy State University, Oleg Balatskyi Academic and Research Institute of Finance, Economics and Management, the Economic Theory Department; The Knesset (the Israeli Parliament), the Green Knesset Project

Olha Prokopenko

University of Bielsko-Biala, department of management; the Kyiv National University of Technology and Design, department of business-economics

Summary

The Green Knesset Project is an innovative project aimed to change the organizational culture of parliaments and government offices in Israel and abroad and bring them to living a life of sustainability. During the years 2014-2017, the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, launched the first stage of this project which was focused on energy efficiency, renewable energy and public awareness. The expected reduction in energy consumption is 33%. The expected ROI is 5 years, and the total investment was 7 Million NIS (2 Million USD). The initial stage of the Green Knesset project was highly exposed on international media and in parliaments all over the world and it is expected to influence the future sustainability of many parliaments and societies. This article discusses the entrepreneurship nature of this initiative and the elements of Green Marketing needed in the project.

Streszczenie

Projekt Zielony Kneset to jest innowacyjny projekt mający na celu zmianę kultury organizacyjnej parlamentów i biur rządowych w Izraelu i za granicą oraz doprowadzenie ich do życia w sposób zrównoważony. W latach 2014-2017 izraelski parlament, Kneset, rozpoczął pierwszy etap tego projektu, który skupiał się na efektywności energetycznej, energii odnawialnej i świadomości społecznej. Oczekiwana redukcja zużycia energii wynosiła 33%. Oczekiwany zwrot z inwestycji wynosił 5 lat, a całkowita wartość inwestycji wyniosła 7 milionów NIS (2 miliony USD). Początkowy etap projektu Zielony Kneset był bardzo eksponowany w międzynarodowych mediach i parlamentach na całym świecie i ma wpłynąć na przyszły rozwój wielu parlamentów i społeczeństw. W tym artykule omówiono przedsiębiorczy charakter tej inicjatywy i elementy zielonego marketingu potrzebnego dla projektu.

Keywords: Green Knesset, Parliaments, energy efficiency, Photovoltaic system, Israeli Parliament.

Słowa kluczowe: Zielony Kneset, parlamenty, efektywność energetyczna, system fotowoltaiczny, izraelski parlament.

Introduction

AS we enter the third millennium, and it seems that the world is becoming more and more aware of the effects of climate change, it is still strange that some of the world governments and leaders are covering their eyes, and looking away from the reality of climate change. Add to this some societies that just don't care enough or are not prepared to pay a price and dedicate themselves to combat climate change, and you end up with a world that is not really doing enough to change its own situation. For example, in a recent article (Prokopenko, Cebula, Chayen and Pimonenko, 2017) we showed that Israel and Ukraine are still only making 2% of renewable solar energy. This piece of data is phenomenal, taking into account that both countries, especially Israel, have a fantastic solar potential. As these words are being written, we have been reported that 2016 was a top year for carbon output. Globally averaged concentrations of CO₂ reached 403.3 parts per million (ppm) in 2016, up from 400.00 ppm in 2015.

So what is really holding humanity back from enforcing much more severe measures in order to save our planet?

Some of the hold-ups can be explained by mere and yet very difficult bureaucracy. However, the facts are still there – both civil society and governments should be moving forward much quicker if they want to mitigate climate change. But are legislation and enforcement enough?

Is civic campaigning good enough? Would it be effective if we would demand that the governments be accountable? That they should annually produce a sustainability report telling us what they have done in the past year to reduce their Carbon Footprint? This question is discussed in depth by Teresa Kamarz and Susan Park (Kamarz and Park, 2016). It is a deep question which does not have a clear-cut answer. However, they conclude that “Accountability remains a weak tool for environmental action because it is conceived as a monitoring, compliance, and enforcement device that is applied, as an appendage, to the execution of particular interventions”. If so, then what can be the right way to awaken government and civil society to significant environmental activity?

The following is a first report of a special parliamentary entrepreneurship – The Green Knesset Project. We will describe the project and ask:

Can such a project occur only by decision of the Parliaments Administration or does it need rather a bottom-up attitude, involving many of the parliament's workers?

How can such a project be “marketed” to the workers of the parliament itself?

What can be the national and the international impact of presenting such a project to other local government offices and other parliaments?

Is it essential for a parliament to have support for such a change by the Environmental NGOs?

1. Green Knesset Project – the vision

On the 1st of January, 2014, Knesset Speaker, MK Yoel Yuli Edelstein, inaugurated the Green Knesset Project. The idea of the project was to increase environmental awareness and activity not only amongst parliaments and parliament officials but also amongst other government offices. In many speeches he reiterated his idea: “it is not enough to have good legislation and even good enforcement. What is needed is a personal example. If we call upon others to recycle, we should be recycling. If we say renewable energy is the right way to closing up coal power stations, so we should be the first to set solar fields on the Knesset roofs”. This was the trigger for setting out with the Green Knesset Project, a project which has literally changed the face of the Knesset – The Israeli Parliament and has also influenced many other government offices in Israel.

The vision of the Speaker of the Knesset was focused on 3 points:

1. Making the Knesset a Sustainable Parliament.
2. Changing the organizational culture of Members and staff of the Knesset.
3. Turning the Knesset into a role model of sustainability for other government offices in Israel and other Parliaments of the world.

1.1 Green Knesset Sub – Projects

The first stage of the Green Knesset Project was a set of sub-projects which were planned mainly to reduce the amount of Energy consumed by the Knesset and also to manufacture “Green Energy” by a solar PV field (Figure 1). Preliminary calculations estimated the possible reduction in energy consumption by 33%.



Figure 1. The solar PV field of the Knesset. In the picture: (Left) Speaker of Knesset, Yuli Yoel Edelstein and former Director General of the Knesset, Mr. Ronen Plot

Source: Green Knesset Website

So, the first stage of the Green Knesset project was divided into sub-projects in the following spheres - Energy Efficiency and Renewables, Water Conservation/Recycling and Organizational culture of sustainability, as follows:

1. Installation of software that shuts down approximately 1,200 computers at the end of the work day.
2. Installation of sensors in every building of the Knesset which automatically turn off the heating, air conditioning, and lighting in unoccupied rooms.
3. Changing the lighting in the parking facility – replacing the T8 fluorescent lamps with LED lighting.
4. Changing bulbs throughout the building – replacing dichroic halogen bulbs with LEDs and replacing T8 fluorescent lamps with T5 lamps.
5. Installation of a 4,650 square meter photo-voltaic solar array – the biggest ever installed on a roof of a parliament. The installed capacity of the system is 450 KwP.
6. Replacement of old toilet tanks with water saving dual-flush tanks.
7. A survey to examine the Knesset's existing irrigation system and develop a new irrigation plan, with the goal of saving 20% of the 20,000 cubic meters used per year – the amount used by the Knesset for irrigation today.

8. Replacing some 50 old air conditioners with new units that are more energy efficient (Inverter technology).
9. A survey to examine the efficiency of the heat pumps and the feasibility of replacing them with more efficient pumps.
10. Installation of a chiller unit which will use heat-recovery to heat water, thus reducing significantly the gas consumption used for heating of water.

1.2 Economic and Financial Plan of the Project

Another main point in the vision of the Speaker of the Knesset, was to show that such a project was feasible economically and worth-while for any organization whether governmental, NGO or private. The Knesset invested in these projects 7 million NIS. As stated before, it was calculated that the Knesset energy consumption would be cut by a third. The savings caused by the project were calculated to be 1.5 Million NIS and the average return time was calculated as 5 years.

1.3 Results of first phase of Green Knesset Project

At present the Knesset is working on a five-year Energy Survey. The results and analysis of this survey will be published in a consequent paper. However, it is possible to coin the first phase of the project (January 2014-August 2017) as success. All 10 sub-projects were finalized and preliminary follow-up shows satisfactory results due to the technological changes. The Photovoltaic system generates “Green Energy” to the approximated value of 400,000 NIS per year. The survey of irrigation water found that 60% of the water can be saved by implementing new technologies. In addition, renowned architectural landscapist, Anat Sadeh has been chosen to lead the planning of the Knesset gardens, and she will integrate sustainable thinking into her work.

In addition to the planned projects some additional projects developed during this first phase of the Green Knesset project.

The Knesset has changed over to serving water in pitchers during committee hearings and at events. The serving of water in pitchers is set to replace the distribution of bottles of mineral water which was common in the past during committee hearings. The Knesset has consumed 60,000 bottles of mineral water a year for use in committees, at a cost of NIS 500,000. Serving water in pitchers will therefore save the Knesset NIS 500,000 a year and also reduce the volume of plastic waste by 30 cubic meters.

2. Environmental Education Activity within and outside the Knesset

As stated other projects developed from the original Green Knesset Project. Some of them were educational. For instance, all the Knesset workers received a basic training regarding Sustainability. Later a unique group of workers received a specific 40 hour course about sustainability from some of the leading lecturers in this field in Israel. A specific course about Green Purchasing was given to workers of procurement. But the educational activities also were directed outwards. The visitors center of the Knesset inaugurated a green tour of the Knesset which was offered to many groups visiting the Knesset. In addition, many groups from other government offices came to the Knesset to learn about the project. For example, the Ministries of Justice and Religion initiated their environmental programs in the Knesset and came to learn how the Knesset implemented its own program.

3. International Diplomacy

The Green Knesset project was presented and exhibited in many parliaments of the world. Thus, it was presented in: Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Malawi, Seychelles, Mexico, Costa-Rica, Panama, Albania, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Sri-Lanka, Vietnam, and additional states. With some of these states, bi-lateral agreements were signed, and in many of the agreements the ecological cooperation was emphasized. Thus, in the agreement between the Albanian Parliament and the Knesset, we can read the following phrase (Figure 2).

This agreement was entitled “Protocol of Cooperation on Sustainability Management between the Knesset and the Parliament of Albania” and was signed by the two speakers of the Parliaments. In addition to presenting the Green Knesset project in the various parliaments, the project was presented to Secretary Generals of parliaments during the 134th meeting of the IPU (International Parliamentary Union), which took place in Lusaka, Zambia, in 2016.

The Knesset also exhibited the project in its “Roaming Knesset” exhibition which was exhibited in various parliaments.

In addition, the project was presented at the Knesset to 20 ambassadors from the EU who specifically asked to see the project and discuss climate change with the Knesset Speaker and Members of Knesset. During this tour, Hungarian Ambassador to Israel, Andor Nagy, congratulated the Knesset on its environmental efforts. „You put Israel on the map of sustainability,” he said (Knesset website as viewed 27.3.18).

The Knesset and the Parliament of the Republic of Albania would like to express their wish to make joint efforts in order to promote environmental management, policies and technologies within their parliaments, such as:

- Environmental technologies which improve energy efficiency (e.g. LED lighting, heat pumps, etc.).
- Renewable energy production (e.g. Photovoltaic Systems).
- Technologies of water conservation and rainwater harvesting.
- Reuse, reduction and recycling of various materials and wastes, such as paper, electronic waste, printer toners, etc.
- Environmental Standards and Policies such as EMAS or ISO 14001.
- Annual Sustainability Reporting.
- Environmental education and increasing awareness of parliamentarians and employees.
- Environmental Ethics and Ethics of Responsibility.
- Sustainable landscaping.
- Environmental communications.

Figure 2. Phrase from the agreement between the Albanian Parliament and the Knesset

Source: Knesset website

4. Discussion. Entrepreneurship

Such a project, needs entrepreneurship. In this case, civilian non-business entrepreneurship. Much before the Knesset administration declared the project, in the year 2010 a group of workers set up a think-tank to analyze the possibilities of “Greening” the Knesset. The group called itself the Green Forum of the Knesset, met periodically and prepared various environmental position papers which were presented to the Director General of the Knesset. These position papers analyzed various environmental issues such as water, waste, energy and suggested ways of dealing with these issues. These discussions and preparation of position papers took place for several years between 2010-2013 almost without any pragmatic results. But, due to the position papers presented by the members of the Green Forum of the Knesset, in the year 2013, former Director General of the Knesset, Dan Landau, decided to adopt the Israeli Government decision of “Green Government” and implement it in the Knesset. The decision lists many activities to be undertaken by the government offices in Israel in order to make their activity sustainable.

The phenomenon of Green Parliaments has been hardly researched, but it seems that every parliament that wishes to become “Green” has to have an “entrepreneur” that will assist and promote the “Green Parliament” program. Thus, in the Scottish Parliament there are two bodies of volunteer workers who assist and promote various Green issues. The Groups are The

RACE (Real Action on Carbon Emissions) programme and the Eco (Environmental Contacts) Network. The Network helps RACE to encourage good environmental practice in all offices across the Parliament (The Scottish Parliament website as viewed 27.3.18).

As stated above, the workers of the Knesset were also trained in a general training about sustainability and a special group of workers received a more specific course on various issues of Sustainability. This enabled adding more people to the Green Forum of the Knesset.

Another process that took place in the Green Knesset project was the active support of the Environmental NGOs of Israel. In Israel there are approximately 150 environmental NGOs all organized under the umbrella organization “Life and Environment”. This organization supported the project from its beginning and gave it important legitimacy and publicity from beginning. This support is very important since in practice it means support of the general public and branding of the project as authentic and non-Green wash.

The question of “Green Marketing” of such a project is a serious question since in order to achieve the target of changing societies environmental behavior a “critical mass” of “Green awareness is needed. The project of a Green Parliament must be marketed to the “residents” of the parliament – MPs, workers and visitors. In addition, in order to have an impact on other national government offices and other international parliaments, it must be “marketed” also on a national and international level. Thus, intensive PR work accompanied the project and more than 30 press releases, in English and in Hebrew, were issued. A massive PR campaign was released on the day of the Inauguration of the Green Knesset project. Later, Knesset’s Media and PR Division won the prestigious Roaring Lion Award for the “Green Knesset” campaign. The Israel Public Relations Association presented its prestigious Roaring Lion Award to Knesset Director-General Ronen Plot and Spokesperson Yotam Yakir. The Roaring Lion is considered the most prestigious award in Israel in the field of public relations. The Knesset won the award in the Quality of the Environment and Sustainability category for the “Green Knesset” PR campaign, which was launched by parliament’s Media and Public Relations Division in early 2014 and has generated interest from hundreds of media outlets in Israel and abroad.

The vast media coverage of „Green Knesset” – the flagship environmental project of Knesset Speaker Yuli-Yoel Edelstein – has also attracted the interest of numerous parliaments around the world which, in turn, have adopted similar environmental models.

Conclusion

The Green Knesset Project may be a paradigmatic change which will have a great influence on the behaviour of other parliaments and societies all around the world. It shows that environmental change is possible and even economic. Much more research is needed in order to figure out how to “market” this idea in a more stronger way within parliaments and internationally. Much more research is needed in order to understand better the optimal way of establishing additional Green parliaments.

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