

LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN HUNGARY

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The issues of environmental protection, climate change and sustainability come to the fore more and more. The elaboration of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development in 2007 and the establishment of the National Council for Sustainable Development in 2008, show that governmental work in this field has also gained momentum. Our investigations cover 48 municipal and 2 micro regional initiatives related to sustainability. Despite the errors and deficiencies of the initiatives we found on the Internet, these strategies mean a major progress and a milestone towards local sustainability as they can serve as a role model for other municipalities.

Keywords: sustainable development, local agenda, strategy, NSSD

Introduction

The concept of sustainable development is currently one of the most important concepts in the world. The message of the concept is that environmental problems cannot be handled on their own, as independent problems, they can only be solved with the integrated application of economic, social and environmental policy, which means that environmental interests must be taken into account increasingly when making economic and social decisions.

The implementation of the global idea is based on the action laid down in the sustainable development strategies of local communities. Many communities in the world – countries, regions and municipalities – urged by the international community, realizing the danger of the destruction of environmental values, decided to elaborate sustainable development strategies.

The system of local sustainable development strategies (local agendas) is formed by top-down intentions and bottom-up initiatives as well. Beside the support of the central government, the success of local sustainable development strategies relies heavily on the self-organizing and initiative skills of local communities. (Lafferty, 2001) The self-organizing skill ensures that the objectives set in the strategy reflect the priorities of the general public, while the initiative skill helps to create innovative solutions for local problems. The result

of the successful cooperation between the national government and the local community is the local sustainable development strategy, the so-called Local Agenda. The strategy contains the environmental approached problem analysis of the community. The basis of successful strategies is the bottom-up initiatives of the community based on voluntary participation. The innovative initiatives of the local community create local solutions for handling the global problem of sustainability (Eckerberg, 2001).

Nowadays almost every country in the world as well as several local communities possess local agendas. However, these strategies have been prepared on political pressure. According to the Hungarian National Council for Sustainable Development politics is governed by the necessity to give priority to economic growth, as the financial resources of the budget derive from it, which express the success of the applied politics (NFFT, 2010, p. 22). These strategies aim to pass the criteria of weak sustainability as a clear environmental-based strategy, which subordinates economic and social interests to giving successful answers to environmental challenges and forces economic compromises for this reason would be rather unacceptable for the general public presently.

In professional literature there have been several references that suggest that there are some municipalities in Hungary which possess local sustainable development strategies, or have some initiatives related to sustainability. Some of these are listed here:

- The book „Sustainable development in the local government’s practice” talks about 7 initiatives (Nyíregyháza, Szekszárd, Tamási, Mezőkövesd, Sümeg, Kerekegyháza, Tatabánya-Tata) which give examples to good practices (Glover et al., 1999).
- The national information for the Johannesburg Summit mentions that there are “a few local governments (which – the author) launched even Local Agenda 21 programmes” (HCSD, 2002).
- *Szlávik* made a study about the initiatives related to sustainability of the town of Kőszeg and the region of Karcag, Egyek and Kunmadaras (Szlávik, 2002).
- The study of *Mária Csete* examines the sustainability of the Tisza Lake region (Csete, 2005).
- In her diploma work *Nóra Dankó* (Dankó, 2006) examined nine local sustainability processes and shows with great subtlety that these processes only partly fulfill the criteria of LA21.
- The Aalborg Charter has four signatory municipalities from Hungary (Aba, Kecskemét, Monor, Nagykanizsa). (The Aalborg Commitments Secretariat, 2010)

There have been some studies carried out in other regions, and there are several projects going on which can be connected to sustainability all over the country.

However, when preparing a paper for an international conference in 2006, we found that these initiatives can hardly be seen as formulized local agendas, they are just encouraging initiatives. The personal and telephone interviews we made with domestic experts (e.g. Szlávik, Füle, Pomázi) also reflected our opinion (Baják & Kuti, 2006). We finally arrived at the consequence that in 2006 no documents existed in Hungary which could be referred to as formulized local agendas.

According to our hypothesis the main cause of this was the lack of knowledge about this important international initiative. The lack of the national government's commitment also influenced municipality leaders in the wrong direction, who as a consequence undervalued the importance of the topic. It is also an adverse effect that as a consequence of the national government's commitment there are not enough guides and case studies available. Altogether it leads to the lack of interest from the local governments and the especially low number of local agendas.

The Local Sustainable Development Plans and Programs Examined

Since 2006 the situation has significantly changed. Environmental protection, climate change and sustainability come to the fore, and governmental work in this field also gathered momentum. In June 2007 the *Hungarian National Sustainable Development Strategy* (MKK, 2007) was prepared, in February 2008 the *National Climate Change Strategy* (MKO, 2008), and in October 2008 after almost a year of preparatory work the *National Council for Sustainable Development* was founded, the aim of which is to foster the implementation of sustainable development in Hungary. The Council also works for the propagation of local sustainability; in the course of 2010 it asked eight municipalities to prepare their own local agenda as a pilot project.

In 2006 we did not manage to find a formulized local agenda, however in 2012 there are about 50 municipalities in Hungary whose documents related to sustainable development can be found on the Internet. This progress is highly welcome, not to mention the fact that no legal bindings and no newer guides than the one published by the Ministry of Home Affairs are available (Szlávik & Turchany, 2002).

In our paper we examine the initiatives of 48 municipalities and 2 micro-regions related to sustainable development we found on the Internet. The spatial distribution of the examined municipalities is illustrated by Figure 1.



Figure 1. The spatial distribution of the examined municipalities which possess documents related to sustainable.

The strategies were completed after the elaboration of the *National Sustainable Development Strategy*, in the period between 2009 and 2011. In five cases the planning process has not been finished, therefore the strategic document is not accessible yet, only the community questionnaires and the short summary can be read.

Among the documents we can find titles like sustainability plan or program, environmentally sustainable development plan or program, sustainable development strategy and local agenda. The title of the document refers to its character. In many cases under the title sustainability plan the organizational development plan of the local government can be found. Naturally these are the shortest documents in length (Figure 2).

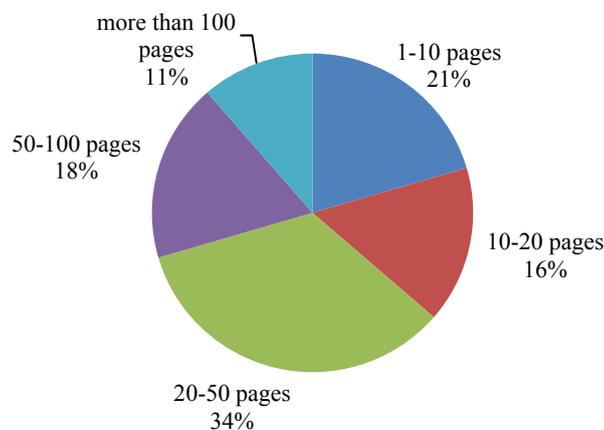


Figure 2. The length of the examined strategies.

Environmentally sustainable development plans and programs only deal with the environmental perspective of sustainability; therefore these programs can be considered environmental programs. The most complete documents of sustainable development are the ones titled Local Agenda21, 9 of which are included in the examination. In these strategies, beside the environmental aspects economic and social issues are included, which means that these documents are among the longest ones (Figure 3).

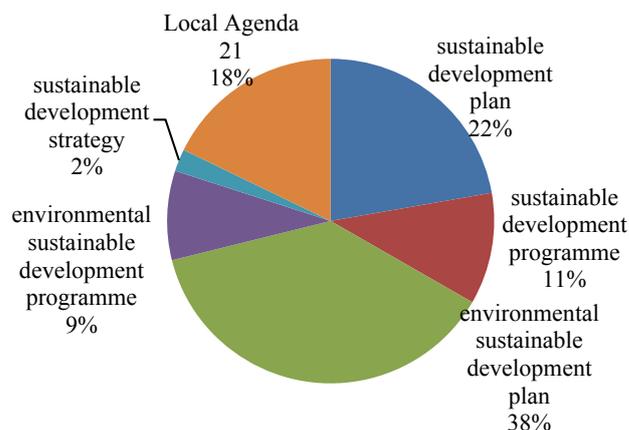


Figure 3. The title of the examined strategies.

Only in case of these documents can it be examined whether they were elaborated in the spirit of strong or weak sustainability, whether the economic and social aspects included in them are in balance with environmental aspects or they are subordinated to them and only appear in the strategies because of their interconnections.

Most of the strategies use the Brundtland definition as a starting point, indicating that the reason for the elaboration of the strategy was the conservation of natural values for future generations. Most of the documents refer to Agenda 21, the Sustainable Development Strategy of the European Union as well on the considerations drawn up in the National Sustainable Development Strategy.

In many cases the strategies are counterparts of each other, one was made with the basis of the other. Contextual analysis justified that it is not a good solution, as municipalities differ from each other, therefore the adaptation of a strategy leads to the distortion of priorities.

The elaborated programs and strategies pay attention to situation analysis, the identification of problems, and the definition of strategic objectives related to the problems, but some essential elements – like the definition of the vision, the identification of partners, and the specification of authorities – are missing from several strategies.

It was also our aim to examine the timing of the strategies, but there were only 9 of the 45 examined strategies that contained information about it. Among these there were documents which contained short and long term objectives as well.

There are 8 topics in the examined 45 strategies which are of major importance. These are energy management and conservation, transportation, the protection of the built environment, natural values, the protection of municipal green spaces, waste management, water management, the development of environmental awareness among citizens and air quality. It can be stated that these are the elements that most municipalities put an emphasis on (Figure 4).

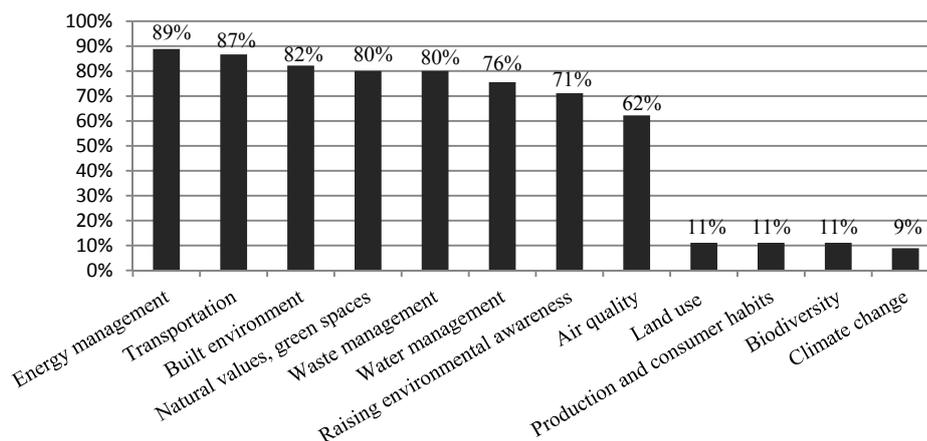


Figure 4. The appearance of environmental aspects in the examined strategies.

Beside the aspects that are related to environmental sustainability, economic (for example the development of the economy, tourism) and social (employment, education, health care) objectives also appear in the strategies which define themselves as local agendas (nine pieces). It is a positive fact that the 3 pillars are in balance: objectives that are primarily economic and social ones have the same priority as environmental objectives. However it must be mentioned that there are some aspects and objectives that appear in the strategies (increase in tax revenues, public safety, religious life), which are quite far from the basic idea of sustainability, therefore their appearance in the strategy can be questioned (Figure 5).

The strategies prioritize the tasks related to the objectives on the basis of whether their implementation requires financial sacrifices from the local government or the local community. Those tasks are implemented first which do not require great financial input from the community or the input can be obtained from application tenders.

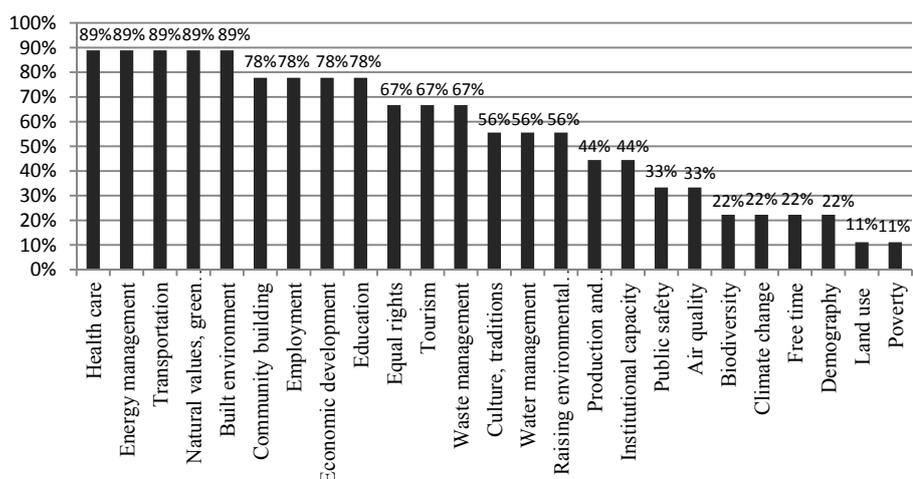


Figure 5. The appearance of some factors in the local agendas of the examined nine municipalities.

The contextual examination of the strategies shows that the basic goal of the strategies is the creation of the conditions of sustainable environmental, social and economic development. However, the balance between the pillars and the objectives which are not necessarily in harmony with environmental interests indicate that these strategies were made in the spirit of weak sustainability. The leaders of the municipalities may have realized that a strategy which provides priority to environmental interests in every area would be difficult to accept for the public in Hungary.

As a summary it can be said that the elaboration of these strategies together with their deficiencies and errors is a major progress and can be considered milestones towards sustainability. In many cases we experienced that among the references of the strategies other municipalities' strategies were mentioned, which means that municipalities which do not possess a strategy look at these municipalities and their programs as role models.

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