

University doctoral (PhD) dissertation abstract

**THE CHANCES OF LOCAL AGENDAS
IN HUNGARY**

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Debrecen, 2012

1. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH, THE INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

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. 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.

The subject of my doctoral dissertation is the examination of local sustainable development strategies. As only a small number of strategies are available in Hungary, first I introduce the importance, the principles, and the steps of elaborating local strategies, then I sum up the experiences of international initiatives related to the elaboration of local sustainable development strategies. After that I explore the main factors that influence the elaboration of local strategies, and introduce the conditions of elaborating local sustainable development strategies nationwide, with the help of the empirical survey prepared in the micro-region of Gyöngyös.

It is not my aim to examine the realization and the economic, social and environmental effects of the goals laid down in the local sustainable development strategies, as LA21 strategies are in progress in many parts of the world, while in the case of Hungarian strategies the results can not be evaluated due to the short time elapsed since the programme started. (The first real strategies

were elaborated between 2009 and 2011, after the elaboration of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, and the horizon of these strategies is at least one or two decades.)

As one of the most important principles of sustainable development states, the implementation of the global idea is in the hands of local communities. („Think globally, act locally.”) In my dissertation I examine the most important national and local factors that influence local sustainability policy. I introduce the initiatives of the national government until the present day. This includes the elaboration of the institutional system, the examination of the local aspects of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, the introduction of the activities to foster the spread of the knowledge related to sustainability (conferences, guides), the mapping of the documents which form the legislative background of local sustainable development strategies, and investigation into the resources available for initiatives related to local sustainability.

I also examine the self-organizing and initiative skills of local communities, which is the catalyst of local sustainable development strategies. Members of the community are able to identify themselves with clearly defined goals elaborated with the participation of the community and with the set of measures which creates the possibility of their implementation, and they are willing to act for their success. The analysis of the conditions and possibilities of municipal governments, the population’s knowledge about sustainability and their willingness to participate in the municipality’s life, the existing documents and initiatives of municipalities related to environmental protection are in the focus of my research. I also summarize the experiences of local sustainable development strategies already elaborated.

Local strategies also answer the question *how and to what extent the leaders and other members of the community are aware of the concept of sustainable development, and what order of values has been formed in connection with it.*

The objective of my research is **to investigate whether the conditions are given to elaborate local sustainable development strategies in Hungary and whether municipalities are ready to elaborate such strategies.**

In the main chapters of my dissertation I summarized and followed my objectives according to the following points:

- I summarize the characteristics of sustainable municipalities with the help of literature review.

- I explore the tasks of the national and the local level in the aspect of local sustainability, the importance of forming partnerships, with special emphasis on the wide range participation of the community.
- I introduce the activity of the EU related to spreading the concept of (local) sustainability, its documents related to it, and the local sustainability processes of some European countries.
- In many parts of the world initiatives related to local sustainability have already been started. It is my goal to investigate the reasons which led to the start of the process.
- Taking international trends into account I introduce the Hungarian conditions, focusing on the tasks and activities of the national government.
- On the example of a concrete micro-region – the micro-region of Gyöngyös – using the results of my questionnaire survey, I specify the conditions and possibilities of local sustainable development strategies in Hungary.

My hypotheses in connection with the examined topics were the following:

- H1: The commitment of the national government towards the elaboration of local sustainable development strategies is missing.
- H2: Most municipalities are not ready to elaborate their own local sustainable development strategies.
- H3: In many cases the available local strategies do not comply with the requirements of local sustainable development strategies laid down in professional literature.

I prove my second hypothesis with the help of four sub-hypotheses:

- AH1: Economic, social and environmental factors have different weight in the life of municipalities. Boosting the economy and social well-being overtake environmental issues in the order of values of communities.
- AH2: Although municipalities possess a number of strategic documents, which could form the basis of a sustainable development strategy in the future, the level and content of these strategies are different from municipality to municipality.
- AH3: The public does not play an active role in the life of the municipality, therefore decisions are made by the bodies of representatives of the municipalities.
- AH4: Given the present personnel and financial conditions municipalities are not able to elaborate local sustainable development strategies.

2. DATABASE AND METHODS

In my dissertation I use an interdisciplinary approach. In Chapter 1, which deals with the concept of sustainable development and in Chapters 2-6 about local sustainability **I imply secondary research exploring and analyzing the scientific literature.**

Chapter 7, which introduces the international experiences of the elaboration of local strategies can be considered an **analytical review of the scientific literature** based on the strategic documents of the EU, available local strategic documents and on works which summarize the experiences of them.

The 8th chapter of my dissertation introduces the activities of the national government related to (local) sustainability. As a first step of my work I explored the research material and used an **analytical review of the scientific literature** utilizing the possibilities the Internet provides. Besides, as a qualitative method I used the experience of interviews with governmental and local experts and internationally recognized Hungarian researchers of the topic. Utilizing the knowledge I gained I created a system which assists in examining the validity of my first hypothesis in the framework of a relatively objective system

In Chapter 9 I introduce the municipal experiences of sustainable development using the results of the **questionnaire survey** conducted in the micro-region of Gyöngyös. The aim of the survey was to introduce the challenges of the further spread of local sustainability on the example of a rural micro-region. Processing the questionnaires I used several mathematical and statistical methods.

In Chapter 10 I carried out **the critical evaluation and systematization of** the existing Hungarian **strategic documents** in order to determine how much they comply with the principles laid down earlier. During my investigation I analyzed the initiatives of 48 municipalities and 2 micro-regions related to sustainable development. Naturally, there are other strategic documents that fell out of my horizon, however, I believe that this number is enough to get a complex picture of the strategies that have already been elaborated after carrying out some examinations. I examined the documents taking formal and contextual aspects into account, but as only 9 of the documents proved to be appropriate from the contextual aspect, I did not have the opportunity to carry out in-depth statistical analysis.

The method used for the examination of the national government's commitment

According to my first hypothesis the commitment of the central government to the elaboration of local sustainable development strategies is missing. To prove this I created a system of criteria and an associated system of values which is capable of highlighting why the hypothesis was accepted or discarded. The aspects I evaluated were the creation of the institutional system, the elaboration of the national strategy, the creation of the legislative background, providing financial resources and the activities related to propagating the concept and tasks of sustainability. I evaluated every aspect on a five grade scale. The parameters that belong to the values are the following:

- $$k_i = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} 1 - \text{the apparent refusal of the criteria.} \\ 2 - \text{late, reluctant implementation, the failure of the deadline, the partial fulfillment of the criteria.} \\ 3 - \text{the proper fulfillment of the criteria for the deadline.} \\ 4 - \text{the fulfillment of the criteria before the deadline without any further activity.} \\ 5 - \text{the fulfillment of the criteria undertaking further voluntary initiatives.} \end{array} \right.$$

After evaluating the 5 aspects introduced, inserting the sum of the obtained values

$$k_i, \quad k_i = \sum_{i=1}^5 k_i = 1; 2; 3; 4; 5$$

in the following list, the commitment of the national government to sustainability can be determined.

- $$\text{Ha K: } \left\{ \begin{array}{ll} \text{below 10 points} & \text{Openly resisting attitude.} \\ 10-14 \text{ points} & \text{Passive resistant attitude.} \\ 15-18 \text{ points} & \text{Obligate attitude.} \\ 19-22 \text{ points} & \text{Active obligate attitude.} \\ 23-25 \text{ points} & \text{Real commitment.} \end{array} \right.$$

With the help of the classification it can be determined whether the hypothesis can be accepted or discarded. The hypothesis is discarded if the commitment of the national government falls into the last two groups, into the categories of active obligate attitude or real commitment, in other cases the hypothesis is accepted.

The methods used for processing the questionnaires

I conducted the empiric survey of Chapter 9 among the local governments and the local citizens of the micro-region of Gyöngyös.

The questionnaire concentrated on the following topics:

- The weight of economic, social and environmental factors in the life of the municipalities, the ranking of problems connected with these factors.
- The existence of the documents which could serve as a basis of local sustainability strategies.
- The mobilizability of the resident population, local citizens' role in the elaboration of documents that influence the life of the municipality, the extent of co-operation between the local government and the population, the methods used to involve the community into the phases of decision-making and implementation.
- Initiatives related to sustainability at the municipalities, the chances of preparing local sustainability strategies, the exploitation of positive changes resulting from conscious planning, inhibitive factors.

I prepared two forms of the questionnaire, one for local citizens, and the other one for local governments. With this duality my aim was to examine the consistency of the priorities of local governments and citizens. 18 local governments filled in the questionnaire. The aim of this type of the questionnaire was to get an accurate picture of the municipalities' documents and initiatives and to analyze whether the local governments' priorities are identical with the citizens' priorities by comparing them with the citizens' questionnaires. The main point about community questionnaires was that as many municipalities' citizens should be involved as possible, and in the meantime the weight of neither municipality should overtake the others' by a large extent. The only exception to these criteria was the head of the micro region, Gyöngyös, the weight of which – due to its size and population – is naturally also larger in the micro region.

The choice of respondents was made upon real estates at the municipalities chosen randomly with the involvement of local governments. We received 329 evaluatable community questionnaires.

There were several questions on the questionnaire in case of which it was presumable that the results are in connection with each other, if respondents filled in the questionnaire judiciously,

responsibly and competently. When the answers were numerical, I checked the closeness of the connection of the answers with the help of the correlation coefficient.

The questionnaire contained questions, where the task of the respondents was to rank different factors based on their importance. For these examinations I used the *Spearman rank correlation coefficient*.

It could also be examined how much respondents agree about a topic, how *homogenous* the rankings are. If the ranking of citizens and students are homogenous it means that the two groups consider the same things important and less important.

I plan to repeat my research in the future to see how much the change of conditions have changed the rankings. For the examination of this type of problems the *coefficient of concordance* can be used.

I also examined how important citizens consider different local problems at the examined municipalities. The *arithmetic average* of the points given by the citizens for the different problems can be an important indicator of a particular issue in a particular area. It can be characteristic of the municipality which problems get significantly high or low average points.

The use of *variance analysis* seems to be evident for this investigation, however, two conditions of it – normal distribution and independence – were not fulfilled, therefore I used the *Friedman probe* instead of it. In case the probe showed significant difference, I examined which questions are the ones where the rankings differ significantly. For this examination I implied the *Wilcoxon signed-ranks test with Bonferroni correction*.

3. THE MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

The success of the local sustainability process is determined by two important factors, one is the bottom-up initiatives based on the voluntary participation of the community, the other one is the central government's support for the initiatives related to local sustainability.

3.1. The Hungarian national government and sustainable development

According to my first hypothesis:

H1: The commitment of the national government towards the elaboration of local sustainable development strategies is missing.

The most important task of the national level is the creation of the institutional system. In the national governing body governance is concentrated at the highest possible level, and as many sectors are involved as it is possible. Then comes the elaboration of the national sustainable development strategy, which should be embedded in the legislative background and financial resources should be provided for its implementation, moreover the local sustainability process should be facilitated. The creation of these conditions gives space for local communities to elaborate their own sustainability strategies.

I prove the hypothesis with the examination of these five aspects, I present the measures introduced in these areas in Hungary, with special emphasis on the initiatives related to local sustainability.

The creation of the institutional system

The Hungarian Sustainable Development Commission was established as a cross-ministerial commission by the decision of the government in 1993 for determining the tasks and coordinating the implementation of the programmes and agreements adopted at the Rio Conference.

The issue of sustainability is defined as a multisectorial area by Government Decision 2064/2004., which expresses the need for a national sustainable development strategy. The task of elaborating a strategy was assigned to the authority of primarily the Department of the Environment and Water, and also the Department of Health, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Minister without Portfolio for Equal Opportunities, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Economy and Transport, the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister's Office.

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.

An important innovative initiative of the government related to the creation of the institutional system was the creation of the position of Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations, which ceased to be on 1 January 2012. The role of the Commissioner was taken over by the newly developed Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, which takes the interests of future generations into account during its activities.

The elaboration of the national sustainable development strategy

The main task of the national governing body is the elaboration of the national sustainable development strategy, which was completed in June 2007 after long preparatory work urged on the insistence of the European Union. This final version was elaborated with the direction of the *National Development Agency* and the *Department of the Environment and Water*. The strategy specified 11 priorities in three areas. The national strategy acknowledges the importance of elaborating local sustainability strategies, but it does not provide guidance to local communities. Although it stresses that it is important to elaborate local strategies, it does not indicate the primary aims of elaborating local strategies and it does not provide the necessary conditions of strategy making. Therefore the report „*In search for the future*” of the *National Council for Sustainable Development* says that the aim of elaborating the strategy was not implementation.

Activity directed to the propagation of the concept and tasks of sustainability

An important task of the central government is the propagation of the local sustainability process by publishing guides and case studies and organizing conferences about the topic.

In Hungary there are only a few conferences and trainings about local sustainability, and only researchers and experts of the topic have knowledge about them. It should be a key objective for the central government to make guides and case studies available for local governments and the public in Hungarian language. Only one such guide has been published: the Ministry of the Interior published the guide edited by *Szlávik and Turchany* in 4000 copies and delivered it to every local government in Hungary in 2002. In addition to this material only a few books, case studies, articles, some diploma works and doctoral dissertations deal with the topic, however they are only known in professional circles.

The creation of the legislative background

By creating the legal background of local sustainability strategies communities get some guidance about the requirements which derive from national initiatives and the rights and opportunities provided by them. As a legal act which specifies the tasks of local governments related to sustainability has not been prepared till the present day, it is „Law 53/1995. on the Protection of the Environment” which most precisely defines the expectations from local governments in connection with sustainable development. Besides this law there is only a government decision which states that local governments can make local sustainability strategies.

Providing financial resources

As local governments are underfinanced across Europe – as well as in Hungary –, and the resources are bound by law, central government programmes can provide resources for preparing and implementing local sustainability strategies, for starting pilot projects and for the recognition of efforts in the form of applications and prizes.

Although the application tenders of the former *New Hungary Development Plan* and the current *New Széchenyi Plan* pay attention to the harmonious, sustainable development of the environment, the economy and society, and contain several elements of sustainability, I do not have information about applications and awards which aim at propagating local sustainability.

Table 1 summarizes the factors mentioned above.

Table 1

The evaluation of the national government’s activity related to sustainability

Evaluation criteria	Performance (1-5 point)
The creation of the institutional system	3 points
The elaboration of the national strategy	2 points
The creation of the legislative background	1 point
Providing financial resources	2 points
The propagation of the concept and tasks of sustainability	2 points
Total	10 points

Source: own analysis

According to the classification system I created, the national government's attitude can be considered passive resistant. It is **consistent with my first hypothesis**, that the commitment of the national government towards local sustainability is not sufficient.

T1: The commitment of the national government towards the elaboration of local sustainable development strategies is missing.

3.2. Local communities and sustainable development

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. 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. According to my hypothesis:

H2: Most municipalities are not ready to elaborate their own local sustainable development strategies.

To prove the hypothesis I analyze the status of local governments, examine the order of values of the Hungarian society, the self-organizing skill and engagement of the public in decision making, and pay attention to the documents that can serve as a basis of local sustainable development strategies, the participation of Hungarian municipalities in international networks, the factors that influence the elaboration of sustainable development strategies and finally the opportunities which arise from their elaboration.

In order to prove my statements empirically, I conducted a questionnaire survey among local governments and citizens in the micro region of Gyöngyös about the life of the municipality and the issues of local sustainability. Presenting my results first I introduce the outcomes of the empirical survey, and after that generalizing the results I present the Hungarian situation about the particular topics.

The order of values of the society

In the order of values of the Hungarian society, the weight of economic issues is bigger than those of social questions, and much bigger than the weight of environmental issues. The order of values of the local governments is basically the same as that of the general public, but economic

issues are much more important for them – probably because of the scarcity of financial resources. (Figure 1)

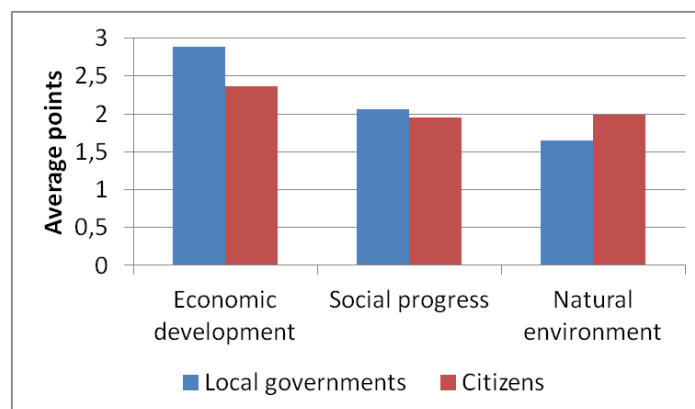


Figure 1

Local governments' and the public's ranking of the three pillars of sustainable development (own composition)

Note: higher values mean higher priority

Source: own composition

In the order of values of the society environmental issues are underprioritized. Sometimes there are events which evoke indignation and interest, but they are not able keep environmental issues on the table for a longer period.

The order of values of the society is reflected in the political situation. In Hungary, contrary to several countries in Europe at the first five Parliamentary elections since the change of regimes, no green political parties managed to get a parliamentary mandate. Environmental issues only occasionally appear in the communication materials of the parties.

An important reason of the environmental issues' relegation to the background in the order of values of the society is the lack of information. Initiatives related to the environment do not attract the attention of the media. They only get increasing attention when there are some really serious problems, which are able to evoke general indignation and interest. That makes the stronger presence of sustainability – its principles and values – in the media desirable, with special emphasis on the role of individuals and local communities. The investigations show that **my first sub-hypothesis is correct.**

AT1: Boosting the economy and social well-being overtake environmental issues in the order of values of communities.

Available documents

Almost half of the municipalities in the empirical survey possess a document which defines the vision of the municipality, but only 20% of them have an action plan to implement the vision. It means that this part of the municipalities is aware of their goals and targets, but they do not know how to reach them. It is a serious deficiency, as the mobilization of the community can be implied by action plans. (Figure 2)

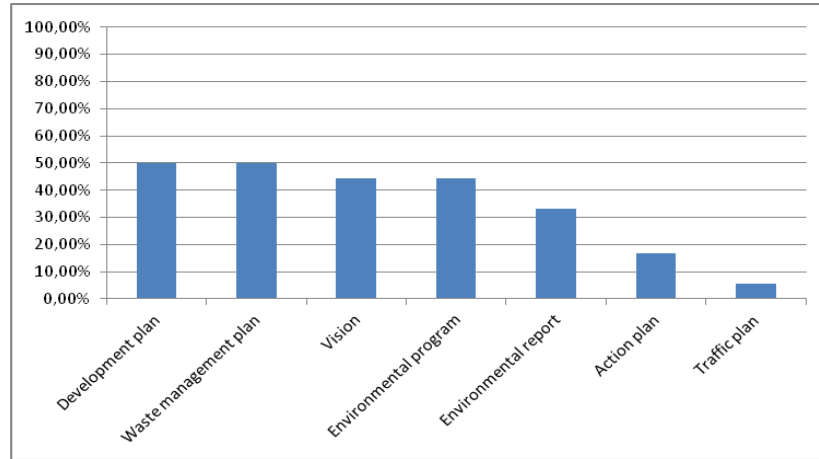


Figure 2

The proportion of the examined municipalities which possess the examined document related to sustainable development (2011)

Source: own composition

It is a positive fact that most municipalities possess documents which could be used as a basis when elaborating local agendas – even though many of these documents were prepared with the help of external experts without the wide range participation of the public. In order to propagate the valuable elements, it would be advisable to highlight them, as these documents can form the basis of a future formalized sustainable development strategy.

Based on the investigation **my second sub-hypothesis proved to be correct.**

AT2: The strategic documents municipalities possess are accidental in many cases, the level and content of them are rather varied.

The self-organizing skill and the mobilizability of the public

Based on the questionnaires it can be stated that the opinions of the local governments and the public about the role of the local government at the examined municipalities are more or less the same: they think that decision making and implementation as well as financial management are

concentrated in the hands of local governments. In contrast, the public does not take part actively in the life of the municipality.

Active and mobilizable communities are able to 'bombard' local governments with initiatives related to sustainability. It is only possible if the local community is receptive to environmental problems, willing to act for their solution and if its self-organizing skill and social capital is enough to handle problems about its own environment on its own.

The responding local governments can primarily rely on themselves at the elaboration of their local agendas. To a smaller extent they can also rely on consultant companies, some community groups and educational and research institutes. There is an even smaller chance for the role taking of private persons and the participation of the business sector. At the examined municipalities the involvement of organizations that represent different social groups – such as minority, youth or women's organizations – is not characteristic. According to the survey the media is the stakeholder that municipalities can rely on the least.

Beside the lack of information of the public it is also a difficulty that due to the political system before the change of regimes, democratic traditions in Hungary are still weaker than in Western Europe. The society lacks social capital, which is the basis of bottom-up initiatives, and as a consequence of this, communities are unable to affect decision making significantly. In Hungary there are relatively few civil organizations that take part in the process of community strategy making. Although there are forums organized about local issues, community participation at them is rather low in many cases. The number of initiatives from the civil sector is not enough, therefore local governments can rely on the community in the formation of their environmental policy and about issues related to local sustainability only to a small extent.

Based on the results presented, **my third sub-hypothesis proved to be correct.**

AT3: The public does not play an active role in the life of the municipality, therefore decisions are made by the bodies of representatives of the municipalities.

The chances of strategy making

Sustainability and particularly local sustainability is still not a well-known concept in Hungary: *only about one fourth of local governments and citizens have some knowledge about the LA21 initiative.* Awareness of the concept is gained mainly from the media, the role of the other sources of information is minimal. (Figure 3)

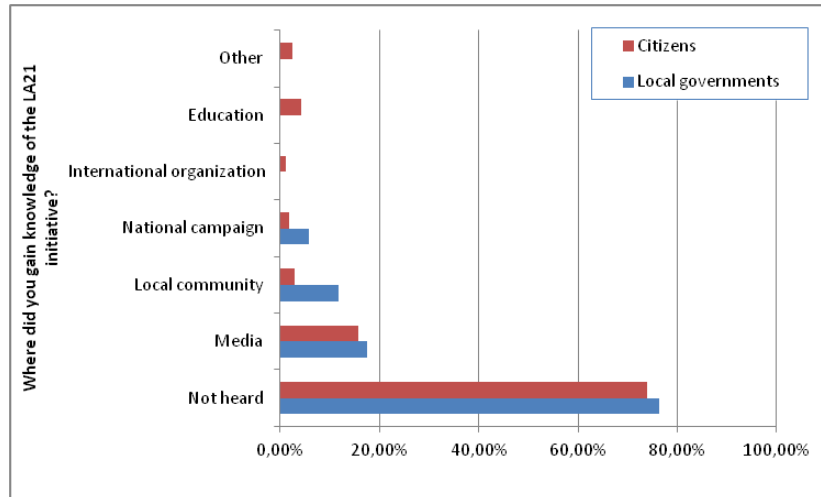


Figure 3

Local governments' and the communities' awareness of the LA21 initiative (2011)

Source: own composition

In about half of the examined municipalities there are initiatives which are somehow related to sustainable development, but only a small proportion of them take part in the work of sustainability related international networks or initiatives.

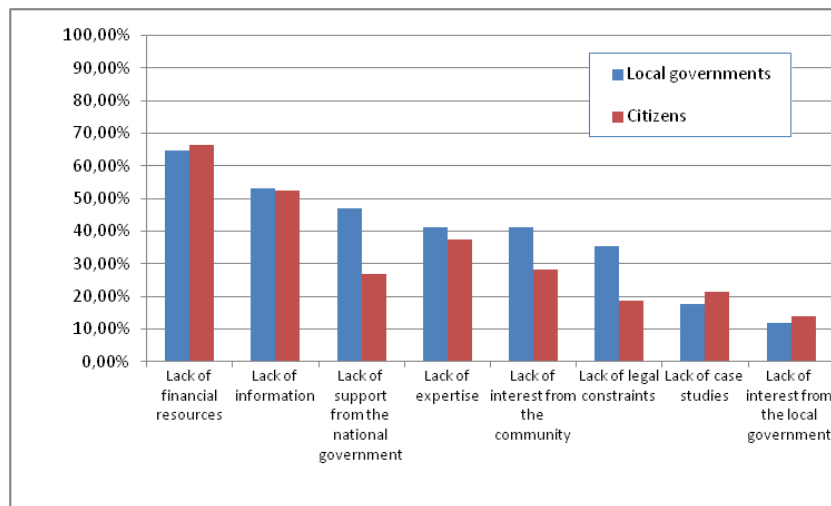


Figure 4

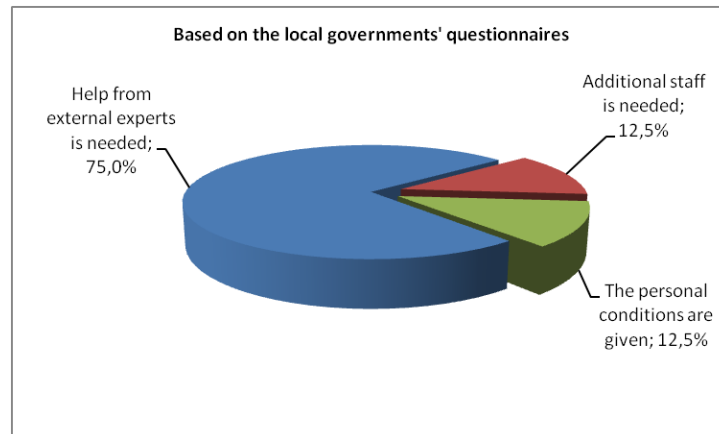
Inhibitive factors to the elaboration of local sustainability strategies at the examined municipalities (2011)

Source: own composition

According to Figure 4 the most important factor of the low number of local agendas is the lack of financial resources, the lack of support from the national government, the lack of information and the lack of expertise. The lack of interest from local authorities and local communities is not

treated as a major inhibitive factor. It means that municipalities, especially small ones, believe that the first step should be taken by the national government, especially in the form of acquiring financial resources.

Local governments highly depend on the sums they get from the higher levels of government, which can not be used freely. Due to the scarcity of financial resources derived from the central government, financial resources for the implementation of regulatory tasks are sometimes too small. Resources for the elaboration and implementation of a local agenda can only be obtained from the own resources of the local government or can be financed from the application tenders of the central government. Local governments' own resources mainly derive from the taxation of environmental polluting activities (local business tax, car tax, parking fees) or from the sale of green spaces.



**Personal conditions of local sustainability
at the examined municipalities' local governments (2011)**

Source: own composition

Local governments only show some interest in the topic at municipalities where researchers are willing to do most of the planning instead of them (in some cases with the help of them). A probable cause of this is the low number of civil servants who deal with environmental issues. Local governments employ environmental experts, but the number of them is not sufficient. Beside the required activities they hardly have time and energy for their own initiatives, one of which, for example, the support of the process of sustainability could be. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the examined municipalities would have difficulties preparing a local sustainable development strategy on their own because of the personnel conditions, they would have to hire additional staff or enlist the services of external experts (Figure 5).

Altogether it means that **my fourth sub-hypothesis**, according to which municipalities are not able to elaborate local sustainable development strategies given the present personnel and financial conditions **is only partly correct**.

Therefore I altered it the following way:

AT4: The elaboration of efficient and feasible municipal strategies can only be realized with the significant help of the central government (providing financial resources and expertise).

Based on the four sub-theses I modified my second hypothesis:

T2: Most of the municipalities – especially small municipalities – would only be able to elaborate local agendas with great effort and significant external help.

3.3. Local sustainable development programmes and strategies in Hungary

I examined the initiatives of 48 municipalities and 2 micro-regions related to sustainable development I found on the Internet. The spatial distribution of the examined municipalities is illustrated by Figure 6.



Figure 6

The spatial distribution of the examined municipalities which possess documents related to sustainable development

Source: own compilation

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. According to my hypothesis:

H3: In many cases the available local strategies do not comply with the requirements of local sustainable development strategies laid down in professional literature.

Among the documents we can find titles like sustainability plan or programme, environmentally sustainable development plan or programme, 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. Environmentally sustainable development plans and programmes only deal with the environmental perspective of sustainability, therefore these programmes can be considered environmental programmes. The most complete documents of sustainable development are the ones titled Local Agenda 21, 9 of which are included in the examination. In these strategies, beside the environmental aspects economic and social issues are also included. 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 as 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 programmes 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 my 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 term objectives and ones with 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 7)

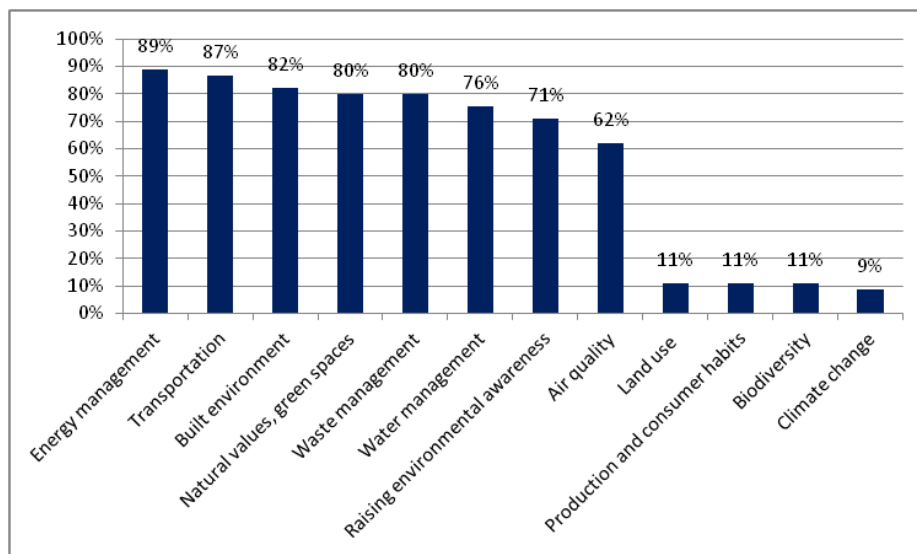


Figure 7

The appearance of environmental aspects in the examined strategies

Source: own composition

Beside the aspects that are related to environmental sustainability, economic (e.g. the development of the economy, tourism) and social (e.g. employment, education, health care) objectives also appear in the strategies which define themselves as local agendas (9 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 8).

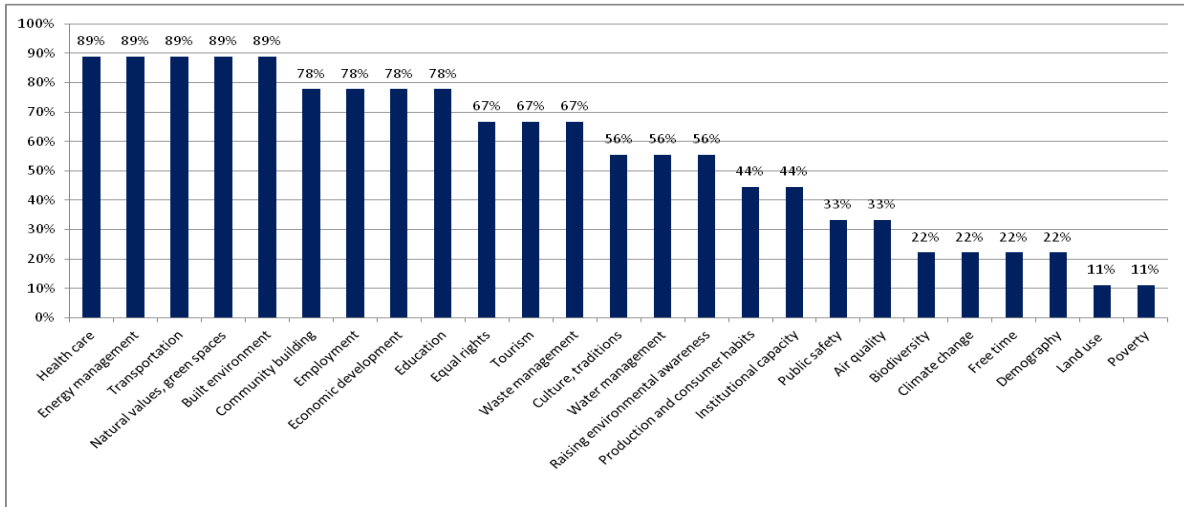


Figure 8

The appearance of some factors in the local agendas of the examined 9 municipalities

Source: own composition

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.

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 the strategies can be considered milestones towards sustainability. In many cases I 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 programmes as role models.

Based on the investigations, **my third hypothesis proved to be correct.**

T3: In many cases the available local strategies do not comply with the requirements of local sustainable development strategies laid down in professional literature.

4. NEW RESULTS

1. I have determined the most important characteristics and requirements of local sustainable development strategies.
2. I have analyzed the framework of the elaboration of local sustainable development strategies and determined the most important factors of success and sources of danger.
3. I have analyzed the importance, the rules, the objectives and the threats of establishing partnerships in the process of the elaboration of local sustainable development strategies.
4. I have described the activity of the European Union and some of its member states in connection with the propagation of the concept of local sustainability.
5. I have constructed a method for the situation analysis of Hungarian local sustainable development strategies, which takes top-down and bottom-up aspects into account. With the help of this method I have identified the major factors that the low number of strategies can be blamed for.
6. I have constructed a questionnaire for the examination of local sustainability, with the help of which we can get a picture of the situation of the elaboration of a local agenda at a particular municipality.
7. I have analyzed and classified the existing sustainable development plans, programmes and strategies of Hungarian municipalities.

5. THE PRACTICAL USEFULNESS OF THE RESULTS

The dissertation gives a picture of how and with what methods the central government can facilitate the elaboration of local sustainable development strategies, and presents the areas where some progress is necessary.

By applying the questionnaire I have constructed for analyzing the situation of local sustainability, local governments can measure the areas where progress can be expected by elaborating a local sustainable development strategy, the elements which they already possess, and the difficulties they would face.

Completing my dissertation I do not consider my work closed. The results I obtained, the questions emerged, my Hungarian and international connections stimulate me to continue my research. I am a member of the VAHAVA network, one of the authors of the newsletter of the Association of Climate Friendly Municipalities, and I have also edited a teaching material with rich visual material that will soon be accessible on the Internet both in Hungarian and English, titled Local Climate Change Strategies. Besides, I try to utilize the knowledge I gained in practice, therefore I try to participate in the elaboration of local sustainable development and local climate change strategies.

6. PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE THESIS

Books, chapters in books:

Baják I. – Fábíán Gy. – Töröcsvári Zs. (2009): *Local sustainability issues in a small region of Hungary*. In „Rural Areas Pressing Questions” Prague, 2010. (not published yet)

Foreign language articles in journals and periodicals:

1. **Baják I.** – Töröcsvári Zs. (2011): Local sustainability in Hungary - an analysis of the factors that determine the low number of LA21 strategies. *Studies in Agricultural Economics* No. 113 p. 105-118. (2011) (HU ISSN 1418 2106)

Hungarian language articles in journals and periodicals with a summary in a foreign language:

2. **Baják I.** – Töröcsvári Zs. (2009): *A fenntartható fejlődés kérdései a Gyöngyösi Kistérség településein*. *Gazdálkodás* 2009. 6. sz. 580-593. old. (HU ISSN 0046 5518)
3. **Baják I.** (2007): *A helyi fenntarthatósági stratégiák intézményi háttere*. *Agrártudományi Közlemények – Acta Agraria Debreceniensis*, 2008. 29. sz. 7-13. old. (HU-ISSN 1587-1282)
4. **Baják I.** (2007): *Gátló tényezők a helyi fenntarthatóság térnyerése előtt Magyarországon*. *Agrártudományi Közlemények – Acta Agraria Debreceniensis*, 2007. 26. sz. 151-157. old. (HU-ISSN 1587-1282)
5. **Baják I.** (2006): *Az Aalborgi folyamat és magyar vonatkozásai*. *Agrártudományi Közlemények – Acta Agraria Debreceniensis*, 2006. 20. sz. 5-14. old. (HU-ISSN 1587-1282)

Published foreign language conference papers:

6. **Baják I.** – Töröcsvári Zs. (2011): Local sustainability issues in Hungary: a case study of the micro region of Gyöngyös. In: Fritz B. – Planer D. (ed.): 'Tagungsband' Thüringisch-Ungarisches Symposium 2011, University of Applied Sciences, Jena, CD-publication, pp. 75-94. (EAN 978-3-932-886-28-7).
7. **Baják I.** – Gyurkó B. – Töröcsvári Zs. (2010): The development of the knowledge and opinions about sustainable development of students of the Agricultural Engineering in Rural Development Master's Programme at Károly Róbert College based on the results of a questionnaire. „Szellemi tőke, mint versenyelőny” Tudományos Konferencián, Selye János Egyetem, Komárno, 2010. június 19. CD kiadvány 805-814. o., ISBN 978-963-216-270-6.
8. **Baják I.** – Fábíán Gy. – Töröcsvári Zs. (2009): *Difficulties of developing a local agenda in a small region of Hungary* EASY-ECO Budapest Conference, 11-14 October 2009, CD-publication, 19 p.
9. **Baják I.** – Fábíán Gy. – Töröcsvári Zs. (2009): *Local sustainability issues in a small region of Hungary*. „AGRARIAN PERSPECTIVES XVIII.” Collection of Papers of International Scientific Conference, Prague, 15-16 September, 2009, (ISBN 80-213-1531-8)

10. Vajsz T. – Fábíán Gy. – **Baják I.** (2009): *Sustainability issues, evaluation of the local level.* In Fritz B. – Planer D. (eds): 'Tagungsband' Thüringisch-Ungarisches Symposium 2009, University of Applied Sciences, Jena, 2009, CD-publication, pp. 122-127. (ISBN 978-3-932886-21-8)
11. **Baják I.** – Kuti I. (2006): *The chances of local sustainability strategies in Hungary—the example of the North Great Plain Region.* EASY-ECO Saarbrücken Conference, 11-14 October 2006, CD-publication, 14 p.
12. **Baják I.** (2006): *Local sustainability in Italy and the chances of adaptation in Eastern Europe.* „AGRARIAN PERSPECTIVES XV.” Collection of Papers of International Scientific Conference, Prague, 20-21 September, 2006, pp. 949-954. (ISBN 80-213-1531-8)

Published foreign language conference papers in Hungary:

13. **Baják I.** (2007): *Material Flow Analysis – A Tool For Managing Sustainability.* 'Erdei Ferenc' IV. Tudományos Konferencia, Kecskeméti Főiskola Kertészeti Főiskolai Kar, Kecskemét, 2007. augusztus 27-28., 452-455. old., ISBN 978 963 7294 64 8

Published Hungarian language conference papers with a summary in a foreign language:

14. **Baják I.** – Herédi É. – Töröcsvári Zs. (2010): *A társadalmi részvétel szerepe a helyi fenntarthatóság folyamatában.* 'Fenntartható Versenyképesség Válság Idején' XII. Tudományos Napok Konferencia, Károly Róbert Főiskola, Gyöngyös, 2010. március 25-26., ISBN. 978-963-9941-09-0, megjelenés alatt
15. **Baják I.** – Szemes P. – Töröcsvári Zs. (2010): *A gyöngyösi éghajlatvédelmi stratégia megalapozása.* 'Fenntartható Versenyképesség Válság Idején' XII. Tudományos Napok Konferencia, Károly Róbert Főiskola, Gyöngyös, 2010. március 25-26., ISBN. 978-963-9941-09-0, megjelenés alatt
16. **Baják I.** – Gyurkó B. – Töröcsvári Zs. (2010): *A vidékfejlesztés szakos hallgatók környezettudatossága a fenntartható fejlődés vonatkozásában.* 'Fenntartható Versenyképesség Válság Idején' XII. Tudományos Napok Konferencia, Károly Róbert Főiskola, Gyöngyös, 2010. március 25-26., ISBN. 978-963-9941-09-0, megjelenés alatt
17. Fábíán Gy. – **Baják I.** – Marsselek S. (2009): *A fenntartható fejlődés lokális szintje, lehetséges indikátorok.* „Lokalizáció - Megoldás a fenntarthatóságra” LI. Georgikon Napok Nemzetközi Tudományos Konferencia, Keszthely, 2009. október 1-2., CD kiadvány 7. p.
18. **Baják I.** (2008): *A fenntartható építés energiagazdálkodási elemei.* 'Vállalkozások ökonómiája' XI. Tudományos Napok Konferencia, Károly Róbert Főiskola, Gyöngyös, 2008. március 27-28., ISBN: 978-963-87831-1-0
19. **Baják I.** (2007): *A Fenntartható Városi Közlekedéspolitikai Elemei – Debrecen Város Példáján.* 'Erdei Ferenc' IV. Tudományos Konferencia, Kecskeméti Főiskola Kertészeti Főiskolai Kar, Kecskemét, 2007. augusztus 27-28., 267-270. old., ISBN 978 963 7294 64 8

- 20. Baják I.** (2007): *Helyi fenntarthatóság: felülről irányítva vagy alulról szerveződően.* AVA 3 – Agrárgazdaság, Vidékfejlesztés és Agrárinformatika” Nemzetközi Konferencia, Debreceni Egyetem AVK, Debrecen, 2007. március 20-21 CD kiadvány 9 p.
- 21. Baják I.** (2006): *A fenntartható fejlődés elemei Debrecen város stratégiai dokumentumaiban 2000-től napjainkig.* „Tudás és versenyképesség pannon szemmel” ’Pannon’ Gazdaságtudományi Konferencia Tanulmánykötet I., Pannon Egyetem, Veszprém, 2006. június 2., 122-126. old., ISBN:963 9696 02 1
- 22. Baják I.** (2006): *A vidéki területek multifunkcionalitása és a helyi fenntarthatóság.* ’Agráralkalmazkodás a változó gazdasághoz’ X. Tudományos Napok Konferencia, Károly Róbert Főiskola, Gyöngyös, 2006. március 30-31., ISBN: 963-2229-623-0
- 23. Baják I.** (2005): *Az EU Városi Környezet Tematikus Stratégiája: támpont a Local Agenda 21 környezeti pilléréhez az európai városok számára.* „Közép-Európa mezőgazdasága lehetőségek és kockázatok” XLVII. Georgikon Napok és 15. ÖGA találkozó, Keszthely, 2005. szeptember 29-30., CD kiadvány 6 p., ISBN:963 9696 99 7

Published Hungarian language conference papers:

- 24. Baják I.** (2004): *A fenntarthatóság helyi stratégiai— tapasztalatok az Egyesült Királyságból.* ’Tavaszi Szél 2005’ Konferencia kiadvány, Debrecen, 2005. május 5-8., 12-15. old., ISBN 963 218 368 1

Published foreign language articles in journals and periodicals in a different subject matter:

- 25. T. Zakár – I. Baják – L. Liebmann** (2011): Financial Performance Of Corporations And Market Value. *Annals of The Polish Association of Agricultural and Agribusiness Economists* Vol. XIII No. 6 Warszawa – Poznan – Wroclaw 2011. p. 266-271., ISSN 1508-3535