

The chances of local sustainability strategies in Hungary — the example of the North Great Plain Region

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Local sustainability strategies are crucial elements of sustainable development. This recognition has been put into practice in several countries of Europe: more than 2000 municipalities have already signed the Aalborg Charter – which is an important document of local sustainability – and many of them have made their sustainable development strategies – their local agendas.

Beside voluntary initiatives like the Aalborg Charter and Aalborg Commitments, in many member states of the European Union integrated management of the urban environment is required by legislation. Also, the European Union takes steps to promote local sustainability: in the beginning of 2006 the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment has been approved. In this document the Commission strongly recommends local authorities to take the necessary steps to achieve greater use of integrated management at the local level and encourages national and regional authorities to support this process.

In most countries the central government also supports the process of sustainability: almost every country in the European Union has prepared their national sustainable development strategies, while some countries (for example the United Kingdom) are working on the implementation of their second or third strategies, in Hungary only the first national strategy is being prepared. Thus it is not surprising that we do not know about local sustainability strategies in our country, it is not a frequently mentioned topic in the media, only the pioneer work of some groups of researchers raises our hope.

There are opposing interests between quick economical development and the conservation of natural and built environment, and in this dispute economical development seems to have taken advantage. It is also a problem that municipality leaders, as well as most people in our country are unaware of this important topic.

Even though, many municipalities have already prepared their environmental programs – with the help of the Environmental Ministry –, which can well serve as a basis of local sustainable development strategies. Also, several elements of urban development plans have been drawn according to the concept of sustainability, so these plans can also be used when preparing LA 21 strategies, and can be built into them.

In our paper we report on the current results of our research on three different levels. We are going to present the lesson from our communication with the mayors of the towns in our region, the officials of the administrative institutions in the North Great Plain Region, and central government officials.