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An analysis of the national strategies for sustainable development with special emphasis on the issues of Agriculture and Rural development[1]

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Abstract: In this paper which is based on my dissertation I carried out a comprehensive analysis of the national strategies for sustainable development prepared by the EU and its member states. I paid special attention to agricultural and rural development issues discussed in the strategies.
According to my hypothesis the sets of objectives defined in accordance with the principles of sustainable development provide a firm basis for the objectives of the ongoing reforms of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. Due to the complexity of the topic I applied an interdisciplinary approach in my research.

Keywords: sustainability, national strategy for sustainable development, evaluation, agricultural issues, rural development possibility

Introduction

Preparing and reviewing the sustainable development strategies have been important processes during the last decade, and they will probably mean a great challenge in the forthcoming years, as well. Handling social, economic and environmental processes in a uniform and integrated way is becoming a significant requirement when making political and economic decisions. Social pressure to fulfil this requirement has strengthened although its extent is highly different depending on the individual countries.

Investigating the agricultural and rural development aspects of the national strategies for sustainable development (NSSDs) is an up-to-date research area for two major reasons. On the one hand, the ongoing reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, which I regard as the most significant change in strategizing, gives an exceptional opportunity to prepare and introduce measures based on the principles of sustainability. Rural areas and agriculture are enriched with new functions, which may become determining in the near future. In my oppinion the objectives related to agriculture and rural development, as presented in the national sustainable development strategies, contribute to this reform. The principles and objectives promoting the reform appear, or should appear in the set of objectives. On the other hand, by investigating the national sustainable development strategies we can see Hungary's position on the way to sustainable development and we can decide what positive characteristics we can borrow from the leading countries' strategies to use them in our national strategy for sustainable development.

Before analysing the concrete agricultural and rural development strategies I strove to explore the theoretical and practical problems and the possible solutions that occurred most frequently in the analysis of the NSSDs. On the basis of my investigation it can be concluded that both the concept of sustainability and the complex task of national level strategy design caused difficulties to the strategy-makers.

For the last two or three decades sustainable development has proved to be an extremely complex and ambiguous concept theoretically, while in practice it can be implemented only gradually and by making serious compromises.

In theory, the concept has several, sometimes contradictory interpretations. At the same time some elements of the problem cannot be clearly defined. In my view, sustainable development is basically a global ecological concept. I do not agree with the interpretation that separates "economic sustainability" and "social sustainability" from the global concept of sustainability as it overshadows the ecological requirement. (*Kiss,* 2005)

From the point of view of strategy design, the clear definition of the theoretical problems of macro-level strategizing can be considered an important result, as it is often neglected by present-day economics. Reviewing the theoretical problems, I emphasize two major problems: the conceptual ambiguity of strategy design, and the lack of connection between plans and strategies. Besides the

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identification and classification of these issues I have focused on the actual manifestations of these theoretical problems in the NSSDs.

The creation of sustainable development strategies is still in the early days of its development. These strategies struggle with the above mentioned problems. Analysing the NSSDs we can conclude that there are serious contradictions and extreme solutions in connection with major issues, such as time span, objectives, social participation, responsibility, institutional system, etc., which originate from the theoretical ambiguity of the subject.

Objectives of the research, definition of the research area and the applied methods

The subject of my paper is the analysis of the sustainable development strategies, so primarily I concentrate on the characteristics, problems and interrelations of the *strategic documents* at the level of the European Union and its member states (by analysing national and supranational strategies.). I did not aim at investigating the practical results of the objectives and principles as defined in the sustainable development strategies and I did not intend to examine the impacts of the strategies on economic and social decision-making. In my opinion the analysis of these issues could not be effective at present, due to the novelty of the process. Furthermore, the analysis of the local sustainable development strategies is not included in the subject of my research, though I would like to emphasize that the two approaches should be combined to achieve good results.

My investigations focus on the sustainable development strategies. It is doubtless that the quality of a strategy in itself is not enough to assess a country's performance in the field of sustainability; however such a document informs us about the public awareness and the attitude of the political leadership concerning the global problems that threaten sustainability. In my opinion the importance of analysing the strategic documents is justified by the fact that the sustainability policies of the different countries apply more and more complex and effective sets of objectives and instruments even if their approaches may definitely differ. The basic difference among the sustainability strategies lies in *the level of awareness about the concept of sustainability* and the related *system of values* as experienced by the political and intellectual elite and the civil society, who took part in formulating the strategies.

I use an interdisciplinary approach in this paper. Due to the complexity of the research area I will include the secondary research exploring and analysing the scientific literature.

Regarding the method of the second chapter, it can be considered an analytical review of the scientific literature. In the first part of the chapter I discuss the concept of sustainability and its most widespread interpretations, and I also demonstrate the growing demand for sustainability strategies by analysing the documents of international conferences. In the second part of the chapter I describe the present situation regarding the expansion of NSSDs.

The results of my research are mainly based on the critical comparative analysis of the NSSDs, as documents. As the first step of my research I explored the research material using the Internet. I continuously updated the stock of strategies, supplementing them with the new documents as soon as they were published. Finally, I studied and analysed the 35 sustainability strategies adopted by the national governments and several supranational strategies of the European Union.

I supplemented my analysis by using a qualitative method, which perfectly suits my chosen theoretical research area. After careful preparations, in January and February of 2007 I carried out in-depth interviews with internationally recognized researchers of sustainability. I managed to consult 12 scholars of the contacted 18. The most valuable outcome of these contacts was the possibility that the researchers informed me about their newest, often still unpublished opinions, and in some cases I could even disagree with their points of view.

The main results and conclusions of the dissertation

The necessity and the appearance of the national strategies for sustainable development

The necessity of the preparing national strategies for sustainable development can be supported by at least two arguments, in addition to the constraint arising from the global ecological crisis. The first argument that is often mentioned both in the international and in the Hungarian literature refers to the international expectations towards the countries (Dalal-Clayton *et al*, 1998). Such expectations are defined, among others, by the UNO, the OECD and the European Union, as well (UNCED, 1993; OECD, 2001; EC, 2001; CoEU, 2006). Besides the expectations, the direct and indirect benefits provided by the national strategies must be mentioned. Indirect benefits include the positive impacts of the strategy-making process, while a direct benefit can be the influential role that a good and effective strategy plays in economy and society.

The main two arguments supporting the necessity of national strategies for sustainable development are the following:

- The NSSD may become an important instrument of creating a social vision, which provides an opportunity for defining long term objectives.
- Preparing NSSDs is an international expectation, which has been emphasized several times on the different platforms.

The necessity to prepare and apply national strategies appeared in the 1960s already, almost at the same time as the need to handle environmental problems in an integrated manner. The process originates from the first studies dealing with the relationship between environmental and social problems. The first report to the Club of Rome refers to the need to establish an institution that is suitable for representing the new approach (*Meadows* et al., 1972). It was

declared that national strategies are important means of the developmental policy. After this, the world conferences organized by international organizations urged the nations to prepare national strategies for sustainable development so that the long term objectives and the tools for their implementation could be defined.

On the basis of the documents prepared by international conferences and institutions, I summarized the main steps how the need for national strategies for sustainable development appeared and how their preparation became an important expectation. *(Table 1)*

In conclusion, I think the countries fulfil the international expectations by preparing their national strategies for sustainable development, and in this way they promote the implementation of the principles of sustainability both at the national and supranational level. The preparation and the implementation of the strategies also contribute to the sustainable development of a country's economy and society.

Countries all around the world responded to the international expectations and started to prepare their national strategies for sustainable development at the beginning of the 1990s. The process was initiated in several ways. This time only few countries were able to prepare a comprehensive strategy meeting the requirements of sustainability. However, by the end of the 1990s the majority of the developed countries completed environmental plans, agreements, and official documents which could serve as a firm basis for the preparation of real strategies.

24 member states of the European Union – with the exception of Bulgaria, Cyprus and Hungary – have already prepared their national strategies for sustainable development, or the draft versions by now. Some of the countries, like the United Kingdom, Slovenia and Finland have already evaluated and revised their strategies. Besides the national documents the EU prepared and ratified its sustainability strategy (2001) and five years later a new revised and renew version was adopted (2006).

The sustainability strategies of the European Union differ from several aspects. The differences are obvious regarding the date and background of the preparation, the scope and specification, time span, social participation in the preparation of the strategy, content (e.g. objectives regarding a sustainable society) and their approach.

The differences of the national strategies originate from the theoretical ambiguities (e.g. the NSSDs of the UK and Slovenia highly differ in the scope, specification and time span), as theory lags behind practice: national strategies are prepared in many parts of the world. The ambiguity of the concept of sustainable development causes difficulties for the strategy-makers. However, the strategies usually do not provide a detailed definition of the concept; they only quote the definition of the Brundtland Committee instead.

The characteristics and requirements of a strategy are not settled either, on the basis of the strategies. The strategy-makers do not undertake the task of defining the characteristics of a strategy; they find it evident that the document they prepare is a sustainability strategy, irrespectively of its approach, content and time span.

Theoretical issues and practical problems in the national strategies for sustainable development

The number of the national strategies, regarding various topics (such as economy, transport, energy, education, etc.) definitely increased during the last decades. Strategy design could be considered a new framework for community planning. An important element of this phenomenon is the appearance of the national strategies for sustainable development, which respond to the most important challenge of our days: the global ecological crisis. At the same time *there is a serious contradiction between the theory and practice of macro-level strategy design and planning that includes environmental aspects*, too. (*Kuti – Szabó,* 2003, 1. o.) Within this, the macro-level strategizing and planning lacks a firm theoretical basis.

In all of the member states of the European Union there is national planning going on related to many different topics. Preparing sustainable development strategies and national development plans are community requirements; furthermore, in most countries, strategies regarding education, energy, transport, healthcare, research, competitiveness, etc. have also been prepared. *The efficiency of these documents is not*

Table 1: The main steps of the appearance of the need for preparing national strategies for sustainable development, and the formulation of the expectation

Date	Event/document	Steps
1972	The first report to the Club of Rome: Limits to Growth	*Need for an integrated approach to environmental, economic and social problems (reference to a strategic approach as an instrument).*
	Stockholm: UN Conference on the Human Environment	
1987	Brundtland Committee: Our Common Future	*Need for new types of developmental strategies.*
1992	Rio de Janeiro: UN Conference on Environment and Development (Agenda-21)	*Recommendations and deadlines for preparing national strategies for sustainable development.*
1996	OECD: Shaping the 21st century	*Recommendations and new deadlines for preparing and implementing national strategies for sustainable development.*
1997	New York: Special Session of the General Assembly to Review and Appraise the Implementation of Agenda 21	
2001	European Union: Gothenburg SSD	
2002	Johannesburg: World Summit on Sustainable Development	
2006	European Union: Renewed SSD	*New deadlines for the member states that have not prepared their strategies.*

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the analysis of the documents

Table 2: Main conceptual differences between a strategy and a plan

	Strategy	**Plan**
Type of objectives	Essentially new objectives	Achievable objectives
Uncertainty	Characterized by a a great uncertainty. The ways to achieve the goals are not known.	Achieving the goals is very probably, the available instruments make it possible.
Time span	Long term; one or more decades depending on the subject of the strategy.	Foreseeable time span: adjusted to a governmental cycle or EU budget.
Financial resources	Finding concrete financial resources is not necessary.	Finding the concrete financial resources is obligatory.
Political support	Broad social support is needed; consensus among political parties, and stakeholders	Governmental, parliamentary decision is sufficient.
Social participation	Social participation is obligatory.	Should be based on expert knowledge.
Instruments	Instruments may be outlined only.	Defining physical and financial instruments is necessary.
Relationship to each other	Determines the plans.	Plans have to be adjusted to strategies

Source: *Kuti,* 2005, p. 27. modified

adequate because the theory lags behind the practice, and does not provide enough support for the social practice.

Supposedly, the ideological opposition is has been an important reason why macro-level planning in the broad sense of the term has been poorly discussed in economics. The shortcomings of the theory are proven by the fact that economics and macro-economics textbooks taught in the world, studies in social sciences and scientific journals all ignore the discussion of this important form of economic coordination.

Macro-level planning struggles with several problems. In my view, the majority of the problematic issues have not even been defined. In my dissertation I deal with the most important issue, i.e. the differentiation between the concepts of a plan and a strategy. I summarized the most important characteristics of a strategy and a plan in *Table 2* could be further extended, however in my opinion these are the most significant and influential differences.

The objectives of the strategies do not appear to be well-defined, or very ambitious – especially as regards the national strategies for sustainable development. As a result of this shortcoming the objectives do not influence society sufficiently, so their implementation may fail, as well. It is the task of the plans to modify the ambitious, long term objectives of a strategy so that they could become effective short and medium term objectives. A plan has to set concrete, numerical, implementable objectives, has to define the ways and instruments to achieve them, and has to find the financial resources and the people to be in charge of the process. These requirements do not apply to strategies, in general. Therefore, it would be essential to limit the political influence, which usually prefers short term interests, when setting long term strategic objectives.

The distance between theory and practice is especially remarkable in the case of the strategies for sustainable development. The diversity of the NSSDs is probably caused by the fact that neither the formal requirements, nor the necessary content of a strategy has been clearly defined. The two basic questions may be formulated as ”What makes a good strategy?” and ”What makes a strategy for sustainable development?” I interviewed several internationally recognized researchers about the problematic issues, and their opinions support my argument that there is no harmony between the theory and practice of strategy design.

In January and February 2007 I carried out in-depth interviews asking international experts about the concept, significance and possible role of a strategy. My primary aim was to highlight the differences and similarities between the real and the ideal state, the theoretical and practical characteristics, as well as their expectations. I managed to consult approximately 66% of the contacted experts (12 of 18), which is considered to be a good ratio, and can be attributed to my prior contact with the researchers. When choosing the interviewees, I aimed at consulting internationally recognized researchers who deal with the issues of sustainability, and whose works I knew and used as secondary resources in my dissertation. In my opinion, consulting international experts is especially useful, because in their countries national strategies for sustainable development have already been adopted so they have experiences in this field.

I consider very important to investigate how the strategies themselves define what a strategy is. Some documents do not fulfil the requirements of a strategy, although their title refers to a strategy. Other documents can be regarded as real strategies, although they were published as plans or action programmes. Oddly enough, none of the strategies defines the criteria for a strategy or the requirements of a strategy. There is little guidance related to this issue in the literature.

In our study with Kuti and Szabó the characteristics of a strategy – based on the national strategies for sustainable development – were defined as a comprehensive and systematic approach, objectives containing essentially new elements, long term view and interpretation as a learning process.

- All the sustainability strategies strive to use a comprehensive and systemic approach, which means investigating all the important problems in the network of their interrelationships. This is mainly the result of the fact that they consider the uniform treatment of the economic, social and environmental processes as an essential element of sustainability. We

do not regard environmental plans as strategies. Recently only the document prepared by the government of Cyprus has claimed that sustainability policy can be implemented by environmental plans. However, earlier in many cases sustainability policy was identified with environmental plans. I consider the systemic approach of the strategies very important. Several documents contains loosely connected chapters and do not emphasize the relationship of the three pillars. The Polish and the Greek strategies are examples for this approach.

- The NSSDs seem to be too cautious when setting their objectives. There is no doubt that the society cannot be changed very quickly. However, if the objectives set by the strategy are not brave enough, the strategy will not stimulate the members of the society. On the other hand, the speed of the change will not be fast enough to meet the requirements defined by the ecological limits. Most of the strategies set objectives that can be achieved, and they do not take into account the objectives that would be really necessary.
- The long term approach is included in the problem itself. It has been recognized that our present activities threaten the future ecological conditions, although we wish to ensure the same conditions for human life for the next generations. The time span of the change in the ecological processes and the concern for the needs of the future generations require a long term view, relating to a few decades. Still there are a lot of countries that set a timeframe for less than 10 years in their strategies, e.g. Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Malta, and Slovenia.
- As strategies define the main directions and set the objectives to be achieved, important elements of a strategy are the evaluation process, the frequent review and the systematic modification. A strategy can be considered as a learning process, instead of one static response to a problem area. The French and the Belgian sustainability policies are typical examples for this type of approach. Partly as a result of the learning process social participation in the preparation and the implementation of a strategy is given a great emphasis.
- The conceptual ambiguities and the theoretical problems are obvious in the NSSDs. The strategies are characterized by diverse and often contradictory features regarding the objectives, time span, social participation and sets of indicators mentioned in the strategies.

I intended to analyse the concrete objectives of the NSSDs by focusing on the agri-environmental problems. The comparative analysis is suitable for demonstrating the differences among the strategies and showing their weaknesses. I carried out a detailed analysis of the strategies that can be considered as real strategies (e.g. the Austrian, the Czech, the German), but I also analysed documents that, in my opinion, cannot be defined as strategies (e.g. the Polish). *(Table 3)*

During the evaluation I focused on the following aspects:

- Definition of the objectives related to the problem
- The concrete objectives and target values to solve the problem
- Timing of the deadlines to achieve the objectives

On the basis of the above mentioned criteria I divided the discussion of a certain agri-environmental problem into four groups (greatly emphasized, emphasized, mentioned, not mentioned). Studying the evaluation we can see the topics and areas that are given more emphasis, and it becomes clear how detailed the documents are from this point of view. *(Table 3)*

The majority of the documents place special emphasis on the relationship of climate change and agriculture, pollution

Table 3: The importance of some agri-environmental issues in the national strategies for sustainable development prepared by some EU member states

Country	Multifunctional agriculture	Climate change and agriculture	Biodiversity	Food safety and quality	GMO	Pollution from agriculture
Austria	***	**	*	**	*	**
Belgium	***	*	**	***	**	***
Czech Republic	*	***	**	**	*	***
Danish	**	***	**	**	*	***
United Kingdom	***	*	*	**	_	*
Estonia	**	**	**	-	-	***
France	***	*	**	**	**	**
The Netherlands	*	*	*	**	_	*
Ireland	*	**	**	*	*	**
Poland	*	-	-	*	-	-
Latvia	**	**	**	*	-	**
Lithuania	**	*	**	**	-	*
Germany	***	**	**	***	***	**
Slovakia	*	**	**	**	**	*
European Union	*	*	**	**	_	*

Source: GÁTHY, 2005, p. 350.
*** : particularly significant, ** : significant, * : only mentioned.

originating from agriculture and multifunctional agriculture. I also investigated these issues in detail in my study. The problem area of the genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is not included in the majority of the strategies, however the German strategy provides a detailed analysis of this issue, as well.

Strategic planning related to sustainability at the EU level

There is a great disharmony between the objectives of the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development (EU SSD) and the Lisbon Strategy (LiS), the two major strategic documents of the European Union (*CoEU,* 2006; *EC,* 2001). The objectives that are often contradictory and belong to different levels hinder their implementation. I reviewed the unsettled system of the strategic documents in a separate chapter, because the EU greatly influences the national strategy design (see: development plans, strategy for sustainable development), so the problems originating at the EU level will appear at the national levels, too. The ambiguous relationship between the two fundamental strategies becomes even more confused if we consider the planning mechanisms related to agriculture and rural development.

The most interesting contradiction is the result of the confusion regarding the two fundamental strategies. When the environmental dimension was added to the LiS (Gothenburg Strategy) the EU juxtaposed short and medium term objectives with long term environmental objectives. Joining these concepts is not adequate as their time span is different, so they cannot be handled together.

I extended the investigation of the two fundamental strategies to the analysis of strategy design regarding agriculture. At the EU level there is no document that could be considered an agrarian strategy, the EU agricultural policy is defined by decrees and programmes. Besides these, the sustainability of agriculture is supported by a new type of instrument. Recently the strategic approach towards agriculture has been strengthened by seven new, so called thematic strategies connected to the 6th Environmental Action Programme – EAP). Three of the thematic strategies (soil, natural resources and pesticides) are closely related to agriculture, while the other four strategies contain more or less references to agriculture and rural development.

The analysis has clearly proven that no systematic relationship exists among the documents regarding agriculture and rural development. As an example I would like to emphasize the strange characteristic feature that the thematic strategies regarding agriculture are not attached directly to the Strategy for Sustainable Development of the European Union, but they are subordinated to the 6th Environmental Action Programme. This solution demonstrates the immaturity of the system of strategies in the EU. The thematic strategies concentrate on a given sub area and ignore the irrelevant information. However, this approach would also require common grounds to start from, preferably a fundamental strategy whose objectives could define the thematic objectives. If this position is not filled by the EU SSD but a solely environmental programme – the 6th EAP, in this case – the thematic strategies may not promote the shift to sustainable development. This dilemma is noticeable when choosing the right time span. Occasionally the thematic strategies define objectives for longer terms than the time span of the 6th EAP. Due to the type of the problem, the thematic strategies often use a long term approach, which is an important feature of the strategic approach.

In my opinion, the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union and its reforms, serving to achieve the objectives set in the Treaty of Rome can be considered an implemented strategy. However, based on my analysis of the thematic strategies regarding agriculture and rural development I strongly believe that there is an urgent need for a declared, documentlike agricultural and rural development strategy.

Similarities, differences and shortcomings of the evaluation methods in the national strategies for sustainable development

The international literature includes numerous studies of international institutions and researchers regarding the analysis and evaluation of the national strategies for sustainable development. I reviewed and analysed the 18 evaluation methods[2] so that I could highlight their similarities and reveal their shortcomings. By investigating the evaluations I founded my own content-based evaluation method. Analysing and evaluating the national strategies is highly important to judge their effectiveness, as the approach, structure and content of a strategy influences its future role.

I summarize the conclusions of the evaluation methods as follows:

- The guides and evaluation methods show significant differences, although there are many common points as well.
- It can be concluded that the studies do not separate sharply the requirements related to the elaboration and the implementation of a strategy.
- The analyses do not pay strict attention to the content of the strategies.
- Only the study prepared by the Committee emphasizes the need to harmonize the strategies of the countries and that of the Union.
- The criteria do not include the need to pay attention to other types of economic and social strategies, such as the Lisbon Strategy.
- Although there are attempts to provide a qualitative analysis of the strategies in numerical forms, but these analyses seem to be rather unnatural, and they are often based on subjective judgements even if concrete numbers are defined.

[2] The most important evaluation methods: *Dalal-Clayton* et al., 1994; 1998; *Geßner* et al., 2001; *Cherp* et al., 2004; *Berger – Steuer,* 2006; *Stevens,* 2005; *Dalal–Clayton–Bass,* 2006, *OECD,* 2006; *Volkery* et al., 2004; *Swanson* et al., 2004; *Niestroy*, 2005; *European Commission,* 2004.

Evaluation of the objectives regarding agriculture and rural development in the national strategies for sustainable development

After reviewing the literature on the evaluation of the NSSDs, I drew the following conclusions. These studies pay hardly any attention to analysing the content of the strategies, they rather emphasize the process of strategy design, their implementation and the integration of the three pillars. It is probably justified by the fact that these characteristics are fairly easy to analyse, and in this way the strategies become easily comparable. Investigating the content of the strategies is a challenging and complex task because the contents of the NSSDs highly differ depending on the economic, social and environmental state of the given country. Analysis of the content is unavoidable as the effectiveness of a strategy is based on the content related to the various topics. I could not undertake a comprehensive analysis of all the strategies. Agriculture and rural development are important research areas of our Doctoral School; therefore, I carried out a detailed analysis of the NSSDs from an agricultural and rural development aspect.

A national strategy for sustainable development should contain new and ambitious objectives so that the shift toward sustainable development could take place. Most of the sustainability objectives are closely connected to agriculture and rural development. These objectives include the economical use of natural resources, protection of biodiversity, change in the consumption and production patterns, fight against climate change, human health, etc. It is highly important to analyse the content of these objectives. The implementation of the objectives may depend on how a nation is able to and willing to form a strategic future vision. As a result, the NSSDs should define a brave and really new future vision to make agriculture and rural development sustainable. The task of the national strategy for sustainable development is to outline the long term vision of a society, taking into account the ecological limits as well. The majority of the NSSDs prepared by the EU member states do not undertake the task of defining a brave vision for agriculture and rural areas. The strategies only define objectives related to smaller problem areas meeting the requirements of sustainability. This is a serious problem, referring to the extreme cautiousness of the strategies when they should adapt to clear values. Natural resources are the basis of agricultural production; therefore, the management of these resources should be the primary aim of the strategies. Stopping the pollution of waters (open and soil) and protecting the soil are mentioned in most of the strategies. However, real future visions are only defined in the Danish, French and Dutch strategies.

In order to analyse the national strategies for sustainable development adopted by the EU member states I elaborated my own points to evaluate the strategies. My aim was to demonstrate whether the steps to promote sustainability are included in the objectives related to agriculture and rural development. The aim of the analysis is to establish the criteria for a good strategy, which could be used when preparing the Hungarian NSSD.

My questions were the following:

- Do the NSSDs use a stock or an assets approach?
- Do the NSSDs include the need to turn production patterns sustainable?
- What possibilities are mentioned in the NSSDs to introduce multifunctional agriculture?

The relationship between natural resources and agriculture is restricted to their role in production. The NSSDs should regard natural resources such as soil, forests, plant and animal stocks, water, air, etc. as a nation's wealth. The following important questions should be included in the NSSDs:

- How much agricultural land do we need? How much land can we occupy from nature?
- What the size of the plant and animal stock that we need? To what extent should the biodiversity of wild and raised plants/animals be changed?
- How much forest do we need? To what extent should we increase the size of the forest?
- How much water do we need and of what quality? How much water can agriculture use?
- How much air do we need and of what quality? To what extent agriculture can influence the quality of air?

The conclusion of my experience was that the strategies do not emphasize that natural resources are parts of a nation's wealth, with the exception of the objectives regarding the stock of plants/animals and forests.

The most important conclusions

- A *comprehensive, critical analysis of the national strategies for sustainable development* prepared *by the European Union and its member states* (27 member states) is provided in the dissertation. I paid special attention to the *problematic issues and the shortcomings*.
- Analysing *the conceptual framework and the contradictions of macro-level strategy design* has been an important result of my dissertation. I explored the shortcomings of the theoretical background, and outlined the new framework adapted to the principles of sustainability.
- *Defining the requirements of a national strategy*, based on the national strategies for sustainable development can be considered a new result. These requirements have been critically analysed in the NSSDs.
- I regard the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union as an implemented "implicit" strategy. My analysis of the reasons why a *declared, documentlike agrarian and rural development strategy should be prepared* represents a novel approach. My arguments are supported by the analysis of the strategic documents regarding agriculture and rural development in the European Union. An agrarian and rural development strategy should not be adjusted to the short term fiscal policy

but it should define the long term developmental objectives and the new functions of rural areas based on the principles of sustainability.

- I provided *a critical analysis of the evaluation methods used in the national strategies for sustainable development and revealed their shortcomings*. I concluded that the evaluation methods and guides do not pay enough attention to the content of the strategies, while the issues of elaboration, implementation, integration, and evaluation are emphasized.
- I investigated the content of the national strategies for sustainable development by analysing the objectives regarding agriculture and rural development. I demonstrated that *the strategies include objectives and novel approaches* that attempt to outline a *new economic and social vision based on the correct interpretation of sustainability*. Thus they form a basis for an agrarian strategy representing a new approach.
- I suggested the introduction of *the assets approach regarding natural resources*, and propose the *analysis of this issue in the national strategies for sustainable development in the EU member states*.

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