

AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THE NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ENLARGED EU¹

AGROENVIRONMENTÁLNÍ OTÁZKY STRATEGIE NÁRODNÍHO UDRŽITELNÉHO ROZVOJE ČLENSKÝCH STÁTŮ ROZŠÍŘENÉ EU

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Abstract:

Based on the analysis of 17 national sustainable development strategies (NSSD) and 8 national reports, the paper demonstrates that agri-environmental issues are important elements of sustainability in all national strategies. Today, the strategy-builders of the EU member-states have given up the sectoral view because of the difficulties and setbacks and they use a problem centred approach instead.

Keywords:

sustainability, development strategies, EU, agri-environment

Anotace:

Na základě analýzy 17 strategií národního udržitelného rozvoje (SNUR) a 8 národních zpráv ukazujeme, že agroenvironmentální otázky jsou důležitými prvky udržitelnosti ve všech národních strategiích. Dnes se již tvůrci strategií z členských států EU odvětvovým pohledem přestali zabývat kvůli problémům a zhoršení situace a místo toho používají na daný problém soustředěný přístup.

Klíčová slova:

udržitelnost, strategie rozvoje, EU, prostředí zemědělství

INTRODUCTION

The national sustainable development strategies have an increasing significance in most of the developed countries of the world. The UN have been urging their introduction since 1992 (Environment and Development World Conference – Rio de Janeiro), but in spite of the efforts and the support of other international organizations (OECD, World Bank) they have begun to reach their targeted content and form, as well as fulfil their required function only by the turn of the millennium.

Preparing for the UN Sustainable Development World Conference (Johannesburg) in the summer of 2002 the majority of the countries – among them several developing countries – have completed their national sustainable development strategies. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation urges states to take immediate steps in order to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of NSSDs and begin their implementation by 2005.

Hungary belongs to the countries that are still editing this important document. In addition, the society has hardly any information about this work, while in many other countries extensive public debates preceded the completion of the strategies with the participation of the intellectuals, the political elite and even the citizens in some cases.

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The idea of sustainable development provides a new framework for the history of human civilization. The balanced treatment of the environment, the society and the economy, which are the three main pillars of this concept originating from the 1980s, gains an increasing significance. Some economic issues (e.g. change of production structure), social problems (e.g. changes in the lifestyle) and ecological dangers (e.g. global warming) can be examined only within one framework.

Objectives and methods

In this paper we intend to demonstrate how agri-environmental problems are presented in each strategy, and how they fit in the harmonious whole of economic, social and environmental dimensions. We illustrate the interdependence of the three pillars with the help of some specific agri-environmental issues.

The basic method of this paper is comparative analysis of the cited works. We attempted to find the latest NSSDs, or if it was not available a relevant document (national report, national environmental plan). We examined 17 NSSDs and 8 national reports or country profiles, as well as the EU strategy.

First, we surveyed all the materials and compared the general features of the strategies (Table 1), as well as the significance agri-environmental problems, and methods of their approach. Secondly 15 NSSDs and the most frequently discussed agri-environmental problems were chosen and we tried to attribute a subjective value to their significance in each document (Table 2). We analysed those documents in details which can be considered a genuine strategy (e.g. the Austrian (AFG, 2002), the Czech (Hrouda – Moldan et al., 2002), the German (BMU, 2002) strategies), but we looked at some documents which in our opinion haven't got the characteristics of a strategy (e.g. GCSSC, 2000).

During the evaluation we took into consideration the following aspects: *i*) specifications of objectives (solidity, depth); *ii*) timing of the examination; *iii*) specific methods (action programmes) and aims. On the basis of these criteria we categorized the considerations of the specific agri-environmental problems into four groups (particularly emphasised, emphasised, mentioned, neglected).

DISCUSSION

Problem centred consideration of agri-environmental issues

It is not surprising that all studied NSSDs deal with agriculture, at the same time with the agri-environmental issues, although with different emphasis.

One of the main changes concerning the documents from the previous decade (e.g. national environmental plans) is that strategies concentrate *on main problems of sustainable development*, instead of using a sectoral approach.

While the previous plans handle the issues firstly in groups of environmental problems (loss of biodiversity, soil contamination), later a sectoral approach was used (industry, agriculture, transport), the new strategies discuss them according to the main issues of the sustainability (e.g. change in life-style, global warming, resource-efficiency), so the agri-environmental issues appear sparsely in these documents, not by chapters as formerly. (For instance, the environmental plans of the 90s mention the methane emission of agriculture discussing the harmful emissions, ulterior programs with a cross-sector view (e.g. EU's 5th environmental action program) discuss it within agricultural questions, the recent strategies deal with it relating to the global warming.)

This kind of discussion permits the balanced handling of the three equal dimensions of the sustainability. The Swedish strategy even refers to this change: "*This is the first time the Government has presented a strategy for sustainable development that brings together the social, cultural, economic and environmental priorities in the shift to more sustainable development in Sweden.*" (Swedish Gov., 2002, p. 5.)

Table 1 – Some characteristics of the national sustainable development strategies in EU member-states

Country	Title of strategy	Publication date	Number of pages	Period	Number of objectives
Austria	Building our future (The Austrian Strategy for Sustainable Development) (2002)	2002	182	8 years	20
Belgium	Federal plan for Sustainable Development (2000)	2000	143	5 years	5
Cyprus*	.. <i>(National Report)</i>	2002	44	–	–
Czech Republic	Draft National Strategy for Sustainable Development in the Czech Republic (2002)	2002	56	10 years	28
Denmark	A shared future – balanced development (2002)	2002	87	20 years	8
Estonia*	.. <i>(Estonian National Report on Sustainable Development (2002))</i>	2002	56	variable	–
European Union	A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development (2001)	2001	17	variable	4
Finnland*	Evaluation of sustainable development in Finland (2003)	2003	36	variable	6
France	Stratégie Nationale de Développement Durable (2003)	2003	150	5 years	6
Germany	Perspektiven für Deutschland – Unsere Strategie für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung (2002)	2002	345	variable	21
Greece	.. <i>(Country Profile)</i>	2002	71	–	–
Hungary*	.. <i>(National Report)</i>	2002	54	–	–
Ireland	Sustainable development – A strategy for Ireland (1997)	1997	267	variable	–
	Making Ireland's Development Sustainable – Review, Assessment and Future Action (2002)	2002	118	variable	–
Italy	Strategia d'azione ambientale per lo sviluppo sostenibile in Italia (2002)	2002	68	variable	30
Latvia	Strategy for Sustainable Development of Latvia (2002)	2002	32	variable	10
Lithuania	National Strategy for Sustainable Development (2003)	2003	89	17 years	9
Luxemburg	Plan National pour une Développement Durable (1999)	1999	81	20-50 years	9
Malta*	.. <i>(Country Profile)</i>	2002	55	–	–
Netherlands	Where there's a will there's a world – Working on sustainability (4th National Environmental Policy Plan) (2003)	2003	79	30 years	7
Poland	Long-Term Sustainable Development Strategy, Poland 2025 (2000)	2000	12	25 years	5
Portugal	Estrategia nacional de desenvolvimento sustentável 2002	2002	71	variable	12
Slovak	National Strategy for Sustainable Development for the Slovak Republic (2002)	2001	278	variable	28
Slovenia*	.. <i>(Country Profile)</i>	2002	127	–	–
Spain*
Sweden	Sweden's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2002 (A summary)	2002	35	variable	8
United Kingdom	A better quality of life (A strategy for sustainable development for the UK) (1999)	1999	111	variable	4

Source: Facts collected by the authors.

*No information is available about the national sustainable development strategy.

The fundamental reason for this change is the recognition that the ecological crisis is rooted on social problems has matured. Presumably, this is the way the social aspect comes to the front in some strategies, and the social values (solidarity, health, wealth) as well as life-style become the basic structuring principles. The strategy of the Czech Republic describes this in the following way: „*A complete list of things that make a human life happy would be very long. Should we select several basic values, they would include adequate material background, health, good quality water and food, a set of social, cultural and spiritual needs, space for living, mobility and leisure time activities.*” (Hrouda – Moldant *et al.*, 2002, p.13.)

In this approach agri-environmental issues (food quality, food safety, labelling of foods, organic farming, GMO-s) appear as elements of life-style change.

Hereinafter, using the three important areas of the sustainable development, we illustrate how agri-environmental issues penetrate the discussion of these areas.

Life-style and human health

Life-style is considered to be a key area in most of the strategies. It is assumed that the present way of living, the manner of fulfilling human needs and the patterns of consumption give an unsustainable character to the production too. Focusing on the quality of life, the strategies often discuss agriculture and agri-environment.

High quality life is linked to good food. The development and support of sustainable agriculture is the principal path to permanent provision of a sufficient amount of high quality food. An enhanced nutritional awareness should result not only in changed consumer behaviour, but also improve the health of the population.

In connection with this, almost all NSSDs deal with the guaranteed safety and healthiness of foods, complete labelling and quality assurance for foods, and renunciation of the use of genetically modified organisms, impact of application of chemicals in agriculture on soil, role and possibilities of organic farming, etc... (e.g. AFG, 2002, p.29.; BMU, 2002, p.25.; EU, 2001, p.11.; SFC, 2002, p.22.). One of the headline objectives of the EU's strategy is to make food safety and quality the objective of all players in the food chain (EU, 2001, p.11.).

Multi-functional agriculture, rural development

The strategies pay attention to the multi-functionality of agriculture and, more generally, to the non-productive significance of agriculture in the future, too, which “will secure the economic foundations of agriculture” (BMU, 2002, p.20.).

The range of issues concerned is large: preservation of diversity of rural regions and creation of new landscape elements, cultivation of ecologically valuable surfaces, assurance of additional sources of income and attractive educational and leisure facilities, etc. So it is not surprising that most strategies deal with these questions in several places. Almost all documents mention the connection with employment, e.g. according to the Austrian strategy: „*Strengthening of agricultural businesses makes a significant contribution towards economic security for the entire rural region by preserving the structure (important supply facilities, doctors, educational facilities do not move away), and creating or preserving jobs (agriculture is a major employer in the region)*” (AFG, 2002, p.167.).

Even in the strategy of the EU where the expression “multifunctional agriculture” does not turn up we can find some paragraphs that can give us an example for the complex approach. One of the headline objectives for improving land-use management is to „*Promote more balanced regional development by reducing disparities in economic activity and maintaining the viability of rural and urban communities*” (EU, 2001, p.12.). And between the measures we can find the following: „*Diversify income sources in rural areas, including by increasing the proportion of Common Agricultural Policy funds directed to rural development.*” (EU, 2001, p.13.)

Indeed: „Sustainable development is quite decisively a matter of taking a good look at the rural area as a whole. It is an area in which to live, an economic area, a natural area, and an area for recreation.” (BMU, 2002, p.212.) But: „there is an urgent need for a new model for a system of sustainable development of rural areas” (BMU, 2002, p.207.).

Global warming

The stabilisation of the global climate by a significant reduction of greenhouse gases is a priority of all strategies. Agriculture, which in the EU in 2000 accounted for about 10% of total emissions, remains a major source of emissions of methane and nitrous oxide, two of the important greenhouse gases. In the Czech Republic agriculture contributes by 24% to the methane emission (Hroudá – Moldan et al., 2002, p.37.) Strategies set several measures to handle this serious problem. In the strategy of the EU, for example, an element of the solution can be the rural policy: „The overhaul of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) agreed in 2003, introducing increased funding for rural development, is a positive step that could lead to emissions reductions in the agricultural sector. The mid-term evaluation of rural development plans in 2004 will provide a useful opportunity to better articulate the agricultural and climate change policies. (EU, 2003, p. 11.)

Table 2 – Importance of some agri-environmental issues in the national sustainable development strategy of selected EU-member countries

Country	Multifunctional agriculture	Climate change and agr.	Biodiversity	Food safety and quality	GMO	Pollution from agriculture
Austria	***	**	*	**	*	**
Belgium	***	*	**	***	**	***
Czech Republic	*	***	**	**	*	***
Denmark	**	***	**	**	*	***
Estonia	**	**	**	-	-	***
France	***	*	**	**	**	**
Germany	***	**	**	***	***	**
Ireland	*	**	**	*	*	**
Latvia	**	**	**	*	-	**
Lithuania	**	*	**	**	-	*
Netherlands	*	*	*	**	-	*
Poland	*	-	-	*	-	-
Slovak	*	**	**	**	**	*
United Kingdom	***	*	*	**	-	*
European Union	*	*	**	**	-	*

Source: author's estimation;

*** particularly significant, ** significant, * only mentioned

SOME CONCLUSIONS

- Agri-environmental issues are important elements of sustainability in all national strategies, although the different problems are presented with different emphasis.
- Strategies emphasise the harmonious and balanced development of economic, social

and environmental dimensions and we can notice a significant progress in the discussion of the integrated approach of the agri-environmental problems.

- Strategies concentrate on main problems of sustainable development instead of using a sectoral approach, so agri-environmental issues are discussed as sustainability problems and, consequently in a dispersed way.

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