

SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF THE MOST DISADVANTAGED SOUTHERN TRANSDANUBIAN MICRO-REGIONS IN HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT - There are the so called most disadvantageous or MD micro-regions. The Hungarian government and the regional development institution system has worked out an own development programme for the improvement of these regions. The Southern Transdanubian Regional Development Council was established in 1998. The investigation focuses on the 8 most disadvantageous micro-regions of Southern Transdanubia. The micro-regional level in Hungary was determined on statistical and not on administrative consideration. The degree of social-economic underdevelopment under Hungarian circumstances is reflected by indicators of economy, infrastructure, society, sociality, and employment. The most disadvantaged micro-regions are qualified as beneficiary micro-regions. The 8 micro-regions of the Southern Transdanubian related to environmental development can be subsidized in the framework of the regional operational programme from the presumable resources of the micro-regions: economic development (business infrastructure), settlement development (function-expanding settlement development), environmental development (sewage, water management).

Keywords: territorial development, micro-regions, most disadvantaged micro-regions, flagship programme, environmental problems

INTRODUCTION

Despite the oversized regional development institutions and multiplied development resources, regional differences in development have further been increased in the last two decades. Certain micro-regions have dropped behind the average in the highest degree concerning the indicators and liveability; in certain places the conditions suggest the level of Third World countries. These are the so-called most disadvantageous or MD micro-regions. Facing this problem, the Hungarian government and the regional development institution system has worked out an own development programme for the improvement of these regions. It is questionable whether the regional policy shaped after the European patterns is suitable for the solution of these problems.

One of the seven Hungarian planning-statistical regions is the Southern Transdanubian region, the territorial inherence institutionalized with the establishment of the Southern Transdanubian Regional Development Council in 1998. The spatial unit has an area of 14,169 km², which is encompassed by the Danube, Drava and Balaton, covering Baranya, Somogy and Tolna counties, its administrative border coincides with that of the external border of the counties, and a section of those is the border of the Hungarian State as well. The region's centre is Pécs, the population of the region was 953 thousand at the end of 2008, while the population density of 67.3 persons/km² is the lowest in

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the country. The investigation focuses on the 8 most disadvantaged micro-regions of Southern Transdanubia in relation to the reasons of environmental problems and the solution, development suggestions and possibilities of those.

Micro-regional environmental and educational development has a double role: on the one hand, it should plan activities which actively contribute in their realisation to solving the environmental and education problems which are considered a priority on national and regional levels; on the other hand, it must be an efficient device for the treatment of local problems which are regarded as most important by the micro-region in question. The programme itself is a means influencing and facilitating decisions, by which grant resources may be involved in order to realise the target conditions, and it is especially true in case of the realisation of environmental development plans of MD micro-regions, where the improvement of the circumstances and maintaining the values of the area are provided with favourable tendering conditions.

THE MICRO-REGION LEVEL

The micro-regional level in Hungary was determined on statistical and not on administrative consideration. The base of the present micro-regions was the district system that had administrative, prefectural functions. Due to their size, districts were suitable to keep daily connection with the settlements, their number varying between 90 and 150 on the current territory of the country. The so-called suburban administrative system that replaced districts was ceased with the Act on Municipalities, which came into force in 1990. The administrative reform of 1990 did not revitalize the territorial arrangement (and institutional system) between the county and settlement level. Consequently, there was no general micro-regional territorial level authoritative for administrative, statistical and other national activities. Nevertheless, there was a need for such a territorial level, as a territorial unit for measuring statistical data and processes as well. Thus, the President of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office implemented with his bulletin 9006/1994 (S.K.3) the category of statistical district as territorial unit of the measurement of statistical processes, which meant 138 districts. The system of *statistical micro-regions* covers the whole territory of the country where the borders of the micro-regions do not cross county borders. A micro-region is the ensemble of geographically contiguous settlements that is based on real connections between the settlements in the field of work and living, transportation, middle level services (education, health, trade, etc.) (FALUVÉGI A., 2000). Its fixed borders do not cover the real (small) territorial units, alignments that are based on very variable connections in sense of quality and intensity. Their present role is to ensure adequate intervention area to a certain part of objectives and sources of territorial development and to support territorial determination, division of national, regional or county development priorities and resources. The territorial categorization was reinvestigated and modified several times: in 1997, 2004 and 2007, which resulted in an increased number of 174 units (GÁLOSI-KOVÁCS B., 2010) (Figure 1).

BENEFICIARY MICRO-REGIONS

Regarding the fact that GDP is not calculated at the micro-region level, the social-economic underdevelopment of micro-regions had to be shown by other indicators. A complex indicator serves this purpose, which involves demographic, employment, economic and infrastructural and other factors as well. In effect, this indicator reflects on the degree of social-economical underdevelopment under Hungarian circumstances better than any GDP-index (FALUVÉGI A., 2001, 2002).

The Government gives an emphasis to the micro-regions in the worst position for the sake of differentiated utilisation of regional development supports; and it contributes to the realisation of their development programmes to an increased degree. CSO (Central Statistical Office) districts function not only as statistical units, but they also have significance in regional development; they are the basic units of beneficiary regions regarding the distribution of decentralised development resources.

In Hungary, micro-regions can be either beneficiaries, that is, receivers of extra subsidies, or they can have better economic conditions than the average – these do not belong to beneficiary micro-regions. Hungarian regulations defined four, then later three types of beneficiary regions in 1997: socially-economically underdeveloped regions, regions of industrial structure change, regions of

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agricultural and regional development. Regions afflicted with permanent unemployment constituted an own group until 2000; this category was omitted later, since the problem of unemployment cannot be involved fully in the framework of grantee regions. These benefiting region types are considered during the utilisation of two financing funds: 1. regional development targets, 2. developmental financing support for regional equalisation.

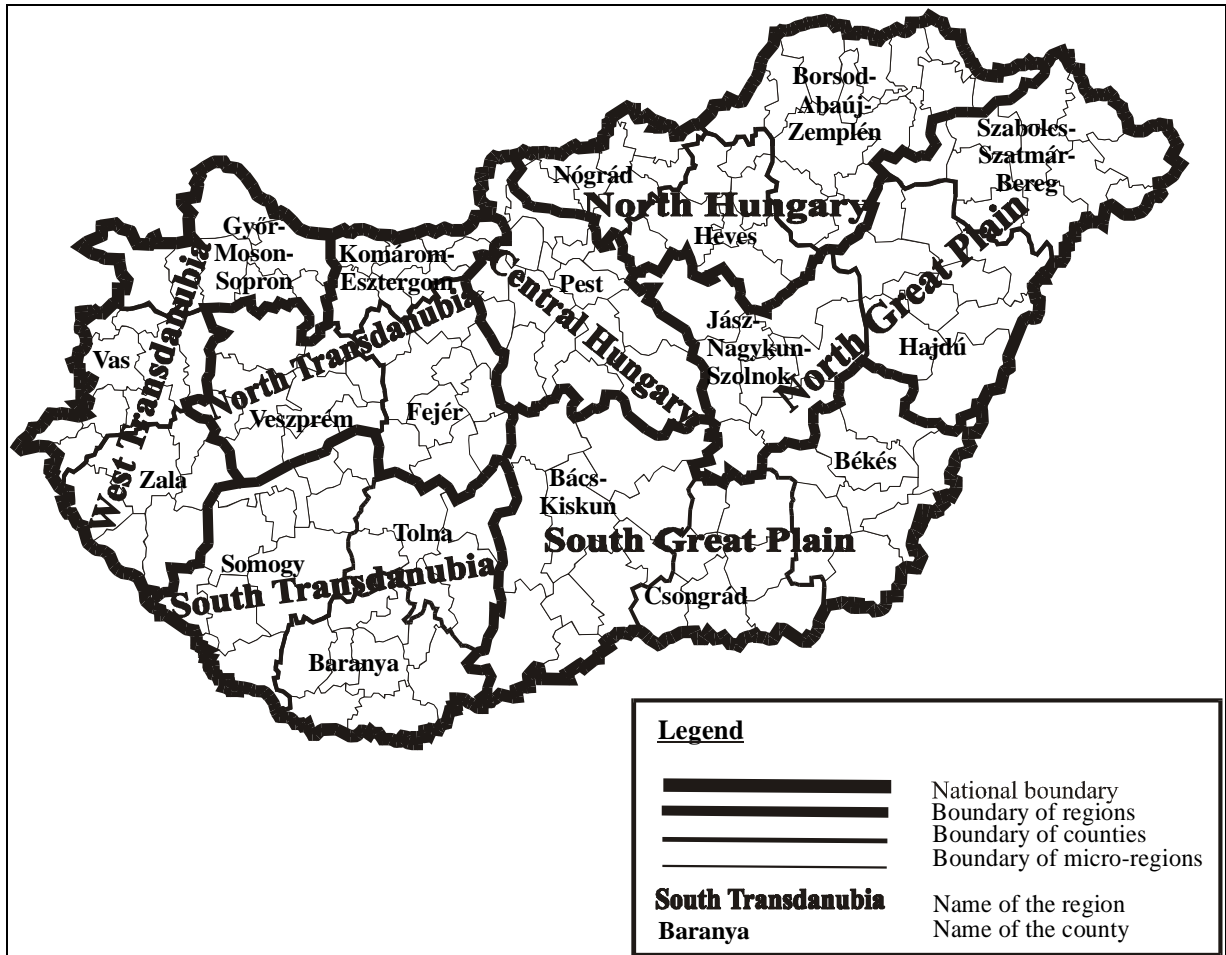


Figure 1. Statistical territorial division of Hungary

Source: GÁLOSI-KOVÁCS, B.-PAP, N., 2010

In 1997, the number of grantee micro-regions amounted to 72. The indicator system for classifying has changed four times since then. First the change in the number of micro-regions accounted for supervision in 1998; nearly 800 settlements got into another statistical micro-region (however, the number of micro-regions remained the same), so that the number of benefiting areas increased to 88. The next classification was announced by the Government in the Act of 91/2001 (15.06.), this affected 82 micro-regions. The 1997 classification was carried out by 32 indicators, in 1998 by 26, in 2001 by 19 indicators (BUZÁS R., 2009). In 2007, the Parliament passed the parliamentary decree concerning regional development subsidies and decentralisation principles and the condition system of classifying beneficiary regions, which simultaneously abrogated the parliamentary decree of 24/2001. Categories are classified by the definition of a so-called complex indicator (32 markers) developed from five indicator groups (economy, infrastructure, social, societal

and employment). According to the 2007 regulations, 94 out of 174 micro-regions (54%) are qualified as underdeveloped, that is, beneficiary regarding the distribution of resources.

According to the 2007 regulations, disadvantaged micro-regions, including the most disadvantaged micro-regions are regarded as beneficiary micro-regions⁶. The new parliamentary decree⁷ provides an opportunity for a more appropriate definition of the development level of micro-regions because 5 indicator groups are to be observed instead of the previous 4, since the complex societal-social indicator group has been replaced with two distinct indicator groups. Thus, the social conditions of micro-regions have become a more dominant aspect.

Disadvantaged micro-regions, including the most disadvantaged micro-regions are qualified as beneficiary micro-regions. Those micro-regions qualify as disadvantaged that have a lower complex indicator than the average of the complex indicators of all micro-regions in the country. Within disadvantaged micro-regions, those are the most disadvantaged that possess the lowest complex indicator value, and their population does not exceed 15% of the average population of the state. For the development of the most disadvantaged micro-regions that have the lowest complex indicator values and the population of which does not exceed 10% of the population of the state, a complex programme shall be processed, essentially based on EU resources.

In those regions where the population of the most disadvantaged micro-regions does not reach 30% of the population of the region, further regionally disadvantaged micro-regions can be selected from the development ranking based on the complex indicator by regional development boards, for the sake of development of the micro-regions within the regions.

No change occurred concerning beneficiary settlements. The settlements included in the list of Government Act 240/2006. (30.11.) as socially-economically and infrastructurally underdeveloped, or afflicted with a level of unemployment exceeding the average to an extreme degree, are in the same legal disposition as beneficiary regions. Socially-economically and infrastructurally underdeveloped settlements or those afflicted with serious unemployment are treated as disadvantaged, while those which are socially-economically and infrastructurally underdeveloped and afflicted with serious unemployment are treated as the most disadvantaged micro-regions.

For the classification of micro-regions based on regional development – except for micro-regions with a county authority city – a complex indicator developed from indicators of economy, infrastructure, society, sociality and employment (five indicator groups) shall be observed.

Beneficiary micro-regions in Dél-Dunántúl (Southern Transdanubia)

According to the 2007 regulations there are nine disadvantaged micro-regions here: four in Baranya county, four in Somogy county and one micro-region in Tolna county, which fall into this category. Nine micro-regions are among the most disadvantaged, including eight to be supported by a complex programme. According to the indicators, three micro-regions in Baranya, one in Tolna and four in Somogy belong to this category.

The governmental flagship programme “No one will be left behind”

In the summer of 2007, the government selected 33 micro-regions which are the most underdeveloped and in which 10% of the population live, based on the classification according to the survey of the CSO and the complex indicator⁸ created by the latter (Figure 2). Twelve such micro-regions are located in Northern Hungary, eight in Észak-Alföld (the North of the Great Plain), five in

⁶ 311/2007. (17.11.) Government decree about the classification of beneficiary regions

⁷ 67/2007. (28.06.) Parliamentary decree concerning regional development subsidies and decentralisation principles and the condition system of classifying beneficiary regions

⁸ Statistical data used: income tax, rate of permanent employment-seekers, activity rate, number of functioning enterprises, number of school classrooms, number of completed school grades, number of persons with a secondary school leaving exam, number of recipients of social benefits, number of GP visits, rate of population per the number of General Practitioners, mortality rate, basic access, drinking water supply rate, sewage rate, waste collection rate.

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Dél-Alföld (the South of the Great Plain), and eight in Dél-Dunántúl (Southern Transdanubia). Regarding the chosen micro-regions the “New Hungary Equalising Developmental Programme” was announced with the motto of “No one will be left behind”.

Due to planning and project generating work, the micro-regions have developed the project package within the centrally prescribed frameworks for the entire sum retained for the 33 micro-regions – respecting the population and the number of settlements. The chosen areas are characterised by a peculiar settlement structure (disintegrated, lacking towns), a generally high rate of unemployment, a low capability for the absorption of resources, deficient lineal and human infrastructure, and a high proportion of the Roma population. The choice for financing may have been influenced by political aspects as well.

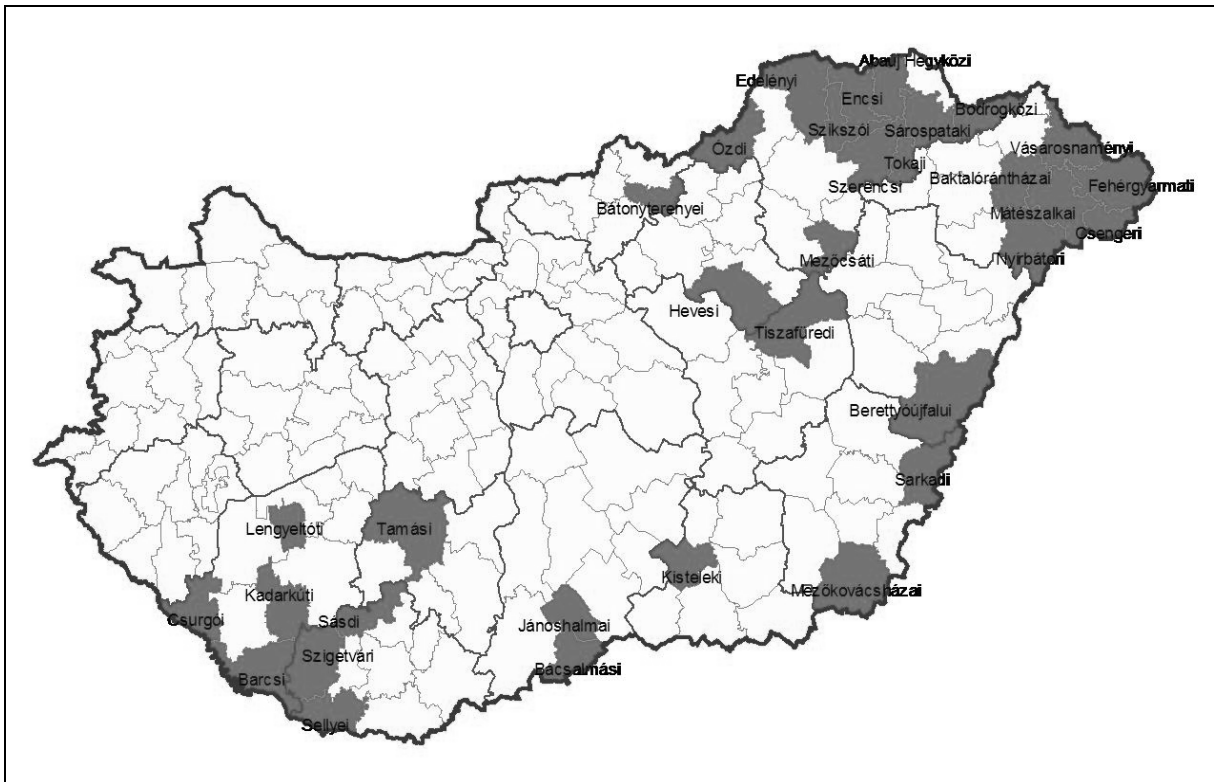


Figure 2. *The most disadvantaged micro-regions in Hungary (MD)*

Source: www.nfu.hu

The aim of the programming is, on the one hand, the initiation of sustainable development processes that, according to the expectations, may slow down or stop dropping off and may enhance standards of living, environment and services, hence, the general welfare of the population, and therefore it may strengthen the capability of settlements to retain their population. Thus, the programme is aimed at targeted human resource improvement, regional economic development, environmental and infrastructure development in the micro-regions.

The basic principles of the flagship programme for subsidy were the following:

- resource-based development (advantage in accessing resources);
- only plans developed together with local participants can be successful;
- it is not enough to develop infrastructure, it must be “filled up” with meaning;
- no investments only for the sake of prestige!
- social integration of the Roma;
- planning in accordance with local needs.

These principles were realised in a rather contradictory way:

- resource-based development – resources were collected on the basis of the residual principle;
- only plans developed together with local participants can be successful – partnership is exclusively formal, marketing-viewed, actual local co-operation was not needed, indicators were only quantitative;
- it is not enough to develop infrastructure, it must be “filled up” with meaning – locals were not able to cope with this otherwise advised principle, they did not need it, they attempted to satisfy it to a minimal degree, without any enthusiasm;
- no investments only for the sake of prestige! – the meaning of these “prestige-investments” was not defined;
- social integration of the Roma – the leaders of the Roma community participated in the programme only to a very small degree;
- planning in accordance with local needs – but there was not enough time nor any way to survey local needs, and the NFU (National Development Agency) has specified the directions of development.

THE OUTCOME OF OUR RESEARCH

We have conducted research regarding the improvement of the developmental work of the 8 Transdanubian MD micro-region in order to summarise the experience of the development programme. These were characteristically empirical observations.

- Summarising the experience of planners (based on the opinions of cca.20 planners).
- Conducting a survey by questioning local partners (250-300 persons/50 respondents).
- Evaluation of the nature of the projects that had been accepted.

We examined in the following sections: Method of planning, Communication, Principle of equal opportunities, Has co-operation been achieved? Relationship with micro-regional centres – the question of village-town relationship, Innovations, Chances for recovery, Evaluation of emerging programmes. Table 1 summarizes the most important results of the survey.

Table 1. *Classification of problems in the order of the need of modification concerning the region*

No.	Problem	Value
1.	Unemployment	363
2.	Lack of employers, new employment, enterprises with a strong balance sheet, industrial firms and industrial areas	252
3.	Underdeveloped, deficient infrastructure	194
4.	Unfavourable traffic options (deficient access, high rate of dead-end settlements, low level of public transport)	169
5.	Low level of qualification, high rate of unqualified work force	165
6.	Low, decreasing number of enterprises/will to venture, lack of capital, lack of investors, entrepreneurs lacking capital, weak enterprises	131
7.	Deep poverty, low income level, dropped-off classes and settlements	121
8.	Unfavourable demographic conditions (ageing, migration)	117
9.	Unfavourable educational conditions – lack of infrastructure and vocational training, decreasing standards of training	96

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10.	Deepening moral crisis, social disintegration	71
11.	Social and ethnic problems, segregatums	60
12.	Low standards of healthcare and social services	44
13.	Settlement-geographical characteristics (locality, peripheral location, small-village structure)	43
14.	Lack of financial subsidings, deficient financial condition of local governments	40
15.	Lack of tourist developments, weak tourism	33
16.	Difficulties in sales, low engross price for agricultural products, extremely low profitability of economic activities	32
17.	Problems in management and decision making (lack of information for local management, weak capability for enforcement of interests, self-interest of lobbying forces, lack of will of government)	28
18.	Lack of quality public services, cultural , educational and sports facilities and public scenes	28
19.	Low level of co-operation	27
20.	Lacking conceptions for enhancing economy	22
21.	Lack of equal opportunities	12
22.	Lack of a young, creative intelligentsia, and experts able to manage programmes; lack of forcefulness in the civic sphere, low participation rate in public affairs	11
23.	Politics (political disintegration, lack of differentiated policies)	10
24.	Draining effect of cities with a municipal/county authority strongly felt	6

Source: GÁLOSI-KOVÁCS, B., PAP, N., M. CSÁSZÁR, ZS., REMÉNYI P., 2010

In our opinion, local persons have an appropriate impression of their own conditions and problems. It is interesting that in spite of the fact that they perceive the phenomena of the social and moral crisis, and that its predominance is unquestionable, these phenomena can be found in a cluster in answers 7-12, following the economic difficulties. This fact indicates that the weight of local problems has not been recognised at its whole extent.

Finally, we evaluated the projects which had been accepted for support. Despite the fact that limitariness is a general feature of MD regions, their problems were in a decisive relation with the cutting-off of the relationship system across the borders, there is only one out of the hundreds of accepted projects which deals with this problem utterly (KURILLA A., OROSZ É., PAP N., 2009). Human programmes potentially contributing to social integration had come out rather weak. Almost none of the innovative programmes able to compensate for social disintegration had been accepted (e.g. the *Micro-regional Universitas* programme developed exclusively for this purpose).

By the experience of micro-regional planning, most problems occur in connection with unemployment and the related underqualification, and – inclusively – with the underlying drop-out from education. Micro-regional leaders consider lack of human resources, the lack of a layer with secondary and higher education that would be able to control changes as innovative agents, as an important factor of underdevelopment. The questions of low standards of education, the poor quality of public education and insufficient infrastructure arise as well.

Experience in planning shows that a massive layer of marginalised people has evolved, being on the periphery of society with low qualifications, permanently out of the workforce market, living in poverty as result of the social-economic changes related to the change of regime. These living conditions have a seriously negative impact on the childhood socialisation of the new generations and lead to disadvantages that are very difficult to reduce later. Educators are forced to face serious difficulties and special pedagogical problems, when they have not received sufficient professional and methodological implements and approaches during their training, and schools are not provided with even the most elementary conditions of efficient educational work in many cases. Thus, educators often have the opinion that it is impossible to correct the fallback of pupils with multiple disadvantages merely by the means of pedagogy. These problems have been emphasised in all micro-regions. The above problems at micro-regional level are manifested by a high rate of drop-outs and ethnic segregation.

Due to magnitude constraints we set aside the interpretation of the developments planned in the programme. However, we would like to interpret the field of environmental development a bit more detailed.

EXPECTATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Programming involved 8 micro-regions of Dél-Dunántúl: the micro-regions of Barcs, Csurgó, Kadarkút, Tamási, Lengyeltóti, Sásd, Sellye, Szigetvár. The following areas related to environmental development can be subsidized in the framework of the regional operational programme from the presumable resources of the micro-regions: economic development (business infrastructure), settlement development (function-expanding settlement development), environmental development (sewage, water management).

Environmental characteristics of micro-regions

The environmental condition of Southern Transdanubia is beneficial. This is partly due to late industrial development, backwardness, and decrease of the environmental polluting economic activities. It has never been a primary target area of the development of heavy industry; the crisis induced by economic restructuring also hit severely the industry and agriculture of the region. Due to the fall of industrial and agricultural production, there was a decrease in the emission of air polluting materials, in water contamination of industrial origin, and in the soil and water contamination caused by large animal farms, fertilisers and pesticides. However, environmental effects of abandoned mining areas and production activities previously generating hazardous waste has to be considered even recently.

Disregarding some critical issues, the air quality of the Southern Transdanubian micro-regions can be considered acceptable. Pollution in the MDs has primarily transportation and communal origin, industrial load is minimal due to underdevelopment. Dust contamination in smaller settlements can be related to agricultural farming, lack of shelter-belts around settlements, roads and tree lines along terrace borders. Social and economic transformation that has been going on since 1990 was guided by a change in production and consumption as well, which had a decisive role on output (industrial restructuring, natural gas programme, etc.) (KOVÁCS B., 2003). Problems in regulation of waterways of the Southern Transdanubian region are present in every micro-region, though, due to diverse geologic, geomorphologic and hydrographical endowments of the regions, these have different weights and priorities. Flood and inland waters mean a potential risk along the larger rivers of the region; however, due to the special relief characteristics this risk is smaller than the national average. In frame of the inland water risk, the outpouring of sewage tanks means a public health problem especially in settlements without sewerage⁹. There is no fundamental quantity problem in the Southern Transdanubian water supply. Contested parameters of water quality in the MDs are as follows: arsenic, ammonium, iron, manganese, nitrite and boric burden. The number of settlements engaged in waste collection has been increasing steadily; at the end of the year 2008 regular, organized waste collection

⁹ South Transdanubia Operational Programme 2007-2013. http://www.nfu.hu/new_hungary_development_plan

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was ensured in every settlement of the region. Ratio of households connected to the public sewerage varies between 14% (Sellye micro-region) and 71%. Large number of small settlements of the Southern Transdanubian region, long distance between the settlements, lack of economic and technical conditions of independent cleaning plant all complicate the solution of sewage disposal.

Planning process

Each micro-region had to observe the rates of investment (ROP) resources. Indicative rates had been calculated on the basis of the above mentioned statistical data, by the calculation of the Department of Strategy and Evaluation of the National Development Agency (NDA). According to the indicative allocation, micro-regions had to concentrate resources into the development of the assigned areas; these areas needed more investment than proportionate.

Micro-regional MD Planning Documents are based on the analyses presenting the social-economic-environmental conditions of the respective micro-region in every case. A condition for success in case of subsidy programmes is that the micro-region in question should regard it as its own and consider it applicable, therefore, it is very important for any intervention to be built on the micro-regions' own evaluations and programmes. During programming, local decision makers acknowledged the frameworks given by directed planning, but in most cases they disagreed with them; the concepts of the local management was different from the focus given by the NDA. Since indicators mark the results of development processes not in the whole range and in temporal delay, it may be reasonable to deviate from the indicative allocations defined above; actually micro-regions have taken advantage of this opportunity. Micro-regions defined their directions of development this way.

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