



MTA Szociológiai Kutatóintézet

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Climate Friendly Municipalities in Hungary

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1.) The role of the Institute of Sociology

The climate of the Earth and Hungary has been changing very quickly. The social causes and consequences of this change are significant. **Social sciences can help a lot in unravelling the social background of climate change, reducing its underlying causes, and adapting to its negative consequences.** Societies must change in order to avoid climate catastrophe. Therefore, it is essential to examine scientifically the social, economical and political conditions helping or hindering the resilience of societies. This is the main aim of the Climate Change Research Group at the Institute of Sociology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Beside theoretical works we also take part in practical programs: the „Climate-friendly municipalities” program helping the elaboration and realization of municipal level climate strategies has been initiated by the Research Group.

Another research area of the Research Group is the study of the health and social consequences of UV radiation grown as a result of the thinning of the ozone layer, further on the elaboration of programs promoting flexible adaptation to the changing condition and their practical implementation.

2.) The climate friendly strategy at local level

Three municipalities that have already prepared and several other would in the near future prepare their local-level strategies of climate change - with the support of the Institute - may play a significant role in accomplishing our aims.. These programmes promote the realization of the aims set out in the National Strategy of Climate change awaiting approval as well.

The city of Tatabánya¹ – which is the biggest municipality in the programme - has initiated the creation of a city-level climate change programme and strategy as well as a local-level heat and UV alarm plan. Educational institutions owned by the municipality have been participating at a national-level energy efficiency improvement programme for municipal institutions, while refurbishment of blockhouses has taken place as part of the national “Panel Blocks Programme” (energy efficiency improvement through refurbishment of buildings built with industrial technology). Tatabánya is a member of ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability (international network of cities) and the Climate Friendly Settlements Program (network of cities in Hungary).

¹ Tatabánya is a town of 71,000 inhabitants located in the North-Central part of Hungary, close to the capital and with strong economic ties to it. Historically, it has been a mining town with activities in heavy industry continuing under socialism, with the largest proportion of the town’s building stock having been built under socialism with industrialized technology. The post-socialist transition brought with it the collapse of heavy industry in the country, which also had implications for Tatabánya’s economy. Post-socialist restructuring of heavy industry also entailed GHG emission reductions in industrial activity. Currently, industrial activity in and around the city includes machine industry, processing industry, electronics and environmental industries, with the service economy also expanding.



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For concrete actions, a climate strategy is needed at the local governmental level, summarizing the main objectives and steps to achieve and identify the means/tools for implementation. In line with the international climate change related process, the strategy should not only include possible ways to reduce GHG emissions, but it should also address the adaptation measures needed to reduce the harmful effects of climate change.

In 2007, the Institute for Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in collaboration with the Municipality of Tatabánya and a local NGO (called Klimakör - Climate circle), completed a detailed study including a Climate Strategy (in line with the Hungarian National Climate Strategy) and related Action Plan 2008 for Tatabánya. The proposed action has three parts; the first related to mitigation, the second to adaptation to climate change and the third is the climate awareness. The members of the Climate circle have grown in the last year and they have a new and well elaborated website as well.

In Tatabánya more and more people know, that the city is climate friendly city, but there are few real changes in the life of the city. This is the situation is the other municipalities as well. We are waiting changes in this field mostly for the Climate Friendly Declaration.

3.) The Climate Friendly Declaration

At the second congress of the Association of Climate Friendly Municipalities at the end of the last year 17 mayors have signed the Declaration:

Albertirsa
Balatonfőkajár
Farmos
Gárdony
Hosszúhetény
Küngös
Mosonmagyaróvár
Pilis
Pilisszentiván
Somotor
Szarvas
Szekszárd
Tápióbicske
Tápiószentmárton
Tatabánya
Vác
Veszprém

The Declaration has the following radical aims:

“During the past years we were not only informed about the consequences of climate change by the news but could also feel its effects on the life of the society. The approval of the National Strategy for Climate Change this year also indicates that we, the leaders of cities and villages, have also to deal with the issue more seriously than before! This is why the present Declaration was worded with the aim of elaborating common, local-level programmes for climate change and of supporting their implementation.

Scientific forecasts expect the continued growth of the emission of greenhouse gases and with the further and speeding growth of warming. In summer this year the joint Statement of 13 Science Academies was published, pressing the leaders of the “G8+5 countries” to take more resolute measures in the interest of reducing the expected risks and also of adaptation that has become inevitable by now. “Climate change is a pressing issue for



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today. Action on adaptation is needed now and failure to respond poses a significant risk.” – says the Statement. It also calls attention to the fact that we may expect further warming which may endanger the functioning capability of societies. “Key vulnerabilities include water resources, food supply, health, coastal settlements and some ecosystems...As the concentration of greenhouse gases increases, these impacts become more severe and spread both geographically and sectorally. **To stabilize the climate the emissions should eventually be limited to the net absorption capacity of the earth, which is less than half of current emissions. Immediate large-scale mitigation action is required.**”

The efforts have been made in order to reduce emission on international and national levels, but they have not accomplished the expected results as yet. **Therefore we, the mayors founding the Association of Climate Friendly Municipalities and supporting the aims of the Association have decided to deal with the issue of climate change more intensively in the future.** We are encouraged to do so because the so-called “extreme phenomena of weather” may primarily disturb the life of local communities and we have to be best prepared for the expected changes. This is why we think that sooner or later each settlement will have to have a strategy for climate change, and at the same time the coordination of measures that can be taken jointly is also necessary. Taking the necessary steps locally and their importance are also stressed by the Hungarian National Strategy for Climate Change.

Our proposal promoting the realisation of aims is the following:

One of the basic aims of strategies for climate change is the mitigation of the emission of greenhouse gases. The exact calculation of them is a complicated task in each settlement. Therefore all those who agree with our initiative and wish to support it are recommended to use those meters with a simplified method for the purpose that are most easily accessible. They are the meters for electricity, gas and water, and the meter measuring the quantity of energy used for distance heating, if available. If we succeed in accomplishing reduction in those four areas, which is one of the important aims of our Declaration, then, even if we cannot learn exactly by how much, but we can assume that we have succeeded in mitigating the emission of greenhouse gases. **Our ultimate objective is to limit emissions eventually gradually to the net absorption capacity of the Earth!** These measures will contribute to the growth of climate consciousness in the settlements and also to improving adaptability becoming increasingly important. This proposal is not only important in view of climate change but also because costs can be reduced which is also of basic importance for all local governments and everybody else. Its significance has grown in the emerging financial situation which may be a further incentive for looking for more climate-conscious solutions.

As this proposal is the first step of a common, local-level strategy for climate change, we expect primarily the accession of those local governments which are ready to take meaningful steps. In addition we expect the support of companies, institutions and NGOs operating on the local level, as well as of local communities and finally of families/households.

Results related to emission, calculated on the basis of data received are published on the homepage of the Association: www.klimabarat.hu. As the aim of the initiative is to strengthen co-operation among settlements, we publish data aggregated on settlement level. (Naturally everybody can possess own data irrespective of it.) Within the aggregate data the calculated figures are published in the following detail due to the significant differences among the participants:

- In the case of aggregate data on settlement level by the consumption of the population, public and industrial ones;
 - In the case of companies: local branches of international companies, domestic large, medium and small enterprises;
 - Institutions (educational institutions, libraries, and institutions of local governments ...);
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– Civil organisations and local communities (in this case the aggregate data of households are asked for);

– Families/households.

Further on, it is recommended to assess the results achieved during the year each year, and the possibilities of further measures are to be discussed at the annual conferences of the climate-friendly settlements. In addition we would publish the values calculated on the basis of data received in every quarter of the year so that changes during the year may be observed. **All those who join this Declaration are requested to return our Declaration to the address of the Association electronically: klimaszovetseg@gmail.com or by mail to the address of the Climate Change Research Group: H-1014 Budapest, Úri utca 49, and also the name and accessibility of our future helper who would send the data quarterly to the homepage.**

Several, well elaborated solutions are already accessible in all the four areas (electricity, gas and water, distance heating) which may help us in moderating consumption, but the Association and the Climate Change Research Group operating within the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences will publish further proposals promoting the achievement of aims. (Currently we are preparing a publication on the protection of water and economising with water, an issue that has become of outstanding significance as a result of climate change.) In addition we expect specific and new solutions elaborated in the various settlements, which could be applied with success in other settlements too. The homepage of the Association also offers an opportunity for their publication.

We are confident that this initiative will contribute to giving a new impetus to local-level programmes for climate change so that meaningful steps may be taken on local level.

We encourage everyone who agrees with the aims spelt out to join this programme. Let us look for cures of the increasingly serious illnesses of the Earth and of societies on local level. We may be assisted in it by the inferences drawn from scientific research and from international and national programmes that press ever more resolutely for the taking of similar measures, and by the fact that the ‘messages’ of climate change, ever becoming more vigorous shock people living in the same place to realise how strong links attach them to people living in their vicinity in case the expected “extreme climatic phenomena” take place. In communities recognising this special situation there is the potential to be capable of launching the necessary changes. Such a community may be capable of developing new norms of social coexistence which allow for developing again a healthy relationship between nature and society. The number of settlements and local communities has been growing annually in the countries of the world that have begun to “heal” the Earth on local level. Our Declaration is linked to this expanding international activity, hoping that a multitude of local initiatives would strengthen one another and will find medication for this “illness”.

The municipalities and the Institute will work hard in this year, because we

realize the real danger of the climate change. The “20 %” is a mistake! We think that this is an important message: **“Immediate large-scale mitigation action is required.”** There is only one real and scientifically based aim: **“...to limit emissions eventually gradually to the net absorption capacity of the Earth!”**

That is the reason why the Institute – the leader of the programme – plan to work together with psychologists and religious leaders.

This radical aim and the needed radical social changes can not be attainable without them.

Budapest, 2009. March 2.
