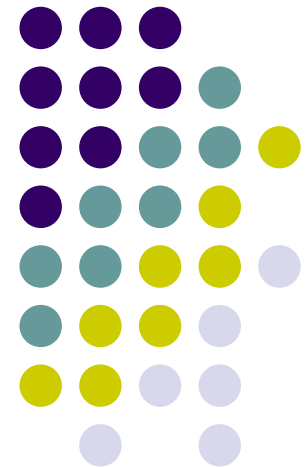




Sustainability and the Hungarian Media – An Analysis

Andrea Farsang and Tamara Steger, PhD
Dept. of Environmental Sciences and Policy

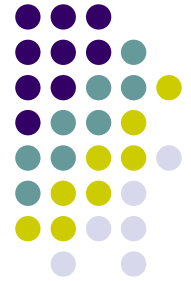




Scope of the project

- Social construction (core perspectives) of media coverage of environmental issues and sustainability in Hungary
- Analysis of relevant documents and videotaped interviews involving media professionals and experts in Hungary

Media Landscape in Hungary



- Media Law of 1996: dissolution of state owned media and introduction of public and commercial media enterprises.
- Media Law is “over-politicized” and highly contentious.



Media Overview: Hungary

- Biggest TV Channels: MTV (public broadcast), TV2 and RTL (commercial)
- Plus several commercial channels accessible via cable or satellite
- Radio: biggest commercial stations are Danubius and Slager
- 3 national public service stations: Kossuth, Petofi and Bartok

Public Media in Hungary—The Case of MTV



- Hungarian Public Television (MTV) became a public service channel with the advent of Media Law 1996.
- Financial dependence on the government.
- Considered the „worst public television” by the EU. It’s on a “short leash” by the state.
- Changes needed due to: internet, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), etc.
- “Huge loss maker” and inefficient.



Media Users Breakdown

- Commercial channels: 80%
- Public service channels: 20%
- Internet: 26% of all households and approx. 40% of people

(Central Statistic Office)

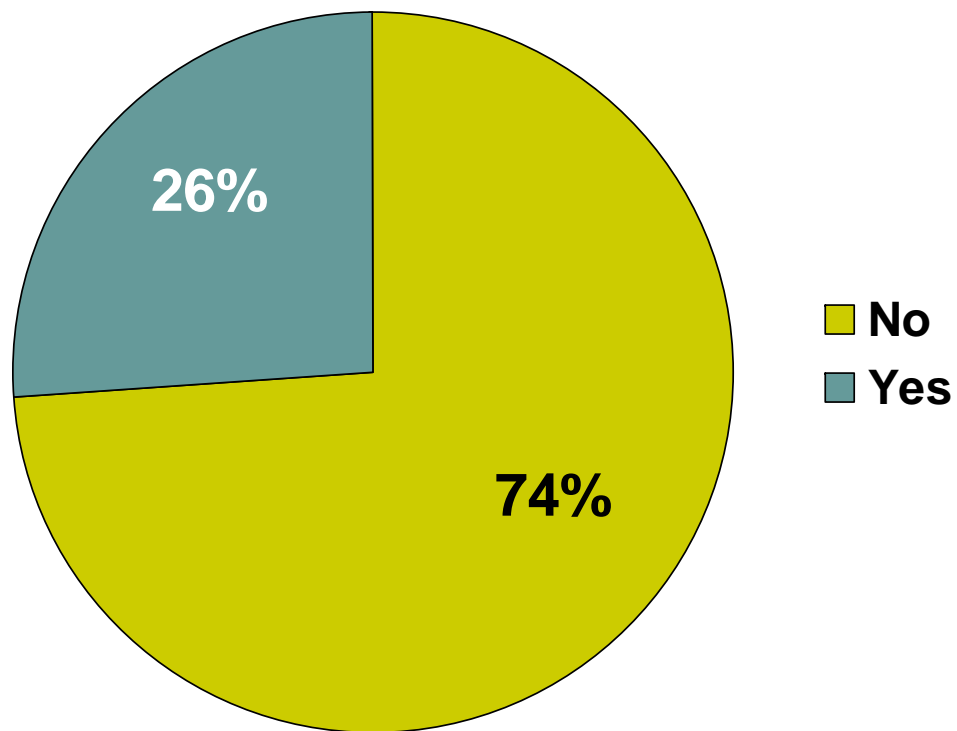
Environmental Awareness in Hungary



- Interviewees attributed the most positive role to the EU in environmental protection (Eurobarometer Poll, 2006)
- BUT, environment ranked lowest for “most important problem”: economy, taxation, housing, health, health care, education, etc.



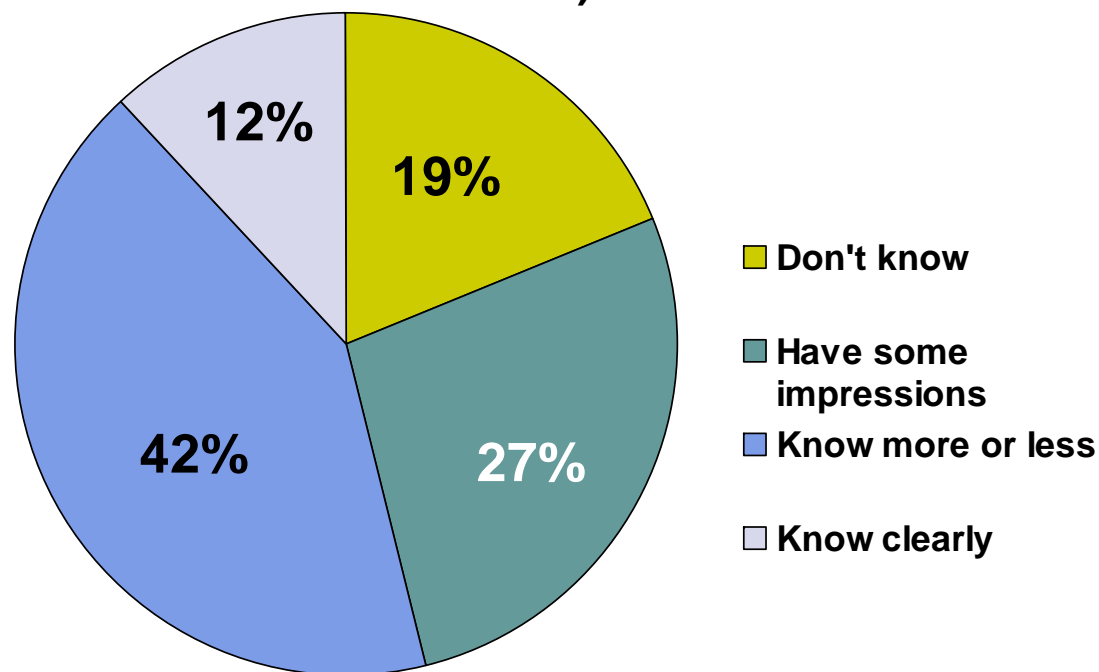
**Have you ever heard the word
'sustainable development'? (N=1000)**



Source: WBCSDH

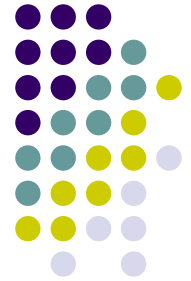


Do you know its meaning?
(Among those who already heard the word,
N=262)



Source: WBCSDH

Environment and the Media: Interview Results



General Outlook:

- Hungarian media coverage of environmental issues is in a growing phase
- Media plays a dual role: shaping public opinion and engaging in agenda-setting AND targets issues of public interest

Unique Challenges for Environmental Coverage



- „Environment is risky!”
- Science-intensive: difficult to communicate complex multi-dimensional scientific issues
- Need effective, representative images for environmental concepts
- Conflicts with commercial interests
- Media is more influenced by its own organizational sustainability than acting as a social force for sustainability.
- Weak interest in topic by media professionals

What did they say should be done to improve environmental coverage in the media?



- Improve capacity for environmental coverage
- Hard sell the environment

Improve capacity for environmental coverage



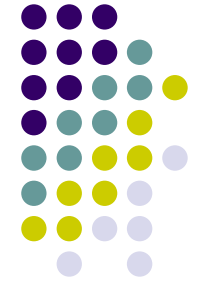
- Educate and train professional journalists and program makers in environmental and sustainability issues
- Strengthen alternative media
- Improve environmental NGO capacity to engage the media (eg. Press releases)
- Increase the capacity for scientists to talk to the public in a way they can understand



Hard Sell the Environment

- “Package” the information well
- Unusual forms and unusual stories (ie. Shock)
- Use a well-known person, celebrities
- Very good visual quality
- Say it for high impact.

Interview Results – Different Approaches



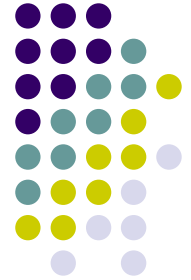
- Entertainment
- Conflict/Violence
- Positive

Entertainment approach:



- Spectacular
- Unusual
- Celebrities and political leaders
- High quality audio-visual features
- Humour
- “Just the style has to make the speed”

Conflict/violence approach:



- Shocking and dramatic
- Disaster-oriented
- Violence
- Struggle
- Humiliation (e.g., hidden cameras)

Positive approach (more effective for change in everyday life):



- Success stories
- Role models
- Real-life “happy endings” examples



**Entertainment and information
alone do not promote
sustainability.**



„Information per se does not prevent the deterioration of the environment. Only when information is transformed to meaningful knowledge and can be effectively channelled through integrated social action networks can information become a resource to improve sustainability and environmental quality.”

(European Environment Agency (EEA) Report, 1999)

What do we want to achieve with sustainability in the media?



- Change consumer behavior
- Put sustainability higher on the agenda
- Inform people about sustainability
- Improve the desirability of sustainability
- Promote the integration of sustainability in everyday life

Propositions



- Strategies, in this case, for “successful” communication of sustainability:
 - Engage the same approaches as other interests in the media (e.g. hard sell)?
 - Promote the commodification of the environment (i.e., turn the environment into something that can be bought and sold)?
 - Ends-oriented needing more creativity in and attention to the means?