



**SZENT ISTVÁN UNIVERSITY  
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MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION STUDIES  
PH.D. SCHOOL**

**Thesis of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation**

**THE LEADER PROGRAMME AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## 1. ANTECEDENTS OF THE RESEARCH

Recently in Hungary the so-called country development is more and more emphasised in which our joining to the EU plays an important role as the European Union pays special attention to regional territories' development.

In Hungary the territorial differences are typically high which unanimously means disadvantages for the county territories, these territories continuously lag behind from the urban districts. In most part of the country territories infrastructure and services are of low level, the economical structure is weak (the role of the traditional producing branches remained the same) and the alternative employment possibilities are missing. As a result of all the above mentioned unemployment is higher and salaries are lower.

Characteristics of the country are significantly worse if you compare with the urban circumstances and consider the traditionally used indexes (role in GDP, employment, incomes, infrastructure). Mainly young people are still migrating from the country territories. On the other hand in other cases inhabitants are forced to remain in their birthplace because they have not any financial possibilities at all. As a result the age structure is unfavourable. Especially small settlements (less than 500 inhabitants) are endangered by depopulation.

It can be stated that Hungary's settlement structure both economically and demographically is concentric. (Budapest and its agglomeration) There are relatively few medium-sized towns while in the country you can find a lot of small villages. As public road and speed-road network are not in good condition you can reach country territories only with difficulties and all these lead to isolation from economical procedures. As a result of the structural change in economy in the 1990s the differences between territories increased and dynamically developing centres and lagging behind territories (outlying districts) were formed. Changes had very unfavourable influence on disadvantageous territories, small villages. Territorial differences exist not only in the town-country relationship but there is a significant difference inside the country where smaller and periphery settlements are in disadvantageous position.

Country territories are places for agricultural production, for forest culture, aqua culture, recreation activities and final but not last they function as place of residence, too. In comparison with urban territories the density of population of country territories is lower,

there are fewer employment facilities and the number of reachable services are lower. Consequently quality of life is usually lower than in urban territories although country territories offer you a healthier living-space.

It is true not only for Hungary but for the most countries in the world that there are significant differences between urban and country territories considering development. Similar problems exist in other member states of the European Union where different financial resources are available to solve these types of problems. So high attention to the country development was never paid in the European Union as in the recent years

Joining to the European Union we became participant of the Common Agricultural Policy which means that its rules are valid for us, too. On the other hand we can receive from the Common supports. We can apply the measures of single country development order No. 1275/1999 which are very important concerning the topic and we can receive supports of the European Agricultural and Country Development Fund which is valid for the programming period of 2007-2013 I got to know the different approaches of rural development and characters of Hungarian rural territory with the help of researches of Rural Development Department of Research Institute for Agriculture. I took part in preparing development documents concerning agricultural and country development documents – SAPARD Program, National Development Plan and their annual report. I took part in preparing of SAPARD Program (Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (National Development Plan) and (Operational Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) and (Programme Complement) – , and in preparing of annual report of the above mentioned All of these antecedents helped me to create a comprehensive picture about the theory of country development and to get to know the Hungarian and the European Union country development practice. All of these knowledge were built in my dissertation.

Studying the country development policy of the European Union my attention was drawn to the program LEADER which plays more and more important role in country territories' development. The program was started by the Committee in 1991 as an attempt to support rural territories and it is actually being realised in the third phase. Speciality of the program is that it supports initiatives which start from the bottom and are based on local requirements and partner relationship

Although support resource of LEADER in comparison with resources of Structural Funds is not a significant amount of money – 1994-1997 it was only 1 % of the funds and 2000-2006 it was 1,1 % of the funds- it proved to be very successful and popular in developing rural territories. For this reason in the next programming phase (2007-2013) the new fund which unifies rural development – European Agricultural and Rural Development Fund1 (EMVA) integrates LEADER program into measures of rural development. EMVA provides support to rural development along four axles the fourth of which is axle “LEADER”. The order declares that at realising of the other three axles’ measures you have to use LEADER approach and method. It means that the role of LEADER as instrument which is integrated and forms development and community becomes more and more significant

As in the next programming phase LEADER’s developing method which is based on local requirements and partner relationship is emphasized more than earlier, this axle receives even more resources than earlier and therefore I think that studying this topic and investigation helps the utilizations of resources with result and to get to know a relatively new method and successful use of it. Our interest is both from economic and social political point of view to use our rural development possibilities as we can and in this helps us the objective exploring and research work which studies the above mentioned topic.

## **Objectives**

At the beginning of my research work I put up a system of objectives in which the main comprehensive and summarizing objective is the investigation of rural development, especially rural development policy of European Union. In this respect there are so many problems which can not be detailed and researched thoroughly therefore I determined more precise objectives connecting with the outlined comprehensive objective. My more precise objective is to investigate the following

- On the base of special literature how you can qualify rural development, what is the connection among rural development, regional development and agricultural development?
- On the base of special literature how you can qualify rural development policy of European Union especially it system of

objectives and instruments and all these what kind of possibilities (with what kind of conditions) offer the member states?

- Concerning rural development which experiences can be used in the old member states' practice, most of all in realising of LEADER program in Hungary's former initiatives?
- Which are the main phases of European Union's rural development policy, the main elements of it, especially considering that rural development has become the second pillar of Common Agricultural Policy (KAP) and LEADER program has become an integrated part of rural development (rural development measures)?
- Which are the most important elements of EU regulations which refer to the period of 2007-2013 and how the financial resources and resources of LEADER will change?

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

I got to know the different approaches of rural development and characters of Hungarian rural territory with the help of researches of Rural Development Department of the research Institute for Agriculture I got to know the characters of the Hungarian rural territories and different approaches of rural development by researches of the Department of Rural Development Policy of Research Institute for Agriculture. I took part in preparing of SAPARD Program (Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (National Development Plan) and (Operational Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) and (Programme Complement) – and in preparing of annual report of the above mentioned. Besides the above mentioned I took part in some other project which study the situations of rural territories and its revelation. All of these antecedents helped me to create a comprehensive picture about the theory of rural development and to get to know the Hungarian and the European Union rural development practice. All of these knowledge were built in my dissertation.

At the beginning of my work I would write just a few sentences concerning characters of rural territories as I think several publications of rank were published in this topic so I could only repeat them. For this reason I just shortly summarise the most important characters of rural territories.

Revelation of connecting legal regulations, legal background and revising and elaborating of European Union's directives and standpoints was unavoidable so that I can process the topic. It meant not only the revision of the current legal document [for example law of 1996. No. XXI. about territorial development and territorial arrangement; 1260/1999 EC order; 1257/1999 EC order; 1783/2003 EC Order; Order of the Council about rural development support which can be offered from the European Rural Development and Agricultural Fund (ERDAF) but the knowledge of the former periods' regulations system, too (for example 2052/1988 EC order; 2081/1993 EC order).

I revised and analysed our different rural development planning documents which were prepared for the period after joining the European Union [AROP (FVM 2004 a) and the connecting ARDOP-PCD (FVM 2004 b), NVT (FVM 2004 c)] and the operative programs referring to the utilization of the Union's resources (HRDOP, ROP, EROP). I analysed them most of all from the point of view which part they play in the development of rural territories.

As my topic is LEADER as a possibility for rural development it was unavoidable to present the conceptual and conceptional differences of rural development in the different professional literatures. Conceptional determinations outline the activity field to which rural development measures refer and to which rural development monetary funds can direct and those systems of points of view which can approach these funds. Therefore research work was accompanied by knowing and evaluation the connecting professional literature and by summarizing the experiences gained during research. I grouped the publications which are very differing and are connected to my dissertation's topic only peripherally but are very important from the point of view of the connections into four groups:

- different approaches of the concept of rural development,
- relationship between rural and territorial development and agricultural economy, their connections,
- change and main characters of European Union's rural policy,
- financing rural development.

At the third and fourth topic the most important is the change of LEADER which is initiated by the Community, the revision of rural development's financial support, and these are presented in my dissertation as independent chapters, too.

This was followed by exploring and knowing the practical realisation of experiences gained during working up the professional.

Objective of the research in the frame of rural development is to know better the LEADER community initiative. For this reason I revised the regulation system of LEADER I, LEADER II and LEADER + program. After knowing all the above mentioned I laid emphasize on the investigation of practical realisation main part of which was to investigate analytically and to evaluate critically the program-evaluations of each member state and the documents which evaluates the programs' realisation (after-evaluation of LEADER-I-II and middle evaluation of LEADER +).

Independent data-survey and general survey was unavoidable to get to know the application and operation of LEADER program. I investigated the practical realisation of the program by independent data-survey on the base of two member states' (Netherland and United Kingdom) example. It was a significant help for me that in Netherland I was able to study in the frame of a study-tour the operation of

LEADER group in Flevoland and the realisation of the projects. In United Kingdom I was able to know the realisation of the project in the frame of a four-month-long scholarship which I spent at the University of Cambridge. Data-survey and analyses were made in both case according to the following:

- Survey of the member states' LEADER program.
- Professional interviews:
  - with officials of ministry who are responsible for realisation of the program,
  - with officials of local government and province,
  - with leaders and project-managers of LEADER groups,
  - with the final favoured ones who realises projects.
- Knowledge and review of the groups' structure and operation.
- Analyses and systematization of projects realised by the groups.

I compared the results of analyses about data-surveys gained during foreign study-tours and the experiences of professional interviews with methods and experiences of other countries. I revised and analysed about 150 projects which were realised during LEADER I and II in order to get to know LEADER program and method better. As one of the main points of the program is to introduce experiences and results to the public as it is possible, a lot of information is available about the program and about the projects already realised. Evaluation of LEADER program was made on the base of the above mentioned analyses.

Elaboration of special literature, analyses and investigations were completed by consultations with foreign specialists and by active participation on professional conferences and seminars.

I took part personally in preparing LEADER program which was started in Hungary as an experiment in 2001 and I took part in the first period of its realisation, in preparing development program of three areas (Göcsej, Baranya-Hegyhat, Dél-Alföld) , so I was able to study the program's realisation from "inside", too. As it is avoidable to revise how LEADER method can be applied within domestic circumstances in order to work out LEADER program in Hungary, therefore I made the following surveys during the realisation of LEADER program:

- Observation and investigation of planning and realisation in partner relationship between the players who take part in the program.
- Analysis of the prepared development plans and projects from the point of view that how typical is the nine main characters of LEADER method of them.
- Professional interviews with specialists, officers of the ministry who take part in realisation of the program and with final favoured ones who realise the project.

Conclusions and suggestions concerning Hungarian application of LEADER are based on the results of comparative analyse of data survey in Hungary and abroad. The analyse of data survey is not presented in the frame of the dissertation on one hand because of extent barriers on the other hand from the point of view of the objectives' realisation the experiences gained on the base of the results are significant and these are presented in my dissertation.

During research I used the experiences gained during the above mentioned works which helped to show disadvantages and difficulties of domestic application of LEADER method.

Revising domestic application of LEADER I investigated and analysed the measures of ARDOP-PKD LEADER+ and the initial period of the program's realisation. Considering the fact that at the time of closing my dissertation only groups selection is realised I do not concern the detailed analysisation of the measure's realisation in the frame of my work.

Conclusions and suggestions in connection with domestic adoption of the program are made after analysing and comparative presentation of realisation of LEADER program both in the European Union and in Hungary.

Research was made above all by analysis of source and empirical method the main elements of which are the following:

- elaboration of special literature and critical evaluation in order to revise problems, to explore results and faultiness and to summarize utilizable experiences and to explore conclusions,
- analysing of domestic rural development planning documents, most of all from the point of view of knowledge LEADER program's "embeddedment",
- professional consultations in the frame of study-tour abroad and with national specialists,

- familiarization and evaluation of concrete local experiences and program' implementation, independent data-survey and general survey on the base of different member states' LEADER groups and on the base of Hungary' experimental LEADER groups,
- “facing” of the accumulated knowledge in experimental realising of LEADER program in Hungary.

### **3. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH WORK**

#### **3.1. New (recent) results**

New (recent) results of my research-work can be summarized in the following:

- On the base of my researches' experiences it can be put into words that LEADER is suitable to draw local resources into development and to complete structural developments starting from the top considering local requirements, too.
- As a result I stated what was the reason for success and result of LEADER program in developing rural territories. It was that in local community organisations player know each other very well and so they now each others' intensions, activity and so initiatives are connected with each other and synergy (positive influence strengthening each other) can form between them. Owing to the program's method economicalness of size and scale may accidentally form with co-operation of more independent economies.

On the base of my researches I stated that applying the program had certain barriers and obstacles.

- On the most backward rural territories (where support of program most of all would be needed) population has generally weak community candidacy and weak ability to enforce interests and there are not any suitable human resources for realisation. Result of the researches show that applying LEADER program the more developed rural territories can get the resources more easily.
- Wide professional skill is needed to judge different types of development, projects and this professional skill is not provided in each case on local level and this may be a problem in filtering out some overlaps with supports. On the base of my researches it can be stated that some territories have so significant disadvantages which can not be avoided by using LEADER method, neither.
- Experiences of my investigation show that local "community" organisations also have disadvantages. As groups exist on a small territorial unit, players know each other and so subjective elements get across at making decisions. Although

the program went through continuous development it did not succeed to build in unambiguous institutional guarantees into the system facing subjective elements during decision-making.

- Although financial resources of LEADER are expanding it can be stated on the base of my research that LEADER will have development influence on the whole country only together with other rural development measure. So it can be a model how to approach rural development.
- Although majority of rural development measures has a horizontal character – and this has LEADER – on the base of my investigations you can state that it is not absolutely necessary to try to reach the national covering. Considering the resources' expectable change and in point of view of their successful use it can be stated that in Hungary 40-50 active LEADER groups are enough.

### **3.2. Conclusions, suggestions**

After analysing the practical experiences of LEADER program's realisation and after revising the system of regulations, connecting legal documents and concerning special literature the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Objectives have been modified since LEADER's start according to local inhabitants' priorities and in order to maximalise the effect of synergy. According to the above mentioned the program's system of institutes and conditions were formed and the so-called LEADER approach was formed which has to be obligatory applied in the next programming period in case of each axle.
- The program is flexible concerning its content because it is possible to get a support for almost any kind of projects which contributes to create values and to the development of the concerned territory. It is locally fixed this means that synergy and coordination can be higher.
- LEADER is suitable to use local resources for development and considering local requirements to complete structural development starting from the bottom.

- In the programming period 2007-2013 the minimum 2,5 % budget proportion which has to be spent on LEADER axle means an increase in comparison with current resources and this can be increased further in member states' competence.
- It is not needed to form higher number of groups than is supported in the frame of AVOP LEADER + (40-50 groups). In this case 2,5 % budget portion of LEADER axle would mean that one group disposed over a support the value of which were 479,5-532,7 million HUF (it is about four or five times more than the current support). This number of groups and supporting proportion can be accepted in comparison with the EU –15, too.
- During realisation bigger territory and groups with higher population must be formed which helps the concentration of resources and their usage, the harmonized development and it makes administrative process faster

The following conclusions and precise suggestions can be made concerning realisation of LEADER in Hungary:

- In the next programming period in case application procedure and LEADER procedure is finished in time it is possible to avoid that deadlines prolong during execution.
- Constitutional system of AVOP LEADER+ measure is bureaucratic for this reason execution process is slow. System of institutions and executive process must be made simpler and more understandable so that LEADER could be a successful development approach in Hungary, too. So it is suitable to reduce the numbers of elements regulated centrally and the numbers of levels which prepare decisions. So you can increase decentralization.
- More time should be provided (one month is not enough before pre-selection) for preparing rural development plan which is base of the groups' selection even before pre-selection. As development plan should be based on SWOT analysis, local requirements, and it is worked up in partner relationship with reconciling the different interests and it is the base of selection of projects which are realisable later. So it is avoidable that from 2007 the groups which did not take part in current LEADER's measure will be in an disadvantageous position as they have no experiences.

- In spite of the expectations the over-bureaucratic application procedure is problem for the potential beneficiaries (interpretation of the announcements, filling out the forms and purchasing the necessary documents). The concerned participants have difficulties in finding the development opportunities, coordination of these and the innovative character. For this reason in the next period training concerning practical realisation and continuous professional advice concerning the above mentioned problems should be provided during execution with the presentation of positive results.
- Training should not present rural development generally but they should present how applying and realisation really works and trainings should prepare potential favoured ones how to apply all the above mentioned. The lack of concrete experience can be balanced with careful dissemination.
- During realisation the most important problems were how to activate community, how to keep up interest continuously. Only few people joined in the real realisation. In order to avoid the above mentioned animators (community developers) were applied in the old member states which is worth considering in Hungary, too.
- The projects implemented during the pilot program reflect that the common interest does not prevail against the subjective, personal interest. According to the research this stems from the fact that the common collaboration was not adequate at the time when the development plan of the area was accomplished. The definition of the development objectives were not based on the harmonization of the interests and conceptions. Therefore it would be expedient to focus on this area at the trainings and lectures.
- As LEADER introduces a new development process in Hungary it is very important to give more information than earlier about process and practice of AVOP LEADER+ measure so that potential favoured ones could be more prepared in the next programming phase. Failing the above mentioned it is possible that the new groups forming in 2007 will have to face the same problems as the current ones, although having mind the experiences it could be avoidable.

- All of the problems mentioned earlier can danger together the realisation and results of the program which contains a lot of new, individual elements for Hungary and which supports mainly the innovative ideas starting from the bottom.

The further experiences of realising AVOP LEADER+ measure and of the initiatives in Hungary starting from the bottom and the investigation of the resources' application and of the results reached can be a point of reference so that rural development directions concerning the future can be determined. It can be a point of reference in answering questions like the following ones:

- The development objectives of the groups are based on real local and common specific needs or it is only motivated by the acquirement of financial sources?
- Have rural territories suitable absorptivity to use the resources?
- Can be developed the potential groups any administrative practice to handle so significant resources?
- What kind of results have the local initiatives in developing rural territories in Hungary?
- In case of what type of developments can be support resources used with more results?
- Is it suitable to use a support of so significant size to support local development plans which start from the bottom?

Further analyses and researches are needed connection with the realisation of the LEADER program so that the questions arisen can be answered in the future and which can make possible different modification on the base of the experiences of a part-period.

## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

### List of publications which are directly and indirectly connected with the topic of current dissertation

#### Scientific publication

##### *Hungarian language*

1. Dorgai L. – Miskó K. (1999): A vidékfejlesztés finanszírozása az Európai Unióban. [Budapest: Agrárgazdasági Kutató és Informatikai Intézet.] 116. p. [Agrárgazdasági Tanulmányok (12)]
2. Dorgai L. (szerk.) (2004): A magyarországi birtokstruktúra, birtokrendezési stratégia megalapozása. [Budapest: Agrárgazdasági Kutató és Informatikai Intézet.] 199. p. [Agrárgazdasági Tanulmányok (6)]
3. Tóth E. (szerk.) (2000): A mezőgazdasági foglalkoztatás alternatív lehetőségei. [Budapest: Agrárgazdasági Kutató és Informatikai Intézet.] 140. p. [Agrárgazdasági Tanulmányok (13)]
4. Tóth E. (szerk.) (2001): Az agrárfoglalkoztatás jellemzői, különös tekintettel a nők munkaerő - piaci helyzetére (1990 - 2000). [Budapest: Agrárgazdasági Kutató és Informatikai Intézet.] 94. p. [Agrárgazdasági Tanulmányok (2)]
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6. Hamza E. – Miskó K. (2005): Az agrár- és vidékfejlesztés szociális kérdései. Integrációs és Fejlesztéspolitikai Munkacsoport. Agrár- és Vidékfejlesztési Témacsoportja. Budapest 48 p.

##### *In foreign language*

7. Dorgai L. – Miskó K. (2000): Financing of rural development in the European Union. 31-34. p. In: Research and Information Institute for Agriculture: *Studies in Agricultural Economics (93)* Budapest: Research and Information Institute for Agriculture 93. p.
8. Miskó (2002): Rural development program in the European Union. 49 – 59 p. In: Research and Information Institute for Agriculture: *Studies in Agricultural Economics (98)* Budapest: Research and Information Institute for Agriculture 72. p.
9. Tóth E. (szerk.) (2001): Alternative possibilities in agricultural employment. 85 – 90. p. In: Research and Information Institute for Agriculture: *Studies in Agricultural Economics (95)* Budapest: Research and Information Institute for Agriculture 101 p.

10. Tóth E. (szerk.) (2001): Agricultural employment, with particular regard to the situation of the women's labour market (1990 - 2000). 19-27. p. In: Research and Information Institute for Agriculture: *Studies in Agricultural Economics (97)* Budapest: Research and Information Institute for Agriculture 57 p.

### **Scientific journal**

#### *Hungarian language*

11. Dorgai L. - Miskó K. (1999): Az Európai Unió új vidékfejlesztési politikája. In: A FALU, 14 (3) 61 – 71. p.

### **Scientific conference publications**

#### *Hungarian language*

12. Miskó K. – Székely E. (2000): Községi Kezdeményezések a vidék fejlesztéséért – Uniós tapasztalatok. 361 – 368. p. In: Kovács T. (szerk.): *V. Falukonferencia - Integrált vidékfejlesztés*. Pécs: MTA Regionális Kutatások központja 532 p.
13. Miskó K. (2001): A vidéki térségeken belüli együttműködés megjelenése a LEADER programban. 121 – 130. p. In: Szent István Egyetem Gazdaság- és Társadalomtudományi Kar: *Vision-2000 III. A kooperáció, a koordináció és az integráció szerepe és lehetőségei az agrár és a vidéki gazdaságban*. 1. kötet Gödöllő: SZIE. 325 p.
14. Miskó K. (2003): A LEADER program a vidékfejlesztés eszköztárában. 162. p. In: Debreceni Egyetem. Agrártudományi Centrum. Agrárgazdasági és Vidékfejlesztési Kar: *Agrárgazdaság, Vidékfejlesztés*. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem 387 p.
15. Miskó K. (2003): Sikeres vidékfejlesztési modell. 153 – 156. In: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége: Tavaszi Szél Konferencia. Sopron: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége.

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17. Miskó K. (2001): The rural development and the LEADER Community Initiatives. 242 – 248. p. In: Szent István University Gödöllő Faculty of Economic- and Social Sciences Marketing Institute: *1<sup>st</sup> International Conference for Young Researchers*. Gödöllő: SZIE. 424 p.

18. Miskó K. (2003): The possibilities of rural development in Hungary. 115 – 120. p. In: University of Miskolc: 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference of PhD Students. Miskolc University of Miskolc 388 p.

## Research report

### *Hungarian language*

19. Dorgai L. (szerk.) (2000): Területi folyamatok a mezőgazdaságban 1990-1998 között.
20. Budapest Agrárgazdasági Kutató és Informatikai Intézet.
21. Dorgai L. (szerk.) (2000): A magyar agrár- és vidékfejlesztési támogatások regionális eloszlásának vizsgálata, a regionális egyenlőtlenségek csökkentésének lehetőségei. Budapest Földművelésügyi és Vidékfejlesztési Minisztérium Területfejlesztési Főosztály.
22. Dorgai L. (szerk.) (2004): A termelői csoportok létrehozásának indítékai, működésük főbb területei és fejlesztési irányai az EU csatlakozás tükrében. FVM FM Hivatalok Főosztály 144. p.
23. Dorgai L. (szerk.) (2004): Az Országos Területfejlesztési Koncepció (OTK) értékelése és a további célkitűzések megvalósítása. VÁTI 156. p.
24. Dorgai L. – Miskó K. (2000): Életképes gazdaságok - fejlesztési lehetőségek, esélyek és veszélyek. Földművelésügyi és Vidékfejlesztési Minisztérium 74. p.
25. Dorgai L. (szerk.) (2004): Területi folyamatok a mezőgazdaságban – a mezőgazdasági beruházások és a vidékfejlesztési célelőirányzat felhasználása. Háttéranyag az Országos Területfejlesztési Koncepció (OTK) felülvizsgálatához. VÁTI Kht. 156. p.
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