



GENDER AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE PUBLIC WORK SCHEME IN HUNGARY

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/ or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word counts for this thesis are accurate:

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ABSTRACT

The thesis assesses the reasons behind female public work employment and the perceived benefits and disadvantages of the program within Hungary. It addresses the difference between men's and women's experience within the scheme and the reasons why public work is attractive to women in a specific structural, relational and circumstantial context. The study is based on interviews I have conducted with 15 public workers and three managers in two different cities, one in Pest county and another one in Komárom-Esztergom county.

The thesis provides a gender analysis of public work and workfare and engages with the debate regarding work-care decisions. It also demonstrates how the prevalence of the ideal worker norm channels women into specific type of employment. I argue that female public work participants use their job as a strategic tool to achieve work-life balance in a time when the labor market is characterized by rigid work arrangements and long working hours. However, this strategy allows women to continue to bear the double burden of paid and unpaid work instead of improving the conditions within the labor market for both men and women. With the increased ratio of women in public work, it becomes a new type of pink-collar employment that tolerates women's domestic responsibilities. Despite of the precarity that surrounds the job, I argue that women are able to derive emotional, social and financial gains from it. Paid work allows women to feel competent and appreciated which stands in contrast with the way domestic work is perceived. As the meaning of work for men is related to their provider role and to the identity they gain through their profession, for them public work is a means to material benefits and does not provide meaning or fulfillment. The topic of this thesis is a relevant and an important issue in order to understand how Hungarian labor market patterns and inequalities within society intersect with gender, class and ethnicity.

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Introduction

It was around 8 in the morning when I got off from the train in one of the cities in Pest county. The train station, which was very neat during all of my previous visits, seemed not to have been cleaned. Some of the bins were overflowing, empty glasses and beer cans were left on the stairs. A plastic bag was floating around. Erzsike, who works at a city maintenance company and supervises public workers, was coming hurriedly towards me. She was taking detailed pictures of the “crime scene” while complaining to me that the public workers who were supposed to clean on Easter Monday were not here “as we can see it”. She was gesturing at the bins and stairs, “that is why it is so messy”. Two female Roma public workers in their 30s showed up, both of them were holding a broom. They started to complain to Erzsike about the situation. They found it unfair that they have to work much more because others failed to do their job. Erzsike nodded at these complaints, which she heard them numerous times before, and introduced me to the women. She explained that I am doing research on the experience of public work participants. Both women smiled at me when they introduced themselves and one of them suggested that if I want to find out what public workers go through; I should work with them for a day. After that I would know everything. During my research, I followed public workers around throughout their whole working day. I often offered to help with their tasks, but most of the times I was refused politely. As I was walking towards the charitable organization where I conducted some of my interviews, I saw three middle-aged Roma women sweeping the square in front of the church. I was wondering whether the situation is the same in other cities. I barely see sweepers anymore; public workers are employed to keep the city tidy. Are they mostly women and Roma people?

In 2011 a unified public work scheme was introduced in Hungary that defined public work as a new legal form of employment decoupled from the statutory minimum wage. The scheme aims to reintegrate participants into the labor market through work socialization and training, but it was heavily criticized and thought to be ineffective as participants are often stuck in the program. In addition, various conditions of the scheme decrease the autonomy of the participants and create power imbalances. Although the public work program is based on a centralized redistribution system, local authorities play a crucial role in allocating resources (Bördös 2015, Kovai 2016). In 2016 when the highest number of participants were registered, public work employment constituted 5 percent of the total employment. In 2018, this changed

3 percent which means that around 135 thousand people were employed in public worker roles. In 2016, the number of female participants overtook that of men and this trend continues to characterize public work ever since (KSH 2019, Közfoglalkoztatás 2019). There is no data available based on ethnicity, but due to accumulated disadvantage, it is likely that Roma people are overrepresented among participants.

The aim of my research is to assess the reasons behind female public work employment and the perceived benefits and disadvantages of the program in Hungary. I have formulated the following research questions: What benefits do female public work participants seek from the public work program? Do they have a different experience than men? What are the possible reasons behind the feminization of public work, does it offer something that makes it more attractive to women? To answer these questions, I have conducted interviews with 15 public workers and three people who supervise or manage their work, I refer to them as managers. The interviews were conducted in two different cities, one in Pest county and another one in Komárom-Esztergom county. Unlike most research about the Hungarian public work program, this study is based on qualitative analysis which helps to highlight individual experience and strategies that are often invisible in quantitative analysis.

My research shows that there is a clear difference between male and female public workers' experience. I argue that female public work participants use their job as a strategy to achieve work-life balance. Public work entails predictable working hours, paid sick leave and maternity leave which helps women to combine domestic and care responsibilities with paid work. However, it also reinforces the exclusion of women from the primary labor market and contributes to the dualization of it. With the increased ratio of women in public work, it becomes a new type of pink-collar job that upholds and strengthens the ideal worker norm and allows women's role to be unchanged in the domestic sphere. Inflexible work arrangements and practices that push women into public work employment are not challenged. Further, I argue that despite the precarity that surrounds public work, women are able to derive emotional, social and financial gains from it. Paid work allows women to feel competent and appreciated which stands in contrast with the way domestic work is perceived. Some women were able to express their skills and gain an identity from their job, while others established social ties and contributed to the well-being of their community. In contrast, men often interpreted public work employment as a failure. I argue that as the meaning of work for men is closely related to their provider role and the identity they gain due to their profession, public work was treated as a means to material benefits and did not provide meaning or fulfillment.

This study contributes to the literature of public work and workfare by providing a gender analysis. It highlights the way these policies that tie the reception of benefits to work engagement, marginalize women and ethnic minorities and reinforce inequalities within the labor market. It also addresses the debate regarding work-care decisions and identifies the way circumstantial, structural and relational factors intersect and influence female public workers' employment opportunities. In addition, the thesis demonstrates the prevalence of the ideal worker norm in today's economy and shows that motherhood penalty is present in low-paid jobs as well. Since 2011 the Hungarian public work program became an important tool to increase the level of employment, but it is also important because it affects social mobility, poverty, local hierarchies. Thus, it is a relevant issue in order to understand Hungarian labor market patterns and inequalities within society.

This thesis is divided into six main chapters. In the first chapter, I discuss the patterns of the Hungarian labor market and provide some background information on the public work scheme. Following this, I explain my research methodology. I address the research design and the interviewing process as well as the limitations of this project. Before turning to the analytical chapters, I present the theoretical background and relevant scholarly literature on workfare, public work, work-life balance and the ideal worker norm. The findings are divided into two separate chapters. One chapter focuses on public work as a strategic tool for women to combine work and family life. The other chapter discusses the meaning of work and argues that participants experience social, emotional and financial gains. In the final chapter, I revisit my research questions and summarize the main arguments of this thesis. I also identify areas for future research.

Chapter 1: Overview of the Hungarian labor market

1.1 Employment patterns in Hungary: continued discrimination of Roma minority and women

The aim of this chapter is to contextualize my analysis of the Hungarian public work scheme and provide background information on the labor market that aids the readers. This chapter demonstrates the selective incorporation of Roma and women into the labor market. It also highlights the problems with the current public work scheme.

First, I will discuss the overall employment patterns with special attention to women's and the Roma minority's position in the labor market. Then, I introduce the public work scheme, explain how it came about and present recent trends.

a. Employment during state socialism

Employment during state socialism (1949- 1989) was compulsory for all able-bodied adults in line with the policy of full employment. As a result, in many families both partners took part in paid employment (Kampichler et al 2014: 44, Zimmerman 2010: 3). Women's employment rate rose from 35 percent in 1949 to 64 percent in the 1970s but domestic work remained their responsibility (Zimmerman 2010: 2). Opportunities of paid work differed according to sex, class, ethnicity and economic sector (Zimmerman 2010: 1). Skilled females dominated the textile, shoes and food industry which were typically lower paid sectors (Zimmerman 2010: 4). Thus, gender segregation was present, and women were incorporated in the secondary labor market. The ethnic employment gap was virtually non-existent during the state socialist era, Roma had access to steady cash flows and were employed in specific sectors, mostly in steel, mining and construction industries (Emigh et al 2006: 8, Kertesi et al 2011: 571). Family benefits were linked to employment and in 1967 maternal leave was introduced through a new system of work-family policies. Women were entitled to a flat-rate benefit until the child's third birthday (Kispéter 2012: 60, Lukács et al 2003: 52) This leave policy was available for women only and mothers on leave counted as active workers (Fodor et al 2014: 386, Kispéter 2013: 3). Due to lack of childcare facilities in rural areas where high proportion of ethnic minorities lived, Roma women's involvement in paid work was often lower (Zimmerman 2010: 5).

b. Employment patterns after 1989

After the transition to market economy in 1989, almost a third of all jobs disappeared in Hungary and unemployment soared. Various welfare benefits, such as family policies, were criticized for being overly generous (Fodor et al 2014: 386). However, unlike in other Central Eastern European countries, job loss affected male and female work force relatively equally (Lukács et al 2003: 43). While the employment rate in 1990 was around 75 percent – 83 percent employment rate for males and 63 percent for females – in 1996, the lowest employment rate was recorded as 53 percent, with 46 percent of female and 60 percent of male employment (Lukács et al 2003: 44).

Although the transition led to similar lay-offs of men and women, the Roma population was disproportionately affected by it (Kertesi 2004, Kertesi et al 2011, Kóczé 2016: 46, Köllő 2009, Tardos 2015: 23). The ethnic employment gap widened significantly, over 60 percent of Roma men and almost 80 percent of Roma women lost their jobs between the period of 1984 and 1994 (Kertesi 2004: 17, Kertesi et al 2011: 571). Some of the causal factors behind these massive lay-offs were low educational attainment, isolated geographical location and labor market discrimination (Bernát 2019, Kertesi 2004, Kertesi et al 2011, O'Higgins 2012, Zimmerman 2010).

Historically, there has been an educational attainment gap between Roma and non-Roma and after the transition jobs increasingly required higher educational attainment which put Roma in a marginalized position (Emigh et al 2006: 9, Kertesi 2004). Roma women are disproportionately affected by the education gap, the number of years they spend in school is lower than that of Romani men and non-Roma women and men. Thus, there is not only an ethnic gap but a gender gap in educational attainment (Cukrowska et al 2013, Kóczé 2016: 47). In addition, the Roma community also has a disadvantageous geographical distribution as they are located in rural areas and less developed regions of the country where employment opportunities are scarce (Bernát 2019: 207, Kertesi et al 2011: 579, O'Higgins 2012: 16). 60 percent of the Roma live in villages compared to the 35 percent national average (Kertesi et al 2011: 576). In addition, labor market discrimination affects the Romani people's employment rate. Most of the discrimination is statistical, which means that judgements for hiring is made based on observation and prejudice (Kertesi 2004: 35). In this way, people who belong and perceived to belong to the Roma ethnic group are thought to have a higher cost of hiring so the most cost-effective action from the employers is not to hire

anyone from the Roma minority. The causal variables discussed above, intertwine and reinforce each other and lead to an accumulated disadvantage for the Roma population.

With the emergence of large-scale unemployment, leave policies were redesigned after the transition. Conditions were differentiated based on insurance status which led to differences in women's claim based on their social class, ethnicity and geographical location (Fodor et al 2014: 386). Mothers employed for at least a year, are entitled to 24 weeks of paid maternity leave [csecsemőgondozási díj, CSED] which is 70 percent of their previous wage. After this, either parent, if they are employed, is entitled to an insurance-based parental leave [gyermekgondozási díj, GYED] until the child's second birthday and receive 70 percent of their former pay. Uninsured parents or those whose child's second birthday has passed can claim a universal parental leave [gyermekgondozást segítő ellátás, GYES] which is a flat-rate benefit that equals the amount of the minimum old age pension¹ (Kispéter 2019: 323). These lengthy leave policies are far from being "women friendly" as they contribute to the discrimination against women in the labor market and facilitate ad hoc informal employment. They also leave the problem of lack of daycare facilities unaddressed (Fodor et al 2014: 393).

Thus, after the transition, labor market is continued to be segmented and women face vertical and horizontal segregation (Lukács et al 2003: 46). Inflexible work arrangements, unpredictable working hours and lack of part-time opportunities further marginalizes women's labor market position (Gregor et al 2018: 16, Kispéter 2019: 319).

c. Employment patterns after 2008

The 2008 economic crisis strongly affected Hungary and led to the decrease of employment which in this first phase affected skilled men in the automotive, manufacturing and construction industry (Kispéter 2019: 323). Before the crisis, the employment rate was around 57 percent – with 63.7 percent male and 50.7 percent female employment rate – while 7-8 percent were unemployed (KSH 2019). 2010 had the highest unemployment rate 13-14 percent and the lowest employment rate which was around 54.9 percent with 59.9 male and 50.2 percent female employment (KSH 2019). As companies tried to cut labor costs by freezing wages and reducing working hours, women became more attractive work force, and some benefited from the crisis (Kispéter 2019: 324). Part-time employment among female employees, which has been very low compared to the European Union average, rose from 5.8 percent in 2007 to 9.8 percent in 2012 (Kispéter 2019: 324). However, Hungarians continue

¹ In 2019 the gross payment of GYES is 28 500 HUF/ month, which is less than 90 EUR. The net payment is 10 percent less due to pension contribution (Csalad.hu 2019)

to hold a rather conservative gender ideology, traditional sex roles govern the distribution of domestic work and they also affect women's employment opportunities (Kispéter 2019: 322, European Commission 2017).

Another way to cut labor costs is through informal employment. In the Eastern European region, the share of informal employment in total employment is above 30 percent while in Hungary it was 12.2 percent in 2016 (ILO 2018: 6, 40, 89). Men's involvement in the informal economy is predicted to be higher than women's and rural areas are more affected by this employment type (ILO 2018: 42- 43). This is important because working outside the formal labor market shapes social entitlements, healthcare expenses are not covered and there is no pension contribution (Tardos 2015: 166). People also do not have access to various benefits, such as paid sick leave or maternity leave.

After the crisis, growth in employment rate among Roma has been faster than in any other social groups. While in 2013 the employment rate was 26 percent, in 2017 this increased to 45 percent (Bernát 2019: 203). However, the increase in employment was not accompanied by equivalent improvement in income (Bernát 2019: 204). Kóczé draws attention to the effect of liberalization and the spread of temporal and low-paid jobs on Roma employment. Their involvement in the informal economy is predicted to be high compared to the non-Roma population (Kóczé 2016: 48). Education and geographical location continue to play an important role in the ethnic employment gap (Bernát 2019: 204, 207). According to the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy II [Nemzeti Társadalmi Felzárkózási Stratégia II], among employed Romani people 41 percent are employees in the primary labor market and 48 percent are public workers (EMMI 2014: 26). In 2017, the share of public workers among the employed Roma decreased but it was still above 30 percent (Bernát 2019: 203). Although, there is no data available on public workers based on their ethnicity, from the above-mentioned details it is clear that Roma people are overrepresented in the scheme.

Employment rates have been rising since 2014. While labor shortage continues to be a problem (Hárs 2019: 149), the latest data in 2018 shows that the employment rate was 69.2 percent with 76.3 male and 62.3 female participation (KSH 2019). These numbers should be interpreted with caution because three distinct factors cause distortion in the employment figures. These are public work schemes, number of Hungarians employed abroad and changes in statistical calculation. Without these factors the employment rate would be around 5-8 percent lower in the recent years (Scharle 2016: 54-55).

1.2 Public work schemes in Hungary

Public work programs have been present in Hungary since the 1990s with a goal to reduce unemployment. In pre-2011 there were three distinct type of public work programs: public employment services (PES) type [közhasznú munka], national type [közmunakörművek] and municipal type [közszolgálati foglalkoztatás]. These programs mainly varied according to the funding mechanisms, but participants carried out similar tasks and received the statutory minimum wage (Bördös 2015: 67).

Since 2011, under the New Fundamental Law [Alaptörvény] there is a unified system of public work engagement which ties the receipt of unemployment benefit [álláskeresői járadék] to the engagement of public work programs [közfoglalkoztatási programok]. Thus, it is a workfare program with a clear political message that criticizes those who “wish not to work” for receiving too generous benefits (Gerő et al 2019: 6). In this way it divides the poor into “deserving” and “undeserving” categories (Kovai 2016: 137). Those who are not participating in the public work program can claim a flat rate employment replacement benefit [foglalkoztatást helyettesítő támogatás] which was 22 800 HUF (around 70 EUR) in 2019 (Kormányhivatal 2019).

The new 2011 legislation decreased the amount of time jobseekers/ unemployed can access unemployment benefit, claimants could receive this benefit for 3 months as compared to the earlier 9 months. To be eligible for cash transfers after 3 months, recipients must enroll to the public work program. While the unemployment benefits are in accordance with the minimum wage, public work engagement falls under a different legal form of employment which means employers are no longer obliged to pay the statutory minimum wage and are able to hire public workers at a lower wage rate (Bördös 2015: 70, Tausz et al 2016: 326-327). The new minimum wage for public workers is declared through government decrees and is around the 80% of the net minimum wage² (Bördös 2015: 70-71, Közfoglalkoztatás 2019). It is also subject to numerous deductions like any other paid work, such as tax, health care and labor market contribution (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019). Participants of the public work program are not protected under the Labor Code and have limited labor rights (Albert 2015: 3). This lack of protection can affect for example the number of holidays participants can take.

² In 2019 the net payment of public worker was 54 217 HUF/ month (around 170 EUR), for those who have completed high school it was 70 859 HUF/ month (around 220 EUR) (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019)

Under the new law, participants are obliged to accept any job offers even if the jobs are below their education level. Those who decline to take the public work or delegated jobs that are offered, will have to face serious sanctions: they will receive reduced amount of benefit, will be removed from the unemployment registry and will not be allowed to take part in public work programs (Bördös 2015: 71).

Local relations shape public work programs significantly. Although, the scheme is based on centralized redistribution, it is mixed with decentralized elements because the implementation of the program and the allocation of the resources are in the hand of the local authorities which can lead to the development of local variations of the scheme (Gerő et al 2019: 4). Local settings can significantly influence public work implementation along ethnic and class lines. In this way, the program can contribute to increased power imbalances (Kovai 2016: 138). Local authorities are allowed to check the level of cleanliness of the jobseekers'/unemployed people's house and the surrounding area. They can also monitor whether the beneficiaries' children regularly attend school and ban participants from the program if they do not fulfill these requirements (Bördös 2015: 71). Thus, the behavioral conditions of public work go beyond the public sphere.

a. Recent trends in the public work scheme

Since the beginning of the program, the number of public work participants increased until the end of 2016 when it peaked at over 200 thousand participants (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019) Since January 2017, a steady decline can be observed. According to the most recent statistical data, there were around 120 thousand public workers in January 2019 (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019).

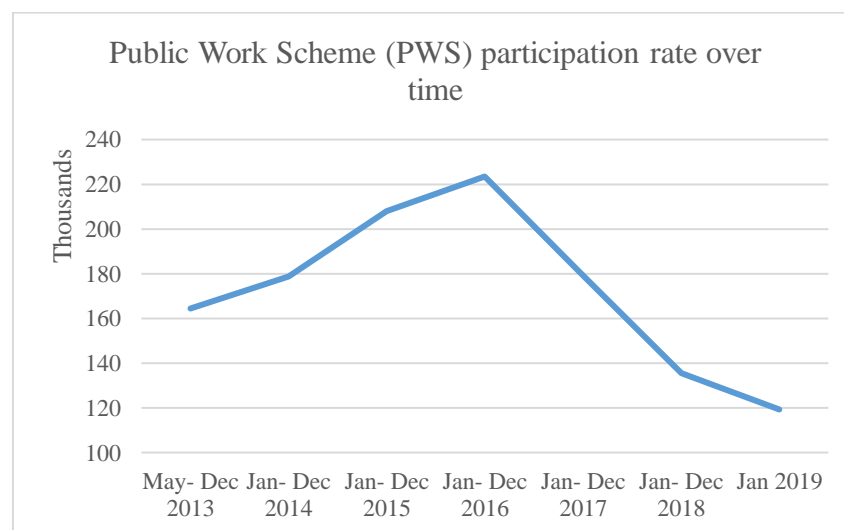


Figure 1: Public Work Scheme (PWS) participation rate over time (2013-2019), figure calculated based on Ministry of Interior (BM) data (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019)

It is important to highlight that the number of male and female participants did not decrease at the same rate. Initially, there were almost 40 percent more male participants than female, but the numbers started to equalize in 2016 with eventually the unfolding of a reversed trend in September 2016 when the number of women participants overtook that of men (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019). This new trend of feminization of public work continues steadily ever since. In January 2019, there were 38 percent more female participants country-wide (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019).

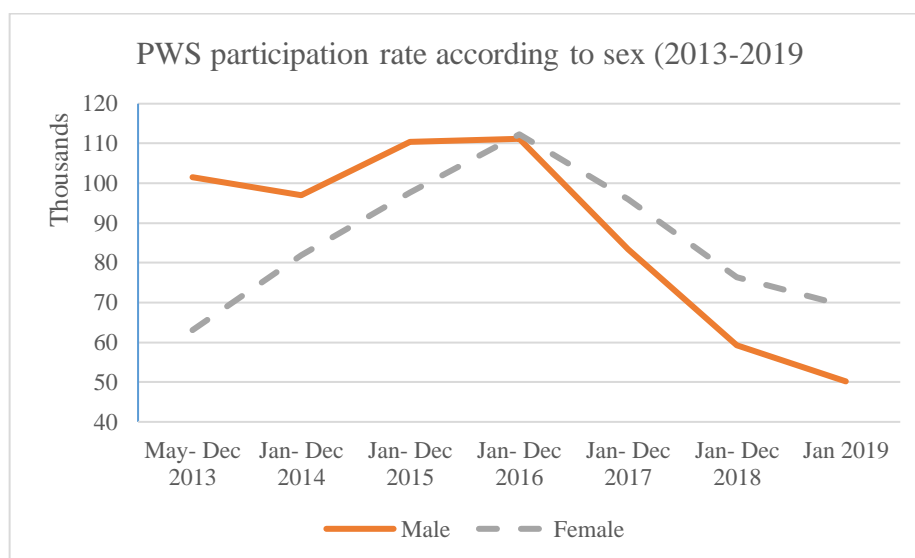


Figure 2: PWS participation rate according to sex (2013-2019), figure calculated based on Ministry of Interior (BM) data (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019)

1.3 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the barriers women and Roma minorities face within the labor market. While labor market segmentation, lack of part-time work arrangements and leave policies influence women's position in the labor market, geographical location, educational attainment and labor market discrimination continue to shape Roma people's experience. Due to accumulated disadvantage, Roma minority is expected to be overrepresented in the public work scheme which is characterized by increased feminization. The restructuring of the public work program led to the decrease of the wages which was accompanied by the decrease of the duration of unemployment benefits. Public work employment is tied to various conditions some of these interfere with the private sphere. Although public work is based on a centralized redistribution system, local authorities are able to decide on the allocation of resources which can lead to power imbalances based on the local settings.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodology behind the data collection. My findings were based on qualitative analysis, I conducted interviews in April 2019 with 18 people altogether in two cities located in different counties.

In this chapter, I discuss the way I accessed the research site and the process of research design and interviewing. I provide an overview of the demographics of my interviewees and the two cities they live in. Lastly, I address some of the limitations of this project.

2. 1 Accessing the site

One of the biggest challenges of this research was to find participants. This was partially because of my class position and geographical location. Me or my family do not know any public workers, so I have contacted various people who are involved in social work or journalism in order to put me in touch with public workers. Many public workers I have contacted expressed concerns regarding interviews. Most of the time the reason was that people were afraid that they will lose their job if they talk with me. It was explained to me by the participants who did not want to take part in the interviews that public work is competitive, and people already consider themselves lucky to be selected. They do not want to lose their jobs because it is very difficult to get by with the unemployment replacement benefit.

Eventually, I was directed to a charitable organization in Pest County that employs five public workers. My entry point was through a social worker who was responsible for giving tasks to public workers. This characterized the way I got into other sites as well, I relied on the help of the management in different organizations to find participants. I originally planned to use snowball sampling, but people were not familiar with public workers who worked at different organizations. Through the three managers I talked with, I was able to find 15 participants. Names of the participants have been changed to ensure anonymity and protect their privacy. I also decided not to include the name of the cities in the thesis to avoid any negative repercussion participants could face for taking part in this study. I refer to the two cities based on the county they are located in.

2. 2 Research design and interview process

In order to assess the experience of public work participants, I conducted semi-structured interviews. Before the interviews, I prepared a guide (Lofland et al 1995: 78) with possible questions in Hungarian language, mainly focusing on participants' employment history, experience with current employment and daily routine. I also prepared a participant information sheet which summarized the purpose of my research, what participation in the research entails and what happens with the data I gather.

I completed all the interviews during my participants' working hours. The interviews were 30 minutes long in average with some taking only 20 minutes while others a bit over 40 minutes. Men and those working outside tended to talk less. As I was introduced to the participants through their managers, this arrangement was approved by them.

The interviews took place in outdoor as well as indoor settings depending on the role of the public worker. In all cases, I was able to come and go any time, but I preferred to stick with a group of people throughout their whole working day. As a result, I have accumulated some fieldnotes. Before interviewing people, I tried to spend some time with them, so they would feel more comfortable talking to me. I also did not leave after the interviews but chatted more with my participants. I often offered to help with various errands, but most of the times I was refused politely. Despite of this, I was able to help to package and coat some cookies, distribute school meals, play with children and pick up some trash.

During the interviews, I tried to separate the participants from other colleagues and managers. When I talked with public workers who were involved with city maintenance, we usually sat down on a bench in the shadow far from other people. However, the work of these people was more closely monitored, so the manager resurfaced from time to time. If the manager was too close I either stopped the interview or diverted the topic towards daily life. It was much easier to talk in private with those who worked indoors because we could sit down in a separate room. In one case, a women's 7-year-old grandchild was in the room throughout the interview. She interrupted us few times to show us her drawings. Two of the women I interviewed were involved with baking during our interview. I originally did not plan to interview the managers but decided on my first day that it would be useful to incorporate their experience into the analysis because they were able to provide information about overall patterns of public employment in their specific organization.

All of my interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. Before turning on the recording, I went through the participant information sheet with the

interviewees. I reassured them that their name and location will be protected and informed them that they do not have to answer every question that I ask and we can end the interview any time (Lofland et al 1995: 84- 85). I took notes throughout the interview process but listened actively to my interviewees' stories. I listened to the audio recordings the same day of the interviews, made detailed notes and transcribed certain parts. I also completed my fieldnotes after each day. In the evenings, I revised the interview guide and added extra questions based on previous interviews.

2. 3 Demographics of the interviewees

The counties where I have conducted research are characterized by low level of public work employment. In 2016, Pest county had 1.3 percent public work employment rate³ while Komárom-Esztergom county had 2.4 percent. Eight counties, mainly in East and Northeastern Hungary, had around 10 percent public work employment rate or higher with Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county having the highest rate at 16.2 percent (Bakó et al 2016: 25). In the first quarter of 2019, the city in Pest county where I completed my interviews, had a 0.67 percent public work employment rate while this number was 0.45 percent in the city located in Komárom-Esztergom county (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019). The employment rate was 70.6 percent in Pest county and 71.5 in Komárom-Esztergom county. Unemployment rates were low, around 2 percent (KSH 2018). This is better than the national average that I have introduced in the previous chapter.

The share of the Roma population is relatively low in both of the cities. The city in Pest county had 4.3 percent Roma population while this was 1.8 percent in the city located Komárom-Esztergom (KSH 2011). Eastern and Northeastern counties had more than 30 percent rate of Romani people (KSH 2011) and public work is often the only employment opportunity in that region. This was not the case in the cities where I completed the interviews. Both had some local and nearby work opportunities for low-skilled labor.

I conducted interviews with 15 public work participants. In Pest county, I talked with nine Roma women altogether. Four of them worked in a charitable organization and one used to work there but became a full-time employee, so she was no longer a public worker. Four other participants worked for a city maintenance company. Four women were in their mid-or-late 50s and had various health issues that limited their ability to work and/or to travel while five women were around 30 and had younger children. Most of the women completed

³ Share of public workers among the active population

elementary school, one of them graduated from high school and completed the school leaving exam⁴ [érettségi].

In Komárom-Esztergom county, I interviewed six people: two women and four men. One male participant had Roma ethnic background. All of the interviewees had a profession and one female has completed the school leaving exam. All of the male interviewees were involved in public maintenance roles while the females worked at the local government office. Three of the men were in their late 50s and two of them fell out of the labor force due to health reasons. One man and one woman lost their job because their workplace closed down. There was one man in his late 20s who was not employed before and had a disability. One of the females was in her 40s while the other was over 50 years old.

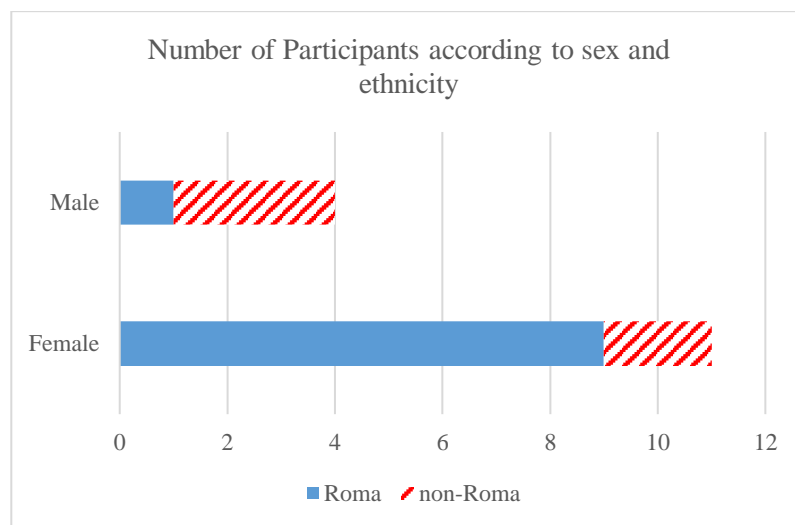


Figure 3: Number of participants according to sex and ethnicity

2. 4 Limitations

As mentioned in the beginning, I found all of my participants through the help of their managers. This could have affected the information people decided to share and exclude. They might have been afraid to complain or point out certain issues. My relationship with the managers could have influenced the way participants related to me and how they framed their experience. To mitigate this problem, I tried to spend as much time with the participants as possible. I stayed with them after my interviews and visited my participants again when I was conducting the interviews with others. However, my ability to establish good relations with my participants was limited by the length of the available research period. As I am not part of the Roma community, my position as an outsider also shaped the interviews with Roma

⁴ Exam at the end of high school. It is also a prerequisite for university education.

people. Roma people rarely brought up the labor market discrimination that they face. Some of them said that they were not differentiated because they did not look or behave like the Roma minority while others shared stories about the discrimination their children go through.

Another limitation of the thesis is the location bias. As demonstrated above, public work employment is not as significant in these cities as in some other ones. According to the participants, labor market opportunities are good, there are available jobs locally or nearby. As discussed in the previous chapter, due to the decentralized implementation of the program, there are local variations of public work employment. This means that my research does not provide a general account of public workers experience. Public work participants could have a very different experience in other counties. However, the aim of the research was not to make generalization, but to gain knowledge and understanding about how public workers perceive their experience in a specific local context.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

This thesis aims to assess the effectiveness of the Hungarian public work program. In order to understand the nature and characteristics of the program, it has to be situated within the literature of active labor market policies (ALMP). In the section below, I will identify the debate around the classification of ALMPs and argue that public work programs combine the human capital investment and incentive-based approach. I argue that the Hungarian public work program is unable to reintegrate public work participants into the labor market due to the lock-in effect. In addition, public work can be considered as a precarious type of employment as it is based on a fixed-term contract and wages that are decoupled from minimum wage legislation. This means that public work programs reinforce the dualization of the labor market and create a secondary sector with less secure jobs. Women and ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented in this secondary sector as they do not comply with the ideal worker norm, thus, it is crucial to highlight their experience. In this way, public work becomes a new pink-collar type of employment that allows women to overcome the conflict of family and work life. Women's work-care decision is influenced by the ideal worker norm and the division of labor at home which the public work scheme leaves unchallenged.

3.1 Classification of ALMPs: workfare as a combination of human capital investment and incentive-based approach

Active labor market policies are different types of labor market intervention measures that aim to make unemployment spells as short as possible by proactively helping jobless people to reenter the labor market (Bonoli 2012: 181). Thus, ALMP is an umbrella term that can include a broad variety of policies such as training, job search assistance, unemployment subsidies, work experience placement programs or public sector job creation programs (Bonoli 2012: 181). Some authors also include sanctions and benefit conditionality as part of the ALMP tools or package (Kluve 2006). As a result, active labor market policy is a particularly broad category of social policy (Bonoli 2012: 183), there are various ways to classify or categorize ALMP measures. In order to analyze a single ALMP tool, it is important to identify which category it belongs to. Therefore, I will explore some of the

categorization and identify where workfare, more concretely where public work programs belong.

There are various scholars who make a differentiation between ALMPs based on targeting the demand or supply side of the labor market. For example, Eichhorst refers to this division as “enabling” and “demanding” elements with the “enabling” tools aiming to improve human capital and the “demanding” tools tying negative incentives to social assistance (Eichhorst et al 2008: 6). In a similar vein, Torfing distinguishes between “offensive” and “defensive” workfare with the former referring to human capital investment and the latter to a variety of sanctions and benefit reductions (Torfing 1999: 9). Thus, many authors clearly separate two distinct dimensions of the ALMP and create a dichotomy between human capital investment and incentive-based approach which does not allow to identify and assess tools that are intersecting. Barbier and Ludwig-Mayerhoffer address this problem to a certain level. Despite the fact that they identify two distinct ideal-types of activation along the above discussed distinction criteria: liberal type and universalistic type, they also mention the possibility of a third type that mixes the elements from both human capital investment and conditionality (Barbier et al 2004: 427). This is important for understanding that certain ALMP tools are able to combine both approach in a single measure. The Hungarian workfare regime is said to combine these two approaches by making benefit reception conditional on the participation of the public work program (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019). Thus, in order to analyze the workfare regime, it is crucial to challenge the dichotomies and acknowledge the intersecting nature of active labor market policies.

3.2 Hungarian public work program: an ineffective way to reincorporate the unemployed into the labor market

Workfare programs are specific types of ALMPs that link welfare provision to participation in public work, job seeking activities or employment placements (Kálmán 2015: 42). The system originates from the United States where provision of benefits was tied to useful work for the public in the 1970s (Kálmán 2015: 44, Keller et al 2016: 13, Kildal 2001: 3). However, from the 1990s increasingly more developed countries witnessed a transition towards workfare state, a shift away from unconditional entitlement towards higher emphasis on conditions and obligations tied to benefits (Lødemel et al 2001: xi).

In the United Kingdom, workfare policies are criticized for giving incentives for “creaming” and “parking” practices. “Creaming” refers to the providers’ behavior that places

more attention to claimants with less labor market barriers (Carter et al 2015: 279, Rees et al 2014: 225). Thus, certain participants that are perceived to be more employable are selected and given more support. On the contrary, “parking” describes a behavior that neglects individuals who are deemed to be unlikely to be reintegrated into the labor market (Carter et al 2015: 279, Rees et al 2014: 225).

Other workfare programs have been criticized for lacking targeting methods, not being systematic and failing to channel resources to intended beneficiaries (Acosta et al 2016: 9, Kluve et al 2002: 413). Different types of programs have different short, medium and long-term effects on different groups, while some bring advantage to specific groups, they are unable to address the needs of others (Martin et al 2001: 25, Messing 2013: 7).

These problems that are identified in the broader literature are also present and visible in the Hungarian public work program. Various authors agree that one of the least successful program types is the public work programs that typically offer short-term employment by the government (Albert 2015: 4, Cseres-Gergely et al 2014: 147, Escudero 2018: 2, Messing 2013: 7). I argue that the Hungarian public work program is not only ineffective in its mission to reintegrate the jobless into the labor market, but it also serves as a punitive system for more vulnerable groups such as women or ethnic minorities.

Similarly to the earlier discussed “parking” effect in the UK, the Hungarian public work program was criticized for its lock-in effect which refers to the phenomenon when public workers are stuck in the program and there is no possibility to move back to the labor market (Albert 2015: 4, Cseres-Gergely et al 2014: 147, Kálmán 2015: 49). Others identified problems beyond the lack of labor market reincorporation and criticized the program for its paternalistic nature arguing that certain behavioral conditions that the enrollment to public work program entails decreases individual autonomy and agency (Szikra 2014, Tausz et al 2016: 345). Thus, it is important to highlight that the public work scheme serves as control mechanism and does not solve problems of insecurity and vulnerability. Participants might be shielded from the shocks that the labor market is subject to, but they are exposed to new sources of insecurity.

Recent analysis also draws attention to the increasing number of women involved in the program (Busch et al 2017: 194) which signals the feminization of public work in the long-term. This leads to the question of why women take up public work program more often than men. Is it because of discrimination in the labor market? Is it because of women’s duties within the household? Is it because of their status as mothers? Data on public work is often not sex-disaggregated. The observation that increasingly more women are participating in this

scheme draws attention to the importance of different social categories when assessing the effectiveness of the policy. However, the lack of recognition in the available data renders women and their experience invisible. Therefore, the aim of my research is to contribute to the literature by examining whether female public workers have different experience than men and if so, how do these experiences diverge and what are the reasons behind the developing trend of feminization of this particular type of work.

In the next section, I will explore the literature on neoliberal policies and precarious employment, gender and work and the dualization of the labor market. Other social categories that I would like to bring into the discussion is class and ethnicity. It is crucial to address ethnicity when assessing labor market patterns in Hungary as the Roma ethnic group was affected disproportionality by unemployment after the collapse of the socialist regime (Kertesi 2004) and the effects of this massive layoff are still visible today.

3.3 Public work as a form of precarious employment

As discussed previously, ALMP tools were crucial to address unemployment, but what are the reasons for increased insecurity within the labor market? I argue that certain neoliberal policies weakened employment protection and generated insecurity and therefore precarious forms of employment. In the recent decades, more and more full-time workers lost their job involuntarily (Kalleberg 2008: 2), regular employment in stable jobs is being replaced by flexible forms of employment (Beck 1992: 140). Workers today are expected to switch jobs and employers more frequently, they tend not to spend their entire career with a single employer (Williams et al 2012: 16). This trend is connected to the rise of neoliberal policies, retrenchment of the welfare state and dismantling of the social security system. Neoliberal policies emphasize the importance of free market and therefore encourage deregulation, flexibilization and liberalization of the labor (Repo 2016: 314). In addition, austerity policies are often implemented as a way to reduce fiscal deficit (Brenner et al 2009: 210). These policies can be observed in Hungary from the 1990s when the transformation to market economy was accompanied by massive privatization which drove down the wages of workers (Stanojević 2014: 5) and led to an increase in unemployment (Kertesi 2004). Thus, these neoliberal policy packages make the workforce more vulnerable and can lead not only to wage-decline but also to more flexible hiring and firing practices. They cause an increased insecurity within the labor market and an increase in precarious forms of employment.

Definitions of precarious work tend to focus on its contractual status - meaning it involves temporary employment rather than permanent (MacDonald 2009: 168) - but precarious work can also entail other forms of increased vulnerability, such as reduced access to various kind of benefits, more specifically paid sick leave, pension schemes or unemployment insurance (Cazes et al 2015: 147). In addition, it is important to highlight that precarity has pervasive consequences, it does not only affect the nature of work and people's work experience but also their social relations (Kalleberg 2008: 2).

Although public work program participants in Hungary are entitled to social insurance and old-age pension (Közfoglalkoztatás 2018), I argue that public work can be seen as a precarious form of employment because of the contractual status and the salary which is below the minimum wage. While the minimum wage increased, the wage of public workers did not change in the past three years (Közfoglalkoztatás 2018). The decoupling of public workers' wage from minimum wage is possible due to the different legal status of public work (Közfoglalkoztatás 2018) which means that labor market discrimination and segmentation is institutionalized (Tardos 2015: 36). During my research, I found that public work is a precarious form of employment because contracts can end unexpectedly, and it affects social relations differently based on whether workers are completing work in an outdoor or an indoor setting.

The above-mentioned economic effects of neoliberal policies are often discussed in negative relations with state power, the state is assumed to have less influence (Ong 2006: 3). However, neoliberal policies can be also viewed as a new technology of government that rationalizes self-governing (Ong 2006: 3, Repo 2016: 309). This means that neoliberal policies produce specific subjects. These subjects inhibit economic individualism that emphasizes personal responsibility for work (Kalleberg 2008: 3). This idea is echoed in the concept of workfare regime in which responsibility for unemployment is individualized. Behavioral conditions are used to impose self-regulation on the subjects but at the same time surveillance mechanisms are incorporated in the system to punish non-complying individuals. For example, if supervisors are dissatisfied with the performance of a public worker, they can be excluded from the social security system for up to three years (Tardos 2015: 36).

Wacquant argues that in the era of fragmented and discontinuous wage work, the combination of workfare and prisonfare (expansion of penal control) facilitate the increasingly punitive management of the poor and creates a double regulation that intersects with race (Wacquant 2009: 14-15). Together they serve not only to encourage work but to manage the misbehaving the poor. There is an emphasis on personal responsibility which

does not only deflect the state's role to aid the marginalized but also prescribe an obligation to be a compliant worker (Wacquant 2009: 8, 101). In this way, workfare is not only a tool of control, but it also devalues unpaid activities and only acknowledges work in the labor market. Thus, workfare is also gendered because it overlooks work that is typically done by women, but it also ignores the fact that women are more likely to be welfare benefit recipients. In the end, workfare does not enhance social mobility and continue to exclude certain groups from the labor market, locking them into poverty eventually (Wacquant 2010).

3.4 Public work as a strategic tool to achieve work-life balance

As women represent a significant proportion of the workforce it is important to discuss their concerns about paid employment. Women's increasing involvement in paid work was not accompanied by the redistribution of domestic work (Brines 1994: 652, Guerreiro et al 2007: 191, Hochschild et al 1989, Pedulla and Thébaud 2015: 116, Perrons et al 2007: 133). As a result, female workers are often torn between work and family obligations (Kelly 2010: 292). This phenomenon is often referred to as the stalled revolution (Hochschild et al 1989), signaling that certain inequalities between women and men remain intact despite advancements. Women's involvement in the labor market led to the development of the "double day", a second shift at home (Szalai 1972, Hochschild et al 1989: 52). To overcome this problem a debate emerged about the ways family life and paid work can be reconciled. Work-life balance or work-family conflict literature proposes solutions about this issue.

The research I conducted contributes to this scholarly debate and argues that women use public work as a strategic tool to combine work and family responsibilities. Their decision is shaped not only by their contextual circumstances but also structural and relational aspect of the work-life balance policies. The public work scheme provides individualized solution for housework and childcare problems and it not only overlooks but reinforces the structures that pushes individuals into a precarious position. In this way, public work schemes attempt to mask unequal labor market opportunities while reinforcing the ideal worker norm and neoliberal agenda of individual responsibility.

3.5 Meaning of work

Before delving into the literature of work-life balance, it is important to briefly discuss few reasons behind the motivation to work. Money is one of the major reasons why people work but paid employment is also important to maintain a sense of self and it also

offers opportunities of socialization (Perrons et al 2007: 145, Rosso et al 2010: 96, Weeks 2011). Lips- Wiersma et al argue that there are four core dimensions of meaningful work: belongingness, expressing potential or talent, contributing to the well-being of others and developing an inner self (Lips- Wiersma et al 2016: 536). The dimensions individuals find meaningful varies across occupations, but workers employ different strategies to express their strength and frame their experience (Lips- Wiersma et al 2016: 544, Rosso et al 2010: 98). In this way, even undesirable, so-called “dirty jobs” can gain meaning by refocusing and reframing experience (Lips- Wiersma et al 2016: 537). Most recently, Kispéter argued that self-realization, financial independence and escaping housework were among the reasons why women with younger children went back to work in Hungary (Kispéter 2019). This happens in a context when home is increasingly perceived as a stressful place, another job and not a place where one can relax (Hochschild 1997: 25). Paid work provides a relief from domestic duties, it allows individuals to feel not only appreciated but also competent (Hochschild 1997: 26). In this way, the distinction between work and home are blurred.

3.6 Agents of work-life balance decisions: a combination of structural and relational factors influencing women’s decision

According to Hakim’s preference theory women’s work-life balance decision is based on their preference for a specific lifestyle: work-centered, home-centered or a mixture of this two (Hakim 2000). However, I argue that contextual circumstances, structural and relational factors intersect with each other and influence the way women make work-care decision. Hungarian female public workers are pushed out of the labor market due to their caretaking responsibilities and in this specific context, they opt for public work scheme employment. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are various social policies in Hungary that aim to overcome the conflict of work and family life. However, these are not accessible for women who work in low paid jobs or in the informal sector which are characterized by long working hours, rotating schedules and flexible hiring and firing practices. As a result, the ideal worker norm polices women into a precarious position in the labor market as public workers and reinforces the male breadwinner model and women’s primary role in the domestic sphere.

Work-life balance decisions can be differentiated based on four different influential agents: the state, the workplace, networks of support and couples themselves (Guerreiro et al 2007: 193, Perrons et al 2007: 133).

The state can propose various policies, such as statutory parental leave or state provided subsidized day care facilities, to help parents overcome the conflict of work and

family life (Crompton et al 2007: 6, Williams 2000: 85). However, Repo argues that these policies can serve as a tool to both control and regulate women's productive and reproductive activities (Repo 2016: 324). In addition, passing these policies does not necessarily mean that workplaces implement them. Thus, it is important to analyze employment practices and workplace culture which also shape women's experience in the labor market.

Some argue that to achieve work-life balance, it is crucial to change organizational culture (Acker 1990, Lewis 1996: 9) and family-friendly policies of the state leave employment practices unchallenged (Kelly 2010: 282, Lewis 2001). Flexible work arrangements, such as part-time work, flextime or job sharing, are often considered as helpful employment practices for women. However, those in lower paid occupations usually have less discretion in the use of time, their working hours are closely monitored, and their pay is also related to hours worked (Perrons et al 2007: 147). Thus, flexible arrangements are not an option for many women and often thought as perks of certain type of jobs. Hochschild argues that even when flextime is an available option, many are afraid that using it would mean losing their job or they simply cannot afford to work shorter hours for less pay (Hochschild 1997: 23). However, flexible working hours are not necessarily beneficial for women because they leave the ideal worker norm unchallenged. They reinforce women's role as mothers and wives by adjusting the demands of employment to fit women's home duties, allow them to work reduced hours and take long leaves (Mandel 2006: 1911). As a result, intervention into women's working time creates sheltered labor markets for women but do not enhance their occupational and economic achievements (Mandel 2006: 1911). This is reflected in labor market segmentation and women's disproportionately high representation in traditionally female jobs that are characterized by lower pay (Gill et al 2015).

One of the relational factors influencing women's care-work decision are families and privately hired caretakers who can act as networks of support and help women to negotiate individual responsibilities. However, outsourcing care is not an option for those in low paid jobs and as discussed earlier they also cannot afford to opt out from the labor market and stay at home (Williams 2010: 42). Thus, women's decision to go back to work differs based on their class because lower-class women often have less opportunities and face more constraints when attempting to achieve the preferred balance of employment and family care (Crompton et al 2010: 10).

Lastly, couples are also important agents in combining work and family life. Gender ideology and attitudes towards sex roles define the division of labor at home. Three different type of approaches have been identified to combine work and family life based on sex roles:

egalitarian (dual earner/dual carer), transitional (one and a half earner) and traditional (male earner/female carer) (Hochschild et al 1989: 75, Wall 2007: 87). A traditionalist view or segmented approach is based on the idea of separate spheres (Guerreiro et al 2007, Lewis 2001: 21). According to this, men are seen as naturally more suited to the breadwinner role while women are seen as nurturers, naturally suited to homemaking (Williams 2010: 78). These ideas are closely connected to the ideal worker norm because they link masculine life patterns to paid work. Being a provider becomes integral part of being a good father (Correl et al 2007: 1298, Williams 2010: 80), masculinity is measured by the size of the paycheck (Williams 2000: 78). In addition, men's absence from the household perpetuates the view that only mothers are competent with children and it creates a maternal wall that pushes women with children to the domestic sphere (Williams 2000: 100, Williams 2010: 93). However, the maternal wall bias creates different expectations based on women's race (Williams 2010: 103). While white mothers are viewed more positively if they stay at home instead of working, the reverse was true for black mothers (Williams 2010: 103). This means that certain women are stigmatized for dropping out of the labor market. In the Hungarian context, this is an important observation because Roma people are often perceived as work-shy and Roma women's labor force participation has been traditionally lower than white women's (Kertesi 2004). Vincze argues that the higher proportion of Roma in the informal labor market demonstrates the differential and adverse type of incorporation of Romani people into the post-socialist economic system (Vincze 2015: 61). The precarious position of the Roma is linked to their personal and moral qualities and seen as result of their ethnicity and culture (Vincze 2015: 72). In this way, precarious position is accompanied by racialization.

The essentialist view that upholds the above-discussed separate spheres ideology is also reflected in the transitional approach, according to which women are the sole caretakers but the difference is that they are also expected to take part in paid employment. This is closely related to the idea of second shift at home which I discussed earlier. I argue that this transitional approach to combine work and family life was reflected in women's work-care decision and made public work more attractive for women.

3.7 Gendered organizations: prevalence of the ideal worker norm pushes women into precarious type of employment

As demonstrated above, one of the structural factors influencing work-care decisions are workplaces. Acker argues that organizations are gendered because they assume a particular

gendered organization of life based on gender-based division of labor (Acker 1990). As a result, the ideal worker is based on traditionally male characteristics which is difficult to achieve for women (Acker 1990). Men are seen as “naturally” more suited to jobs that require high levels of responsibility and authority and women are more suited to jobs that entail less commitment (Acker 1990: 149). Workplaces favor employees with little or no outside workplace commitments, someone who can prioritize work over family (Acker 1990, Brumley 2014: 799, Lewis 2001: 21, Williams et al 2012: 549). Thus, the ideal worker is clearly dependent on women’s invisible support at home (Kelly 2010: 294).

The masculine norms that characterize the labor market are present in job designs that discriminate against women on the basis of their inability to combine family work with paid employment (Williams 2000: 65). On the one hand, certain jobs are suited to male bodies due to equipment design or physical strength the specific tasks require (Williams 2000: 79). On the other hand, masculine social norms manifested in employment practices or policies, such as work schedules and sick leave policies, create expectations that favor men (Brumley 2014: 801). Jobs with rotating schedules and nonstandard or unsocial working hours create a problem in the arrangement of day care (Williams 2000: 80, Williams 2010: 46) and the resolution of these rests primarily with women. Scheduling is an important factor in keeping women in traditional women’s work, in so-called pink-collar jobs such as administrative work or teaching (Williams 2000: 82). In this way, it is clear that gender is an important factor that informs various practices in the labor market, such as promotion, hiring and firing (Brumley 2014: 801, Williams 2010: 42). Motherhood becomes a status characteristic that causes biased evaluation of mothers. It triggers negative assumptions about commitment and competence which are in sharp tension with the ideal worker role (Correl et al 2007: 1301, Williams 2010: 92). This is the so-called motherhood penalty which claims that parental status disadvantages women but not men (Correl et al 2007: 1335).

I argue that women’s decision to participate in public work schemes takes place in a context where workplace practices are governed by the ideal worker norm. The labor market is characterized by a punitive system that forces women with caretaking responsibilities out. Public work is a new form of pink-collar job where family responsibilities are tolerated, and women’s inferior position is upheld. Dual labor market theory, which I will discuss next, explains why it is important to consider that women are employed in specific and inferior sectors.

3.8 Outside the primary labor market: the effect of public work on dual labor market

Although there is an increase in precarious forms of employment, it is important to acknowledge that different jobs have different level of precarity attached to them. The concept of dual labor market has been used to differentiate between stable and unstable jobs (Kalleberg 2008: 5). According to this concept, uncertain jobs are positioned in a secondary labor market. This division within the labor market can be adapted to explain employment segregation (Gill et al 2015: 62). In this sense, the primary sector holds mainly ‘male’ and ‘white’ jobs, while the secondary sector is constituted of jobs taken up by females, older workers and ethnic minorities (Gill et al 2015: 62). The idea of sex segregation within the labor market can be connected to the previously discussed ideal worker norm. Jobs that require more responsibility suits men better while jobs with less commitment are more suitable for women (Acker 1990: 149). This leads to women being overrepresented in the secondary labor market and taking jobs that are not only less well-paid but also devalued (Gill et al 2015: 65). These jobs are often feminized as well as racialized. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that the dualization of the labor market leads to segmentation of workers into preconstituted groups with different rewards and opportunities (Gill et al 2015: 62).

The concept of dual labor market can also be adapted to describe public work schemes’ special position outside of the primary labor market. Tardos argues that the segregation of primary and secondary labor market came about due to public work (Tardos 2015: 35). The secondary labor market is the labor market of the local authority where public work employment takes place while the primary labor market refers to formal labor market (Tardos 2015: 35). In this sense, public work is not only separated from the labor market but also replicates the insecurity which was identified within the secondary labor market. With the trend of increasing number of female public workers (Busch et al 2017: 194), we see the feminization of this particular type of precarious work arrangement. However, there is a polarization among women based on their educational background which intersects with class and ethnicity. Unfortunately, the racial makeup of public workers is not available, but more than half of my interviewees identified as part of the Roma minority. It would be important to discover whether feminization and racialization is happening simultaneously. Due to the constraints of this project, I was not be able to collect sufficient data to determine the overall

ethnic dimension of public work, however, I aim to incorporate the experience of ethnic minorities which is often missing from the analysis.

3.9 Conclusion

In this literature review, I argued that the Hungarian public work scheme combines human capital investment and incentive-based approach of ALMPs in principle. I also demonstrated that public work programs are considered to be an ineffective way to resolve unemployment on the long-run. Due to its ineffectiveness and new sources of insecurity that the program creates, public work schemes can be considered as a form of precarious employment related to neoliberal policies. This is also reflected in the workfare regime in which responsibility for unemployment is individualized. I also argued that feminization of public work takes place in a specific context in which the ideal worker norm continues to dominate workplace culture and those in lower-paid jobs struggle to achieve work-life balance. This is connected to the dualization of the labor market. Public work programs replicate the patterns of the secondary labor market. Throughout the overview, the importance of social categories and intersecting identities was emphasized. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the literature by examining whether female public workers have different experience than men and if so, how do these experiences diverge. I also address the way gender, class and ethnicity complicate the experience of public workers.

Chapter 4: Public work as a strategic tool for women

Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, the Hungarian public work scheme is ineffective in reintegrating job seekers into the primary labor market. What is more, wages are decoupled from the statutory minimum wage and contracts are fixed-term but in many cases they can end abruptly. Due to these factors, public work is a form of precarious employment that contributes to the dualization of the labor market, the creation of a secondary labor market with badly paid, less secure jobs that women and ethnic minorities take up more often. Despite all of these disadvantages, we see an increased ratio of female public workers. This leads to the question of why women stay in the scheme, what does the program offer to them that men do not consider or benefit from. In this chapter, I argue that the public work is utilized as a work-life balance strategy by women.

The chapter is divided into two sections, one of them is focusing on the working hours and it demonstrates how predictable 8 to 4 working schedule allows women to do unpaid work: looking after children, cooking and cleaning. The other section looks at the leave policies public work offers and highlights that the public sector is more tolerant towards women's family responsibilities. Both sections identify the ideal worker norm (Acker 1990) as a barrier to women's employment in the private sector which eventually pushes them towards the public work scheme especially if they have younger children. This happens in the context of inflexible employment arrangements and expectation to work for long hours which makes it difficult for women to overcome the conflict of work and family life (Williams 2000: 82). Hence, I argue that public work assigns the double burden of paid and unpaid work to women while it leaves structural problems in the labor market unchallenged. This way it upholds the transitional family model (Hochschild et al 1989: 75) and reinforces inflexible work arrangements for both parents instead of providing a solution. Ultimately, public work does not challenge the structural and relation factors that influence work-care decisions (Crompton et al 2007: 6) and emphasizes individual responsibility.

4.1 Appealing working hours: “This job is good for me because of my little girl”

One of the earliest findings of my interviews was that it is almost impossible to get a hold of women after working hours. The women I talked with all quoted plans after work which were often related to family life and children. Anna, who works as a social worker in a charitable organization that employs five Roma female public workers, sees public work as an entry phase into the labor market after childbirth. Anna noticed that in the past three years there are lot more female public workers than men which she thinks is due to the fact that it is the only type of employment that these women are qualified to do and operates with the 8 to 4 working hours. According to Anna, there are a lot of job opportunities for women who take up public work in the city where she lives but due to their low educational attainment the majority of these available jobs for these women are seasonal or shift work which is characterized by uncertain working hours.

Care responsibilities combined with lower education lead to the exclusion of women from jobs in the primary labor market and the inclusion of them in a secondary labor market. Women are marginalized because they do not conform the norms of the ideal worker who is not constrained by domestic duties (Acker 1990). Women are unable to take up paid employment in the primary labor market because of the rigid work hours that cannot be reconciled with family life. One of the jobs that tolerates women’s family responsibilities is public work. This means that public work provides a work-life balance strategy for women with young children because the working hours allow women to pick up and drop off their children.

Cili, who is a 35 years old Roma female public worker responsible for keeping public spaces clean, describes the conflict of paid employment and caretaking responsibility with three kids, two of which are in kindergarten:

There are a lot of cleaning jobs but my problem with them is that I could take the girls to the kindergarten, but I would have to be at work from 2pm till 10pm... so again, this is another issue, who will take them home.

Similarly, Andi describes problems with picking up kids, but she also mentions that she receives no help from others: “I had to leave my job because of the little girl. I could not solve picking her up from the kindergarten. We finish at 9pm and the grandparents do not live here”. Andi is also a 35-year-old Roma woman who cleans public spaces, but she has four children among which one has recently started primary school. She used to work in a factory

that wraps sandwiches and liked her job, got along well with her colleagues but had to leave because she could not take her daughter to the bus station. It is clear from these accounts that women are the sole caretakers of children and their opportunities to get a job in the primary labor market decrease because there is no one they can rely on to take care of their children in their stead. Support networks are not available to negotiate the conflict of work and family (Guerreiro et al 2007: 193) which leads to women looking for other solutions. Williams argues that nonstandard working hours create a problem for women who are responsible for arranging day care for their kids (Williams 2000: 80, Williams 2010: 46). Thus, scheduling plays an important role in the exclusion or inclusion of women in certain positions. Fix and foreseeable working hours allow women to plan their day ahead and complete care responsibilities without receiving any help. Public work offers this opportunity but at the same time it reinforces the idea that it is women's role to take care of children and does not challenge the inflexible arrangements in the primary labor market that continue to push women towards more precarious jobs such as public work. It also upholds the ideal worker norm and does not encourage flexible arrangements for men either.

Another preference for public work among the interviewees was the close proximity of their workplace to the children's school or kindergarten. Managing travel between home, school and work is a complex task and the resolution of this lies primarily with women (Perrons et al 2007: 140). Spatial logistics may lead to withdrawal of women from the workforce (Perrons et al 2007: 140).

Linda, who is a 31-year-old Roma woman, used to be a cultural public worker⁵ and her duty was to look after children. Her workplace was near to where her own children go to nursery and kindergarten. During our discussion I asked her whether it is important to have a job where she can go home sooner, and she answered that: "even this is good for me... that I am here, and I can drop off and collect the kids. Of course, I would be happier if let's say I would work from 8am till 2pm but even this is manageable". Similarly, Cili, a Roma public worker with three children two of whom are kindergarten age, highlighted the importance of having a job locally. She said that she specifically applied for her current position because it was nearby:

⁵ Cultural public worker (*kulturális közfoglalkoztatott/ kiemelt közfoglalkoztatott*) is someone who has completed the school leaving exam (*érettségi*) or has a diploma and employed in the position for which this qualification is required. They earn more than other public workers (52 thousand forints net payment) but their wage (71 thousand forints net payment) is still below the statutory minimum wage (99 085 forint and 129 675 for those who have higher qualification) (Közfoglalkoztatás 2019).

I applied to work here and thanks God they accepted me... because to travel [to a workplace] with train and things like that I cannot solve it. Because there are good workplaces, they give you a good wage, but I really cannot do them because of the kids.

Cili used to have a job in a chicken factory for four years before becoming a public worker but she was picked up at 6am by a company bus that drove her to her workplace. This early schedule caused a problem when her daughters started to attend kindergarten. As she did not receive any help from others, she decided to quit her job and started to work as a public worker the next month following her resignation.

The examples discussed above illustrate that the working schedule allows women to complete unpaid work: dropping off and collecting children or looking after them but it also helps them to complete housework. This also means that even when women are involved in the labor market, they remain responsible for household tasks. The second shift awaits at home (Hochshid et al 1989). Eszter, who is a Roma female public worker in her 30s and a mother of three, says that going home at 3pm – which is the usual time for those who are involved in city maintenance – allows her to complete domestic work, keep her yard clean and help her daughter with her homework. Similarly, Cili, who as I mentioned before also has three children, finds it impossible to continue to work 12 or 16 hours long after her children are born.

My working hours are from 7am to 3pm. After that I go home but I do not rest... I finish everything (housework) in two hours then I get on my bike and pick up the children from the kindergarten and my night shift starts: bathing the kids, giving them food and tidying up after them... there is no stopping until 9 or 10pm... so working for 12 or 16 hours would be too much next to the children because I would have to do the washing, cooking and cleaning the same way.

When women discussed these duties at home, their husbands rarely came up in the conversation. This invisibility shows men's lack of involvement with care and domestic work, it also signals a transitional model in arranging work and family life according to which women remain the main caretakers despite their paid employment (Hochschild et al 1989: 75). However, women did not seem to expect help from men. Although there were participants whose husband worked in another city during the weekdays and only came home at the weekends, women strongly felt that care and domestic responsibilities are their duties and something natural for them to do. When I asked Cili who has a teenage son whether he helps with housework her answer was "...he is a boy, he does not do things like that. To hang up the washing... no, no, no... that is not for him". This statement reflects that women feel it

would be unnatural for men to take part in housework. Similarly, when Linda described taking care of her ill child, she emphasized that the child needs his mother at those times, even the father would not be able to cater the sick child's needs. Therefore, attitudes towards sex roles shape the division of labor at home which affect women's work preference. Men are seen as naturally suited for the breadwinner role and women for homemaking (Williams 2010: 78). To cope with work around the house, women take public work jobs. This strategy upholds the ideal worker norm, because it does not challenge inflexible work arrangements and facilitates men's long working hours. Public work is a new type of pink-collar job that leaves structural problems of work-family conflict intact and advocates individual solutions.

This was also reflected in the attitude of women public workers who were in their mid-50s. These women had children who were grown-ups and have already started their own family. Márta, who is a Roma woman living together with her daughter and granddaughter, mentioned numerous times - while she was baking in the kitchen of a charitable organization that employed her as public worker - that she needs to get home at 5pm to take over from her daughter.

Márta: I help my daughter because she is divorced as well. I will go home around 5pm and I will take over from her because she goes to work in the afternoon or evening hours.

Me: So that means she works in two shifts?

Márta: Yes, and she is able to do that because I help her out.

The above quote illustrates that women's family responsibility does not necessarily disappear once their children get older and public work can be utilized to take over caretaking responsibilities and help a family member take up a job that otherwise they could not. Márta also said that it is helpful for her daughter that she does not have to work during the weekends because she can have a part-time job for the weekends at a Gyros place close to them. Thus, family members can help to overcome the conflict of family and work life (Guerreiro et al 2007: 193). In this specific case, the domestic division of labor depends on the arrangement between mother and her adult daughter. This type of negotiation is crucial when the male breadwinner is absent because it helps to manage the burden of paid work, child rearing and housework (Utrata 2011: 617). Katika, who is also a Roma woman in her 50s, mentioned that her boss allows her to leave earlier from her public maintenance job if her daughter-in-laws need help looking after the children. She has 13 grandchildren altogether and looks after couple of them every day. Thus, public work provides a work-life balance strategy not only for

grandmothers, but it contributes to the work-life balance of women who rely on their help.

There were cases when the public workers themselves were able to do extra paid work due to their work hours. Anna said that in 2014 when there were more male public workers, they often did casual work after their official working hours. This extra payment was very important to supplement the low wages. Similarly, László, a middle-aged man whose job is to organize and supervise public workers who are doing city maintenance work, says that those who were motivated and in a good health were able to go to private houses and earn some extra money from doing various errands, such as pruning, grass cutting or planting. This signals that men do not have domestic and care responsibilities and are able to take jobs that have longer and/ or varying working hours. Hence, it is easier for men to conform to the ideal worker norm due to women's invisible support at home (Acker 1990, Kelly 2010: 294). In addition, the lack of involvement can also demonstrate the pressure men as main breadwinners face to support their family financially with a job that is characterized by low payment and uncertain contract duration.

Zsuzsi, who is a non-Roma single mother in her 40s, has been working as a porter under a public work contract since 2010. She says that the working hours were important when her now 18-year-old daughter was younger, but she also highlights that the pay is very little. However, opposed to her previous job in a food store, which she left because her employer refused to declare her work hours properly, she is able to do casual jobs during the weekend.

...because I am bringing up my daughter alone I could not go anywhere (after leaving my job)... and there was a vacancy here for a porter position. The working hours are from 7.30am till 4pm after that I can go home, do the housework, talk with my daughter and help her. ...I have a friend who I visit during the weekends... they have a big garden and I help her out.

Zsuzsi was only able to do this extra work when her daughter was older. She considered herself lucky because her husband paid child support, she did not have any loans and lived in a smaller apartment where the gas bills were low. She stayed in this job even after her daughter got older because she has frequent panic attacks that hinders her mobility. Thus, her options initially were limited because of her family responsibilities but when these lessened, her health did not allow her to take up a different job.

Inflexible working arrangements do not only cause a problem when women have caretaking responsibilities, but it is also an issue for those whose health is deteriorated.

When I asked my interviewees, who had younger children, whether they are looking for a different job, they all said no but they expressed a desire to look for something else once the kids are more independent. Andi said that “this job is good for me because of my little girl” and that she is not planning to look for a new job unless her daughter is older and able to go to school on her own. Thus, women postpone their job search because of the conflict of available jobs and family responsibilities and use public work strategically while their children are small. The family tax break also contributes to the appeal of public work and delay in reentering the labor market. Although public work is decoupled from the statutory minimum wage, it is still a type of formal employment. This means that workers are entitled to a refund which they are unable to claim in the informal sector. My interviewees highlighted that this means that an additional 10 thousand forint per children up to three children. As a result, someone with three children can earn around 60 percent more than someone who does not have children under the age of 18. This improvement in the overall cash transfer makes the job more appealing for women with young children and mitigates the low wage that is not suitable to support a family.

In contrast to the women I interviewed, men stressed their hopeless attempts to find a new job in the primary labor market. They seemed to be very frustrated and tired of trying, they were not satisfied with their current work position as public workers whose main duty was to maintain and clean the public spaces of a city. While women expressed their dissatisfaction with the wages through complaining about the amount and wishing it was higher, men found the “laughable amount” offensive. This difference in the attitude suggests that earning well, being a provider is integral part of being a man and masculinity is measured by the size of one’s paycheck (Williams 2000: 78). In this way, public work takes away men’s identity as the main provider. Although three of the men I interviewed were in their mid or late-50s, close to retirement age, none of them thought about public work as a temporary strategy to earn money and contribute to pensions. On the contrary, women saw public work as a temporary solution that enables them to complete their care and domestic responsibilities. In addition, none of the interviewed men had family responsibilities, two of them were unmarried and childless and those who had kids did not have to take care of them as the children were already adults. Thus, men did not have a preference for specific working hours because of their lack of caretaking responsibilities. Their work options were limited due to different reasons, such as poor health. Flexible work arrangements or training for lighter jobs that can be done while sitting was also not available for men. Two of the men I interviewed, applied for a training program to operate forklift trucks, but none of them were

selected. This signals that although the Hungarian public work program claims to combine the incentive-based approach with the human capital approach to achieve labor market reintegration, training opportunities are not available. None of my interviewees attended training sessions and they claimed to have learned little or nothing through their public work job.

In sum, feminization of public work can be seen as a result of the working hours it entails which makes this type of job more appealing for women who have younger children. It was also demonstrated that the ideal worker norm is prevalent in lower paid jobs. Inflexible work arrangements and long working hours put women with domestic responsibilities at a disadvantage. The lack of help with family responsibilities and required travel for the workplace limits the work options of women. It is also clear that women consider public work as a temporary strategy to achieve work-life balance while their children are younger.

4. 2 Appealing leave policies: “If a child is ill, the mother needs to stay next to them”

Linda went on GYES after her son was born but could not return to her job when her son got older because they hired a new employee for her position. She took up another job but was shortly fired because the employer did not tolerate her family responsibilities. Eventually she became a cultural public worker. While on her contract she gave birth and was able to return to her workplace after she took 6 months of GYED and her son started to attend nursery. This shows that those who employ public workers are more tolerant and understanding towards personal matters, which is not the case in the competitive private sector. While the private sector reinforces the ideal worker norm, the public sector where public workers are technically employed allows space for negotiation and provides jobs for women where they are able to return after maternal leave. The higher leniency of those who employ public workers can be connected to the work socializing function of the scheme. In some cases, employers expect participants to stick to working hours and come to work regularly (Gerő et al 2019: 16).

Hajni, who helps children write their homework in the same organization as Linda, used to have a casual job as a truck loader. She is a 31-year-old Roma woman who is expecting a baby now. As a result, she expresses her relief that she is employed as a public worker because she is able to go on GYED unlike at her previous job which did not have this option. She has already discussed with her boss that she will come back when her child starts

attending nursery. She is eager to return to work and by no means she wants to drop out from the labor market.

Overall, public work allows women with lower education attainment to return to their job after giving birth and it also provides them a minimal amount of compensation throughout their maternal leave unlike casual, temporary or irregular jobs that the women I interviewed were often involved with.

Anna highlighted different leave policies that she thought were helpful for public work participants. These were sick leaves and holidays which were not available to many participants before as they worked informally.

Sick leave also contributes to the predictability of these jobs [public work] because if needed women can use their holidays or get sick pay. However, in the case of shift work and other types of unskilled work for which low education attainment is sufficient, the employer simply looks for a new employee if someone's kid is ill for too long.

Linda did experience this first-hand and talked about her former workplace where they fired her because her son's illness. Absenteeism often signals a lack of commitment which exacerbates the "motherhood penalty" that view women as less competent and committed (Correl et al 2007: 1301). Linda seemed to be agitated when recounting this experience and expressed her frustration in a raised voice.

What I do not understand is that they [employers] never had children before? Because this [firing someone] is not very nice... you obviously would not make up that your child is ill. If a child is ill, the mother needs to stay next to them. They would not stay with a stranger... To be exact, even my husband could not do anything with them.

This inflexibility leads to a vicious circle. Due to neoliberal policies that weakened the protection of the employees and uphold the ideal worker norm, women face layoffs because of work-family conflict (Williams 2010: 42). Even when flexible arrangements are available women either cannot afford to work shorter hours or afraid of using them due to the risk of being laid off (Hochschild 1997: 24). Among those of my interviewees who previously worked formally, when I asked about paid sick leave or holiday, women said that they rarely used them. Linda experienced that many mothers bring their kids to the nursery or kindergarten when they are already ill and because of this one of her children is ill every two weeks. As Linda puts it, "this is not because they [mothers] are bored but because they [employers] do not keep their workplaces [if they miss couple of days] or they need the money". Besides the inflexibility of employers to support women's responsibility outside of

work, it is also noticeable that the husband is not expected to help out. Public work allows women to continue to bear the double burden of paid and unpaid work instead of improving the conditions in the labor market that allows both parents more flexibility. It reinforces the transitional model for dividing work and domestic duties (Hochschild et al 1989: 75).

Eszter, who is my only female interviewee who never worked in the primary labor market before, started to work now because her kids are more independent. Two of them are attending primary school and one is in high school now. She says that public work helps her to get away from housework and it is a better option because of the kids.

... if God forbids there is a problem or something, I tell the boss and she lets me go home. I can also take a sick leave with the kids and with myself as well. We also have paid holidays which I can use in case the children are ill.

Thus, participants are not only able to take a leave when their kids are ill, but they are able to pick up their kids earlier if they are feeling unwell. This level of tolerance and flexibility is not available in the jobs they can take in the private sector.

Overall, public work mitigates the conflict of work and family life by providing maternal leave and letting women continue their work after return. It also allows women to look after their children when they are ill or even leave their work earlier in order to be able to collect their sick kids. However, it also encourages women to continue to be the main caretakers and places a double burden on them.

4. 3 Conclusion

All in all, this chapter argued that female public work participants use their job as a strategy to achieve work-life balance. The predictable 8 to 4 or, in the case of jobs that involved in the cleaning of public spaces, 7 to 3 working hours allowed women to send their children to care facilities and collect them. The preference towards this specific work schedule was stronger when women could not receive any help from other family members. Working hours also helped women to complete unpaid work after their job. Family responsibilities continued to characterize older female interviewees' after-work-schedule. They made use of the early finish by looking after grandchildren and helping another family member to take up a job that otherwise they could not. In this way, taking up public work can help to negotiate the work-life balance strategy of another family member. It was also clear that women postpone or put job search on hold while their children are young, but plan to return to the primary labor market once the kids are more independent.

Another perceived advantage of my participants was connected to the leave policies. It was emphasized that public work not only offers maternal leave but also offers the possibility to return to one's position once their child is older. Sick leave and paid holidays were also important for women to support their children if they are unwell which was not typically available at unskilled jobs. The increased flexibility of the employer and tolerance of family responsibilities allowed public workers to leave work on a short notice if their children were unwell. This provided a certain sense of safety for women.

The women's accounts showed that the combination of care responsibilities with low educational attainment leads to the exclusion of women from the primary labor market and the incorporation of them in a secondary labor market. With the increased feminization, public work can be viewed as a new type of pink-collar job. This solution not only reinforces the idea that it is women's duty to look after children, but it also does not challenge inflexible work arrangements and practices which uphold and strengthen the ideal worker norm and polices men and women into different positions in the labor market. Women who are not free from domestic duties cannot attain this ideal and are pushed towards another type of precarious job, public work. Attitudes towards sex roles continue to shape the division of labor at home which directly affect women's choices in the job market. The invisibility of men in our conversations showed their lack of involvement in domestic and care work and signaled that women are left to resolve the double burden of paid and unpaid work individually.

Chapter 5: Emotional, social and financial gains of public work

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that despite the precarity that surrounds public work, it is still utilized by women as a work-life balance strategy. This happens in the context when inflexibility within the primary labor market and jobs characterized by the ideal worker norm limit women's options. Besides reconciling family and work life, interviewees suggested to gain something else from their paid employment. This is connected to the meaning or value of work, individuals' understanding of the purpose of their work or what they perceived to achieve through it (Wrzesniewski et al 2001: 180).

In this chapter, I argue that public work provides financial benefits which is crucial to support families with low socioeconomic background, but it also allows women to feel a sense of satisfaction in paid work. In this way, work is not an end in itself, it is not the center of these women's life, but it is a source of recognition and in some cases a place where they can deepen community-belonging and social ties. Work does not only provide material benefits, which the incentive-based approach to workfare highlights, but it also offers a sense of fulfillment (Rosso et al 2010: 98, Wrzesniewski et al 1997). In some cases, it helps women to express their talents and fosters their self-realization. Further, I demonstrate that public work offers satisfaction because it enables women to establish and maintain personal relationships. Lastly, public work contributes to financial independence. According to these, work experience can be divided based on emotional, social and financial gains.

5.1 Emotional gains

a. Pleasure

Many of my female interviewees did not simply say that they liked their job but highlighted different aspects of their work they find pleasure in or in other words enjoy. In this way, their job was not just a means to financial ends (Rosso et al 2010: 98). This was especially true for those who worked indoors. Anna highlighted that the advantage of working at a charitable organization like theirs is that people are able to try themselves out in different tasks and roles and see what fits them better. It was visible that the "indoor type"

public works had less fluctuation. For example, the two women I talked with in Komárom-Esztergom county have been working in their respective roles before the program was reformed in 2011, merging different types of public works together. Their fixed-term contract was repeatedly extended. These cases highlight the “creaming” or lock-in effect of public work (Carter et al 2015: 279, Cséres-Gergely et al 2014: 147, Kálmán 2015: 49, Rees et al 2014: 225). My interviewees identified this phenomenon themselves by telling me that their advice to someone who starts public work now would be to get another job as soon as possible otherwise they will be stuck in public work.

Those who worked in “outdoor roles” described that their history of public work is characterized by interruptions or rotations. People dropped out or their contract was not lengthened, they went on unemployment benefit or if they did not work long enough received employment replacement benefit then returned to public work when people were needed. Thus, public work is a precarious job, it does not address job insecurity or vulnerability. The fragmented employment pattern did not only affect people’s attitude towards work but also defined the relationships people were able to make. While people who worked indoors were part of set teams, those working outside either worked on their own or in pairs with changing partners. In addition, city maintenance works included little on-the-job training, when I asked my interviewees, they had a hard time identifying the new things they learnt. Therefore, the human capital approach to workfare, that is supposed to enhance the employability of the participants through specific training, was completely missing (Eichhorst et al 2008: 6).

Magdi néni, who is a 55-year-old female Roma public worker, is working indoors now. The charitable organization which employs her has a kitchen and her duty is to make sweet and savory products that they sell on the local market or make according to the current orders. She used to work at one of the city maintenance companies for 8 months as a public worker, but they did not lengthen her contract because the state did not support the program anymore. Magdi néni expressed strong negative feelings towards that job and described it as uncomfortable and embarrassing which was not the typical description from other public workers currently in this role. Before becoming a public worker, Magdi néni used to work in a bakery. She emphasized that besides the taste, presentation of baked goods is also important. Thus, rather than creating food that simply serves the needs of the customers, the goal was to make the food as “nice” as possible which allows the expression of an additional talent, creativity (Wrzesniewski et al 2001: 193). Magdi néni is full of smiles when she shows me the final, packaged products and the list of pastries they are making, many of which are

based on recipes that her grandmother taught her. She tells me that she likes baking and happy to do it again as a job.

I am a public worker here as well. But it does matter what I have to do. It does make a difference if I am putting my hands into trash or if I am making pastry with these hands. This is... well, more delicious. I feel totally different.

Magdi néni emphasized that she enjoys her job and feels better here not just compared to her former public work job but her previous employment in a bakery. She expressed over and over again that she does not want to leave this job and is not looking for anything else nor does she plan to. However, it was not just Magdi néni's role that made her job more enjoyable but also social relations to which I will come back to later in this chapter.

Linda highlights that she learned many new things as a public worker in a charitable organization and has a lot of experience in looking after children. Her work experience and her boss motivated her to apply to be a kindergarten teacher. Although Linda said she wanted to be a teacher or lawyer when she was younger, she would not have thought about pursuing a degree if it was not for her job as a public worker. Linda's case demonstrates the importance of human capital approach in workfare policies and the idea that work helps you express your potentials and develop as a person (Eichhorst et al 2008: 6, Lips-Wiersma et al 2016). However, it is important to note here that Linda's case was unique and the idea to develop further skills was largely motivated by her work experience and her boss but was not supported by the public work program. Linda applied on her own to pursue further studies and is not going to receive any support, such as scholarships through the program, even though she applied for a profession that currently faces shortages (EMMI 2014: 78).

In a similar vein, Hajni explained that she always wanted to have a job that is connected to kids. She wanted to be a nanny⁶, but she got into trouble as a teenager and her certificate of good conduct did not allow her to complete the necessary qualification. However, through her public work job she had a chance to work with children, play ballgames with them and help with their homework. Hajni said that kids can be annoying from time to time, especially when you have to repeat things over and over again, but she enjoys doing this job.

⁶ She used to word "óvodai dajka" in Hungarian, which I translated to nanny. Nannies assist kindergarten teachers. They usually clean up after the kids, distribute food or help them change their clothes. Unlike kindergarten teachers, nannies are not required to complete a university degree.

When talking about what work means for Márti, who is helping with the baking processes in a charitable organization, she highlights that she does not only find joy in her work but also finds it useful.

Completing my tasks bring me joy. I am happy when I am here, I am happy that I can work. I find the things I do useful, especially when these girls (her colleagues) praise me for doing a good job.

Márti, who just like Magdi néni has some health issues and finds the speed of work here more comfortable and is thankful that she has a workplace that accepts her despite of her health issues and slower pace. This is in line with the findings of the previous chapter that demonstrated that public work is a flexible type of employment compared to other jobs that are available for women with lower educational attainment. Márti also highlighted the recognition she received from her coworkers. This helps to build mutual solidarity which is often undermined in the private sector that is characterized by job insecurity and intensified competition among coworkers (Brune et al 2008: 725).

Overall, interviewees experienced satisfaction because their roles brought them pleasure. This was because they enjoyed doing their tasks and, in some cases, they found them fulfilling because they were something they wanted to do since they were children. The tasks were also perceived as useful for the work community. However, my position and my relationship with the management could have influenced these accounts. People could have told me what they assumed I wanted to hear or might have been afraid of complaining about their work experience. To overcome this problem, I tried to spend as much time with my participants as possible to establish a trusting relationship.

b. Pride and self-realization

My interviewees often took pride in what they were doing which they expressed by quoting other people's opinion about their work. This was often in a form of praise and/or acknowledgement. In other words, a certain level of recognition, which is an important part of meaningful work (Brun et al 2008: 717), was important for participants. Their job gave them a sense of achievement which made it more satisfactory.

Cili, who works with city maintenance emphasized that they often receive praises from other residents.

They (other residents) praise us for keeping the whole city clean. They do not tease us. If there were no public workers, it would be a bit problematic to keep the city tidy. There are times when we finish something and 10 minutes later when we go back the trash is there again and we restart our work.

This means that the work Cili does is visible and recognized by other people. Lips-Wiersma argues that “dirty work” can provide meaning if it serves a larger purpose and benefits social interests (Lips-Wiersma et al 2016: 539). The example reflects that public workers and city residents find this type of work useful because it makes a contribution to other people’s well-being by providing a cleaner environment. Although, the idea of serving others was not explicitly present among public workers, they expressed that their contribution is important and if they were not doing their job, it would cause problems for the city and its residents.

In other cases, people’s pride came from the quality of work or the showcase of specific skills and/ or expertise. This means that their tasks allowed them to express their talents and fostered self-realization (Lips-Wiersma et al 2016). Tasks that workers are involved with but are outside of one’s formal role, can help them to alter the meaning of their work and craft it as critical (Wrzesniewski et al 2001: 191) Zsuzsi, who works as a porter, went into various details when talking about her job. She did not only help people to navigate to the right office, something that porters are expected to do, but she also took phone calls, kept various logs and brought letters to the post office. She explained her tasks as it follows.

Things that administrators do, I do them as well. I help them [people in the office] out, I do not know how to describe this, but it is a similar situation to those who help a chef out.

Thus, Zsuzsi emphasized that the tasks she does are beyond her formal role and the job is not only important but necessary so that others can carry on with their work. Because of the specific skills this job involved, Zsuzsi told me that the office cannot just hire anyone for this role, the person who works here has to know the above-mentioned tasks well. The person who was hired before her could not do them. Zsuzsi clearly took pride in the quality of her work. She also mentioned that she felt that certain colleagues look down on her because of her position as public worker. Therefore, emphasizing her expertise can be a way to cope with the negative stigma.

Magdi néni was very proud of the sweet and savory pastries she baked, she made sure that I tried everything when I visited. When she was comparing her current public work position with the previous one, city maintenance, she said that this role is completely different.

I am the everything here. The pastries are made with my hands and they take those to big conferences in Pest. They order them in big amounts... and everyone knows who bakes them.

The role Magdi néni is doing now allows her to express her talent for baking and in this way, it helped her to gain acknowledgment but also a specific identity related to her job (Lips-Wiersma et al 2016). In other words, her job fostered self-realization. Later on, Magdi néni tells me that someone asked her to work in their restaurant after trying her pastries, but she refused. This job offer shows that Magdi néni is competent and does a quality job. Hochschild argues that work became more attractive, it allows people to feel more appreciated, competent and at the same time relaxed. It offers emotional support and a sense of belonging. At the same time, home increasingly became another workplace, full of tasks that people dread (Hochschild 1997: 26). In this way home and work are reversed. Magdi néni did not talk much about her life at home but she received a phone call from a teacher during our interview. Magdi néni explained to me with a sigh that one of her grandchildren, who lives together with her, got into mischief at school again. From this account and the way Magdi néni talked about work, it is clear that while family life is somewhat tiring, work is self-fulfilling and relaxing.

Katika also highlights the quality of her work by comparing the cleanliness of the park she is responsible to keep tidy to the day when she first started working. Before becoming a public worker, Katika had cleaning jobs at various places which were the type of roles she preferred. She stresses that not everyone is able to do a good job and the boss should be mindful with delegating people who do a proper job. She mentions that the person before her did not clean well and shop owners nearby noticed the difference ever since she has been cleaning and praised her work. Just like Magdi néni, Katika is expressing her talent through her role which provides her with an identity as a good cleaner.

The feeling of pleasure and pride as well as self-realization or identification with one's role stood in strong contrast with how women perceived unpaid work. Women usually described domestic duties as part of their daily routine, something repetitive and never-ending, a second shift (Hochschild et al 1989). There were no achievements highlighted, no one told me that they cook delicious meals for their family, or their home is sparkling clean. In other words, unpaid work was undervalued compared to paid work. It was not considered as real work and it also did not provide the possibility for self-realization, while paid work allowed women to feel appreciated and competent (Hochschild 1997: 26). My conversation with Hajni about why public work is useful illustrates this point.

Hajni told me that she finds public work useful because she is able to work. What she means is that due to this job, she will not idle or slack off. However, later on when she tells me about her daily routine, and it is clear that she has work to do around the house. “After work I go home and start cooking and things like that. I have to clean up after my beautiful and sweet partner. He is worse than a little child...”. Thus, Hajni does not consider her domestic responsibilities as real work, her role as the main caregiver is not seen as a job. It is her duty to keep the house clean and serve her partner, but it is also something natural which shows that essentialist view of sex roles governs the division of domestic work (Williams 2010: 78). The idea that those who are not involved in paid work are lazy are present in various stereotypes about the Roma community as they are often criticized for being work-shy. What is more, as Williams argues, race can assign different expectations about work and motherhood to women, it is less acceptable for ethnic women not to work when they have children (Williams 2010: 93). Hajni, who was involved in informal work before starting to work as a public worker, emphasized the importance of declared or formal work and thought that it will help her finding a different job later. Therefore, Hajni is utilizing public work to tackle certain stereotypes and demonstrate her ability to work.

In sum, as discussed in the previous chapter women take up public work in the context of inflexible work arrangements in the primary labor market where the ideal worker norm further marginalizes women’s position. Despite the precarity of public work and the low payment it entails, interviewees were able to find some sense of pride in their work because it helped them to receive recognition and praises from their community. Paid work also helped them to contribute to other people’s well-being and express their skills. If people perceived themselves as good in certain tasks, their job contributed to their self-realization.

5. 2 Social gains

Another area where prominent differences were identified between public workers who work outside and those who work inside is the way participants were able to establish social ties. As mentioned previously, paid work offers opportunities of socialization (Perrons et al 2007: 145, Rosso et al 2010: 92). The difference between the quality of connection was striking and this was partly due to the differences in work arrangements. While those who worked inside were part of a team, even if they worked on their own like Zsuzsi, who was a porter, they relied on each other and had to work together. Working together with others helps workers to experience a sense of support and belonging which contributes to the

meaningfulness of their work (Lips-Wiersma et al 2016: 537). People working outside often worked in pairs or on their own and, as I explained earlier, these jobs had higher turnover rates, more interruptions and fluctuations. When comparing her public maintenance role with her current baking role, Magdi néni said that they rely on each other's work much more in the bakery. Even if she is unwell, she wants to show up at work because of her concern that her colleagues will have a hard time finishing work without her help. However, she did not feel the same way about public maintenance which was not characterized by team-work but relied more on individual-work.

When I worked with them [public workers doing city maintenance] there were no strong ties between us. Here we rely on each other a lot. If I am ill... if I can get up, I am still able to stand on my feet, I do not let Ildi [coworker] to be on her own because she would be in trouble if I do not come. I cannot let her down. At the other place if someone did not come, they did not come. They were still able to gather the trash.

Thus, there is a strong emotional bond between coworkers in Magdi néni's workplace, they care about each other and try to help out one another which motivates them to come to work. Similarly, Márta described that she and her colleagues support each other. If someone is ill, they give them a call or visit them. If they need anything, they are happy to bring it over to them. In this way, workplace functions as a place to share community values and maintain relationships (Isaksen 2000: 99, Lips-Wiersma 2016: 538).

Comparisons of workplace environment to a family was very common among those who worked in the charitable organization I visited. Everyone emphasized that they are not differentiated in any way as public workers and are treated equally compared to regular employees. Linda who is a full-time employee at that charitable organizations where she used to work as a public worker describes this as follows.

I was not differentiated [when I was a public worker]. We treat everyone the same way here. Of course, we know who is employed as a public worker, but it does not mean anything to us. We get along well and we love each other. There is no such thing as "Oh you are public worker, you earn less and studied less" or something like that... there is no disadvantage.

Linda's statement shows that the person and personal relationships are more important than their position or contract type. Linda also mentioned that they always discuss the work that needs to be completed in the beginning of the day. They are not simply assigned to tasks but their boss listens to their opinion and preference. In a similar vein, Hajni emphasized that her

boss offers her various tasks to choose from when she begins her day. In this way, they were treated as members of the team who are equally important. This practice is a type of vertical interaction through which managers recognize the work of employees, it helps to establish a more egalitarian relationship which affects people's attitude towards work (Brune et al 2008: 724).

Zsuzsi, who is a porter at the office of a local authority has a different experience. She has a good relationship with most of her colleagues and her boss, but she also mentioned that there are coworkers who look at her differently.

My colleagues are helpful, I get along with them. There is no problem with them... But to be honest, there are people who treat me differently. There are many sweet colleagues but there are people who like to have power over others, and they use degrading language with me... and I have to suck it up unfortunately.

The fact that Zsuzsi felt like she should not be complaining about this coworker and her attitude shows the vulnerability the surrounds this job. Even if there is power abuse and/ or unfair treatment, people will carry on because they need to keep their job. This highlights the problem with the controlling elements of workfare that give disproportionately big power to employers that allow them to exclude participants from the scheme for years (Bördös 2015, Szikra 2014).

Others described the work environment as more accommodating compared to their previous job. People felt less pressure and are calmer, this work was not characterized by performance-based pay which was typically the way wages were calculated for those working in the informal sector. The boss' attitude was often different at public work and participants had closer relationship with them. Magdi néni happily tells me that her boss praises her quite often.

And then the boss comes in and imagine that she looks at the baked goods, tastes them and hugs us. There were times when I almost burst into tears. She praises us with every single word of hers.

Magdi néni complained that at her previous job in a bakery, people were treated as machines and only production mattered. In contrast, at this organization "there are people, people with capital letter". Thus, interpersonal relations can shape people's work experience both negatively and positively. It also influences people's attitude towards work. As mentioned before, this could relate to the goal of the Hungarian public work program according to employers. In certain cases, public work is seen as a tool for work socialization and not a

means for financial gains which influences expectations towards participants (Gerő et al 2019). Both Magdi néni and Márti said that when they receive praises from their boss, they feel motivated and determined to do a quality job.

I feel better here. Even when I am tired, I am not tired. Even if there is a lot of work, because many times we have a lot of work, I still do it because of the people that surrounds me... The boss gives me so much strength because she is a good person. My stomach does not churn when I come in to work.

Magdi néni is attached to the people she works together with and their support is important for her to be able to complete her tasks.

Those who had certain health issues emphasized the understanding and flexibility of their boss. The increased flexibility of public work compared to private sector jobs was discussed in the previous chapter. Márti and Mariska both said that it is okay for them to sit when they feel out of breath. Magdi néni tells me that at her previous job the boss was shouting with her when she needed a break, saying “I do not pay you for sitting down” but here she is encouraged to look after her own health and she shows me a blood pressure monitor which is provided by the organization and her boss asked her to use before taking her medication. Some bosses can be more caring and tolerant towards workers’ needs in public work roles. The impact of better-quality relations with the management affects people’s attitude towards work (Brune et al 2008: 724).

Social relations also manifested themselves in different networking systems people formed. Magdi néni was recommended for her position by one of her childhood friends who is a regular employee at the bakery of the charitable organization. After working there for a while, she recommended Márti to her boss who is employed there now as well. When we were distributing meals for schoolchildren during the holidays, few women expressed their desire to work at the organization and asked to be notified in case of a job opening. Thus, networking is utilized by women to get a position with specific tasks that they prefer. This was also evident among people who worked outdoors as some of them requested to be put in that specific position after it was recommended by a friend. Katika, who dropped out for over a year due to health issues, reconnected with her boss after she got better and specifically asked to be delegated to the same position again. This demonstrates that good relationship with management can motivate people to work (Brune et al 2008: 724).

In short, public work enabled certain participants to establish quality connections with their colleagues and bosses. The emotional bond not only motivated people to go to work but made their job more fulfilling. Participants also utilized networking in order to be able to

work together with specific people or do specific tasks. However, this tactic did not change the precarity of public work and the insecurity it involves. People can easily lose their job if the state stops financing their particular position or if the local authority prefers to hire someone else. Thus, it is important to emphasize the specific circumstances in which people perceive the benefits of this job.

5. 3 Financials gains

Lastly, the necessity of money and the importance of financial independence in terms of being able to pay for food, medication and bills was very important among my interviewees. Work played an important role in gaining material benefits (Perrons et al 2007: 145, Wrzesniewski et al 1997). Mariska, who cleans at a charitable organization and has several health issues, explains that public work is very useful for her.

Those who are so ill that they are not able to complete hard labor, public work offers lighter tasks and you can earn money with it. It helps you to pay for the medicine and for the bills because the children cannot help, they also have their own children.

Mariska sees the importance of work in earning money which helps her to cover her expenses. It is also necessary to achieve financial independence because her children are unable to support her. Hildi, who works as an administrator, also finds work necessary to pay her expenses. She is in her 50s and does not have a family but lives together with her mother. She says that no matter whether you work outdoors or indoors you have to work for your money. She finds herself lucky to be able to work as an administrator and thinks that her tasks are among the better ones that a public worker could get. However, the wage is not good, and they can only survive on it because they combine with her mother's pension.

Linda says that paid work helps her to provide more opportunities and better future for her kids. In this sense, she is working to improve the life of her children. She tells me that her parents could not afford to pay for that many activities, but she wants to provide more opportunity for her children. "I feel like we do everything what we can... and me and my husband work this much so that the children can do what they like". Therefore, earning money is important for Linda to support her children having a fulfilling life.

Those who worked outside often stated that public work is the same as any other type of job. Eszter tells me that this is just like any other workplace, they are working for money and not playing around. The idea that their work is no different from any other paid job was often present. This is not surprising because public work has a regular, 8-hour work schedule,

it offers paid holiday, sick leave and maternal leave. However, its work status is not reflected in the wages which everyone finds unfair. Katika tells me “the money was not going up, it is the same as it was years ago, but there is more work. They expect a lot from us for a little money”. This quote signals that the amount of work should be reflected in the award, in this case the money. People does not only find the “ridiculous amount of pay” - as Katika puts it - unfair but it also undervalues their work which they felt is the same as any other paid job. Hildi, who works in an administrative role, also told me that some people were surprised that she works for this little amount of money. This created a stigma around her job. However, as presented in this chapter, people were able to find meaning besides financial gain in their job. As these people did not have the option not to work, the way they talked about their experience can be interpreted as a coping mechanism with a stigmatized occupation (Wrzesniewski et al 2001: 186).

Taking everything into account, paid work offered the possibility of financial independence and the opportunity to provide better life for one’s family. However, the low payment belittled people’s work and separated it from other types of paid employment. This reinforces the stigmatized position of public work in the secondary labor market. In this way, the Roma minority who was criticized for living off of benefits without doing any work (Kovai 2016: 137), remains stigmatized in the workfare program. Thus, public work continues to uphold unequal relations in the labor market, instead of providing solution for those with accumulated disadvantage.

5. 4 Conclusion

Overall, this chapter argued that women gain certain level of satisfaction from public work because they derive pleasure and pride from their work. This is because they enjoy their tasks or find them fulfilling as they can express their skills and talent through them. The completion of their tasks was accompanied by recognition and praises from their community members or colleagues. The ability to excel in certain roles contributed to women’s self-realization. In addition, their tasks were perceived not only as useful, but also it thought to make a contribution to other’s well-being. Besides emotional gains, I have argued that public work helps people to establish and maintain social ties. Participants formed emotional bonds with colleagues and coworkers which not only made their work more enjoyable and fulfilling but also motivated them to continue their job. Networking was used by participants to get into specific roles. Lastly, paid work contributed to financial independence and the opportunity to

improve the life of one's family. However, women's experience takes place in a context where the work conditions in the primary labor market cause various problems for women. Inflexible work arrangements limit women's job opportunities while the competitive work culture which manifests itself in performance-based pay undermines women's ability to access social and emotional gain through their tasks.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the meaning of work for men is often related to their provider role and having a good salary (Correl et al 2007: 1298, Williams 2010: 80). Men tended to talk more about their previous employment and did not see many benefits of public work aside from financial gains. Their previous job was characterized by long working hours but allowed them to express their talents and gain an identity as an expert in their profession. Compared to other domains of life, work was more important, their previous job was the center of their life, a source of meaningfulness (Rosso et al 2010: 97). This high level of work centrality meant that people experienced the loss of their job as devastating (Rosso et al 2010: 97). Public work was unable to fulfill this hole and was treated as means to material benefits. It did not include specific meaning, nor did it provide fulfillment (Wrzesniewski 1997: 22).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Hungarian public work scheme is a specific type of workfare program that ties unemployment benefit to compulsory work. In 2011 a unified public work scheme was introduced as a new type of legal employment decoupled from the statutory minimum wage. The program has been heavily criticized due to its increased control over beneficiaries and inability to reintegrate them into the labor market. The scheme played an important role in masking unemployment statistics. In 2018, public work amounted to 3 percent of the total employment. Since 2016, a new trend of feminization can be identified.

This thesis discussed the reasons behind female public work employment and the perceived benefits and disadvantages of the program. I demonstrated that men and women experience public work differently and identified possible reasons behind the feminization of public work. I argued that female public work participants use their job strategically to achieve work-life balance. Public work is one of the employment opportunities that tolerated women's domestic responsibilities. It is a new type of pink-collar job that is characterized by predictable working hours, paid sick leave and maternity leave which makes it more attractive to women with caretaking duties. However, public work reinforces the marginalized incorporation of women within the labor market and contributes to market dualization. The ideal worker norm is reinforced through the scheme and inflexible work arrangements and practices continue to push women into precarious jobs. What is more, I argued that women are able to derive emotional, social and financial gains from public work despite its precarious position. Public work roles allowed women to feel competent and appreciated, to express their skills and gain an identity from their job. In contrast, men often viewed public work simply as a means to material benefits and it did not provide meaning or fulfillment.

My analysis made a contribution to the literature of public work and workfare by providing a gender analysis. It highlighted individual strategies that are missing from quantitative analysis. It also engaged with the debate regarding work-care decisions and argued that circumstantial, structural and relational factors intersect and push women toward public work. In addition, the thesis demonstrated the prevalence of the ideal worker norm in today's economy.

Further research is needed to identify the role local settings play in public workers' experience, especially in areas where public work is the only employment opportunity. In

addition, conducting further interviews would be helpful to identify the reasons behind the flexible work arrangements and employers' leniency within the public work program. Local authorities and employers shape public workers' experience in a different manner. My research did not show that behavioral conditions of public work are strongly implemented but it would be important to discover whether this is present in other local settings, especially where the population is divided on class and ethnic lines.

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