
RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES OF THE TWO GENDERS IN SMALL VILLAGES IN ORMÁNSÁG

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social-economic circumstances, altered with the democratic transformation and revived arguments on traditional and modern female roles. Employment and unemployment, social mobility, division of labour inside families become determining factors in the life-strategy of individuals and families living in different regions and settlements. Relations between the sexes and the role of the gender¹ connection between women and men were revalued. The results of several international studies, published in the last decades, justify that the gender attitude in the research of unequal regional development makes a contribution to a wider improvement of the science of geography and to a deeper analysis of area and society. When we wish to reveal social-economic processes, the relations between sexes, which are present in these processes and to define them in a special way, have to be taken into consideration. (MCDOWELL L. 1993, WOMEN AND GEOGRAPHY STUDY GROUP 1997, HOVEN–IGALSKI VAN B. 2000, LITTLE J. 2002). Although this approach of research goes on its own evolutionary way in Hungary in several disciplines like History, Anthropology, Sociology and Linguistics, it is yet not part of social-economic analyses (TIMÁR J. 2007). However, some researches and case studies of the past years already prove that the inequality in the situation of the sexes and the differences of this inequality based on geographical position, have to be taken into consideration on revealing local sources and elaborating more effective local regional developments. (SZÖRÉNYINÉ K. I. 2001, KOVÁCS D. – KOVÁCS K. – VÁRADI M. M. 2006).

¹ In this essay the word 'gender' refers to the socially developed features of women and men, contrasting the English word 'sex' which emphasize the anatomical, biological differences.

The aim of this study is to examine the extent of traditional gender roles in the work of self-governments, regional development, civilian bodies and the structure of power in a less-favoured region with many small villages, called Ormánság.

The first part of this study examines the participation of genders and the experiences in local governments in decision making positions. The second part analyses the economy vitalizing effect of important regional development projects according to the genders. A third part examines the public activity of women in local civil organizations.

For my research I equally used quantitative and qualitative data. I compared the national election data to the local Ormánság data, checking up the differences of the genders in respect of time and sizes of the settlements. For local data, I gathered information from 55 settlements that belong to Ormánság, either according to former partitioning by Géza Kiss² or because of their disadvantageous situation.

To recognize the experiences of the exercise of power, I made partially structured interviews with ten public persons, 5 women and 5 men (mayor, regional developer and an employment officer) who play important roles in Ormánság. A list of the interviewees can be found in the appendix with numbers instead of their names and their opinion is written in italics (APPENDIX).

2. THE UNEQUAL POSITION OF THE GENDERS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

After the democratic transformation of Hungary the administrative character of the settlements grew. The importance of the personal abilities and the efficiency of the local elite, self-government leaders and characters of the local public life was revalued (BELUSZKY P. – SIKOS T. T. 2007). The mayor and the body of representatives play a decisive part in the democratic operation of the local society and in the decisions made to answer the challenges of the market economy.

The evolution of democracy did not entail automatically the equal opportunities in managing the local policy for different social groups, like women and men. It did not help larger participation of women in public life, in forming policies or making decisions (LÉVAI K. – KISS R. 1999). Although data facts indicate the increase of females' participation, still there are disproportionately fewer women in positions where decisions are made about people's life, the future of settlements

² Géza Kiss used to be the Reformed priest of a village called Kákics in Ormánság and he reported about the desolation of the region in his monograph (G. KISS 1937).

and where women can influence public opinion. One of the most important obstacles of women's public activity is the traditional 'female roles' attitude of the society, which defines the organisation of the home life, conducting of the household and raising children as the females' central job. After the democratic transformation, the relation between regional inequalities of the economic-social changes and the inequal situation of genders became more evident.

Disparity of the genders in political decision making is supplemented with geographical aspects. In holding the power of a mayor the settlement pyramid principle dominates. The less populated settlements we acquire, the higher is the female ratio on top of local governments (*table 1*).

Table 1. Ratio of female mayors according to the size of settlements between 1998 and 2006

Size of settlement (population)	1998 %	2002 %	2006 %
11 50x – 11 499	14.8	17.7	19.8
11 500 – 11 999	13.6	17.1	17.5
11 000 – 11 999	12.0	13.8	14.9
12 000 – 14 999	10.8	11.0	13.4
15 000 – 19 999	5.9	8.8	8.6
10 000 – 49 999	3.5	5.8	5.7
50 000 – x	4.8	9.5	4.8
Altogether	12.5	14.7	16.2
Cities	6.4	7.6	9.0
Villages	12.9	15.3	2016-09-01

Source: TIMÁR J. 2004. Own calculation: www.valasztas.hu

Aquiring the data facts from a different view point, it can be seen that although the majority of the body of representatives in local self-governments are men, women have more chances to be elected as representatives than to be elected as a mayor when they are already in the body of representatives (*table 2*).

Ratio of women in local decision making was higher in the years before the political transformation although it did not reach even 30 percent (27 per cent in 1985). After the political changes this number declined (16 per cent in 1990), since then it has been higher and higher but it is still under 30 per cent.

The ratio of female mayors is even smaller than that of representatives. The pyramid principle predominates regarding the position of mayors. The smaller population a settlement has, the higher the ratio of female mayors is. In cities, which means a higher position and bigger power, the ratio

of women is smaller. From 23 cities only 2 have female mayors while in the 23 districts of Budapest there is not even one female mayor. Considering the 301 settlements of Baranya county, only every fifth have a female mayor. Among the 55 Ormánság settlements, which I examined in my study, the ratio of women is higher than the average of the country: there are 15 female mayors.

Table 2. The ratio of women in local government positions 1998 – 2002 – 2006

		Budapest %	city %	village %	altogether %	Ormánság settlements %
1998	mayor	13	6	13	13	13
	representative	17	14	25	22	30
2002	mayor	8	8	15	15	20
	representative	18	17	28	25	32
2006	mayor	0	9	–	16	27
	representative	21	19	–	–	31

Source: LEHMANN H. – POLONYI G. 2004. Own calculation: www.valasztas.hu

Results of researches conducted in the past years lead to the conclusion that a prejudiced way of thinking and restrictive family traditions obstruct women who live in bigger settlements much more in the achievement of their goal to play a public role than in smaller settlements where personal acquaintance demolishes these obstacles (SCHADT M. 2000). It is --- most probable that a self-government is directed by a female mayor in settlements that belong to the most backward regions and struggle with permanent, high rate unemployment, low agricultural production or an industry in depression (TIMÁR J. 2004).

The same phenomena can be seen in Ormánság, a region with many small villages. The ratio of women in local self-governments, both as mayors and as members of the body of representatives, is higher than the national average.

This phenomena can be explained with the relation of:

- The correlation between the different socialization character of the genders and the size of the settlement
- the correlation between the relation of power of the genders and the size of the settlement.

Preconceptions about women, presuppositions that question their ability to manage and make decisions do not predominate in settlements with less population. Good communicational and community-forming features, female qualities of considering a small community as a family and

taking care of its members as family members conquer these preconceptions. On the other hand women's participation in local decisions can be explained by the state of power between the genders. The leader of a bigger settlement has more authority, and it is more probable that the mayor is a man. In smaller settlements, where political and economic power extend onto a smaller community, it is more probable to find a female mayor. Considering the two larger settlements of Ormánság, the ratio between the two genders is 50-50 in the city of Sellye the mayor is a man, but Vajszló (a large village which has been an applicant for municipal rank for years) has a female mayor. He is in his first period (he won a provisional election) and she is in her second period as a mayor.

Comparing to the national average we can find even higher female activity in the body of representatives of the Gypsy minority governments in Ormánság. Of the 55 settlements 33 ones have Gypsy minority governments with 5 representatives in each. The ratio of women in the Gypsy governments is 40.6 per cent, which means a higher ratio, higher activity and determination to work for their community, comparing to the ratio of female representatives in the self-governments of the majority.

2.1. Reconciliation of public and private life

The aim of my experimental research during the gender-based analysis of the society of Ormánság was to inspect local public life. The method of 'deep-interview' was used to ask mayors, former mayors, 5 women and 5 men having good knowledge of the social-economic situation of the region. A list of the interviewees can be read in the appendix. Their opinions are identified with numbers in the appendix. It is a characteristic of Hungarian public life that 'the world of local politics became the world of business and so the world of men' (LITTLE J. 2002 p. 135.), so during the interviews, I paid more attention to the public roles of women who are less in the foreground.

The characteristics of public activity and joining the local self-governments of the persons I asked and the motivations leading there are of course different, personal stories modified by several influential factors. In disadvantageous small settlements trust and personal relations can help women to be elected as mayors or representatives.

Sociology students of Pécs University conducted a village research in 1998 studying the changes of the social positions of women and the roles they play in managing the economic, political and public life of their settlements (PITLIK T. 2000). The site of the research was the city of Sellye. The results of the research show, that although more and more women achieved higher qualifications in the past decades, it is not the reason why they are in managing positions in these settlements in higher ratio than men. Cognizing the course of these womens' lives, it turned out,

according to conversations made with them, that their position is not the result of a conscious career plan (except for one case) but rather an adjustment to the changing conditions: they undertook the managing positions on local level, which men abandoned, because they got into more beneficial positions in other settlements or in other sectors. Women accommodated themselves to the new situation and assumed these empty positions, although they still consider their traditional woman-mother role as a primary one, so they have constant pressure to decide on the question of work and/or family life.

According to the interviews made with female mayors, ambition can be considered the most common motivation in taking part in public life, in contrast with the results of a previous sociological study researching the motivations of women in Sellye. There is one whose most important motivation in joining local governments is her family background (2), while in another case the main reason is a moral motivation to help the local community (3). There is one example whose career is in correlation with her professional career (5).

Difficulties in the reconciliation of public life and private life is inescapable in a research dealing with public roles of women. This is a question that does not occur in case of men in public roles. 'Private life and public life cannot be divided hermetically from each other, although assigning them to the genders is a result of centuries-long prejudices (Jóó M. 2005 p. 44). My interviewees could harmonize home life and public life. However they could do it only by forming a more modern division of labour in the family than the conservative male-female roles and they needed to do it this way because they undertook public roles in the period of raising small children. Women reported that their families played a very important role in their successful public work. *'Since I have always been an active person, I got myself nominated for the election and I won. I became the mayor. I got all kinds of support from my family and my parents also helped me. My father was a graduate and my mother took high-school graduation exams when she was already an adult. My father-in-law and mother-in-law also gave me a lot of help both in my studies and in my work'* (2). She mentioned the difficulties in the beginning:

'If I could start it again, I wouldn't take on so much burden: getting married, going to the university and having children. I lived 5 years this way, or to be more precise only three since in the last two years I became a correspondent student because physically it was too much for me. I even had to have a job to be able to finish university. I worked for the local council' (5).

In two female mayors' successful career their adult children (sons) play an important role, they follow the scale of values of their mother. Mothers and sons work together in a civil organization or an economic enterprise, in both cases in Ormánság, to help the development of the local society and economy (3)-(5). In a typical way the problem of harmonizing family life and public life was not even mentioned in the interviews made with male mayors.

According to the experiences of a male mayor, women and men can equally work together, there is no discrimination between the genders either in the office of the self-government nor in the Assembly. Another male mayor's opinion is that there is a political intention behind the issue of discrimination with the aim of dividing the society (6). One man says that when he was a mayor his wife did not work, she was at home and so she could provide a solid family background for his work (9).

2.2 Working method, efficiency

Women are considered, and they also consider themselves to be more open to compromise than men. They do not feel the disadvantages of being a woman in politics. However, when recalling their career, my interviewees mentioned some experiences of the prejudicial attitude of men against women who are in leading positions. *'During my mayoralty a well-known businessman came in the office once and said he could not bear that the leader was a woman'* (5). *'There are problems with being a woman. There are some people among the representatives who cannot accept that I am a woman. One of these men even asked me how I thought that I would tell him what to do when even his mother and his wife never told him'* (4).

Another woman interviewed could experience the difficulties of cooperating with male employees as the leader of an agricultural enterprise even before she became mayor.

'It took me four years to make them accept the situation that a woman tells them what to do' (1). Although managerial experiences show that efficiency has its price: *'Such a small settlement like this can be maintained, developed and run only if its leaders make decisions that are not popular. The main aspect of decisions is business, you have to hold things in a steel grip, you mustn't let things run through your fingers'* (1). And how can you succeed as a woman? *'You need to be tough and a woman of authority. There are people who like me and there are ones who don't. Somebody once told me that there are many people who don't like my style but they admit that I am a good mayor'* (1).

One of my interviewees, who became mayor at the age of 27, has to cope with the difficulties of not only being a woman but also with being young. *'My first four-year period in the self-government was difficult, because as a young woman I had to work with older male representatives. One of them is my deputy-mayor now. They accepted my work when results started to come. They saw the results of development and successful realizations of tenders'* (2). Another female mayor used the experiences of a traditional, caring woman when she planned her public work during the campaign of the election: *'When I organized my campaign I thought out all my plans with a woman's mind. Because a woman usually thinks the way she does at home, in the family, that I have a big family which I have to care about and so my first job is to tidy up'* (4).

The opinion of a female leader, who has the most experiences in region development about efficiency is thought-provoking: *'If I want to do something, I prefer doing it with my female colleagues because there I can always find consistency and continued effort. In men's case I can't. There is a lot of talking, and then they are the ones who reap the rewards'* (5). This former mayor was described by the present female mayor as *'somebody who carried the whole Ormánság on her back, it depended on her work that the settlements joined forces'* (2).

3. INEQUALITY OF GENDERS IN REGION DEVELOPING PROGRAMMES

In solving the problems of Ormánság I lay emphasis on local participation and developments built on the utilization of local sources. These innovations which are based on the co-operation of families, local and regional civil communities, small enterprises and the local governments create the possibility to restore a multifunctional village region based on regional facilities, a chance to increase employment and to establish a balanced economic existence for many generations (G. FEKETE É. 2001, BERÉNYI I. – DÖVÉNYI Z. 2005). Local developments mean job creation for women who want to work.

A programme called 'The complex ecotourist development of Dráva-Basin' aimed the better utilization of the ecotourist facilities of River Dráva. In 2003 the self-governments of two counties, 30 settlements of 5 small regions and the Danube-Dráva National Park joined their forces. Their goal was to include the environment of River Dráva, that is rich in natural values, in tourism without damaging these values. As results of the programme which ended in March, 2008, such investments were accomplished which serve to improve hiking, cycling, horse riding and water-sports tourism. The newly established accommodation and tourist centers offer possibilities for employment. Guest houses and tourist hostels provide simple work (cleaning, washing), qualified work (cooking, services, bicycle repairing) and also work that need special qualification (programme organizer, interpreter).

The 'Original-Dráva Programme' is a region developing programme which establishes the conditions for maintaining the long-term development of the region. The basis of it is restoration of the optimal water balance of the region. The programme improves regional infrastructure while it creates jobs through the system of projects and sub-projects. Since the Selye-region is fully and the Siklós-region is partly included in the programme, this development means an important source for settlements in Ormánság. By restoring the favourable natural conditions of the wetland, the

programme goes back to the basis of a harmonic coexistence of men and nature. By landscape-rehabilitation, which will be done in several decades, several forms of agriculture can become viable which conform to the natural endowments of the region. These forms of agriculture can equally provide jobs and so income earning for both women and men, either according to the traditional division of labour between the genders or according to personal preparedness and talent: restoring native forests, organic farming, stock-farming on the flood area, fishery, processing of bulrush, reed and sedge, handicraft industry and catering trade. After planning and preparation the programme started in 2008 with EC and government support, offering a chance for serious social and welfare changes. But for being able to use the opportunities, it will be necessary to inform and educate people living in the region.

'Leader-programme' is organized on the basis of the co-operation of the self-governments, civil organizations and enterpreneurs who feel responsibility for their settlement and region and who are determined to develop it. The aim of the programme is to encourage and help the co-operators to think about long-term possibilities of their region and to maintain the development with the help of integrated and innovative strategies. The field of its support is the local plans for rural development made by local action committees. These committees are responsible for preparing a plan and for operating a local tender-system. From South-Baranya the settlements of Selye-region and Siklós-region form a common action-committee, a local rural developing community. The basis of the co-operation is a local rural developing strategy named 'From Ormánság to Szársomlyó'. Eighty-eight settlements of the two regions are members of this community, forty-eight of them belong to Ormánság. The strategic aim of the community is to encourage local people to renew their living space and to create a more pleasant environment by training them and increasing their ability for income earning and self-sufficiency. Plans include economy-development, working out a model-programme which utilize the agricultural and touristic facilities of the region in a new way. It means the formation of a solidary economy, based on producing local values, the restoration of natural sources, spreading alternative ways of using lands, the improvement of services, developing quality of life in the fields of heritage-protection and cultural traditions, and at last the development of human resources for socially disadvantaged groups, including women. The fields of development are wide-ranging so it is understandable that 206 organizations of 88 settlements joined the programme from public utility, civil and business spheres. The common tender of the two regions won in the autumn of 2008 and so 2.5 billion forints are available to realize the plans until 2013.

Among the 20 members of a work team, who were chosen from 88 settlements of the two regions, there are experts of regional development and mayors. The work team includes 9 women (4 mayors and 5 representatives of different foundations and organizations) and 11 men. This ratio, although it does not correspond with the breakdown by sex of the population, is good, comparing to the previously unequal ratio of women in similar fields.

However, the leading of this local rural-development programme is still patriarchal: the representative, the deputy assistant and the general assistant are all men.

4. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN LOCAL CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS

After the political transformation, using the opportunities for self-organizing, the number of civil organizations increased significantly in Hungary. In case of Ormánság it is remarkable from two aspects. On the one hand, the development of the region and the survival of the settlements is greatly determined by a co-operative and active local community. On the other hand, although the work of civil organizations is based on voluntary helpers, some of them employ permanent workers and contribute to employment. Under the name of civil organizations I mean foundations, associations, public-service corporations and trade associations. All the data I used come from my interviewees and from websites of settlements and regions.

It is a consequence of the small size of the settlements that civil organizations intend to improve the quality of life of local people and deal with local problems. One part of their activity is to organize programmes for local people and another part is to operate associations based on free time activities, such as sport, hunting, fishing. There are organizations that intend to protect the environmental values and traditions of a settlement. There are different kinds of associations in 16 settlements of the 55 ones. There are several civil organizations in 7 settlements and only one in the other ones. The names of the organizations and associations almost always include the name of the settlement. From the 37 civil organizations 4 are minority-based, 2 were established with the aim of preserving Croatian traditions and culture and 3 with the aim of safeguarding of Gypsy interests and preserving Gypsy traditions.

There are no such civil organizations in the region that are based on different genders, unlike in other regions of Baranya where we can find associations for women (safeguarding of female interests, preserving traditions, spending free time). The network of small settlements and sparsely populated villages can be blamed for the lack of female associations. There are only a few women who are willing and able to organize efficient community work. Female mayors, deputy mayors and representatives in the small settlements of Ormánság are educated women with good organizing

ability, who are available for 24 hours a day. Other active women can be found in other organizations and associations, co-operating with men. It would be important to have strong civil organizations for treating the social problems of women with large families, several children, organizations that could provide efficient services in the fields of education, employment and way of living. Non-profit organizations in the European Community play an important role in the fight against exclusion from the society, discrimination and exclusion from the labour-market (becoming an enterpreneur, going back to work, coping with unemployment, non-profit developments). There are many non-profit organizations that were established by the initiative of self-governments with particular aims.

Several tender sources are available for self-governments only if they submit a common tender with a civil organization which shows that the tender is supported by the local society.

This system motivated self-governments to found civil organizations and associations. One of the mayors says: *'When the budget of the self-government was reduced and there were tender-sources for civil organizations, we founded one and submitted a tender. We used that money to buy and renovate a house for a community center'* (2). It is frequent that the members of the self-government are also members or even leaders of civil organizations, but in the case of small settlements it is sometimes the result of the fact that there is nobody else who would undertake this job. There are only a few people who are not only willing to work for their local community but also have the knowledge and qualification that is needed. One of my interviewees says about this problem: *'There is only the headmaster and a few other people in the village I can co-operate with'* (3).

We could say that in the life of small villages the activity of civil organizations and associations complement the work of self-governments and create the possibility to be efficient in fields where they could not be successful because of the lack of financial sources. These organizations act as connecting links between public life and the economy in operating local sources of power. However, the co-operation of women and the safeguarding of interests at different levels of female society is not present yet in the public life of Ormánság.

I pay special attention to the most important non-profit civil organization of the region, the 'Ormánság Foundation' which was established in 1990. During its activity it has worked out several regional-development programmes which aim-- to revive the economic sources of Ormánság and to restore a harmonic coexistence of land and people. The leader of the foundation says: *'The foundation had many failures because we started everything before others. The projects we started were enterprises with financial risk. The marketing environment did not yet exist which later helped similar initiatives'* (1). These initiatives included organic stock-farming, organic farming, carpet weaving and a tree-nursery growing fruit trees which are typical of the area. This project is still the most important one of the foundation. Besides integrating the most disadvantageous Gypsy population into production, another important field of the foundation is to make studies about the possibilities of development.

The present fruit-tree project is part of an action plan made by the local rural developing community of LEADER. The different projects of the foundation would give opportunities for both genders, but its operation is restrained.

5. SUMMARY

After the political transformation, social-economic changes opened a way towards public democracy both in politics and in civil life, making it possible that matters concerning women and the relation of genders could be part of public debates. Gender-based geographical studies also aim at this, revealing the connection between regional inequalities and the division of power of the genders. The aim of my research was to study the connection of unequal male-female relation and a disadvantageous region on the level of local decision-making. The fact that we can find a higher ratio of female leaders in regions with disadvantageous, small settlements indicate a close connection between regional inequalities and the relation of genders. Among the reasons there are 3 important ones I want to draw attention to:

- The community of a small settlement, with its small size and basically personal-level problems function as a family and female mayors can extend their traditional woman-role to the whole settlement.
- In the case of small settlements personal acquaintance demolishes the traditional prejudices linking to unequal leadership qualities of the genders. Their own experiences are more important for local voters than to elect the leaders of their village on the basis of the stereotypes of male-female politicians.
- And at last the question of authority: The smaller the settlement is, the smaller the power the self-government has over its environment. Men abandon these positions and leave them for women and they are in leading positions of self-governments with greater power, like towns, cities, districts of the capital.

The example of Ormánság proves that female participation in local politics is varying according to the settlements. The ratio of women in local self-governments, civil organizations and public life can be different even in settlements with similar population and geographical features. The determining factor of the participation is local society which reproduce the unequal connection of genders in disadvantageous regions. To achieve equal chances between the genders, such favourable conditions must be created which can ensure a higher ratio of female activity in decision-making and settlement development, where it is possible for both genders to harmonize

private and public life and to have an equal access to different services. It is important especially for women who are more burdened because of the traditional female roles, like bringing up their children and keeping the house.

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APPENDIX

List of interviewees:

	Sex	Time of birth	Qualification	Profession job	Marital status	Number of children
(1)	female	1963	secondary school	depot-manager part-time mayor	married	2
(2)	female	1963	three college diplomas	full-time mayor	widow	2
(3)	female	1948	college	full-time mayor	married	2
(4)	female	1963	college	mayor	divorced	2
(5)	female	1954	University of Law	leader of a region-	married	2

				developin programme		
(6)	male	1956	university	part-time mayor, employee of a foundation	married	2
(7)	male	1938	university	part-time mayor, individual farmer	married	2
(8)	male	1976	college	mayor	single	–
(9)	male	1948	secondary school	individual enterproneur	married	2
(10)	male	1952	college	office leader	married	1