



CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

BEATA NAGY

Hungarian Companies' Equal Opportunity Policies

2003/2004

CPS INTERNATIONAL POLICY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM ▲

BEATA NAGY

Hungarian Companies' Equal Opportunity Policies

The views in this report are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Center for Policy Studies, Central European University or the Open Society Institute. We have included the reports in the form they were submitted by the authors. No additional copyediting or typesetting has been done to them.

‘I think that company must support women in order to reach a healthier society, a mentally healthier environment, and this true for men, too. A woman falling out from her job, pushed into the background within the family may have a definitely negative effect both on the whole family and on male employees. I mean that some kind of support is necessary.’ (Employee’s interview)

HUNGARIAN COMPANIES’ EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICIES

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Beáta Nagy PhD

2003 Policy Fellow

Open Society Institute

International Policy Fellowship

<http://www.policy.hu/nagy>

CONTENT OF TABLE

INTRODUCTION..... 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 3

CORPORATE RESISTANCE..... 3

THE GENDER OF MANAGEMENT..... 6

WHAT CAN AND SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS DO? 7

ACCESS TO COMPANIES 8

GENDER SITUATION AT THE COMPANIES 9

SEGREGATION..... 9

MANAGEMENT 12

SUBJECTIV EVALUATION..... 15

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AS A COMPANY ISSUE 16

PICTURES OF LOYALTY: COMPARING THE FIRM TO OTHER FIRMS 20

ATTITUDES TOWARDS AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS..... 21

ACCEPTANCE OF THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION..... 22

CORPORATE PROGRAMMES FOR FAMILIES..... 23

CHILDBEARING AND CHILDCARE 24

ATYPICAL EMPLOYMENT AT THE COMPANIES 29

FLEXIBLE WORKING TIME..... 29

PART-TIME WORK 31

TELEWORK..... 33

FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKPLACE – AN AWARD FOR COMPANIES..... 33

SUMMARY 34

REFERENCES..... 37

INTRODUCTION

“Globalization has created both unprecedented economic opportunities as well as deepened social inequalities and personal insecurities. Both women and men have been affected. However, gender inequalities persist and it is overwhelmingly women who suffer the most.” – is stated in the official documentation, *e.quality@work: An Information Base on Equal Employment Opportunities for Women and Men* published by the International Labour Office’s Gender Promotion Programme (GenProm) in 2001. There exist several aspects of inequalities starting from disadvantageous employment conditions to dismissal, promotion, pay inequality which can be observed all around the world.

In the last decades the economically developed countries have undoubtedly seen explicit and stable labour market processes; one of the most important features of them was women’s increasing and continuous participation in the labour force. An important part of these changes was that values connected to equal opportunities came into the limelight. They are more and more integrated into the changing organisational culture. Gender is an important topic, moreover a horizontal aspect of all the EU-policies. Besides the Lisbon summit on 24 March 2000 declared that EU should raise its employment rate to 70 per cent of its workforce by 2010. It means that it is necessary to increase women’s labour market participation, and reach the target employment rate, which is 60 percent for women by 2010 (Rubery et al, 2001).

Many investigations, carried out in the last decades in Western countries, proved that women's participation on the labour market grew steadily. Both the supply and the demand sides of female workforce showed basic changes compared to the earlier phenomena. As it was pointed out among others by Powell (1999) the question is not why only few women are in higher level management, but rather why so few women are in top positions. As he stresses, besides the fundamental changes in society and economy as far as women's work is concerned, the basic attitudes towards gender roles moved only inconsiderably.

This paper focuses on the investigation, how deeply if at all Hungarian companies are involved in equal opportunity policies, what are the basic assumptions about the necessity of equal opportunities after having forty years of socialist emancipation or state feminism behind us. The work includes the results of questionnaires and interviews. The paper has been based on the research carried out in 2003/2004 at Hungarian large and medium sized companies. (To learn more about the research visit the homepage: <http://www.policy.hu/nagy>)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CORPORATE RESISTANCE

Whereas many researchers have analysed the existent gender inequality at work and organisations, many companies have launched equal opportunity programmes, even employees query very often the necessity and the seriousness of the subject. Concerning the Opportunity 2000, introduced in the UK, Jill Rubery pointed out the fact: „The scheme, at least helped to keep equal opportunity on organisations’ agendas, even if still towards the bottom of the list of priorities.” (Rubery et al, 1999: 75) In post-socialist, transitional countries it is particularly frequent that the issue of gender equality is not treated as a real subject even in the academic field, and pushed back.

In their article on equal opportunity policy Jewson and Mason differentiated two conceptions of equal opportunities, which are ideal-types. Although the different types seem to be distinct in the theory, they are still mixed and confused in practice. In the article the authors point out the major contrasts between the two types of policies.

Elements of equal opportunities policies	Conceptions of Equal Opportunities	
	Liberal	Radical
Principles	Fair procedures	Fair distribution and rewards
Implementation	Bureaucratisation of decision making	Politicisation of decision making
Effectiveness	Positive Action	Positive Discrimination
Perceptions	Justice seen to be done	Consciousness Raising (e.g. training)

Jewson–Mason, 1986: 312.

The liberal view on equal opportunities is widely accepted both by employers and employees. The liberals concentrate on the individuals' chances, whereas the radicals put the group into the foreground of discussions. '...the aim of liberal equal opportunities policies is the removal of unfair distortions to the operation of the labour market by means of institutionalising fair procedures in every aspect of work and employment.' (Jewson–Mason, 1986: 315) As far the investigated companies are concerned, we can see that the liberal concept of equality is widespread in Hungary, and at least in the displayed cases I found fair procedures. (I will come back to this issue, when I discuss the sample.) The radical view concentrates on the group, because discrimination affects individuals 'but it can only be identified at the level of the group'. (Jewson–Mason, 1986: 316) It is a very hard nut to crack in the corporate setting, because it is easier to find examples from the discriminatory labour market in general than from the discriminatory organisation. As Acker has stressed there have been discursive boundaries between the economy and the organisations. (Acker, 1998)

Cynthia Cockburn in her book (1991) on men's resistance towards women's career found that even at companies, which introduce equal opportunity programmes in order to help disadvantaged groups we can find significant prejudices and controversial attitudes towards the topic. Gender is only one aspect of the differentiation: class and ethnicity weave the structure of the organisation, too. From the starting point of patriarchy she wants to analyse how the obstacles 'in the way of women' can be pointed out. Patriarchy stabilises the hierarchical relations between women and men, thus gender issues mostly deal with the topic of power. 'Due to its systemic nature, patriarchy is not something in which membership is optional. A woman cannot escape, even by climbing to elite status by marriage or career promotion...' Cockburn (1991: 8)

Judy Wajcman (1998) gives a review of the development of the equal opportunity idea; she presents both the theoretical and the practical background, and the consequences of the different measures. She argues that current equal opportunity actions or directives 'draw mostly on the equal treatment/sameness notion of equality'. (Wajcman, 1998: 16)

A long and heated debate is about the issue whether men and women are rather similar to or different from each other. Those who deny the similarities and stress the differences, mostly call for biological and physical characteristics, usually connected to the biological reproduction function, the motherhood. According to this standpoint the social differences can be explained by these 'essential' differences. (Cockburn calls it as the 'difference lobby') The other group of arguments (the 'sameness lobby') neglects any original distinctions, because any difference we can observe is due to the socialisation process. This is responsible for

developing the gender identity. (For more detailed descriptions see Wajcman, 1998; Powell-Graves, 2003)

The problematic point in this debate is that always women are related to *men*, thus *men are the reference group* from which women do or do not deviate. Cockburn wants to quit from this tight framework. 'I take the position that women need to keep the idea of sexual and gender 'difference' in play, but on their own terms. Women are the ones who must be able to say when 'difference' is relevant. Otherwise we are led either into seeking equality as being 'just like men', or into rejecting the equality movement altogether...' (Cockburn, 1991: 9-10)¹

That is why more attention has been paid to the issue of sameness and difference in the sociological literature in the last period. If we have the precondition that women and men are the same at the workplace, have to perform the same, mostly even in the same way, we lose the information originating from the different dispositions. 'However, a conception of equal opportunity which requires individuals to be treated the same can never adequately address the fact that women are situated differently. Ignoring women's relationship to the private sphere, for example, conceals the way women are penalized for their difference. Unless difference is recognized and taken account of, women will not be able to compete equally.'" (Wajcman, 1998: 16)

What are the explanations for the refusal to consider gender equality important at the workplace? This issue can be closely connected with the organisational culture. On the basis of her empirical research in the Swiss business sector Brigitte Liebig differentiated four types of gender culture in organisations. She made distinction between the following types: masculine traditionalism, corporate collectivism, normative individualism, pragmatic utilitarianism (Liebig, 2000). In the *masculine traditionalism* men form a homogenous group, which is based on the masculine jobs culture. The idea of women's equal opportunity is not supported in this culture, as it is seen unfair. The *corporate collectivism* refers to a more heterogeneous environment as far as gender relations are concerned. However, the issue of equal opportunity is excluded from the corporate discussions and ideas. Representatives of this culture declare that gender problem lies *outside* the company. Women in these companies usually assist this corporate culture stressing that this a social and not a company issue. *Normative individualism* concentrates on the individual sovereignty, and the principles of

¹ This argument is very positively evaluated by the Hungarian female employees' opinion, too. In many cases they express that men and women are different in a set of cases, especially how differently they approach certain problems. In these cases women try to understand what men may think.

equality, freedom and justice is highly evaluated. Diversity and multiculturalism are placed among the most important values. In this culture people are conscious of gender differences, and female attributes are seen as competencies. Equality is seen as a result of individual performance. The high level of expectations often leads to self-exploitation. *Pragmatic utilitarianism* connects the inside and the outside worlds, because the corporate situation is a part of the social conditions. This culture is averse to continuously stressing the differences between the genders, thus the difference theory, because the advocates of this culture investigate the issue in complexity. The integration of women into the workforce is a precondition of a successful company, thus men have to accept the different measures to achieve this goal.

THE GENDER OF MANAGEMENT

Although women are represented among employees in almost the same proportion as men, their ratio in management, especially at the higher ranks is not balanced. The bulk of reasons about women's under-representation in senior management is complex. There are different groupings for the explanation why women meet the glass-ceiling. (Summary is provided, for example: Powell, 1999; Vinkenburg, 2000) Most of the explanations collect their arguments around two main points: gender and organisation. These pillars are in some cases completed with individual differences or deficiencies.

Organisation as a bias among other factors refers to the experience that the ratio of a social group in itself can already explain the position of the given group. The ratio of women at the top level of the organisations is slight, only symbolic. That is why the group of women suffers from tokenism. This refers to the phenomenon that not only women themselves are evaluated, but they are held as a token of their gender. This very often means that these women are in limelight, and they feel their performance controlled by the dominant group. (Kanter, 1977) Organisation can hinder women's achievement even by structuring the organisational career paths. The two elements of limited career described above strengthen each other and are supported by the social, institutional *system*. (Fagenson, 1990) These three factors influence and determine people's attitudes, behaviour. Powell differentiates between the following groups of explanations: person-centered explanations, situation-centered explanations, social-system-centered explanation. 'The social-system-centered and situation-centered explanations account for the glass ceiling as a barrier to the upward mobility of women in management hierarchies.' (Powell, 1999: 339)

WHAT CAN AND SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS DO?

The main goals of the market-oriented organisations are the efficiency and profit-making, however, most of the companies' visions include paragraphs on the human resources as a tool to realise the goals. The *issue of equal opportunity in organisations is usually marginalised* and does not appear either in formal or informal conversations. However, as a result of the different equal opportunity programmes fuelled partly by governmental or European-level initiatives, a set of colourful 'equal opps' policies has been launched. Most of them targeted women in order to help them to reach the level where men were, to adjust themselves to the masculine norm of employment. The main forms of these policies have been the revision of equal chances in application processes, recruitment, and promotion especially into higher positions of management. Cockburn (1991) labelled these policies as the **short agenda**, which mostly meet even the male managers' support in order to increase women's commitment to the organisation and the tasks they are responsible for. As the present research has indicated, the acceptance of the short agenda depends very much on the organisational culture. At many companies there have been fears of introducing and implementing these policies. The objective of the **long agenda** is to redefine and reorganise the work, re-evaluating women's contribution to the company's goals, and transforming organisational culture. Cockburn gives the example of maternity leave and flexitime, which usually creates problem for the management. Besides, men often find the different policies threatening and unfair.² However, most women agree with the changing organisational culture and the flexible organisation, i.e. with the long agenda.

These policies mostly focus on women, because their unbalanced social and reproductive burdens. Women's unequal share in domestic work and overall responsibilities mean an important root for inequality in wage labour, too. The companies want to ease the tensions deriving from the double/triple burdens. Paradoxically enough these measures often stabilise the slavish domestic division of domestic labour and do not build a new basis for equality.

² Paradoxically we found in the Hungarian investigation that even some women were rejecting the idea of supporting women's employees, because they found it unfair, whereas many men were not against at all.

ACCESS TO COMPANIES

Generally it was extremely difficult to get access to companies in Hungary. If I had not had any personal and informal contact to the gatekeepers in many firms, it had been hardly possible to conduct the research activity. The two most frequent explanations were the overburden of employees and the disinterest in the issue.

The easiest type to access was the company employing about at least thousand people, where the human resource managers were particularly interested and open to the topic and investigation. The largest companies have had more difficulties with gathering all the relevant data and finding the most suitable employees to be interviewed. This throws light on the fact that firms rarely have data by gender.³

Some of the companies have refused the participation in the project, because they have been lack of time and capacity. An affiliate company of a large American firm refused it very softly telling me: 'The firm does not want to appear in Hungary. The company is registered at the Registry Court (Cégbiróság). This is the only (official) publication about this Hungarian affiliate. Besides its only goal must be the growing profit and efficiency, thus people are not allowed to participate in any other activities.' They warned me very sympathetically that I should not have invested too much energy into getting the permission from the American owners, because it took only time and the output was highly risky. The other personal negative experience derives from the state owned economic sector. Although the company's HR manager agreed with the research, in the last minute she denied the access to the firms, because the workload of their employees.

On the whole I have to tell that both the sample and the circle of the interviewed people are biased. I could approach only companies, where the gender awareness and social responsibilities have already achieved a limit, and the company leaders were conscious about the importance of the balanced representation of men and women in firms. In these cases managers seemed to be interested in benchmarking their position among other companies. Although, they were convinced that there has not been any problem with gender equality at

³ It is often the same for the whole statistical data gathering. The Hungarian Statistical Office does not have data on entrepreneurs, self-employment, or the different levels of management by gender.

their companies, they were interested in getting experiences from other companies' cases and their employees' opinions.

GENDER SITUATION AT THE COMPANIES

The issue seemed to be almost non-existent at the first sight when I started the research. According to the information of the companies' ethical codes we can notice that the investigated large scale organisations are conscious of the necessity of the non-discriminatory working environment. Similarly to the companies listed in the ILO-survey, these Hungarian companies mostly have recorded that they do not distinguish between their employees because of their gender, race or age. The only important point is the competence. The companies not only publish this principle but the employees really believe in it. All the companies have been convinced that this problem is not a real one at their workplace.

Now I summarise the main points of the gendered structure.

SEGREGATION

One of the main reasons of gender inequality is the high level of segregation. Gender segregation is significant within the Hungarian labour market on the whole and this has been reflected in the data collected from the investigated companies. One of the largest differences can be seen *between the blue collar and white collar occupations, but even among different segments within white collar workers*, i.e. we can observe the phenomenon of horizontal segregation. The other significant difference can be experienced *between the managerial levels* i.e. strong vertical segregation exists. Depending very much on the profile of the company we find that men are mostly employed in technical and operational areas (especially in the field of telecommunication). Besides, men are more frequently employed in sales, but the latter one depends very much on the type of product, whereas women are involved in financial activities. Women mostly have a career in some feminised economic areas, where the subordinates are overwhelmingly women (HR, PR, logistic departments). However, in some cases even the feminised areas have male managers as it sometimes happens to the financial departments. It is a general opinion held by the companies that *the strong segregation*, which can be observed in all cases, *is a consequence mainly of the character of the job and partly of the differentiation of students in higher education*. 'If there are not

many female students at universities, we cannot take them to the company and cannot promote them, either' – I have heard the widespread argument everywhere. The situation is more complex at companies, where experienced employees are looked for a job. These segregation data are clearly reflected in the Hungarian labour statistics.

Occupational segregation, 1999 (%)

Occupations	Individual jobs'	Employed women's
distribution within the total group		
90–100% women, 10–0% men	11,0	35,7
60–90% women, 40–10% men	19,0	34,2
40–60% women, 60–40% men	16,0	17,2
10–40% women, 90–60% men	27,0	11,7
0–10% women, 100–90% men	27,0	1,2
<i>Total</i>	<i>100,0</i>	<i>100,0</i>
N	617	1726 700

Source: Frey, 2002: 24

Segregation is an important obstacle in the way of women in organisations; it was obvious from the argumentations in almost all interviews. Where can we lead back the origins of this stable and tough segregation? There are several well-elaborated theories on the explanation of gender segregation. (England, 1992) There have been several groupings of these explanations, which concentrate on both the demand and supply side of the labour market. If we look at the company as a locus of gender segregation, according Wajcman's argumentation segregation derives partly from the domestic division of labour (supply side) and the organisational need (demand side).

However, we can observe some fundamental changes in higher education. Compared to the earlier years the ratio of women in all fields has arisen dramatically, which coincides with the trends experienced in Western societies. Women spend more time, energy and money in order to increase their human capital. Women's presence is enormously high in teacher training and education science (71,5%), humanities (66,8%) health and welfare (76,2%), but even in business and administration (66,4%) and law (58,7%). As a result of the growing interest in higher education there have been only four fields, where women are underrepresented. According to the latest Hungarian Statistical Yearbook women's ratio was 45,6% in sciences, 27,1% in computing, 19,3% in engineering and 46,4% in agriculture in the academic year 2002/03. (KSH, 2003: 236) However, women's presence even in these fields has grown steadily, thus the pool is increasing. But we cannot take it for granted that women's higher percentage in tertiary education will directly increase their participation and opportunities in male occupations. Women are present in middle and large sized firms' technical staff, which in itself is not sufficient to be promoted. According to my interviews not only motivation but

even some kind of self-exploitation is necessary, when his/her other personal and private goals are pushed into the background. Men are more willing to follow the organisations' expectations, on the one hand because they are (or they are assumed) the main breadwinners, and on the other because the unbalanced domestic responsibilities. Women about thirty start to think about establishing a family and they tend to finish work earlier, i.e. at 5 p.m., in the afternoons. (M: V.P.) In this case I found manifest the male norm of employment, which presumes that employees should prefer work to private life.

MANAGEMENT

'Everybody has the same opportunity to be promoted to a managerial position' – this opinion was the universal answer to my direct question. Still there is a clear gender structure of the companies even in the fields where we can find mostly female employees, due to the character of the business. Both horizontal and vertical segregation can be found within all companies. Men's dominance in senior management is rather well documented already in management and organisational literatures. (Powell, 1999; Powell-Graves, 2003; Wajcman, 1998) The comparison between the companies is rather difficult because of the diverse definition of managerial positions. It is due to the technical profile of the company.

In some cases it is very shocking to experience that there are no women at all in the highest ranks of management, e.g. working as CEO or deputy CEO. The smaller is a company, and thus slightly flatter the hierarchy, the more opportunities have women to go ahead. In the case of a multinational company employing mostly men (seventy nine percent of the employees are men), women are relatively highly represented in management, they constitute 1/3 of senior managers, but none of them can be found in the first, but in the second line. In this company women's presence at the middle and lower level of management is decreasing, which is a rather unusual phenomenon.

It is general at Hungarian companies that women are in positions where they have to work extremely hard but they are less visible than their bosses, who present the achievement in both the Hungarian and the international context. Despite the several attempts during the socialist period to 'emancipate' women, and push them into managerial positions in diverse sectors, their opportunities remained structured: male and female managerial positions can be differentiated both by functions and economic sectors, and women are still less accepted and evaluated than their male colleagues. This coincides with findings of a research carried out in the United Kingdom. (Wajcman, 1998) The differentiation means that women are mostly

promoted in feminised fields, e.g. HR, marketing, and very rarely in the field of research and development, production, however I found some examples for the contrary, too. The differentiation by sectors means that female managers have better opportunities to climb the ladder in sectors, where more women are employed. That was observed during the nineties in Hungary, when women still had much better chances in financial sectors, especially in banks and public administration. (Nagy, 2001)

There have been several explanations for the emerging question why are so few women in the highest managerial level. As the main findings of the earlier researches have shown there is a bulk of different but interrelating reasons for women's under-representation in these positions. (Powell, 1999) In my research *nobody mentioned either organisation or men as an obstacle in the way of women*; however most of the management and sociological literature find them extremely important. Even at companies where special affirmative actions exist in order to develop women's promotion, people do not see any evidence for an existing glass-ceiling. This is often the opinion of very highly positioned female managers, too. What are the reasons responsible for women's under representation in managerial positions, particularly in the boards of the companies? In the following I will summarise the main components mentioned by the interviewed persons. Although these company data were well-known by all of them, they usually have not thought about them, because they found them 'normal'. It is not a surprising and unusual phenomenon; for example we can see very low female participation in public life, too. The latter is not discussed widely, either.

1. *One group of the explanations is deriving from women's reproductive duties*, however the interviewed person in the next quotation does not hold essential opinion on gender roles. 'If you ask me about the reason behind this – I think it is just by chance...Inherently women are devoted to bigger, sorry to more tasks than men are. I could say even bigger.'
2. The reproductive responsibilities fulfilled by women play an important role not only in employees' attitudes but in employers' decision too. *On the basis of the statistical discrimination employers prefer men, who bear fewer burdens connected to child rearing and family issues.* (The acceptance of this argument is wide even among young women at universities, too.) A woman of middle age told me about it: 'if a younger woman wants to move forward, in her case it will be taken into consideration whether she has a family, and children, or she is married but does not have any children. I know it very well, because she is asked about it. I was told about it by some women,

my girlfriend told it me, when she changed her job within the company she was asked whether she has children, because it is taken into account at the change.’ (M: I.B.)

3. The difference lobby, elaborated in Cockburn’s book, found further support in many other interviews. To explain the reasons for the low presence of women at the top, they usually mentioned *the biases in male and female psychological and mental constitution and attitudes*. ‘Eventually there are some women there. Thus I think if somebody is so highly committed and ambitious, she/he can get into the management. The reason, why there are more men in management *now*, can be that the top management has more stress and tension. Men are perhaps better in dealing with them’. (E: F.I.) This quotation suggests that sometimes women form the majority in top management, which has never been the case.
4. A further explanation emphasises *the existing gender segregation of the workforce at the company*, sometimes because the company’s main business area is technical, which predicts men’s predominance in management. (However, it is not necessary, as I pointed out in the earlier section.)
5. A very uncertain interviewed person listed several causes for women’s low ratio, however at his company there have been rather a few women in managerial positions. He started the list with an unusual point, but he corrected and completed it immediately. *‘I don’t know, it is perhaps a question of genetics*. Or it is perhaps a social problem: women have much more imagined or real roles and tasks connected to family and household. ... My wife is also in leading position, still it is never me who irons and cooks.’ (U: O.Z.)
6. Lack of culture and acceptance of women’s emancipation was mentioned by a young male interviewed person. ‘I think we still have to wait for some years, until it will be widely accepted, and a young woman will not feel herself uncomfortable if she does not start a family immediately, but she is dealing with her job very seriously.’ (U: M.T.)
7. On the whole we can observe a continuous confusion concerning women’s unbalanced representation. Even most female managers, who are highly positioned, stress almost exclusively the individual reasons for being promoted to a higher position. Independently from their tasks in the companies, they think if a woman is well-prepared and willing to go ahead there are not any obstacles in the way of women.⁴

⁴ It is extremely surprising in such cases, when the company started to run a women’s network in order to help motivated women.

These female managers recalled several cases, when directly women were intended to fill the position, but the company was not able to find any woman among the one hundred candidates to meet the requirements. (G: Sz.E.) In another case a young female HR manager emphasized the lack of efficiency in case of women: ‘Why do we have only one woman in the board? *It’s simply because of quality reasons....* Actually we haven’t had any prepared female manager for being promoted. (U: G.R.)

SUBJECTIV EVALUATION

All the interviewed persons, independently from their company, gender or age, denied that there would be any difference in the treatment of men and women at the corporation. Moreover in some cases it was the men, who delivered cases for existing inequalities in their companies, especially in traditionally male jobs. Direct discrimination hardly exists at the investigated companies. However, I will display some examples for discrimination against women on the basis of some stories.

Just to link the *subjective* evaluation to the *objective* segregation I quote the opinion of a female employee, who definitely denied the different treatment of women and men. ‘It is sure that there are significantly more women in jobs such as accountancy, finance, where one has to work like a dog.’ (H:S.E.) This opinion underlines the importance of job segregation in distributing workload unequally.

Most of the interviewed people told that *women’s and men’s performance had been evaluated on the same basis and on the same way*. (It was a clear evidence for the liberal meaning of equality. Not the real outcomes of the process but only the starting opportunities have been taken into account. If there have been some differences in the treatment of men and women, it could be traced back either to the different gender roles played in society in general or to the intrinsic obstacles women have to combat. According these views women first of all have to persuade themselves that they want and can go a step further on their career. Men are usually more skilful in getting the jobs. ‘Men have different skills, and sometimes perhaps they are more successful with them. They have more self-confidence and ambitions.’ (E: F.I.) (Top manager of a company)

Although mostly the sameness of the genders has been stressed by the interviewed persons, it became clear in many cases that employees think that women’s and men’s performance cannot be evaluated on the same basis, as they are different, thus they cannot be really equal.

‘I usually say that there has not been real equality, because men and women are different.’ (M: L.H.) She gave an essentialist, biological explanation for this difference, deriving mostly from supposed differences in mentalities and brains, which is affirmed by social traditions. Subconsciously she argued for the grounds of the *implicit male norm in employment*, which is the base of a peaceful co-working of the genders. ‘If you try to use their heads, or understand why they tell something in this way, it can be excellent to work with them.’ It is especially true for a technical job, where men’s presence is still dominating. Women not only have to perform on the same base and level as men, they even have to conform themselves to the masculine way of thinking in order to have a harmonious contact with the male colleagues. It can hang together with the traditional female roles outside the corporate world, i.e. women are expected to subordinate themselves to the needs of their environment.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AS A COMPANY ISSUE

Although in some steps of the research I had the impression that the problem almost does not exist at the companies, *there have been a wide variety in approaching the issue, employees of some companies were still gender-sensitive*. The explanation for this variety has mostly rooted in the diverse organisational cultures. Where it has been less rigid in itself and influenced very much by the home country’s perception on gender equality in case of multinational companies, there have had even the employees more open and honest opinions, and have recalled their experiences from inside their own firm.’ I think, but it is only an impression, that here is the situation better than the Hungarian average, but it is true for this company, too that women have to perform more for the same evaluation, or performing the same their wages and benefits are behind their male colleagues’. (E: M. I.) Using Hofstede’s masculinity scale we can notice that in this case the home country has had a rather feminine organisational culture compared to other countries in the investigation. He argues that among other things the difference between male and female values is rather small in the feminine culture. (Hofstede, 1997)

Equal opportunity and equal opportunity policy have not been an issue at the investigated companies. *The interviewed persons had the view that such a policy was not necessary unless there was a problem to be corrected*. Some company representatives even declared that they did not want to create any artificial edge between males and females with this approach. Almost all the interviewed persons declared that this topic arises sometimes in

everyday discussions, but not at company level. (M: I.B.) They have not been informed about the company policy, or they have not perceived these formalised policies on women's reintegration after the childbirth as a women-centred policy. Besides they found the issue insignificant. 'I don't really know, if there is any policy to help it (women's equal opportunity), but I'm sure that there isn't any to hinder it.' (U: O.Z)

The liberal meaning of equality could be observed in all cases, rejecting the necessity of discussing this issue. Three different types of organisational cultures could be observed according to Liebig's classification: the masculine traditionalism, the corporate collectivism, and the normative individualism (Liebig, 2000). The fourth type that Liebig called *pragmatic utilitarianism is missing from the Hungarian organisational culture*. The *normative individualism* could be observed only at one company, where the home country's top management declared that women face serious problems in getting ahead. The company launched a new programme and developed a circle of women's network. It is a corporate initiative, which has been introduced in most countries over the world, but not in many in Eastern Europe. The Hungarian 'hub' as they call the units is particularly successful and won a lot of intra-company award due to its intensive work. The point in this action is that the gender differences are recognized, and women as a group should be helped by the firm. However, after receiving this support it depends on the *individual*, whether she can live with the opportunity. Liebig indicates that self-exploitation is rather frequent among these employees. This could be observed in case of Hungarian companies, as it was stressed in the foregoing.

In most cases I found evidence for the type of *corporate collectivism*. In this case employees ignore the corporate heterogeneity, and exclude the question of gender inequality. They refer to the 'facts' like just as many women as men are employed at the company (or even more in some segments), and do not care with the unequal distribution of the genders; top managers are overwhelmingly men, whereas the cleaners are women. Apart from these extreme examples we must stress that a relatively large number of women are in managerial positions at middle level. The segregation is usually taken as normal and linked to physical and reproductive abilities. 'The selection's basis is not that somebody is a woman or not a woman, or we employ just male persons, males, but it is the job, which must be filled by someone who is the most suitable in terms of schedule, loadability and capacity of working.' (H: K.A.)

In case of another multinational company a representative of employees expressed his opinion that equal opportunity is not a company issue. However, he recalled an occurrence

from the near past, when it was discussed at international level. ‘Within the company in the European Workers’ Council it has been discussed that women have suffered by discrimination in some countries, and the workers’ council takes steps to deal with the problem in order to change the situation. ***But I have to tell that this problem has not arisen yet in Hungary.*** (U: M.T.)

Even at other companies the same argumentation returned over again: it can be a real issue but not at the investigated company. If there is a problem, of course it must be treated. ‘Fortunately it is not an issue here, and I think it is all right.’ (N: K.Zs)

There have not always been pure cases in accordance with Liebig’s typology. I met almost continuous suspicion and contradictory statements concerning the topic. As mentioned earlier the idea of any positive support to women as a group has been rejected, however the firm has had the priority to help a special group of young women. I met more HR managers at this firm, who denied the gendered heterogeneity of the workforce (corporate collectivism). A young woman even explicitly labelled the affirmative action of other firms as a negative phenomenon, privileging women ***unfairly***. She continuously stressed the liberal idea of equal opportunity. ‘From the first I have a special opinion on dealing or not dealing with women. If we have to speak about it separately, it’s already a problem for me... I would rather prefer a network, where both women and men are included, and they are discussing how to help together everybody in the network.’ (U: G.R.) This standpoint reminds us of the type of ***masculine traditionalism***, where creating the conditions for equal opportunity is treated as an illegitimate privilege. I will return to these arguments later, when I will analyse the opinion on an existing affirmative action.

In order to contrast the employees’ opinion with the managements’ ***perception on equal opportunity we have to note that some companies or their home countries have launched different advanced programmes and departments for promoting gender equality*** (e.g. European Equality Award, Total-Quality Management, Managing Diversity-programmes, etc.). Although the Hungarian affiliates have applied for the different awards, the employees have not had almost any information on them. It usually remained the task to be solved by the human resource department, but this action was not publicised in the firm. ***According to critical voices this award tries to hide the real problems, like downsizing***, which have surely existed in this economic branch all over the world in the last three years.

The other argument for the ignorance was that ***the idea of equal opportunities is an unwritten part of the company culture***, where respect and equality is highly positioned both by employees and employers. (E: SZ. I.)

Both company and public discussions are not developed on gender issues. Although in the last periods there have been published several news in the daily papers, they mostly focused on macro level topics, like the disadvantaged labour market position of women, troublesome integration after childbirth and childrearing, which are surely serious problems in the country. The other side of the issue is that companies usually do not consider gender equality as a company issue, even though they have several programmes in order to integrate women into the working life and possibly avoid the ‘mommy track’. (This expression refers to the fact that after the childbirth women are not taken seriously by their employers as far the wage work is concerned, because they are assumed to have the family as the priority. They are offered special opportunities to harmonise family life and work life after returning to work, for example part-time work, this is treated as a solution for not really committed workers, thus they are excluded from career opportunities. Women can find themselves on a special way in the organisation; this is called the mommy track.) However, *an HR-manager told me a story about the gender sensitivity of the CEO*. The company intended to introduce measures in order to advance the work-life balance. The CEO, who is a not-Hungarian man, warned the HR department that gendered consequences should be taken into account before the decision. Namely the flexibilisation of working time may affect men and women differently: whereas men will use the increasing free time for recreation, women will run home to do the household duties. Thus this company measure may advance rather the traditional division of labour and not the work-life balance. (A CEO explained the following company measure: the last workday before holiday women can leave earlier in order to do the shopping and cooking.)

In general the interviewed employers and employees denied that there would be any problem concerning gender equality at their companies. They most frequently expressed the view that *the problem exists only outside the company*. Since shortly after launching my project the Governmental Office for Equal Opportunity has been set up, people have been very much informed about this issue – in the outside world. This standpoint coincides with Brigitte Liebig’s category on corporate collectivism, because the interviewed persons made a clear distinction between the inside and the outside world. If there is such a differentiation it is logical to ask people to compare their workplaces with other companies as far as equal opportunity is concerned.

Yet, we can state that company management’s attitude has changed slowly over the time. During the research period I felt a continuous and positive shift into this direction. This investigation took place in the year before the EU-accession, therefore the increasing importance and influence of the EU-directives could be observed. To support my experience I

will present the case of a Hungarian affiliate of a multinational company, where we cannot find any kind of equal opportunity policies. Here not the organisational culture, but rather the institutional environment has caused that the management started to think about gender equality. The interviewed middle level manager at this ‘familiar’ and family company, as all the employees characterised their firm independently from their positions within the organisation, referred to the European Union’s directives on gender mainstreaming. When I started the research at this company the CEO was extremely open, and visibly wanted to shape the good image of the company, however he could not mention any direct institutionalised arrangement or initiative in order to create gender equality at the company. It is fact and it has been quoted very often by the employees that among the four factory managers we can find three women at this company. Accordingly a male subordinate had the opinion half a year later: ‘I think that the company displays not only openness but perhaps even a strategy behind having women as factory managers’. (H: F. A.) Although he has not worked for the Human Resource Department, he realised that the EU requires a more gender-sensitive behaviour of companies. ‘After the EU-accession there will be the opportunity to get money through tenders, and obviously the *H* (company) will apply for this money. We know that in this application we have to fill out a form containing the questions: how many new persons will be employed by the employers during the realization of the project, how many of them are women. ... So it may become an issue.’ (H: F.A.)

PICTURES OF LOYALTY: COMPARING THE FIRM TO OTHER FIRMS

Because of the several biases mentioned in the earlier paragraphs it cannot be surprising that all the interviewed people were highly satisfied with and loyal to their companies. This is only partly due to their perception on the existing gender equality; the other factor in this positive evaluation was the relatively high level of social and company benefits, which are very often absent from Hungarian companies services to their employees.⁵ However, a man working for a privatised firm expressed the opinion that his company usually has paid attention to women’s situation. According to his view, it can derive mainly but not exclusively from the socialist period. His main evidence for this gender-sensitive behaviour of the company was

⁵ Just to give an example for my biased sample: an ‘average’ Hungarian employee is sometimes already satisfied if he/she is registered and the different types of fees are paid by the employer after his/her salary. It reflects the unclear situation in employing people, and the widespread existence of illegal employment. This illegal

the simple collection of statistics and data on the situation of women at different hierarchical levels. According to the interview carried out with this company's HR-manager there has not been any specific investigation on this issue: it has not been justified, because they assumed, their indicators were better than the Hungarian average. (M: Sz. ZS.)

One part of the organisational culture is implicitly that employees are loyal to their firms. Although some companies have difficult situation in terms of constant fusions and downsizings, the employees exactly know that they should not complain about their burdens, because it would cause offence. A clear indicator for these difficulties was that it was complicated to make an appointment for the interviews. In case of two companies I had extreme difficulties in doing my work, because several people cancelled the appointment because of business meetings, and they complained about the continuous stress.

One argument for the better gender equality situation was that there have been several women in managerial positions. Compared to Western countries we can state that in post-socialist countries in general women are relatively often in leading positions, as it was analysed in the foregoing parts.

Still there have been mentioned some critical points, e.g. women cannot go ahead similarly to the bank sector. In the Hungarian banks relatively a few women have been present in the higher ranks of hierarchy, because of the development of the two-tier bank system in the late 1980s. According to my experiences this relative advantage in the bank sector has been diminished, however many women work at the middle level of top management. One young woman thought that the opportunities are still better in the bank sector. 'My acquaintances work in banks, where a man and a woman can go ahead equally, but there are more women in higher positions there than at our company. (E: B. M.) Career opportunities are very much limited. It will be a very sensitive point in organisations very soon.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS

In a set of questions I tried to explore the attitudes toward positive, affirmative programs in order to help women's promotion or equality. As a starting point I asked the employees about their knowledge of such programmes' existence. None of them had any idea on affirmative programmes in Hungary; however one of them mentioned the Ericsson Hungary. Ericsson was one of the prize-winner organisations at the family friendly workplace competition in

employment is very often not obvious for the employees. Only if they want to use the health care or social

2003, and some articles have been published about the firm. Nobody has known the initiative of the General Electric, which was made broadly common in business journals, and introduced at several business meetings, organised for example by the American Chamber of Commerce and the Hungarian Management Association. The explanation for this difference can be that the public discussion is still more interested in family than in gender issues.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Some people expressed their reserves from any positive discriminatory programmes, because they are not fair for the other parts of the employees. Some evidences have been quoted for it in the earlier chapter on equality as company issue, when a young female HR manager expressed her aversion to any ‘unfair’ support for women. Many people, both men and women had negative views on starting such a programme, because they mostly found it strange in the Hungarian context, where men and women are equal, at least according to their opinion. ‘I’m averse even to positive discrimination. Perhaps it is wanted, but at this company I don’t feel that it is necessary. Well, even the others can say that she went ahead, because she was a woman.’ (E: N.Sz.)

This opinion in some cases has been connected with the fear of unfair promoting process, when the promoted person does not have the sufficient skills. This reminds us the socialist area, when positive discrimination was used to bring more women and worker into managerial positions just because their social status and to display the emancipatory characteristics of the system. In socialism many women were ‘token’, and did not have real power, even if they were sitting for example in the national parliaments. These bad experiences are long-lasting memories even in the younger generations, how very often try to avoid any type of positive discrimination. ‘But in a certain case the forced career, getting into a task, position, which work is beyond one, it can be even harmful.’ (N: Sz.R.)

‘I have the problem with these formalised solutions, that instead of solving the problem, they rather stress them.’ (N: S.K.)

Some people’s negative attitude was based on prejudices against the American corporate culture and/or the sensitivity towards sexual harassment. ‘Sometimes it is going already too far, hearing from that in the news right and left, or reading about it ... I have the view that they (the Americans) sometimes swing to the other extreme.’ (H: K.A.)

service, they must meet the unpleasant fact. The government tries to change this situation recently.

However, *most of the interviewed persons accepted the establishment of the GE Women's Network*, and found it well founded and attractive. In this section I try to collect the arguments explaining the positive affects of this initiative.

‘We do not have such a programme at our company. We can draw several conclusions from it at first sight. One may think that there are problems with this issue at that company, which must be treated. And the company tries to treat the problem. It can be a conclusion, but I'm not sure that it is right. It can happen too, that the company has the view in general that this is a problem, and tries to prevent it and to assist people to combat it within the company. It is not a bad initiative.’ (E: Sz. I.) – had the opinion a young male engineer.

Another man in managerial position at the same company expressed a particularly progressive view on this issue. He has thought in the long run about the future of female workforce. ‘In my view the point is not what the company thinks about women, but what women think about the company. Thus, if women think it is a certain kind of support for them, and they need it, than it is good.’ (E: S.G.) Thus the positive programme can raise the satisfaction and the motivation of female workforce, and can reduce the fluctuation of the employees; however the latter one has not been expressed openly.

Mainly women stressed the aspect of belonging to a group, where members meet similar problem, and give each other some good advice. ‘It is not a bad thing. I guess that within the framework of this network women discuss the problem, which have arisen, they can help each other... Everybody has to belong somewhere; if such a small good group with a nice climate comes together, it can have only effects.’ (H: G.M.)

On the whole this programme's acceptance is not unambiguous, which is in connection with the socialist experiences and the lack of knowledge of corporate initiatives in many European Union's countries. The interviewed persons clearly expressed their view that these initiatives are not necessary in Hungary, because gender equality is not a problem.

CORPORATE PROGRAMMES FOR FAMILIES

Hungary is taken for a family-friendly country, where the aims of the family are placed at the top of the priorities. We could discuss it and to point out the difference between the slogans and the reality, but it is not the topic of this paper. It is still noteworthy that a middle-aged managerial woman expressed a very positive opinion about her company's attitude to families: ‘We attach importance to having children and families.’ (E: D. S.) Although it seems

to be obvious, but it is not a general approach to the question. The motive of the family returned throughout the interviews. These programmes have mostly focused on the common programmes for employees and their family members, which can raise the feeling of cohesion among the employees. In the last periods more and more companies have launched these kinds of programmes. The most frequent events were the traditional celebrations of Santa Claus, Christmas, carnival, or the June celebration of the beginning summer. ‘You can take there really the whole family.’

The employees mostly like these occasions of gathering, even though due to the downsizing these are not as large-scale as several years ago. These programmes are rooted partly in the socialist traditions, where the end of the year was celebrated together by the employees, and employees’ children were invited for Santa Claus to the workplace. But we should not underestimate the influence of some multinational firms. In the latter case there is a clear reason that company wants to build a community and raise the loyalty to the company management. Paradoxically and unconsciously these narratives were sometimes gendered, however the Hungarian language does not express the sex of the narrator. In several interviews I received the narrative, where the employee in the story was undoubtedly a man. The manager of a multinational company introduced these occasions in the following way: ‘You can make harmony (between work and family) in many ways, for example there are programmes that bring the family into the firm in order to display it for the child and *the wife* where works the dad, and they can be together. We have at least one or two occasions a year. It is not by accident that Santa Claus is celebrated here in this building. Never at another place.’ (E: F. I.)

At other companies a set of sport competitions was mentioned. Here not only families but friends were invited to help the company’s team in order to win the net-cup, as it was the case in a company producing human management software for the Hungarian market. There has been hardly any company, where the family has not been involved into the company life in the above mentioned way. However, not everybody was enthusiastic for spending the private life with other employees, but the tendency is clear and the overwhelming majority of employees like these occasions.

CHILDBEARING AND CHILDCARE

'It's a current topic in my case, because at the moment I am completely suitable for the requirements of a multinational company. Namely, I do not have children; I can stay in the office until there is any work. Consequently I am suitable for the company's requirements. It will be now interesting; I reveal it to you, I would like to have a baby very soon. And now the question is arising, how this relationship (between the company and me) will change. (H: P.K.)

As the former quotation shows childbearing is a very sensitive point in the companies' practice. The Hungarian child care allowance system is generous, as it is in other post-socialist countries. It means that there is the opportunity to spend three years paid leave per child, and during this period the parents, overwhelmingly women are absent from work. This opportunity is granted by the state and there is a guarantee: these employees must be reemployed by their last employer after returning from child care allowance. Before the transition this practice was completely accepted by both the employees and employers, however now it is a vital topic in women's advancement and (re)integration to the workforce. Companies differ from each other largely from the point whether they are dealing with this issue. But all of them have to meet the 'problem'. Paradoxically this generous child care allowance system is a major obstacle in women's reintegration.

There are at least three different groups concerning companies' attitudes to childbearing of female employees. 1. Companies, which partly want to reduce all costs connected to the absence and/or fluctuation of young professionals, thus making positive steps in order to help women's (quick) return to work. 2. Companies, which do not influence directly and obviously women's or families' choice on timing. 3. Those companies, which do not count seriously on those women, who prefer childbearing to their jobs in a certain period of their lives. Although according to the news the last group is rather large nowadays in Hungary, in my sample the second group is the most frequent. Now I give a more detailed description of the investigated companies from this point of view.

The companies, belonging to the first group usually have a well developed human resource management, and do not want to miss young professional women for a long time, i.e. longer than six or nine months. These organisations have realised that they employ many women and they have to take care of them. 'Beside their family responsibilities women will not be able to put enough professional work (into the company's performance – B.N.), unless the organisation is more *tolerant* of them.' (U: G.R.) This argumentation is again an indicator for the male norm of employment. In these companies there used to be some women in the

board, and these female managers have children, even if less than their male colleagues in the board.

These companies started to elaborate an efficient programme to deal with this issue. The reasons have been rooted both in the top management's ideas about the modern HR management and in the curriculum and textbook of human resource management. The aim of the programme is to help women's return to the company after the childbirth, to have motivated *mothers* at work, and to reduce the stress deriving from the difficult combination of work and family life, as the HR manager declared in the interview. Although either parent could live with the opportunity, until now only women have made use of it. These opportunities are open mainly to professionals working in the head office, whereas blue-collar workers do not use them. The latter group prefers to follow the traditional pattern of motherhood, i.e. stay at home for the maximum length of the childcare allowance.

A direct consequence of this practice is as it happens in many cases that young mothers return to their jobs and either their partners or parents take over most of the responsibilities connected to childrearing. (The average time spent on childcare by these managerial women is 9 months.) It means that their partners take the childcare allowance, or follows their wives abroad, when they get a job in another country within the company. In these cases the status and the salary of the partners' jobs is significantly lower than the wives'. However, it is clear that *young fathers at this company do not take the courage to stay at home* with their small children.

According to the research experiences, these firms form the minority among the companies, and do not want to make these efforts public in a wider circle. These family friendly initiatives cover both generous financial, professional support and actions to combine family and working life. The financial help means that some of the young managers, who want to return to work relatively early, can keep their official cars and mobile phones. There is the opportunity for women with young children to work in part-time jobs, or in telework. The company supports some crèches run by local governments, which take those children of the employees, who are under three years. Some good quality crèches and kindergartens are situated close to the company. There is an active career planning for these women before the childbirth and they are actively informed about the opportunities to return, however it very rarely means their original jobs, because they have been occupied already by other colleagues.

There have been run several projects for this purpose, and they are well institutionalised and all the employees know about them, and they are very proud of them. Although these

projects aim young women, the company's managers and employees tried to avoid any kind of unfair help for women. However, the HR manager has pointed out that it can be heard often that returning women get more financial tools than an average employee. Just to back up this view I quote the opinion of a young man: 'It is really good to be a woman at the company.' (U: Sz. I.) And here is the view of a young female manager, who is partly responsible for the programme 'I already have the impression that we swing to the other extreme, and we are going to reshape the organisation to their needs excessively.' (U.G.R.) Although this woman intended to express a rather negative attitude to the trend, we can see it is close to the idea, which was explained as the long agenda in Cockburn's argumentation, and would be very progressive in order to reach real equality and work-life balance.

The majority of the investigated companies, the second group considers childbirth and childrearing as a normal part of female life course. This means that they expect it to occur: women leave the workplace for a period, which largely depends on the job, and thereafter, usually after a long period they return to the workplace. These companies usually do not put any direct pressure on women. All initiatives connected to the earlier return of these women, particularly of the ambitious ones, depend on women. Usually they start to find solutions for part-time or telework.

In case of a multinational company, where the corporate atmosphere seemed to be friendly ***despite the downsizing, child-bearing has been a valued, not only acceptable but prestigious event in the company's life***. Employees spend on childcare allowance two and a half years on average. The situation is not very optimistic, however. Due to the depression of the Hungarian economy and particularly some of the investigated branches, it is not easy to arrange the return of these mothers. Many of the interviewed persons had the opinion that these women are in a defenceless situation. However, the HR departments in all these companies are conscious about this situation and they know exactly that returning mothers should not be handled roughly. Mostly it means that the company is aware of keeping the law, i.e. to guarantee the job for the returning parents and not to dismiss them for a month. Still there are companies, where the CEO, who is from abroad, has paid special attention to the correct reintegration of women into the labour force.

To have an unproblematic reintegration process there are at least two preconditions:

1. The well organised family background that makes it possible to work continuously even if the children are sick
2. The high level performance and commitment of these women in the years prior to childbirth. In these cases the company's management is convinced of the advantage to count

on the return of these women. This strategy is very often suggested by management consultants for young women at the beginning of their careers.

However, employees have the experience that young women, who quit their work because of childbirth, must face the danger of dismissal due to the recession, since they do not have sufficient labour market and organisation-specific experiences. ‘Who gives birth to a child, isn’t a manager yet. She is young, and she can be whatever excellent in her job, it is uncertain, whether she will have a position when she returns.’ (E: M.I.)

In this way young women must produce an excellent performance, the ability of organisational and logistic skill, and in this case the company offers them for example the opportunity to work in part-time. As mentioned above the employees do not find unproblematic the return of young mothers, and find it selective; however the management explicitly tries to reduce the negative expectations. ‘If I got a baby now, I could not come back. It depends on the position, I am pretty sure, that it depends on the position.’ (E: B.M.)

Even the priority of mothers can change after getting a child. They try to reduce the long working hours and the overload, thus they sometimes leave the company. In many cases it coincides with the company’s priority, because of the recession. ‘There are many cases, when we cannot employ these women. Honestly, the majority of the women do not care about it. They do not care because we pay them a correct lump-sum settlement, and a one month salary. They cannot imagine working at a speed than before the baby.’ (E: E.Á.)

A remarkable shift could be observed between the cohorts. Young men do not handle the childbirth and childrearing as female duties. They consider it rather as a family duty. They have been thinking about how to harmonise family and work in their own and their subordinates’ lives. However we cannot neglect the influence of the corporate culture.

The third group of companies is underrepresented in my sample, because they are usually not open to such kind of investigation. These companies employ mostly men, and there are some tendencies that they increase the ratio of male workforce. In this group it is not question that only the direct and immediate benefit of the company can be important, and the employees must subordinate their private lives and priorities to the corporate targets, otherwise they do not get opportunities to prove their abilities. Both from formal and informal conversation became it clear that these firms do not count on young mothers in responsible jobs. ‘It is very simple: we do not take them back’ – expressed an HR manager in an informal talk on this issue. There are many ways, how to get rid of the redundant female employees: the company offers posts, which cannot be occupied because of the working conditions, long distance from the home, night shift work, inflexible working time, etc. The companies,

especially the larger ones, who want to protect their good reputation offer outplacement for the professionals.

Despite the negative tendencies some companies have launched a very rational human resource management, where the recreation of employees is very important, otherwise they cannot perform well. The work-life balance initiative is an important part of this programme.⁶ There have been different actions, informal and formal policies in order to help employees to reconcile work and family life. The main forms of these actions depend very much on the company management; however most of them are institutionalised. An investigated company has placed the aim of work-life balance on the list of the most important twelve corporate values, where it is the last item.

These policies can lead to very controversial outputs, as it has been realised by some company managers, but very rarely by the employees themselves. There is the possibility that biased gender roles will be reproduced and intensified by institutionalising these measures. 'At most it is a topic before Christmas that women have to do the shopping. In my view men have to do the shopping, too. Thus it is usually not a very sensitive point. From this point of view I am keen on (the distribution) that everybody should do everything equally at home, too. If we work equally at the workplace, we can work equally at home, too.' (N: K.Zs.)

ATYPICAL EMPLOYMENT AT THE COMPANIES

The working time arrangements are rather inflexible and rigid at the Hungarian companies. Employers prefer those, who work full-time, i.e. at least forty hours at their desk and are under the supervision of the managers. Only an insignificant part of the employees work part-time. In my interviews I found contradictions in the opinions of employers and employees. In many cases the manager, CEO or the owner talked about all forms of opportunities concerning flexibility, but the employees have not experienced them.

FLEXIBLE WORKING TIME

There are only a few companies, which introduced flexible working time for most of the employees. In these cases the employees have to be in their office between 9 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. The opportunities presented by the flexibility are very popular among them. The

flexibility offers the chance to arrange private tasks in the morning or afternoon hours. According to sarcastic opinions flexibility has the connotation that there are endless working hours. 'If I leave at 3.30 pm., I am asked: do you leave already. Indeed at 4.30 pm., too.' (E: E. Á.) There have been ironic remarks at other companies, too. 'I work in flexitime. It means that I can decide how long I want to work. So far are things flexible. I have a boss, who always says that the sky is the limit, and he/she (?) does not care at all what happens, the work must be done.' (M: L.H.)

If there is really flexitime, young parents enjoy the advantages of the company's positive attitudes very much because they can plan even the family duties in advance. Young fathers, who would like to spend more time with their families, mentioned this aspect particularly often. 'Thus there are short days and sometimes I have long days.' (E: Sz. I.)

Most of the companies have not introduced the flexibility. The employees would prefer it. 'Even the flexible working time has not been introduced here, in the head office. At least in the head office, what many of us would like. I do not know why it is not possible.' (H: S.E.)

At the same company the HR manager declared that although there is not any institutionalised arrangement for the flexibilisation of the working time, but it still exists in practice. 'There is flexibility in the sense that if anyone has to settle something, and for this reason he/she comes later or leaves earlier, etc. and catches the work up. It works at our company. Even if the working time is declared as fixed. (H: G.Cs.)

Indeed flexible working hours are rarely institutionalised at the companies, and they are related only to professionals. On the question whether these opportunities are fixed, an employee told me that this is a very friendly firm in the field of information science, where there is lots of work. 'Our managers are flexible, but I think it is not the case everywhere.... The firm works like a family, thus the managers discuss the situation and try to find a solution (to get a flexible job).' (N: K. Zs.)

Whereas, as I will show it, part-time employment is conceived for women, flexibility is thought for both genders, or in some sharply segregated areas it gives much more opportunity for men. At the company, quoted in the next sentence, in the jobs of costumer service and payroll calculation mostly women are employed, while men mostly work as engineers.⁷ 'In the field of costumer service we must adjust ourselves to the average work schedule, because our clients usually work from 8 a.m. till 4 p.m. Employees at the payroll calculation

⁶ Although in the interviews I had some questions on this issue, but I do not analyse the data now deeply. The attitudes and the initiatives concerning the topic will be analysed in a later article.

department within a company keep this working time, thus we must adjust ourselves to that. In the case of programmers it is (the working time) more flexible, because they can think about the problem even on the subway, and it is not sure that they always have to sit in front of their computers.’ (N: Sz.R.)

PART-TIME WORK

As mentioned in the earlier section, the presence of part-time work is very marginal. Five percent of the employed people have part-time jobs. This rather unique phenomenon, which is an obstacle in the way of women’s increasing labour market participation, has several reasons both on demand and supply sides. On the supply side it is often mentioned that families, which really need the second income, do not earn enough money with this solution. It is an explanation, why only women use this alternative working arrangement. At the same time companies do not prefer part-time work or job sharing either, because they are usually convinced that these employees are rarely committed, and cannot be involved into new projects. Besides it is a rather expensive solution for the employers, as they have to pay fix costs, i.e. the same amount of affixes like in case of full-time worker. This regulation has slightly changed during the investigated period.

There have been some companies, where part-time work has been a real option. Even in these cases it has not been institutionalised, and was open to young managerial women. While discussing this topic with the employers and employees *only young mothers* have been mentioned. This is the only group where part-time work is a legitimate option in these companies. Career planning helps the return to the workforce in part-time, as is has been shown in the earlier part.

Although part-time management is a rather popular topic among the progressive human resource management initiatives, it is still at the very beginning even in companies, where particular attention is paid to equal opportunity. (See for example the initiatives of Deutsche Telekom in Germany) This intention has been formulated at an investigated firm as well. The main significance of such an initiative is that it keeps the excellent workforce and offers a positive role model for the subordinated workers.⁸

⁷ This situation is clear from not only the interviews, but it is displayed in the company’s homepage. In order to keep the company’s anonymity I do not give the address of the webpage.

⁸ Some good practices from the Hungarian context could be read in the business journal *Figyelő*, (January 30, 2003) Fehér hollók. Részmunkaidős menedzserek.

However, in some cases it has been mentioned that this issue would be elaborated deeply in the near future. If the firm makes it general for the employees, it can be really pioneering in the Hungarian corporate culture. ‘Where we certainly will make progress, or at least we want to make progress in a very short time is part-time work.’ (M: Sz.Zs.) Although, according to the HR department there have been already several measures to offer this opportunity for the employees, people were not sure about whether everybody is entitled to use it. This can be assigned both to the novelty of this initiative and to the poor communication of this topic, which could be observed in case of equal opportunity issues in general, too. ‘There are some people on part-time work; I know a young mother, who works part-time, there are some people, who use telework. The alternative is given.’ (M: I.B.)

As this way of employment is rather expensive for the companies, they usually, if at all offer this alternative on an individual basis. The company applies it as a kind of privilege for those employees, who have proved their knowledge and value. ‘Young mothers live with this opportunity, those who we need extremely. It does not work for anybody, when we do not know it either, whether we should take them on again. Usually those succeed in getting the opportunity, who are appreciated and who are important for the firm... In general women live with this opportunity.’ (E: E.Á.)

Other companies’ employees expressed their supportive views on this issue, too: the company should not lose the highly qualified, excellent colleagues, because they can work (temporarily) less. It gives a tool in the hand of the employer to differentiate between the employees on this basis, too. ‘There is part-time work at the beginning of the motherhood, and when she can arrange the family responsibilities, and the children grow up, and they are less and less sick, she comes back to work fulltime. She can return to work part-time whenever she wants.’ (N:A.G.)

‘It is possible that she works in six hours more than others in eight hours. As I mentioned earlier, it (the performance) does not depend on the length of time, how long I gaze at the computer screen. It is possible that I am capable of doing such things in one or two hours, which cannot be done by others in more than ten hours. It is very individual.’ (H: F. A.) Flexibility occurs more often at companies, where the manager has trust in his/her employees commitment and performance. It depends not only on personality, but rather on the corporate culture, which is formed by the top management’s and the headquarters’ basic values.

All these interviews underline that part-time work is usually thought for women in a certain period of lifecycle. The interviewed companies were in general positive to this initiative, but on an individual basis. They supported their female colleagues to work part

time, but nobody mentioned a man among the employees, who took the childcare responsibilities and stayed at home.

TELEWORK

Telework is very rare in the practice of Hungarian companies. In my sample the only firm, which has a more developed initiative for it, works in telecommunication. Otherwise there is not any difference between the investigated firms. There are many cases, when it is impossible to introduce this atypical work, because of the characteristics of some jobs, like sales, trading activity, factory work, when the employee must be in person on the spot.

‘I have the opinion that in this position, where I am now, there are not big opportunities. My job is accompanied by lots of moving, measures, phoning, thus I have to be here. I have to be here to run into the neighbouring room, I have to be here to run into the stores. I have heard that there has been a female colleague, who has made an attempt at doing so; she has been employed in this way, because she has a little baby. But there is only a restricted group of tasks, which can be arranged from home. So, all what remained was computer downloading, and analyses. But our job is much more complex.’ (H: P. K.)

The only firm, employing telework, gave the data on the availability of this alternative. Although the HR manager stressed the importance of combining family and work duties, thus privileging young mothers, mostly employees in sales, IT, public payphone, and investment areas use the opportunity. Thus the beneficiaries are in seventy percent men.

The most widespread arguments against this type of work are the insufficient internet access, security reasons, and lack of continuous control over the employee.

FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKPLACE – AN AWARD FOR COMPANIES

It was the year 2000, when the Ministry of Social and Family Affairs announced the Family Friendly Workplace Award the first time. The goal of this competition is to pay respect to workplaces, where different kinds of actions have been introduced to help employees with children/families to reconcile work life and family life. We can take it as a distinct part of *social responsibility*, which is a very fashionable expression in today’s organisations, particularly in business life.

My original aim was to map the selection procedure, to have a look at all competing organisations' application, and finally the analysis of the award winning organisational programmes. Due to a current, parallel investigation, which has been carried out at the University Pécs, these applications have not been available at the ministry, responsible for the application and selection. Thus the only kind of information I received is the list of award winning companies in different categories, and some news for business journals. This list is rather confusing for an outsider, because in 2000 eight categories were differentiated starting with the usual categories, like large, medium, and small size companies, institutions belonging to local governments, foundations, and continued with the extraordinary prizes of the chamber of commerce, etc.

It is not clear whether the prize was given sufficient publicity. The prestige of the prize should and could be increased by different tools:

- to reduce the number of prize-winners,
- to increase the publicity
- open selection process
- publicise the advantages of the family friendly workplaces based on 'hard' economic analysis
- emphasise of changing gender roles within organisations/role models
- publish a *best practice* collection from these organisations' experiences
- developing a webpage describing these workplaces, and their initiatives (At this moment only the names of the different organisations are available at different places.)
- business leaders and owners should become interested in this competition

SUMMARY

Although at the beginning of my work it seemed that the issue of gender inequality at companies is a non-existent one, and I have not addressed the adequate research question, several characteristics of gendered substructure have become clear.

The Hungarian labour market *has been splitting* over the last fifteen years. The rate of employment has decreased dramatically, whereas the unemployment rate stabilised below the level of the European Union. Consequently huge parts of labour force became inactive. Particularly young mothers have been pushed out from the workplaces. This has been partly

due to the generous child care allowance, which has encouraged women to stay at home long, thus sometimes choosing an alternative solution to the potential unemployment in the short run. This group of the inactive women is in particularly vulnerable situation while preparing to re-enter the labour market. This negative trend has been reinforced by the traditional attitudes on women's employment commencing parallel with the transition.

Whereas the other group of women, working in the corporate life competes with men, employed almost exclusively full-time, and has an almost continuous life cycle with short career break, adjust her to the male norm of employment. There have been some alternative options, too, but they have not been wide-spread, and may offer the trap of the 'mommy track'. Career-oriented, motivated and committed employees rarely use this opportunity.

The liberal concept of equality has emerged in all interviews. It includes the guarantee for a fair procedure for all employees independently from their sexes. It concentrates on the starting positions, not on the fair outcome. Radical view is rarely expressed at companies; its acceptance could be measured both directly and indirectly. In a direct way people refused the idea of positive actions, whereas when I asked the concrete practice of an affirmative action, most of the interviewed people accepted it. Whether these positive actions and the ideas on gender equality are accepted depends very much on the company's background. The large-sized, multinational companies have the advantage that their international board usually prefers or even presses for such initiatives. If emancipation is an important topic in the homeland, this attitude is perceptible in the Hungarian affiliate. Moreover the management's attitude, its identification with gender equality is inevitably to reach sincere and true solutions, and realise dignity at the workplace even in this respect. Middle sized Hungarian companies' position is more complex and difficult. They do not have the support and ready-made initiatives, thus they should raise the issue alone. These companies' human resource management is not the most sophisticated part of their activity, because that is far away from their business. Consequently the sensibility towards social inequality, to the kind of initiatives and whether they are penetrating depend above all on the company owners' and/or CEOs' personality.

Job segregation is definitely one of the main obstacles in women's professional career. Women are less often present in the technical field, currently an important and dynamic sector in the world. Using this fact as an argument both women and men employees totally accept that for example in a telecommunication company men should have the leading positions even in Human Resources or Public Relations. Girls and women should be encouraged to gain non-traditional female degrees from universities, which could give them more opportunities in the

corporate world. Simultaneously boys and men are welcome in feminised fields. Due to the different social evaluation of male and female jobs the prestige and the wage connected to female work could be increased this way.

According to the general view of both sexes women's and men's performance had been evaluated on the same basis and on the same way. Women and men did not differ in their answers given to the question how they evaluate gender equality at their companies. However, I found some evidence and stories on unfair selection or promotion.

Equality in general is not an important issue nowadays in the Hungarian corporate context. The figures referring to the investigated companies, e.g. ratio of female employment, female managers, particularly at middle level, are usually higher compared to many West-European countries. Still we have to be aware of the possible opposite trends in Hungary. Presently many companies face continuous downsizing, there are more and more tasks not a single new person is employed, thus everybody must meet an increasing pressure at the workplace. Even leaving people are not replaced with new ones. 'Those who have work, work like a dog. Those who haven't, they try to find a job.' (HR manager of a multinational company) These tendencies may affect women's chances in a negative way.

If the country and the companies have to and want to widen employment, female workforce must be taken into account to a greater extent, and all the concerned issues become even more urgent. Governments must keep these principles in mind, too and should encourage firms to employ and reemploy women. If the introduction of part-time employment or telework is financially supported, the companies can become interested in women's long-lasting employment.

REFERENCES:

- Acker, Joan 1998. The Future of 'Gender and Organizations': Connections and Boundaries. *Gender, Work and Organization* 5,4: 195-206.
- Bálint, Zsuzsa 2003. *Női és férfi vezetők esélyegyenlőségének vizsgálata a gazdasági szférában.* (Investigating women's and men's equal opportunities in the economic sector) M.Sc. Thesis at the Budapest School of Management, Budapest University of Sciences and Public Administration.
- Carli, Linda L.–Eagly, Alice H. 1999. Gender Effects on Social Influence and Emergent Leadership in: Powell, Gary N. (ed.) *Handbook of Gender and Work.* Sage.
- Cockburn, Cynthia 1991. *In the Way of Women. Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations.* Macmillan
- England, Paula 1992. *Comparable Worth. Theories and Evidence.* London, Aldine de Gruyter.
- e.quality@work: An Information Base on Equal Employment Opportunities for Women and Men* 2001. ILO, CD-ROM.
- Fagenson, Ellen A. 1990. The Earth of Women in Management Research: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches and Their Biases *Journal of Business Ethics.* 9:267–274.
- Frey, Mária 2002. Women in the labour market In: Nagy I.–Pongráczné–Tóth I. Gy. (eds.) *Changing Roles* 2001. Report on the Situation of Women and Men. TÁRKI–SZCSM. On-line: <http://www.tarki.hu/adatbank-h/kutjel/pdf/a497.pdf>
- H. Sas Judit (1988) *Nőies nők és férfias férfiak,* Akadémiai, 180–237.
- Halford, Susan–Leonard, Pauline (2001) *Gender, Power and Organisations,* Palgrave.
- Hearn, Jeff–Kovalainen, Anne–Tallberg, Teemu 2002. *Gender Divisions and Gender Policies in Top Finnish Corporations.* Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration. Research Reports 57, Helsingfors.
- Hochschild, Arlie 2001. *The Time Bind. When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work.* Holt
- Hofstede, Geert H. (1997) *Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind.* McGraw–Hill. 79–108.
- Hofstede, Geert H. (et al.) 1998. *Masculinity and Femininity. The Taboo Dimension of National Cultures.* Sage.
- Höpflinger, F.–Charles, M.–Debrunner, A. 1991. *Familienleben und Berufsarbeit: Zum Wechselverhältnis zweier Lebensbereiche.* Zürich, Seismo Verlag
- Jewson, Nick–Mason, David 1986. The theory and the practice of equal opportunities policies: liberal and radical approaches. *Sociological Review* 34/2 307–334.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss 1977. *Men and Women of the Corporation.* New York, Basic Books.
- KSH (2003) *Statistical Yearbook of Hungary 2002,* Budapest
- KSH 1998. *A nemzetgazdaság munkaerőmérlege,* 1998. január 1. (Labour account Hungary, 1 January 1998), Hungarian Central Statistical Office (<http://www.ksh.hu>)
- KSH 2000. *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv 2000* (Statistical Yearbook of Hungary 2000), Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

- Liebig, Brigitte 2000. Organisationskultur und Geschlechtergleichstellung. Eine Typologie betrieblicher Geschlechterkulturen. *Zeitschrift für Frauenforschung/Geschlechterstudien* 18. Jahrgang 2000 Heft 3 47-66.
- Nagy, Beáta 1999. Munkahelyi előmenetel. (Workplace achievement). In: Pongrácz Tiborné–Tóth I. Gy. (eds.): *Szerepváltozások. Jelentés a nők és a férfiak helyzetéről 1999.* (Changing Roles. Report on the Situation of Women and Men) Bp., TÁRKI– Munkaügyi Minisztérium (<http://www.tarki.hu>)
- Nagy, Beáta 2001. *Női menedzserek.* (Female managers) Aula, Budapest
- Nagy, Beáta 2003. Women in the Economic Elite. In: Domsch, M.–Ladwig, D. –Tenten, E. (eds.) *Gender Equality in Central and Eastern European Countries*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 151–168.
- Powell, Gary N. 1999. Reflections on the Glass Ceiling: Recent Trends and Future Prospects In: Powell, Gary N. (ed.) *Handbook of Gender and Work*. Sage.
- Powell, Gary N.–Graves, Laura M. 2003. *Women and Men in Management*, Sage
- Rubery, Jill–Smith, Mark–Anxo, Dominique–Flood, Lennart 2001. The Future of the European Labor Supply: The Critical Role of the Family. *Feminist Economics* 7(3) 33–69.
- Swedberg, Richard 1987. Economics and Sociology: Past and Present. *Current Sociology*, Vol. 35, No 1. Women in the Economy 65–77.
- Vinkenburg, Claartje J.–Jansen, Paul G. W.–Koopman, Paul L. 2000. Feminine Leadership – A Review of Gender Differences in Managerial Behaviour and Effectiveness. In: Davidson, M. J.–Burke, R. J. (eds.) *Women in Management: Current Research Issues*. Volume II. London, Sage.
- Wajcman, Judy 1998. *Managing like a Man. Women and Men in Corporate Management*. Polity Press