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# Food Sovereignty for Whom?

## Food Poverty, Innovative Public Work Projects and the Authoritarian State

*Abstract*: In Hungary, public work-based municipal projects played a major role in handling welfare challenges, such that the rise of a precarious rural underclass posited following the postsocialist disembedding of marginalised rural societies from the economy. Given the conditions of an authoritative populist state, this paper explores, using examples of case studies located in disadvantaged rural municipalities, innovative agrarian public work projects, as expressions of the relative freedom of action of local welfare states. Following the critical thinking inspired by Polányi's theory (1944), it sheds light on these efforts, from countermovements to the neo-liberal disembedding of the economy from society including theories on food sovereignty movements. Thus, it reflects upon the degree to which these agricultural activities could be seen as part of a broader countermovement to the social disintegration of rural areas that emerged in the context of the transition to capitalism.

*Key Words*: authoritarian state, food poverty, public work, disembedding, postsocialism, rural, capitalism, neoliberalism

## Introduction[1]

Food poverty is an aspect of global inequality that is increasingly present in the peripheries and semi-peripheries of global capitalism and has surfaced as a new

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mass phenomenon in former CEE countries. Inequalities have prevailed after the accession of former CEE countries to the EU, including food poverty. 6.9 per cent of people were malnourished in the 15 member states of the EU prior to extension, while this percentage amounts to 20.5 per cent in the new, primarily former state socialist, member states and is even higher (29 per cent) in Hungary.[2] Poverty also has an ethnic dimension. In Hungary, the ethnic poverty gap is increasing. The proportion of measured poverty rate[3] has been 12 per cent among none-Roma heads of households, while it was 76 per cent among Roma in 2012. The proportion of households that fall under the poverty rate was substantially higher in rural villages (23 per cent) than both in the capital (6 per cent) and cities (17 per cent).[4]

Conspicuously, food poverty is substantially higher in rural settings, where the potential for self-production is higher than in urban areas. This is indicated by the comparative 2002 UNDP survey on food poverty among Roma. [5] On the question "were there periods during the last year when your family did not have enough to eat?", 51 per cent of urban and 43 per cent of rural households in five CEE countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Check Republic) answered "no". Meanwhile, 12 per cent of urban and 19 per cent of rural respondents answered "yes" to the statement "we are constantly starving". The proportion of "yes" answers were highest in Bulgaria (close to 40 per cent) and Romania (over 30 per cent), while in Hungary they only amounted to 34 per cent. Cutting down on food and accepting malnutrition is the second most common strategy (practices by close to 60 per cent of households in Bulgaria and 50 per cent in Romania) to combat poverty. Against the backdrop of rural food poverty, which emerged as a concomitant of the transition to capitalism, this paper explores rural agrarian public work projects as a means to counter the repercussions of incorporating a semi-periphery[6]

2 Miklós Somai, World's Agricultural Production and Trade: Food Security at Stake?, in: International Journal of Biotechnology for Wellness Industries 2/4 (2013), 182–195.

3 The *TÀRKI* measure of poverty rate was those falling below the poverty line of 202 thousand HUF in 2000 and 540 thousand HUF in 2012 per capita household incomes. This figure is calculated as the 60% of the median value of the yearly household income (net 792 thousand HUF in 2012 calculated according to the equivalent of the OECD scale, see András Gábos/Péter Szívós/Annamária Tátrai, Szegénység és társadalmi kirekesztettség Magyarországon, 2000–2012, in: Péter Szívós/István György Tóth (ed.), Egyenlőtlenség és polarizálódás a magyar társadalomban, TÀRKI, Monitor jelentések, Budapest 2012, 37–57.

4 Gábos et. al, Szegénység és társadalmi kirekesztettség, 53.

5 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe: Avoiding the Dependency Trap, A Regional Human Development Report, Bratislava 2002.

6 József Böröcz, A new kind of right-wing extremism is on a roll in Hungary, People's Dispatch, 1.12.2019, https://peoplesdispatch.org/2019/12/01/a–new–kind–of–right–wing–extremism–is–on–a–roll–in–hungary/?fbclid=IwAR2Of3nzwDJmX_AMW6Sa0ZnjkZJ3EZOxJNpt1QSk_uHaVEQ36jUwaJ59jRs (12 November, 2020).

into global capitalism and of the post-socialist disembedding of the economy from rural communities.[7]

In Hungary, municipalities are responsible for the citizen's social security. After 2010, the government expanded public work projects as the key workfare instrument to combat poverty. Mainstream criticism of public work interprets it as an instrument of institutional authoritarianism and a central tool for the reproduction of the rural power base of authoritarian state capitalism.[8] Research has also emphasized that the benefits of local public work projects for long-term unemployed people depend on the benevolent engagement of local stakeholders rather than the system per se. Meanwhile, disadvantaged rural municipalities increasingly utilize public work to produce the food required in their own institutions, such as schools, nurseries and care homes for the elderly, and, as such, become producers of local food, decreasing their market dependency. Many of these municipalities aim for spill-off effects on the households of long-term unemployed people by encouraging and supporting them to produce their own food. This potentially improves the food security for those in long-term unemployment.[9]

While public work is robustly criticized as a workfare project of the authoritarian state, the way in which agricultural public work fits into the transition of the global food regime and the disembedding of the economy from rural society is undertheorized. This paper offers a theoretical contribution to fill this gap, using examples of empirical case studies in disadvantaged rural municipalities. It develops a critical understanding of public work based agricultural production against the backdrop of theorising on countermovements to the neoliberal governance in the post-socialist semi-periphery[10] influenced by Karl Polányi.[11] It also critically reconsiders the interpretation of post-socialist experiences of local food production under authoritarian

7 Chris Hann, Marketization and development on a European periphery. From peasant oikos to socialism and neoliberal capitalism on the Danube-Tisza interfluve, in: Economy and Space 52/1 (2020), 200–215.

8 Gábor Scheiring/Kristóf Szombati, From neoliberal disembedding to authoritarian re-embedding. The making of illiberal hegemony in Hungary, in: International Sociology 35/6 (2020), 721–738.

9 Ildikó Asztalos Morell, On the Roma's precarious experience facing Pentecostalism, in: Donatella Della Porta et al. (eds.), The new social division: Making and unmaking Precariousness, London/New York 2015, 139–158.

10 József Böröcz, From comprador state to auctioneer state. Property change, realignment, and peripheralization in post-state-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, in: David A. Smith/D. J. Solinger/S.C. Topik (eds.), States and Sovereignity in the Global Economy, London/New York 1999, 193–209; Attila Melegh/Iván Szelényi, Polányi Revisited. Introduction, in: Intersections 2/2 (2017), 4–10; Chris Hann, Repatriating Polanyi. Market Society in the Visegrád States, Budapest 2019; Gábor Scheiring, The Retreat of Liberal Democracy: Authoritarian Capitalism and the Accumulative State in Hungary, Cham/Bedford/St Martins 2020.

11 Karl Polányi, Great Transformation. the Political and Economic Origins of Our Time, New York 1944.

regimes[12] as expressions of food sovereignty movements. Building upon Polányi's work,[13] the paper starts by exploring the outcomes of the incorporation of the post-socialist semi-periphery into the third food regime. Secondly, it sheds light on the rise of public work as an instrument of authoritarian populism, and how it captures rural discontent. Thirdly, it assesses how food-sovereignty movements emerged as countermovements to neoliberal food governance. Fourthly, it explores the scope of action of local welfare institutions in initiating innovative uses of public work and how this enhances food sovereignty of local communities. The paper concludes with some empirical case studies.

## The emergence of rural food poverty and integration into the third food regime

Polányi's theory of the double movement between market forces and those countervailing their adverse impacts, albeit developed during World War II, experienced a revival in the context of critical understandings of neo-liberalism. His theory of disembedding the economy from society as a result of the neo-liberal quest for self-regulating markets has been influential for the understanding of contemporary expansion of neoliberal pressures towards deregulation of markets, not the least in the postsocialist context.[14] Rural food poverty emerged as a concomitant of CEE countries, being incorporated into the 'third food regime'[15] as a semi-periphery, a transition enhanced by the anticipated accession to the EU. The 'third food regime' implies the withdrawal of the state and the expansion of market forces via integration into the global food market and the elimination of obstacles to free trade with food, accompanied by the privatization of food security and the domination of a corporate food regime. In terms of local food regimes, it resulted in the increasing displacement of local family-based producers.[16] Meanwhile, neo-liberal state responses to rural poverty do not challenge the disembedding of the economy from society, taking an individualized approach of transferring responsibility to individuals and civil society.

12 Oane Visser et al., 'Quiet Food Sovereignty' as Food Sovereignty without a Movement? Insights from Post-socialist Russia, in: Globalizations 12/4 (2015), 513–528.

13 Karl Polányi, Great Transformation.

14 Attila Melegh/Iván Szelényi, Polányi Revisited; Chris Hann, Repatriating Polanyi; Gábor Scheiring, The Retreat of Liberal.

15 Philip McMichael, Global Development and the Corporate Food Regime, in: Frederick Buttel/Philip McMichael (eds.), New Directions in the Sociology of Global Development, Bingley 2005, 265–299.

16 Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, Peasants and the Art of Farming: A Chayanovian Manifesto, Halifax 2013.

The food regime that Hungary left behind had emerged by the 1980s and was characterized by a symbiosis between large-scale and household production as well as industrial side-activities relocated to rural areas.[17] Rural household-based production was seen as a silent revolutionary power, through which the peasantry forced the state to concessions and a system that contributed to a rising consumption standard in rural areas.[18] The market production of households, which, to an increasing degree, was integrated into state socialist institutions, expanded. Thus, social security has been secured through participation in production, and the economy continued to be embedded into social relations. [19]

In contrast to the production-focused practice of state socialism, the postsocialist transition to capitalism put emphasis on property relations and the creation of private property-based agriculture. [20] Thus, the transition assumed a fundamental restructuring of the economy and its relation to the state. Adherence to the neoliberal transition package included the privatization of the economy, including agriculture, radical transformation of the production structure, liberalization of the market, entrenchment of social spending and deregulation of protective measures in international trade.

The economic transition to capitalism had adverse impacts on livelihoods. Rural communities were heavily affected by rapid decollectivization, desindustrialization and devolution of the the primary sector, since industries and mining enterprises employed rural residents. In the devolution process of the state socialist production apparatus, 1.6 million jobs – that is every third job – disappeared, the majority of which impacted rural livelihoods. Decollectivization and agrarian privatization included the demolition of the state socialist production structure. The food chain increasingly became subject to buying markets of global corporations and has, and has, to a large extent, been dismantled. Furthermore, this process destructed the supportive networks of integrated marketing systems that scaled up household-based production.[21] These were replaced by global food chains including marketing and processing. As a consequence, local markets and household-based production declined from 1.6 million households in the 1980s to 420,000 by 2018.[22] This, in

17 Ildikó Asztalos Morell, Emancipations Dead-End Roads. Studies in the Formation and Development of the Hungarian Model for Agriculture and Gender (1956–1989), Doctoral thesis, Uppsala University, Uppsala 1999.

18 Iván Szelényi et al., Socialist Entrepreneurs, Embourgeoisement in Rural Hungary, Madison 1988.

19 Chris Hann, Repatriating Polányi.

20 Ildikó Asztalos Morell, The importance of cultural, economic and social capital in the genesis of farm family enterprises during the transition from state socialism to capitalism in Hungary. in: Àgnes Neményi (ed.), Trends in Land Succession, Cluj 2009, 97–134.

21 Hann, Marketization.

22 KSH, Gazdaságszerkezeti Összeírás, Budapest 2010.

turn, damaged related informal social security networks of patron-client relations[23] and incorporated rural Roma without household-based production traditions into this system of local food production.[24]

Postsocialist agrarian transition had an adverse effect on production. Agrarian production in 1995 dropped by an unprecedented degree to 63 per cent of the GDP production in 1988. The food available for consumption had not yet reached the level prior to 1989.[25] Global integration resulted in increased international mobilities of food and a further separation of the site of production from that of consumption.

Unlike rural transition in Russia, where the use of rural land remained concentrated in the hand of postsocialist oligarchs who nonetheless retained social and economic responsibility for the rural settlements where they functioned and for their employees,[26] large-scale enterprises in Hungary detached themselves from locally embedded social responsibilities. This detachment of responsibility, combined with a "neo-liberal disembedding of labour relations" and mass rural unemployment, intensified the "structural disintegration" of society.[27] Marginalized rural settlements were most negatively impacted by this.

Food poverty became a concomitant expression of social deprivation that impacted the most marginalized rural inhabitants, particularly Roma. They did not benefit from compensation laws, since, prior to collectivization, their ancestors did not possess land. As a group, Roma were left out of entitlements of two-hectare parcels given to former cooperative employees and members. Furthermore, due to counter-selective mobilities,[28] marginal and aging rural areas received downwardly mobile residents, many of which lacked rural anchorage and know-how of agricultural production. Declining capacities and know-how of households in producing food locally can be seen as a key aspect of rising poverty in rural Hungary.

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23 Mónika Mária Váradi, Èrtékteremtö közfoglalkoztatás periferikus vidéki terekben, in: Esély 1 (2016), 30–56.; Judit Durst, „Bárók", patrónusok versus „komák". Eltérő fejlődési utak az aprófalvakban, in: Mónia Mária áradi (ed.), Kistelepülések lépéskényszerben, Budapest 2018, 232–281, Tünde Virág, „Ez it a reménytelenség vidéke". Falvak a Dráva mentén, in: Mónika Mária Váradi (ed.), Kistelepülések lépéskényszerben, Budapest 2018, 70–101.

24 Péter Szuhay, (Utó)parasztosodó törekvések a szendrőládi romák körében, in: Györgyi Schwarcz/Zsuzsa Szarvas/Miklós Szilágyi (eds.), Utóparaszti hagyományok és modernizációs törekvések a Magyar vidéken, Budapest 2005, 59–74.

25 KSH, Élelmiszerek egy főre jutó hazai fogyasztása, 1970–2013, Budapest 2020.

26 Natalia Mamonova, Understanding the silent majority in authoritarian populism: what can we learn from popular support for Putin in rural Russia?, in: The Journal of Peasant Studies 46/3 (2019), 516–585.

27 Scheiring/Szombati, From neoliberal disembedding.

28 Katalin Kovács, Kistelepülések lépéskényszerben, in: Mónika Mária Váradi (ed.), Kistelepülések lépéskényszerben, Budapest 2008, 7–28.

Transition implied endangerment of rural food security for the marginalized new long-term employed underclass, among which Roma have been overrepresented. This underclass is vulnerable in two ways: first, owing to a loss of both paid employment and, thus, social benefits and, second, because of their lacking ability to contribute to their own subsistence through household-based production. This precariat is highly dependent on welfare and shows a very low propensity of labour mobility.

## The rise of public work as authoritative workfare response

The doctrines of the "transition package" for CEE countries, inspired by the Washington Consensus, which included the liberalization of trade and a private property regime, resulted first of all in the retrenchment of welfare. Sanctioned by the debt-regime,[29] neoliberal welfare state solutions to rising unemployment embraced during the first phase of the transition by the MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) and SZDSZ (Free Democrats) governments (2002, 2006) included austerity measures combined with a preference for market rather than collective solutions to poverty reduction. Unemployment was seen as the natural concomitant of the restructuration process. Active labour market programmes, such as the *Road to Work*, were initiated to encourage the return to the labour market, and public work was introduced.

Secondly, a human rights agenda was promoted, including the emancipation of ethnic minorities. As the root cause for Roma marginality and segregation, this agenda identified discrimination and the violation of human rights, disregarding the effect of economic restructuring on mass-unemployment. As Szombati[30] argued, the left-liberal elite attempted "to emancipate the surplus population by disaggregating the local mechanism of segregation and control through the centralization of welfare and education programs" such as the promotion of anti-segregation school programmes. Left-liberal policies had adverse local outcomes. Among others, the declining non-Roma poor, primarily the post-peasant strata, also became increasingly dependent on institutionalized support and perceived themselves as being abandoned by the state. The collapse of the integrative force of the state socialist moral order based on a hard work ethic caused a moral panic among the post-peasant middle class. They feared a future where unemployed people would live off the

29 McMichael, Global Development.

30 Kirstóf Szombati, The Revolt of the Provinces. Anti-Gypsyism and Right-Wing Politics in Hungary, New York 2018.

solidarity of society without working for their subsistence. Since Roma were disproportionately represented among the long-term unemployed, poverty obtained a Roma face, as Szalai put it.[31] This contributed to the association of liberal elites, who were pursuing this desegregation policy, with Roma, who were increasingly labelled as undeserving poor and "unworthy" others in populist politics. Former bonds of solidarity between Roma and non-Roma broke. Thus, as Szombati argues,[32] rural polarization between a declining non-Roma post-peasant middle class and a growing Roma underclass proved an explosive combination for political mobilisation.

Due to the lack of a charismatic left movement, authoritarian populism captured the growing discontent, which was particularly alarming in rural areas, as an authoritarian response of the semi-periphery.[33] FIDESZ, powered by nationalist notions of authoritarian populism, returned to state power in 2010 and laid the grounds for what Scheiring identified as "authoritarian state capitalism".[34] Alongside other tactics, capturing rural support resulted in three constitutive electoral victories (2010, 2014, 2018) for the FIDESZ. According to Scheiring, this authoritarian state capitalism relies on several components: its stability is vested on striking a compromise between the interests of transnational and national capitalism in regards to issues like the precarization of labour rights. Although the regime employs a critical rhetoric towards EU and international capital, juxtaposing it with the interests of the nation, its power is vested in the channelling of EU resources towards national capital accumulation, which favours circles close to the government. Despite renationalizing certain branches, the regime promotes transnational capital, including global food chains, with favourable tax reductions. Thus, in summary, the regime does not question the neoliberal hegemony of the market.

While the regime promotes a pro-farmer rhetoric, in practice, as documented cases of the land-grabbing, pro-government national bourgeoisie illustrate, it undermines their economic interests.[35] Rather, its rural support is fostered by capitalizing the above described moral panic. According to Gramsci,[36] the transformative state needs to secure public support and to "sustain a historic bloc the dominant class has to make concessions to the subordinate forces, giving them material interest in

31 Júlia Szalai, Nincs két ország? Társadalmi küzdelmek az állami túlelosztásért a rendszerváltás utáni Magyarországon, Budapest 2007.

32 Szombati, The Revolt of the Provinces.

33 Böröcz, From comprador state to auctioneer state.

34 Scheiring, The Retreat of Liberal Democracy.

35 József Ángyán, Állami földprivatizáció. Intézményesített földrablás, Budapest 2015; Noémi Gonda, Land grabbing and the making of an authoritarian populist regime in Hungary, in: The Journal of Peasant Studies 46/3 (2019), 606–625.

36 Quintin Hoare/Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds), Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, New York 1971.

its maintenance". As Mananova emphasizes,[37] authoritarian populism rests upon a strong interventionist state, on "law and order" and a populist unity between those in power and the people. It places nationalist over sectional interests, promising to favour the silenced people rather than the elites or combat imagined threats of the nation's greatness and health. Authoritarian populism typically attributes decline to racialize others.[38] Right-wing politics often finds moral support among the silent rural majority, whose livelihood has been endangered by neoliberal capitalism and by the "relative surplus population" created by it.[39] "Right populism conflates 'the people' with an embattled nation confronting its external enemies."[40]

From the 2010 governing period onwards, the extension of state funding for new forms of public work targeted those strata worse hit by the adverse impact of the neoliberal free market-based transition to capitalism, among them long-term unemployed people in marginalized rural areas. In contrast, targeting the most exposed, the FIDESZ-Christian Democrat coalition government employed a populist strategy to win the vote in rural areas in two consecutive elections. By 2016, there were 223,469 people employed in public work projects. This number dropped drastically to 93,661 in 2020. In 2010, Hungary became a leading nation regarding the proportion of expenses on the creation of workplaces of active labour market expenses: in 2012, 40 per cent of total labour market expenses in Hungary were spent on the creation of workplaces, compared to 3 per cent in the EU.[41]

However, as Scheiring argues, social expenditures of the accumulative authoritative Hungarian state do not target developmental goals, in contrast with the Asian Tiger developmental authoritative states.[42] On the contrary, the regime has reversed to devolution, which is signified by cuts in educational expenditure: there was a 15 per cent decline of the number of people in tertiary education between 2010 and 2016, with a drop of the compulsory school age from 18 to 16 years. This accommodates the needs of (inter)national capital for low-skilled, low-wage labour. The extension of the state funded public work programme fits into this overall strategy of maintaining disadvantages rather than improving the capacities of those marginalized from the first economy.

37 Mamonova, Understanding the silent majority.

38 Ian Scoones et al., Emancipatory rural politics: confronting authoritarian populism, in: The Journal of Peasant Studies 45/1 (2018), 1–20.

39 Ruth Hall/Ian Scoones/Dzodzi Tsikata (eds.), Africa's Land Rush: Rural Livelihoods and Agrarian Change, Oxford 2015.

40 Samir Gandesha, Understanding Right and Left Populism, in: Jeremiah Morelock (ed.), Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism, London 2018, 49–70, 63.

41 Judit Kálmán, A közfoglalkoztatási programok háttere és nemzetközi tapasztalatai, in: Júlia Varga (ed.), Közelkép. Közmunka, Budapest 2014, 42–58.

42 Scheiring, The Retreat of Liberal Democracy.

While public work is the instrument of the authoritarian state, Franklin et al recently highlighted food production within the framework of public work as an isolated innovative process. This paper explores the scope of action that local municipalities have to innovatively utilize public work for local food production and overcoming food poverty of the long-term unemployed.

## Authoritative workfare state and the municipal scope of action

In Hungary, municipalities are charged with the task of providing social security for their residents. The social division of the country into an upper and lower strata is enforced by residential segregation.[43] Expanding authoritative workfare solutions transfer state funds to resource-poor municipalities, with the precondition of minimized social transfers to at least 30 day's work the previous year.

Critics of public work emphasize that it conserves the exclusion of the emergent rural underclass from employment in the 'real' labour market, which increases their dependence on workfare projects.[44] These projects are seen to have responded to the moral designation by 'proper local citizens' towards those in growing dependency on social transfers without demand for work. Associating social problems of poverty with Roma, who in this context serve as a scapegoat, overtly and implicitly confirmed their 'unworthiness' within local moral economies, which regulate access to public work.[45] The disposition of local elites over public work projects enforces their power and their grip on the loyalty of long-term unemployed people, providing them with a tool for implementing paternalistic and authoritarian local relations.

Others emphasize the innovative and socially sensible uses of public work resources by local municipalities.[46] The *START* programme enabled productive, value-

43 Zsuzsa Ferge, Kétsebességü Magyarország, Budapest 2002; Szalai, Nincs két ország?

44 Károly Fazekas/Ágota Scharle (ed.), From pensions to public work: Hungarian employment policy from 1990 to 2010. National Employment Fund of Hungary, Budapest 2012; Dorottya Szikra, Democracy and welfare in hard times: The social policy of the Orbán Government in Hungary between 2010 and 2014, in: Journal of European Social Policy 24/5 (2014), 486–500; Zsombor Cseres-Gergely/György Molnár, Public works programmes in the public employment system, 2011–2013 – basic facts, in: The Hungarian Labour Market, Budapest 2015, 86–100.

45 Györgyi Schwartz, Ethnicizing poverty through social security provision in rural Hungary, in: Journal of Rural Studies 27/1 (2012), 99–107; Tatjana Thelen et al., 'The sleep has been rubbed from their eyes': social citizenship and the reproduction of local hierarchies in rural Hungary and Romania, in: Citizenship Studies 15/3–4 (2011), 513–527; Margit Feischmidt/Kristóf Szombati, Understanding the rise of the far right from a local perspective: Structural and cultural conditions of ethnotraditionalist inclusion and racial exclusion in rural Hungary, in: Identities 24/3 (2017), 313–331.

46 Mónika Mária Váradi, Èrtékteremtő közfoglalkoztatás periferikus vidéki terekben, in: Esély, 1 (2016) 30–56; Ildikó Asztalos Morell, Workfare with a human face? Innovative utilizations of public work in rural municipalities in Hungary, in: Metszetek 3/4 (2014), 1–24; Alex Franklin/Imre Kovách/Ber-

creating employment within public projects and channelled prioritized resources to the most disadvantaged regions.[47] While in 2011 only few of the preferential municipalities used the START programme, by 2013 all of them were obligated to initiate at least one type of value-creating activity. Such qualifying activities included agriculture, irrigation, maintenance of agricultural service roads, bio and renewable energy utilisation, maintenance of municipal public roads, liquidation of waste, winter and other value-creating employment and public work according to local conditions.[48] Agricultural production is an expanding form of such activities,[49] accounting for 40 per cent of workplaces.[50] During the past years, between 26,000 and 32,000 people worked in the agricultural START programmes (a third of the labour force employed in agriculture) on a total of 1865 hectares of land and an average of 12 hectares per settlement, most of them owned by the municipalities.[51]

By creating public work-based agricultural production projects, municipalities de facto established a tool for non-market based local food production. Typically, the food produced by these projects provisions municipal institutions such as nurseries and care homes. The projects motivated utilizing abandoned land as a source for provisioning good-quality, locally produced food. As a result, they have increased the independence of public institutions from global food supply chains. There is a growing interest among rural mayors to view these arrangements as potential arenas for transferring knowledge on household-based subsistence production to long-term unemployed people, in order to enhance local self-sufficiency on food and circumvent food poverty and dependency on market-based transnational food chains. These municipal efforts are prime examples of a non-market based re-embedment of food production. Thus, these mayors implement practices and utilize discourses that enable social innovation,[52] where food sovereignty issues are implicated. Among others, food programmes have contributed to the improved nutrition of participants.[53] The degree to which such public work-based agricultural production opportunities enhance the independent production capacity of public workers who participate in these work projects to produce their own food depends on the orientation of the local political community, rather than on public labour as an institution.[54]

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nadett Csurgó, Governing Social Innovation: Exploring the Role of 'Discretionary Practice' in the Negotiation of Shared Spaces of Community Food Growing, in: Sociologia Ruralis 57/4 (2017), 439–458.

47 Kormány 1044/2013 (II.5) governmental decree.

48 http://kozfoglalkoztatas.kormany.hu (6 May 2000).

49 Bálint Koós, Közfoglalkoztatás a mezőgazdaságban, in: Tér és Társadalom 30/3 (2016), 40–62.

50 http://kozfoglalkoztatas.bm.hu/(6 May 2000).

51 Luca Koltai (ed.), A közfoglalkoztatás hatása a helyi gazdaságra, helyi társadalomra, Budapest 2018.

52 Franklin et. al., Governing Social Innovation.

53 Koltai, A közfoglalkoztatás hatása.

54 Asztalos Morell, Workfare with a human face?

These aspects of public work warrant the reconsideration of Scheiring's distinction between "accumulative" versus "developmental state capitalism".[55] Scheiring regards the establishment of authoritarian institutions of public work as being symptomatic of the lack of potent left-wing countermovements in Hungary, which could have captured discontent for mobilization along a labour rights perspective. Meanwhile, the innovative uses of public work countervail the disembedding of the economy from local societies and enhance the development of resources, which promote food sovereignty of public workers. In this way, these efforts imply *developmental aspects of the local state.* Therefore, this paper argues for a reconsideration of these efforts against the backdrop of recent theories on the relevance of food sovereignty movements for the understanding of local governance of food and poverty on the postsocialist semi-periphery.

## Food sovereignty as a countermovement to the neoliberal food regime

Neoliberal states have deregulated protectionist tools, enabling free market mechanisms that benefit transnational agribusiness interests, which has accelerated global depeasantization. As discussed above, the authoritarian populist state of Hungary has not challenged this doctrine and is pro-global capital. Food sovereignty movements[56] have grown into the most important countermovements against globalized food markets of the third food regime. Food sovereignty movements have been primarily understood against the backdrop of the experiences of peasant movements in the global South and, to some degree, the global North, as democratic, participatory, bottom-up movements relying on autonomous peasants as core agents.[57] Agarwal has identified two key aspects of how food sovereignty movements are typically understood.[58] Food sovereignty is seen as being rooted in "agitational collective action" (protest actions and an organized movement base) and contains "cooperative collective action" (independent farmers' cooperatives and banks […] enhance collective action). This pluralistic perception of sovereignty came to the fore with

55 Scheiring, The Retreat of Liberal Democracy.

56 Annette Aurélie Desmarais, The Via Campesina: Consolidation and International Peasant and Farm Movement, in: Journal of Peasant Studies 29/2 (2002), 91–124; Priscilla Claeys, The Creation of New Rights by the Food Sovereignty Movement: The Challenge of Institutionalizing Subversion, in: Sociology 46/5 (2010), 844–860.

57 Desmarais, The Via Campesina.

58 Bina Agarwal Food sovereignty, food security and democratic choice: critical contradictions, difficult conciliations, in: Journal of Peasant Studies 41/6 (2014), 1247–1268

LVC's2007 declaration.[59] These bottom-up, autonomous, collaborate, democratic, mobilizational aspects of "maximal democracy" have subsequently become centrally associated with food sovereignty. [60]

This pluralistic vision prompted several critical "amendments".[61] First, it ignores the continued importance of nation states in managing national food systems and their intermediary role between global and local regulations, where functions of the second food regime prevail under the auspices of the third.[62] As Clark has stated, a "Westphalian state-centric notion of sovereignty" has been apparent in earlier declarations by the Peoples Food Sovereignty Network. [63] The 1996 LVC declaration emphasizes national self-sufficiency: "Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods, while respecting cultural and productive diversity".[64] It continues that it is the rights of states to "[…] protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives […]."[65]

The dualism between state centric versus pluralistic conceptions of food sovereignty raises the question of how to perceive their nexus: as mutually enforcing or exclusionary? As Claeys has argued,[66] one needs to incorporate the possibility of fruitful balance between liberalism and communitarianism, between the possible supportive role of the state and the agency of autonomous citizens. Bringing the state back into discussions on food sovereignty enables us to explore which kind of state policies would be supportive in combining state and non-state forms of food sovereignty.[67]

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59 Patrick Clark, Can the State Foster Food Sovereignty? Insights from the Case of Ecuador, in. Agrarian Change, 16/2 (2015), 183–205.

60 Michael Mesner, The Territory of Self–Determination: Social Reproduction, Agro–Ecology and the Role of the State, in: Peter Andrée et al. (eds.), Globalization and Food–Sovereignty. Global and Local Change in the New Politics of Food, Toronto 2014, 53–83.

61 Gerardo Otero, The Neoliberal Food Regime in Latin America: State, Agribusiness Transnational Corporations and Biotechnology, in: Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue Canadienne D'études du Développement 33/3 (2012), 282–294.

62 Harriet Friedmann/Philip McMichael, Agriculture and the state system: The rise and fall of national agricuture, 1870 to the present, in: Sociologia Ruralis 29/2 (1989), 93–117.

63 Clark, Can the State Foster Food Sovereignty?, p. 186.

64 Via Campesina, The right to produce and access to land. Voice of the Turtle, 1996, http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/library/1996%20Declaration%20of%20Food%20– Sovereignty.pdf (13 November 2020); Raj Patel, Food sovereignty, in: The Journal of Peasant Studies 36/3 (2009), 663–706.

65 Peoples Food sovereignty Network (2002) 'OurWorld Is Not For Sale.Priority to Peoples' Food Sovereignty.WTO out of Food and Agriculture', http://www.citizen.org/documents/wtooutoffood.pdf (19 May 2021)

66 Priscilla Claeys, The Creation of New Rights by the Food Sovereignty Movement: The Challenge of Institutionalizing Subversion, in: Sociology 46/5 (2012), 844–860, 851.

67 Clark, Can the State Foster Food Sovereignty.

According to Bernstein, a Chayanovian state policy that promotes autonomous producers would rely on several pillars.[68] First, the state would be "regulating international (and domestic) trade in food commodities, protecting and promoting small-scale farming"; second, it would enable "scaling up" from the local to the national; and finally, it should "subsidize both (small) farm incomes and consumer prices for food sourced from small farmers". Furthermore, state regulations should be implemented in participatory ways, a kind of "co-production of public policy" based on "state-society synergy"[69] and "embedded autonomy"[70] and co-governance of public policies for food sovereignty between the state and civilian agrarian society.[71]

Nonetheless, conceptualizing the nexus between the 'peasantry' and the state has been contested. As Bernstein argues, left-wing as well as reformist Latin American governments have not been pro-peasant, and introduced top-down reforms.[72] What Scott calls "state-led developmentalism" imposes one-size-fits-all solutions and productivist visions that ignore local realities.[73]

Meanwhile, we lack a comprehensive analysis of how food sovereignty struggles emerge in the postsocialist context. State-induced agrarian collectivization in former state socialist countries of "actually existing socialism"[74] usually has a rather negative image. This view has been challenged in publications on the late phases of state socialism,[75] which highlight how the collective sphere scaled up and integrated household-based production in Hungary, leading to hybrid, quasi-food sovereignty models. Meanwhile, post-socialist realities also contradict food sovereignty models. On the one hand, we see "silent food sovereignty", a persistent household-based production without agentic movement in the region.[76] On the other hand, we find authoritarian populist states such as Hungary mobilizing around "moral panics".[77] Meanwhile, degrees of autonomy of the local state enable opportunities for innova-

68 Henry Bernstein, Food sovereignty via the 'peasant way': a sceptical view, in: Journal of Peasant Studies 41/6 (2014), 1031–1063, 1054; Henry Bernstein, V.I. Lenin and A.V. Chayanov: looking back, looking forward, in: The Journal of Peasant Studies 36/1 (2009), 55–81.

69 Elinor Ostrom, Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy and Development, in: World Development, 24/6 (1996), 1073–1087.

70 Peter Evans, Government action, social capital and development: Reviewing the evidence on synergy, in: World Development 24/6 (1996), 1119–1132, page ???

71 Clark, Can the State Foster Food Sovereignty, 2020.

72 Bernstein, Food sovereignty via the 'peasant way', 1054.

73 James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, New Haven 1998.

74 Marc Edelman, Food sovereignty, Forgotten genealogies and future regulatory challenges, in: Journal of Peasant Studies 41/6 (2014), 959–978, 971.

75 Nigel Swain, Collective farms which work? Cambridge 1985; Hann, Repatriating Polanyi; Szelényi et.al., Socialist Entrepreneurs; Asztalos Morell, Emancipation's Dead-End Roads.

76 Mamonova, Understanding the silent majority; Visser et.al., 'Quiet Food Sovereignty'.

77 Scoones et al., Emancipatory rural politics.

tive utilizations of authoritative workfare institutions to countervail the effects of the third food regime and create momentum for local mobilization.

## Research agenda and methods

As part of my research project *Negotiating Poverty: A Comparative Study of Processes Producing and Reproducing Poverty in Post-socialist Rural Local Communities in Russia and Hungary,* I analysed public work projects of various forms in 24 municipalities. Most of the municipalities (16) were located in the broader agglomeration of Miskolc, one the former industrial centres most severely hit by deindustrialization, three in Szatmár County, two in the Salgótarján agglomeration and one in Baranya in south-western Hungary. Some of these analyses (10) included one or two interviews with mayors and staff members of the local authorities. Most of the analyses involved repeated interviews with several members of the municipal leadership and local civil society organizations between 2010 and 2018. In six case studies, I conducted interviews and participant observations with public workers. Alongside municipal case studies I have participated in regional meetings and local food fairs associated with collaborative projects by civil society organizations and municipalities aiming to enhance food sovereignty, such as the *ProLecsó* initiated Hejő-Sajó collaboration. I participated in national network building *MERI*, initiated for progressive municipalities by the European Social Fund. Together with the Sociological Department at Miskolc University, I have organized a Mayors' Forum and a workshop to discuss issues of food sovereignty and public work. Thus, my research is based on intensive research efforts on the subject.

For the purpose of this contribution, I focus on case studies from four municipalities, in which I have been actively engaged throughout the research period and have the broadest contextual coverage for my data, including interviews with municipal leaders, public workers and civil society organizations. I will first present the municipality of Bükk (1500), comparing this case with research results from three other municipalities: Mátra (2000), Palotás (1300) and Udvari (540). They also represent different ethnic compositions. Bükk and Palotás have a 10 per cent Roma minority, while in Udvari the population consists of 90 per cent Roma. Mátra has an equal share of Roma and non-Roma residents. The main source of data used from my fieldwork at these four places has been mayor interviews. I analysed the interviews based on the concept of meaning concentration,[78] which helped identify key

78 Steinar Kvale/Svend Brinkmann, Interviews. Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing, London 2009.

thematic frames within which the food and public work nexus was developed. Based on this analysis, the following key aspects of this nexus were identified: access to land and material assets, food security versus food sovereignty in the utilization of products, public work and food sovereignty for employees, participation in public work projects as labour relation; public work-based agriculture and the market, and finally adverse effects on community cohesion.

## Public work-based municipal food production

### Land and material assets

Following the privatization of land and the dissolution of former state socialist forms of production in the postsocialist transition, the land that remained in the possession of municipalities became relatively small, thus, most rural municipalities lack sizeable land to use for cultivation. The amount of land under cultivation within public work projects is between 3 and 12 hectares. After some years of carrying out public work projects, some of the municipalities under examination have also purchased additional hectares of land to expand agricultural production.

Other than municipality-owned land, the municipalities under examination have utilized alternative land sources. After 1992, a substantial fragmentation of land ownership occurred. Land entitlements were granted based on compensation laws, partly in reference to 1947 landownership and partly to the former employment status. These allotments were up to 2 hectares in size and located in the vicinity of residential areas. Those who have not lost their entitlements to cooperatives obtain their land as undivided joint property, which form the land basis for continued large-scale farming. Many of the new property owners have ceased to cultivate these small lots in the vicinity of residential areas that are not suitable to large-scale cultivation. Such land became the basis for cultivation in Bükk.

Lajos Barna, the mayor of Bükk, argues that taking unused land under cultivation frees the mostly elderly residents from the responsibility to weed the land, who would otherwise have to pay someone to do it. Instead, the municipality contracts these units for long-term use, which can provide some income for the elderly:

> "Municipality has a long-term tenancy with the owners of small plots; the municipality frees the plot owners from the responsibility to keep the land free from weeds." (Barna)

From a land-use perspective, Bükk is a declining community, where many, especially elderly households, have abandoned the cultivation of land for own consump-

tion. The revitalized land belongs to inner smaller gardens of approximately one hectare that belong to elderly people who are not able to cultivate the land.

The mayor also addresses the urgency to cultivate abandoned land. Barna argues for the benefits of employing public workers for the reconditioning of uncultivated units:

> "Owners can expect rent only after the land's productivity has been restored. This was achieved by public workers. The ownership relations, documents of the land had to be cleared. 8 out of 20 hectares of uncultivated land were prepared for cultivation last year. 200 sq m are covered by folia tent. Some hectares have been utilized for fruit plantation." (Barna)

As the mayor argues above, these unused lands not only result in incurring costs for their owners, as they must keep the land free from weeds, but also prevent them from leasing out the land due to its uncultivated status. In addition, the lack of valid property documents of abandoned land was an obstacle that could be solved when the land was used by the municipality. Public workers reconditioned the lands, which resulted in win-win effects for landowners and the municipality.

### Promoting food security and food sovereignty in the utilization of products

After clearance, Bükk municipality utilizes the land and cultivates it for the use of municipal institutions such as the local school, nursery and care home (18 persons):

> "It will result in cost-reduction and, surely, the organic production of food, vegetable growing under controlled conditions will result in healthy vegetables for children and the elderly."

Thus, the mayor highlights four important motivations for the engagement with public work-based agricultural production. First, the health-promoting effects of organically and locally produced food when the municipality controls the conditions under which production is carried out, which, as a result, enhances food sovereignty, that is the control over the production of food, of the municipalities in their efforts to supply local institutions with food. Second, public work-based production reduces the costs that a municipality must spend on food provision in its institutions. Some municipalities even aim to derive incomes from the production by engaging with food processing and selling the products at local markets.

Third, and more importantly, life conditions of public workers have been improved by enhancing their food security, that is their access to food. Different strategies were documented in municipalities to increase the food security of par-

ticipants in public work-based social land programmes. One such common measure has been that those participating in public work social agriculture programmes can consume the products on the production sites.[79] In one of the municipalities, Mátra, food not used in local institutions was sold at a favourable price to the workers.

Fourth, in some municipalities, public work contributed to the food security of the broader community within the municipality through the distribution of surplus products among the needy in the community, for instance the elderly.[80] Therefore, mayors utilize the option of distributing agricultural products of public work projects to combat rural food poverty in different forms and degrees.

## Public work and food sovereignty for public workers

All mayors in the study expressed their hope that public workers of the programme would acquire knowledge about cultivation and animal husbandry that they could use in their own households. Municipalities encouraged public workers, in different ways and to different degrees, to produce in their own gardens. One mayor initiated an educational farm with ten different kinds of chicken in order to teach skills in poultry farming. Furthermore, he handed out poultry to five households for breeding. This model is similar to a system practiced during state socialism, although the objective of the current projects is to spread knowledge on food security among public workers. The mayor also recognized household work as allowable work time in the context of the public work project. Public workers were to cultivate their own land, which had remained fallow for decades. This also follows the previous socialist norm of considering time spent on household plot work eligible for socialist sector benefits Most mayors provided seeds or plants for household cultivation. Some provided seeds were left over from planting on municipal lands. These efforts reach far beyond food security efforts, since they aim at encouraging public workers to utilize learned skills for autonomous subsistence production. Despite these efforts, the response of public workers to these opportunities varied from resistance (Mátra) to increasing involvement. These efforts must also be seen against the backdrop of cases where municipalities use public work as a punitive measure to "teach the undeserving poor to work", like in Èrmellék. As previous studies show, there is great variation in how mayors put public work into practice, and a progressive attitude is dependent on the benevolence and political inclination of the ruling moral community.

79 Ildikó Asztalos Morell, Beneficiaries and anomalies of innovative municipal public work projects in Hungary, in: Szellem és Tudomány 1 (2017), 240–270.

80 Asztalos Morell, Workfare with a human face?

Similarly, the mayors' views regarding the capabilities of public workers depended on their predilections and prejudices. All of them stated that public workers were unskilled and lacked motivation. The mayor of Bükk explains that, in his experience, extra supervision is thus required:

> "It is difficult to keep sixty to seventy people [of the public work programme] in motion; supervising and monitoring them in a way that they produce value is a difficult task." (Barna)

Mayors react to these shortcomings in different ways. The remuneration of public workers set by the government is below minimum wage, while they are expected to work for eight hours a day with limited labour rights (for example paid holidays). Despite the low wages, which do not cover the minimum standard of living, public work jobs are in high demand among long-term unemployed people as they pay double the social security benefit. Access to even short-term public work with a minimum of one month per year is necessary to qualify for social security benefits. Thus, some mayors recognized the disadvantageous conditions of public work, accepting the low motivation of public workers as a form of passive resistance. They thus seemed willing to tolerate lower work ethic and performance (for example they allowed workers to go home if there were no meaningful tasks).

Other mayors argued that low performance was due to a lack of work experience, caused by long periods of unemployment. Public work would thus improve working skills. These mayors emphasized the importance of public work as a "pedagogic instrument", through which long-term unemployed people, under the guidance of benevolent municipal authorities, could obtain training and get back into a working routine.

The mayors labelled the long-term unemployed differently in ethnic terms. The mayor of Mátra, with a 50 per cent Roma population, used a racial narrative, similar to the so-called "Èrmellék model" that was publicized via the media. He equated Roma's lower motivation with the undeservingness of those in public work, emphasizing the importance of public work to solve the "Roma question" through disciplinary methods. In doing so, he framed undeservingness in ethnic terms. Meanwhile, the mayor of Bükk, with a 10 per cent Roma minority, did not use ethnic terms. Yet another view was taken by the mayor of Udvari, a municipality with 90 per cent Roma, who has challenged critics for accusing him of being "Roma-friendly". He has suggested three guiding principles to meet ethnic challenges: zero tolerance of discrimination, zero tolerance of criminality and social solidarity. This indicates that the proportion of Roma, as well as social challenges related to marginality, play a

major role for a different point of departure in local policy. However, the proportion of Roma alone does not explain policy outcomes, even if the mayor of Mátra did suggest the urgency of addressing ethnic issues in municipalities where a non-Roma population (just about) forms the majority and where a further demographic shift is perceived as a threat.

The low motivation of public workers prompted mayors to agree on the need for supervision and the implementation of a variety of measures (from pedagogic to disciplinary). However, many mayors, including that of Bükk, concurred that finding the appropriate form and extent of supervision was difficult:

> "The intention is to choose brigade and group leaders among public workers in return for higher remuneration. But they do not accept leaders chosen from their own ranks. It is not working. I need municipal employees for this task. But to monitor 4–5 areas, to have permanent control, we do not have enough people for that." (Barna)

Thus, supervision needs to be provided by skilled regular municipal employees. The expenses of such employees are usually not covered by the resources that municipalities receive for public work projects.[81] While this argument has also been brought forward in Mátra, I found that municipalities employed Roma foremen both in Mátra and Udvari, the two municipalities with the highest proportion of Roma. In Mátra, an experienced Roma accountant with secondary school level education was employed. Her task was to calculate payments and employment conditions for 170 public workers of eight different projects. She was also the supervisor of the agricultural production project, which had thirty members. Despite the fact that she performed qualified administrative tasks, she was not offered an office in the municipal building together with 'proper' employees. She met public workers in a separate building of a lower standard, a discriminatory treatment that she resented. Thus, public work is a work relation with in-built problems, which invites municipal employers and employees to share moralizing and biased views on public workers, placing them in a vulnerable position, depending on the benevolence of their employers. As this example shows, workfare that is decentralized in Hungary makes local authorities, mayors and the moral majority omnipotent. Thus, the way in which public work is implemented depends on their either progressive or prejudiced predispositions.

81 Asztalos Morell, Beneficiaries and Anomalies.

## Public work-based social agriculture and the market

The mayor of Bükk municipality states that municipal engagement with public labour-based social agriculture is ambiguous in terms of its broader societal utility, beyond the needs of finding productive employment for the long-term unemployed. In respect to the relationship between public work and the market, mayors criticize that public work distorts the 'pure' function of the market. This is discussed from different perspectives.

Initially, in 2012, the mayor of Bükk argued that his municipality was engaged with social agriculture due to the lack of market-based alternatives to the employment of public workers, while municipalities needed to fulfil their social obligations to long-term unemployed residents. However, when I returned in 2017, the situation had changed. Now mayors argued that new minimum paid low-skilled work opportunities had emerged in the multinational sector, such as packaging work at logistics companies. However, rural long-term unemployed people preferred public work. This could be explained with the physically demanding, strictly monitored, poor working conditions in the private sector. Recent concessions by the government to private companies, the so-called "slave law", further degraded labour conditions, including an increase in the overtime that employers can demand. Furthermore, these jobs require the workers to be mobile, which, when considering poor public transport facilities, adds additional commuting hours to work time. The additional costs for commuting compared to public work in situ are not covered by the slightly higher minimum wage. Thus, public work is seen as a factor that prevents workers from entering the primary labour market. Nonetheless, some mayors have argued that public workers are also not capable of enduring the physical and mental pressure of jobs in the primary labour market: "They break down after a few weeks and quit".

Second, mayors wonder whether social agriculture supported by public funding is the most effective way to produce, since it is not the municipalities' main function to cultivate land. They lack both material resources, such as up-to-date equipment, and immaterial resources, such as know-how. Furthermore, municipalities are forced make major investments in production technologies to further the production:

> "We have to start everything from scratch. I have higher investment expenses to start any kind of programme."

Therefore, mayors question whether it should be the primary goal for municipalities to get involved in production:

> "It should not be the task of the municipality to produce. I mean, this is not a co-operative, not an agricultural company, or any other company." (Barna)

Rather, as one of the mayors considered: "The most effective way would be if local enterprises and producers [*őstermelők*] received out-sourced public workers [to work in their production units]. (Barna). This could have multiple benefits. For one, they already have the knowhow and equipment at hand and could produce more efficiently:

> "On the other hand, there are five [companies] that already have folia tents, they have watering pipes. They have tractors. They do not have to buy it. Two or three persons could be placed at these sites, who would help the company produce. That way the company could produce much more. The production price per unit would be much lower […] those people [the entrepreneurs] are experts, they are competent in their field." (Barna)

Moreover, these companies could contribute to the municipality through taxes:

> Since he owns a company, he has to pay taxes. If he employs that person, it also has consequences in terms of taxes. The value is increasing, if he is generating value, and he sells his products, then the commercial tax generated flows into the municipal budget. This would be an expansion for us." (Barna)

However, one could argue that outsourcing public workers to private enterprises would not overcome the distortion of the market, since these enterprises would dispose of free labour force and gain advantages on the market. Furthermore, the working conditions of outsourced labour could be difficult to supervise: "Of course it would be more difficult to control."

The mayors also identify advantages of municipal-based social farming. First of all, they claim that this activity creates socially and economically useful products, as opposed to other commonly performed public work tasks:

> "It is definitely an advantage to carry out value producing labour. It is definitely better than the previous practice, when one could practically only utilize public work for communal and settlement maintenance tasks." (Barna)

Reflecting upon the relationship between the market and public work, some mayors conclude that the products of public work are to be distributed to the public, while others strive to be functioning units in the market. The latter argue that municipal social farming projects only have a future if they can survive on their own and create employment that is viable without public work. These mayors engage with marketing products, some rather unsuccessfully, like the mayor of Mátra, where the products of public work that could not be sold rotted away. Other mayors, like the one of Palotás, have been successful in expanding public work-based production year

by year, by scaling it up with EU development funds and reinvesting sales incomes. Some municipalities, such as Mátra and Palotás, engage with ecological and environmentally-friendly production and the integration of processing.

## Adverse effects on community cohesion

Looking at the impact of public work-based municipal social agriculture projects on community cohesion, the mayor highlights internal contradictions and conflicts of interest. By actively supporting the production and utilization of products in its institutions, the municipality, at the same time, decreases its economic support for small producers [*őstermelő*], who are potential food/suppliers for municipal institutions. Their economic interests collide with the interest of those long-term unemployed people that are benefiting from the programmes:

> The volume (supplied by municipal production) falls below public procurement [*közbeszerzés*]. There is a requirement for tenders of public institutions. Our real problem is that we have many small-scale private producers [*őstermelő*] in the area. Previously, we bought a lot of products from them, in order to help them. With this programme we have created a competition for them, as I'm not buying from them what we produce on our own.

The interests of these private producers conflict with that of providing meaningful employment for the long-term unemployed: "On the other hand, I secure the employment of thirty to forty people". Thus, municipalities need to balance the interests between groups with different degrees of vulnerability, meaning that market-distorting effects have a potential knock-on effect on social cohesion.

I found an alternative strategy pursued by another mayor to balance similar conflicts. On the one hand, in agreement with those participating in municipal social agriculture, the mayor decided to distribute surplus products equally to all residents in the municipality.[82] On the other hand, he promoted private producers by alternative project-based support forms. One such example was the start-up support for commercial cucumber producers. Both strategies inadvertently counteracted and, in practice, polarized side-effects of public work-based projects.

82 Asztalos Morell, On the Roma precarious experience.

## Discussion

In the following I would like to discuss public work-based agricultural production against the backdrop of considerations by Franklin et al.[83] Building upon their case study of the Hungarian town of Hajdunánás, they argue that as long as public work continues to be "orchestrated from above", it holds greater potential "to continue conserving existing social orders rather than bringing about transformative change". They base their conclusion primarily on the nexus of the public worker and welfare state, which remains within the authoritative workfare paradigm, positing "claimants as holding personal responsibility, not only for their own food insecurity, but more fundamentally for their own poverty". The discretion of welfare state agents in choosing public workers from the eligible indicates the benevolent status of the state in relation to workers.[84] Thus, neither participation nor food security is defined as a human rights issue.

Taking a departure from the criticism of food sovereignty movements, the neoliberal ideology, in supporting the third food regime,[85] propels the supremacy of the market. It deregulates national protectionism, the safeguard of national food sovereignty, replacing it with the global mobility of food channelled along profitability and efficiency of production. Non-profitable production is terminated, superfluous labour disposed of. At the same time, public benefits for the superfluous workforce of this growing underclass are retrenched, and individual responsibility for employability is enforced. Small-scale household production that ensures food sovereignty and autonomy at a basic level is squeezed when former state socialist institutions that used to scale up these activities ceased to exit. The production capacities develop without consideration for ecological balance.

As I have argued, accumulative authoritative capitalism emerged due to the lack of effective left-wing mobilization for a countermovement with electoral support, based on the concession given by the transformative state, in the form of, among others, public work. I argue that there is a growing number of rural municipalities, which despite the authoritative roots of public work, create a countermovement that reach beyond both the imagination of what Scheiring referred to as the authoritative accumulative state[86] and the hegemony of the third food regime.

Considering the third food regime, public work-based agricultural production counteracts the hegemony of the globalized food market by producing local food,

83 Franklin et al., Governing Social Innovation, 452–453.
84 Asztalos Morell, On the Roma precarious experience.
85 McMichael, Global Development.
86 Scheiring, The Retreat of Liberal Democracy.

| | Third food regime | Authoritative workfare | Developmental authoritative workfare |
|---|---|---|---|
| Market | Market supremacy | Market supremaca, social benefit for deserving poor | Benefit and means for resilience |
| Local food sovereignty | Not an issue | An issue for the provision of institutions | An issue for the provision of institutions and households |
| Mobility of food | High | Locally produced for institutions | Locally produced for institutions and for households of public workers |
| Production goal | Profitability, efficiency | Social employment | Social employment, increase efficiency |
| Labour relations | Superfluous labour released | Employment of superfluous labour | Employment of superfluous labour; development of agricultural know-how |
| Local farmers | Subordination to the value chain | Market inhibition through own production | Compensatory programs supporting farmers |
| Subsistance production of households | Deagrarianization | Not a goal | Repeasantization |
| Ecological impact | Negative due to transports and chemical production forms | Positive due to lack of transport, increased control over production | Positive due to lack of transport, increased control over production |

with technologies controlled by local experts. This production is not channelled by the interests of the market, even if mayors express concerns about the righteousness of what they do. They recognize clearly that what they do, does not correspond with what is expected from actors in the market and counteracts the principles of the market. They produce, even if production is not efficient, because they see the social benefits of agricultural work for the long-term unemployed. In doing so, they also counteract another principle of the market, namely that unproductive labour should be laid off, which creates a superfluous underclass. Public work projects constitute an antithesis to this principle, reinforcing a kind of revitalised state socialist work ethic. In contrast to the function of the market, which disembeds economy from society and facilitates deagrarianization and depeasentization, many of these public work projects, to varying degrees and in slightly different ways, revitalise aspects of the former state socialist household based *oikos*, integrated into the state/cooperative based economy. Thus, they stimulate skills of self-sufficiency, which can give partial autonomy from the adverse impacts of the market. Some municipalities which have engaged in public work-based food production chose to use organic production methods, countervailing the adverse ecological impacts of chemicalized production.

But what about transformative features in relation to the accumulative authoritarian state? Nancy Fraser argued that neoliberal politics by emphasizing human rights agenda,[87] which supports recognition and, to some extent, participation, ignores the consequences of distributional injustice related to the impact of economic transition. The critics of the public work programme emphasize, to a large extent, these recognitional (racialized undeservingness) and non-participatory (paternalistic control over access) aspects of public work. To be sure, these are elementary aspects of social justice. Nonetheless, without distributional justice and access to basic needs, justice remains partial. Public work is not, per se, a supreme instrument to secure livelihoods. Many argue that a citizen's basic income would correspond better to a human rights perspective. To use public work resources for agricultural production does not change the underlying paternalistic dependency of workers. But by providing them with the knowhow and necessary means, such as seeds or assistance in cultivation and the opportunity to use public work time to cultivate their own plots, the content of public work changes in a radical way. It allows for synergies between the activities of the household and the public, and stimulates the activities in the former.

Furthermore, to engage with local production, be it within the public or in the household, has ecological benefits. It hands over control over food, the kind of food produced and the methods of production to public institutions or the household, which increases both food sovereignty and security. Transforming former peasant gardens, which have almost turned to stone due to decades of neglect, into productive soil capable of yielding a good proportion of a family's nutritional needs and thus preventing starvation, does not provide the members of the underclass with jobs of the first sector, but contributes to their health and resilience to cope with poverty. However, violation against recognition and participation principles, despite of some elements of distributional justice, excludes the case of Mátra, from the examples of progressive efforts.

The majority of mayors I interviewed did not belong to any party, which is a conscious choice. They aim to work for and serve their locality within the framework of these institutions in an innovative manner. Accessibility of EU developmental funds as well as welcoming of developmental ideas of NGOs, for example the *ProLecso* NGO, which propagates ecological methods, enable more diverse ways to scale up agricultural activities in public work. Such scaling up is not a mandatory feature of public work, rather it depends on the benevolent attitudes of local mayors. However,

87 Nancy Fraser, From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age, in: New Left Review I/212 (July–August) (1995), 68–93; Scheiring, The Retreat of Liberal Democracy; Szombati, The Revolt of the Provinces.

there is increasing evidence of a broader movement among progressive mayors who propagate these innovative solutions. Some of them achieved spectacular results in agricultural production utilizing public work through, more or less, isolated efforts. László Bogdán, the Roma mayor of Cserd, has drawn large-scale media attention to his unconventional pedagogic methods in linking the fight against criminality with work ethics training, combined with Roma identity politics. Although his methods were seen as controversial, agricultural production contributed to increased local food security. Other mayors expand their production through networking, such as the association of municipalities along the Hejő and Sajó rivers or the circle of mayors co-ordinated by Miskolc University, where developmental ideas are exchanged. These developments indicate that such efforts are far from isolated[88] and reflect different types of regional, and even national, levels of co-operation between progressive municipalities.

Therefore, I do not see these innovative uses of public work purely as isolated attempts, but as part of a growing movement. Following the recently published work of Hann,[89] I argue for the need to re-evaluate the heritage of state socialist symbiosis between collective and household production, which faces the dire consequences of transfer to the third food regime and the disembedding of marginalized rural settlements, and large or disadvantaged segments of it, from the economy. Public work can contribute to revitalising household-based production and increasing the resilience of the underclass that is left outside the post socialist economy. Strengthened household-based production cannot replace the need for high-quality education, which can close the gap between marginalized communities and the mainstream. Nonetheless, it can contribute to food sovereignty for those engaging in household-based production by increased food security and control over the household's food supply. Public work contributes to this process by the transmission of skills.

Mayors of Bükk, Udvardi and Palotás represent local efforts, which aim explicitly at solving issues of local food security as well as food sovereignty and address the needs of different segments of their constituency. Somewhat uncertain about their mandate and its consequences, they make use of public work to secure opportunities for local food production and ensure the control over production, while they also make various efforts to improve the food security of public workers and, in some cases, other disadvantaged segments. Furthermore, by encouraging household production of public workers, they stimulate the food sovereignty of public workers in a top-down fashion with diverse outcome. Bringing forward the positive features of

88 Koltai, A közfoglalkoztatás hatása a helyi gazdaságra.
89 Hann, Repatriating Polányi.

these efforts is therefore important to avoid that viable innovations of these models become the victims of political controversies.

Meanwhile, as long as the implementation of these pro-food sovereignty measures rely on the supply of means by an autocratic state and participation is forged due to a dependency on welfare benefits, these efforts will be dependent on the stability or failure of political regimes at the national level and on the benevolence of local welfare state agents at the local level. Participation and positive recognition, and improved work conditions need to be offered to those engaged with public work. As for the enablement of a broader community of long-term unemployed who live in food poverty, municipal interventions could be designed to support required services, such as secured access to water. The promotion of food production in the household should not be seen as the final goal. Support for training and education interventions, which enable the return to the first labour market, should also be strengthened. Eligibility, access to public work, an increased support for household-based production or alternative interventions should cease to be a discretional opportunity for those deemed 'deserving'. Rather, access to such interventions should be based on rights, and state authorities should be assigned the duty and resources to create integrational and resilience enhancing interventions. Partnership with private and voluntary sectors should be enhanced to deliver interventions. Furthermore, public work-based production may place local farmers at a disadvantage. Therefore, municipalities need to create compensatory measures to avoid conflicts in local communities.

## Conclusion

The emerging post-socialist societies need to be considered in the context of rising food sovereignty movements. This special concern can be motivated by the recent re-emergence of a post-peasant family farming strata, who are not yet strong enough to organise themselves in order to defend their rights. The emerging rural underclass is also not in possession of enough political or cultural capital to raise food-sovereignty issues in their own right. Rather, we see a growing movement of socially sensitive local agents, who countervail authoritarian governance by utilizing the institution of public work, which is an otherwise conservative and paternalistic state-funded workfare instrument, to increase municipal food sovereignty. These leaders make use of their scope of action by innovatively exposing the developmental potentials of the authoritarian workfare instrument public work. By this I refer to Scheiring's distinction between accumulative authoritarian capitalism (promoting the economic interests of the elite) and developmental capitalism (focusing on developing the human capital of the broad citizenship). Even if agricultural sub-

sistence production is not a comprehensive solution for the underclass, and not a necessary part of the implementation models of public work projects, know-how gained in public work fosters an engagement with it. Participation in agricultural production strengthens public workers resilience.[90] Furthermore, locally produced food enhances ecological sustainability goals.

Therefore, rather than thinking in terms of the dialectic duality between family farms and the state as interacting agents, responding to the food regime of global corporate capitalism, the importance of the state, especially the local welfare state, needs to be considered as an agent in its own right. As the case of Hungarian public work projects indicate, such intentions to increase local food sovereignty do not correspond with democratic participatory principles of those food sovereignty movements where family farmers are the focus of organising. The enabling role of the state was conceived according to the Westphalian model of food sovereignty movements as restructuring access to land, food and markets for both food providers and consumers.[91] However, despite the evidence documented in this article concerning the positive engagement of progressively oriented local leaders for the benefit of local food security and sovereignty issues, public work projects primarily safeguard the provision for their own institutions, by organising production through the local state. At the same time, the stipulation of the participatory engagement of public workers with public work projects organized by the local welfare state and with household-based production on their own land is dependent on what Sen has coined the well-willing attitude of the benevolent ruler. This article argues that there is a growing co-operation between mayors engaged with innovative adaptations of public work, which may open for a broader transformatory process, reaching beyond public work as an instrument.

Ongoing mobilization of some civil society-based NGOs to promote community-based agricultural production indicates the rise of such engagement.[92] Other case studies show examples of how civil society-based NGOs seek for synergies with municipal public work projects.[93] These initiatives show a possible way of encouraging participatory features in public work projects and integrating them into the autonomous agricultural production of local producers.

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90 Koltai, A közfoglalkoztatás hatása a helyi gazdaságra.

91 Hannah Wittman/Jennifer Blesh, Food Sovereignty and Fome Zero: Connecting Public Food Procurement Programmes to Sustainable Rural Development in Brazil, in: Journal of Agrarian Change, 17/1 (2015), 81–105.

92 Bálint Balázs, Local Food System Development in Hungary, in: International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food 19/3 (2012), 403–421; Bálint Balázs/György Pataki/Orsolya Lazányi, Prospects for the future: Community supported agriculture in Hungary, in: Futures 83 (2016), 100–111.

93 Ildikó Asztalos Morell, Social farming as a means of poverty reduction in rural Hungary, in: socio. hu (2015), 83–106.