

Preliminary Data of Public Work Programs in Forestry

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Abstract – A public works program (PWP) is the provision of employment by the creation of predominantly public goods at a prescribed wage for those unable to find alternative employment. Recently the Hungarian government envisages large scale PWPs in order to lead people back to the labor market. In this study the social effects of a PWP program in forestry were investigated on the basis of a questionnaire filled out by around 600 participants in the northeastern part of Hungary most hardly hit by unemployment. Parallel to this a semi-structured interview was carried out among managers at the forest companies responsible for the program. According to the data analyses we can assume, that forests have a positive effect on people's work attitude, who have been unemployed for a long time. The majority of the people would like to have continues occupation in forestry, even those with a different profession, to be able to support their families, find work close to their homes, families.

Keywords: forestry, public work program, sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the political change in Hungary in 1989 the unemployment rate increased in rural areas. Many factories were closed, the employment rate decreased both in forestry and in the agricultural sector. The structural changes in Hungary's economy especially in the north-eastern part of the country caused a big socio-economical challenge. The unemployment rate has grown in many regions, especially in the north-east and south-west where the most forested areas are. Many studies underlined the reasons for this increase in the lack of highways, the low level of other infrastructural systems, for example the lack of schooling, the low level of health care, and the vocational education, the lack of necessary structural changes.

In Hungary people typically live in their own houses what is against their mobility. The low educated people or young people suffer mostly from the lack of jobs; those without labor experiences are unable to 'sell' their labor force or to start their own business without necessary help close to their homes.

Another important reason for such a high level of unemployment rate is that there was no big difference between the minimum wage and the income, what the social welfare ensures. There are families, villages who get their living from social welfare, especially the gipsy population, who are especially over-represented in the forest covered areas mentioned above.

Summarizing we can state that the permanently unemployed, low educated people are not able to find jobs without any social assistance and job opportunities. This was the reason, why the Hungarian government put more emphasis on the forest public works and a renewed forest public program (PWP) was introduced in 2011, with a significantly increased amount compared to the years before.

In the north-eastern region the unemployment rate was always larger than 10% for the last 20 years, right now this figure is at around 17%. The region also lacks capital investment

because of the lack of qualified labor force and transport infrastructure. To help people live in these handicapped regions the government introduced a forestry public work program (PWP) in 2003, which became a model for PWP's in the whole country. In 2004 similar program was introduced to all state owned forest companies and as of 2011 private forest owners can also participate in this program. The evaluation of forest PWP is positive. The state would like to extend the program, to involve more participants in the future.

2. METHODS AND ASSUMPTIONS

When planning my research I was looking for answers to the following questions:

- Do they really want to work, or is it just a 'forced job' for them?
- What is PWP workers work attitude in the forest?
- What are the PWP attitude toward change their current situation for the future - learning anything new, to move, to commute, just have a job, etc.?
- Could forest help for unemployed people to re-establish their position on the job market, and become employed again?

The questionnaire I prepared consisted of 24 basic questions and 7 questions to identify the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. Altogether 620 questionnaires were sent out, and 587 questionnaires were returned. Parallel to the questionnaires a semi-structured interview was carried out with managers responsible for the PWPs at the forest companies. The relatively high level of return of the questioner's is that the research was supported by the Hungarian Development Bank, who is right now in the owner position of the Hungarian state owned forests.

The questionnaire was distributed among participants of the PWP in the next four state owned forest companies. The location of the companies is shown in Figure 1. The numbers denote areas of the forest companies: These are the most forested, and in the same time the most depressed areas.

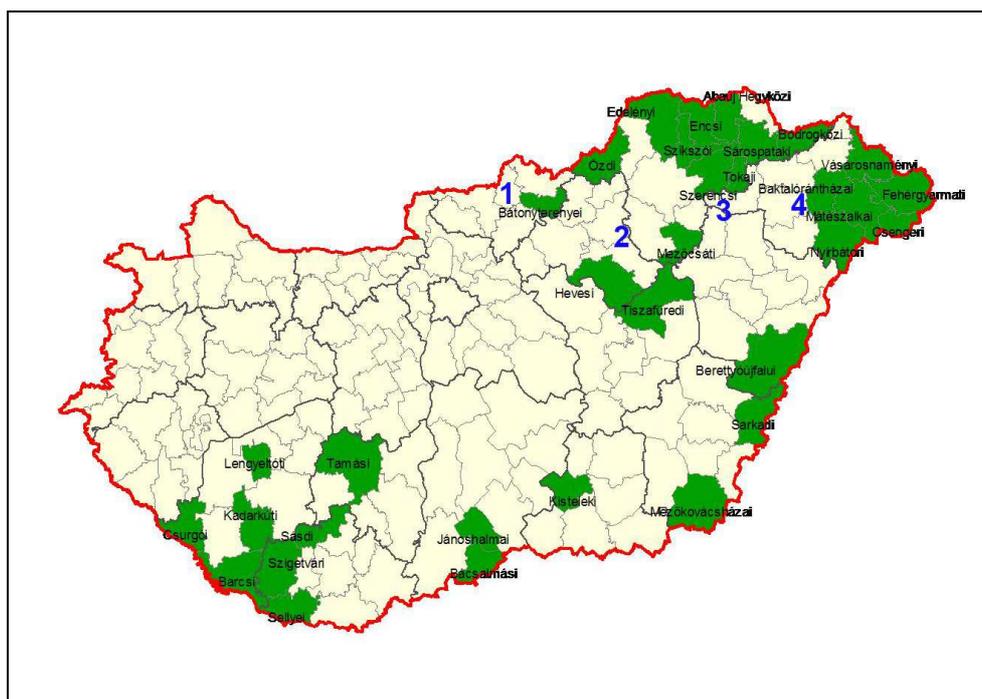


Figure 1 Study area (1 Ipoly Erdő, 2 Egererdő, 3 Északerdő, 4 Nyírerdő)

3. RESULTS

The gender distribution shows that 84% males and 16% females were involved in the forest PWP research; it means that there are a lot more men involved. A very high rate of PWP participants, about 46% have very basic education (8 classes or less of the elementary school, without profession), 43% are skilled workers, 10% have high school graduation and only the rest (1%) has higher education.

On the question ‘Does work in the forest in a PW program mean an option for you to get income, or you feel you were forced, or you feel it’s an option to be among people again?’ The high majority, 93.3% of participants consider the PWP program as a possibility to work and get income, only 3.1% answered that ‘this is a work I am obliged to do’. The rest of the people (2.2%) answered; it’s a possibility ‘to be again among people’. We can summarize, that the majority (93.3%) PWP participants like the work in the forest, and just a few (2.2%) had the feeling of abundance, when they didn’t have the job.

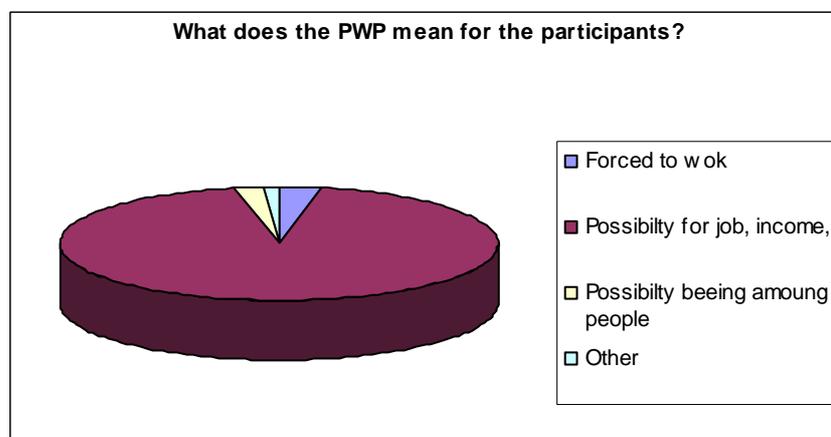


Figure 2. What does the PWP mean for the participants ?

The majority of respondents confirmed in another question, that they choose to work in the forest, and they would like to work in the forest in the future as well (Figure 3).

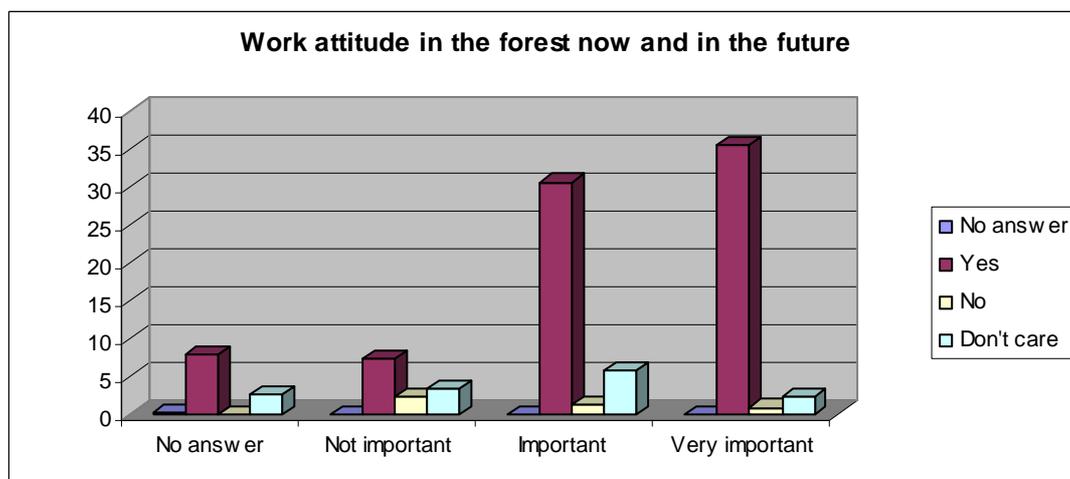


Figure 3. Work attitude in the forest now and in the future

The overwhelming majority of the respondents (87.1%) would choose an 8 hour occupation either in a PWP or any other job to ensure the family budget (Figure 4). This is very obvious, because forest PWP doesn't take a round year program, and pays just less, than any professional job.

The majority of PWP workers live in their own house or flats (79.8%), which properties aren't at easily sellable this moment, because of the economical crisis, and these areas counts depressed areas, where the property prices are very low. At the same time this unemployed people, participating in PWP can't move easily to have a job. From the questions of 'What is your job preference?' we could see, that most of respondents answered that they would prefer to work in a full time, 8 hours job.

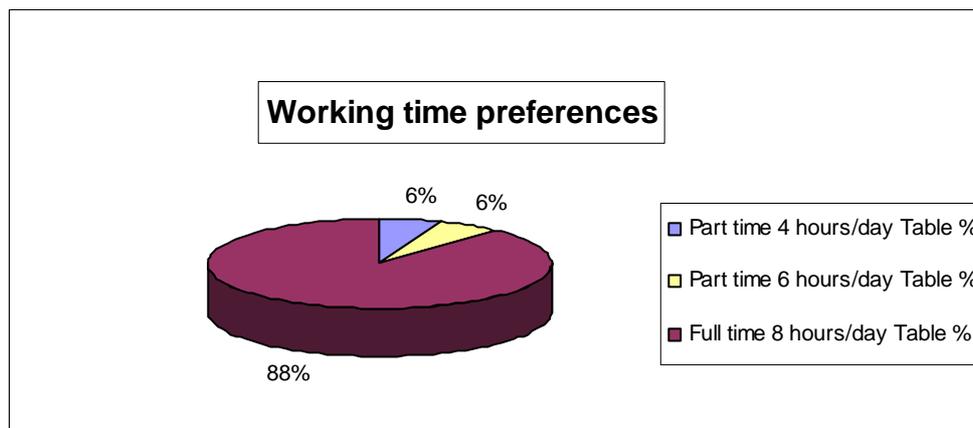


Figure 4. Working time preferences

Many PWP participants would prefer to work close to their own homes (83.8%), and also many of them have a high preference to work in forestry in the future (76.5%). There is a very high risk for those PWP participants, who don't have any profession (46%) to find a proper job near to their residence.

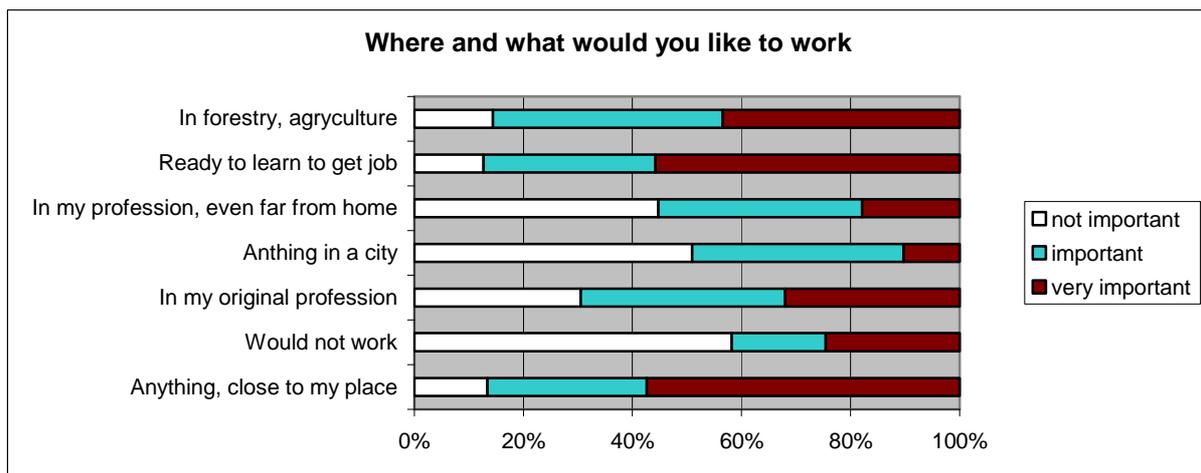


Figure 5. Where and what would you like to work

The 73% of the workers would be willing to learn a new profession or any other skill in order to improve their chances to get work.

From my previous information I learned, that the most part of the respondents like the extra benefit of the forest PWP very much – to receive fuel wood. The PWP managers told

that a big part of the workers is ready to work more, and there is high motivation for participants to receive the fuel wood as an extra benefit.

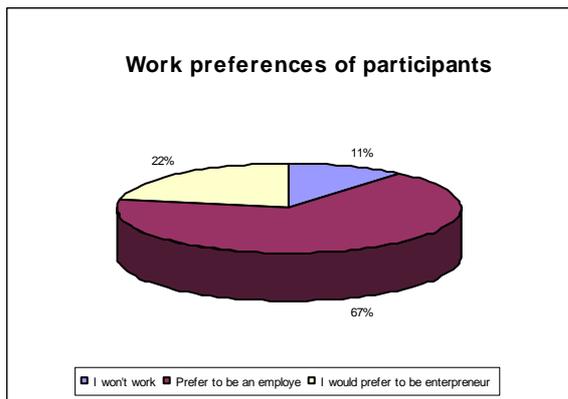


Figure 6 Work preferences of participants

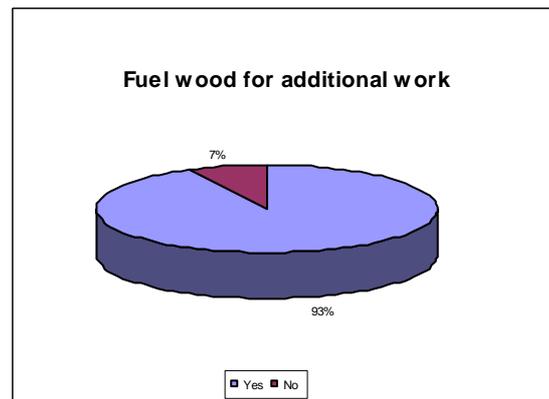


Figure 7. Fuel wood for additional work

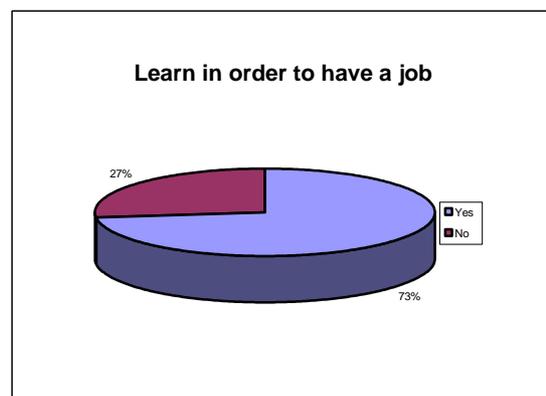


Figure 7. Willingness to learn to have a job

73% of the workers would be willing to learn a new profession or any other skills in order to improve their ability to get work. 80% of respondents are ready to cultivate a piece of land in order to improve their living conditions.

We can conclude that most respondents of PWP have basic education, and want to have an 8 hour job near to their homes. They are ready to add some additional effort (work more for fuel wood, cultivate land, or to learn) to improve their chances to have a job, or improve their living conditions.

Forest companies consider the PWPs as beneficial program for the company because the state is financing the public workers, and they can accomplish works for which they would not have financial resources.

In my PhD thesis I would like to further analyze the data with different statistical methods and to explore the social situation, work attitude of the people working in forest public work program in this region. Combining the results with international experience it's a possibility to receive suggestions for the further development of forest PWP programs.

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