

Citizenship undermined.
Messages received through the social assistance system in
contemporary Hungary

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Abstract: Very few narratives go as unchallenged about the transition of Central and Eastern European countries from state socialism to market democracies as the following: before the transitions people in these countries had strong social rights but were lacking any civic and political rights, and while the transformations provided the people with firm civil and political citizenship, they lost out on social rights. In my dissertation I argue that this is an oversimplifying and highly distorted narrative that is blind to the deep inequalities in these societies. My research focused on one particular means of reproducing these inequalities, namely welfare institutions, and explored what recipients of social assistance provision learned about their citizenship in the post-transition Hungarian welfare complex. This analysis not only demonstrated an inextricable interrelationship between civil, political and social citizenship, but also allowed for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which apparent political inequalities were reproduced in practice. By the innovative method of institutional ethnography I constructed a mosaic of

the various component elements of the institutional system of social assistance provision in contemporary Hungary and investigated the influence that each had on recipients' civil and political citizenship. This study indicated a marked discrepancy between recipients' ideal and their lived experiences of citizenship, and found that certain characteristics of the system of social assistance provision played a crucial part in reproducing this discrepancy. The high level of discretion in the system, recipients' lack of information, the treatment they underwent in the welfare office, as well as the lack of institutional guarantees that could ensure that they enjoyed equal and fair treatment in all the welfare offices in the country proved to be the most important characteristics of social assistance provision that had direct or indirect effects on recipients' democratic subjectivity.

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*Poverty is one of the
fundamental dangers facing
the hardly institutionalized
[Hungarian] democracy.
(Szalai, 1998, p. 66)*

Chapter 1: Introduction

The puzzle

It is a broadly shared image of the transition of Central and East European (CEE) societies from state-party systems to market democracies that these processes brought about a rearrangement in civil, political and social citizenship. The common narrative suggests that before the transitions members of these societies had firm social rights, but were lacking in civil and political rights; and while the transformations provided people with civil and political citizenship anchored in constitutions and other democratic guarantees, they lost out in exchange, on social rights (Kolankiewicz, 1992).

However, daily life in these societies, as well as rigorous academic research clearly demonstrate the hopefulness that resulted from newly gained political freedoms seems to have quickly given way to a detachment from active involvement in political processes that many Western European societies also witnessed at the time (Mason and Kluegel, 2000). Moreover, there is also powerful evidence that the volume and the forms of political detachment significantly vary across social groups (Verba et al. 1978; Paczynska, 2005;

Schlozman et al. 2012). That is, most contemporary societies are facing an alarming democratic deficit, fuelled by the realities of inequalities in citizen participation – voting turnout, as well as other forms of civic involvement. Post-transition Hungary is no exception to these un-democratic trends: a considerable body of research suggests that levels of citizen participation show considerable inequalities along the lines of class, ethnicity and gender, among others in the country (Angelusz-Tardos, 2005; Kern-Szabó, 2011; Kmetty-Tóth, 2011). That is, the patterns of the interplay among the different forms of citizenship are in reality more complicated than the above narrative would suggest – at the dawn of the 21st century neither social, civil nor political rights seem to be fully granted for certain social strata after the Central and East European transitions (Ferge, 1997; Szalai, 2007; Offe, 2009; Rat, 2009; Vanhuysse, 2009).

The above empirical studies have shown that a number of factors play a role in the materialisation of these differences: one's level of education, gender, income, place of living, and employment status, among others. However, one factor has largely missed due scholarly attention so far – in the European and even more in the Central and Eastern European context – namely, welfare provision. There has been recent criticism of the ways in which the so-called Washington Consensus informed the volume, the forms, as well as our understanding of social relations, and inequalities in particular, in contemporary societies (Harvey, 2005; Giroux, 2008; Plant, 2009; Brown, 2015).

This scholarship demonstrates that the neoliberal political economy, that is based on monetarism, the prioritisation of corporate interests over social needs by deregulation and corporate tax reductions, the financialisation of economic relations, and the channelling of state resources from public services into corporate operations that results in the marketisation of public services, leads to the radical restructuring of welfare policies (Wacquant, 2009; Gustafson, 2011; Schram and Silverman, 2011; Soss et al., 2011). And in this socio-economic context, there has been an increasing interest recently in the role that welfare policies and institutions play in what I call the 'citizenship socialisation' of individuals (Soss, 1999; Kumlin, 2002; Mettler and Soss, 2004; Mettler and Stonewash, 2008). By citizenship socialisation I mean the complex process in which a person becomes a political being – that is, the set of life events, influences and mechanisms through which someone learns the political context in which they exist, and becomes aware of their potentials as a citizen and of how to exercise these potentials in the given context. This study uses the term citizenship socialisation, instead of 'political socialisation' that is a more prevalent concept in social and political theory (Hyman, 1959; Marsh 1971), because it explores a broader range of activities and attitudes including the ones related to both the civil and political forms of citizenship as conceptualised by Marshall (1950) (discussed in Chapter 3).

Nevertheless, the recent scholarly interest in the role of welfare institutions in the citizenship socialisation of their beneficiaries has so far been manifested

primarily in the US context, and European scholarship seems to lag behind in this respect. The present research aims to contribute to the intellectual task of filling this gap by exploring the ways in which welfare provision (or certain types thereof) influences recipients' experiences of citizenship in contemporary Hungary. I argue that it is important to analyse these processes in the European context, due to the deep-rooted, although increasingly fluid differences between European welfare regimes and the US. Due to its historical specificities and its particular socio-geographic, state and party structures, the US is considered a laggard in the classic welfare state literature in terms of the development of welfare policies and institutions (Dobbin, 2002). However, as a result of the above-mentioned trends of the restructuring of welfare policies in the neoliberal political economy (discussed in Chapter 2), the once sharp distinction between welfare policies in the US and in the core European welfare regimes has recently become much more blurred. I argue that contemporary Hungary is an important entry point into the analysis of the interrelationship between welfare provision and civil and political citizenship, due to its outlier status to Esping-Andersen's (1990) classic typology, somewhere between US and European models of welfare provision – containing elements of both the liberal and the conservative model, with a few characteristics of the social democratic regime.

Haggard and Kaufman (2009) compellingly propose that studying post-transition CEE welfare institutions is not only a particular focus of scholarship, but also 'promises to deepen our understanding of the more general political

processes of redistribution, insurance and service provision' (p. 236). Undergoing the formation of democratic citizenship at the same time as the establishment (or reformation) of welfare policies after the transition, in an era when both democratic and welfare institutions are facing historical challenges globally makes the Hungarian welfare complex a crucial terrain for examining the interplay among the different layers of citizenship that Marshall (1950) conceptualised in his seminal essay – that is, to study the ways in which the everyday instruments of social citizenship inform individuals' civil and political citizenship.

I use the term 'welfare complex' to refer to the comprehensive, multi-layered system of policies, institutions, and agents that play a part in welfare provision in contemporary welfare societies, in order to grasp both the complexity and the actual operation of a system that involves a range of agents, as well as the state (Powell, 2007).

Research context – Central and East European welfare states

Central and East European state-party regimes were no exception to using welfare institutions strategically. In the first phase of regime development, social policies served economic purposes, and thus were functional in shaping and stabilising the new system; while in their second, mature or declining phase, the expansion of quasi-universal welfare provisions played a crucial role in maintaining social support for the system in spite of the many destabilising

factors (Szalai, 1997; Szikra and Tomka, 2009; Tamás, 2010). However, the rapid transition to market capitalism – especially to its neoliberal version, expanding globally at the time – was strongly affected by the influence of international actors such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Community (EC), later the European Union (EU). These actors strongly pushed an agenda focused on fiscal stability (meaning cost containment) and privatisation in the transitioning societies in the early 1990s.

Existing research argues that in the course of the transition Central and Eastern European societies were therefore facing a double burden. On the one hand, they were struggling with the difficulties of political transformation and the severe economic shocks resulting from the fast and quite firm push of market economic policies (namely, mass unemployment, deepening poverty and ever rising levels of inequality) (Haggard-Kauffman, 2009; Offe, 2009). On the other hand, they also needed to cope with the ‘new social risks’ of the time, such as mass unemployment, ageing societies, shifting gender roles, among others (Lewis, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 2002; Bonoli, 2005; Standing, 2009; Viebrock and Clasen, 2009). However, I do not view these as two distinct processes. In contrast, I contend that the ‘new risks’ in post-transition CEE societies were a result of the very way in which the transformations were pursued – namely, without questioning the actual form of the institutionalisation of democracy and market economy into which these societies were transforming. This is one

of the reasons why I considered that researching the interrelationship between the social, civil and political forms of citizenship in the context of the newly emerged Hungarian welfare regime could be a valuable scholarly endeavour.

In addition, in the very early stages of the transition processes, so-called 'emergency welfare regimes' were established in CEE countries to help to bear the costs of the transition (Inglot, 2009), which, however, proved in the end to be quite enduring. In most of these countries the pre-war Bismarckian style (compulsory, insurance-based, and therefore segmented) systems were complemented with certain elements of benevolent state paternalism universality inherited from the state-socialist period in the early 1990s. These systems started to undergo a 'retrenchment' or 'restructuring' (Pierson, 2001; Rothstein and Steinmo, 2002) period from the late 1990s, as a result of the above-mentioned 'new social risks', which pushed them in an increasingly liberal direction in the sense of Esping-Andersen's classic typology (Ferge, 1997). This unique CEE blend of a welfare regime has served a number of social, political and economic functions ever since.

First of all, the newly created welfare institutions were used to 'divide and pacify' the different layers of these societies (Vanhuysse, 2006). That is, relatively stable provisions were offered for a wide stratum of the middle classes but only meagre, residual social assistance for people in marginal social positions. By establishing different tiers in the welfare system, governing elites designated 'deserving' and 'undeserving' groups in these societies, rewarding

the former and punishing the latter (Ferge, 1997; Szalai, 2007; Rat, 2009). In this way, the political elite managed to contain discontent and prevent destabilisation – a common function of welfare institutions since their emergence (Piven and Cloward, 1972; Ingram and Rathgeb-Smith, 1993; Ingram and Schneider, 1993). By analysing protest behaviour in three post-communist democracies (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland), Vanhuysse (2006) found that the segmentation of the labour force by welfare provisions prevented political alliances between different sections of society and quieted the middle classes and older people – or at least channelled their grievances into more peaceful means and in this way secured political stability in spite of increasing economic hardship.

In this way, welfare institutions successfully consolidated the new political and economic systems of post-transition Central and Eastern Europe (Vanhuysse, 2009) in the early 1990s, at least for the time being. In the Hungarian context Szalai (2007) compellingly demonstrates the ways in which the gradual refinement of a dual system of generous contribution-based provisions for middle-class employees and pensioners with strong social rights on the one hand, and extremely meagre, means-tested social assistance provision with high levels of discretion for disadvantaged social groups (such as the long-term unemployed or the unemployable) on the other, was established. This dual system promoted a strong and stable middle class supportive of the new regime and in this way served the functions of maintaining social peace and securing

the economic functioning of the regime (for instance, state pension funds served as an important fiscal asset in these countries). An important element of this class-making and economic stabilising by welfare institutions was the employment of less educated middle-class Hungarians, mostly women, who had difficulty finding jobs in the increasingly competitive job market and thus were facing status insecurities. Thousands of these women became social workers, social assistants, or staff members of municipality welfare offices, family or job centres, and in this way managed to maintain their middle-class status, albeit on a fairly low level (their income is extremely low and their efforts do not receive much social recognition). On the other hand, for an increasing section of the population in these societies, and especially for the Roma minority, the newly introduced social policies had disempowering consequences, such as increasing control and humiliation, stigmatisation, contained mobility, disciplining, and restrictive workfare measures (Szalai, 2007; Rat, 2009).

Thirdly, the dualisation of welfare provisions (Emenegger et al., 2012) was also functional in securing the labour flexibility that the neoliberal political economy increasingly required. By providing meagre benefits for the most vulnerable sections of the population, such as people facing long-term unemployment, coupled with strict conditionality – most importantly, tough workfare conditions – the system of social assistance in post-transition Hungary successfully controlled and regulated the poorest strata and ensured that they

took whatever job they could find, or which needed to be done, under any terms and conditions (Szalai, 2007).

Lastly, closely related to this, together with the transforming political economy, the social conception of need was also recast in the emerging Hungarian democracy, resulting in shifting definitions of 'the needy' themselves – with a focus on their material contributions, or rather the supposed lack thereof. Research has shown that the system of welfare policies was adapted to these shifts, and as a consequence, the overall conception of social assistance and the populations associated with it became increasingly stigmatised and pathologised in post-transition Hungary (Haney, 2002).

These large-scale socio-economic transformations took place amidst the establishment of democratic institutions, civil liberties, and ultimately, the social construction of the very idea of citizenship. Even though some elements of citizenship may exist without democratic governance as a context, my focus in this study is on citizenship as a central concept to, as well as an instrument of democracy and the democratisation of post-transition Hungary. Gilens (2012) argues that the concept of democracy is based on the idea that every citizen is competent. This implies that citizenship is more than a set of administrative requirements being fulfilled and the entitlements based on this; rather, certain capabilities and freedoms are inherent to full citizenship (Sen, 2004). In other words, as Schattschneider (1969) eloquently put it, democracy 'begins as an act of imagination about people' (p. 46) as equals in their inherent worth. This

study is based on this body of scholarship, and hence, conceptualises citizenship as intimately linked to democracy. It means that citizenship is not conceived of here as a neutral, administrative category, but as a normative concept that attaches values to the idea of the citizen, such as competence and capabilities, and implies the potential to participate in a wide range of democratic processes from claiming welfare, through filing an appeal against a bureaucratic decision, to casting a vote or grassroots organising. That is why I use the terms 'citizenship' and 'democratic subjectivity' interchangeably in this thesis, since the latter conveys the interrelation between democracy and citizenship discussed above, as well as the inherent human capabilities and agency that is implied by subjecthood (see Norval, 2007). The concept of citizenship is further discussed in Chapter 2 and 4 of this thesis.

At the time of the transition, democracy and civil rights and liberties came to the forefront of public discourses in Hungary, as well as the concept of citizenship. In the first few years of the 1990s, citizenship quickly became a key concept organising society, an unquestionably positive idea that represented the values and opportunities people had been craving and fighting for in the preceding decades, such as autonomy, human rights, freedom, and dignity. The word 'citizenship' quickly became an integral part of Hungarian vocabulary, and people started using it in their everyday lives as well as in public discourses (Kiss et al., 1987).

However, the actual content of citizenship and the ways in which citizens

themselves conceived of it have not yet been given much attention. Consequently, we have very little understanding of what connotations the term has in everyday language: whether it is indeed such a significant category as it was imagined at the time of the transition; if people do in fact identify as citizens; if so, who does, on what basis, and who does not and why. My research aims to provide a more elaborate view of the actual meanings and functioning of citizenship from a particular perspective – namely, as recipients of social assistance in Hungary perceive and experience it in their everyday lives. In Chapter 4 I explore how people who received social assistance conceived of citizenship and the institutional system of democracy in the abstract, and the ways in which they perceived their own citizenship in post-transition Hungary. Later in this thesis, (Chapter 6-8) I investigate how recipients exercised their citizenship in practice, within and beyond the institutional system of social assistance provision. Exploring these questions therefore allows me to investigate the interrelationship of the different forms of citizenship – i.e. the interplay between social and civil/political citizenship.

Analytical framework

My analysis departs from the existing literature not only in terms of the context in which it investigates the interrelationship between welfare provision and civil and political citizenship, but also in its analytical framework. Even though some (albeit only a few) empirical studies have been conducted which focus on

the effects of welfare institutions on different aspects of democratic subjectivity (political trust, system legitimacy etc.), we still have very little understanding of *how* these effects come about in reality, as previous pieces of research have also pointed out (Mettler and Soss, 2004). Wright (2015): argues that 'Little is known, however, about how benefit recipients experience information, advice and employment services, beyond official satisfaction surveys and evaluation results' (p. 242). In other words, existing literature tells us little about the actual mechanisms through which welfare institutions and their implementation shape recipients' sense of citizenship, what contextual factors play a part in these processes, and how these impacts are interpreted by their subjects. Therefore, this study aims to delve deep into these mechanisms and examine the social, institutional, psychic and cognitive processes that play out in the day-to-day functioning of the contemporary Hungarian welfare regime. By this I hope that a more complex understanding of the ways in which these processes come about and actually inform recipients' citizenship will be arrived at.

In order to do this, I applied a 'bottom-up' research approach that allowed an exploration of the nuances of these mechanisms that have to date been missing from the mosaic, and their effects as they unfolded during the actual implementation of social assistance policies in contemporary Hungary. Therefore, I pursued an institutional ethnography, that is a research design that allows for examining such nuances while simultaneously interrogating the structural, institutional forces that determine their everyday functioning

(explained in Chapter 3).

Smith (1987) argues that institutions are not neutral bureaucratic structures, but

knots of the ruling apparatus to class, coordinating multiple strands of action into a functional complex. Integral to the coordinated process are ideologies systematically developed to provide categories and concepts expressing the relation of local courses of action to the institutional function and providing a currency or currencies enabling interchange between different specialized parts of the complex (p160).

Therefore, in order to pursue a comprehensive analysis of citizenship in relation to welfare provision in post-transition Hungary, we need to explore the multiple layers and players of the existing welfare institutional complex of the country. Hence, in this ethnographic endeavour I conceive of the post-transition Hungarian welfare complex as a multifaceted 'message machine' (Piven, 2012, p. 117) that creates social positions inscribed with political significance; and explore what kind of social positions it creates and with what political significance it inscribes them. That is, I attempt to grasp, amplify and interpret the messages that recipients receive through the various layers and elements of social assistance provision in contemporary Hungary, and analyse the influence that these messages have on recipients' democratic subjectivity.

Research questions

On this basis I pose the question: *What do recipients learn about their citizenship in the social assistance subsystem of the post-transition Hungarian welfare complex?*

And in order to be able to give a satisfactory response to this central question, in this research I seek to answer the following sub-questions:

How do recipients view themselves as citizens of post-transition Hungarian society?

How actively do recipients participate in society as citizens? To what extent, and how, do they exercise their citizenship rights within the welfare system and beyond?

What messages do recipients get through the different component elements of the system of social assistance provision concerning their citizenship?

Structure of the thesis

To answer these questions, this thesis will first explore the literature on the different conceptualisations of the interplay between welfare provision and citizenship (Chapter 2). I identified three existing models of how this interrelationship has been conceived of so far in the welfare state scholarship; having discussed these three models I will introduce a fourth, alternative approach (p. 40) that provides a more appropriate analytical framework for the investigation of the central questions of this research.

In Chapter 3 I discuss the main methodological concerns of this thesis, namely, the reasons why I chose to apply qualitative research methods, and an institutional ethnography design in particular; matters of case selection; the

exact methods I used to explore the topic (semi-structured interviews with recipients and department managers of local welfare offices, and participant observation); and the ethical concerns that arose during the design phase of the research and in later phases, at the time of implementation.

In the first findings chapter (Chapter 4), I discuss how recipients of social assistance provision conceived of citizenship in a democracy in general, and the ways in which they experienced their citizenship within and beyond the welfare system. In the following four chapters (Chapter 5-8), I investigate the messages that the recipients got through different aspects of the post-transition Hungarian welfare complex in relation to their citizenship. In Chapter 5, still at a distance from recipients' individual perspective, I analyse the policies that regulated social assistance provision in contemporary Hungary – on what policy levels social assistance was regulated, how the relevant state-level laws and local orders were enacted and modified historically, and how recipients experienced these policies in their everyday lives.

Chapter 6 contains an analysis of the spatial organisation of social assistance provision on the municipality level. In this chapter I describe the location of the two welfare offices I investigated within the respective city halls, the entrance and waiting areas, the toilets, case workers' offices where staff-client meetings (were supposed to) take place, the general state of these spaces, and their furnishings. Then I discuss how recipients perceived and actually used these spaces, and I link the findings of this analysis to recipients' citizenship.

In Chapter 7 I analyse the bureaucratic procedures that organised the day-to-day functioning of the welfare office and that recipients had to regularly go through in order to receive the assistance to which they were entitled. Finally, the last findings chapter (Chapter 8) takes the reader deepest into recipients' experiences of social assistance provision in the post-transition Hungarian welfare complex. In this chapter I zoom in for a close-up of the interactions between social assistance recipients and the welfare personnel, both their face-to-face and written interactions, and I discuss the effects of these interactions on the ways in which recipients understood their citizenship and exercised it in practice.

In the last chapter I summarise the main findings of this research, and draw conclusions from them regarding the interrelationship of welfare provision and civil and political citizenship in the contemporary Hungarian welfare regime. Finally, I put forward some ideas for consideration for further research that would be worth pursuing in the future on the basis of the findings of the present research.

Limitations

There is no research without limitations and shortcomings, and the present undertaking is no exception; the real question is how one handles them. In terms of this study, first of all, I could conduct only two case studies due to financial and time limits in pursuing the investigation, and therefore the general

conclusions drawn from the findings have to be interpreted with caution. Along the same lines, the empirical data of this research was collected in one particular socio-historical context, namely, the post-transition Hungary welfare state, and however well suited this context was for the present research (as discussed above), this fact also calls for a level of prudence regarding the generalisation of the conclusions to be drawn. I attempt to give due regard to these limitations when drawing the overall conclusions of the thesis in the final chapter.

In addition to these contextual and case selection limitations, the most pressing concern arising from this undertaking is certainly the issue of causality. The central topic of this research concerns the interrelationship of receiving social assistance and the recipients' civil and political citizenship. However, the methods I used to investigate this topic do not allow for a rigorous disentangling of the many factors that may also play a part in shaping recipients' understanding of citizenship and the ways in which they exercised it in practice. I attempted to mitigate this problem by a number of means. Firstly, by applying an ethnographic research method. Shore and Wright (2011) compellingly argue that

Sustaining a tension between 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives [...] is the hallmark of social anthropology. Social anthropologists are particularly experienced at tracking the genealogies and flows of policies and their impact on people's lives and everyday behaviour. But they are equally good at examining the meanings that those policies hold for those actors whose lives they touch and the cultural logics that structure those 'policy worlds'.

Therefore, I hoped that the ethnographic approach of the research would help detect causal relations. Besides, I also used triangulation (Cohen and Manion, 2000; O'Donoghue and Punch 2003; Ritchie, 2003; Altrichter, 2008) to be able to track causality; that is, I used various research methods (semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis), which provided rich and robust data and allowed me to interrogate the different types of data. Lastly, I designed the topic guide for the recipient interviews (see Annex 1) in a way that aimed to uncover the connections between receiving social assistance and exercising civil and political citizenship, but without leading the participants in any particular direction.

Bearing these limitations in mind, this research is an attempt to dedicate due attention to the ways in which the different forms of citizenship interrelate with one another, and identify the factors and mechanisms that inform this interplay on the 'street level' of welfare bureaucracy. In this way, this thesis aims to understand the role that social assistance provision plays in the (re-)production of inequalities in democratic participation, and the mechanisms through which this comes about in post-transition Hungary.

The way we define citizenship is intimately linked to the kind of society and political community we want (Mouffe, 2005, p. 60).

Chapter 2: Welfare and citizenship – a review of the literature

The interconnections of welfare provision and civil and political citizenship have been widely theorised in academic scholarship. In this chapter I review the literature on existing conceptualisations of this interrelationship and discuss why I find it an important scholarly undertaking to study this interconnection from a particular perspective, namely a view of welfare institutions as a domain of reproducing democratic subjectivities, and as a result, as a core political instrument, rather than a mere technical implement of social policies.

Idealist views – Welfare as an attribute of citizenship

The key theoretician of discussing welfare in terms of citizenship is unquestionably Marshall, whose seminal essay, *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950) has become one of the most cited pieces in the welfare state literature. Marshall conceives of citizenship as a normative ideal, that is, a 'status bestowed on those who are full members of a community' (p. 14) and 'societies

in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed' (p. 28-29). The key innovation of Marshall is nevertheless contesting the uniformity of citizenship, as he conceives of it as a tripartite entity that emerged via the historical evolution of rights constituting three dimensions of the contemporary concept of citizenship: civil rights achieved in the 18th, political in the 19th and social rights in the 20th century, at least in the English context.

Conceiving of social citizenship as ranging from 'the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society' (p. 10), Marshall explicitly conceptualised social protection as an inherent part of citizenship. As Powell (2002) put it, social rights shifted the welfare-citizenship nexus from an either/or relation (paradigmatic in Poor Law times, when, if on the dole, the individual ceased to count as a member of society) to an intertwined association in which social rights modify – but do not eliminate – class relations by shifting the underlying principles of social and economic relations (Barbalet, 1993). In other words, in Marshall, welfare is inextricably incorporated in the concept of citizenship by the means of social rights that entitle citizens to certain level of social security. Consequently, in this idealist view contemporary citizenship is conceived of as necessarily incorporating a level of welfare; that is, a standard of well-being that

entails a certain – however modest – level of social provision.

As a result, in this idealist view, the concept of citizenship is a matter of civilisation as conceived of by Elias (1994), that is, a set of socially defined rules and norms that determine the status of individuals as well as social groups. Since Marshall, it has been a widely shared view that to be a citizen not only means bearing civil liberties, political power and responsibilities, but also living a ‘civilised’ life. What was civilised has gradually been incorporated in the definition of citizenship and thus, in later phases of social existence, this enriched idea of citizenship has fed back into what a given society viewed as well-being and deprivation (Townsend, 1979). That is, in any society, socially institutionalised standards of living constitute an inherent part of the idea of citizenship (in Marshall, this is manifested in the idea of social citizenship), and this idea closely influences what the given society views as a ‘civilised’ minimum of welfare provisions. In Galbraith’s (1958) words

People are poverty-stricken when their income, even if adequate for survival, falls markedly behind that of the community. Then they cannot have what the larger community regards as the minimum necessary for decency; and they cannot wholly escape, therefore, the judgment of the larger community that they are indecent. They are degraded for, in a literal sense, they live outside the grades or categories which the community regards as acceptable. (pp. 323-324)

What is ‘acceptable’ or ‘decent’ in Galbraith means the same as ‘civilised’ for Marshall, ‘approved’ for Townsend or ‘not disgraceful’ for Adam Smith (see Sen, 1993): ideas of the norms and standards defining how the individual

should live their life and act as a full member of the political community. These norms are institutionalised in the concept of citizenship that, in turn, has a significant impact on welfare institutions.

However, even though the separation of civil, political and social citizenship is valid analytically and serves the purpose of deepening our understanding of citizenship, it risks the de-politicisation of welfare provision by disconnecting social rights from civil and political citizenship. Young (1990) convincingly articulates this danger by arguing that welfare institutions tend to institutionalise class conflict, and hence reduce social conflict to a competition over distributive shares, leaving structural matters uncontested. That is, the distribution of the pie is what is publicly debated, while the type and size of the pie and the method of slicing it are left to be decided upon via 'behind the curtains' negotiations of government and business elites. In this way, Young contends, the citizen is reduced to a client or consumer excluded from direct participation in decision-making and normative deliberation. As a result, their relationship to the state is privatised and public life is fragmented. This, in turn, depoliticises the issues and spheres that would help to ground a functioning democratic arrangement.

In my view, studying welfare in terms of citizenship allows for preventing such de-politicising tendencies. I agree with the strand of – primarily feminist – political theory that argues that the domain of the political cannot be reduced to redistribution, as such reductionist tendencies would omit essential aspects of

the political (Fraser, 2003, 2005; Young, 1990). Hence, I argue that social protection cannot be restricted to welfare benefits and in this way detached from questions of equality, social cohesion or political power and representation. As Bustle (2001) compellingly notes, social rights are the domain where democracy and equality converge. That is to say, citizenship is an essentially normative concept in the sense that it is not a mere container of legal-administrative rules and regulations but also a crucial element of our conception of the polity as a whole (Faist, 1995). In other words, citizenship not only defines what welfare provisions the individual is entitled to under what conditions, but also determines the very shape of society by defining members' rights and responsibilities and the relationship of the two, as well as the relationship between the individual and the state.

Furthermore, Powell (forthcoming) persuasively argues that

Marshall, Crosland and the rest had been dangerously over-optimistic: [...] they had tried to build the top floor of citizenship before the first floor was in place. For the pioneers of social citizenship were wrong in supposing that political citizenship had already been achieved. [...] Social citizenship faltered because political citizenship was lacking. (no page number)

In other words, Powell challenges the materialisation of social citizenship through questioning the validity of Marshall's three-storey edifice and the reality of political rights in contemporary societies. In his research Powell demonstrates that existing socio-political arrangements in the United Kingdom today do not enhance either active civic participation or citizens' voice. Rights

are defined collectively and are not unconditional, thus they are hardly individually enforceable, which, he argues, makes the UK a 'subject culture' rather than a civic one.

And even before Powell, Marshall's evolutionary concept of citizenship has been critiqued from a feminist point of view by highlighting that in many contexts women received maternal welfare provisions before they were franchised. That is, women in many cases gained social entitlements before political rights (Phillips, 1993; Lister et al., 2007; Lewis, 2008). One could further argue that in many contexts immigrants too have experienced a similar chronology of gaining citizenship rights diverting from the one described by Marshall – that is, social before political citizenship (Faist, 1995). Powell's above argument however challenges the Marshallian 'edifice' of citizenship from a different point of view. His critique is not focused on the chronology of the evolution of citizenship of particular social groups, but rather, he re-examines the very relationship of the layers of citizenship defined by Marshall. In doing so he highlights the difficulties individuals face while actually attempting to realise their citizenship in 21st century societies and in this way (re-)politicises social citizenship.

Liberal views – Welfare as a prerequisite of citizenship

There is a substantive body of literature that conceptualises welfare provision as a prerequisite of citizenship. This scholarship does not contrast, but rather,

overlaps with and complements the above, idealist view of the interplay between welfare and citizenship. These theories are centred on the individual and the rights that make them full citizens, therefore, this thesis refers to them as 'liberal views'. Even though liberal authors do not deny the responsibilities entailed in citizenship, they conceive of certain rights as inalienable from the citizen and therefore detached from their duties, especially from duties established by a private contract such as waged work. As Dahrendorf (1996) put it, in the liberal view both rights and duties are *in principle* universal, hence, neither are contingent on the other.

Among these rights, social rights play a particularly significant role in contemporary liberal discourses on citizenship – a large body of literature points to the empowering effects of these rights. Dahrendorf (1996) argues that, although political rights are the real entry ticket to the public sphere (as they are the means of channeling individual interests into the law), they are not sufficient themselves to effective political advocacy. Civil rights are often curtailed by unequal power relations and economic weakness, and political rights require at least some level of education to make use of them in practice. Hence, social rights, as the means of enabling citizens to fulfil their capabilities, are necessary for effectively asserting one's powers as a citizen.

Nussbaum (1990) defines citizenship by the capabilities that enable the individual to live and act as a citizen. Conceiving of human capabilities as necessary for practical reasoning and making real choices, Nussbaum concludes

that welfare provisions not only to *not* hinder individual choice (as feared by neoconservative thinkers discussed in the next section) but the two are essentially intertwined. Full citizenship necessitates certain welfare provisions that 'make available to each and every citizen the material, institutional, and educational circumstances in which good human functioning may be chosen' (p. 203); in other words, welfare provisions are a crucial instrument that enable individuals to become real citizens.

While Dahrendorf and Nussbaum base their argument on individual powers and capabilities, Plant (1988) applies Berlin's (1969) positive concept of freedom – that is, the freedom to do or be – and highlights the essential role of social rights in ensuring the basic human capabilities that bring about the freedom of the individual to live the life they choose. That is, by framing social rights in terms of freedom, Plant explicitly links welfare provision to civil and political agency, and in this way demonstrates the inextricable interrelationship between civil, political and social citizenship.

However, the lack of social rights not only deprives individuals of the freedoms and capabilities necessary to fully realise their citizenship, but also strips them of the very basic resources needed for effectively exercising their civil and political rights. Being deprived of 'a modicum of economic welfare and security' results in a situation in which people are forced to dedicate a significant fraction (if not all) of their individual resources to satisfy their very basic needs such as food, health and shelter. Furthermore, excessive

preoccupation with life sustenance leaves

very little mental space for any general and long-term reflection on issues that go very far beyond their present predicament. [...] Need, then, and the urgency of the demands that it generates, can radically undermine the possibility of civic politics and distort the contribution that an individual participator can make. (King and Waldron, 1988, p. 428)

Moreover, King and Waldron argue that such a financial and psychic condition makes people vulnerable to political manipulation that further compromises their citizenship. In other words, by providing a sense of security, social rights are not only a means of assuring material and psychic well-being, but as such are also an essential instrument of making use of one's civil and political rights and thus fully realising one's citizenship.

Based on this argument, King and Waldron associate the provision of welfare and its interrelationship with citizenship with a Rawlsian concept of justice, in the sense that it is a reasonable expectation that people would not agree to a socio-political arrangement that does not offer at least a safety net for those facing hardship (Rawls, 1999). That is, the concept of 'the citizen' must entail some sort of social rights, as well as civil and political rights in order for individuals to be able to exist and act as citizens.

Even though liberal theories of the interconnection of welfare institutions and citizenship make a clear link between civil, political and social layers of citizenship and in this way effectively politicise welfare provision, I argue that the above literature implies an essentially passive conceptualisation of social

citizenship and, as a result, overlooks some crucial components of the concept.

Lister (2003) responds to this conceptual deficiency by focusing on agency as the key to reconcile traditional views of citizenship and develop a new, more inclusive concept. She argues that the traditional liberal concept of citizenship is an essentially passive one as it is conceived of as a status based on individual rights. Moreover, these rights are not only vested in liberal democratic institutions biased towards the interests of the powerful, but also predominantly function as instruments of negative freedom, thus not conducive to active citizenship. Therefore, Lister argues for a synthesis of citizenship as status and as practice by centring the concept of citizenship on *agency*. On the theoretical level, resonating with the above arguments of Young (1990), Lister proposes an inclusive concept of citizenship based on the principle of differentiated universalism that allows for the active *social and political* participation of a wide range of social groups and a re-articulation of the public-private divide. Such a re-articulation would allow for an extension of political agency beyond the public sphere as traditionally conceived of, and thus broaden the scope of citizenship agency so that it includes subjectivities and activities hitherto excluded from it – for instance, bodily and reproductive rights, the domestic division of labour, the labour market and welfare institutions.

Consequently, such a conception of citizenship is not only a status but also an active assertion of agency in the – broadly defined – public sphere. However,

Lister highlights that such activities are by no means necessary component elements of citizenship as neoconservative thinkers propose (see below), merely opportunities that everyone may exploit according to their personal preferences. As she eloquently put it 'The goal is to shift the dynamic of the interaction between public and private from a vicious circle that undermines women's citizenship to a virtuous circle that promotes it.' (p. 200). In addition, Lister argues that a fully inclusive – and therefore feminist – concept of citizenship ought to account for welfare provision as well (among other domains) in order to incorporate

women's 'accidental activism' in the interstices of the public and the private spheres, their active participation in a nascent global civil society and their contribution to the development of welfare citizenship come to be acknowledged and valued as acts of citizenship on the political stage (p. 199).

In line with this argument, I use such an inclusive concept of citizenship in this study that accounts for a broad democratic subjectivity, which entails 1) a sense of belonging to the body politic; 2) being a full member of the political (i.e. moral and institutional) community; and 3) the capability to participate in shaping and governing this political community. Consequently, I also use an extended concept of participation in this thesis, which transcends the merely instrumental assertion of civil and political rights (such as casting a vote or pursuing paid public or private activities in the labour market), and also entails individuals' exercising their powers to shape and govern the political community they are part of.

Neoconservative views – Welfare as compromising citizenship

In contrast to liberal thinkers, who ground the concept of citizenship on the individual and their inalienable rights, neoconservative scholarship prioritises the community over the individual and thereby centre the concept of citizenship on the duties and responsibilities of individuals towards the community. Mead (1986), one of the most prominent figures of this school of thought, justifies social obligations on two separate grounds. First, common duties generate a sense of equality in individuals that enhances in them a sense of community with others and in this way strengthens social cohesion. And secondly, fulfilling certain duties legitimises individual demands. That is to say, Mead postulates a conditional relationship between individual rights and duties that determines one's membership of the political community. On the basis of such a conception of citizenship anchored in common obligations, Mead rejects the idea of welfare provision as a right. He argues that social rights make recipients dependent on welfare institutions, thus restrict their autonomy and in this way compromise their citizenship.

Furthermore, Mead also argues that as people do not participate in the community on equal terms, an entitlement-based arrangement of welfare provisions erodes their sense of community too. In order to tackle these deficiencies, he suggests a 'civic conception' of welfare that is based on a conditional relationship between rights and duties. In such a system of welfare

provisions, recipients capable of working are required to do so; however, they are also provided with the opportunity to fulfil this requirement. From Mead's point of view, such an arrangement enhances recipients' sense of citizenship by setting them on equal terms with others and legitimising their individual demands. However, from a feminist point of view Fraser and Gordon (1994) point to the fact that individual independence has been set as a norm only recently (in a historical perspective), by socio-economic changes brought about by industrial capitalism, whereas interpersonal dependence had been an integral part of human experience for a very long time. They compellingly demonstrate that only after World War II did 'dependent' become associated with receiving aid and at the same time this 'dependency' became increasingly stigmatised, as 'major forms of dependency deemed proper in industrial usage are now considered objectionable, and postindustrial uses of the term carry a stronger negative charge (p. 15).

Nevertheless, recent neoconservative scholarship also diverge from Mead's rigid conditionality, for example, Etzioni (2011) concedes the above criticisms of the universal concept of the common good upon which neoconservative and communitarian thinkers traditionally based the concept of citizenship, and argues for a restoration of the balance between citizens' rights and responsibilities. He acknowledges that citizenship is indeed a particularistic concept; however, he maintains that the 'common good' cannot be, and is in fact not, fully rejected because it serves a number of crucial functions in society. Via

historical examples, Etzioni demonstrates that the idea of the common good helps the individual maintain a sense of identity that is essential for human well-being and flourishing. Secondly, he argues, with no sense of the common good there can be no functioning community, as it is the primary force that legitimises common institutions and a collective understanding of the common good functions as a means of social control. On these terms Etzioni defines the good citizen as someone who accepts basic responsibilities towards 'the common good of the nation' and otherwise pursues their individual goals and follows their preferences. For instance, minorities must not be denied certain minority rights; however, their members must fulfil certain duties and in this way bear responsibility for the community as a whole.

Nevertheless, in contrast to Mead, for Etzioni this is not a strictly conditional arrangement of rights and duties. Individuals are not endowed with rights *for* pursuing certain responsibilities but 'by the mere fact of their humanity, as ends in themselves' (Etzioni in Gilbert, 2002, p. xv). When discussing his approach to welfare provisions he clearly rejects the 'rights for responsibilities' argument, and contends that the reforms of welfare capitalisms in the 1990s went too far and they 'need to be re-reformed if we are to cease the violation of this basic tenet of a good society' (p. xv). He argues that 'one and all deserve a basic minimum standard of living' (p.xiv), and therefore certain basic rights should be detached from any public responsibilities.

Providing a basic minimum will not kill the motivation to work for most people, as long

as work is available, and they are able. Though some will abuse the system, a good society should consider this a small price to pay for affirming the basic humanity of everyone (pp. xiv-xv).

Resonating with Etzioni in terms of his treatment of the relationship between social rights and civic responsibilities, White (2003) elaborates the concept of 'justice as fair reciprocity'. White also highlights the significance of civic obligations; however, he places a particular emphasis on *fairness*. He argues that the lack of reciprocity is harmful for society in many ways: it harms the self-esteem of the individual who may not feel worthy when not contributing to the community as expected to. It also causes dignitary harm by not respecting members' equality. Furthermore, non-reciprocation creates a parasitic arrangement in which some can free-ride while others contribute, which, in the long run, disrupts social cohesion, destabilises institutions and leads to alienation. Consequently, White argues that the basic commitments of justice – in his conception: protecting citizens' integrity interests, respecting civil liberties and securities, preventing discrimination, and protection from market vulnerabilities and brute luck disadvantages – need to be complemented with the principle of *substantive reciprocity*, that is, the standard of proportional shares and dues.

The principle of *fair reciprocity* therefore does not imply the absolute rejection of linking welfare rights to performing certain responsibilities, but this linkage should be based on the fairness of contributory obligations. In *The Civic*

Minimum (2003), White elaborates in detail the standards and possible shape of civic obligations, the terms on which citizens can be required to fulfil them, and a minimum of the above basic commitments of justice that together set up an arrangement of 'democratic mutual regard' and 'justice as fair reciprocity'. In White's conception, this is the 'civic minimum' in which citizens' contributory obligations are proportional to their abilities and require certain attributes of fairness to be assured *before* these obligations are required. Hence, the principle of justice as fair reciprocity implies generous but work-tested welfare provisions once a lower threshold of justice is met, which guarantees the elimination of brute luck poverty and economic vulnerability, the provision of meaningful work, and the elimination of class-based inequalities.

Upon such conditions, complemented with claimants' procedural rights, contributory obligations may be applied (such as a work test policy), in so far as they meet the principle of fairness – that is, expectations are democratically defined, appropriately publicised, and reasonably acceptable, the policy provides adequate work opportunities and an adequate income, and different forms of work are treated equally. That is, although White lays a great emphasis on the individual's contributory obligations towards the community, in his concept of 'the civic minimum' a basic level of welfare provision is inherently incorporated. Hence, a certain level of welfare is inherent to citizenship just as in the idealist view, and only beyond this minimum does the principle of reciprocity come into play. And even then it is not formal but substantive

reciprocity that shapes public policies and social institutions.

The above suggests that the dividing line between contemporary liberal and neoconservative theories of citizenship and its relationship to welfare provision has been blurred. Both Etzioni's later work and White highlight the significance of a basic minimum of welfare provisions for contemporary conceptions of 'the citizen'. On the other hand, certain liberal theorists lay equal emphasis on community values and active performances of citizenship as on individual rights. Jordan (1996), for instance, explicitly argues that contemporary welfare capitalisms need to find ways to reconcile individual autonomy and the common good. He demonstrates that in contemporary welfare states the community is based on market exchange and in such proprietary societies new dynamics of social exclusion have emerged. These communities are socially polarised along the lines of power and status, that is, powerful interest groups of mainstream citizens are confronted with powerless excluded groups. As Jordan compellingly put it, it was a move from a Tocquevillian to a Hobbesian society, and welfare provision becoming a means of intrusion and enforcement in these societies has been key to this shift. To counter these polarising processes, harmful for both the individual and the community, Jordan proposes an arrangement conducive to counter-exclusive collective actions suited to diverse, consumption-oriented sovereign individuals in a global environment of scarce and unequally distributed resources.

Nevertheless, neoconservative theories prioritise the thriving of the community

over individual flourishing, and hence, in their conceptualisation, welfare provision is primarily a means of social cohesion rather than a tool of strengthening democratic subjectivities. Consequently, scholars of this school of thought still focus on the obligations of citizens, paid work in particular, rather than their individual rights as the means of enhancing a collective sense of equality and community. As a result, according to this school of thought, welfare institutions serve the common good only to a limited extent, and beyond a certain level they still become detrimental to citizenship by eroding people's sense of equality and membership in the community. Furthermore, the above review demonstrates that neoconservative scholars in general, with the only exception of the latest work of Etzioni, still postulate a conditional relationship between rights and responsibilities, since the concept of reciprocity, be it fair or substantive, entails a give-and-take approach to this subject.

Moreover, it is also controversial in my view to make as pronounced a partition between the thriving of the community and that of the individual as neoconservative thinkers do. When the focus is on citizenship, the individual is necessarily identified in relation to the community; and *vice versa*, a flourishing community that neoconservative scholars and publicists desire, entails democratic subjects, that is, individuals capable of exercising their powers as citizen and hence, shaping the political community they are part of. And this, I argue necessitates rights and capabilities beyond the very minimum that neoconservative thinkers assume, such as separate minority rights, respect for

civil liberties, prevention from discrimination, and conditional welfare provision.

It is also arguable that neoconservative scholars have a fairly limited conception of 'contribution'. As demonstrated above, when it comes to civic responsibilities, neoconservative theories primarily focus on paid employment obligations and in this way fail to take account of a plethora of unrecognised contributions fulfilled by marginalised people, such as running households, performing a wide range of care work (done predominantly by women, and poor minority women in particular) or grassroots advocacy (performed mostly by people living in poverty and minority groups).

Furthermore, perhaps most importantly, both liberal and neoconservative scholars overlook the broader socio-political setting in which they theorise welfare rights and civic obligations. It is contentious to argue for generous *but* work-tested welfare provisions after the elimination of brute luck poverty and economic vulnerability, and once meaningful work was provided in an era when the global economy is built on brute luck poverty and economic vulnerability and the lack of meaningful work opportunities for broad social strata (Harvey, 2007; Gilmore, 2007; Piven, 2012).

As Soss et al. (2011) eloquently put it,

contrary to paternalists' claims, directive and supervisory welfare programs do not seem to hasten civic and political incorporation. In more moderate forms, these programs appear to have no effect on the profound civic and political marginality of the

poor. In stronger forms, they actively enhance this marginality, pushing the poor further outside civic and political life. (pp. 288-289)

Neoliberalism, as we have argued, recasts citizenship as a quasi-market role. Its citizens are not defined by their mutual engagement in a democratic mode of governance; they are identified by their discipline and prudence as consumers, workers, and taxpaying investors. (p. 43)

An ever broadening stream of scholarship studies the operation of welfare institutions in relation to the political economy of neoliberalism (as defined in Chapter 1), and argues that Western societies have been undergoing the neoliberalisation of welfare policies since the late '70s. At an early stage of this process, Gough (1979) already pointed out that public welfare provision had increasingly been restructured as a means of legitimising the hegemonic economic order and related class relations. Along these lines Pierson (1998) argues that instead of containing and controlling the 'new risks' emerging with the global expansion of a neoliberal political economy, institutions of the welfare state have been going through a crisis dating back to the 1980s.

A substantive body of literature demonstrates convincingly that '[w]elfare programs for the poor continue to operate [...] as derivative institutions shaped by pressures that arise from the polity and market' and as a result, neoliberal paternalism has become the predominant mode of poverty governance (Soss et al., 2011) and a business model of welfare provision has been increasingly dominant in these societies (Piven, 2012). Consequently, embedded in neoliberal political and economic structures, welfare institutions are increasingly focused

on surveillance and discipline in contemporary welfare capitalisms (Piven and Cloward, 1993; Schram and Silverman, 2012). Moreover, welfare regimes in neoliberal societies are merging the functions of restrictive and stigmatised workfare and expansive 'prisonfare' (Wacquant, 2009) programmes and hence, result in the criminalisation of poverty (Gustafson 2011) through 'the penal welfare complex' (Brin Hyatt, 2011).

For these reasons, it is important that we analyse the relationship between welfare provisions and citizenship in a framework that takes into account the broader political and economic environment in which this relationship materialises as well as the breadth and complexity of the structure of both welfare provisions and citizenship. For such an analysis in this research I employ a conceptual framework that studies the functions of welfare institutions as a means of citizenship socialisation, which I introduce in the next section of this literature review.

Welfare as an instrument of citizenship socialisation

The literature discussing the role of welfare policies in contemporary societies is vast and covers a wide range of functions, such as social protection, risk management, social justice and fairness, social reproduction, and social segmentation to name but a few (Deacon, 2002; Pierson, 2006; Alcock, 2011; Daly, 2011). From the '70s, an increasing stream of literature have focused on the disciplinary functions of welfare institutions, and Piven and Cloward (1993)

were pioneers of this scholarship. They investigated the functions of public welfare in the US through an historical analysis of welfare reforms and identified a cycle that starts with economic change or a market downturn that leads to the dislocation of lower class people resulting in, among others, unemployment, poverty and homelessness. This, beyond causing human suffering, poses a risk of social unrest, instability, and disintegration that enforces the government to expand relief. This is, in time, followed by cuts in relief (in terms of level, coverage as well as eligibility) and work enforcement masked as welfare reform. Such 'reforms', Piven and Cloward argue, above all serve the regulation of poor people. That is, they are functional to prevent unrest, regulate labour, reverse the deterioration of communities and transform recipients' behaviour; and in this way they shape the polity as a whole, as well as individual citizens.

Another key figure of this literature is Lipsky (1980), who studies government policies through the functioning of 'street-level bureaucrats', i.e. government agents working directly with the clients. Lipsky compellingly demonstrates that government institutions, including the welfare system, serve a number of functions beyond redistributing state resources. They exercise control, confer status and also mediate the relationship between the state and the citizen, and in this way, Lipsky highlights, have a significant impact on participants' citizenship. He points out a number of aspects of the functioning of street-level bureaucrats that ultimately constrain and control the clients and compromise

certain aspects of their citizenship, such as discretion, work pressure, ordering, classification or alienation. Some of these attributes are functional components of the system (such as discretion or work pressure), while others are a result of the tension between bureaucrats' drive to do good and the impossibility of realising this goal under the given circumstances (e.g. relying on stereotypes, or blaming the victim).

That is, this stream of literature demonstrates that certain aspects of the functioning of contemporary welfare institutions (such as shaming, discretion, infantilisation, relying on stereotypes or work pressure) rather than reinforcing clients' citizenship, in fact undermine their capabilities to realise their democratic subjectivity (Lipsky, 1980; Haney, 2002; Kumlin, 2002; Dubois, 2010). On the surface, these authors seem to agree with neoconservative scholars in concluding that receiving welfare provisions potentially compromises citizenship; however, there is a significant difference in their argument. While neoconservatives blame the very principle of unconditional, universal welfare for causing dependency and in this way damaging recipients' self-respect and eroding their sense of community and membership, the above authors argue that particular elements of existing welfare regimes (especially their conditional, non-universal features) compromise recipients' democratic subjectivity.

On the basis of this more comprehensive conception of the functions of the welfare provision, a new approach has emerged in the scholarship of welfare

institutions that links welfare provision and citizenship directly, on the instrumental level, as opposed to the above, more abstract, normative conceptions. This scholarship investigates a less explicit function of welfare provision, namely, the ways in which welfare institutions socialise individuals (claimants, recipients as well as the broader society) into being citizens.

Just institutions matter – the pertinent title of the main work of Rothstein (1998) is also the essence of his argument, that is, beyond serving their central, de facto, functions, social institutions also have a significant influence on social norms and the role they play in society. Rothstein compellingly demonstrates that there is an iterative relationship between the institutional setting of a given society and the social norms prevailing in the community. Not only do social norms play a crucial role in shaping the institutional setting of the community, but also institutions have a significant feedback effect on prevailing norms. Their functioning and the ways in which they appear in everyday discourses shape the very logic of society (whether it is predominantly driven by norms or by other forms of reasoning such as the market logic), as well as the content of social norms, that is, people's mental map of what others are and would do in the given social context, and what they consider good, just or fair.

In other words, just institutions matter not only in the sense that they bring about just outcomes in terms of substantive, procedural and distributive justice, but also because they shape social norms and influence society radically. And since norms are internalised by individuals in a social setting, the design and

functioning of institutions affect and shape citizens themselves as well. Therefore, 'It is [...] just (i.e. democratic) institutions which create democratic citizens interested in justice' (Rothstein, 1998, p. 44).

Brady (2009) follows a similar logic by defining the *institutionalisation of equality* as a core function of the welfare state. He argues that beyond managing risk and organising the distribution of resources welfare provision shapes societal ideologies at the same time as being shaped by them. In this way it is an agent of normalising collective expectations about what just distribution is and the volume of poverty that is 'normatively allowed to exist in a society' (p. 73). As he compellingly put it,

societies with very generous welfare states are societies that collectively define egalitarianism as appropriate and just. Welfare states also create constituencies of beneficiaries that feed back into the political process that supports welfare states' existence and form. Welfare states reflect political struggle, but they also guide subsequent political struggle. Thus, welfare states contribute to the formation of citizens' interests and ideologies in the maintenance or expansion of welfare state programs. Through these interests and ideologies, societies collectivize and socialize the responsibility of averting poverty for their citizens. (p. 73)

This logic echoes Bourdieu's argument on social space and symbolic power (1989). In this seminal text, Bourdieu argues that the social sphere is under double construction: structure and perceptions construct and organise the social in a dialectical manner. That is, perceptions of the social world inform its structures that, being internalised by individuals, thereby inform perceptions.

On this basis Bourdieu identifies 'legitimate symbolic violence' as the process through which those who bear symbolic power (which is mostly monopolised by the state and its representatives) define the hegemonic view on social divisions and by using this power they impose this particular view on others and hence construct these social groups as real. As a result, people internalise this view and therefore realise themselves as members of these social groups.

When applied to welfare provision, this logic highlights a further dimension of the relationship between welfare and citizenship, namely that welfare institutions are a crucial terrain of 'learning' citizenship – that is, being socialised as a citizen. This dimension is far less explored in the literature than the ones discussed earlier, although an increasing number of scholars have started to study it in the past decades. In reaction to the weaknesses in conservative, liberal, and radical criticisms of the welfare state, Gutmann (1988) and Moon (1988) suggest shifting the focus from individual virtue, equality or self-realisation to democratic citizenship and develop a 'democratic perspective' on the welfare state. On this basis, they both argue for a system of welfare institutions that promotes democratic subjectivity. They contend that an institutional system of universal welfare provisions that guarantees procedural and distributive justice, together with a certain level of social protection, enhances individuals' democratic subjectivity. By alleviating poverty and inequality and thus eliminating severe individual hardship and social instability, while not harming people's self-respect, such an institutional

arrangement effectively promotes democratic society.

In the same volume, Fullinwider (1988) identifies a dual relationship between welfare provision and citizenship. He argues that, although it is highly contestable on both instrumental and moral grounds, in contemporary welfare states citizenship is a necessary precondition of receiving welfare provisions. On the other hand, citizenship is not only a legal-administrative status but also a 'set of habits and attitudes on which the delivery and receipt of welfare services have tutelary effects, either supporting or undermining good habits and attitudes' (p. 261). That is, welfare provisions teach recipients lessons in citizenship. Firstly, they make recipients self-supportive and in this way enable them to pursue their ends, which is necessary for developing a self-perception as citizen. And secondly, using common institutions with other members of society has an instrumental, as well as an intrinsic value that also teaches recipients important lessons about their membership and their status in society, that is, their citizenship.

The logic of welfare provisions teaching lessons of citizenship has a lot in common with Mead's civic conception of welfare. Mead cites conservative members of the U.S. Congress of his time, who argue that only a system of welfare provisions that promotes self-reliance can facilitate recipients' 'developing into citizens' by enhancing their self-respect as equal, contributory members of society. However, as opposed to Gutmann, Moon, Fullinwider, or Jordan, who highlight universality and social security as key components of a

welfare system conducive to democratic subjectivity, Mead and the discourses he builds on lay great emphasis on the role of obligations in producing the citizen. He argues that citizens are 'thoroughly schooled in their obligations' (p. 229), consequently, duties – work requirements in particular – are necessary components of a welfare arrangement that produces citizens.

The above are theoretical arguments about the possible or desirable educative impacts of welfare institutions on citizenship. However, a few pieces of empirical research has also been conducted on this topic. In a large-scale postal survey conducted in Sweden, Kumlin (2002) examined the impact of the institutional design of the welfare system on recipients' experience of justice, their political preferences (their support for the democratic political system and incumbent politicians) and their endorsement of state interventions (in the form of their support for the welfare state). He distinguishes three types of welfare systems on the basis of the degree of discretion of welfare institutions and the range of realistic exit options they offer to recipients: consumer (empowering), user (neutral) and client (disempowering) institutions. Kumlin's data clearly demonstrates that the institutional setting of the Swedish welfare state has a significant effect on all the examined variables. He found that

Experienced distributive justice and experienced voice opportunities have an impact mainly on political trust, where those who have personally experienced injustice are less likely than others to be satisfied with the democratic system and to trust politicians. (p. 294)

On the other hand, 'If the opportunities to exercise influence are poor, welfare state experiences will have negative effects on political trust, no matter how satisfactory services are' (p. 271).

That is, confirming the above theoretical accounts, Kumlin's research demonstrates that welfare institutions have broad political relevance for democratic subjectivity – the experiences they generate shape citizens and also have a feedback effect on the broader democratic institutional system. As Kumlin eloquently put it,

voice opportunities seem to be more than mere instruments for improving personal outcomes. This finding tells us, not just that people care about voice opportunities, but also something about why they care. Judging from the results, voice opportunities are not just an instrument for achieving accurate service delivery. Rather, they seem to be important in themselves. (p. 271)

Although Soss (1999, 2002) conducted his research in a very different environment, his findings clearly resonate with those of Kumlin. In his empirical research based on interview, observation and survey data collected in the US, Soss compellingly demonstrates that the welfare complex is not a mere technical apparatus, but in fact a core political institution. First of all, welfare claiming is based on citizens' needs (that are inherently social as discussed above) and these needs are directed at government personnel and institutions. Secondly, it affects public resources and their redistribution, and therefore it is an agent of political stratification. Furthermore, it is an act and a relationship embedded in legal regulations. And fourthly, claiming welfare provisions often

entails some form of state surveillance over claimants/recipients that also politicises these provisions. Having explored the ways in which welfare institutions are a key domain of political action, Soss turns to the empirical data at his disposal and demonstrates that the receipt of welfare provisions has a significant impact on recipients' actual incorporation in the polity. It affects their (broadly conceived) political activities, their self-perception as citizens as well as their sense of political efficacy – that is, their view of how responsive the government is to one's claims (Gilens, 2012).

In conclusion, Soss argues that

as clients participate in welfare programs they learn lessons about how citizens and governments relate, and these lessons have political consequences beyond the domain of welfare agencies. [They] become the basis for broader orientations toward government and political action. (1999, p. 364)

In addition to this bulk of the literature, an emerging body of empirical research – predominantly conducted in the US – compellingly demonstrates that *certain types of welfare provision* have a demobilising effect on recipients. The pioneering study of Verba et al. (1995) demonstrated that in the US, there is a significant difference between the broadly conceived political activities of recipients of means-tested and non-means-tested benefits, even when controlling for other potential causes (while 18% of the former were engaged in at least one political activity at the time of the research, the proportion was as high as 44% in case of the latter; see also Schlozman et al. 2012). Furthermore, unlike social insurance

recipients, clients of public assistance were underrepresented in every political activity measured by the researchers.

In another empirical study, also from the US context, Mettler and Stonecash (2008) found a clear difference between the effects of universal and means-tested programmes on recipients' voting behaviour. Their data persuasively show that the greater the number of universal programmes citizens have used the greater the likelihood they vote, whereas the use of means-tested programmes results in a decrease in recipients' inclination to vote.

Mettler and Stonecash explain this palpable difference with the messages that the recipients, as well as broader society get from the different programmes. They argue that privileged, middle-class individuals get the message from policies that target them (such as pension schemes or veteran benefits) that they are valued citizens, and therefore they are more likely to form a view on politics as a fair and open game overall. On the other hand, recipients' sense of political efficacy is impaired by the design of means-tested programmes.

In addition, Mettler (2010) compellingly demonstrates that the majority of those who benefit from a government programme (e.g. a pension programme) do not even know that they use a government programme, whereas those who receive social assistance are always made very clear, and reminded time and again, that they receive state support. Moreover, this fact is often made very visible by these recipients being employed in public spaces (as a precondition of the aid they receive) and in this way the broader public is also made sure to be

informed about the given individuals being subject to welfare support.

Soss (1999) also found that participants in the social security programme in the US were significantly more likely to vote than the participants in the means-tested, discretionary and highly stigmatised AFDC¹ scheme. Besides, Soss's research also demonstrated that the sense of so-called external political efficacy of social security recipients was significantly stronger than that of AFDC participants.

Furthermore, Campbell (2003) provides a complex empirical analysis of the differences across welfare programmes in the US as to what she calls the participation-policy cycle. She comes to the conclusion that

Like Social Security, veterans' benefits confer resources that enhance participation, foster interest in public affairs, endow recipients with a political relevance that invites mobilization by interest groups and parties, and enhance recipient feelings of government responsiveness. These program recipients participate at higher levels than they would in the absence of the programs. Welfare recipients, by contrast, participate at even lower levels than their already modest participatory capacities would predict, largely because of the disengaging aspects of program design that relegate them to a lower tier of democratic citizenship. (p. 19)

As a synthesis of such pieces of research, in a meta study Mettler and Soss (2004) identified a number of ways in which public policies reinforce or undermine civic capacities. First, resources extended by policies provide

¹ Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 replaced AFDC (along with other programmes) with a cash benefit called the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

material incentives for mobilisation. In addition, policies can also play a role in building and distributing civic skills within the citizenry, just as they can supply resources for political mobilisation. Furthermore, policy designs shape citizens' personal experiences with and evaluation of the government and thus, influence their patterns of political belief and their processes of political learning. Mettler and Soss also demonstrate that more recent studies found so-called interface effects that shape citizens' encounters with government – for example, clients of AFDC in the US formed particularly negative impressions about government. In addition, policies can also frame the meaning and origin of societal problems; hence, they convey messages about the underlying nature of the problem and in this way shape citizens' perspective of the issue. In certain cases, policies have the potential to affect the publicly perceived importance of the given issue and potential reactions to it and in this way, in turn, shape policy agendas. Furthermore, certain policies, such as the ones concerning incarceration or ID regulations, directly structure political participation. Last but not least, Mettler and Soss also found that policies influence the ways in which individuals understand their rights and responsibilities as members of the political community. Consequently, they identified policies that explicitly encourage or discourage demand making and hence, lead to extended or underutilisation of the given policy (for example, while the Earned Income Tax Credit actively encourages take-up, the TANF programme is designed to divert and deter claimants). Moreover, Bruch et al.

(2010) found that experiences with state TANF programmes have significant and substantial negative effects on the rates of civic and political engagement of people living in poverty.

This body of evidence has significant implications. Such political inequalities deplete not only procedural fairness but also substantive justice. Moreover, they are also harmful for democracy, as they place in doubt the equal worth of citizens – as members of the community, capable of having a conception of the common good, and controlling their own lives through influencing collective decisions (Verba, 2001 and 2003).

Based on their findings corresponding to the above, Ingram and Rathgeb-Smith (1993) argue for a refocusing of welfare policy analysis on citizenship and democracy. They contend that the

elements of policy design send messages about citizenship to target groups. Different target populations of policies receive quite different signals about their status, what sort of game politics is, and how people like themselves are to be treated by government. (p. 16)

On this basis, their research demonstrates that citizenship may be nurtured by certain policies or policy designs, however, particular components of policies (e.g. clinical reasoning or discourses of (un)deservingness) may send disempowering messages to the target population. As a result, Ingram and Rathgeb-Smith conclude that policy-making is a learning process and since policy symbols affect political participation, they should be studied as an

independent variable while investigating political mobilisation and participation.

To conclude, the above review compellingly demonstrates that recipients of means-tested benefits, subject to broad discretion and lacking in meaningful voice opportunities tend to have a less favourable orientation towards political involvement, weaker trust in the actual system of government and democracy in general, and exercise their citizenship rights less than recipients of universal schemes. Consequently, beyond and together with their various other functions, welfare institutions inform social norms and the stratification of contemporary societies, and in this way they also shape citizens themselves. Therefore, the welfare complex is an inevitable political force that should be duly recognised and conceptualised in political theory.

However, in spite of the increasing academic attention to this particular function of welfare policies, our knowledge of this subject has been limited to primarily quantitative analyses that focus on aggregate outcomes rather than processes. Scholars conducting research in this field noted that

students of policy feedback must pay closer attention to the processes that mediate policy-feedback effects. Much can be learned from studies that show how policy actions, or features of policy design, correlate with public responses. (Mettler and Soss, 2004, p. 64)

That is, even though empirical studies have already been conducted in both the US and the Western European context that investigate the effects of welfare

institutions on macro aspects of democratic subjectivity, such as political trust or system legitimacy, 'Little is known, however, about how benefit recipients experience information, advice and employment services, beyond official satisfaction surveys and evaluation results' (Wright, 2015, p. 242). Therefore, we have very a limited understanding of *how* in fact these effects come about, as the literature tells us little about the actual mechanisms through which welfare policies and their implementation impact recipients' sense of citizenship, how these impacts are interpreted and the ways in which these interpretations in fact inform recipients' democratic subjectivity. In the present research I aim to contribute to filling this gap by studying the contemporary Hungarian welfare complex from an ethnographical perspective and exploring *how* the regulation, the institutional procedures and the interpersonal interactions within this complex inform recipients' civil and political citizenship.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the potentials of democracy for citizens have not been equally distributed in post-transition Hungary. The barriers to civic participation have beset disadvantaged social groups disproportionately. Mainstream political sociology demonstrates that a number of factors play a part in (re)producing these inequalities (Schlozman et al., 2012; Piven and Cloward, 2000). The present research focuses on one particular component element of this mosaic, a notably under-studied one, namely welfare institutions; and investigates how social assistance provision in particular informs recipients' democratic subjectivity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research approach: qualitative methods

This research investigates the processes through which social assistance recipients in Hungary are socialised into being citizens through their individual experiences and perceptions of benefit provision. This topic implies that an inductive case study research design with a qualitative approach is the most appropriate form of data collection for the project. This methodology allows me to learn 'what kinds of things are happening, rather than to determine the frequency of predetermined kinds of things that the researcher already believes can happen' (Lofland, 1971, p. 76). A qualitative approach should enable me to grasp the complexity of recipients' experiences and perceptions and, thus, to gain a deeper understanding of the 'things that are happening' with them. The ultimate goal of this study is to explore and understand what recipients learned about their citizenship in the world of post-transition Hungarian social assistance, how they perceived what they were learning, and how they interpreted these perceptions. That is, I do not aim to measure or quantify respondents' realities, but to 'describe, explain and make [them] understandable' (Janesick, 2000, p. 395). Therefore, I use qualitative research techniques that do not aim to attain statistical significance, but to provide rich enough data to explore the above questions in their complexity and give

meaningful answers to them.

By applying a qualitative research approach, I was able to explore the personal standpoint and experiences of social assistance recipients. Although social assistance provisions are quite well represented in Hungarian social science research, the perspectives of recipients have been almost completely missing from the literature thus far. Most of the existing studies about the contemporary Hungarian social assistance system are pursued from a macro-structural perspective; that is, most of the scholarship relies either on desk research investigating laws and regulations or on surveys of the workers' perspective rather than recipients' own narratives. My research will add to this body of literature by an in-depth investigation of the experiences of recipients themselves, their views of the post-transition Hungarian welfare system, and the implications of these narratives for their civil and political citizenship.

Research design: institutional ethnography – two case studies

Nevertheless, instead of analysing recipients' personal experiences as detached, individual narratives, this research incorporates these views into a multifaceted institutional analysis. In order to grasp the complexity of the processes and phenomena that are the subject of this research – the various aspects of the Hungarian welfare complex that shaped recipients' socialisation into living as citizens and the processes through which this socialisation came about – I conducted a complex, multi-method study of the functioning of municipality

welfare offices that administer social assistance in the Hungarian context, and recipients' experiences and interpretations thereof.

Hence, the present research studies the municipality welfare office as an institutional complex, constituted by various elements (a physical construction and environment; internal and external rules and regulations; human agents and their everyday practices; relations of power; and institutional values, norms and discourses, among others), fulfilling particular roles, and being embedded in a broader structure of social and thus power relations. It can be pictured as a molecule composed of atoms that form a particular structure within a larger body serving a well-defined function (Miller, 2012). In order to grasp these component elements, and to comprehend the broader functions they serve in Hungarian society, as well as the ways in which they inform recipients' citizenship, I pursued an institutional ethnography investigation that allows the researcher to study the particular and 'go[ing] back to the politico-economic context for an answer', in this way constantly moving back and forth between individual experience and the structural context (DeVault and McCoy, 2002, p. 769).

It is important to note that institutional ethnography has no pre-given theoretical destination. That is, it does not aim to learn the micro ethnographically and then link it to structure theoretically; instead, it views the institutional setting as a whole from the micro perspective. Also this research approach does not aim to generalise from individual cases, but rather to

understand the processes that have generalising effects; that is, it aims to disclose features that operate across many local settings and in this way provide a map that guides us through a complex of social relations, 'emphasizing voices of people but also going beyond those voices' (DeVault and McCoy, 2002, p. 372). These epistemological principles make institutional ethnography as an analytical framework a good fit with the inductive approach taken by this study.

As an 'empirical investigation of [the] linkages among local settings of everyday life, local organizations, and translocal processes of administration and governance' (Smith, 1987, p. 369), institutional ethnography is an appropriate approach to studying the multiple layers and component elements of the interrelationship between receiving social assistance and the recipient's civil and political citizenship. In this approach the initial point of entry is the examination of local phenomena, and the end goal is to 'expose how larger power relations shape local experience' (Slade, 2010, p. 462). In other words, an institutional ethnography is an 'extended case [study] into the mechanics of power' (p. 462). Therefore, the researcher who follows this approach

proceed[s] from what people know about their lives, what they actually do everyday, and how they express this knowing and doing in their own terms. Recognizing that *knowing is always knowing from somewhere*, we choose to conduct an inquiry from the standpoint of the people whose experiences are being ruled. As researchers, we stand with them and attempt to make sense of their expressions of experience [...] That is, we undertake an inquiry that traces the social relations organizing particular people's lives.

The research begins with making ethnographic accounts of people's knowledge and experience and then moves to a different level, as we explore the social organization of what happens. (Campbell, n.d., para. 1, emphasis added)

On this basis, DeVault and McCoy (2002) suggest a preferred sequence for institutional ethnographic research: first, identify an experience; then identify the institutional processes that shape that experience; next, investigate those processes (e.g. trans-local relations, discourses, institutional work processes); and lastly, analyse how they operate as the basis for the experience by exploring frontline interchanges, as well as macro-institutional policies and practices. According to this account, therefore, triangulation is an inherent characteristic of this approach.

Following this sequence, this research started with semi-structured individual interviews conducted with recipients of social assistance in post-transition Hungary in order to investigate their experiences of citizenship and receiving benefits, and identify the institutional mechanisms that potentially shape these experiences. It was followed by periods of participant observation aiming to explore the identified institutional processes and frontline interchanges. In addition, at the time of the participant observation, semi-structured interviews with managerial level officials were also conducted, as well as a desk research of the policy documents that regulated social assistance provision at the time of the research in order to study the macro-institutional policies and practices relevant to the research topic.

Apart from the above reasoning, the decision to conduct recipient interviews first and the participant observation afterwards was also informed by the concern that if the sequence had been reversed, then the fact that the recipients saw me working in the welfare office before I approached them about the interview could have compromised their trust in my neutral position and therefore impaired their openness and honesty in the interview. Before discussing the methodological questions that concern the interviews and the participant observation in detail, I first explain the specific focus of this thesis – i.e. the reasons for selecting a particular provision and focusing the research on the people who receive that specific benefit, and afterwards I introduce the most important questions of the case selection.

Focus of the research

As discussed in the Introduction, the system of welfare provisions in Hungary has developed into a dual regime in the post-transition era – that is, the characteristics of contributory and social assistance types of provision differ to such an extent that they form two completely separate, detached and enclosed systems within the broader institutional structure of welfare provision. Contributory benefits are regulated in state-level laws (tellingly called ‘normative’ provisions, to be discussed in Chapter 5); therefore, they do not allow for discretion on the local level, and these provisions offer relatively generous allowances. Whereas social assistance provisions are highly

decentralised, i.e. predominantly regulated on the local level, and – closely connected to this decentralised characteristic (see Chapter 5) – they entail high levels of discretion, means testing and other, often very strict and/or stigmatising, conditions; and in addition, most of these benefits are extremely meagre.

Due to these characteristics, recipients have significantly more regular personal experiences of social assistance types of provision than those involved in contributory types of benefits which, in most cases, people receive through very little actual interaction with the street-level representatives and manifestations of the system (be they department managers, case workers, or documents received or to be filled in). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that the above-mentioned characteristics of social assistance provision have a strong influence on recipients' self-perception and agency in general (Piven and Cloward, 1993; Lipsky, 1980; van Oorschott, 2002; Haney, 2009). Consequently, I inferred that social assistance was the most appropriate provision to study in order to explore the interrelationship between receiving benefits and the experience of civil/political citizenship.

More precisely, this research is focused on one particular form of social assistance, namely, the 'employment substituting benefit' (ESB). The specificities of this benefit are the subject of Chapter 5; here, I highlight only the characteristics that make it the most appropriate provision to be studied in order to explore the interrelationship between receiving a form of social

assistance and the recipient's experience of civil/political citizenship. First of all, recipients of ESB are required to be in close contact with the local municipality welfare or employment office; therefore, they have regular personal experience of these agencies. Secondly, being a very meagre, means tested, benefit, with a high level of associated discretion, ESB has the key features that potentially inform recipients' experience of their citizenship according to the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

Thirdly, ESB is one of the most prevalent forms of social assistance in contemporary Hungary, meaning that it was reasonable to expect that I would not have significant difficulties in finding interview participants. Furthermore, it also meant that it was the benefit which was the centre of attention in everyday public discourses in Hungary at the time of the research, largely in highly stigmatising terms and in terms of deservingness in particular – most importantly in this regard, receiving ESB was not tied to any of the eligibility conditions that research has shown to enhance popular support for a particular provision, such as disability or old age (van Oorschott, 2008). This, I hypothesised, made recipients of this particular provision likely to be the subject of experiences highly relevant to the topic of this research, such as discrimination and stigmatisation. And last but not least, detailed data on ESB provision was available up until December 2010 at the time of planning and organising the research, which was helpful in terms of selecting the two cases and finalising the research design.

Case selection

Since the regulation and management of social assistance provision were primarily pursued at the municipal level in Hungary, it was local welfare departments that served as the central setting for the present research. Thus, I conducted two case studies of the institutional ethnography of the municipality welfare offices of two medium-size townships in Northeast Hungary. The choice of the geographical location of the research sites was driven by the consideration that the case studies should provide sufficient data – that is, a considerable number of people received social assistance in the municipality, meaning that it would not be difficult to find interview participants and that social assistance was a crucial socio-political issue locally. On the other hand, it was also important that the cases selected were not outliers (e.g. with an excessive representation of social assistance recipients), because such a situation could potentially have generated particular dynamics and attitudes (on the part of the recipients, case workers, and/or the broader local community) that would have skewed the study, such as the ‘normalisation’ of receipt or very deep fault-lines of segregation within the community.

In addition, a D.Phil. project is, in most cases, quite limited in terms of resources, which is also a factor that plays a role in the case selection and the sampling. In my case, the primary considerations in this regard were the following: I had approximately 6-9 months to spend collecting data, not more

than 500 GBP to spend on travel and accommodation expenses, and I had to do the work by myself, that is, not as part of a research collective. Hence, I limited the data collection to one particular micro-region of Hungary that was typical in terms of the proportion and demographic characteristics of social assistance recipients. And in this micro-region I selected two municipalities in which I pursued an institutional ethnographic study in a consecutive manner – that is, first I conducted the interviews and the participant observation in the first location and then I did the same in the second location. Due to the capacity constraints, I was not able to undertake more than two case studies in this research, however, it was important that I pursue more than one case study so that I would have the opportunity to compare and contrast the functioning of different institutional settings to however limited extent. The comparison was certainly not the main focus of the research and contrasting only two cases is not a sufficient basis for generalisation, however, I anticipated that by selecting the cases appropriately (discussed below) the differences and the parallels between them would provide meaningful findings and/or bring subjects to the surface, which may be investigated in further research.

This case selection may be criticised on the basis that it lacks statistical significance or external validity. However, the research question capitalises on the strengths of this research design. Namely, the two selected cases offer depth, detail, richness and also variation – within and between the two cases, and in this way help us to understand processes and explore relationships between

phenomena. Furthermore, the two case studies also allow for reflection on the context of the issue in question and thus facilitate comprehensive study of such complex phenomena as the subject of this research (Flyvbjerg, 2011). In this way, even though the present study does not offer statistical validity, it can ensure conceptual validity. As described above, citizenship socialisation through the welfare regime is a fairly under-researched topic, especially in the post-transition CEE context in which the welfare complex have been facing significant 'new risks' at the same time as democracy and market economy have been institutionalised, as discussed in Chapter 1. Therefore, the nuances and the complexity that the two case studies can offer promise a meaningful addition to existing knowledge about the research topic.

I approached the heads of the welfare departments of the two selected municipalities and asked for their permission to pursue the planned research. I ensured them of the anonymity of the location and offered to share the dissertation in its final format with them. However, I emphasised that I could only promise to make the English version available to them, as – even though I plan to translate the final study into Hungarian – at that stage I could not be sure that I would in fact have the opportunity to do so. In order to be able to guarantee confidentiality, I anonymised not only the participants (recipients, case workers and managers) but also the two municipalities, as it would be fairly easy to track the participants, especially the staff in the institution, in places of this size. Therefore, in this thesis I refer to the two localities as S and P.

The S office immediately consented to the research, while P proved to be more hesitant. First the head of the welfare department turned my request down on the basis of the lack of capacity in the institution. I reinforced my request by a more detailed explanation of the purpose of the research and what my participant observation would mean in practice: 4 hours of volunteer work per day for four weeks. I also explained that it was very important that I pursued the study in two locations that were selected on the basis of very specific criteria, and since S had already agreed it would be very helpful if I could conduct the observation in P as well, as the two cities matched very well in terms of the case selection criteria. After this, I was invited by the head of department to discuss the proposal in person and in the end, having consulted the notary², the institution gave consent to the research and after that they were very helpful and cooperative during the entire time I spent in the office.

The population was 20,949 in S and 32,640 in P at the time of the research. The financial and demographic profile of the two selected municipalities was similar. The fundamental difference between the two, which determined the case selection was the representation of Roma inhabitants – according to Census data, the proportion of Roma inhabitants was average in S at the time of the present investigation, whereas in P, Roma citizens were considerably over-represented in the local population (KSH, 2011).

² The person, most often with legal qualifications, who oversees and directs the functioning of the municipality office. The responsibilities of the notary include, among other things, acting as the employer of the office staff, supporting the mayor's decision-making, and making decisions in the cases in which the municipality acts as an authority. The notary is accountable to the local mayor and the board of representatives.

Although Roma people's experiences of social assistance provision and citizenship is not the main focus of this study, existing research has demonstrated that the Roma is a social group of great importance in terms of the interrelationship of social assistance provision and citizenship in Hungary. Formally, Roma people were full Hungarian citizens, and they have been an important part of Hungarian society ever since the 15th century. However, as a result of centuries of continuous ethnic discrimination and the resulting marginalisation, research has shown that they have become highly over-represented among the poorest strata (Dupcsik, 2009; Kertesi, 2005; Szalai, 2007). In contrast to the approximately 7-8% representation of Roma people in contemporary Hungarian society, 32% of poor Hungarians are Roma today (Messing and Molnár, 2011). In 2003, the monthly income of 82% of Roma Hungarians was below the subsistence minimum and the per capita income of Roma citizens was a mere 1/3 of the Hungarian average (Kemény et al., 2004). Consequently, Roma citizens are not only much more likely to be poor than the average Hungarian citizen today, but their poverty is also significantly deeper (Messing and Molnár, 2011).

Furthermore, Roma people have also been over-represented among the unemployed ever since the transition, and even more so among those who were long-term unemployed (although their integration into the Hungarian labour market was not complete even before the transition). Even those who were employed often worked in the most precarious (irregular, seasonal, short-term)

jobs, or in the informal labour market (Kertesi, 2005; Köllő, 2009). As a result of this employment pattern, Roma people were largely excluded from higher-level, contribution-based welfare provisions in the dualised welfare system of Hungary; however, due to the poverty levels of Roma citizens described above, meagre social assistance provisions played an important role in the life of Roma Hungarians. Consequently, 'the Roma' (or rather, 'Gypsies') played a very important role in public discourses on social assistance and the welfare state in general in contemporary Hungary.

The Gypsy 'scrounger', who does not contribute to society, but lives off the taxes paid by hard-working 'Hungarians' (meaning only Hungarian nationals in this context), has become a key trope of everyday public discourses. These discourses transmitted a very shallow and distorted picture of the welfare system, of who received what and what it meant for the central budget. And in these discourses Roma' people were presented as particularly efficient in abusing the welfare system – they supposedly gave birth in order to receive more benefits and their total welfare income was much higher than the amounts the majority earned by hard work on the labour market. The media and many politicians have fed these discourses and distorted views, and incumbent governments have been very responsive to the public opinion misled by them. Virág (2009) argues that such a discursive environment has played an important role in making the (even in CEE comparison) particularly small social assistance budget especially prone to cuts, despite its negligible potential to make a

difference in the central budget.

And, as research evidence shows, these discourses have also affected the actual practices of welfare bureaucracies, at the expense of Roma recipients. Babusik (2004) found that 28% of Roma Hungarians claimed that they experienced discrimination on the part of municipal welfare personnel. In addition, Szalai (2007) found significant differences between the reasons given to Roma and white³ claimants for rejecting their benefit claims: 66% of white, as opposed to 34% of Roma, claimants were rejected due to a formal deficiency of the claim (e.g. not being eligible), while 14% of white, as opposed to 27% of Roma, claimants were rejected with reference to the financial situation of the municipality. That is, Roma claimants were rejected significantly more often with reference to unaccountable factors in the absolute discretion of the municipality and with no possibility of legal recourse. Hence, in this case they were not discriminated against in the system, but in their chances of entering the system.

On the basis of these research findings, the comparison between the experiences of social assistance provision and citizenship of Roma and white Hungarians

³ Even though it is not very common to refer to the ethnic majority of Hungarian society as 'white people', I still decided to use this term throughout this thesis because, having considered the other options, I found this terminology the most adequate in the particular politico-historical environment of contemporary Hungary. The Roma v. Hungarians differentiation that many scholars use would be inappropriate in my view, as Roma people are also Hungarian citizens and, according to the data provided by the most recent Census, many Roma citizens identify as being equally Roma and Hungarian culturally. In addition, the term 'white' also captures the fact that the Roma minority is a 'visible minority', that is, the main differentiating feature of Roma people is their skin colour, which has significant repercussions in general as well as in relation to the present research.

needed to be part of this research. By selecting two cases that differ only in the share of Roma inhabitants, I aimed to explore as part of my study the differences between how white and Roma recipients experienced and interpreted social assistance provision in post-transition Hungary and the ways in which these differences played out in their perception and performance of their citizenship. Complementing the interview data, during the participant observation I particularly focused on the ways in which Roma claimants and recipients⁴ were treated in the welfare office and how this treatment differed from that of white Hungarians.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews in an institutional ethnography are windows on the different aspects of and relations within the organisation, and as such they are partial views that need to be integrated by the researcher (De Vault and McCoy, 2002). Therefore, in the first phase of this research I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with people who received ESB in the two selected locations, to explore their ideals and lived experiences of citizenship, and the ways in which these were interrelated with their experiences of social assistance provision. I only interviewed people who received the benefit for more than 6 months so that they had sufficient experiences of the social assistance system and with the

⁴ Throughout this thesis, I refer to people who had applied to a provision but were rejected or the decision have not been made yet as *claimants*; and to the ones who were actually receiving a provision as *recipients*.

realities of the provision of this particular benefit.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews – including their relatively long time-frame and conversational style – allowed for a thick description of participants' individual experiences and standpoints (Legard et al. 2003; Bryman, 2008), and it was especially helpful in exploring such abstract phenomena as citizenship and agency. In addition, this method also allowed participants to define what issues mattered for them beyond what I asked them in terms of the research topic.

Since qualitative research does not normally aim for representative sampling, I used purposive sampling to select interview participants. This is a strategic form of sampling that ensures that participants' characteristics are relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2008, Chapter 19.); however, it aims for a wide variety within the sample. De Vault and McCoy (2002) also recommend that institutional ethnography should strive for diversity of experiences rather than categories, as the main goal is to 'gain access to as wide a range of individuals as possible, so that many different perspectives and ranges of activity are the focus of attention' (Bryman, 2008, p. 414). Consequently, this research design and participant selection also informed the data analysis in the present research in a way that aims primarily for grasping depth and complexity rather than identifying categories of participants and differences between them. For the same reasons, in most cases I also avoided quantifying the findings of this study, as such an interpretation of the research data could easily create the

impression of statistical significance, which this study was not designed to attain. As a result, I highlighted patterns, views, themes, and reasonings instead of discussing numbers and percentages that might convey misleading perceptions.

In order to reach as wide a range of individuals as possible, I spent the first couple of weeks of data collection in the selected welfare offices and approached every client who came into the waiting area during that time. I summarised the aim of the research to them briefly and asked them if they had received ESB for more than 6 months (in this way I could avoid making them feel that they had to share what type of aid they receive, which many people find shameful (Chase and Walker, 2013; Jo, 2013)). I asked every individual who met these two criteria if they wanted to participate in an interview and set a date with the ones who agreed to do so. I aimed for 20 interviews in each location, as I anticipated that this number, together with the other types of data I aimed to collect (participant observation, manager interviews and document analysis) would provide sufficient depth and detail about the subject of this research. In the end I conducted 42 interviews (21 at each research site), and 19 at each site proved to have actually met the two selection criteria – that is, I finished the data collection with 38 in-sample interviews. The wide sampling worked very well in the sense that among the participants in these 38 interviews there was a very wide variety of people in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, family status, state of health and ability.

The topic guide for the interviews was revised and improved after having conducted the first two interviews, which allowed the topics to be discussed to be adapted to suit the actual local circumstances of the participants, as well as the questions and prompts to be reworded that had proved to sound foreign to the participants. In this final version, the topic guide covered two broader themes: recipients' experiences with social assistance and their perception and exercising of their citizenship. In the first part of the interview I enquired about participants' actual knowledge of the provision they received (concerning primarily the rules, the eligibility conditions, and sanctions); their personal views about the system of social assistance provision and its implementation in practice in their municipality and in Hungary in general; and their feelings about being a recipient of social assistance provision in this particular context.

In the second part of the interview, I asked participants to define what citizenship meant to them and how they viewed their own citizenship – their position in society in general, their efficacy as citizens in contemporary Hungary, the overall political efficacy of members of the social stratum they identified with, and what they saw as being limits to their citizenship and what the key factors were that enhanced it. Lastly, I enquired about participants' citizenship as they actually performed it. Since this research defined citizenship in a broad sense, I had to make sure that the participants discussed the broad variety of activities that this study conceived of as the performance of citizenship, even if their own definition of citizenship was narrower. Therefore,

I structured this part of the interview more than the previous sections, and first listed certain activities that this research defined as core 'citizenship activities' (voting, being a member of/active in a trades union, community organisation, protest activities, and filing a complaint at the welfare agency), and asked participants if they had engaged in such activities in the recent past. Nevertheless, participants were also given the opportunity to name any other activity that they had engaged in and regarded as an act of citizenship, and to explain why they performed or did not perform these activities.

The large distance between the researcher and the interview participants in terms of social class – namely, the former being a young white woman from a world-famous foreign university working on her doctoral dissertation and the latter being individuals living on meagre social aid, many of them Roma – posed the risk of intimidating the participants and hence compromising their openness in the interview. I tried to mitigate this risk by wearing casual clothes, using an informal, intelligible language and scheduling the interview at a time and location preferred by and convenient for the participant. Most of the interviews took place at local cafés at both research sites, with a few exceptions when the participants preferred to talk in their own homes. The former set-up raised the concern of confidentiality, as in a public café other customers could have overheard our conversation; this was clearly not acceptable ethically, and it could also have impaired participants' openness. However, since the interviews took place during the day, the cafés where the interviews took place

were fairly deserted; hence, we could always sit at a table where no-one else was in earshot. On the other hand, conducting the interview in the participant's home raised concerns in terms of my own safety as a researcher, which I tried to assure by informing a third person (a friend of mine, or a relative) of my exact whereabouts and the expected ending time of the interview and contacting them once the interview was over.

I provided each interview participant with an information sheet written in accessible Hungarian language that explained the topic, purpose and relevance of the research. In addition, it discussed the most important matters of confidentiality and data protection, why and how participants were selected, and the ways in which the interview data would be used in the future. The document also explained the practical details of the interview (length, audio recording etc.), and assured the participants about the opportunity of withdrawing from the research at any time or of omitting any part of the interview should they wish to, and highlighted the fact that participating in the project would by no means have any repercussions for their social assistance provision. The last bit of the sheet contained my departmental contact details and offered participants the possibility to ask any queries, as well as the those of the Research Ethics Committee of the university should they wish to file a formal complaint directly to the institution. Once the participants had read the information sheet they signed a form, also written in easy to understand Hungarian, in which they gave consent to participating in the research and the

use of the interview data, as explained in the information sheet. I offered to read both documents out loud to each participant, to make sure that everyone would be able to give truly informed consent, as I could not be certain that every client in the office was literate. I decided to offer everyone to read the documents instead of asking if they could read with the purpose of preventing them from having to share information that they might have found shameful.

One of the most difficult ethical issues I faced during this research concerned interview participants' remuneration. Initially I planned to remunerate interview participants financially to compensate for the time and effort that they devoted to this research project. Being aware of the serious financial difficulties of people who received social assistance in Hungary, I first paid each participant approximately the average hourly wage (1,000 HUF, that is, 2.67 GBP). However, I did not mention the remuneration at the time of the recruitment and paid everybody at the end of the interview, so that the payment did not distort the researcher-research participant relationship by imposing on it a further layer of hierarchy, and to avoid the risk that the participants tried to 'say the right thing' or live up to some supposed expectations. Nevertheless, after the first few interviews I had to realise that the payment made many participants feel very uncomfortable. And then one man told me with tears in his eyes: 'I wish I did not have to accept this, but unfortunately ... I did not expect this, I am moved ... but it should not be like this, I came here as a volunteer ...' This made me reconsider the remuneration

policy of the research. Being a voluntary contributor to the study was in itself a valuable undertaking for many participants, one that enhanced their self-regard, and being paid for it corrupted this experience in the eyes of some. Having seen a middle-aged man being really hurt by the monetary remuneration, I decided to stop paying cash to the participants, and instead, I compensated their efforts with the symbolic gesture of inviting them to a drink and/or snack in the café where the interview took place.

Participant observation

Having reached the planned number of recipient interviews, I started the one-month period of participant observation in each location. This method is often used in case studies, and is also well suited to institutional ethnography, since these forms of research design require the holistic examination of a phenomenon (DeVault and McCoy, 2002; Esterberg, 2002). I applied focused observation, which suggests that the researcher narrows down what they look for during the observation rather than exhaustively exploring the site (Spradely, 1980). That is, I focused the observation primarily on the topics that the interviews highlighted or existing research suggested could be important concerning the main themes of this research. In this way, I could put the personal, individual angle provided by the interview data into a structural, institutional perspective and let the different types of data complement, strengthen and cross-fertilise one another.

Being a participant observer meant that I was not only investigating the functioning of the two welfare offices from an external perspective, but was also actually involved in the day-to-day functioning of the offices as an assistant and in this way had an 'insider' perspective on it. Moreover, I also had access to the personal views and feelings of the local administrators and department managers, as well as the interpersonal relations between them. I planned to spend one month in each office pursuing participant observation in order to allow time for the administrators and managers to become habituated to my presence (Jorgensen, 1989), and hence to open up in front of me and behave 'naturally' in the office. However, it seemed to be an overcautious consideration, as case workers were surprisingly open in front of me from the beginning, which was in and of itself an important finding of the research in the sense that they did not feel the need to hide even their often vulgar or exclusionary views from me.

During the observation I took handwritten notes, which I tried to do in a concealed manner (in spite of the case workers' fast habituation to my presence) so that my note-taking would not remind the workers time and again of being observed. In addition, I made further notes reflecting on the day's observations on the train trip back home at the end of each day. At the end of the data collection phase of the research, I transcribed these notes thematically - by the themes and topics that the interviews identified, and analysed this section of findings together with all the other types of data.

At the beginning of the research process, I provided every case worker whose work I would observe with an information sheet and a consent form with similar content to the one received by interview participants discussed above, though adapted slightly to suit their different position.

Lastly, as part of the participant observation I also conducted informal interviews with some of the case workers whose work I closely observed – that is, with whom I actually worked as an assistant in the two offices. The methodological literature conceives of lengthier, relatively structured conversations during the participant observation as legitimate interviews that should be treated as valid research data, though of a specific format – less structured but more organic than formal interviews (Jorgensen, 1989; Spradely, 1980). My own research greatly benefited from such informal interviews. I had three of such longer, in-depth conversations with the case workers, one in S and two in P. These discussions were primarily led by the case workers; however, I also had the chance to ask my own question and in this way direct the conversation to topics especially relevant to the research. In this way, I was able to learn a number of details about the social assistance provision that I probably would not have asked about otherwise. In this sense, case workers' past experiences in the office and their comparison of these experiences with the functioning of the office at the time of the research proved to be especially valuable, as they put my observations and findings into broader perspective.

Document analysis and manager interviews

In order to complement the interview and participant observation data and obtain a more comprehensive view of the interplay between social assistance provision and recipients' civil/political citizenship, I conducted document analysis focused on the main texts that regulate social assistance provision in post-transition Hungary, and pursued managerial interviews in both locations.

I discuss the documents that I analysed in the course of the present research in detail in Chapter 5; here, I only discuss the methodological considerations that guided this analysis. The methodological literature on institutional ethnography recommends that the researcher complement more direct forms of data collection (such as participant observation and interviews) with text analysis. DeVault and McCoy (2002) argue that institutions increasingly operate by textual forms of coordination; that is, it is texts that coordinate people's activity across time and space within institutional relations, playing a standardising, mediating, and organising role that needs thorough analysis. Building on Smith's diagnosis that contemporary social organisation is text-mediated, Slade (2010) argues that to an institutional ethnographer texts are not static documents but rather a means by which power is manifested in dominant social relations. Therefore, the literature on institutional ethnography suggests that the researcher should investigate how people are introduced to the text, what knowledge they (ought to) have in order to use the text; what they do with, and as a result of, the text, and how different texts relate to one another,

'as well as the conceptual schema that organises the text and its competent reading' (DeVault and McCoy, 2006, pp. 36-37).

That is, in an institutional ethnography the researcher explores texts as they function in the day-to-day operation of the institution. Consequently, I focused the document analysis on the documents that were in fact in use in the two welfare offices. The documents that could have been relevant to the topic but were not used in practice were not analysed in the present study; however, their absence is discussed in the empirical chapters of this thesis as part of the research findings. On the basis of the above, the process of document analysis lasted throughout the entire research process, including new documents as they became relevant. I analysed the Social Code at the beginning of the data collection process (that is, before the interviews and the participant observation), since it was the main document regulating social assistance provision in post-transition Hungary and thus, learning its content in detail was important in defining the main topics of the interviews and the focus areas of the participant observation. The rest of the documents were analysed in the course of conducting the interviews and the observation, as they were mentioned by the staff or participants and hence became pertinent. I focused this analysis primarily on the themes and issues raised by the interviews and the participant observation, but I also aimed to understand the broader structural characteristics of social assistance provision that the documents conveyed.

Last but not least, I interviewed department managers in both locations, in order to complement recipients' bottom-up perspective with their top-down approach to social assistance provision based on their position that gave a perspective on the functioning of the municipality welfare office as an institutional structure that was also part of a broader system, namely, the city hall. I conducted one such interview in S, with the head of the unit responsible for social assistance provision, among other responsibilities (the exact institutional structure of the two welfare offices is discussed in Chapter 5). This interview was pursued fairly late in the research process, just after having finished the participant observation, due to the reluctance of the director, based on her limited capacity. In P, on the other hand, two managerial interviews were conducted, because in that municipality a separate unit was dedicated to Social and Child Welfare cases within the Governance and Institutional Management Directorate, and this unit had its own director, who was subordinate to the head of the directorate. These two interviews were pursued separately, both in the course of the participant observation in P. The same topic guide (see Annex 2) was used in the three managerial interviews, which focused on the directors' institutional position (their qualifications, work history, present position and responsibilities); their overall views on social assistance provision in post-transition Hungary (its functions and position within the broader system of redistribution, its regulation, and the resources dedicated to it); and lastly, the managers' perception of and relationship with the ground-level agents of social

assistance (the staff in the office and their clientele, and ESB recipients in particular).

The two interviews in P were approximately 60 minutes long. However, the interview with the S director was considerably shorter, as her initial reluctance was also manifested in her brevity and abruptness during the actual interview. All three managers were provided with detailed written information about the research at the very beginning; hence, at the time of the interview they only received a consent form, which all of them signed. All three managerial interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Due to the very limited number of these interviews and their secondary data status, I did not code these interviews but, rather, used their content as complementary sources – that is, I looked for the topics raised by the recipient interviews and the participant observation or issues relevant to these topics.

The researcher's position

The present research is based on the epistemological position that knowledge is socially constructed and therefore the processes that aim to generate knowledge need to reflect its social, contextual, and discursive nature. On this basis, this research questions the positivist idea of value-free learning and the possibility of fully objective social science, and suggests that knowledge is deeply embedded in context and, thus, in power relations. Therefore, in order to acquire more comprehensive and more pertinent information, social scientists

need to take account of various sources of knowledge and thus employ contextual, reflexive or collective methods that reflect the contingent nature of the knowledge that is produced in this process (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006; Fals-Borda, 2006).

Nevertheless, in the framework of a D.Phil. research project, such epistemological aspirations necessarily have to be negotiated with the realities of fairly limited resources (namely, time, money and human capacity), and the institutional requirements of the university where the study is pursued. As a result of these considerations, I decided to foreground the reflexive and contextual features of the present research, but downplay its participatory potential. As noted above, I did place emphasis on allowing the voice of recipients of social assistance to be conveyed by this research. Nonetheless, their participation was fairly constrained throughout the research process. It was limited to participating in a semi-structured interview and sharing their experiences and opinions in this setting via discussing certain questions defined predominantly by the researcher, as opposed to being involved in defining the research problem, developing the research approach, and analysing the data, which Gaventa (2003) describes as necessary component elements of the ideal type of participatory research.

On this basis, using Fine's (1992) taxonomy, I would position my role as a researcher as 'the Voice Stance', that is, among those who,

in their texts, assume a dis-stance, importing to their work the voices of Discarded

Others, who offer daily or local meanings in contrast with hegemonic discourses and practices. With voices as the vehicles for social representation, these researchers typically claim little position for self. (p. 211)

Even though this research design did not allow for deep levels of participation on the part of recipients, many noted at the end of the interview that they highly appreciated the opportunity to voice their feelings, opinions, and complaints and the fact that someone 'finally' really listened to their views and was willing to meaningfully discuss such political issues with them.

On the other hand, in the participant observation phases of the research I acted in a semi-involved manner, functioning fully as a researcher (Gans, 1968). That is, my actual participation in the functioning of the office was limited to background (mostly paper-)work, that did allow me to observe events as they occurred naturally, but did not make me a fully-fledged participant in these events. Consequently, the present thesis is written predominantly in a first person singular form that reflects my insider perspective and participatory approach as a researcher, as well as my objection to assuming the objectivity of this research project.

Nevertheless, this position raised pressing ethical concerns. Most importantly, to avoid the risk that my personal presumptions or political/ideological views would bias the research. I mitigated this by a high level of reflexivity on my part as a researcher; that is, I constantly checked and reflected on my position throughout the entire research process, and took these reflections into

consideration when interpreting the research findings. The external perspective of my supervisor and my regular consultations with her were especially helpful in putting this into practice.

The long lines in front of welfare offices that are frequently closed tell dependents more about government than short lines for the voting booth. (Ingram and Schneider, 1993, p. 91).

Chapter 4: Citizenship: ideals v lived experiences

This chapter mostly relies on the interviews conducted with recipients of social assistance in contemporary Hungary, and discusses the ways in which they conceived of citizenship and democracy in the abstract, as well as how they experienced their own citizenship within and beyond the domain of welfare provision.

Ideas of citizenship – what makes a citizen?

In the interviews I confronted participants with questions as to how they defined citizenship as an abstract ideal, what it meant to them, and what made a citizen in their view. At both locations, approximately the same number of people presented a neutral, merely administrative view of citizenship (possessing basic documents, being registered), and substantive qualities. However, my data shows an interesting pattern, namely that in P, where ethnicity is more of a social and political issue than in S, due to the larger proportion of Roma people in the local population, Roma participants were clearly more likely to think about citizenship in neutral vis-à-vis substantive

terms, whereas white participants responded in a contrasting way: almost every white participant highlighted substantive qualities of citizenship. In S, on the other hand, responses were more balanced, tilting slightly towards substantive views in the case of both ethnic groups. The following chapters explore the institutional procedures and characteristics that can be accounted for these differences.

The substantive qualities of citizenship that participants highlighted in the interviews can be organised around four themes: democratic rule of law; community and belonging; participation; and personal welfare or well-being. In relation to democratic rule of law, a number of people pointed out universal rights and responsibilities as distinctive features of citizenship. In particular, some participants highlighted citizens' right and obligation to vote and their duty to pay taxes, respect the law, know the Constitution and work regularly. In addition, a few participants pointed out that a citizen was free to do their business; however, when participants specified citizens' actual rights and responsibilities most of them indicated duties and only a few recipients listed the rights that citizens enjoyed. This imbalance was also reflected in how participants of this research viewed their own citizenship (discussed below).

Democracy – as a set of values and institutional guarantees of rights – was also a recurring theme in the interviews in relation to the concept of citizenship.

To me [citizenship] means democracy, it means that I can vote, here in Hungary. I know that I have rights as a Hungarian citizen. (Eszter, Roma woman in her forties in S)

In addition, some participants pointed to equality – equal respect and equal treatment, i. e. being protected from discrimination – as a crucial aspect of citizenship. One of the Roma participants in S highlighted that being free from ethnic discrimination was especially important for him in terms of citizenship.

In relation to the second theme – community and belonging – an interview participant eloquently noted that a citizen was ‘part of a functioning machinery’. Some people explicitly linked their sense of citizenship to being Hungarian, which they felt for example when they saw the national team in a sports competition or when they needed to stand up for their home country. Since the membership of Roma people in the Hungarian political community is questioned time and again, it is no surprise that this aspect was mentioned more frequently by Roma participants.

A few people emphasised that being proud of one’s community was an important part of citizenship, and one interview participant highlighted in particular the importance of citizens being able to respect and look up to their political leaders. Also related to the sense of community membership, some participants – mostly women who are traditionally expected to take care responsibilities – pointed to the possibility of helping others as a central aspect of citizenship, which, as we will see later, they could not practise as much as they wished, due to their lack of resources.

As a third theme, interview participants also pointed to a number of active forms of exercising one’s citizenship. The forms of participation that people

regarded as 'civic' varied broadly, from helping others and standing up for their fellows, serving a good cause, going to a demonstration, and signing a petition, to staying informed about one's rights, as well as duties as citizens. As noted in Chapter 3, a few people even pointed out their participation in the present research as an act of citizenship, since by doing so they could both voice their views and contribute to a public cause. Some participants emphasised being equally able to pursue their interests and not depending on others as key to full citizenship. For others, the most important aspect of citizenship was that they ought to have a say, and their voices and opinions were supposed to be heard – for instance as members of unions or parents' working groups in schools.

Lastly, while some emphasised the importance of being respected and being treated as a human being as key component elements of citizenship, a number of participants directly linked the concept of the citizen to a secure livelihood.

Citizens are ... where people are contented, where there is no hunger, no tears [...] where people work and can make a living. [...] I will feel that I am a citizen when I can support my family and there is no risk of ending up in a shelter or without electricity and water.
(Viktória⁵, 32-year-old Roma woman)

In other words, some recipients emphasised that citizenship required a certain level of material welfare: they argued that only the upper classes could actually make use of their citizenship, while 'the little person' did not have a say. Closely related to these views, a number of people said in the interviews that

⁵ All the names of the research participants, both the recipients and the office managers, used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

employment and/or having a livelihood were crucial prerequisites of pursuing one's interests, and hence, of being a citizen. They argued that this was a necessary condition for one to be able to contribute to society – which, as demonstrated above, many participants viewed as an essential component of citizenship.

In contrast, some of the participants brought up the issue of homelessness when discussing citizenship in abstract terms. One participant highlighted the lack of such basic requirements of citizenship as possessing basic civic documents in the case of homeless people – while a homeless participant argued that homeless people were deprived of their humanity in the eyes of society and therefore, they could not be full citizens.

These responses lead to the conclusion that, even though there has been little public deliberation about the substance of democratic citizenship ever since the transition in Hungary (see Chapter 1), there was a broadly shared view among members of the lowest echelons of Hungarian society (and more so among white people) that the idea of citizenship transcended its merely administrative conception. In this view, citizenship denoted a shared ideal that was of great value to participants, and this abstract ideal was closely connected to material well-being.

Social assistance recipients' lived experiences of citizenship

Having explored participants' conception of citizenship in general, I asked them how they viewed their own citizenship and their position in contemporary Hungarian society. I found a clear difference between the two locations in this respect: in S, responses were quite balanced, that is, the number of participants who felt that they were citizens was approximately equal to the ones' who said that they did not have a sense of citizenship personally. In contrast, in P, I identified a clear relationship between participants' definition of citizenship in general and their personal sense of it. A majority of the participants who defined citizenship in substantive terms felt that their citizenship was compromised, while most of the people who had a neutral conception of citizenship did have a sense of being a citizen. This pattern of responses strengthens the above suggestion that in P, where ethnic tensions were more pronounced, fewer recipients felt that they were citizens in the substantive sense of the term.

As to how participants perceived their own citizenship, and in what situations they felt that they were citizens, responses revolved around three broader themes: most people felt that they were not citizens in reality at all, or that they were second-class citizens, and only a smaller proportion of the recipients had positive personal experiences in relation to their citizenship. A small minority of participants definitely stated that they were indeed citizens and that they also felt that they were. Some of them highlighted the administrative aspects of

citizenship, such as 'I was born and raised here, I studied here, I work here ... worked ... so [this shows] the fact that I am here for quite a while' (Andrea, 24 year-old white woman in S). Nevertheless, the majority of the positive responses to this question highlighted participants' rights and responsibilities. A few recipients pointed out certain rights as the cornerstone of their citizenship, such as their right to vote, their right to equal treatment and the fact that they had access to the authorities. However, a greater emphasis was laid by participants on their awareness of their responsibilities, especially their duty to work and pay taxes, as the following example demonstrates.

What makes me a citizen? The fact that I was always working, I was always productive, I always paid the taxes, social security and all. Above that, on top of paying the mandatory contributions, I have not really served much more, but I have not really had a chance to do so... There were not many opportunities for me to do something, and I have not really wanted to either. (45-year-old white man in S)

Research shows that certain social groups tend to have greater difficulty articulating their rights than their responsibilities (Lister et al., 2003). And Mettler and Soss (2004) have demonstrated that 'Welfare state programs [...] may also influence the ways mass publics perceive the nature of their civic obligations and the priority of such obligations relative to rights' (p. 61). In the following chapters I investigate to what extent the component elements of the contemporary system of social assistance provision in Hungary play a part in shifting recipients' focus from their rights as citizens to their duties.

On the other hand, the majority of the participants had negative experiences in

relation to their citizenship; and as a result, most of them did not view themselves as citizens, or at least not as full citizens. 'Because I don't have rights, I don't have a vote, I don't have a say, so we are like slaves', as a 32-year-old Roma woman in S eloquently explained this in the interview. Another compelling example of participants' impaired sense of citizenship is the argument of a 50-year-old white man in S that, instead of feeling like a citizen, he felt as though he was 'the servant of this leadership, the government's servant in fact'. A number of participants argued that they were deprived of their rights, and even their personal feelings of Hungarian nationality did not help make up for it any longer, as 'people walk head down', the needs of 'little people' did not matter, only those of 'the big fishes', and they were 'at the very bottom of the social ladder', or 'under the frog's arse'⁶, as one of the participants expressively put it.

And a few participants explicitly linked their damaged sense of citizenship to living on social assistance. As a 47-year-old white man in S powerfully put it:

When you are on benefit and all, it's like you are not even a citizen [...] Recipients can't even have any wants, whereas citizens have everything – they have their family, etcetera, they are, I should say, part of a functioning machinery.

Another common thread running through participants' responses to the question about how they experienced their citizenship was that they did feel

⁶ Common expression in Hungarian used to describe a devastating and hopeless situation.

that they were citizens formally but their democratic subjectivity was limited, since they could not fully exercise their rights and potentials as citizens. Some highlighted certain occasions when they did feel that they were citizens, such as when voting, serving in the army, or at an international soccer match, only to add that otherwise they did not feel so. Others emphasised that they did not have a chance to stand up for themselves (to protest, for instance) and they could not realise their goals, and this made them feel less of a citizen.

For a number of participants, this compromised sense of citizenship was a direct consequence of their marginal socio-economic status, and in a few cases explicitly related to the fact that they lived on social assistance. 'I am a citizen for now, but I don't know how it will end ... I think of myself as a citizen, but I feel very oppressed as a citizen, due to where I ended up', said Ibolya, a 49-year-old white woman from S; and she explained that she felt this due to her very limited livelihood and the fact that she was pressurised to work but did not have a chance to do so. The pressure to work that was impossible to meet and lacking the right to work were raised by a couple of participants as factors pushing them into feeling as though they were second-class citizens.

These participants reasoned that they felt that they were outlaws, rather than citizens, as they lived in constant precariousness, in an ever more marginal position in society and as a result, they felt that they were disrespected by others. Some also expressed their resentment and shame about 'living on the hard work of others'. This finding suggests that there were participants who

seem to have internalised the popular view that a considerable body of literature showed to be prevalent in European and North-American societies (see Taylor-Gooby, 1985a; Kangas, 2000; van Oorschot 2006; Gustafson, 2011; Gilens, 2012; Chase and Walker, 2013) – namely that welfare recipients ‘scrounge on taxpayers’ money’, and the sharp differentiation between ‘hardworking citizens’ and ‘freeloaders’, and that these views related to participants’ status as ESB recipients significantly affected their sense of citizenship.

In addition, a number of the Roma participants expressed the view that their citizenship was compromised by the exclusion that they experienced in Hungarian society and that the fear of racist abuse limited their scope for participation. As an interesting contrast, Gizella, a 53-year-old white woman in S, who was of Hungarian nationality but was born and raised in Transylvania (which used to be part of Hungary and now belongs to Romania), claimed that she was a Hungarian citizen as she had gone through a complicated process of gaining formal Hungarian nationality – she paid her dues and met all the administrative conditions. The way in which she made this claim suggested that she felt she had earned the feeling of being a citizen.

Lastly in terms of ESB recipients’ sense of their own citizenship, in the following section I discuss the responses that participants gave in the interview to the question about how they perceived their citizenship in the welfare office in particular; whether there were situations when they felt like citizens; and if

so, what those situations were. Participants gave positive and negative responses to these questions. The few people who said that they had a sense of citizenship in the welfare office gave different reasons why it was the case.

A common thread running through the answers was that the fact that they had a place to turn to, that the administrators were there in the office for them, and that they were eligible for some sort of a provision at all made them feel that they were in fact citizens, and put them on an equal footing with administrators. An elderly woman, for example, highlighted that since her husband had passed away it was her who attended the welfare office, and it made her feel capable and as a result enhanced her sense of citizenship. In addition, the experience in the welfare office also resulted in the realisation of some participants that many other people were in the same shoes as they were. Besides these arguments, one person reasoned that he viewed public works as a public service and hence, performing public works being tied to benefit eligibility (discussed in Chapter 5) gave him a sense of citizenship. In addition, a Roma man in S – whose sense of citizenship was also informed by ethnicity – highlighted that he felt like a citizen in the welfare office, because he did not feel discriminated against for his ethnicity there. These findings demonstrate that there was considerable potential in the welfare office to reinforce clients' sense of citizenship; however, only a small fraction of recipients actually experienced such an enhancement, whereas an overwhelming majority had explicitly disempowering experiences with the welfare authority.

Some of the participants pointed to the power asymmetries they experienced in the welfare office as a factor that impaired their sense of citizenship. 'If they want to, they can repeal everything', a recipient in P argued. Another interview participant in S reasoned that 'I have to feel that I am a citizen, because it is mandatory that I do what they send me by mail'. That is, this man felt that even being a citizen was a must in the welfare office – and he linked this to duties imposed on him by the authority without him having any say in it. Along the same lines, a Roma woman in S answered to the question if she felt that she was a citizen in the welfare office by saying 'No, I just go there and do my business, do what I have to, what they call me in for, what I have to sign for them'. These accounts reflect pressure, orders, and a one-way direction of communication. That is to say, these recipients felt that their powers as citizens were constrained by their vulnerability vis-à-vis administrators. Since they depended on the provision, they had to follow the orders of the authority; there was no degree of mutuality between the authority and the client, and recipients' agency was clearly curtailed in relation to the office. 'They send me back and forth, but I never get an actual goal fulfilled. That ... well, I solved this problem ... that never happens', as a 23-year old Roma participant concluded in the interview. Related to this issue, others highlighted that the ways in which the administrators treated them in practice prevented them from feeling that they were a citizen. I discuss this in Chapter 8 when I analyse the interactions between case managers and recipients.

As another reason for not feeling as though they were citizens in the welfare office, some of the participants emphasised their lack of social security, and the lack of a decent livelihood due to the inadequate support they get from the welfare authority. Participants highlighted components of the contemporary Hungarian social assistance system, such as the fact that 'people are forced to live on minimal money', or that the welfare office could not provide employment opportunities, as key factors in relation to their not feeling like citizens. In this way these recipients directly linked their sense of citizenship in general – or the lack thereof – to their social position as recipients of social assistance.

Irén, a 47-year-old Roma woman in P, for example, compared her feelings about claiming ESB to being a starving dog, when she discussed her impaired sense of citizenship in the interview.

As if I was a hungry dog, a hungry dog that is asking for a gnawed bone. It's really like that, like ... you are ashamed, but you just have to [claim the assistance] no matter how hard you try to hide it and say that it is due to you, because if they say it is not due to you, then it is not due. Many people think that it is due to them, but if they do not want to provide it, then it is not due. You can claim, or how shall I put it? They can provide it, but not everyone can claim it, or, as they say, you can claim, but it is not certain that you can actually get it.

Her argument indicates that the uncertainty of ESB provision – that was for the most part the result of the discretionary features of the benefit discussed in the next chapter – made her feel insecure about her social citizenship. The claim

‘Many people think it is due to them...’ suggests that she did acknowledge that recipients were supposed to have social rights; however, claimants’ precarious position and her perception that they had no agency to influence benefit provision in reality, made her view ESB as charity rather than an instrument of her social citizenship, which made her feel ashamed and impaired her sense of citizenship.

Along these lines, some of the interview participants pointed specifically to not having any say in the provision, when they discussed their citizenship in relation to benefit provision. They felt that they completely depended on the state and the local authority, and they could not make any change to the current system no matter how much they wanted to. ‘It is not social assistance that we need; not something that they [welfare administrators] either give or not’, a recipient pointed out in the waiting room in P, demonstrating the vulnerability that claimants experienced due to the high level of discretion in ESB provision. In addition, another recipient argued: ‘the state sets whether it is enough or not, you cannot do anything about that.’ Moreover, ‘they [the administrators] read their own truth from the law anyway’, as a client in the waiting room in S eloquently put it. Chase and Walker (2013) show that in the case of people experiencing poverty, strict control and the resulting loss of agency, especially in relation to social services, lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, damaged physical and psychic well-being and an acute sense of powerlessness. The above statements of recipients indicate such a sense of powerlessness vis-à-vis the

welfare authority (irrespective of the person's gender, age or ethnicity), as well as the feeling of shame and frustration that accompanied it.

The above accounts demonstrate a marked discrepancy between participants' idea of citizenship in theory and their actual lived experiences of citizenship as a social and political institution. The analysis of how this discrepancy came about, and the ways in which it was informed by recipients' experiences of social assistance provision are the subject of the following chapters. In the remaining part of this chapter, I dig deeper into recipients' actual experiences and practices of citizenship beyond the welfare institutional complex. That is, I discuss participants' views about democracy in general, the current political system of Hungary, and Hungarian decision-makers in particular. Then I explore recipients' actual participation in elections, their attendance at protests and demonstrations and their involvement in civic organisations. In this regard I had to rely exclusively on the interview data, as the participant observation could not provide any detail on these questions. In the following chapters, I complement these findings with an analysis of the ways in which recipients exercise their citizenship in relation to ESB provision in particular (to what extent they felt that they were citizens, how they obtained information about benefits, and how they voiced their views, complaints and interests in the welfare office), based on both the interview and the participant observation data I collected.

Views on democracy, the political system ('politics') and politicians

In the interviews, I asked participants direct questions about their views on democracy in general, as a political system. Many responded that they either do not know what it meant or did not care about politics at all. This finding suggests that it was quite prevalent among adult citizens whose daily livelihood depended on the state not to have a basic understanding of or to feel disengaged from the functioning of the overarching political structure that was supposed to guarantee their rights and civic involvement. And it was predominantly young interview participants, Roma as well as white recipients of ESB, both men and women in their twenties – that is, people already educated in the current democratic system – who said that they did not know at all what democracy meant.

Nevertheless, a number of participants expressed clear views on the system of democracy. A few of them highlighted what they viewed as the risks of the democratic arrangement, such as that it was easy to suppress people under the guise of democratic ideals by 'divide and rule' practices, or that democracy was a distorted idea in which 'the majority rules over the minority'. On the one hand, these views can be seen as part of a recent trend of disappointment in the reality of the system of democracy and detachment from active involvement in democratic processes (Mason and Kluegel, 2000). On the other hand, such attitudes can also be viewed positively, namely as evidence of an increasingly critical public, especially when it comes to marginalised individuals who are

particularly vulnerable to the risks of political engagement.

However, the majority of the respondents who did articulate their understanding of democracy described it as an appealing system, for various reasons: its functional characteristics (namely, that democracy was the basis of the multiparty parliamentary system, which they considered as being precious political arrangements), as well as its substantive merits – freedom, the institutional protection of human rights, and the possibilities of active civic participation that democracy offered (for example, to form grassroots communities; to deliberate public matters; and the promise of civic representation). This is an important finding in the sense that it suggests a counter-narrative to the popular view in Hungary that poor individuals, and benefit recipients in particular, do not care about the less tangible values and benefits of democratic institutions, they are only interested in material goods.

Nevertheless, many interview participants not only said that they valued democracy highly, but also explicitly linked it to social security. That is, they recognised *both* the abstract values of the democratic political arrangement, as well as its instrumental merits in terms of citizens material well-being, and made a direct link between the two. Some pointed to equality and solidarity as fundamental prerequisites of democracy – namely, that a system in order to be called democratic ought to provide equal rights to everyone and create a community based on equal partnership. For example, a participant explicitly contrasted the democratic necessity of equality with living on social assistance

by arguing that democracy was not only about the right to vote, but should also mean a lot of other things that it did not represent at the moment. For him, one of the missing components of democracy was equality, which he felt lacking, not because of his poverty in general but specifically for the reason that he lived on social assistance – since he felt beholden and hence constrained by receiving ESB.

Another common view among recipients was that for a functioning democracy more employment opportunities were needed so that people can make a living; however, a number of participants viewed personal subsistence not as a goal in and of itself but in relation to abstract ideals such as equal treatment, human dignity and social recognition. It was also highlighted in some interviews that it was a precondition for a democratic society that the people felt cared about by the state as this was what made them feel respected, treated as equal partners, and not being oppressed.

Along these lines, some participants made a direct link between the lack of true social security and active democratic participation. For example, Attila, a 38-year-old white man in P argued that if the work of people was valued and a middle class existed, then people could be active, they could mobilise, and that would be a functioning democracy. Moreover, when participants were asked about what democracy meant for them, many highlighted the importance of freedom of speech; however, Béla, a 48-year-old white man in P added to this popular view that freedom of speech was not enough for a democracy to

function, since in the present time people could not voice their opinion at their workplace, for example, as they risked being laid off as a result, and therefore such a system was not a democracy. In other words, these recipients argued that a certain level of social rights was a prerequisite of a democratic political establishment.

Democracy in Hungary

After each participant shared with me their views on democracy in general, I asked them how they viewed the state of democracy in Hungary in particular. Most of the participants who responded to this question expressed their reservations about Hungarian democracy. Some were disappointed in the state as it did not live up to their expectations. Others resented the lack of actual possibilities to participate – ‘decisions are made above people’s head’, as one participant eloquently put it. A few participants criticised the role of financial capital in the operation of Hungarian democracy – in their view, corruption impaired democratic processes and as a result someone called the current Hungarian political system a ‘money dictatorship’. Some of these critical accounts highlighted that the hardships people have faced since the transition prevented Hungary from functioning as a true democracy. The participants who held this view argued that due to exploitation and the lack of a decent livelihood that they experienced in the current system, they would prefer ‘communism’ or ‘socialism’ – that is, the earlier, state-party system, as in their

view 'People were happier then', and 'richer in their spirit'. And some of them pointed to the lack of social rights – manifested in, for example, universal access to free education and support available when someone got into trouble – as a reason why they viewed contemporary Hungary undemocratic. This view clearly goes against the truism discussed in Chapter 1 – namely, that the decline in social rights was the price Hungarians paid for the newly established institutions of democracy at the time of the transition. This account suggests that there are people at the bottom of the social hierarchy who are lacking in both social and political citizenship today, and, based on their personal experiences, they make a link between the three Marshallian forms of citizenship.

As to being engaged in, or talking about, politics in general, interview participants were divided into three types in relation to their behaviour. There were people who wished to stay out of it completely and wanted to 'live peacefully' instead. A peculiar take on this was when a participant argued that 'little people' did not want to get involved in politics – but they had to, they could not avoid it, as they were affected by it, and therefore they had to get involved, whether they wanted to or not.

Secondly, some participants told me that they were not competent in politics. 'I'm not really good at politics, I'm a simple woman' – as Ilona a 53-year-old white woman in S summed up the view of many. In addition, a man in his forties in S told me: 'I do not understand politics, let the ones smarter than me

deal with it', even though he expressed fairly clear views on political issues later in the interview and was very eager that 'something needs to be done finally' so that people could have a better living. On the other hand, it was only a minority of interview participants who said that they did engage in or discussed politics – mostly with their friends or relatives or on Facebook. A few even said that they enjoyed doing this. These results suggest that a considerable number of recipients felt insecure or even incompetent in relation to their political participation; the following sections of this chapter provide a detailed account of these attitudes.

In the interviews I also asked recipients what they thought about Hungarian politicians in general and what they believed politicians thought about people who received social assistance in particular. Participants' general views about the Hungarian political elite were overwhelmingly negative, and revolved around two themes: first, politicians were ignorant of the realities of recipients' lives; they did not interact with this social stratum, and hence did not care about them or the issues that were important to them; and spent public money on unimportant things instead, such as parking lots, street beautification or supporting soccer. Secondly, they thought that politicians only sought their own and their party's advantage, made empty promises at best (more jobs, for instance) in order to buy people off, especially at the time of elections, or 'just throw some gnawed bones' to them.

A number of participants argued that politicians in Hungary looked down on

recipients as a particularly undeserving social group, since they believed that recipients did not want to work, only abused the welfare system. As a result, participants argued, politicians made decisions over recipients' heads, without asking for their opinion – even about such crucial issues as the level and conditionality of the provision they received. 'It is them who make the laws', as one participant sum it up bitterly, and 'the law never benefits the lower classes', added another recipient.

And some participants explicitly linked these views about politicians to the decisions they made concerning social assistance provision. From the humiliatingly low level of the assistance that was 'not enough to live on, but too much to starve to death', the constant cutting of the benefit, certain conditions of eligibility (such as the one household–one benefit regulation, discussed in the next chapter), and the fact that claimants did not receive any support while waiting for the decision of the authority, participants *learned* that they were worthless, excluded, 'at the very bottom of the social ladder', and hence undeserving of the support of the community. As a 59-year-old white woman in P eloquently put it,

They [politicians] claim that they try to help, but they do not ... perhaps they understand [our difficulties] sometimes, but then there are these measures from which one realises that they do not understand.

And from these particular experiences of the regulation of social assistance provision, some people concluded that in practice Hungary was not a

democratic state, or was a fake democracy at best, since people who were forced to live on such assistance did not have any say in politics and their interests did not matter on the political level at all.

The literature on political inequalities demonstrates in the US context that politicians' and decision-makers' responsiveness to public needs and preferences is clearly biased along the lines of social status, as well as political activity that is, however, strongly related to status (Campbell, 2003; Gilens, 2012; Schlozman et al., 2012). Moreover, in the Swedish context Kumlin (2002) compellingly demonstrated that

experienced distributive justice and experienced voice opportunities have an impact mainly on political trust, where those who have personally experienced injustice are less likely than others to be satisfied with the democratic system and to trust politicians (p. 294).

The above opinions suggest that the lived experiences of being a recipient of ESB seem to confirm the validity of these scholarly accounts also in the context of contemporary Hungary. Recipients' accounts indicate that many were not only clearly reluctant to trust politicians and highly dissatisfied with the democratic system of contemporary Hungary, but also perceived their civic/political efficacy (Gilens, 2012) being compromised not only by their social marginality in general, but also by their status as a recipient of social assistance in particular. The specific perceptions in which these views were informed by social assistance provision in Hungary is the subject of the following chapters of

this thesis.

On the other hand, in contrast to the overwhelming majority of interview participants, who held such negative views about politicians in relation to social assistance recipients, a few participants expressed less critical views about decision-makers. They argued that the picture was more varied, as politicians' performance depended on the actual person; or they empathised with recipients and did their best to help them, but they simply could not, due to the overall lack of resources. Concerning these opinions, this research identified an important pattern – namely, that each participant who held such a view had social characteristics that were recognised as deserving in contemporary Hungarian society: all of them are white and middle-aged, with considerable histories of formal employment, one of them was a single mother; and another one had been privileged by the employment centre in terms of participating in two paid courses that other participants argued, as well as research showed (AJBH, 2012c) were impossible to get into (discussed in Chapter 5). And in addition, all of them said that they had positive experiences at the welfare office in general. This pattern suggests that there is correlation between recipients' conforming to the mainstream ideals of deservingness in Hungarian society, having positive experiences with welfare institutions, and having positive views about the current political arrangement and the overall performance of decision-makers in Hungary.

These findings shed light on how 'welfare creates a bridge between their status

as clients and their status as citizens' (Soss, 2002, p. 167). In order to explore further how this bridge was constituted and the experiences of citizenship that recipients had as a result, in the second part of this chapter, I analyse the ways in which recipients exercised their civil and political citizenship in contemporary Hungary in general, that is, beyond the domain of welfare institutions.

Recipients' citizenship participation beyond the domain of welfare institutions

Voting

Voting was the activity that most people associated immediately with citizenship participation in the interviews. Many claimed that voting was an important event in their life and a number of people said that this was the act when they actually felt that they were citizens. Moreover, one participant – a Roma woman – reported that she had even run for office as a representative in the local minority government (LMG)⁷. In addition, on one occasion an ESB recipient (as I later learned) agitated for other clients' participation in the elections due in 2016 in the waiting room of the S welfare office. However, this was the only example of such explicitly political activity which made use of the

⁷ The Minority Act of Hungary, adopted in 1993, created an opportunity for all the 13 national minorities officially recognised in the country to establish Local Minority Governments (LMG), with a mission to provide effective social, cultural, and political representation to each ethnic minority.

welfare office that I observed during the two periods of one month each that I spent in the waiting areas of the two welfare departments and the four months I spent overall in the two offices.

On the other hand, many participants gave fatalistic responses: namely, that it was absolutely no use going to the polls, as it changed nothing in their view; there was no alternative option; or that all candidates were the same and none of them cared about 'little people' – as recipients tellingly referred to themselves and others in the same social position. And this was also how clients responded to the woman agitating to persuade them to vote – they told her that they were disappointed in all the existing parties. However, a number of people told me in the interviews that they did not vote because they were unable to. Either it would have been too costly for them – to travel to the location where they were supposed to cast their ballot, or to change their registered address, as they (wrongly) thought this was a prerequisite of being able to vote at a given location. Or they were prevented from voting by other factors, such as family problems or the fact that they had to work⁸.

These findings indicate, on the one hand, that taking part in the election of state, local or minority representatives was seen as an important constitutive element and/or a symbol of citizenship by many people who lived on social assistance – but that, on the other hand, many have been disappointed in the institution of voting in practice. This is no surprise in the light of recipients' overall views of

⁸ Note that elections are always on Sundays in Hungary.

the political elite and democratic institutions discussed above, and, as I noted, it was also related to their experiences as recipients of social assistance. This relationship is further elaborated in subsequent chapters.

Furthermore, the fact that some participants were prevented from casting their vote by the lack of financial resources, or the lack of precise knowledge of the address requirements for voting, also suggests that the current social assistance system did not provide its clients with the necessary resources – namely money, information and administrative support that would have enabled them to exercise one of their most important political rights. And my research found that this form of deprivation of citizenship rights disproportionately effected recipients in the most disadvantaged position. One of the participants who said she had difficulty casting her vote had been a victim of domestic violence and she had not have enough money to change her address after fleeing her abuser. The other participant who was not able to participate at the last election was a homeless man whose problem was his extreme poverty and the resulting lack of adequate housing, and therefore an adequate address card, that prevented him from casting his vote.

Involvement in civil society organisations

In the interviews, I asked participants whether they were involved in any civil society organisation (CSO) – be it formal, informal, religious or secular. The question was very general: ‘Are you involved in any civil society organisation?’,

in order for participants to define for themselves both what a CSO was and what 'involvement' meant for them. There was only one person among the participants, a 55-year-old white man, who lived in a shelter for homeless people at the time of the interview, who reported, quite reluctantly, being a member of a political party. He had actually become a member while already living on social assistance. When I asked him about his reasons for joining the party, he said he would keep that to himself. This behaviour, together with his initial reluctance to admit his party membership, is likely to reflect the stigma attached to it in popular discourses in contemporary Hungary.

None of the interview participants was a member of a trade union, even though there was one union and one grassroots organisation that represented unemployed people and people engaged in public works employment in Hungary at the time this research was conducted. Some reported that they had been active in a trade union before Hungary's transition into democracy, when this was practically compulsory; however, contemporary unions disappointed them. Some participants reasoned that today's unions were affiliated to political parties and that was why they did not trust them; others resented that in reality unions did not represent the people, actual families or the most disadvantaged strata of workers. Consequently, as state pressure to enrol ceased with the end of that regime, they left or did not enrol at all after the transition.

A Roma woman in S, who had once run in the local minority government elections but lost, reported still being active around the LMG – she attended

meetings and regularly participated in the activities of the organisation. However, apart from her, there was only one other participant who was actively involved in the activities of the local LMG (also in S) – a Roma woman, the wife of the current president of the organisation, who organised charity clothing drives in the local Roma community. Nevertheless, in S, a number of the Roma participants had some contact with the LMG, sought support from it when needed, most often in relation to welfare provisions, and were in general satisfied with its activities. On the other hand, in P, where the larger Roma community lived, people were generally disappointed by the local minority government and hence had very little contact with the organisation. These findings resonate with earlier research that demonstrated that the effectiveness of LMGs highly depended on the location in Hungary, making the local Roma community vulnerable to the activities and dedication of the local Roma representatives (Koulisch, 2001).

Koulisch (2001) has also demonstrated that LMGs 'are incapable of providing the Roma with effective access to public life' (p. 10) no matter how much members of the local Roma community want to be involved in civic life. The interviews and the participant observation in this research showed that local LMGs did not function as political organisations in reality but rather as social and cultural entities (both in P and S), and therefore, rather than organising the local Roma population politically they lobbied the local authority and the welfare office on an individual basis. In practice it meant that they supported Roma people who

turned to them by helping them fill in benefit claiming forms or accompanying them to the welfare office if the person needed support in advocating their interest in front of the authority. I argue that this practice socialised Roma recipients into a particular form of political advocacy – namely, individual lobbying. This, however, reinforced the hierarchical relationship between the LMG and the local authority that Molnár and Schafft (2003) demonstrated, and therefore could not mitigate the power asymmetry between Roma recipients and the welfare office.

Moreover, Molnár and Schafft (2003) also found that the functioning of each LMG was often dependent financially on the local authority in Hungary, which compromised the position of LMG members as political representatives of local Roma individuals. Their research shows that LMG leaders were often silenced by public works offers, and in some cases they were appointed to leadership positions among public workers that proved to be a successful ‘divide and rule’ strategy that prevented recipients and public works employees from uniting in opposition. My data shows that the president of the LMG both in P and S were part of a household that received social assistance at the time of the study – in P, it was the president himself, whereas in S, it was the wife of the president who was registered as a recipient. I argue that this fact could influence the way in which the LMG as an institution was able to advocate for the rights of Roma recipients in relation to social assistance provision.

Nevertheless, a number of people, almost exclusively women (and one man)

did report being quite active in charity organisations, such as the Red Cross, and churches. Moreover, there were a considerable number of participants who pursued charity activities independently from existing organisations, such as helping out in their children's school, donating 1% of their income tax to a registered civil society organisation (part of the regular tax return procedure in Hungary) or helping a sick or elderly neighbour with doing groceries, cooking, cutting wood etc. voluntarily. The reasons for such civic or community engagements of participants were to serve the common good and that they enjoyed doing good and helping others.

Attendance at protests and demonstrations

Hardly any of the 38 participants had taken part in a protest or demonstration in the recent past before the interview. Only two participants, two middle-aged Roma women, had such an experience. One of them went to a protest demonstration against a nearby factory that discriminated against and denigrated its Roma employees (mostly women). Her reason for going was to demonstrate solidarity with the employees, and she gained information about the protest via the local LMG that organised the demonstration. The other participant joined the 'Hunger March' that was organised by a party-affiliated union in the name of fair conditions and regulation of work, under the slogan 'Work and Bread'. Two further interview participants said that they had meant to take part in the march (one of them the above Roma woman, who took part

in the solidarity protest demonstration), but they were unable to – one of them due to medical reasons, the other for a lack of timely information about the march.

It is important to note that both of these women who did participate in demonstrations had been involved with the local minority government before the protest. The woman who went to the solidarity protest said she was recruited by the local LMG that organised the demonstration. The other woman said that she was not politically active any longer; however, earlier, in her hometown, she had been a minority representative for 16 years. It suggests that such institutional ties are important for people to be active politically. This finding is supported by Bagguley (1991), who found that in the case of marginalised people a significant part of critical cultural and organisational resources derive from earlier political engagement, especially from the labour movement and union experiences. However, the interviews I conducted indicate that recipients were mostly lacking in such resources due to their marginalised social position.

Besides these participants, no-one mentioned an actual demonstration they would have even considered taking part in. Some of the participants referred to external factors that hindered their participation, while others said that they did not want to participate in demonstrations. The external factors mentioned were, firstly, the lack of protests or demonstrations organised in their location – such events only happen in the capital if at all, some participants argued resentfully.

Secondly, the lack of information about the demonstrations that were actually organised. Many participants said that they did not know about protests being organised or were informed about them too late, as the above example demonstrated. Consequently, a considerable number of ESB recipients believed that their interests as people of low social status and/or as living far away from the power centre of the capital were not represented in the public protests that were actually organised. Such events were, in their view, organised with a sectarian logic, as people only acted for their own interest. Others said that it was no use attending a demonstration, as it changed nothing – only politicians had a say anyway. In addition, a similarly fatalistic account was to blame national characteristics for recipients' inactivity – namely that 'Hungarians are just like this, there is no solidarity'; or that today, people are opportunistic and hence, resigned to everything. Finally, another recurring argument against going to demonstrations was the fear of retaliation – mostly in the form of losing their job, having trouble in the municipality office or police abuse, especially against Roma participants.

These accounts resonate with a number of themes identified above – namely, recipients' acute lack of information about political activities, their impaired sense of political efficacy and their vulnerability in relation to political actors. These findings suggest that, even though protests and demonstrations were not very common or popular in Hungary in general, there were a number of participants in this research who expressed their willingness to take part in such

activities. However most of them were prevented from participating in such activities by either their isolated social position, their impaired sense of political efficacy or their feeling of powerlessness as recipients of social assistance. The link between these perceptions and the receipt of ESB is further discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

Public forum

In the interviews, I asked participants if they ever attended public forums organised by the local authority. Officially, the aim of such forums was to inform the public about local matters and involve local citizens in making decisions affecting the local community. The overwhelming majority of participants either did not know what a public forum was, or found it pointless to participate; thus, only a handful of people reported that they had attended a forum recently.

Being informed is a crucial attribute of citizenship; hence, it is significant that many people did not even know what a public forum was and whether such forums took place at their municipality at all. It means that they were not able to get first-hand information about, or share their opinion regarding, local matters in a transparent and accountable manner. Some did seek information about local matters via the local television or the local paper; however, these instruments allow only for a one-way flow of information and do not induce deliberation, let alone active participation in local political processes.

Furthermore, in some cases such media outlets are suspected to be biased towards the incumbent government in Hungary. Furthermore, the broadly shared belief that there were no such forums implies that people perceived a marked distance between themselves and the municipality, and shows the silent acceptance of this distance and the resulting lack of information and low level of involvement in public deliberation.

On the other hand, the few participants who did know about public forums either viewed them as pointless or questioned their personal competence to contribute to such political discussions. Some participants argued that public forums were just token measures: that is, that the public forums presented an inclusive and democratic picture of the municipality, whereas their own opinion would not be taken into consideration anyway. This reasoning reinforces the finding that these recipients felt powerless in relation to the local authority that was supposed to represent their interests. Moreover, it also indicates recipients' limited sense of political efficacy even on the local level, in addition to the broader national level discussed above.

On the other hand, others felt that they 'would not be able to ask constructive questions', or that they were 'not adept at deliberation, so would not be able to persuade others'. This suggests a self-perceived lack of capacity and confidence on the part of these recipients, which, on the one hand, does not fit the ideal of the citizen as interview participants defined it. And, on the other hand, it can hinder recipients' civic/political involvement in practice, as indicated above

and as it seem to have happened in relation to local public forums as well.

In addition, a Roma woman in P explained in the interview that on one occasion she had made a fuss at a local public forum and after that she had been called 'the quarrelling woman' in the welfare office where she claimed and collected ESB and other types of benefit. Such an experience is not only derogatory but also intimidating. It creates an evident link between exercising one's basic political right to actively participate in a public forum and seeking essential support for one's livelihood in the welfare office. Moreover, Dubois (2010) persuasively argues that waiting rooms at welfare offices can serve as spaces of group formation, i.e. spaces of resistance, which the staff is well aware of, which is one of the reasons why 'loudmouths are quickly get straight' (p. 46) in those spaces. The example of this woman suggests that such a stigmatising practice, exercised in front of other clients, can send a discouraging message to the clientele – namely that being assertive and making their voice heard were inappropriate behaviour that would have their due consequences. As a result, the act of embarrassing a recipient for exercising her basic citizenship right contributes to the shaming effect of the municipality that Chase and Walker (2013) have compellingly demonstrated.

Contacting local representatives

Lastly, concerning citizenship participation in general, I asked the participants how they voiced their concerns and advocated their interests as citizens. This

chapter considers recipients' advocacy practices *beyond* the welfare office, as making complaints and seeking legal remedy in or in relation to the welfare office is the subject of the following chapters.

The majority of the interview participants had negative impressions of and experiences with the municipality and the mayor in particular. Even though Act CLXXXIX on the Local Governance of Hungary required municipality representatives, including mayors, to keep in direct contact with local citizens, many participants said that the local mayor was absolutely unavailable to the people. 'He did not show up at the Roma forum, although we invited him' – as a Roma woman in S told me resentfully. Another recipient said that

I don't know how appointments work here, but in M. [a nearby municipality where she was originally from] the mayor is isolated hermetically. You can enter only with a magnetic card and if you ask for an appointment, you get one 3-4 months later, so he is unapproachable. [...] You cannot come to ask for an appointment either, only on the phone, and you either get one or not (Mária, 56-year-old Roma woman in S).

As a result, some participants believed that the mayor was not aware of the reality of people's lives and did not even care about it.

In practice, only a few participants succeeded in reaching the mayor, a local representative or a relevant official, and most of them did so by circumventing the official procedural route. That is, instead of making futile calls or being turned down at the reception, they stopped the mayor on the street or used their personal connections to contact an official. This finding suggests that without a higher social status it was a necessary strategy of recipients to pursue

their interests. However, not all participants could successfully pursue their interests in this way either. All in all, there were only a few participants who tried to settle a personal issue with the municipality and actually managed to do so.

Hall persuasively argues that oftentimes

services are received not by those in greatest need (by any definition) but by the most vocal, the most persistent, the most articulate, those better able to understand the workings of the bureaucracy, the better educated and so on (Hall in Wright, 2003, p. 35).

These findings indicate that the unavailability of local authority representatives to recipients through the official channels can amplify the vulnerability of the most powerless – the ones with little or no social capital and those whose confidence has already been broken by shame and marginalisation – and further limit their possibilities to exercise their basic citizenship rights (such as their right to legal remedy or to contact local representatives directly) and advocate their interests. I come back to discuss a different aspect of this topic in Chapter 8.

Summary

This chapter discussed the views that people living on social assistance held in regard to citizenship and democracy in general and how they perceived and experienced these institutions in relation to their own lives in Hungary. In addition, it analysed the ways in which recipients exercised their civil and

political citizenship in practice – at state and local elections, in civil society organisations, at public forums and demonstrations and in relation to political organisations and their representatives.

The interviews indicated that recipients varied widely in terms of their interpretation of citizenship – from merely administrative accounts, to more substantive definitions; the latter revolving around the following themes: democracy, belonging (membership in the community), participation, and personal welfare. The interview data highlighted a peculiar pattern in this regard, namely that in the municipality where Roma inhabitants were overrepresented, ESB recipients of Roma ethnicity interpreted citizenship primarily in neutral, administrative terms, whereas white interview participants emphasised the substantive merits of citizenship. In contrast, in S, where the local population was ethnically more balanced I did not find such a pattern of responses – neutral and substantive interpretations were equally present there, slightly tilting towards substantive views in the case of both ethnic groups.

Furthermore, the interviews also showed that ESB recipients in both locations tended to lay a greater emphasis on the responsibilities attached to citizenship – especially on the duty to work and pay taxes – than their rights as citizens.

In terms of democracy as a political arrangement, most interview participants expressed their disappointment and disengagement. However, in contrast to the popular view that marginalised people only cared about material goods,

many pointed to such abstract, substantive or procedural merits of democracy as equality, protection from discrimination or the freedom of press. In addition, many recipients made a direct link between democratic participation and social security or social rights, and hence demonstrated the way in which the boundaries between the Marshallian layers of citizenship were blurred in the reality of the people whose livelihood depended on welfare provision.

Nevertheless, the interviews indicated a significant discrepancy between participants' idea of citizenship as an abstract ideal and their actual lived experiences of it as a social and political institution. Even though some participants definitely identified as citizens in the administrative sense of the term, the majority of the recipients who identified the concept in substantive terms felt that their citizenship was compromised by their marginal position in society. While taking part in state or local elections was an important symbolic act of exercising their citizenship for many, and a number of participants in fact practised their voting rights; most recipients were withdrawn from the other forms of civil and political participation that the interviews investigated – namely, being active in political or civil society organisations, advocating their rights and interests in public forums or demonstrations, or via local representatives. However, a significant finding of this study was in this regard that the few recipients who held positive views about politicians or political processes in contemporary Hungary were the ones who did conform to the prevailing social norms of deservingness and had positive experiences with the

welfare office.

This chapter identified various factors that played a part in bringing about this discrepancy. Participants' isolated social position as recipients of social assistance, which, for many, resulted in strong feelings of shame, a lack of social contacts and the inability to participate in certain social activities due to the lack of resources (e.g. shopping and attending cultural or community events) was a dominant theme in the interviews. In many cases this isolation led to participants' lack of information about how to exercise their civil/political citizenship, and/or their lack of access to the means and channels of political participation and civic advocacy. Another recurring theme was recipients' perception of their political efficacy being very limited. That is, many believed that politicians and decision-makers did not listen to the voice of people like them and their needs and interests were not represented in political discourses or in political acts. Thirdly, a number of recipients demonstrated a self-perceived lack of capacity and confidence to participate in civil and/or political activities.

All of these explanations can be linked to the powerlessness that many participants experienced in some form and that seem to have a restrictive effect on the extent to which they exercised their civil/political citizenship. Some of them feared retaliation, and others simply felt that the 'little people' like them did not have a say in political matters and were not able to change anything, as administrators in the welfare office and politicians could push through

whatever decision they wanted to make anyway, including decisions about recipients' benefit eligibility.

And a number of participants made a direct link between this sense of powerlessness and living on social assistance. Some highlighted the shame attached to ESB receipt, and the interviews suggested that many recipients internalised stigmatising public discourses about recipients of social assistance that prevail in contemporary Hungary. Others emphasised the lack of resources that resulted from living on such a meagre provision as ESB, which prevented them from being able to exercise their citizenship rights. The fear of one's losing their benefit eligibility as a reason for not attending a demonstration or not voicing one's complaint or interest was another explicit link made by interview participants between receiving social assistance and an impaired democratic subjectivity. Last but not least, there were participants who interpreted policy decisions (e.g. benefit cuts and the ever more restrictive conditionality of benefit eligibility) and public statements concerning ESB and the people who received it as politicians' indifference towards people who lived on social assistance. These participants believed that politicians were ignorant of the realities of their lives; they did not care to interact with this social group, and therefore were not motivated to tackle the problems that they faced.

In addition to these explicit links recipients made between their civil and political citizenship and receiving ESB, the following chapters explore the more subtle links between the two that the interviews and the participant observation

brought to light in relation to the policies that regulated ESB provision (Chapter 5), the spatial and bureaucratic organisation of provision (Chapter 6 and 7), and the interactions that recipients had with officials in the welfare office while receiving ESB (Chapter 8).

Chapter 5: The reciprocal policy-participation relationship

Introduction

Having explored interview participants' definitions and interpretations of citizenship and democracy in general, as well as their personal experiences of citizenship in contemporary Hungary, in this chapter, I zoom out from the immediate perspective of ESB recipients and analyse the policies that regulated social assistance provision in Hungary at the time of this research. As I explained in Chapter 3, this research investigates the functioning of Hungarian social assistance provision as a system, that is, a complex structure of various interconnected elements that complement and support one another to serve particular social and political functions. A crucial element of this complex is the very policies that govern assistance provision in contemporary Hungary, as these policies frame the actual functioning of all the other elements of the system – the local authority, local welfare managers, case administrators, social workers, and the recipients. In what follows, I investigate the ways in which the relevant state-level laws, municipality orders, and other policy documents evolved historically, and how recipients experienced these policies in relation to their citizenship. This chapter focuses predominantly on the component elements or characteristics of these policies that regulated the particular angles of ESB provision that were related to the specific themes and issues that recipients highlighted in the interviews.

Rathgeb-Smith and Ingram (1993) argue that the analysis of welfare policies has to be refocused on citizenship and democracy, as

The elements of policy design send messages about citizenship to target groups. Different target populations of policies receive quite different signals about their status, what sort of game politics is, and how people like themselves are to be treated by government. (p. 16)

Their research found that citizenship may be nurtured by particular policies, but on the other hand, certain policy designs can also send disempowering messages (see also Walker, 2014).

Ingram and Schneider (1993) describe in detail the actual process leading to such effects. Their research demonstrates that policies send symbolic messages about the role of government, about which citizens count as un/deserving, and about what form of participation is supported in the political community. Moreover, they also argue that from policies in effect different social groups receive different messages about their potential mobilisation and participation, as well as their citizenship. In this way, policies define their target groups – that is, social groups get shaped by the very policies that target them. Ingram and Schneider describe this process in the following way: policies send messages about each group they target; these messages are internalised; and these internalised messages, in turn, affect the actual pattern of participation of the different groups, as well as their potential alliances. And finally, the authors identified the main characteristics of those policies that strengthen beneficiaries'

citizenship capacity and participation: they establish universal as opposed to discretionary provisions, require balanced sacrifices, build capacities, and transform existing boundaries between social groups.

In Hungary, post-transition politics and policies have established a chaotic, contingent and over-bureaucratized system of welfare provisions. More than 10 central laws contained some 40 types of provisions (Gyulavári and Krémer, 2006) under the authority of at least 4 ministries: the Ministry of Human Resources, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Public Administration and Jurisdiction, and the Ministry of the National Economy at the time of the present research. The legislation has been constantly changing in the 20 years of the current institutional regime; however, reforms have not responded to the structural, transitional deficiencies of the system, but instead merely amended eligibility conditions (Virág, 2009).

In order to gain a critical understanding of the ways in which the contemporary Hungarian institutional complex of social assistance provision shaped recipients' citizenship, I pursued a policy analysis in 2013 and 2014 – during and after conducting the interviews and the participant observation. In this desk research I first analysed the central state laws and local orders that directly governed the provision of the Employment Substitute Benefit – the form of social assistance that my research focused on. According to the principles of institutional ethnography research methodology (Smith, 1987, 2005; de Montigny, 1995), I based this policy analysis on the legislative documents that I

experienced as being in actual use in the two welfare offices in which I conducted this study; namely, the Social Code and the municipality orders on welfare provision. Beyond these laws, I analysed the legislative documents that were substantially referred to in any of the above laws and the ones that frame the implementation of these particular laws, such as the Fundamental Law and the Act on local governance (for a list of all the documents analysed, see Annex 3). Secondly, this chapter is also based on the analysis of secondary sources, namely policy analyses about and legal assessments of social assistance provision in post-transition Hungary conducted by policy experts and state officials.

Institutional structure of welfare provision in post-transition Hungary

It only took a couple of years for the first democratically elected Hungarian Parliament after the transition to design the Social Code. Act III on Social Governance and Social Benefits came into effect in 1993 and has been governing welfare provision in Hungary ever since – albeit, with a significant number of amendments. The Social Code has become a mammoth law, a 62-page long bill that comprehensively regulated the governance of most social provisions in the country; nevertheless, a number of further Acts, government and ministerial decrees, and local orders also played a role in regulating welfare provision in Hungary. Notwithstanding this, it was a highly contingent law – at the time of the present research, 977 new entries, amendments and deleted sections were

listed in the Act.

Piven (2012) demonstrates that the growing complexity of welfare regulation is a key element of what she calls the neoliberalisation of welfare provision. As a result, she argues, as governance is becoming increasingly incomprehensible for the citizen, clients become susceptible to propaganda and manipulation. My data show that recipients, as well as the welfare personnel and even the department managers, were indeed lost in this 'legislative anarchy' – as the head of the S welfare department expressively depicted the policy framework of social assistance provision in Hungary.

Some interview participants explicitly complained about the rules changing too often, as it made it even harder for them to fully understand and effectively cope with the system. This was a feature of the contemporary regulation of the Hungarian welfare complex pointed out by academic literature, as well as professional policy documents time and again (see Simon and Tausz, 2011). In addition, most of the clients were also confused about the institutional structure of social assistance provision, especially about the relationship between the municipality welfare office and the employment centre, even though the division of labour between these two units (discussed below) was a key component of the present Hungarian welfare complex, and hence an understanding of these regulations was key for someone to be able to effectively exercise their citizenship rights in relation to welfare provision.

One of the key features of contemporary Hungarian welfare regulation was its

high level of decentralisation. Article 4 of the Social Code delegated the powers delineated in the Act to a) the city council, b) the local mayor, c) the notary, d) the county or area level government office, and e) the social authority. This devolution reflected the legacy of the country's state socialist past and the resulting will to distance post-transition governance from its fully centralised party-state predecessor. As Article 2 of Act CLXXXIX on the local governance of Hungary explicitly states

1. Local governance is the right of citizens of the given municipality or county, it asserts civic responsibility and develops creative cooperation in the local community.
2. Local governance represents and realises the will of the local people in local public affairs in a democratic way, engendering broad public deliberation.

In practice this devolution meant that some social benefits and services were guaranteed by the central state, hence, they were also regulated and financed thereby – whereas other provisions were fully under the authority of local government. It is telling that professionals called the former, state regulated provisions 'normative' benefits in Hungarian, referring to the fact that they were granted by higher-level laws as opposed to local orders; and as a result they had a much more formative, norm setting role in society. On the other hand, the Social Code defined a number of provisions that were fully at the discretion of local authorities; furthermore, it authorised municipalities that they 'may define other provisions beyond what is regulated in this Act at the expense of their own budget' (Social Code, Article 1, section 2). Such provisions

were entirely regulated, financed and administered by local authorities.

According to policy experts, as well as the participant observation I pursued, municipality welfare offices, due to their highly restricted financial and professional means, were lacking in the competences necessary to be able to efficiently exert the powers devolved to them. The Social Committee of the city council had in many cases no members with expertise in welfare policies (Kozma et al. 2004); the mayor in many cases made decisions without having an expert apparatus (Virág, 2009); and municipality level decisions concerning welfare provision were often incompetent and hence, inefficient (Darvas et al. 2004; Szalai, 2007; Nagy, 2008; Tausz, 2008; Virág, 2009). This was partly the result of the fact that the legislation did not contain clear rules considering professional competences. The general rule was that government officials, at any level of governance, must have some qualification in public administration; however, this was not further specified for the different sectors. Consequently, neither the management nor the administrators of the welfare office were required to be trained in welfare policies, let alone the forms, root causes and consequences of social marginalisation. And my research showed that this gap in their knowledge was not filled in on the job either, as discussed later.

In the case of the two sites of the present research, no-one from the two welfare departments was a member of the Social Committee⁹. The two heads of department did participate at Committee meetings, but in S the director

⁹ According to Act CLXXXIX the Committees of the city council may elect members who were not elected representatives of the municipality.

explicitly pointed out that she participated only when the Committee discussed an issue specifically related to welfare provision. It suggests that in S, welfare provision was treated as a segregated matter on the Committee level and the welfare director was not involved in the deliberation and decision-making concerning broader topics or issues regarding other policy fields.

The director of the welfare department in P had 2 degrees in pedagogy and a doctorate in law. As she noted, she was relatively new to this field; she had been working in 'the social and governance field' since 2008. In this location, the welfare unit – that is, a subsection of the welfare department – had its own head; she completed a 2-year course in social administration and had a college degree in social work. However, it was not her but the director of the entire department who was responsible for overseeing the provision of social assistance. The head of department in S did not share her qualification with me, but she said she had come to the office from 'an entirely different field' in 1992. And even though she had been working in the welfare office ever since, she highlighted that 'back then' when she was an administrator in the office, the system was very different and she had very little to do with 'social issues'.

Mettler (1998) argues that decentralisation can only work effectively if the decentralised institutions and powers are hedged around by national standards and certain insurances. However, as the pieces of research cited above demonstrated, such guarantees were missing in Hungarian municipality welfare offices, which had considerable consequences for social assistance

provision, and especially its discretionary character that I demonstrate below.

In addition, even though notable responsibilities were legally assigned to local authorities, the financial means to accomplish them were in many cases only partially provided by the state (if at all). As the head of the S municipality welfare department eloquently noted:

the welfare department is always a bit like a stepchild, and as far as I know this is the case in every local authority. ... I do not say we do not receive recognition for certain things, but we are the department that costs money. It is us who serve a large number of clients and our clients in general are ... well, our clientele is not composed of elite people. It's like ... I feel like ... or rather I think it is very undervalued in this sense. Our location is all right now, the staff is small, I am quite convinced it is insufficient, but we try to overcome it by realignments, work organisation so that we can keep deadlines, obviously, and therefore, the staff is overloaded, this is what I observe in general.

In addition, she also argued that the recent reorganisation of welfare provision and the resulting establishment of area office¹⁰ 'took away more people for fewer tasks, while fewer people remained here to do more work'. As a result, she added resentfully, she has 'minimal time left for actual welfare management'.

Virág (2009) argues that the actual performance of municipalities in fulfilling their duties depends on their social, political and economic powers which were primarily determined by their size and geographic location. However, in the reality of Hungarian social assistance provision, neither the responsibilities of

¹⁰ The discussion of this reorganisation transcends the scope of this thesis and it is not necessary for the reader to understand the analysis that is being pursued.

local authorities nor their supply of state funds depended on the actual social and economic resources of the given municipality and its inhabitants, but only on the number of its population.

The Employment Substitute Benefit that the present research focused on was in a particular position in this institutional hierarchy: it was a 'normative' provision, insofar as it was guaranteed by a central state law (the Social Code). Nevertheless, it was a means-tested benefit and some of its eligibility criteria were specified and tested on the local level; therefore, the decision about actual provision ultimately rested upon the municipality, as well as the details of the actual provision process. As I describe in more detail later in this chapter, both P and S created its local law on welfare provisions, in which they defined highly discretionary terms for providing ESB for local citizens.

Organisationally, a 5-pronged institutional system governed the provision of ESB in contemporary Hungary, consisting of the central state (the Parliament and the government), the local authority, the local employment centre, the local family support centre, and the county authority office. The role of the state was to establish the regulatory framework in which local regulation and provision were to be enacted and to provide part of the financial resources that enabled local provision. In the case of ESB, government financing was only partial: the state budget funded 80% of the costs of ESB provision, and the remaining 20% was to be paid from the local budget. On the state level, three laws and one government order were particularly relevant to the provision of the

Employment Substitute Benefit: the Social Code; Act CVI of 2011 on Public Employment and the Amendment of Laws Related to Public Employment and Other Laws (Public Works Act); Act IV of 1991 on Promoting Employment and Provisions for the Unemployed (Unemployment Act); and in addition, the 63/2006 Government Order on the Detailed Regulation of Applying for, Granting and Providing Cash and In-kind Social Benefits.

As I explained above, municipality welfare offices were responsible for the entire process of ESB provision. In practice, this process meant the testing and annual re-testing of applicants' eligibility, granting or refusing the applicants' claim in a decision issued by the notary, paying the sum to the eligible citizen every month, monitoring whether the recipient continued to fulfil the eligibility criteria, and imposing sanctions when the recipient violated the rules of ESB reciprocity. Although the state mandated local authorities to provide ESB for all eligible local citizens, 20% of its costs burdened the municipality budget. The hardship that this situation caused for the local authority depended on its financial status, which depended primarily on the socio-economic status of its inhabitants. It resulted in a paradoxical situation in which the more the citizens of a municipality would have need ESB provision, the less capable the local authority was to satisfy these needs.

With certain legal restrictions, local authorities were free to establish their own institutional system; therefore, local institutional structures of welfare provision differed from one other. It was the Social and Child Welfare Unit within the

Governance and Institutional Management Directorate that was responsible for welfare provision in P. This Directorate contained 3 further units: the Unit of Institutional Services, the Births and Deaths Register, and the Management Unit.

In S municipality, the system was somewhat different. The 'Social Administration' was part of the General Management Department, and the head of department was the director of each unit in the department: the general client service, the birth and death register and the social administration unit. It was she who was responsible for overseeing and approving each and every ESB decision issued by the administrators in practice; and – as she admitted in the interview – she did not really have the time and capacity to do much more about these decisions than simply signing them. Officially, as defined by the law, it was the local notary who issued the orders concerning welfare benefits; however, they could delegate this responsibility to other officials. In practice, in both offices I observed the ESB order was signed in the following way:

In the name and authority of notary X. X.

.....

Y. Y. / Z. Z.

Head of Department / Director of Governance and Institutional Management

Local authorities were institutionally linked with two service providers concerning ESB provision: the employment centre and what was generally called the 'family support centre'. Employment centres were organised on the area level. However, both P and S were area centres; therefore both

municipalities had an employment centre on site. For most ESB recipients, the employment centre was the entry point to receiving the benefit. Many were its clients first as recipients of the social security-based, contributory unemployment benefit. In this case, once the citizen had exhausted the 90 days of the unemployment benefit (one of the shortest among the OECD countries), the employment centre was legally obliged to inform them that they may be eligible for means-tested social assistance and refer them to the municipality for application. They were also mandated to post the ESB application form on their website.

Other ESB recipients were in contact with the employment centre to fulfil the 'preliminary cooperation' requirement, that was a precondition of ESB eligibility in the case of people who did not qualify for the contributory unemployment benefit. They needed to regularly visit the centre and personally meet an official for 12 months to become eligible for social assistance – that is, before getting any stable provision. In addition, all ESB recipients attended the employment centre regularly throughout the entire period while they received the benefit, as this was one of the eligibility conditions of the assistance. The employment centre was also responsible for organising training courses and workshops for its clientele in support of their long-term employment and these training courses were also open to ESB recipients. However, some of these courses required the passing of certain tests that the applicants often found quite difficult, and only a few applicants were selected in the end.

In the interviews, 5 participants (4 of them from P) shared their resentment that even though they found these training courses an appealing option vis-à-vis receiving social assistance or doing public works (discussed below), it was not in fact a viable option for them. Some of these courses required qualifications that the recipients did not possess; others required the passing of tests that 3 out of this group of 5 participants failed to pass. Even though the people who expressed their wish to participate in such training were varied demographically (white, Roma, men, women, young and older), the two participants who did manage to get on to a training course (in fact, one of them got into two courses, while others did not manage to get into any course) were middle-aged white men. These findings suggest that the regulation of supported training courses was designed in a way that was biased towards recipients of higher social status and hence disadvantaged those who needed support the most.

In some cases, ESB clients were mandated to participate in training as a condition of benefit eligibility, otherwise they lost the provision for at least 15 months. In addition, all ESB recipients were required to 'cooperate' with the local employment centre while receiving the benefit; I discuss this requirement in more detail later in this chapter, when I analyse the eligibility conditions of the provision. Last but not least, the centre was evidently in charge of assisting ESB recipients to find employment – either on the primary job market or in a public works programme. In practice, it not only meant offering training

courses and workshops for clients, but also the collection and distribution of information about employment opportunities, as well as personal advice.

The other service providing institution related to ESB receipt – although much less closely than the employment centre – was the local family support centre. The Social Code listed ‘family support’ among the basic services that all municipalities with more than 2000 inhabitants were required to provide to their citizens free of charge (Article 86). According to the law

Family support is a service provided for individuals or families in need of help due to social or psychic problems and other crisis situations, to tackle the causes that lead to such situations, cease the crisis situation and protect life management skills. (Article 64, Section 1)

The primary tasks of the family support service provider were family and individual therapy, consultancy, and conflict resolution, among others. The task most directly related to ESB receipt was to ‘organise access to cash and in-kind benefits and social services for those facing financial difficulties’ (Article 64, Section 4/b). That is, ESB recipients were not required to get in contact, or work together, with the family support centre, but they could seek extra support from it if they wished to do so. However, only 2 of the 40 interview participants said that they got help in the family support centre, while 3 women explicitly said that social workers in the centre did not provide them with meaningful support. Some of the participants complained about the fact that the different authorities and service providers of which they were clients often referred them to one

another – the employment centre to the welfare office, the welfare office to the family support centre, the family support centre back to any of the above. This ‘ping-pong’ practice made the management of ESB even more tiring and seem a dead-end. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, such cross-referrals weakened clients’ trust in these institutions – the belief that they could or would in fact provide the support that clients needed. In addition, being sent back and forth between different offices made recipients feel that officials could do or object to do whatever they wished, and therefore they were highly vulnerable to the officials, which constrained their agency as citizens. Furthermore, for most participants the division of responsibilities between the employment office and the welfare department of the city hall was not clear and transparent at all, which further limited their sense of being able to manage the system. I demonstrate this in detail in the Chapter 6 and 7.

The last key component of the 5-pronged institutional system established by the current Hungarian welfare policy regime that governed the provision of ESB was the county authority office – that is, the regional administrative organ of the government, which had very broad authority. This office had multiple responsibilities: it was the supervisory body of the local government, that is, it guarded the lawfulness of the operation of local authorities under its jurisdiction. As such, it was responsible for overseeing municipality level welfare provision. With regard to ESB in particular, it was responsible for overseeing local orders that regulated ESB provision; furthermore, the

government office was the first appellate authority in relation to ESB provision. That is, in the event that a claimant or recipient wanted to file a complaint or disputed a decision concerning the benefit, they could submit an appeal to the county level government office. On the other hand, the government office was also a resource for the municipality – it settled jurisdictional disputes between municipalities (e.g. concerning their authority in particular cases of benefit provision), or resolved ambiguities concerning a specific rule upon the request of the municipality, if municipality officials had difficulty interpreting it.

Having discussed the overall institutional setting of social assistance provision developed in Hungary since the transition, I turn to the analysis of the actual content of the regulation of social assistance provision in the country. I explore the system thematically and analyse the ways in which the elements identified above informed the citizenship of recipients on the basis of the interview and participant observation data.

Content analysis of ESB regulation

Social rights, social citizenship

The Fundamental Law of Hungary, that is the constitutional statute of the country since 2011, states that

(1) Hungary strives to provide social security to all of its citizens. Every Hungarian citizen has a right to support defined by the law in the case of motherhood, illness, disability, widowhood, orphanhood and unemployment that is no fault of their own.

(2) Hungary realises social security for people in need listed in Section (1) and others by the system of social institutions and measures.

(3) Laws may define the quality and quantity of social measures on the basis of the recipient's socially useful activities. (Article XIX; all emphases added.)

Article XIX suggests that the contemporary Hungarian state recognised social citizenship in the Marshallian sense, that is, the right to social provisions as an attribute of citizenship. However, the term 'strives to' and the subsequent merit-based restrictions of eligibility clearly demonstrated that the idea of citizenship was applied in an exclusionary and stratifying way on the constitutional level. This is closest to the approach that I called neoconservative in the Literature review.

Two key themes played out in this section of the Fundamental Law that concerned social citizenship: evoking the responsibility of those in need for their situation; and contribution to the common good as a condition of social provisions. Thereby, the fundamental statute of the Hungarian political community reinforced the powerlessness of those in need by communicating that their very existence and dignity were in fact not citizenship rights but conditional on certain authorities' views about their individual behaviours. Furthermore, the fact that the actual amount of ESB was far below the national subsistence minimum and even the poverty threshold set by the government (see details below), together with Section 3 – that linked the quality and quantity of social provisions with the alleged social use of recipients' activities –

conveyed the message to ESB recipients that the Hungarian political community deems their pursuits inadequate.

Furthermore, in Article 2, the Social Code stated that

Securing the conditions of social provision is the task of the central authorities of the state and the local authorities; but at the same time, it is also the responsibility of individuals for themselves and their families and that of local communities for their members.

In addition to perpetuating popular exclusionary discourses of ‘one’s own fault’ and contribution to the common good on the constitutional level, the contemporary Hungarian welfare legislation reinforced the view that welfare provision was in fact not a citizenship right but a residual duty of state and municipal authorities. Moreover, this residual responsibility did not concern welfare provision as such, merely secured its conditions.

Furthermore, the above passage of the Social Code recognised the responsibility of ‘local communities for their members’; however, this was differentiated from the duty of local authorities to realise social provision. This separation discursively distanced political representatives from their actual communities and hence deepened the division between the powerful and the powerless in the social imagination. As the previous chapter demonstrated, most recipients who participated in the interviews did experience such a large distance between ‘little people’ – as many referred to themselves – and decision-makers such as the mayor and parliament representatives. And recipients’ responses

also demonstrated that this division was detrimental to their sense of citizenship, as it generated a sense of powerlessness or strengthened such perceptions, especially in the case of marginalised people who already faced various forms of social vulnerability.

Conditionality

The amendments of the laws that were supposed to tackle poverty and the social crisis did not primarily aim to dismantle the structural determinants of poverty, or the establishment of new systems and regulation adaptive to the transformed economic environment, rather, the modifications almost exclusively meant the reshaping and refining of the systems of conditions of accessing social provisions (Virág, 2009).

This assessment of the transformation of welfare legislation in Hungary since the transition highlights the significance of conditions in contemporary welfare regulation. This research demonstrated that the regulation of ESB provision has been changed time and again in the past decade, always resulting in more numerous and ever more restrictive conditions of eligibility. A detailed analysis of the two decades long history of the transformations of social assistance in post-transition Hungary would transcend the scope of the present analysis; thus, here I only demonstrate the last phase of amendments (the 2009-2013 period) that resulted in the regulation of ESB at the time of this research.

As part of the so called 'Pathway to Work Programme' (PWP), an amendment of the Social Code channelled earlier recipients of Regular Social Assistance into a new type of welfare provision, namely, the Provision for Working Age People¹¹ (PWAP) in 2009. However, this new provision in fact meant two forms of assistance: Regular Social Assistance (RSA) and Availability Allowance (AA). This shift in the terminology is indicative of the changes in the functioning of the provisions and the political ideal behind them. The name Provision for Working Age People explicitly linked the benefit to wage work and in this way communicated a neoconservative approach of social citizenship as defined in this thesis (Chapter 2) to recipients as well as broader society. Furthermore, the term 'availability' clearly indicated the main difference between the two types of provision – namely the workfare condition (see below). Recipients of the AA were required to be ready for certain types of employment, including public works jobs, in order to be eligible for the assistance. These shifts, however, were not unique to Hungary. Research demonstrated that conditionality has become more restrictive over this period in many OECD countries (Eardley et al., 1996). What I aim to demonstrate here is the ways in which these policy shifts and the resulting rules of social assistance provision were perceived and interpreted by recipients in relation to their citizenship - this analysis is the subject of the following sections of this chapter, as well as the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

¹¹ The Social Code defines 'people of working age' as persons of at least 18 years of age, who have not yet reached the pension age applicable to them (Article 4, Section 1/k).

Workfare – Public works

According to the regulation, people who passed the general means-testing and registered themselves at the area employment centre as jobseekers or were under age 35, had not finished elementary school and participated in compensatory or vocational education, were eligible for AA. In contrast, the clientele of RSA consisted of people unable to work for health-related reasons, people older than 55 (that is, people who had less than 5 years to become eligible for state pension), and people raising a child under 14 for whom daytime care was not available.

The central budget funded 90% of the costs of RSA, 80% of the costs of AA and 95% of the costs of public works programmes at the time. That is, the state clearly incentivised involving people in public works employment as opposed to paying them cash benefits. Also, public works employment was significantly expanded in the years following the introduction of the Pathway to Work Programme. The central budget fund allocated for the financing of public works programmes was significantly increased when the Programme was introduced – in the first year of PWP, state expenditure on all forms of public employment was increased from 36 billion HUF (2008 data) to 105 billion (Csoba, 2010) and to 148 billion by 2012 (Koltai and Kulinyi, 2013). The number of people involved in public works activities was also expanded rapidly: while an average of 15-20,000 people had been employed in public works programmes

before 2009, in the year of the Programme's introduction the number of public works employees was already about 100,000, and it rose to as many as 261,000 by 2012 (Koltai and Kulinyi, 2013). Clearly, the introduction of the Programme meant a shift to a workfare regime that directly tied social assistance to formal employment and made the management of public works a central function of municipality-level social assistance provision.

This regime of workfare was further tightened on 1 January 2011, as a result of yet another amendment of the Social Code. The amendment changed the name of the Availability Allowance to Wage Substitute Benefit (WSB), and further restricted the eligibility conditions of PWAP. This move introduced most of the conditions of receiving social assistance that were in effect at the time of my research. The introduction of the Employment Substitute Benefit on 1 September 2011 – i.e., merely 9 months after the previous amendment – only brought changes in the level of the benefit and the wage due for public works. However, as I demonstrate later, these changes were of critical importance in relation to recipients' citizenship rights. And again, the shift in the terminology already sent the message to recipients that it was not their income that was to be substituted but their employment. In other words, this shift symbolically conveyed that people did not receive the benefit on the basis of their status as a citizen, but rather, on the condition that they had been engaged in formal employment.

Since January 2011, within one assessment period – that is 365 days in the case

of ESB – every recipient was required to demonstrate at least 30 days of (1) public works involvement, (2) formal paid activity, including household work (discussed later) or occasional work, (3) participation in an employment programme, or (4) participation in a training programme as specified in the Unemployment Act. If a recipient was not able to fulfil any of these conditions, voluntary community activity was also considered as a viable fulfilment of the 30-day requirement. However, neither the local government nor the National Employment Service was obliged by any means to actually provide employment or voluntary community work opportunities for recipients. And even if they did organise local public works or community work programmes, actual participation in these activities was not guaranteed for ESB recipients in any way.

Due to the heavy criticism of the regulation, the Commissioner of Fundamental Rights¹² conducted a comprehensive investigation of employment regulation in Hungary in 2012, which looked at public works regulation in particular. The report of the ombudsperson firmly contested the 30-day workfare condition of ESB provision. He declared that legislative provisions must not be arbitrary, i.e. unrelated to the original goal of the law, or impossible to fulfil, as such regulation would violate recipients' right to human dignity, as well as their

¹² The Commissioner of Fundamental Rights was mandated to ensure the fundamental rights of citizens in Hungary and in particular, the implementation of the Fundamental Law of Hungary. Even though the range of the issues that the ombudsperson could investigate was rather broad, and the individual her/himself could submit a complaint directly to the Commissioner, the power of the ombudsperson was limited: they could only make recommendations, initiate further investigations or legal procedures, and report to the Parliament. That is, their statements and recommendations were not legally binding for the concerned authorities.

right to social security. Furthermore, he also asserted that the fact that the local authority was not required to organise voluntary community work programmes and the general lack of information on how to organise such activities were a violation of the principle of legal certainty, and it was also controversial considering the right to social security of those in need. Moreover, the ombudsperson also stated that, since ESB recipients might be forced to undertake these activities under the threat of losing their benefit if they did not find any other employment opportunity, the regulation was in conflict with the principle of voluntary work as well (ABJH, 2013).

Beyond the 30-day requirement, recipients of ESB were also required by the law to 'cooperate' with the local employment centre. According to the Unemployment Act, the duty of cooperation on the part of the recipient of ESB meant (1) visiting the local employment centre at least once in 3 months, on the date named by the client, (2) reporting to the employment authority any changes in their situation relevant to the provisions they received, (3) actively searching for employment, (4) participation in the training course or service offered by the employment authority, and (5) the acceptance of the job offered by the authority and defined as adequate by the law. What was considered 'adequate employment' also changed in 2011, to the disadvantage of ESB recipients. Until the latest amendments of the Social Code, recipients of social assistance were obliged to accept a job offer only if the educational requirements of the job met the qualification of the recipient or they were at

maximum one level lower than that. However, since 2011, ESB recipients had to accept any job offered them by the employment centre, straight away, regardless of its educational level.

Furthermore, since September 2011, ESB recipients were required to undertake the offered job even if it was public works employment. If a recipient refused to take up the proposed job, training or 'integration programme', or did not fulfil the 30-day condition for any reason, they lost their benefit eligibility for at least 15 months (once they lost their eligibility they were not allowed to re-apply until they fulfilled the condition of 'preliminary cooperation' again, which, in practice, meant regularly visiting the local employment centre for 12 months after a 3-month sanction period, that is, 15 months on the whole without any support). The same sanction applied to recipients who refused to undergo the annual re-assessment of their assistance eligibility.

The 2011 September addition to the law concerning public works was critical to recipients' citizenship rights. The Public Works Act of 2011 defined specific regulations that discriminated against public workers in comparison with regular employees who were subject to the Labour Code. One of the most important differences was the available wage: according to the Labour Code, every employee had to be paid at least the current minimum wage that was net 48,000 HUF (~123 GBP) per month for 6-hour/day employment and net 64,000 HUF (~164 GBP) per month for full, 8-hour/day employment at the time of the present research. In contrast, the Public Works Act explicitly excludes the

possibility that public workers were paid more than the 'public works wage' that was net 37.000 HUF (~95 GBP) per month for 6-hour/day employment and 49.000 HUF (~126 GBP) per month for 8-hour/day employment. Moreover, public workers could only be subject to fixed-term contracts, up to a maximum of 12 months, and the law did not allow for a probation period either. Public workers were entitled to 20 days of paid vacation per year, whereas regular employees could have many more vacation days depending on their age, employment history and family status.

In addition, public works regulation was also institutionally segregated from regular employment governance. While it was the State Secretariat for Employment Policy within the Ministry of the National Economy that was responsible for general labour market and employment affairs and the State Secretariat for Social Inclusion and the State Secretariat for Social and Family Affairs within the Ministry of Human Resources that were responsible for welfare affairs in general, public works administration was delegated to the Ministry of the Interior. Last but not least, if the public worker was dismissed with immediate effect or quit the job for a reason not defined as 'adequate' by the law, they were also sanctioned by losing their ESB provision and eligibility for at least 15 months.

Piven and Cloward (1993) argue that 'To demean and punish those who do not work is to exalt by contrast even the meanest labor at the meanest wages' (p. 369). On this basis Soss (2005) asserts that 'degradation in the AFDC program is

not an incidental feature of welfare provision; it is a crucial form of dramaturgy that functions to shore up work compliance and the family wage system (p. 313).

In the case of Hungary, the ombudsperson stated in his comprehensive review that the Hungarian public works model created a specific form of employment with certain authoritarian elements that was not based on an equal relationship of the parties, nor on a voluntary contract. Not finding, or refusing, public works employment resulted in the termination of benefit eligibility that institutionally linked the system of public works to social assistance. Therefore, this model rendered public works employees particularly vulnerable to the powers of the municipality both as local authority and as employer. As a result, it bore the risk of arbitrary implementation of the law, and in this way increased the vulnerability of public works employees (the ones involved in public works as well as those excluded from it), and also the risk of potential drawbacks concerning data protection (AJBH, 2013).

As to the definition of adequate employment in the law, there were further differentiations between ESB recipients and other unemployed citizens. In the case of regular jobseekers, the Unemployment Act defined a job as adequate if, among others, (1) the expected wage reached the current level of the unemployment benefit (that is, the contributory, social security type of benefit for unemployed people), but it had to reach at least the minimum wage, and (2) the daily commute between the person's home and their workplace by public

transport did not exceed 3 hours or 2 hours in the case of unemployed women caring for a child under 10 or single unemployed men caring for a child under 10. In this way the law discriminated against certain unemployed people on the basis of their gender, expecting women to be the primary caregivers even if they raised their children with a partner, while expecting the same from men only if they were single.

This institutional reproduction of discrimination and gender-based stereotypes is enacted also in the regulation of adequate employment in the case of ESB recipients. They were not only obliged to accept the job offer of the employment centre even if it was an offer of public works under the threat of losing their benefit for at least 15 months, but they were also disadvantaged as to the legal requirements concerning commute time. In contrast to the above maximum commute time of 2 or 3 hours, ESB recipients were expected to take up the offer even if the commute time was longer but the employer provided free transport or, if the daily commute was longer than 4 hours, the employer provided free accommodation and the possibility of eating and washing less than 20 km away from the workplace. If the public works job proposed by the employment centre was located in a municipality different from one's hometown, the unemployed person could refuse the offer if it was disadvantageous to their family life. However, the local notary had full discretion in deciding whether the circumstances were considered disadvantageous, which made the claimant highly vulnerable to the local authority.

The above elements of the regulation of ESB, I argue, resulted in a structure that was not a simple, ever tightening workfare regime that was increasingly the norm of welfare provision in European states, but one that clearly disadvantaged and segregated a most vulnerable group of citizens in need of welfare support into a dead-end situation and impaired their basic citizenship rights – social and civil, as well as political. The workfare regime, based on large-scale public works programmes established by contemporary Hungarian welfare regulation policies, was ineffective in fulfilling its own goals stated in the law, namely ‘value creation’ and employing the unemployed. Research shows that most of the jobs that these programmes generated were the simplest unskilled physical, often menial, occupations, most of which would be able to be done by machines rather than manually and more efficiently in addition. Therefore, such jobs could not create significant value and neither were they able to enhance the skills and thus the employment opportunities of ESB recipients (Koltai and Kulinyi, 2013; Koltai, 2013). Furthermore, since the employment of ESB recipients in public works programmes was highly subsidised by the state, employers (primarily local authorities or affiliated corporations) were interested in keeping the most educated, most skilled, most competent recipients in these programmes instead of supporting their entry into the primary (i.e. non-state) labour market (Koltai and Kulinyi, 2013). And this was known by recipients themselves as the following statement demonstrates: ‘it is worse than slavery, because you would think things get

better if you work, but they don't get better with this [public works employment] (János, 50-year old white man in S).

The interview participants expressed very varied views about this matter. Only very few people had positive experiences with public works employment. These were primarily the people who were employed in higher status jobs, such as mail carrier, maintenance worker or nursemaid in the local kindergarten; and they were the clients of higher socio-economic status (all of them white, middle-aged, with higher levels of education). Some were neutral about the conditions they faced during public works employment. However, many recipients reported very negative experiences. Their physical needs were not recognised – for example, an allergic man had to remove ragweed, and a diabetic woman did not dare to hydrate herself during work so that she did not have to use the toilet very often. Elderly people with several health problems had to do physical work. Some people reported that they were not provided with the equipment necessary to perform their job, did not have the opportunity to use a toilet, and did not get acceptable drinking water in the fields. Others had to have their lunch next to a waste container, as it was the only thing nearby that provided shade in the heat. Some participants reported being very strictly controlled during work; others said that they had to walk a lot to get to the field where they were ordered to do their job. Their overtime was not paid; those who did longer hours were compensated only in shorter work time on other days, and reported that they were not informed about this in advance. As to the jobs in

public works programmes themselves, many participants criticised them as being 'very bad jobs': difficult, tiring, unpleasant, and unhealthy ones that 'drain your body and soul'.

These were recurring themes in recipients' criticism of public works employment; and the fact that many of these were raised both in S and P suggests that these were systemic problems. The fact that some public works jobs were much more pleasant and offered more social recognition, such as the ones mentioned above, does not undermine these claims, but instead suggests that there were significant differences in who were employed in what kind of public works jobs. I come back to this differentiation in the following chapters.

In addition, many participants highlighted the shaming effect of public works. Research demonstrates that people often experience public works employment as a sign of failure (Jo, 2013). Furthermore, the fact that these jobs were typically done outdoors in both P and S, often in distinctive clothes, such as bright colour safety vests, put it on display that the person doing it was on welfare (Piven, 2012), and since that was a shameful experience for most recipients (see Chapter 4), public works employment also became a humiliating undertaking. Participants who had experiences with public works employment highlighted a number of reasons why it was degrading for them: First of all, because of the wage they got for these jobs (that is, wage that was lower than the current minimum wage in Hungary). Secondly, the types of jobs most of them had to do – 'Criminals are supposed to do this kind of thing', said one participant in the

interview. Thirdly, the discrepancy between their level of qualification and that needed for the job was also embarrassing for a number of people. The work environment discussed above was also highlighted. All of these elements of public works employment, but the last one, were inscribed by the policies that regulated social assistance provision in Hungary. On the other hand, the recurring deficiencies of the work environment were in fact against the law, which precisely prescribed what public works employees had to be provided with on the work site. However, recipients' rights thus secured were in many cases violated as the above claims demonstrated.

Lastly, some participants pointed out that they felt ashamed of public works employment because of 'the others' who did it. This finding implies that the degrading public discourses about welfare recipients, including the ones involved in public works employment were internalised by recipients themselves. In addition, it also demonstrates that the mechanism that Chase and Walker (2013) calls the 'co-construction of shame' was in play among recipients. Chase and Walker (2013) demonstrated that the punitive elements of contemporary welfare systems, especially the threatening of clients and the obligatory but clearly useless back-to-work programmes played a crucial role in the co-construction of shame for recipients of social assistance. As a result, 'People who sense being defined as the "Other" appear to distance themselves from the label by passing it to "others"' (p. 752). Such mechanisms, Chase and Walker argue, lead to a self-imposed stratification among recipients that

undermine social solidarity and hence result in further social fragmentation and atomisation. The participants who voiced such concerns in the Hungarian context argued that public works employment was or should be undertaken by people who had no education, who 'had nothing', who were homeless, who were 'raised to do it' or by Roma people. That is, people whom society looked down on. The interviews and the participant observation confirmed that recipients felt uneasy about doing public works, especially outdoor jobs. For example, on one occasion, I heard a woman calling the office to ask what other options she had besides public works, and the administrator told me after the phone call that recipients often came to her with such concerns, and that 'people are terrified' of doing public works.

A further element that a number of participants highlighted about public works was that they had absolutely no agency in relation to this. They pointed out a number of evidences of their powerlessness in relation to public works: all sorts of jobs were forced on people, as in the previous regime, before the transition; people had to accept any type of job, irrespective of their qualifications; workers were under constant control; they did not have a say in how long they did the job, whether it got prolonged or not. 'It is humiliating – not public works itself, but the fact that you must accept it', as Károly, a 30 year-old Roma man put it. This participant also recalled the following conversation with the municipality public works coordinator: 'I tell her that they have to ensure a place with shade for the breaks. They said they don't. If I don't like it, I just say so and they have

my benefit taken away.'

Moreover, a number of participants had a medical condition that would impede them in doing the job, but this was not taken into consideration and they were still mandated to do the job. 'This is dictatorial, that people are sick, but the doctor finds them capable', argued István, a 47-year old man in S. Some participants reported serious illnesses not being taken into consideration, such as diabetes, epilepsy and serious disability. To such requests they received authoritarian responses, such as 'you will get used to it [the job], that's all there is to it, you have to do it'.

Such experiences, together with the above differential rules that applied to public works employment in general, communicated that the basic rights of those involved in public works (many of whom were forced into it) to safe work conditions, physical integrity and human dignity were not fully respected by local authorities. Furthermore, it conveys the message that the rules of democracy did not fully apply to them, as they had very limited possibilities to report or challenge unlawful treatment.

The Unemployment Act established a register of the personal data of recipients of ESB and rehabilitation allowance and those involved in public works in order to improve their labour market position and ensure their participation in public works programmes. In addition to this, the register also aimed to support local authorities in managing public works employment and testing benefit eligibility. This register contained information about the duration of clients'

unemployment, their level of education, family care needs, ethnicity, and age, among other characteristics. On the basis of these characteristics the Act defined who was regarded as a 'disadvantaged employee', a 'severely disadvantaged employee', an 'employee with disabilities', or an 'employee with altered employment capabilities'; and the employment authority was supposed to assess the client's 'priority level' on the basis of this categorisation. However, neither the Unemployment nor the Public Works Act contained explicit rules as to the way in which these priorities had to be applied. Hence, these particularly disadvantaged groups of ESB recipients were not guaranteed access to public works employment in practice. Consequently, the under-specification of the law institutionalised the vulnerability of ESB recipients to the discretionary powers of the local authority concerning whether they were able to fulfil the eligibility conditions of the provision.

My research data demonstrated that these priority levels were not applied in practice, the rotation of people was a goal which was not realised. As a result, research shows that current public works programmes in fact perpetuated the exclusion of long-term unemployed people from the primary labour market. A mere 10% of ESB recipients involved in public works programmes actually found formal employment on the labour market having exited the programme; 90% re-entered the ESB roll, and 80% sooner or later ended up in public works again (Koltai and Kulinyi, 2013; Koltai, 2013). The researchers argue that these outcomes were not, or not only, the result of inadequate implementation of the

law, but the very content of the legislation of ESB provision – the conditions of benefit eligibility, the discretionary powers of local authorities, the often under-specified nature of the legislation.

Home checks

Nevertheless, it was not only work-related eligibility conditions which were restricted with the January 2011 amendment of the Social Code. From this date on, the law allowed local authorities to include in their local welfare orders that the provision of PWAP was conditional on whether

the claimant or recipient fulfils conditions concerning the order of their home environment set in the order of the local authority. The following duties may be specified as securing the order of the home environment: keeping clean the apartment or house residually inhabited by the claimant or recipient, including the garden and the courtyard, and maintaining the condition, functional use and hygienic state of the real estate. (Article 33, Section 7)

Both municipalities where I conducted research in fact included such passages in their local regulation in this way rendering ESB eligibility conditional on claimants' home environment. Representative research demonstrates that this was not at all exceptional – out of the approximately 3200 municipalities in Hungary, 1625 enacted such local regulation in 2011¹³, that is, immediately after such legislation was made possible (AJBH, 2012a).

¹³ No more up-to-date information is available on local regulation with such content.

The local welfare order of S stated that the claimant was eligible for PWAP if they took care of the cleanliness of the real estate they dwelled in and its environment as specified in another local order. Among the annexes, the S welfare order contained a template for home checks and the representative of the authority was supposed to use this template for assessing benefit eligibility. On the basis of the template, the municipality investigated the size and state of the apartment/house, the cleanliness of the garden or courtyard and the grassy area or pavement in front of the building, the cleanliness and 'functional use' of the kitchen, the residential rooms and the restrooms, as well as the keeping of domestic animals and pets.

The Order of the City Council of P on Cash and In-kind Social Provisions also compelled ESB recipients to 'use their house or apartment according to its function, take care of its cleanliness, as well as the courtyard or garden attached to it' (Article 8, Section 1/a). However, as opposed to S, the order of P provided a detailed list of exactly how recipients were supposed to fulfil this eligibility condition. Among others, it ordered the establishment of a trash receptacle in the courtyard and the apartment, contracting a service provider for emptying the receptacles, and regularly paying the service fee that the notary may check with the service provider. Furthermore, the recipient was required to keep the garden or courtyard clean, use and cultivate it 'according to function', uproot ragweed, mow the lawn, and remove organic and other waste, as well as to clean the pavement in front of the building and keep it dry. If the recipient or

claimant did not fulfil any of these conditions, the notary warned them to do so within 10 days; and if the recipient still did not comply with the warning, they lost their benefit eligibility for at least 15 months. The same sanction applied if they did not consent to the home inspection by the local authority.

The comprehensive investigation of the ombudsperson concluded that such eligibility conditions directly violated a number of citizenship rights of ESB recipients. He argued that the fact that representatives of the local authority could enter the home of claimants and recipients was an obvious violation of their fundamental right to privacy and as a result, their human dignity was also impaired. Furthermore, the actual wording of the two local welfare orders left certain terms – such as ‘hygienic state’ or ‘functional use’ – undefined and delegated exact regulation to the local authority. Therefore, it allowed for an arbitrary and harassing implementation of the law and hence, violated recipients’ right to legal certainty (ABJH, 2012a).

Benefit level

When the PWAP was introduced in 2009, both of its types – RSA and WSB – amounted to the national minimum pension that had been 28,500 HUF (~73 GBP) since 2008 (not being adjusted by inflation since then). However, the 2011 amendments of the legislation also brought major changes in the level of the benefit. Already in 2010, a significant restriction of the provision was introduced: since this date, only one person could be eligible for WSB in a

household (I will refer to this as the 'one household–one benefit' rule). Later the same rule applied to ESB as well. It was possible to receive one RSA and one WSB/later ESB in a household; however, as I described above, eligibility for RSA was rather limited, thus not many households qualified for two benefits.

In 2011, the level of the provision was further constrained – from this date on, PWAP was reduced to amount to merely 80% of the minimum pension. As the minimum pension still had not been raised, or even adjusted by inflation, the amount of ESB, as well as RSA was 22,800 HUF (~58 GBP) at the time of the research. As a comparison, the subsistence minimum was 85,960 HUF (~220 GBP) in Hungary at the time and the official poverty measure set by the government was 79,200 HUF (~203 GBP) in 2012¹⁴ (KSH, 2013). These are all per capita amounts, however, ESB has been provided on the household level since 2010 as explained above. The fact that social assistance – that is, the bottom pillar of the Hungarian safety net – was so far below the recognised subsistence level casts doubt on recipients' equal citizenship at the symbolic, as well as practical level, especially when the Fundamental Law of the community explicitly stated that 'Laws may define the quality and quantity of social measures on the basis of the recipient's socially useful activities' (Article XIX, Section 3).

Furthermore, the actual amount of ESB compromised recipients' citizenship at the material level as well. Resolution 32/1998 of the Hungarian Constitutional

¹⁴ No 2013 data was available for this poverty measure at the time of my research.

Court declared that the right to social security consisted of the state providing a subsistence minimum through the sum of social provisions that was essential to the realisation of human dignity. Later, in 2000, the Court confirmed that by the declaration of the right to social security the state became obliged to provide a subsistence minimum via social provisions and when the state established these social provisions the fundamental principle to be applied was the protection of human dignity – that is, the state was bound to provide sufficient conditions for human existence. However, the Constitutional Court also declared that the pledge of the subsistence minimum did not grant any tangible entitlements as a constitutional right (AJBH, 2012b). Even though a new constitutional statute, the Fundamental Law, was enacted after these resolutions, which further weakened the social rights of Hungarian citizens as demonstrated above, one could argue – on the basis of the significant discrepancy between the level of ESB and the subsistence minimum and the poverty threshold in the country – that ESB had been set at such a low level that it jeopardised recipients' citizenship even under the new constitutional regime.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a number of participants felt that the very low level of the benefit, the recurring cuts, and the 'one household–one benefit' rule made them second-class citizens. The case of the man who made me rethink how I rewarded the efforts of the interview participants (see Chapter 3) is indicative of the effects of such a low level of provision on recipients' sense of their citizenship. The conversation I had with him made me understand that

taking part in the research was an act of service for him (as well as for others, as some participants explicitly said this), a contribution to something larger than them, something communal, i.e. an act of citizenship, as many participants defined it. And the fact that he had to accept remuneration for it, due to the fact that the level of the benefit he received was extremely low, made him feel ashamed.

Furthermore, participants' responses suggested that ESB had been set at such a low level that it prevented recipients from fully exercising their basic civil and political rights, such as their freedom of movement or their right to participate in civil society and politics, since they did not have sufficient means to pay for transport, communication and accessing quality information. The chapters that follow provide evidence about such restrictions.

Last but not least, as to the actual level of ESB provision, the Social Code allowed local authorities to provide ESB partially in kind if any of the children in the family was administratively taken into state care¹⁵. The decision about in-kind provision, the exact regulation, and the form of in-kind provision were all at the full discretion of the city council. The Social Code constrained the discretion of the local government only to the extent that it declared that a maximum of 20% of the provision per child, but a maximum of 60% in total, may be provided in kind. The law provided a list of the primary means of in-kind provision, namely, food stamps, fuel support, tuition payment, or the

¹⁵ It means that the child still lives with the family but under the close supervision of the child welfare authority.

payment of utility fees. However, this list was not a closed one; that is, the municipality could use its discretion in defining whatever form of in-kind support it wished to provide to ESB recipients. Such discretion not only made recipients vulnerable to the power of the local authority, but also limited their rights as free agents and consumers, since in the case of in-kind provision they could not decide for themselves how they wanted to spend their benefit. Furthermore, such discretion also impaired the person's fundamental right to equal treatment and non-discrimination, as certain recipients could be treated in a disadvantageous manner on the arbitrary decision of the local authority.

Information

Access to undistorted, comprehensible, and up-to-date information is a fundamental prerequisite of citizenship, as it enables members of the community not only to be aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, but also to effectively exercise their rights and fulfil their duties in practice. Nevertheless, the regulation of social assistance provision in Hungary had little regard to regulating the ways in which claimants and recipients were to be informed about their rights to social assistance and the conditions they needed to comply with in order to receive such assistance.

The fact that the quality as well as the quantity of the information recipients got varied across municipalities to such an extent already indicated clients' vulnerability. The above analysis demonstrated not only that crucial elements of

the legislation depended exclusively on local representatives, but also that the design of contemporary Hungarian welfare legislation made it possible that the actual realisation of clients' fundamental citizenship rights, such as their right to be adequately informed, depended on the selection for analysis by the ombudsperson and their willingness to conduct such an analysis in the first place (as they have discretion about what issues to look at).

Furthermore, Act CXL of 2004 on the General Regulation of the Procedure and Service of Public Administration (Administrative Procedures Act) established the general rules about how clients were to be treated in the course of public administration procedures, including what information they were entitled to and in which ways they were to access information. Nevertheless, the legislation concerning ESB provision, as specified in this chapter, did not contain much specific regulation concerning the ways in which claimants and recipients of ESB were to be provided with the necessary information regarding the provision. The Social Code concerned information about cash assistance in the following sentence: 'The social authority provides information on the eligibility conditions of cash and in-kind provisions and the documents needed for applying for them' (Article 5, Section 2/a). This is not only very brief but also rather vague wording – it does not specify who exactly was to be informed, about what, by what means, in what form etc.

Beyond this passage, the 63/2006 Government Order on the Detailed Regulation of Applying for, Granting and Providing Cash and In-kind Social

Benefits declared that it was the responsibility of the employment centre to publish the PWAP application form and the related wealth declaration form on its website. Furthermore, the law also required the employment authority to inform clients who had already exhausted their unemployment benefit about the PWAP eligibility conditions (Article 15, Section 7).

First of all, the very low average level of education and deprived financial status of the ESB clientele (Scharle, 2012) made it clearly insufficient to publish the required application forms online. Nevertheless, the legislation contained no instructions as to how to make these forms more widely accessible amongst this particular social stratum. Furthermore, the above passage is, again, not specified enough. It does not define the ways in which information was to be provided for the clients, in what form (e.g. verbally or in writing), and by what means (e.g. via the administrator, as part of the contract between the centre and the client, through brochures or the notice board in the waiting area). Neither of the two local social orders I examined consisted of any instructions as to the ways in which ESB claimants' or recipients' were to be informed about their rights and responsibilities, nor the specificities of their right to information.

Besides, Hungarian legislation was infamous for being absolutely unintelligible in general. I myself, not being trained as a lawyer, had difficulty in understanding the legislation and in fact needed to consult legal experts in order to fully comprehend the laws that governed welfare provision in the country. Moreover, one of the department managers I interviewed also

admitted that in some cases she and even her superior had difficulties following the law they needed to apply. Therefore, merely referring to state-level statutes in local orders or citing the exact passages of the law in local decisions concerning clients' social assistance was insufficient to meaningfully inform people with low levels of education and long experiences of social marginalisation. This inadequacy of the regulation of ESB was a key reason why recipients ended up feeling incompetent and uninformed, as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

Public works employment was a critical issue in this regard as well. The participant observation demonstrated that many clients were not even aware of when their public works wages would be paid, which was confirmed by the above comprehensive analysis of the ombudsperson. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of the recipients I talked with were uninformed or misinformed about the actual procedure for claiming and receiving the benefit, the exact conditions of eligibility, and the sanctions for violating the conditions, as well as the ways in which they could file a complaint or challenge the decision or procedures of the authority in any other way.

For instance, none of the interview participants had completely correct information about the conditionality of the provision, especially its workfare element. They did not know or had incorrect information about who exactly had to fulfil this condition, what the different options were to fulfil it, and how the sanction worked if someone failed to fulfil the condition. Some thought that

they were not mandated to take any kind of job – that is, they believed that the regulation took into consideration their qualifications, which in fact was not the case. Others were not aware of the exact period in which they were supposed to fulfil the workfare duty. And no one knew exactly how long after someone's provision was suspended it was possible to receive the benefit again – some thought the punishment period was one year, others thought it was three, yet others believed that it was five years – whilst in reality it was 15 months. A number of interview participants and people I observed in the two offices did in fact lose their ESB eligibility because they did not have appropriate information about the conditions and the sanctions. The report of the ombudsperson stated that in the first half of 2012, 6000 recipients lost their ESB entitlement due to not fulfilling the 30-day condition (ABJH, 2012a). My findings suggest that part of the reason for this was recipients' under-information. Another reason was the lack of employment opportunities for this social stratum and the fact that they did not get meaningful help in finding a job in the welfare office, which I discuss in Chapter 8.

Furthermore, recipients in general did not know whose task it was to select people for public works and on what basis people were selected; many in fact believed that the mayor himself picked people selectively. This resonates with recipients' overall views about decision-making in Hungary discussed in Chapter 4 and their resulting sense of powerlessness. Besides, recipients were also not aware of whose responsibility it was to find public works employment

for clients so that they were able to meet the workfare condition. And the policy framework did not support them with meaningful guarantees of obtaining adequate information about these subjects either.

The home check eligibility condition was another issue about which recipients had very little and unreliable information. Some interview participants did not even know that such a procedure existed – they had never heard about or experienced it. This finding itself is an indication of the strong discretionary power of the welfare office, which enabled administrators to selectively apply the regulation. Others did know about the condition, but could only guess what its function might be. Most participants who had heard about or experienced the home check had a wrong impression about the actual function of this condition: they thought that it served as a way for the authority to check whether they were indeed poor enough to receive assistance. This was, as I demonstrated above, not the case in reality. The administrators were in fact complaining at both sites that even if they believed that someone lied about their financial circumstances and was not eligible for social assistance in reality, they could not do anything about it, because the regulation did not provide them with the means to act upon such suppositions.

Legal remedy

Another pillar of citizenship rights is the institutional guarantee of legal remedy – it is a cornerstone of the rule of law and legal certainty, as well as a basis of

exercising other rights. As such, the right to legal remedy is one of the fundamental citizenship rights in contemporary liberal democracies. This was also recognised in the Hungarian Fundamental Law, which declared that ‘Everyone has the right to seek legal remedy against a court or government decision that violates their right or rightful interest’ (Article XXVIII, Section 7). Nevertheless, the right of ESB recipients to legal remedy in relation to the assistance was rather weak institutionally.

The general rules of seeking legal remedy in Hungary were defined by the Administrative Procedures Act, which clearly stated that

the client may appeal the first instance decision. The right to appeal is not tied to any specific claim, the appeal may be made on any ground that the subject deems unfavourable.

The Social Code did not define specific rules for benefit recipients as to asserting their right to legal remedy in general, it merely stated that

the provisions of the act concerning the general regulation of the procedure and service of public administration are to be applied to assessing eligibility to cash or in-kind provisions and the rights and obligations of the eligible person as well as to administrative control (Article 5, Section 1).

The Social Code did not provide claimants and recipients of ESB with any further, more specific information concerning the ways in which they could exert their right to legal remedy. According to the general regulations defined by the Administrative Procedures Act, the client had to submit their appeal to the authority whose decision they contested. In the case of ESB-related cases, it

was the municipality, that is, the very authority on whom the client depended financially. Moreover, due to the institutional organisation of Hungarian municipalities, in practice this often meant that the client had to hand the appeal to the very administrator who managed their benefit.

If the first instance authority maintained its original decision, it forwarded the appeal, together with its official point of view, to the second instance, that was the county government office in the case of ESB appeals. The second instance authority may maintain, modify or repeal the decision of the municipality. If the original decision was maintained on the second instance, the client may file a court appeal. However, in contrast to the first and second instance appeals, that were free of charge in social administration cases, the court appeal cost a significant amount of money. In such cases the applicant may apply for a remission of the costs of the court procedure however, in this case their ability to seek legal remedy was vulnerable to the discretionary powers of the court. In this way, recipients could exercise their right to legal remedy only under conditions that they could not fully control.

In addition, the Social Code declared that the Court may modify the decision made in a social administration procedure (Article 12). However, in relation to means-tested cash benefits in particular, the law explicitly excluded this possibility. In such cases the Court may only maintain or repeal the decision (Article 32, Section 2 of the Social Code). However, even if it repealed the decision, it could only order the municipality to make a new decision, which

may very well be the same as the previous one was, and this cycle may go on endlessly without any actual remedy to the recipient, as research shows often happened in reality (see Tausz, 2008).

The findings of Kumlin (2002) are pertinent here, as they demonstrate that

poor voice opportunities hamper system legitimacy even if the quality of the services are deemed to be good. In short, voice opportunities seem to be more than mere instruments for improving personal outcomes. This finding tells us, not just that people care about voice opportunities, but also something about why they care. Judging from the results, voice opportunities are not just an instrument for achieving accurate service delivery. Rather, they seem to be important in themselves. [...] if the opportunities to exercise influence are poor, welfare state experiences will have negative effects on political trust, no matter how satisfactory services are. (p. 271)

As I demonstrated above, ESB recipients in Hungary did indeed feel that they were lacking voice opportunities, both in absolute terms and in relation to other, higher status members of society or decision-makers in particular. And, as the above analysis shows, the regulation of legal remedy did not provide a broad scope of agency to recipients either.

The ombudsperson pointed out two further elements of the current legislation that constrained recipients' right to legal remedy. First, he highlighted that public works employees – many of whom were recipients of ESB – lacked access to legal aid or legal advice. Even though the Ministry of Public Administration and Jurisdiction maintained county level legal aid services that were responsible for providing legal advice for people in need, access to these

services was limited for many members of this social stratum. As the services did not operate helplines free of charge, they were not personally available in every municipality, and they did not refund clients' transport costs, people lacking financial resources were in fact inhibited from actually accessing their support (AJBH, 2012b). And the current regulation did not require municipalities either to provide free legal aid and legal advise services to their inhabitants in need or to adequately inform them about the available, albeit limited, possibilities.

Secondly, the legal remedy available for ESB recipients who were to be involved in public works programmes was merely a formal possibility in certain cases. When the employment centre and the municipality welfare office selected a recipient to be involved in a public works programme, they first needed to undergo a health check. If the doctor found them physically capable of doing the job, but the recipient questioned the doctor's opinion, they could appeal the decision. However, according to the legislation they were required to start working anyway while the appeal was being assessed. That is, they were still obliged to do the job that they contested their physical capability to perform in the first place (AJBH, 2013).

During the two months I spent in the offices, I did not observe a single recipient making an appeal – not even when they appeared to have experienced a serious injustice, such as in the case of Viktória discussed in Chapter 7). During this time, I asked welfare administrators at both sites what their experience was in

terms of the extent to which social assistance recipients officially appealed against their decisions. Administrators told me that this happened occasionally, and one of them said that such appeals were made largely in relation to medication support, which clients seemed not to be able to accept being deprived of. Two recipients (one in each location) reported that even though they have not made any appeals concerning social assistance, they did make an appeal earlier with regard to the disability-related benefit that they had been receiving at the time. In addition, a woman asserted that she had indeed come to the office to complain when she had been receiving child benefit; however, she found it absolutely useless to do so since she has been receiving social assistance. That is, she felt that she had a narrower scope for exercising her right to remedy vis-à-vis other forms of welfare provision when she was receiving social assistance.

These findings suggest that, even though recipients of social assistance have as much of a right to appeal against a decision as do recipients of medication support or disability-related benefits, clients considered ill-health and disability as better bases of claiming support than, for instance, joblessness or dire poverty. Notwithstanding that many said in the interview that helping the poor and/or the unemployed should be the responsibility of the state or its local authorities. In an analysis of 23 EU countries, van Oorschot (2006) found that the overall rank order of solidarity towards the four groups he analysed were (in declining order): elderly people, sick and disabled people, unemployed

people, and immigrants (see also Taylor-Gooby, 1985; Kangas, 2000). The above observations, together with the perceived powerlessness that recipients indicated in the interviews suggest that some clients were likely to internalise such popular attitudes toward need and deservingness and it had an effect on the ways in which they exercised their civil rights in practice, such as (in this case) their right to appeal.

In addition to the participant observation data, I also asked interview participants if they ever complained against the decisions of the welfare authority or their treatment by administrators – either formally or informally. Only three participants reported that they ever appealed against an unfavourable decision of the welfare office – a 47-year-old Roma woman and a 25-year-old Roma man in P, and a 47-year-old white man in S. And even one of these three participants had initially been discouraged from doing so by the administrator. Research shows that such discouragement of even the very few actual appeal attempts was a common practice in Hungarian welfare offices, and in fact a biased one. Szalai (2007) found that in 12 months on average 20% of the households turning to the welfare office for social assistance in different locations in contemporary Hungary were persuaded not to make an appeal. And the number of such discouragements was 7-8% higher in the case of Roma clients.

Even though some participants claimed that they had not had any reason to make a complaint against the welfare office, the most frequent response to this

question was that it was futile and/or ill-advised to do so. Soss et al. (2011) argue that

most [recipients of social assistance in the US] reported that they actively worked to avoid speaking up or raising complaints. The reasons they gave for disciplining themselves in this manner focused consistently on two themes: Speaking up would be futile (it would not affect decisions), and it would be risky (it could antagonize the case manager and, thus, result in benefit losses or punitive actions). (p. 286)

Responses that recipients gave in this research, such as 'I can only bear a grudge against it, but nothing is going to change' or 'it will turn out as they [the authority] want it anyway' or 'I'd rather just swallow it [a complaint], it's no use opening your mouth', reflected such a sense of powerlessness, a belief that one client cannot change anything anyway.

Another recurring view was that the law was the law; they could not change it or argue with it, so there was no scope of action for them. One participant claimed that she used to try to assert her concerns in the office – but, since nothing ever happened, she ceased to do so. That is to say, as a result of their first-hand experiences in the welfare office, recipients learned that it was a futile endeavour to act on their interests. This indicates a feedback effect of such experiences on recipients' actual exercising of their basic citizenship rights.

On the whole, none of the interview participants reported any successful formal complaint or appeal against the decision of the welfare authority. However, some participants had not even tried to challenge the decision of or the treatment by the authority, because they claimed that they had no reason to do

so. These participants were asked what they would do if they had anything to complain about. Some of them admitted that they would not know what to do, and some mentioned solutions that did not exist in reality, such as writing in the 'book of complaints'. Nevertheless, some participants claimed they would turn directly to the administrator with their complaint, and others would appeal to the mayor, the employment centre or the superior of the administrator. That is, clients who – hypothetically – considered making a complaint would do so via personal contact, rather than via the official institutional procedure, which indicated a lack of knowledge of such procedures in some cases and a lack of trust in them in other cases. On the other hand, the participant observation demonstrated that these potential complaints often remained on the hypothetical level, as none of the clients made any formal complaint or appeal during the two months I spent in the two welfare offices, even if they would have had a reason to do so (e.g. they had been misinformed and lost their benefit due to the wrong information; or they were treated in a derogatory manner). I come back to these issues in Chapter 7 and 8.

It was an important finding in itself that many interview participants, irrespective of their age, gender or ethnicity, mentioned the mayor when I asked them whether they made complaints in relation to the provision they received. It turned out that many believed that their receiving the benefit (or the easing of their financial hardships) depended on the mayor himself. The participant observation did not confirm this belief in either P or S; however the participant

observation data demonstrated that the mayors did have a strong say in what types of public works employment opportunities were available in the municipality, how many people had the opportunity to participate in public works, and which ESB recipients would have this opportunity. Moreover, the results of the ombudsperson's comprehensive review and interview participants' experiences suggest that the proportion of Roma participants in local public works schemes largely depended on the mayors, some of whom 'arbitrarily ranked the unemployed' (AJBH, 2012b, p. 9).

As the above views of interview participants suggest, this environment appear to make ESB recipients feel highly vulnerable to the administrators and the mayor. Some argued that the previous one did more to help the locals; others claimed that at other municipalities people receive more support from the mayor's office. Yet others believed that the mayor only helps people in his own circle. As a result, some participants explicitly claimed that they fear losing their benefit if they complained. 'I do not bother them until I have this [an issue with their benefit] sorted' and 'I go down to the welfare department and I tell them my complaint and then it is passed further to the lawyer and then it's only ... I think I would get into further trouble'. These remarks from two participants demonstrated the silencing power of this vulnerability. Whereas other recipients became disappointed and defeatist; some said that it felt pointless even approaching the mayor, since 'he will do nothing [in response] anyway'. This made them feel undervalued and looked down on, which reinforced their

feeling of shame and undeservingness that was communicated to them via other channels as well.

Nevertheless, there were a few occasions when a client did end up taking their case to the head of department. Even these sporadic cases were actually prompted by administrators, that is, when a client insisted on a claim (for example, someone wanted to receive prompt crisis aid or monetary crisis aid instead of in-kind support) administrators sent them to the director of the welfare department and in this way relieved themselves from the administrative burden of yet another case to be dealt with, as well as the moral burden of not being able to help or the responsibility of actually taking the decision, which is great if the level of discretion is so high as in this case.

Moreover, all of these three cases were witnessed in P, where – on the basis of the managerial interviews – the heads of department proved to be clearly more sensitive to the hardships of their clientele, and had a more critical view of the overall system of social assistance in contemporary Hungary, than the director in S, who blamed primarily the recipients themselves for their plight. This finding suggests that recipients' options to find redress or advocate their interests in the welfare office depended on factors out of their control, which left them highly vulnerable to the circumstances in which they lived.

Discretion

The above sections demonstrated that ESB was provided under highly discretionary terms in contemporary Hungary. This was partly a result of the highly decentralised structure of the regulation of social assistance provision in the country that laid great responsibility on local authorities concerning ESB provision. Whereas this institutional design left it contingent whether a municipality was actually endowed with the resources and competences necessary to provide social assistance in a satisfactory manner. On the other hand, decentralisation should not necessarily bring about such a high level of discretion; it was also the actual content of the state level regulation of ESB provision (primarily the Social Code) demonstrated above that allowed for it.

A significant body of literature demonstrates that discretion clearly has detrimental repercussions in terms of clients' citizenship. Based on Rawls, King and Waldron (1988) argue that it is a reasonable expectation that people would not agree to a socio-political arrangement that does not offer at least a safety net for those facing hardship. That is, the concept of 'the citizen' must entail some level of social rights as well as civil and political rights in order for individuals to be able to exist and act as citizens. Nevertheless, in a system in which the local authority had the power to define who deserved social assistance and who did not, marginalised individuals were prone to fall through the collective safety net, and hence, fall out of the concept of the citizen.

In addition, Rothstein (1998) compellingly demonstrates that if the goal is a

democratic society, decision-makers need to design democratic institutions, as institutions have significant feedback effect on the norms and political concepts that shape society. He thus argues that institutions have to comply with the principle of procedural justice, among others, if they want to promote a democratic citizenry. Hence, Rothstein concludes that universal institutions are more legitimate than discretionary ones from a democratic point of view, as discretion entails a form of selectivity that is difficult to justify on the social level and therefore, violates the integrity of the citizen.

Empirical research provides powerful evidence for the above theories. Campbell (2003), for instance, found that discretion is one of the key component elements of the reciprocal relationship between policy and beneficiary participation. She demonstrated that discretion, close control, lack of resources, and demeaning discourses are the elements that specifically lower recipients' sense of efficacy towards the government and welfare programmes in particular. As a result, recipients' level of participation decreases, and, in turn, the programmes concerned fall prey to retrenchment much more easily. In addition, Kumlin (2002) demonstrates that welfare institutions that do not provide realistic exit options and are discretionary undermine clients' support for the current political system (i.e. representative democracy) and state interventions (such as welfare provision).

The above analysis demonstrated that the highly discretionary features of ESB provision in Hungary had a significant effect on the ways in which recipients

perceived and exercised their citizenship. Who got involved in public works employment and how the local public works programme was implemented; how recipients home environment was assessed; who was selected to participate in a training course; how the local authority decided about in-kind assistance provision; and the ways in which recipients were informed about the details of ESB provision were all issues at the discretion of the municipality – the mayor and the managers and administrators of the municipality welfare department. The interviews and the participant observation found that these decisions and institutional processes were not transparent to recipients and they did not have a say in these decisions and processes either. And this lack of ability to comprehend, let alone influence the system of ESB provision not only frustrated many recipients, but, as the above examples demonstrated, also made them feel powerless vis-à-vis administrators and decision-makers, and in many cases also constrained their agency to advocate their needs and rights in practice.

Summary

In this chapter I discussed the policies – state laws, municipality orders, and other policy documents – that regulated social assistance provision in Hungary at the time of this research and analysed the ways in which ESB recipients experienced this regulation in relation to their citizenship. The above analysis demonstrated that the current legislation was very complicated, contingent, and

therefore incomprehensible to many recipients. This in turn made it difficult for them to manage their benefit and make informed decisions about it.

I also found that the highly decentralised institutional design of ESB provision and the content of its state level regulation endowed the local authorities with strong discretionary powers without providing them with the necessary institutional competences and financial resources to appropriately fulfil this responsibility. This lack of capacities, in turn, increased recipients' vulnerability, since the resulting local regimes of ESB provision were prone to design inefficient local rules and the implementation was also likely to be unprofessional. As a result, the ultimate objectives of decentralisation set in the law – namely, local authorities having a deeper understanding of the local context, including the needs and interests of the local population, and therefore being able to give more effective responses to these problems and demands – were hardly met in practice in this policy environment.

This chapter also showed that the ways in which social rights were interpreted in the Fundamental Law and the Social Code, as well as the recent changes of the name of social assistance provisions and related government programmes suggest a marked shift in the direction of a neoconservative account of assistance provision as defined in Chapter 2.

As to the content of ESB regulation, I demonstrated that the level of the benefit was set extremely low, which jeopardised recipients' constitutional right to social security. In addition, the meagreness of the benefit, as well as public

works wages was also found very humiliating by a number of recipients, in the same ways as certain conditions of ESB receipt, such as doing menial public works jobs in public or undergoing thorough inspection in their home by the officials. These conditions conveyed the message that recipients did not deserve the same respect of their privacy and human dignity as other members of the community.

Furthermore, meeting the conditions of ESB eligibility was in many cases beyond recipients' control. Firstly, a large number of recipients were not able to find appropriate employment that would have enabled them to fulfil the 30-day work condition. Secondly, recipients' ability to comply with the officials' requests in relation to their home environment was in many cases constrained by their lack of resources. These experiences of lack of control not only increased recipients' feeling of powerlessness, but in many cases also resulted in their losing their ESB eligibility for 15 months.

Other characteristics of the regulation – namely, recipients' restricted access to adequate information and legal remedy, and the often imprecise wording of the law impaired recipients fundamental right to legal certainty. In addition, the legislation also contained elements that discriminated against ESB recipients and hence restricted their right to equal treatment, such as the specific rules of public works in contrast to regular employment, the differential clauses concerning recipients' right to legal remedy or the gender-based discrimination in the definition of 'adequate employment'.

Last but not least, the legislative complex I described in this chapter significantly enhanced recipients' powerlessness. First of all, the discretionary features of ESB provision and the 'legislative anarchy' described above rendered recipients highly vulnerable to local authorities. In addition, the way in which public works employment – that was institutionally tied to ESB provision – was regulated clearly violated the principle of voluntary employment. Similarly, mandatory home checks under the threat of losing one's benefit eligibility, as well as the severe sanctions for not complying with eligibility conditions or breaching the regulation (e.g. losing one's eligibility for at least 15 months) also significantly increased recipients' sense of vulnerability.

Chapter 6: Spatial organisation of welfare provision

Introduction

Space, in its tangible physicality, is a key organiser of social relations. While literature on social assistance rarely considers the physical environment of benefit management, other areas of social policy scholarship have explored the spatial dimensions of social relations and social inequalities in particular. Environmental psychologists have found that the organisation of space can influence behaviour in various public settings (Bechtel and Churchman, 2002). Sociologists have investigated the spatial segregation of lower-class communities and ethnic minorities (Kelly, 1985; Ladanyi, 2008; Calder et al, 2010; Virág, 2010). Urbanists and geographers have examined the dialectical relationship between social spaces (public and private) and the citizenship of the individuals who use these spaces (Mitchell, 2003; Mitchell and Staeheli, 2006). These strands of literature compellingly demonstrate the ways in which social/political dynamics and divisions play out in public spaces. As space informs individuals' very physical experiences, it, in turn, essentially shapes and reproduces power relations prevailing in society.

Therefore, in this case I argue that the actual physical environment of the welfare authority is a key element of the interlocking components of institutional communication concerning recipients' worth, position, and civic agency in Hungarian society. Local welfare departments are public spaces,

where the provision of social assistance is actually realised, where the officials who administer the provision spend 8 hours of their lives on each weekday, and where claimants and recipients physically experience the functioning of the welfare system. In this chapter I discuss the ways in which the welfare offices of S and P are designed, organised, and populated, and the messages that these spatial attributes of welfare provision send to clients. I also explore how recipients experience, interpret, and internalise these messages within the broader institutional context of the office and the society as a whole.

Entering the office

At both places, the welfare office was located within the city hall that was, as usual in Hungary, situated in the middle of the main square of the city. The facades of both buildings were well kept and the main squares were nicely refurbished at both sites. This is unsurprising as a large proportion of the massive inflow of 'urban redevelopment' capital triggered by Hungary's EU accession had been spent by municipalities on flowers, ponds, drinking fountains and decorative paving surrounding city halls where mayors' offices are located (Dósa, 2009).

According to my data, many recipients came in from remote, rural areas both in S and P; however, their travel expenses were not supported by any means. Younger and/or fitter clients may come in by bicycle, but some older recipients and people in a weaker physical condition complained that sometimes they

would want to come to the office to settle an issue concerning their benefit, but could not afford it. In other words, recipients who faced multiple vulnerabilities – such as old age, physical infirmity, peripheral location – were further disadvantaged by the location of the welfare office combined with the policy of not supporting clients' travel expenses.

Inside the buildings, the general information offices that were visited by citizens of various class and ethnic backgrounds and gender were located right at the entrance in both cases. These offices had apparently been modernized in the past couple of years at both sites; they were fully equipped with modern technological devices, such as touch-screen information boards and new furniture items. All in all, entering the city hall at either site clearly communicated to the visitor that they were about to do their business in a very 'European'¹⁶ space, representative of a developing and civilized Hungary, and that the municipality itself – representing the locality and the authority at the same time – could fully live up to current standards of modernity.

However, if one had a specific problem that required a visit to a particular department of the city hall and thus, needed to go beyond this very modern entry point, the experiences would possibly be very different, depending on what kind of business someone had to do, which was closely related to their social characteristics (their class, ethnicity, gender, and above all physical and

¹⁶ For an analysis of reproducing social inequalities in contemporary Hungary through 'urban renewal' projects, partly or fully funded by the European Union, and the functions of framing such projects as civilizing Hungarian society through employing the label 'European' as a trope for modern, developed, cultivated, etc. see Dósa, 2009.

mental capacities). But before visiting a particular department one had to pass a security guard at both places.

In S, just a few months before I started the field research in 2013, a registration desk had been placed in the lobby of the city hall; and everyone who wanted to go beyond the general information office had to register at the desk. In practice it meant that some of their personal data (name, address, ID number, social security number, among others) were stored in a computer the first time they visited the registration desk, and at every subsequent visit they had to report at the desk. Then the operator registered the aim and the destination of their visit, and they received a visitor card; only after this process could they enter the rest of the building. When clients left the building, they were required to give the card back to the woman at the desk. If a client lost the card, they were supposed to pay a 5000 HUF (13 GBP) fee – that is, around a quarter of the monthly amount of the ESB. If someone passed the desk without registering, they were stopped by the security guard, asked where they were heading and told to go back to the desk and register. At busier times of the day, people were crowded around the desk and waited in line to get registered and be able to do what they came for.

None of the clients I talked to in S was informed about the purpose of the registration desk, nor about the ways in which their data was going to be handled and what data protection regulations applied to this procedure. The fact that clients were not appropriately informed about the procedure and the

reasons behind it were also apparent throughout the participant observation. It was occasionally a matter of discussion between clients in the waiting room that they did not have any idea what to do with the card and/or why it was handed out to them at all. They clearly did not know what the visitor card was for and what to do with it. Some wanted to give it to the caseworkers, and others left it in the waiting room, whilst some forgot to give it back at the reception desk. I have not witnessed, nor heard about anyone who got fined in practice for not returning the card; however, the threat of this was constantly present as it was written on the card itself.

In addition, the plastic card that clients received at the registration desk served not only as a means of tracing clients entering and leaving the office, but also as a signifying instrument that differentiated them as *visitors*, as an interview participant remarked. That is, the card communicated that clients did not actually belong to the city hall – the symbolic representation of the local community; they merely visited it for a contained and controlled period of time. On the other hand, staff members had their own cards signalling their position as intrinsic agents of the institution. Moreover, it was also informative that the word 'VISITOR' was written on the card in English in large capital letters and only in a much smaller font in Hungarian. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, a number of interview participants described feeling incompetent or under-educated throughout the claiming process. I argue that the card with the large English word on it was one part of the reason for these feelings, as this

institutional practice was disrespectful towards the large number of recipients who did not speak foreign languages, as it pointed to their incapacity with no meaningful justification.

Such details may seem negligible nuances – and indeed, both the registration and the presence and actions of the security guard were aspects of the system that everyone experienced when they entered the office, not only the ones who received social assistance. However, my research demonstrated that the way in which all the elements of social assistance provision in contemporary Hungary merged into a coherent institutional complex, that only recipients of social assistance experienced in that particular combination, sent clear messages regarding the status of particular clients as citizens of the Hungarian political community.

In S, most of the people I talked to were irritated by the registration process. They could not think of any reasons for setting up the registration desk. Some of the interview participants did not understand why, having been registered, they were not at least called in by their names, in the order of their arrival. They supposed that administrators' computers were linked with the registration desk and thus officials knew who was waiting outside; therefore, some clients argued, administrators might as well have used that information to make the process easier by calling clients in the order of their registration. Furthermore, some recipients resented that they had been clients of the office for a long time by the time the registration desk was set up (for several years in most cases, but

at least for a couple of months) and were still 'not in the system'. Others complained about the extra hassle that registration caused them, making it a more difficult and annoying procedure to do what they came to the office for. An interview participant explicitly expressed her resentment about restraining clients' access to the offices by these new arrangements, making it 'less free' for them to visit the authorities. Another concern that a few clients raised was that purchasing the visitor cards was a waste of money on the part of the municipality, and that money could have been used, instead, to support the people who turned to the office for help.

Interview participants were resentful of the presence and practices of the security guard as well, primarily in S, where the guard was clearly more active in policing clients. Two Roma participants in S reported feeling criminalised by the behaviour of the security guard. One of them told me about an occasion when she simply passed the newly installed registration desk, not knowing what it was there for, and the guard, together with another person, immediately ran after her, stopped her and asked why she did not report at the desk. 'They run after me, two of them. They apologized after that. I say, did I steal something or what did I do that made you run?' (Aranka, 48-year-old Roma woman). In addition, a Roma man told me that he did not understand why the municipality would need a security guard. He felt puzzled by the presence of the guard, because, he argued, the city hall was not supposed to deal with large sums of money and no criminal act had ever been committed against the

municipality that would justify such caution. As a result, he felt that employing the guard was just a waste of money. Such narratives suggest that Roma clients in particular – who face systemic criminalisation based on their ethnicity in Hungarian society according to research evidence (Pogany, 2012; Feischmidt et al. 2014) – felt that the newly introduced entry procedure primarily served as an instrument of control and regulation, and sent the message – to them, as well as other clients – that they were criminals who needed to be chased.

And these narratives were confirmed by the participant observation. On one occasion, in the S office, some 800 clients were called to collect the annual child benefit (due before school started in September) on one given day, in two time slots. The administrators were terrified of such a large number of people entering the office at the same time, they had been preparing themselves for this procedure for days before. The communication between the administrators regarding this event suggested that they viewed clients not only as a burden, but also as a potential danger. Even though there must have been clear differences among administrators in how they viewed clients in the first place, I observed that they had a clear impact on one another in this sense. They talked one another into (or by behaving anxiously they aroused one another to), in other words they socialised one another into being fearful of and irritated by recipients. I discuss this phenomenon in detail in Chapter 8.

Therefore, in this particular case, cash desk administrators asked the operator at the registration desk to halt people and let them through at a staggered pace.

This practice actually caused chaos at the entrance on the one hand, and idle time at the welfare office on the other, which also dealt with the payments on that particular day. However, it did indeed decrease the presence of clients in the inner areas of the municipality and at the cash desk in particular. On another occasion, at lunchtime, one of the assistants at the welfare office asked the registration operator to tell the clients to come back in the afternoon, otherwise they would need to wait for a long time to be seen by the administrators. For clients it meant either an extra trip to the office that day, or a lot of waiting; but it meant that the administrators could finally have lunch without being 'disturbed' by the clients, even if it required the administrator to lie to them. Even though turning clients away explicitly only happened once during my research, administrators in S continuously complained about how they could not peacefully have lunch because of the clients. As a result of their frustrations about this matter, they invented a number of ways in which they could keep clients away at midday. I discuss this issue in more detail in the next chapter.

I also observed a number of times that the security guard was policing the clients without due reason, especially in S (particularly one guard, but the others were also closely monitoring the clients of the welfare office). They asked people what they were doing in the city hall and gave them instructions as to what they should be doing, which was clearly not their job.

Physical instruments of control communicated that clients are perceived as a

security risk to the municipality, as dangerous people, who needed to be contained and controlled, otherwise they might cause trouble – steal something, or enter areas that they are not supposed to enter. In fact, it suggests that there *were* areas in the city hall – the centre, as well as the symbol of the local community – that recipients were not supposed to enter. The above messages also suggest that clients' mere presence in the office was in many cases an inconvenience for the personnel. In addition, the fact that clients were not provided with adequate information about the purpose and the process of registration indicates that clients did not matter – that they were not worth the effort for the municipality to ensure their right to adequate information in practice.

These containing and controlling components of the physical setup of the welfare office were clearly more elaborate in S than in P. In S clients had to report at the registration desk which office they wanted to visit and they could only enter those specific areas of the building. In addition, the entire first floor where the leaders of the municipality were located was physically closed to clients, one could only go upstairs if they had got an appointment, which was very rare as demonstrated in Chapter 4. I myself had more freedom to wander around in the city hall in P than in S. In P, there was no compulsory registration at the entrance and, even though there was a security guard, he was not controlling the clients as closely as the guard in S. This difference seem to echoes the different ways in which managers view the clientele of the

municipality offices. In the interviews I conducted with them, the head of the Governance and Institutional Management Directorate in P, as well as the team leader of the Social and Child Welfare Unit within the Directorate, expressed much more client-friendly attitudes than the head of the General Management Department in S. On the basis of the interviews as well as my observations, managers in P view the mission of the municipality as serving local citizens, in contrast to the director in S who perceives the task of her office to be managing and controlling clients. Due to the small number of the case studies, this research could not draw indicative conclusions regarding the relationship between the attitude of the management of the welfare office and the organisation of the office space, however, this topic would be worth further investigation on a larger scale.

Waiting areas

Having successfully entered the building, clients went to the welfare department to apply for assistance or manage the aid they were receiving both in S and P. The welfare office was located on the ground floor of the building at both sites. Both city halls were two-storey buildings, with most client service offices located on the first floor and the management, including the offices of the mayor and the local attorney, and the administration of the institution, operating on the second level. This was a very typical organisation of institutions – a spatial representation of social hierarchy that was recurrently

echoed in recipients' as well as administrators' everyday lives. Both staff members and clients often referred to the leadership – on the institutional, local, and the state level – as 'people up there'. And indeed, such popular conceptions of power relations and socio-political hierarchy were reinforced by the spatial stratification of the municipality building at both sites.

In S, the clients of the welfare office waited to be received by the administrators in the corridor in front of the three office rooms in which the different welfare benefits were administered. The waiting area was clean, light and had recently been painted. It was equipped with 10-12 chairs, and a small table, and a few plants were also placed in front of the large windows facing an inner courtyard.

When it comes to human services, the state of the toilet is of crucial importance, as it strongly affects individuals' feeling of comfort and dignity while using the services. In this regard the municipality of S performed very well. The restroom open for all the clients of the office was kept clean at all times and equipped with all the essentials: toilet paper and paper towels, as well as hand soap supplies were regularly refilled. Hence, although there were locked toilets in the building for the exclusive use of the staff, the state of these was not any better than that of the public one, and therefore, even some of the employees used the public restroom either occasionally or on a regular basis.

All in all, according to the participant observations, the conditions of the welfare office in S corresponded to those of the entire city hall; and interview participants did not raise concerns about the general environment of the

welfare department either. A woman told me that it would be good to have some entertaining material in the waiting area (books and magazines) and a man complained about the heat and the lack of any air-conditioning in the waiting area (the summer of 2013 was extremely hot in Hungary, with the temperature often as high as 40 °C without any rain for weeks). The office spaces where the administrators worked were equipped with fans that were constantly in operation while I was conducting my research in S. Even though such complaints were not very common among the interview participants, and neither have I experienced any significant concerns regarding the physical environment of the welfare office during my stay in S, these two comments suggest that there were clients who were made to feel neglected in this environment. Indeed, seeing a fan in operation in the office while having to bear the heat without one in the waiting area conveyed the message that the municipality cared more about the wellbeing of its employees than about those whom they were there to serve.

Furthermore, I noticed that there was a CCTV camera placed in an upper corner of the waiting area in front of the welfare offices in S. Staff members or the managers of the office did not mention it during my stay, nor did clients raise it as an issue; therefore, I have no information about whether it was actually in operation or not. However, the technical operation of a surveillance camera is not necessary to its actual functioning, that is, for it to be effective in regulating people (Foucault, 1977). The camera – be it in operation or not – as a symbolic

device of surveillance was an effective complement to the security guard, the registration desk and all the other means of control and regulation that my research demonstrated to be employed by the contemporary Hungarian welfare complex.

On the other hand, the physical environment of the municipal welfare office of P was in striking contrast to the facade and the general state of other departments in the building. The city hall of P was also a two-storey building with an inner courtyard. Clients entered the waiting area in front of the welfare offices from the courtyard. The waiting room was small, dark, cold, and dilapidated. It was approximately 7 square metres, there was very little natural light, the window was barred, even though it was on the ground floor and faced an inner courtyard, and the furniture consisted of one large table and 3 chairs, all old and shabby. During my stay in P the weather turned very cold, but no-one seemed to care about the temperature in the waiting area, except when I was sitting there trying to recruit interview participants. Although the city hall complex was heated centrally, and therefore the radiator in the room automatically started to operate when the heating season started, together with all the other heating devices in the building, it was often very cold in there, since the door was open most of the time and the radiator was occasionally turned off. When the administrators saw me sitting there, they immediately closed the door and turned the lights on, as it also got darker in the autumn, and encouraged me to do so whenever I felt the need. However, during the two

months I spent in P I heard an administrator ask clients if they wanted her to close the door on only one occasion. In contrast, administrators' offices were very well heated and lit; therefore recipients not only experienced the cold and dark of the waiting area, but could also compare it to the much more humane office environment and sense the discrepancy between the two.

Looking around in the building, I discovered significant differences in the condition of the waiting areas in front of the different departments of the municipality. I already noted above that I had found the facade and the general information office in very good condition at both sites, apparently recently refurbished and modernized. In addition, in P, I visited a few other departments and I could see that they were very well maintained, equipped with brand new furniture, supplied with magazines, and altogether very different from the environment of the welfare office. Examples included in particular the Taxes Department and the General Administration Department that handles marriages, legacies, estate protection, and name changes, and also issues official certificates. In S however, I did not have the chance to explore other departments in the city hall besides the general information office, partly because, as I demonstrated above, access to the offices was more restricted in S, and partly because I found the environment of the S welfare office appropriate in general, and it therefore did not prompt such a comparison.

In addition, the restroom that clients of the welfare office were supposed to use in P was in absolutely disgraceful conditions: dirty, malodorous, and lacking all

essential toilet equipment, including paper and soap. On the other hand, staff members had access to locked restrooms that were regularly cleaned and fully equipped. These findings suggest that in P the physical space of the welfare offices functions as a stratification device. Those considered as contributing and compliant citizens according to contemporary social norms in European societies, that is, those who pay taxes, get married and accumulate property, were recognized as such also by the means of spatial differentiation: through establishing spaces of respect for 'the deserving' and spaces of neglect for the people deemed undeserving. Hence, in P ESB recipients received messages from the physical environment of the welfare department that their wellbeing was worth less than that of other clients and the administrators, and that their very basic human needs (warmth, light and hygienic facilities to relieve themselves) were neglected by the municipality that was supposed to represent and serve the entire local community.

Nevertheless, in spite of these circumstances, the clients in P did not complain about the environment of the welfare office either during the interviews or while doing their business in the municipality. Only one woman remarked in the interviews that the welfare department was quite shabby, but she too was resigned about it. Moreover, one man actually noted that it was a very good thing that there was a table in the waiting room, so they could easily fill in the required forms on site. This was a recurring finding of my research: recipients expressed fairly low expectations regarding different aspects of welfare services

throughout the interviews and were content even with small conveniences, such as having a table in the waiting room. I argue that this phenomenon is part of the complex mechanisms through which clients adapted their expectations to the reality they experienced and rationalised these experiences in their own terms. However, these terms were strongly informed by the dominant social norms that pervaded recipients' lives and they necessarily internalised these norms to some extent as they lived in a social setting (Fanon, 1967; Foucault, 1977; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Martin-Baró, 1996). These mechanisms were key to the process of people's socialisation into citizens.

Chase and Walker (2013) persuasively demonstrated that internalised negative emotions, such as shame were 'co-constructed'. That is, one's internal sense of inadequacy was – in the context of poverty and especially benefit receipt – most often combined with the externally imposed disapproval for failing to meet existing social norms and values based largely on consumerism and economic achievements. The research of Chase and Walker pointed out that welfare bureaucracy was clearly one of the factors that generated such feelings in people experiencing poverty. And the authors argue that the repercussions of such co-construction of the shame of poverty far transcend the individual. People who internalize the shame of poverty tend to distance themselves from the labels attached to it by passing it to 'others', which I also found in my research as demonstrated in Chapter. This, on the long run threatens the social bond between the individual and their social environment, foreshadows the

dispersing of social solidarity and, as a result, the atomization of society.

Martín-Baró (1996) compellingly argues that the processes of internalising prevailing social norms contribute to the reproduction of the reality of social inequalities. People lacking in powers as citizens perceive their reality as unchangeable, beyond their control, therefore, in order to sustain their social self, they adapt to dominant reality conceptions by internalising the stereotypical labels attached to them in these conceptions. But on the other hand, I argue that clients thought and acted rationally when they adapted their needs and desires to the dominant conception of reality, namely, a reality in which they did not have access to a decent washroom (many did not have access to such a thing at home either, as the interviews revealed), they were closely policed, and made to spend their time in cold, dark, and dilapidated spaces. It is a common coping mechanism that helps marginalized people gain a social identity and protect themselves from devastating social exclusion (Patrick, 2015; Chase and Walker, 2013). And such mechanisms of internalisation are in fact key to recipients' citizenship socialisation: these institutional arrangements and the ways in which they are internalised shape how recipients see themselves as members and/or active participants of society. As Patrick (2015) compellingly argues

both [recipients'] internalisation of a stigma and shame around benefits reliance, and their active participation in 'othering', participants could be described as acting as 'conditioned' citizens, whereby they accept and appropriate aspects of the dominant citizenship narrative. (p. 244)

I argue that learning to accept and rationalise such conditions as I discussed above socialised recipients into an impaired form of citizenship – one that compromised their dignity and their freedoms. I discuss further aspects of recipients' internalising prevailing stigma attached to welfare receipt in the two upcoming chapters.

In the office

Having entered the office where officials administered the benefit, clients in S found themselves in fairly spacious rooms with decent furniture, computers, plants, and bearable temperature – whereas in P, both offices were small and hence felt congested, and the furniture was old and shabby. In both offices where ESB recipients were seen in P, the area where administrators worked was fully separated from the clients by tall desks, reaching the chin of clients and wooden gates between the desks and the walls; and administrators were careful to maintain this separation. The wooden gate was locked all the time that I spent in the office, however, once one administrator left it open accidentally and when she realised it, she became very anxious and immediately asked me to close it – in front of the client being seen. Administrators' first-hand accounts explained this caution: during the participant observation, I heard them discuss how vulnerable they were to recipients. They were complaining to one another in a worried tone that they could easily get infected, be stolen from or even get hurt by the clients. An extreme demonstration of such fears was when one of

them offered me an apple, but emphasised several times that I wash it well, because she had got it from a client, who was 'Gipsy'. And she added that it was important for her that I knew this information.

In her research, Haney (2007) found that social workers in Hungary were positioned as 'piece-rate employees armed with surveillance tools' (p. 175), i.e. workers were assessed by the number of clients they served with very little resources to manage their clients' cases other than closely controlling them. Haney argues that in this way they become increasingly distanced from the clients, and 'Out of this separation have emerged mythologies about the "new" welfare client – myths that imbue welfare practices with stigmatizing tendencies' (p. 175). Administrators in the welfare offices I investigated demonstrated similar tendencies, such as being petrified of clients stealing something or spreading diseases. My findings demonstrated that certain spatial aspects, such as registration desks and security guards preventing clients from spending much time in the welfare department, tall desks and inner gates between the administrators and recipients, facilitate this process effectively. (Further reasons for administrators' behaviour, such as their working conditions or their own social status, I discuss in the following two chapters.)

In S, where the actual office space was much more friendly, and clients were not as strictly separated from administrators as in P, I nevertheless also observed similar discussions. One of the administrators brought up the idea once that the municipality should install a plastic wall between administrators and the

recipients so that the personnel was better protected from clients. 'What if they infect me with some disease?', one of the administrators reasoned, while others wondered who knew what clients took from their desks. In line with these fears, administrators recurrently accused ESB recipients of stealing amongst one another – wood from the forest, vegetables from the garden where they performed public works, the cell-phone of a staff member etc. And these prejudices contaminated their interactions with recipients. Once I observed in P that the administrator handed a pen to the recipient reluctantly, and explicitly explained her reluctance by telling the client that 'they [clients] often take them', suggesting to the client directly that they were viewed as thieves in the office. I analyse such interactions in detail in Chapter 8).

In addition, two administrators were working in the same office at the same time, without any physical spatial division both in S and P. This spatial organisation impaired clients' right to privacy, as they had to discuss their very personal, familial problems and often their devastating financial situation in front of others. In S, moreover, the door between the two offices where three administrators were managing individual cases at the same time was almost always open, exposing clients' confidential matters, very often their severe hardship, to even more people. Furthermore, very often other staff members were present in the offices while their colleagues were meeting a client; they were looking for some documents or office materials, using the copy machine, or, in many cases, interrupting the meeting by their questions or requests. Some

of the recipients I interviewed expressed her discontent with such a lack of confidentiality. Clearly, this spatial organization of the welfare office contributes to recipients' feeling of shame, which was an emotion detrimental to their sense of being a citizen as discussed in Chapter 4. Furthermore, this spatial set-up contributed to the large perceived power difference between recipients and administrators, which weakened recipients' sense of citizenship; and it also made them more reluctant to disclose certain details of their situation in the office, no matter how important these could be concerning their case.

Information

The last component element of the spatial organisation of welfare provision I discuss in this chapter is the way in which office spaces were used to inform clients about social assistance provision. As I argued in previous chapters, being informed is key to one's democratic subjectivity – one needs to be aware of one's rights, as well as the institutional processes in which one can exert one's rights in order to effectively realise one's citizenship. The ways in which administrators inform their clients in person or in writing is the subject of Chapter 7 and 8; here, I only discuss the instruments of information physically manifest in the office spaces.

Surprisingly, as basic a piece of information as the office hours of the welfare department was not posted in either of the two city halls I conducted my research at – I could not find them posted during my stay, and none of the

interview participants could point out where one could find them posted. Many participants complained about this and reported that they had learnt the office hours by experience, which in many cases meant trial and error. That is, they came to the office and if they were lucky, they found it open; if not, they asked someone on site when it would be or just came back at another time. Moreover, some participants were sent to the office at a particular time by another authority only to find it closed. And some clients who claimed to be aware of the office hours had in fact got incorrect information. Such institutional under-information affected clients differently based on their access to resources. That is, those with more resources such as credit on their phone, Internet access or personal contacts in the office had a better chance of getting adequate information, while the most disadvantaged recipients made futile trips to the office while they finally learned the office hours.

In terms of providing clients with the necessary information about welfare provisions, the S welfare department, however, fared better than the one in P. In the waiting area of the welfare department of S, there was an information board that informed current and prospective clients about a number of important matters: a list of the provisions whose administration was recently moved to the regional authority (part of the institutional reorganisation mentioned in Chapter 5), an explanation of who counted as a household member according to the Social Code, and current calls for social housing applications, among other information. Some of the interview participants expressed their appreciation

about the information available and the fact that it was updated from time to time. During the participant observation, many clients were studying the information posted on the board while waiting to be called in to the office.

Nevertheless, I observed that crucial information was still missing from the board in S, and the information board in the welfare waiting room in P was practically empty and the very little information posted there was either out of date or absolutely irrelevant. Furthermore, the city maps put on the walls of the waiting room in P, which indicated all sorts of services and public institutions (such as hospitals, schools, kindergartens) were also obsolete: many of the services listed have already been reorganised, if not closed down. In addition to my observations, some participants complained in the interviews that the information displayed on the board in the waiting area was not satisfactory. For instance, sometimes only web or email addresses were posted, which most recipients did not have the skills or resources to make use of. One could argue that since much of 21st century public administration is actually managed online, this is in fact a move towards more inclusiveness, i.e. not treating low-income and under-educated clients differently from the more well-to-do. However, I argue that in the present case, this was merely token inclusion, since actual inclusion would require providing the means of accessing online information, such as computers, Internet access and computer literacy. Without such additional efforts, such initiatives only perpetuate the exclusion of under-resourced people from the flow of information.

In the office spaces I also realised that in neither of the waiting areas was the list of required documents posted on the information board. This would not be a problem for clients had they been informed by other means; however, according to the participant observation and the interviews I conducted, clients were often short of the documents necessary for managing their provision, and hence needed to make extra trips to the office, often within one day (further discussed in Chapter 7).

Application and other forms to be filled in by claimants and current welfare recipients were not available in the waiting area or at the reception at either site. It means that clients had to wait for their turn even just to get the forms filled in. Therefore, once they completed the forms in some cases they had to wait again to hand them to the administrator. Some people filled them in on site, at the table provided in the waiting area; others took them home or to someone who helped them to complete the forms. (I analyse where people get support from in Chapter 7.) And not only did recipients need to wait longer due to the lack of open access to the forms, but they also had to ask for the forms. That is, instead of being provided with the basics of receiving assistance as a right of claimants and recipients, they needed to plead for the application form – just as they needed to ask for support, go through irritating testing and other bureaucratic procedures, and fulfil humiliating conditions in order to gain their livelihood (or a fraction of it). Some of the application forms were accessible online; however, as I argued above, many clients could not access these.

Moreover, in S, the idea that application forms could be distributed among clients in the waiting area came up once while I was conducting participant observation there. However, the reason for experimenting with this practice was not to make the process faster and easier for clients, but to somewhat relieve the workload of administrators, and the way in which the assistant administrator brought up the idea (her intonation and facial gestures) suggested that it also served as a form of punishing the clients, to let them cope with it themselves. Nevertheless – and as an evidence of my interpretation having been valid – this practice was not continued on other days.

On the other hand, there was an interesting participatory initiative at P: small wooden boxes asking ‘What do you think?’ were placed in the waiting area of each department of the municipality, and welfare was no exception. This could indeed be a constructive way of communicating with clients, allowing them to give feedback regarding the functioning of the office in an anonymous form. However, I have not seen anyone checking the content of the boxes any time while I was pursuing this research and none of the administrators whom I worked with or the managers I interviewed mentioned that they would receive feedback from the clients in this way. Furthermore, I have not experienced any of them ever encouraging a client to give feedback through the box while I was there. Neither have I seen any clients using the box; and none of the participants mentioned the boxes in the interviews either. Seemingly therefore, this was merely a token instrument, rather than being a real opportunity for

clients to have a say in the operation of the office. Lister (2004), for example, persuasively demonstrates the dysfunctionality of such phoney participatory initiatives – if people learn that their participation does not make a difference in fact, they will simply not be engaged.

With regard to informing clients about the actual procedure of the administration, both offices fared quite badly. The S welfare office did not provide its clients with any guidance as to the process. There was no information about the office doors except for the name and position of the administrators working in the given room. Since in S clients did not meet the same administrator each time they came to the office, they did not know in which room their case was going to be dealt with when they came to the office and, according to my observations, many of them in fact became confused in the waiting room: they did not know in front of which door they were supposed to wait; whether they were supposed to knock on the door or just wait to be called; who came first and who was next in line; etc. As a result, some of the clients seemed helpless; some waited in front of a closed door for a while before they realised that they were supposed to go to another one.

In P, on the other hand, clients were assigned to administrators alphabetically and not only were the names of the administrators displayed on the office doors but also the sections of the alphabet the given administrators were responsible for. Here people clearly seemed less lost about how the procedures worked; however, according to my observations, it was not the letters displayed on the

door without any further explanation that guided recipients successfully. Instead, those who came to the office for the first time often simply went to one of the doors randomly and when they reached the administrator in the office, she informed them whom they were officially assigned to on the basis of their surname. And the fact that after their first visit clients were required to see the same administrator each time they came to the office prevented the kind of confusion that I often witnessed in S.

As I have discussed above, the director of the P office has a very different view about social assistance and the people who receive it than that of the S office. In the interview I conducted with the director of the P welfare office she highlighted the importance of the close, personal relationship between client and administrator. She argued that it was crucial that the administrator actually knew her client personally as it helped them better understand the client's situation and their difficulties, which in turn prevented the administrator from being prejudiced. My data shows that the spatial organisation of the welfare offices in P did indeed facilitate the development of such personal relationships; however, the participant observation and the recipient interviews clearly showed that such relationships hardly ever materialised in the P offices. Moreover, according to my findings the administrators in P were rather prejudiced against ESB recipients in general, with very few exceptions (who were mostly clients of higher status or the ones administrators personally knew from before).

The reasons for this are manifold: due to the lack of institutional capacities, administrators did not have time to see the clients long enough to learn their circumstances well and build trust between one another. Secondly, the inefficient work organisation in the office and the lack of agency on the administrators' part in organising their work more efficiently (discussed in Chapter 7) also hindered the development of close relationships. Last but not least, the general biased attitudes of administrators against clients, especially Roma clients – that was not counterbalanced by any topical professional or sensitising training in the institution, instead it was increased by administrators' socialising one another into exclusionary attitudes – also played an important role in preventing the formation of a compassionate relationship between administrators and their clients (further discussed in Chapter 8).

Symbols

In nuanced empirical research, Goodsell (1977) demonstrates that physical symbols presented to clients in the client reception area of government offices form part of the bureaucratic 'presentation of self'. Such symbols seek to enhance the legitimacy of the given institution or facilitate its operation. Furthermore, they do not merely label but also evoke emotions. Goodsell's research differentiates between authority and service symbols. Authority symbols include, for example, a wall between client and bureaucrat, uniform versus civilian clothing, or the application of signs such as a flag, a picture of

the president, certificates, badges, a written list of prohibitions etc. On the other hand, service symbols are such as comfortable seating (e.g. couches, upholstered chairs), reading matter, vending machines, plants, service assistance instructions, 'welcome' signs, information posted, and different ways of personification such as nameplates, among others. On the basis of the frequency in which the organisation exhibits authority and service symbols Goodsell differentiates four organisational models: monopolist, marketing, manipulative and regulative. According to the findings in this chapter, both welfare offices that I researched operate with many authority symbols and few service symbols, therefore they follow the 'regulative' model. Goodsell argues that agencies who employ this model

must be prepared to overawe potentially resistant clients and hence will display authority symbols. Its near-monopoly over enforcement of laws within its jurisdiction obviates the need to attract clients with service symbols. (p. 80)

As ESB recipients in Hungary were most often in dire need of social assistance, welfare offices were not compelled to use many service symbols (no vending machines, no magazines, no fans, little/out-dated information, no instructions, few/not very comfortable furniture), and the lack of such physical symbolic gestures was noted by some clients as demonstrated above. However, as this chapter also showed, the personnel both in S and P were quite suspicious or in some cases explicitly petrified of their clientele, which was reflected in the application of a significant number of authority symbols in both places, such as

the guard, the CCTV camera, the visitor card, the registration desk, and the tall, wall-like tables between client and administrator in S.

Summary

In this chapter I analysed the spatial organisation of social assistance management in the city hall complex of P and S. My data suggest that entry procedures, contained and controlled by bureaucratic registration requirements, a security guard, and a CCTV camera, operated as a means of controlling and regulating clients within the city hall. That is, these spatial features of the two welfare departments acted as gatekeepers protecting the office. Other facets of the office spaces, such as tall desks and inner gates firmly dividing the space between the staff and the recipients, communicated that recipients were a potential threat to the office – that is, the threat of an increased workload, disorder, theft, or any other kind of trouble. Such features were the spatial reflection of the expanding criminalisation of poverty (Wacquant, 2009; Gustafson, 2011; LeBaron, 2012) within the welfare institutional setting. As a result they played an important role in the formation of the ‘penal welfare complex’ (Brin Hyatt, 2011), that is, in the increasing and increasingly apparent punitive functions of welfare institutions (Soss et al, 2011; Piven, 2012).

The dilapidated waiting room ‘down there’ that was of a much worse standard than other areas in the city hall, a restroom of disgraceful and unhygienic conditions, and freezing or sweating in the waiting room while administrators’

offices were well-equipped with fans and functioning radiators, communicated neglect towards clients by the municipality, suggesting that recipients deserved only the minimum or even less than that. Such material conditions indicated an institutional attitude in which clients' right to dignity was not worth the public money that some soap and toilet paper, more tables at which to fill in forms, a fan or heating, or some refurbishing would cost the municipality, while recipients envision politicians 'sitting in the red chair for one or two million forints and read, surf on the Internet, maybe do Facebook and chat with the others' (Viktória, 32 year-old Roma woman).

The ways in which the registration desk was installed in S and client reception was spatially organised at both places made clients disclose their personal data, their very personal and family issues, and their hardships in front of other clients and staff members. This arrangement compromised clients' right to data protection and their right to human dignity.

Furthermore, the lack of adequate information available in the office spaces about the provisions for those in need, as well as the exact procedure clients had to go through to acquire them, communicates that welfare recipients had a weaker right to information than other citizens. Recipients' institutional under- and misinformation suggest that clients' time was not worth the effort of the personnel to make sure that recipients did not have to wait more than necessary (for example when they wait even though the administrator was free to see them, but they did not dare to knock on the door) or came to the office in vain.

Such a lack of information often resulted in frustration and feelings of insignificance, as some of the clients I talked to reported, and as I observed in the two waiting areas. Last but not least, by making crucial information available only via the Internet or telephone to which only a limited number of recipients had access, the institution established an expectation that everyone should be able to use these instruments. Therefore those who lacked access to them, or the capability to use them, were outside the circle of citizens that the municipality cared about.

All in all, various elements of the spatial organization of welfare provision in the two offices I researched, as they interlock into a physical institutional complex, communicate a certain view of social assistance recipients – that they are a burden for the municipality, a potential danger, and their rights and needs are less important for the municipality than those of other citizens.

However, I observed significant differences between particular spatial elements of the two offices. While in S the physical environment of the welfare department was satisfactory, recipients were closely controlled and disciplined by various instruments. In contrast, in P, the policing of clients was much less prevalent; however, the physical conditions of the welfare waiting area were well under any civic standards. That is, the spatial organisation of local welfare provision played an important role in the socialisation of recipients in both institutions, but in different ways. My data suggest that one reason for these differences was the different attitudes of the welfare managers in the two

municipalities towards their clientele and social assistance in Hungary in general. While, according to the interviews, in S the director of the welfare office viewed the system of social assistance provision as appropriate and well-functioning, and held clients responsible for their difficulties, the P director, as well as the team leader in the welfare unit, were clearly more critical about the system, had a much more balanced view about recipients, and gave more emphasis to structural deficiencies such as the high level of unemployment in the country and clients' low levels of education as the main reasons for people claiming benefits. Viewing welfare recipients as faulty in having to rely on social assistance and abusing the otherwise well-functioning welfare system seems to be one part of the explanation why the S management employed more controlling, disciplinary components in the spatial organisation of the welfare office than the management in P.

On the other hand, my data also suggests that it was the location where Roma people were significantly more highly overrepresented among clients – that is, P – where the physical conditions of the welfare waiting facilities were substandard. Even though the managerial interviews did not confirm that there was a connection between the clients' ethnicity and the physical quality of the offices, it is certainly a matter that would be worth further investigation.

Furthermore, the fact that the existing regime of welfare provision in Hungary allowed for such differences between different municipalities was part of the functioning of the system. The fact that municipalities were able to install a

CCTV camera in the waiting area, introduce a new data registration procedure, let certain facilities dilapidate to the extent that they no longer meet the most basic hygienic standards, and share as little information with their clients as they wish without due administrative controls, was itself an impairment of a number of recipients' basic citizenship rights, such as their right to legal certainty, their right to information, their right to human dignity and health.

That is, the significant differences between the spatial organisation of the two welfare offices that my research uncovered demonstrate that the system of social assistance provision in contemporary Hungary did not provide sufficient safeguards against one authority implementing such an extensive surveillance of its clients, or redistribute its share of public money (such as EU cohesion fund support) in a way that lays more emphasis on the façade of the city hall than on servicing social assistance recipients, or providing a clearly substandard physical environment for its clientele.

Nevertheless, public – that is, widely shared – spaces entail the potential of social interaction and active civic performance as well (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1971; Gaffkin et al., 2010; Sennet, 2010). As the classic work of Piven and Cloward (1972) demonstrated, the welfare department of the city hall can be an important site of clients' active political participation – a place where otherwise socially isolated people (such as single mothers or unemployed people) can meet, share their experiences and even organise around the issues they have in common. However, as I already suggested in Chapter 4, my research has found

no significant indication of such a function of the welfare office in P and S. Many participants expressed in the end of the interview how good it felt for them to be able to share their experiences and complaints concerning social assistance with someone, and have someone actually listen to them. It suggests that they did not feel that the welfare office offers them such opportunities. When I explicitly asked participants if they talked to other clients in the waiting area, the majority said that they only made small talk and did not have substantive conversations concerning the provision or politics in general.

However, during the participant observation I found a difference between the ways in which clients used the waiting area. In S, I saw a number of people complaining to one another about their hardships, which can be an important form of ventilation and hence, stress reduction for recipients. Some clients also helped one another in the waiting room in S by sharing information with others concerning job opportunities and welfare provisions, and in a few cases they checked each other's documents and tried to make sense of them together. And it was Roma women in particular, who performed such acts of solidarity. The interviews demonstrated that indeed there was a strong social bond and network of solidarity among Roma women who received social assistance: they shared household duties (such as childcare and cooking) and basic resources (such as food and money), supported one another with information and by filling in forms for one another. Such acts of solidarity were not found either among Roma man, or among white women. A reason for such signs of

solidarity in this particular group can be the multiple intersecting marginalities that Roma women living on social assistance experienced, which left them especially vulnerable and therefore in need of a grassroots support network.

On the other hand, I did not observe any of such interactions among recipients in the waiting area of the P welfare department, neither did interview participants report such practices. This finding suggests that the physical environment of the welfare office could have an influence on the development of such social ties. A dark, cold, shabby room, with no relevant information posted and furniture enough to seat only two individuals was clearly not conducive to substantive discussions or acts of bottom-up social solidarity.

Having analysed the spatial components of social assistance provision, in the following chapter I move one step closer to recipients' direct experiences of ESB provision and discuss the actual bureaucratic procedures through which the benefit was claimed, provided and received in the municipality welfare offices of Hungary. In this way add another piece to the mosaic of recipients' citizenship socialisation in the Hungarian welfare complex.

Chapter 7: Bureaucratic procedures in the welfare office

Waiting and entering the administrators' office

In the interviews, ESB recipients reported that they were supposed to visit the municipality office only on particular occasions: to submit an application form, collect the documents released by the office (unless the authority decided to send them by post), undergo the annual eligibility revision process, and go through the procedure of public works administration. Nevertheless, clients were free to visit the office any time during office hours if they wished so. As I demonstrated in Chapter 6, no matter whether recipients visited the office on being called in or came of their own will, they generally lacked adequate information as to the exact procedure of benefit administration. The process of waiting and being called in is worth describing in detail, since recipients' behaviour, their actual actions, and their words, as well as their bodies, revealed important insights about their capacities of realising their citizenship in the current institutional system of ESB provision.

In both P and S the administration of social assistance was proceeded on a first-come first-served basis. And even though a number of recipients were assertive enough to just come and knock on the office door, or ask other clients who the last one in the line was, many were not; and for them, lacking any guidance as to how the procedure worked caused difficulty. Some just sat down and waited,

often for a long time, until they saw an administrator, or a more assertive client came in and took action. Others acted only after having waited in vain for a while and got frustrated about it. (However, that frustration was mostly tempered once they have entered the office. I discuss clients' self-tempering in detail in Chapter 8.) This, in fact, often led to clients piling up unnecessarily in the waiting area – when no client was actually being received in the office but, not knowing it, people were still waiting outside.

Nevertheless, many people did not dare to knock on the office door in practice. Some of the clients, even when encouraged to do so by other clients asked apprehensively: 'May I?' or explicitly expressed their concerns to one another: 'Wouldn't I get into trouble then?' I had the following conversation with a recipient in an interview:

– So how do you know that you may enter?

– Well, like, trial and error, they yell my head off or not, I knock.

– Do you fear to be shouted at?

– I'd rather not even knock. Just wait for someone else to come and they go in.'

(Erika, 32 year-old white woman)

The participant observation also showed that many of those who did knock in the end did it very timidly; they knocked very softly (I was often not sure whether the administrators could actually hear it), and if called in, they opened the door slowly, just a little bit, only to be able to shyly pop their head through the door, often their upper bodies bent, to ask 'May I?'

Furthermore, a lot of clients seemed quite helpless or lost in the office once they entered. Some of them hardly dared to actually step into the administrators' office and when they did, they hunched their shoulders and entered timidly. Women in general, especially the elderly, were more hesitant to knock or step up assertively than men. Besides, I was surprised to see as many young people (couples and individuals) in the waiting area of both offices as I did. Both Roma and white clients who were young were clearly less assertive bodily than middle-aged participants when they attended the office in both municipalities. The interviews confirmed this observation as young participants were more likely to mention that they often (or only) came to see the administrators with their parents or more experienced friends, relatives or, in the case of Roma clients, a LMG representative. Also, a few middle-aged interview participants said that they accompany their children or other younger relatives to the office, as the latter were too intimidated to come alone.

Administrators were not very responsive in such situations. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 8, which deals particularly with administrators' interactions with clients; here, I only want to note that when clients knocked on their door or entered their office, administrators often responded after a long pause, and mostly in a low voice. Hence, clients in the waiting area often did not actually hear whether the administrator replied and what the response was. Also, their responses were typically cold and lacking encouragement.

Some of the recipients explicitly expressed their discontent with these practices

– in the interviews, not in the office. For example, an elderly woman told me that it was very different ‘back then’, when the welfare office was still located elsewhere in the building; the administrators regularly checked the lobby to see whether there were people waiting there, it was more transparent, it was better in her view. Furthermore, even though clients were made to visit the office only strictly during office hours (on 3 working days out of the 5 weekdays at both sites), it was a practice at both S and P that in the event that the administrators needed to do a job urgently they simply closed one of the doors and in this way limited their availability for the clients. Since clients were not informed about the temporary limitation in advance, the waiting time often increased significantly in such cases, resulting in increasing tensions and frustration for both the clients and the administrators. In P, the administrators at least informed the clients at the time of the event – they put a note on the door saying ‘No case management today’ and referred clients to the office where they could have their case dealt with. However, in S, administrators failed to inform clients about the service limitation altogether, even at the time of the event. Consequently, it happened recurrently there that clients were waiting in front of a closed door until they realised that they should have been waiting somewhere else. In an interview, a man told me that since the administrators neither called the clients nor checked the waiting area, he *learned* that he had to knock on their door.

In his seminal work Lipsky (1980) provides a detailed analysis of queuing for

public services. His research demonstrates that services that operate on a first-come first-served basis and therefore make clients queue often make the impression that the given institution assumes that clients have nothing else to do with their time. I observed a number of times both in P and S that the administrators discussed amongst each other or in some cases told clients explicitly that they expected them to come to the office any time they were called in. The fact that in some cases the clients were called in for a given 2-hour time-slot with no possibility to change the date if it did not suit someone also confirmed these assumptions. Just as cases such as the man's who was made to come to the office three times in one day that I discuss below in detail. Moreover, the name of the earlier version of the benefit: 'Availability Support' is also telling concerning how recipients' time was treated institutionally.

Lipsky also argues that services organised in such a way often demonstrate a lack of responsiveness, while putting a pressure on the recipients that other clients are also sharing the burden of waiting. As discussed above, during the participant observation I found the administrators often being rather unresponsive to the clients waiting for them or knocking on their door. Furthermore, recipients were often made to wait an undetermined amount of time for a decision or a payment. Some interview participants noted that feeling the pressure of other clients waiting for the same service made them not to ask clarifying questions or not interrogating the administrators when being in the office.

Lipsky acknowledges that certain amount of waiting is inevitable in such institutional settings. Nevertheless, on the basis of his research findings he distinguishes appropriate and inappropriate forms of waiting, and concludes that waiting or queuing for a public service is injurious and inappropriately costly when it exceeds the time generally expected for a service, when it involves a violation of an explicit agreement, when clients have made an appointment, and when clients perceive waiting unfair, such as when a favoured client gains access to service more easily than others or when certain clients (e.g. ethnic minorities) are discriminated against and that is why they have to wait longer than necessary. My findings suggest that in the case of social assistance provision in Hungary part of the waiting that recipients were subjected to was inappropriate in Lipsky's terms. During my research clients often waited in vain (in front of a closed door or for an administrator who was actually free to see them), due to their lack of information about the administrative procedure. In addition, in some cases clients were waiting unfairly in the sense that a favoured client had faster access or everyone in the waiting area was waiting for the administrators to finish their collective lunch (discussed below). These findings I reached primarily in S, but on the other hand, I argue that the substandard physical environment that recipients experienced in the P welfare department also made their waiting inappropriate or injurious and in this way caused dignitary harms to recipients.

On the basis of the participant observation and recipients' experiences I

discussed above and in the previous chapters, I argue that the existing practices of the two welfare offices in terms of informing clients about the rules and the process of ESB administration sent disempowering messages to recipients. Such practices communicated that recipients' time (spent waiting in vain) was not respected by the office, they did not deserve the minimal effort of the administrators to check the waiting area occasionally and if there were people waiting, call them in, or in S, even to put a sign on the office door in case they temporarily prioritised something else over receiving clients. Reading recipients' body language in the waiting area and listening to their stories during the interviews suggested that many felt helpless and neglected because of these practices; moreover, many felt intimidated. In addition, such lack of information about the procedure also limited recipients' agency in the sense that they could not in any way control the process – they did not have an exact appointment nor could they keep track of when their turn came in the line. The only thing they could 'do' was wait until a door opened and they could enter to do their business. This, I argue, was detrimental to recipients' sense of themselves as citizens as they defined citizenship in this research that entailed a sense of equal membership in the community and the capacity to have a say in the matters concerning one's life.

During the two months I spent in S, I observed in some cases that the administrators dealt with some cases in the waiting area, that is, on the corridor. It was not a very frequent practice; but it happened a few times. Such a

procedure violated the bureaucratic principle of confidentiality and hence, clients' civil right to the protection of their personal data and their privacy. In other cases, I observed that clients were sent out of the office for some time while the administrator was dealing with their case, suggesting that parts of the process were none of their business.

Administrative burden

In the interviews, many recipients complained about the immense administrative burden of receiving ESB. They reported to be required to present a large number of documents to the authority proving their social and financial eligibility. In addition, they receive a lot of documents as well in relation to the provision: the decisions and orders released by the various local authorities and service providers that I described in Chapter 5. Many clients also expressed resentment concerning the requirement to present copies of the same document in different applications submitted to the same office, even when it proved something that was very unlikely to change, such as their divorce. And again, claimants and recipients were not adequately informed about exactly which documents they had to present to prove their eligibility. This often resulted in additional visits to the city hall – when they came to the office first, they were informed about what documents they needed to present, or which ones were missing from those that they did bring, hence, they had to come again to actually do their business.

Being made to make additional visits due to inadequate information about the application process was not only tiring and frustrating, as clients reported in the interviews, but also suggested that clients were not equal partners in the process with clear agency as citizens, but the institution could drag them as it pleased. A telling example of this was when an elderly man was sent to the doctor for an assessment of his medical fitness for public works and requested to come back to the city hall right after the check-up. The administrators forgot to tell him to bring some further personal documents with him when coming back from the doctor's, and so he needed to go home to get the papers and come back to the office again – the third time that day. The man did express his resentment to the administrators about this treatment; but in the end he had to follow the order anyway, as his existence depended on the assistance he was receiving from the municipality. The administrator later tried to absolve herself by noting 'I did not tell him because he is so dumb, he wouldn't have remembered anyway. He can come back, there's enough time for that. He can only remember two things at a time' – and she laughed.

These findings resonate with Lipsy's above arguments about the institutional devaluation of clients' time. Furthermore, Lipsky also highlights that the costs of spending a great amount of time with benefit administration were not the same for all the clients. For example, it was more costly for those who did informal work or for parents with small children at home. Furthermore, those who came in from remote areas, the elderly, or people with physical disabilities

were also at a disadvantage if the authority ordered them to come back or if they were misinformed and therefore had to make an additional trip to the office – which happened several times as demonstrated above.

In addition, some of the recipients' experiences demonstrated that the lack of adequate information as to what documents clients had to present not only meant an additional administrative burden, but also made recipients vulnerable to the office. Many of the participants believed that what documents they needed to present in order to prove their eligibility depended on the administrator, i.e. the staff could come up with any idea what documents they required, and clients had absolutely no control over the application process. The story that one of the participants shared with me clearly demonstrates this vulnerability:

When we were submitting my son's application for social assistance, the lady [the administrator] asked for this and that, but by that time I already knew what was required, but she had special requirements, [she said] it is not me who says what is needed. But I said I could tell because I knew what was needed, and why was she asking for that which was not required? And then she sent me out so that I did not have a say in this. ... I said 'I won't not go out, because my son does not understand these things and does not know what is required, because he is claiming for the first time' (Jolán, 47 year-old Roma woman in P).

Occasionally, administrators did in fact abuse their power resulting from recipients' under-information, and asked for additional documents not required by the law. Once, in P, the administrator was dealing with the case of a Roma

woman whom she did not like, and told her to bring a certificate about living separately from her ex-partner. I understand that the law did not require the certificate, since the administrator told me after the client left the office 'I bug her a little bit now', and smiled.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, many people were waiting in line only to get the application form for assistance. Once they got hold of the form some people filled it in on site, while others took it home and brought the completed form back later – again, spending much more time with the administration than necessary. Some of the clients who decided to fill the form in the office asked for my help with it. For example, an elderly Roma woman who asked for my help turned out to be illiterate. She, as well as other recipients I talked to, said that in the office they did not get the help they would have needed with the forms, a few reported having been told by the administrators to seek help elsewhere. Some of the people told me that they took the form to the local family support centre where social workers helped them to fill it in. Others got help from friends and relatives or even strangers in the waiting area like me, this way reclaiming their agency and hence making up for institutional indifference. In addition, many Roma interviewees told me that they got help with the benefit forms at the Local Minority Government office. In S, I had the chance to talk to the current head of the LMG in the waiting area of the welfare office, and one of the interview participants was a former LMG representative. Both of them told me that a significant part of the LMG's work was actually helping the local

Roma population with their benefits. The LMG helped people to fill in the application forms or to verify their eligibility, accompanied claimants and recipients to the office if they had a problem or a complaint, among other things. However, this practice was less prevalent in P, where – although the ratio of the Roma population was higher than in S – many Roma participants expressed their disappointment with the local LMG. As discussed in Chapter 4, research on the LMG system in Hungary demonstrated that providing support with welfare benefits was a crucial activity of LMGs in general and the engagement and effectiveness of LMGs varied significantly in Hungary (Koulis, 2001). These findings suggest that Roma people who lived in locations with a less effective LMG were more vulnerable to the powers of the local authorities, and hence, their citizenship rights were less protected.

Similarly, many clients found their own ways to make up for systemic misinformation, mainly by turning to friends, relatives or other institutions such as the family centre or the LMG in the case of Roma people. This finding indicates that they did exercise their agency in some forms; however, this arrangement had its own pitfalls, too. First of all, gaining information from unofficial sources made people vulnerable to unreliable information – indeed, my research demonstrated that a number of interview participants were misled by rumours and incorrect information they got from various sources. Secondly, some of the participants were suspicious that other clients would not help them with information, since ‘they are selfish, it is not in their interest’. Such a notion

also suggested that some recipients of social assistance did not perceive welfare provision as a citizenship right but as a resource to earn and compete for. Moreover, the fact that clients were, to a large extent, left alone in gathering the necessary information on the provision they claimed or received poses the risk that the most vulnerable among the clients – those who were lacking in social networks and who were less assertive – would not necessarily be able to get the information they needed in order to act and feel that they were full citizens of the community.

In addition, the way in which recipients viewed one another in general also limited their potential to support one another. Apart from the very few statements of compassion and solidarity participants made in the interviews, the overwhelming majority described other recipients of the same benefit in an overly disparaging way – they viewed them as stupid, lazy, aggressive, undeserving or not having friends like them. The most frequent notion participants expressed was that other recipients were cheating the system. Clearly, these were the mirror reflections of the views flooding public discourses about people who received social assistance in contemporary Hungary (Szalai, 2007; Rat, 2009); and these views were far from the ideas that recipients proved to share about citizenship. The argument of Chase and Walker (2013) discussed in Chapter 5 is pertinent in this matter and suggests that the above findings mean that participants distanced the image of ‘the recipient’ – that is, themselves – from that of the citizen; and by not

demonstrating any solidarity with their fellows they were also deprived of the collective civic capacities that laid in the fact that they shared hardships, as well as interests.

Furthermore, my data demonstrated strong ethnic prejudices among recipients in this regard – namely, a number of white participants reiterated the popular view that Roma recipients of social assistance were cheating the system: they simply did not want to work, had expensive cars at home, and still claimed benefit. Such ethnic prejudices and the resulting divisions among benefit recipients were a recurring phenomenon not only in the Hungarian context, as demonstrated in a considerable body of literature (Zucchini, 1997; Gustafson, 2011).

These observations lead to a more general finding about the actual functioning of social assistance provision in Hungary, namely that the process was much less based on needs and the people themselves than on papers and computer-based automation. During my research claimants were supposed to fill in an application form and hand it in; after that the staff processed it, assessed the claimant's eligibility (including a home-check that I discuss below), and lastly, the authority issued a decision that the client collected in the office (in S) or received via post (in P). One could argue that such automation protected clients from abuses of power. However, the regulation of ESB (discussed in Chapter 5) did allow for discretion on the part of administrators: through the home-checks, the work test and the institutional possibility to pay the benefit partly in kind in

certain cases. Therefore, the functioning of ESB provision neither shielded claimants and recipients from the discretionary powers of the local government nor provided them with the opportunity to get meaningful support – that is, support which was sensitive to clients' personal situation and needs – from the administrators. Indeed, only one interview participant said that the administrators helped her to fill in the application form: a white woman who worked in the welfare office earlier as an assistant, and thus was in close contact with the administrators. (The fact that even she, a former employee, needed help with the form is symptomatic of its accessibility.)

Both the participant observation and the interviews with the recipients demonstrated that administrators only responded to formal claims and beyond that they did not engage with clients constructively, or only did so when they themselves wanted to. In other words, my research suggests that the system of social assistance provision in Hungary did not provide sufficient guarantees to recipients for receiving comprehensive information about or support in relation to the assistance. Some of the clients also expressed their resentment for never being called on the phone or visited in person by administrators, even though they had their phone numbers, and even when an issue was important. Some participants argued that they would have appreciated the effort of a phone call; it would have communicated that the administrators cared for them and that they were important for the municipality. And besides, it would have had a practical significance too – for example, one recipient told me she that had just

missed an opportunity to claim schooling benefit, because she was not aware of the possibility, while – in her view – administrators must have been aware of her having been eligible. She would have expected administrators to call and inform her about the opportunity, and she resented that it did not happen. This resonates with what I observed when an administrator in S was informed that she had to call clients for some reason – she was annoyed and startled at the same time. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, administrators of the welfare office were only required to have qualification in public administration; therefore, many of them were not trained specifically to work with people, let alone with people who lived in extreme poverty and social marginality.

My findings suggest that people as human beings were omitted from the system as much as possible. They were clients, claimants, recipients, they were a case, a job to perform, an address to visit, means of production for the municipality as public workers, and in general they were a lot of paper – a multitude of forms, orders, decisions, appeals etc. This institutional de-personification relieved the office not only from the moral burden of not helping a large number of people who would need support, but also from having to inform clients appropriately. Once someone exhausted their Unemployment Benefit, the employment centre handed them a pile of documents that they were supposed to take to the welfare office in order to start claiming social assistance. In this way the employment centre avoided discussing with their clients the opportunities for support available to them,

and passed 'the case' – i.e. a person – to the municipality welfare office instead. Nevertheless, the welfare office did not assess clients' needs in detail or map the opportunities available for them either. They merely had claimants fill in the application form, processed it on the computer and made a decision in the end of the procedure, in which clients had no say either.

In P, official decisions were posted via mail, while in S, they had to be collected by the clients in the welfare office. However, even in the latter case clients did not have a real opportunity to ask questions about the decision, let alone to contest it, as the decisions were handed out to them by an assistant in a room separate from the ones in which administrators performed the case management. The participant observation and the fact that in some cases it was myself who was doing this job demonstrated that the staff members who handed out the decisions were not qualified to answer most of recipients' questions and could not inform them about further support opportunities. In Chapter 8, I analyse the interactions between administrators and clients in detail; here I only demonstrated that the administration of ESB was organised in a way that minimised personal, verbal interactions and instead made the process very mechanical, almost automatic, leaving clients with very little opportunity to gain adequate information about and have a say in the process, i.e. limiting their agency as citizens.

Paradigmatic of the lack of recipients agency regarding the claiming procedure was the very narrow time-periods they had in many cases to fulfil the

administrative requirements of the office. Very often they were called in for one particular day with no possibility to negotiate the date. In other cases clients had only a couple of days to handle an issue that meant a number of assignments, such as collecting documents from various authorities and institutions, filling in forms etc. And if recipients tried to make the process easier for themselves, the system did not allow for it in many cases. For example, a woman came to the welfare office in P at the end of September to ask for the application form for fuel support. She was sent home and told to come back later, in the heating season, that is, when she would already be in need of the support, and when all the other people in need would submit their application. In another case, also in P, a man came in and asked where he could pay some charges. He emphasised that he only had 15 days to pay his dues and he did not want to be late with the payment. The administrators told him that the cash desk was dealing with something else on that day, therefore, he had to come back the next day. It was clearly not transparent to the client that he could not visit the cashier any time during office hours. Moreover, the administrator urged him to come the next day, to make sure that he did not miss the deadline. These findings suggest that the lack of adequate information about bureaucratic procedures in the office and the power asymmetry between recipients and administrators limited recipients' agency to manage their provisions and made it work best for themselves.

The interviews also demonstrated that most of the people who lived on ESB

were stuck in an administrative cycle: many could not find long-term employment during the 90 days while they received the Unemployment Benefit, therefore they started receiving ESB. From time to time they got involved in public works or a training organised by the local employment centre for a couple of months while receiving the benefit, and some also found formal employment for a while; however, eventually most people fell back to living on the monthly 22.800 HUF of ESB. This cycle was reinforced time and again by structural factors such as recipients' low level of (or obsolete) education, the high level of unemployment in the country and the very low level of geographic mobility due to the underfunded and underdeveloped public transport system and the extreme inequalities in housing opportunities in the country (Kertesi, 2005; Köllő, 2009). However, the very design of the policies that regulated ESB provision also played a crucial role in constantly reproducing this vicious cycle: the 90 days that someone could receive the Unemployment Benefit was extremely short, the shortest in the OECD, and research demonstrated that it was much shorter than what would be necessary for the recipients to find appropriate employment (Landais et al., 2011; Scharle, 2012). Once they exhausted the Unemployment Benefit, people did not receive enough money to be able to invest in searching for jobs. Furthermore, the fact that recipients of social assistance must be available for involvement in public works programmes at any time, on call, made it difficult for many people to participate in informal work, which was the only viable option for many to earn

a living, as both the administrators and the interview participants asserted. Moreover, in every single phase of this cycle, administrators produced a document – a call, a decision or an order in most cases – that went through several institutional steps (the registrar, the director, the assistants), most of which was absolutely pointless, as the administrators indicated and I experienced while working in the two offices. It was telling when we realised that some documents were missing or not administered properly in the office during the participant observation, the administrators often concluded that it did not matter much, as no one would take a look at those documents anyway. Nevertheless, these useless administrative steps used valuable institutional capacities the lack of which administrators were constantly complaining about both in P and in S, and that could have benefited clients if used in a more effective manner.

Being stuck in such a cycle contributed to recipients' helplessness and lack of control of their own lives. Furthermore, partly due to the pointless, though quite capacity-intensive, paperwork, the time that administrators could devote to each client was rather limited, which then resulted in very pressured meetings in the office. Seeing the long lines in the waiting area not only put pressure on the recipients that other clients were also sharing the burden of waiting discussed above, it also made administrators frustrated. This frustration often resulted in administrative errors on their part, less adequate information provided for recipients, and little opportunity to provide

meaningful support to their clients. In the following section I analyse the work organisation in the welfare office in more detail.

Work organisation in the welfare office

The observations I discussed above suggested that the institutional organisation of the administration of welfare provision was far from efficient in both municipalities. The interviews I conducted with the management of the two welfare offices provided a deeper insight into the systemic reasons for this inefficiency. These interviews together with my observations suggested that these institutional deficiencies partly resulted from the policies that regulated welfare provision (and the redistribution of resources in general) on the local level, and partly from the way in which the management and the administrators organise their work in the office (capacity-allocation within the municipality and personal decisions).

In an informal interview, the head administrator in S – who used to be the interim director of the welfare department when it was still a separate entity in the municipality – was complaining about the very heavy workload in the welfare unit while their institutional capacities have been gradually shrunk. When she started working in the office, 7 administrators were managing citizens' welfare cases; while it was only the 3 of them for the same, or even a higher, number of cases at the time of this research. She told me resentfully that when she was managing the closure of the separate welfare unit, she started at

6.30 in the morning and often was still in the office at 6pm. When I asked her whether they indicated their difficulties to the municipality leadership in any way, she responded, 'We don't understand [them]. No use telling them up there in vain, they don't hear us'.

On the other hand, the director of the P welfare office claimed that

I think quite a lot of people work at the Directorate. I do not say that we could not make use of even more colleagues, both the Institutional Management and the Welfare units could make use of further 1-2 or 3 people and it would make their work more efficient, but I think those who work here do their job wholeheartedly and if they cannot fulfil their tasks in their working hours, they are happy to stay overtime, practically for nothing, say, as community work. Hence, I think [this job] requires devotion, as this social and child welfare field is especially one in which it is easy to burn out.

And indeed, an extreme example of the work overload in welfare administration was when in P, the municipality was managing the recruitment of more than 300 people for public works in one wave, the administrator responsible for this had to go on sick-leave in the middle of the process, due to the stress resulting from the organisational chaos, and a couple of days later she ultimately quit the office.

As my discussions with the management of the two welfare offices and the participant observation demonstrated, these capacity constraints were, in part, the result of the institutional politics of the municipalities. In a group discussion in the S office, after it turned out that one of the assistants had made a mistake that could have serious repercussions for the office, the assistant asserted that

under such a workload it was impossible to do her job properly. When she confronted the director with the fact that other units had just received new staff members, the director's response was: 'We cannot do anything about that'.

Such futile attempts to improve their working conditions suggested a level of powerlessness on the part of administrators themselves. It was not only frustrating for them as I found during the participant observation, but also made them less responsive to recipients' attempts to exercise their own powers as citizens. In addition, the power inequalities between the different units in the municipality that I demonstrated above also affected the ways in which case work was actually performed in the welfare office. Units with a less stigmatised clientele and a higher perceived value in the institutional hierarchy were endowed with more resources to do their work properly; and they seemed to have more leverage in the municipality as well to make their needs recognised and met.

Lunchtime was paradigmatic of these institutional organisational problems. In both offices administrators' working time was fixed and did not include a lunch break, which clearly caused a lot of frustrations and difficulties in S. In P, administrators had lunch after one another, making sure one of them was always in the office to receive clients. And those who were having lunch usually went out to eat or used the kitchenette that was provided explicitly for such purposes. In contrast, in S, none of the administrators went out to have lunch, and neither were they provided with a separate space for eating. Therefore,

they always ate in one of the rooms where they received the clients, and in the majority of the cases they did it at the same time. On the one hand, it was their collective resistance to the institutional policy that had not allowed for a formal lunch break, which they considered unfair; and on the other hand it was also their way of 'letting off steam'. As an administrator in S expressively put it 'Lunchtime and a couple of minutes on Facebook – this is our smoking, this is our freedom, our way of regeneration'. These made-up lunch breaks were the times when I learnt the most about how the administrators in S perceived their job and their clients, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 8. What is of importance at this point is that due to these lunch breaks administrators lost scarce work time that they did not make up for in the afternoon. And in some cases these lunches were quite long; on client days administrators paid attention not to make the break too long, nevertheless, even on those days it took approximately 30 minutes, which was rather long for clients to wait outside. And on other days, reserved for paperwork, these lunches occasionally lasted as long as an hour, making it even more difficult for administrators to complete their tasks in time.

I found that not many clients did actually come to the office around 12noon-1pm, some of them must have had their own lunch around that time, while some must have learned that it was not worth coming to the office at that time of the day. Nonetheless, there were still some people who came to the office when the administrators were eating; some of them were, therefore,

waiting quite a lot, while others interrupted them by stepping into the office – in case administrators forgot to lock the door, as they generally did while eating. This situation was clearly causing frustration for everyone – for the clients who were waiting for a long time, for the ones who accidentally discovered that administrators were having lunch together in the office during office hours, and for the administrators as well who were constantly worrying about when they would be able to eat (as they usually served every client present in the waiting area before they stopped for lunch) and were oftentimes interrupted by clients when they were finally doing so.

Another key issue I found to be significant concerning work organisation in the welfare office was over-bureaucratisation. As the director in P said in the interview: ‘certain fields are way over-regulated, we need to circle the documents too much [within the institution], collect too many signatures on them, control is over-regulated’. As already discussed above, administrators had to produce documents at every single step of the administrative procedure, have them institutionally registered and signed by a superior and pass them to the client. A telling example is the separate document the authority sent to the client informing them about the fact that a decision legally came into effect.

On the other hand, in spite of such strict administrative regulation and close control, administrators and often even the directors were lacking adequate information concerning their responsibilities. During the participant observation, I found that administrators often were not aware of important

details of the tasks they needed to perform, or learned them only at the last minute. Paradigmatic of this was when I asked the head of the welfare office in P what her exact tasks and responsibilities were and she became quite confused and started to look for her job contract that listed these responsibilities. This ambiguity was especially prevalent in relation to public works administration. The director in P expressed her satisfaction with the way in which the supervisory bodies informed them; however, she added that the information often came late, at the last minute. On the other hand, the director in S was more critical; she told me that 'tracking the regulation would be a very important part of our work and the problem is, again, the lack of time; we suffer a constant lack of time'.

When I asked her whether they received information from superior authorities, she responded that

naturally, we get help, but not from the county level. It is very, very rare now, what used to be a common practice, namely to coordinate changes in the regulation on the county level. There are very few such cases now. [...] In the welfare department it is very, very rare that we get information, so it is more often that we try to track these changes or have them tracked on the notary or the directorial level. [...] it would be my job, but the administrators are also tracking the changes in the regulation and primarily they are the ones who respond to them, as these changes need to be translated into everyday life.

In addition, the acting head of welfare administration in S told me in a lengthy informal interview that they used to work in pairs a lot; it was important for

them to be able to discuss ambiguous cases and check up on one another. However, due to the increasingly limited institutional capacities of the welfare office, recently they did most of their work individually, and asked for help from their colleagues only if they were really stuck with something. When I asked if they communicated these problems to the management or the municipality leadership, she responded: 'Pointless. Nothing changes anyway' that confirms the above finding that the administrators felt lacking control over their job.

Nonetheless, it was not only structural institutional factors that determined the organisation of work in the welfare office, but also personal competences and individual work management skills. Personal discussions with their colleagues, popping out to do their personal business (going to the bank or the drugstore for instance), receiving or making personal phone calls, having a lengthy collective lunch, all meant further constraining administrators' time to do their job properly.

Furthermore, sometimes it was the decisions of the staff that made their work more difficult and frustrating. For example, when they called more than 800 clients into the city hall to collect their school enrolment vouchers on one single day in S. Even though it was the way in which the personnel decided to organise their work, i.e. it was not an order from 'above', they were very frustrated by the fact that they would need to service so many clients in one day – they were worrying about it a lot beforehand, counted how many minutes

they would have for one client, discussed how they should organise the office so that they could withhold the clients etc. It was also very frustrating for them during that day, as I discussed in the previous chapter, and it was quite difficult for many clients as well, since they were ordered to come in for the voucher in a two-hour time slot on one particular day. The call specifically indicated that 'no deviation from the given appointment is possible with any reason'. Even though beneficiaries could authorise someone to collect their voucher, the call did not specifically explain how to do so; it merely listed 'authorisation (in case you do not turn up personally)' among the documents one needed to collect the voucher. It resulted in a number of clients coming in with wrong authorisation documents resulting in a difficulty for them to receive the voucher.

The same happened when the staff handed out food and fuel donations to the clients. The office informed clients about the day and location of the distribution and from then it was the responsibility of the recipients to be able to turn up and carry the material home. In the case of fuel, the weight of the aid was hundreds of pounds that was impossible to transport without a car; however, ESB recipients could hardly afford to maintain a car. Hence, such institutional practices were not only frustrating for recipients, but also disadvantaged the most vulnerable among them (those not having a car or a social network they could turn to) and limited their agency as clients, that is, their capacities to fully exert their social citizenship rights.

All these institutional organisational factors and power relations, together with

the individual elements of work organisation in the welfare office, had significant repercussions for the performance of the administrators and sent ambiguous messages to the clients as to their citizenship. First of all, as administrators explicitly expressed during my research, it led to mistakes in the administration, often significant ones with serious consequences either for the office or for the client. Administrators lost documents, papers were missing from files, they forgot to tell certain things to the client or missed certain administrative steps, among other mistakes. The recipient interviews demonstrated that such mistakes caused mistrust in the staff on the part of the clients and an undervaluation of their professional competences. Some interview participants were deeply troubled by the mistakes of administrators, the fact that they were blamed or supposed to make up for these faults in some cases, and that their truth was never recognised and they were never apologised to in the end.

Soss et al. (2011) argue that in the US 'Discoveries of [welfare] fraud, small and rare as they may be, can be pursued as felonies punishable by imprisonment. The contrast with service provider fraud could hardly be greater' (p. 206). My findings suggest a similar asymmetry between how mistakes or fraud by the staff was handled and perceived, and how the faults of clients were treated. This asymmetry is a reflection of the power imbalance between client and administrator, which compromised recipients sense of their agency in the sense that recipients who had experienced mistakes on the part of the staff felt that

their behaviour was very closely controlled, however they had no means to make the administrators accountable for their faults.

In addition, as research demonstrated in different contexts, the frustration that the extreme work overload and the inefficient work organisation causes for the staff also degrades the quality of staff-client interactions (Lipsky, 1980; de Montigny, 1995). As the acting head of the welfare department in S explained somewhat regretfully, she had got very tired due to the extreme workload and 'then you often do not talk to others as [you ought to]'. Besides, administrators felt that they did not have enough time to deal with clients, as they were aware of the long line of clients in the waiting area. Albeit I often had the sense that the staff over-reacted to the client load and further distressed one another by this; I come back to this question in Chapter 8. Such circumstances put pressure on recipients to hurry up as I discussed above, and also made administrators go through the paperwork as fast as they could. Therefore, clients did not have a real opportunity to ask questions, and administrators could not provide them with adequate – detailed and intelligible – information. The staff could not meaningfully explain the regulations and recipients' obligations, and they could not dedicate the time necessary to thoroughly assess clients' needs and opportunities to satisfy those needs. An extreme example was when a recipient spent several extra days in public works employment, long after his contract ended, because he did not know he was not required to go to work any longer.

On the whole, the participant observations and the interviews I conducted with

ESB recipients, administrators, as well as the management of the two welfare departments demonstrated that the work organisation in the welfare office was often ineffective, which was a result of partly institutional disorganisation and capacity constraints, related to the status of the clientele of the welfare office, and partly the individual decisions of the staff. This lack of effectiveness, in turn, caused frustration to both the staff and the recipients, a lower than optimal quality of assistance, lack of adequate information to both the clients and the staff, and various verbal, bodily and procedural expressions of indifference towards recipients. Such futile and/or inappropriate processes, I argue, sent messages of devaluation to the clients: that they were not worth adequate institutional resources and a competent staff. In addition, in many cases these inadequacies explicitly impaired recipients' citizenship rights such as their right to information or to social security, since the lack of sufficient and intelligible information resulted in the loss of ESB eligibility in some cases.

Revision of eligibility

As I noted above, those who had already received ESB did not have to come to the office very often (at least not in relation to ESB provision). Both in P and S most recipients told me that they had first come to claim the benefit and after that they came back only when they were called in for public works or for the annual revision of their benefit eligibility. However, further parts of the interviews and the participant observation demonstrated that a number of

recipients also came in occasionally to claim crisis aid.

At both places, clients received a written call with a date when they had to visit the office for the eligibility revision. According to the law, the failure to 'cooperate' in this process, namely to visit the office on the given date, provide all the necessary documents, and undergo the home check again, resulted in the termination of eligibility. In P, the administrators took pride in reminding ESB recipients of the upcoming revision 'well in advance' as an administrator told me, in the form of a letter that highlighted the 30-day condition and the ways in which recipients could fulfil it. One of the administrators emphasised that they were not obliged by the law to send out such a letter in the context of demonstrating their client-friendliness. When I asked how much in advance did they send the letter out, she could not give me an exact answer, but replied: 'Well, say, 2 or 3 months ahead of revision'. However, the letter I came across during the participant observation was dated 20 November, 2013 and informed the client that 'the annual revision of the Employment Substitute Benefit is, in your case, to be expected in December 2013'. That is, it was a far too late reminder of the 30-day condition as it was literally impossible to fulfil it in the time left (that was less than 30 workdays). Nevertheless, the office could maintain an image of client-friendliness by sending the letter. This practice was controversial in two respects: it implied that the effort to meaningfully inform recipients and help them not to lose their benefit eligibility was not an inherent responsibility of the office, but instead resulted from its benevolence. This

indication, however, conflicts with the concept of social citizenship. Secondly, this practice proved to be a token instrument as it clearly did not leave a realistic option for the client to fulfil the 30-day work condition had not they fulfilled it by the time they received the letter. But still, having sent the letter, the office could further constrain recipients' potential to challenge the cutting of their benefit for not fulfilling the workfare condition on the basis of not having been adequately informed about the exact details of the condition.

My data demonstrated that the decisive question in the course of these annual revisions was in most cases the fulfilment of the 30-day work requirement. Neither office did, however, provide meaningful support for their clients to be able to meet this condition. In S, the municipality did not organise voluntary work at all that could have been a last resort for people with no other option to fulfil the workfare condition (see Chapter 5). The municipality of P, in contrast, did offer some volunteer opportunities; however, my data implied that it was not a widely available opportunity either. During my stay in P I learned about only one such option, namely, to work in the public toilet as a 'volunteer', as two interview participants told me that this was the way in which they had met the 30-day condition in the past.

In other words, my findings corroborate those of the ombudsperson, who found that local authorities could not provide sufficient opportunities for ESB recipients to be able to fulfil the 30-day condition; moreover, they did not even consider it to be their responsibility. Both the directors of the two welfare

departments where I conducted my research told me in the interview that it was a responsibility of the office to motivate recipients to work, 'indeed, to direct people to work and be able to manage their earnings'. However, no staff member in either office asserted that either the municipality or the welfare department in particular was responsible for providing work opportunity for ESB recipients, not even for 30 days per year.

Furthermore, many recipients told me in the interviews that it was very difficult to get involved even in public works. It was not transparent to them by design, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5 how clients were selected for public works; therefore, they assumed that it depended on one's status and social connections as the following interview excerpt demonstrates:

Irén (47-year-old Roma woman in P): This is interesting that they are biased even in [public works]. I told Tímea [the public works manager in P], 'put me in the toilet as a janitor'. But no, 'you are not good for that', she said, 'I have someone else for that'. And who was that? X.Y., blond, blue eyes, blond, blue eyes, dyed blond. [...]

Researcher: And what sort of work do you think you would get?

Irén: Well, I will go again to the cultural centre to collect bloody tampons, dirty diapers, dirty toilet paper and remove cigarette stubs, and sweep the leaves here at the main square. And I will not get gloves, nor a picking stick; they will only give me a broom, a shovel, a bag and string.

According to my data, the primary reasons why clients lost their benefit eligibility were: not being able to meet the 30-day workfare condition, their per capita income exceeding the eligibility threshold (however, even the

departmental director in P pointed out that the threshold is set too low), missing an appointment with the Employment Centre, taking part in the 'wrong' training or reintegration programme, or not accepting the municipality's offer of public works employment. When I asked an administrator in P what the primary reason was why clients failed to meet the 30-day condition, she asserted that 'They [clients] don't care. They live on something else for a year and then come back to claim ESB'. And this was also the way in which the acting head administrator in S viewed the situation. However, the interviews with recipients and ex-recipients depicted a different view, namely, that in many cases it was in fact the lack of adequate information about the condition and how one could fulfil it that led to the termination of their eligibility. A man in P, as an extreme example, misinterpreted the very letter that was supposed to warn him of the approaching revision, which ultimately led to his losing his eligibility for 15 months, no matter how hard he tried to explain the misunderstanding to the administrators. He did not file a formal appeal though; and when I asked him whether he knew how to make an appeal at all, he replied: 'All what I could do is ask for the complaints book'.

Even though I witnessed only one case at the two sites in which someone lost their eligibility due to having participated in the 'wrong' training or reintegration programme, it was a quite remarkable case, which I argue is symptomatic of the way in which ESB provision as an institution functioned in Hungary and socialised clients as citizens. First I met Viktória in the waiting

area of the S welfare office, where I approached her for an interview. We had a lengthy informal discussion in then, and later I conducted a formal interview with her. On both occasions, she was very vocal and demonstrated a strong interest in politics and quite elaborate views about local matters. The next time I saw her was when she came to the office for her eligibility revision. Then it turned out that the programme in which she had been involved (through the mediation of the employment centre), titled 'The development of the employability of disadvantaged people (decentralised programmes in the convergence regions)', was in fact not an employment reintegration programme. Even though its title had both the words 'employability' and 'programme', administratively the programme counted as a supported training course, and in the case of such training courses at least 6 months of participation was required to make up for the 30-day requirement (in the case of reintegration programmes there was no such threshold). Since this programme was only 4 months long, Viktória did not meet the 30-day condition and therefore her ESB eligibility was terminated. The news apparently came as a shock for her; she started crying and explained to the administrator her hardships and how impossible it was for her to sustain her family without the benefit. Nevertheless, the only thing the administrator could say was 'there is nothing we can do'. In this case, it was not only the lack of adequate information on the part of the client that caused the problem, but also the failure of both the employment centre and the welfare office to realise that the

programme in which Viktória had participated was not going to be sufficient for her to meet the eligibility conditions. It was clearly not recognised by the welfare administrator who dealt with Viktória's case, as she had to phone the employment centre and clarify the situation with them. These were only two of the many cases that I was confronted with in this research in which people lost their benefit – in many cases their only secure income. These examples clearly demonstrated that the lack of adequate information about the exact rules of eligibility and the lack of transparent institutional processes concerning eligibility management made recipients vulnerable to the power of the administrators, which not only jeopardised their basic civil rights, such as their right to fair treatment and legal certainty, but also impaired their right to social security.

Last but not least, as explained in Chapter 5, a further condition of receiving ESB was visiting the employment centre regularly (at least once in every three months). Recipients were supposed to go to the centre to get help with finding employment; however, the interview participants pointed out that it was not what actually happened in the office. Tellingly, recipients called these visits 'stamping', as what happened at these appointments was that the administrator put a stamp in the clients' 'jobseekers' booklet', proving that they had fulfilled the condition to 'cooperate' with the employment authority, that is, they showed up in the centre at the time indicated in the booklet. And even though the regulation specified the condition as 'visiting the local employment centre at

least once in 3 months, on the date named by the client', in fact none of the recipients I talked to mentioned that they had a say in when exactly they would want to visit the centre. Instead, they were given a date that they needed to keep in mind under the threat of losing the benefit. Some people emphasised that it was very important to show up exactly on the given date, otherwise they would be told off. An elderly woman just realised it during the interview that she had missed the date and said regretfully that she would be rebuked by the employment officer again. Others highlighted the difficulties this practice caused them, such as not being able to attend a job interview or fulfil important family obligations.

Some interview participants added that in addition to putting a stamp in their booklet, the employment centre administrator also checked whether any of the client's personal data had changed since the last appointment, and clients 'may also enquire about job opportunities'. That is, just as in the case of the welfare office administrators, the job centre staff did not provide support to the clients actively, and in hardly any case did they actually offered any job or training opportunity to ESB recipients. The latter could partly be explained by the general lack of such opportunities in contemporary Hungary, especially for individuals of such socio-economic status as the ESB clientele (Köllő, 2009). These findings suggest that even employment centre officials were aware of the pointlessness of these appointments; nevertheless, they made ESB recipients obey the rule, often in a harsh manner, under the threat of losing their benefit

for 15 months. However, research compellingly demonstrated that such futile constraints further increase recipients' sense of powerlessness and hence curtail their agency (Lister, 2004; Wright and Haux, 2011; Chase and Walker, 2013).

Administration of public works

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, public works employment has been a crucial element of social assistance provision in Hungary since 2009. Even though the management of public works programmes was the responsibility of local employment centres, municipality welfare offices also had a number of related duties, since many ESB recipients (though not only them) were involved in public works programmes. Nevertheless, I found that welfare offices had very little information about public works, moreover, what information they did have, they mostly gained at the last minute. That is, clients' lack of information concerning public works employment was partly the result of administrators' insufficient information. In fact, in some cases administrators were seeking up to date information about public works from the clients involved in the programmes.

Since these programmes generated a lot of work for the municipality – in relation to the ESB recipients who were employed by the municipality as public workers – therefore, both offices that I studied created a specific position within the institution for managing public works employment. However, launching such a position also meant that the information became even more fragmented

– between the employment centre, the welfare office and the municipality public works coordinator. I found that a lot of information got lost in this triangle, and the ones who had the least information in the end were the recipients.

Furthermore, public works programmes not only resulted in a lot of administrative duties, but also a very tight schedule for welfare offices. Even though municipalities could organise their own public works programmes, the state reimbursed only 70 to 100% of the costs of such programmes, in contrast to the ones launched by the government that were in all cases fully funded from the central state budget. However, this also meant that municipalities had much more limited agency in the design and management of such programmes (which would be the purpose of the functioning of local authorities as stated in the law, as discussed in Chapter 5). In August 2013, the government released a circular that ordered local authorities to involve a total of 220,000 people in public works employment between November 2013 and April 2014. The share of each municipality was also set by the government: 380 people for S and 600 people for P, in two waves, and part of this obligation could be covered by involving ESB recipients in supported training courses. This state requirement caused severe institutional concerns in both municipalities I investigated. In S, I was present when the director brought the news to the staff, whose immediate response was panic. Administrators' concerns were threefold: 1) the office did not have the institutional capacities to manage such a large number of cases; 2)

the municipality could not provide employment opportunities for such a large number of people; and 3) there were not enough people among their clients who would – in their view – have been suitable for regular employment, even if it was public works employment. The last concern was symptomatic of the way in which the welfare department staff viewed their clients that I discuss in Chapter 8.

Nevertheless, when the department director raised these concerns with the mayor, he reasoned that 'First you [i.e. recipients] need to put something on the table, only after that can you take something' (as the director shared with her colleagues in one of their made-up lunch breaks). This reasoning indicates that mass public works employment was not interpreted institutionally as value creation or providing employment opportunities for disadvantaged individuals as the law suggested; but rather the enforcement of a reciprocal, i.e. neoconservative conception of citizenship on ESB recipients: social assistance being a reward for recipients' public works efforts, rather than their right as citizens. As the director interpreted the mayor's argument, the aim of the programme was 'to shake people up, to get rid of ESB recipients'. Furthermore, since April 2014, the end date of the programme, was in fact the date of parliamentary elections in Hungary, one could argue that the government used mass public works employment to increase its popularity.

The response of the director: 'I agree, but we cannot do this. With what reason?' indicated the ambivalent position of the management concerning social

assistance and public works employment. It suggested that the head of the office felt trapped between her own disciplinary views about their clientele and the regulation that governed her work. Moreover, the mayor's response to the director's concerns, namely that he was looking forward to hearing her suggestions what they could do about this conflict, also indicated that the welfare unit had to face the burdens of administering the mass programme without receiving substantial support from the local leadership. And besides, this conversation also demonstrated the relative powerlessness of the department within the local authority.

In the following section I describe the procedure of public works admissions in the welfare office, as I found it being a key element of recipients' citizenship socialisation through welfare administration. Due to the timing of the mass programme, I actually participated in the procedure only in S; however, on the basis of how the staff in P described the process, it was organised in a similar way also in that municipality. First, the employment centre sent a list to the municipality welfare department with the names of their clients (ESB recipients) whom the office was supposed to call in for recruitment. Then the welfare office sent a letter to the people whom they selected from this list. The selection was performed by the administrators, on the basis of their personal assessment of the clients capabilities and attitudes. In the letter they informed people about the employment opportunity and called everyone into the office for one particular date. The administrators called in more people than the

number of available jobs, so that they have enough people even if some would decline the offer or were found unsuitable as a result of the medical assessment. Those who turned up for the appointment had to declare whether they would take the job offer or not. They had not received a detailed explanation of the job at this time; they were merely referred to the letter they had initially received from the office. Many people told the administrator that their health conditions did not allow them to do such work, but the administrator pressured them to accept the job anyway and if the doctor found them unsuitable for the job, they would not have to take it in the end anyway.

Each person who signed the document was sent to the doctor for a medical assessment of their physical capability for employment. All of them had to visit the same doctor, on the same day, and the doctor issued a written assessment in each case. Having received the document, clients had to take it to the welfare office together with the other documents they were supposed to collect at home on the way. In S, the doctor found all but one person medically fit for the job; even though many had asserted before that they were sick or partially disabled. Moreover, there was also a case in which the doctor indicated that the client was not physically apt for 'doing heavy medium heavy physical work', nevertheless, found him fit for park maintenance. This practice was backed up by recent policy changes that significantly constrained the possibility of members of Hungarian society receiving any form of social security provision on the basis of disability. Thousands of people were reassessed and many have

been deprived of the disability allowance they had received earlier. As a number of interview participants demonstrated, many people were assessed to be 40-43% disabled, while the threshold for the allowance was reset at 44%.

Everyone who was found medically fit for the job by the doctor was admitted to the programme by the welfare authority, sent home and asked to come back later for the official written decision that informed employees about the details of the job. The ones who got to this point in the procedure had to start the job almost immediately, a mere 4 days after the entire procedure was started. When clients came back for the written decision in S, they did not meet an administrator, but instead, the document was handed to them by an assistant in a separate room. In P, on the other hand, decisions were posted to clients. Therefore, in neither of the two offices had clients a real opportunity to get informed, ask questions or raise any concerns about the job at this stage, even though they were not provided substantial information about it before either. As a result, some of the clients did try to ask questions of the assistant who handed them the decision in S anyway, but not being a qualified administrator, she could not answer most of these questions, not even the most basic ones such as how many hours they would work per day. Hence, she recommended clients to arrive early on the first day of the job: 'there will be a lot of people, you will be informed then'. Consequently, until the very day they the employment actually started clients were not adequately informed about the job they were forced to accept under the threat of losing their social assistance for 15 months.

The above findings highlighted a number of deficiencies of the public works admission process. First of all, the procedure was very fast – in spite of the fact that it required the collection of a number of documents as well as a medical check-up it was completed within a few days. Strongly related to this, and also a consequence of recipients' extremely vulnerable position resulting from the regulation of ESB provision, clients had very little (practically no) agency throughout the process. Therefore, they could not negotiate or assert their interests in practice. Furthermore, they had insufficient information about both the procedure of public works admission and the job they were expected to undertake.

Besides the private labour market and public works employment, a further option to meet the 30-day workfare condition was participation in a supported training course (as specified by the law). However, as I indicated in chapter 5, it was not a viable option for many ESB recipients, only for the ones of higher social status, since most ESB recipients did not qualify for these training courses.

The public works employment opportunities offered to ESB recipients were varied at both locations: ditch clearance, park maintenance, gardening, post delivery, and maintenance work in the city hall were the most frequent jobs. However, it was not at all clear for the recipients how people were selected for the jobs. Many believed that it was the mayor, who decided which recipients were involved in public works. This lack of transparency regarding public

works employment, I argue, could significantly limit recipients' political agency. If someone assumes that their livelihood depended directly on the mayor, they would be less likely to freely express their political views, let alone take part in political activities.

Others supposed that participants of public works programmes were selected arbitrarily by the administrators in the welfare office. Both the interviews and the participant observation indicated that recipients were intimidated by the power asymmetry between the administrators and themselves, which led to recipients' limited exercising of their civic rights and agency in the welfare office that I demonstrated in Chapter 4. The above findings suggest that the public works admissions procedure and its lack of transparency was one of the factors that contributed to recipients' constrained citizenship agency.

In addition, it was not clear for recipients either how people were selected for specific public works jobs. And since there was a significant difference between the social recognition and the actual conditions of the different jobs, this selection was rather important for them. More assertive recipients tried to negotiate with the administrators in the employment centre or the municipality welfare office what types of jobs they got; some did it in person, while others phoned the office. However, according to my observations, the decision was ultimately the result of the negotiation between the two employment centre and the municipality welfare department. My data indicated a particular 'creaming' effect resulting from this process: administrators selected the most capable, the

most educated people from the pool of ESB recipients, rather than those with the most pressing need for employment so that they could at least fulfil the 30-day workfare condition.

Moreover, often the contracts of these more privileged clients were prolonged or they were recurrently employed in subsequent waves of public works programmes, leaving even fewer opportunities for others as some interview participants reported resentfully. These institutional practices left multiply disadvantaged recipients and the ones with weaker social connections, such as Roma women, the elderly, or clients with low levels of education in an even more vulnerable position. In addition, being completely unaware of the rules and criteria of employee selection, and not knowing who had the final say in the decision – whether it was the mayor, the employment centre, the public works coordinator of the municipality or the administrators in the welfare office – made recipients especially vulnerable in the administrative process. This power asymmetry was one of the factors that constrained recipients' willingness to file a complaint or an appeal, to question administrators, or to be openly critical concerning local welfare provision.

Home checks

Another key element of the administration of ESB was the compulsory home checks that both S and P municipalities ordered as a condition of social assistance provision. In both offices I found that even though most recipients

were aware of this requirement, they were not adequately informed either about the exact goal of the visit or about the way in which it was performed. The majority of interview participants asserted that they had been informed about the day of the visit, but not about the exact time when it was realised. This finding was partly confirmed by my participant observations; however, this type of data indicated that in some cases the client was not even informed about the date of the visit, as the following example demonstrates:

Administrator: Next time, be at home [for the home check].

Client: But when do you come?

Administrator: When it is your turn.

Nonetheless, I also found that some recipients were not even aware of the existence of this requirement at all, but I could not identify any pattern concerning which participants were better informed about the home checks.

When I asked interview participants what they thought the motivation behind the visits was, only a few people could give me a definite answer; most of them said they did not know or only speculated about it. Recipients either supposed that the municipality wanted to confirm that they were in need of support, i.e. their financial circumstances made them eligible for the benefit (which was not the case as explained in Chapter 5), or that the administrators checked how orderly their living circumstances were, as the municipality did not want to assist those who did not take care of their environment. That is, many recipients were, in fact, un- or misinformed about the actual procedure and/or the aim of

the home environment condition.

I also found significant differences in the ways in which administrators actually applied the home check regulation. In many cases, if they knew a client for a long time or had already conducted a home-check at their place earlier, they did not visit the household on the occasion of a claim or benefit revision. In P, the local order on social assistance provision explicitly declared that administrators might omit the home check if they had already visited that household earlier and they could reasonably suppose that there had been no change in the client's circumstances. However, there were recipients who reported - and resented - in the interview that their home was checked time and again when they applied for a provision or their eligibility was being revised. Furthermore, the interviews suggested differences in the ways in which participants experienced the visit. Some reported that administrators had not even entered the building, and had only looked around in the courtyard, while others told me that officials had closely scrutinised the entire house/apartment, including the bedroom and bathroom as some highlighted resentfully.

These findings suggest that the combination of the highly discretionary design of the home environment requirement and recipients' insufficient knowledge of the regulation allowed for a discriminatory application of the law. That is, administrators visited only certain homes and not others, checked ones more thoroughly than others, and provided certain clients with detailed information about their visit while being very brief with others. Such arbitrary practices

made recipients particularly vulnerable to the power of the administrators, who could use the regulation as a means of control or discipline if they wanted to. Consequently not only did home checks compromise recipients' right to privacy and human dignity, as the report of the ombudsperson asserted, but also impaired their right to legal certainty, fair treatment and non-discrimination.

Last but not least, the local order of S on social assistance provision contained the form that administrators had to fill in at the end of the home visit. In P, on the other hand, the form administrators used was not part of the order and therefore it was not publicly accessible. In addition, although according to the Administrative Procedures Act the written record of the home visit should be signed by the administrators who conducted the check-up, as well as the client, none of the recipients I talked to reported that they would have had the chance to read the report and/or actually signed it, let alone received a copy of it. This finding indicated that the implementation of the home visit procedure systematically limited clients' access to information regarding the procedure, and constrained their agency in seeking legal remedy, which would be particularly difficult without holding a written record of the home visit to refer to. Moreover, the above practice violated the civic principle of transparent public procedures and in this way curtailed clients' fundamental right to legal certainty.

Discretion and differential treatment in the welfare office

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the current system of ESB provision in Hungary was designed in a way that delegated significant discretionary powers to municipality welfare administrators. The empirical findings of my research complemented this picture by demonstrating the ways in which this power was actually enacted in the everyday practices of welfare provision. A number of interview participants complained about favouritism that they experienced in regard to ESB provision, namely that some people were subject to preferential treatment, received more support, and were offered more opportunities. In addition to the arbitrary selection of public works employees by the employment and the welfare authority demonstrated above, my research identified a number of ways in which certain clients were treated favourably in both S and P, and in this way their social citizenship was reinforced, while the needs of others were neglected.

I noted above that administrators in both offices primarily responded to formal claims and did not proactively engage with clients in most cases. However, I found significant exceptions to this. For example, administrators' acquaintances did not have to wait in line; instead, they could simply enter the office and do their business immediately. Furthermore, those regarded 'deserving' by the administrators, that is, primarily old women, white and higher status clients, received more detailed information about the ways in which they could acquire social assistance. In addition, they received more attention, devotion and

empathy from administrators. In many cases, the staff apparently did their best to find the way to help these clients: they made additional phone calls to other offices, drew clients' attention to the loopholes in the system, or even stretched the rules in calculating the client's total household income. An example of this favouritism that was typical of administrators' attitude was when an administrator in P spent more than an hour trying to find the way to declare – that is to say, make – a man eligible for ESB. In the end she succeeded by counting the client's August income instead of his September revenues, and told me: 'I do not even like this client, but I would hate it if those who lie about everything got it [the benefit], while he got excluded from it'.

Moreover, in some cases it was an order 'from above' that a client had to be treated preferentially. In P, for example, one of the administrators got a phone call from the department directorate one day that a man who was 'someone' (in her words) in the city earlier would soon come to apply for ESB and she was asked to treat him 'accordingly'. Later I found that the client had been a local representative (or the candidate) of the then existing far-right party MIÉP some years earlier. And indeed the administrator did treat him 'accordingly': she made several phone calls and urged other departments to administer this particular case promptly, while others were always told to wait an indefinite amount of time for a decision. Hence, the case went through the system at record speed: the official decision that the man was eligible for assistance was made in two days, and the benefit was due for him from the following month.

For others, the process took much longer and required a lot more administration on their part.

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, in the case of married spouses or those living in a registered partnership and in the same household, only one of the couple may be eligible for ESB. Because of this regulation intimate partnerships of claimants and recipients were a constant topic of discussion for administrators in both offices. They often complained about people supposedly cheating the regulation: continue living together but formally getting divorced, or registering separate addresses officially but continue living at the same place in fact, only to qualify for the benefit. However, in the case of clients whom they favoured for one reason or another, not only did administrators not question such practices, but in some cases even gave them advice about how they could manage to receive two benefits for the household.

Summary

This chapter demonstrated that the bureaucratic procedures in the municipality welfare office were a crucial component of the institutional complex of social assistance provision in contemporary Hungary, and these procedures played a significant role in recipients' socialisation into citizens. Clients indeed learned in the system – not only to knock, but also to bend, to step back, to bear being shouted at and to do their best to avoid getting into trouble. On the basis of the participant observations and recipients' experiences I discussed above I argue

that the existing practices of the two welfare offices in terms of informing clients about the rules and the process of ESB administration send disempowering messages to recipients. Such practices communicate that recipients' time (spent waiting in vain) was not respected by the office, they did not deserve the minimal effort of the administrators to check the waiting area occasionally and if there were people waiting, call them in, or in S, even to put a sign on the office door in case they temporarily prioritise something else over receiving clients. Reading recipients' body language in the waiting area and listening to their stories during the interviews suggested that many felt helpless and neglected, moreover, some clients even felt intimidated due to these practices.

In addition, the above findings demonstrated that most recipients lack even the most basic information about the exact procedure of administering ESB, and this, in many cases, led to unnecessary waiting, futile bureaucratic steps, and frustration on the part of recipients. Moreover, I argue that such lack of information about the procedure also proved to limit recipients' agency in the sense that they could not in any way control the process – they did not have an exact appointment, nor could they keep track of when their turn came in the line.

On the other hand, recipients were made fully aware of the fact that they lived on social assistance, vis-à-vis employment remuneration, by certain institutional practices such as having to do menial jobs in public spaces or going through lengthy and futile bureaucratic procedures. Citing the empirical

research of Mettler discussed in Chapter 2, Piven (2012) compellingly argued that while a majority of those benefiting from a government program did not even know it was a government program, those living on welfare provisions, as well as the general public, were made very clear that they received government support. Institutional processes 'often made the participating poor very visible indeed, outfitting them in orange day-glow vests as they picked up trash in the parks or on the parkways' (Piven, 2012 p. 119). The above findings demonstrated that recipients not only felt humiliated by having to do public works jobs in public, but some also noticed an institutional bias in who was made more visible for the general public as a recipient of social assistance. Primarily Roma interview participants sensed such biased practices, which made them feel shame and discriminated against.

Furthermore, the above findings demonstrated that a number of recipients did not receive meaningful support from the administrators, but rather got stuck in a futile administrative cycle, and in many cases the procedures conducted in the two offices had a de-personifying effect on the clients. These processes, I argue, not only impaired recipients' social citizenship, but also reinforced the message of institutional indifference that I identified in the previous chapter as well. In addition, such practices also contributed to the lack of recipients' trust in the local authority that was supposed to 'represent and realise the will of the local people in a democratic way' as the act on local governance defined their primary mission.

This chapter also demonstrated that the work organisation in the welfare office was often clearly ineffective, which was a result of partly institutional disorganisation and capacity constraints, related to the status of the clientele of the welfare office, and partly the individual decisions of the personnel. This lack of effectiveness, in turn, caused frustration to both the staff and the recipients, a lower than optimal quality of assistance, lack of adequate information to both the clients and the staff, and various verbal, bodily and procedural expressions of indifference towards recipients. Such futile and/or inappropriate processes sent messages of devaluation to the clients: that they were not worth adequate institutional resources and a competent staff. In addition, in many cases these inadequacies explicitly impaired recipients' citizenship rights such as their right to information or to social security, since the lack of sufficient and intelligible information resulted in the loss of ESB eligibility in some cases.

Furthermore, the above analysis also indicated that the operation of the welfare department in both P and S was clearly not transparent enough for the clientele, especially the process of the annual ESB eligibility revision and the procedures related to public works employment. The lack of transparency apparently increased recipients' vulnerability to the power of the administrators that I found not only to jeopardise such basic civil rights of recipients as their right to legal certainty, fair treatment and non-discrimination, but also to impair their social citizenship by constraining their access to certain welfare benefits and

services. In addition, such futile constraints as the pointless visits in the employment centre, the presentation of countless documents in the welfare office, or the neverending maundering from one institution to the other (the welfare office, the employment centre, the doctors' etc.) also reinforced recipients' powerlessness.

Additionally, the above findings demonstrated that the home visits not only violated recipients' right to privacy, but also made many – primarily Roma people – feel humiliated. Furthermore, the conclusion of the comprehensive investigation of the Commissioner of Fundamental Rights that such home checks infringed recipients' right to legal certainty and non-discrimination was corroborated by the above findings that demonstrated recipients' apparent lack of information about and discriminatory implementation of the visits.

Last but not least, the above analysis indicated that the discretionary elements of the ESB regulation made recipients particularly vulnerable to the power of local authorities by allowing for differential treatment and favouritism. This vulnerability was proved to infringe recipients' right to legal security and restrict their agency as citizens in many cases, as such it makes recipients' existentially dependent on the benevolence or indeed the sympathy of the personnel of the local authority. Moreover, the discretionary character of ESB provision further disadvantaged the more vulnerable recipients such as the ones with weak or no institutional connections or the ones regarded undeserving by society or the administrators personally.

'If they opened just a bit more towards the people, there wouldn't be so many issues. Then we could speak with them more easily and we would dare to ask questions much more, but when you enter the office and see the lady being grumpy, then I would rather not ask her, I would rather not ask her.' (Eszter, 40-year-old Roma woman interviewed in this research)

Chapter 8: Interactions with welfare officials

Soss et al. (2011) compellingly argue that 'treatment and responsiveness in the welfare system are not administrative sidebars to democratic governance. They are, in their own right, critical measures of what citizenship means in practice' (p. 296). In the present research, a number of interview participants highlighted the way in which they were treated by welfare officials as a crucial factor that informed their experience of citizenship. When a middle-aged white man responds to a question about what he would do when he withstood an injustice: 'Well, I tell you frankly, one takes a note, but what could we do? So you remember it, and since then you know what to expect.', it clearly shows that recipients learn important lessons about their lack of power and standing as citizens from their experiences in the welfare complex. This – final – chapter of findings explores the interactions between ESB recipients and welfare administrators in the two municipality welfare offices where the research was

conducted, and discusses the ways in which treatment by officials shaped recipients' sense and realisation of citizenship.

Language

An issue that proved to be critical concerning the interactions between welfare officials and ESB recipients was the language used by the administrators and the tone of their communication. In the interviews, a number of recipients reported (in both locations) that they were talked to in a derogatory manner in the welfare office. 'I came here for the first time and they shouted at me and they were absolutely offhand about what sort of papers I hadn't brought with me' – explained one of the participants in S bitterly. Interestingly, when directly asked how the officials treated them, many participants – in both P and S – responded that the administrators were nice and kind. In S, however, it was a similarly recurring answer that it depended – on the personality of the administrator, on officials' daily mood, or on the way in which the client behaved in the office. In P, this experience was less prevalent among recipients. In both places few people reported that the treatment they experienced in the welfare office was neutral or ordinary, and also only few people asserted explicitly that they were treated in a derogatory manner. However, recipients' responses to further questions in the interview and the participant observation complicated this picture.

Administrators being aloof – unconcerned and cynical – was a recurring topic

of the recipient interviews, as well as a ubiquitous finding of the participant observation. A typical example of this attitude was when the director of the S welfare department asked a client, 'Do you think this is the cash desk?' when she came to the welfare office instead of the cashier's office by mistake. In addition, recipients also highlighted that they were sometimes explicitly reprimanded by the officials, often in very harsh ways and it made them intimidated. 'She will tell me off again!' a recipient suddenly exclaimed, when she realised that she had just missed her appointment for 'stamping' in the employment centre (see Chapter 7). That is, recipients faced not only losing their benefit eligibility due to missing the appointment with the employment centre, but were also being condemned and humiliated by the staff. Moreover, this example also shows that the sanction of losing the benefit because of not showing up at the appointment was in fact not automatic as the law would suggest, but at the discretion of the official, which further increased recipients' vulnerability.

Furthermore, the participant observation demonstrated that the officials often commanded recipients in a harsh, authoritative manner.

'Go home and check your post regularly!'

'You go out and get a number!'

'You go to the doctor now. But don't go home on the way!'

And the recipients were sometimes reprimanded with no due reason. For instance, a woman in S was rebuked for coming into the office to manage her

schooling benefit 'the last minute before school starts', while in fact she came in on 12 August, and school starts on 1 September at the earliest in Hungary – whereas if someone came in early, they were sent home to come back later, as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

In addition to the indifferent, reprimanding or commanding tone that a number of recipients experienced and the participant observation data confirmed, the administrators often interacted with recipients in an infantilising manner. Recipients were lectured by the officials about, for instance, how to (or not to) speak. 'You should not say it like that "are you ready?" [imitating the client in a much harsher way than she in fact spoke], but like "did you manage to get it done?"', an administrator in P scolded a woman in her 50s when she was inquiring about the documents she had been waiting for. The client was clearly startled and became very apologetic – she repeated 'forgive me' three times and left the office saying 'thank you for your efforts'. Even though administrators often spoke quite vulgarly, as demonstrated below, they often rebuked clients for their language. 'Don't you say "old hag", you should say "elderly lady"!', or 'You should not speak so roughly with the Police.'

But what more recipients highlighted in the interviews explicitly was the lack of compassion or a caring and supportive attitude on the part of the administrators that they experienced in the welfare office. One of the themes often mentioned in the interviews, and an issue recurrently witnessed during the participant observation, was the negligent treatment of the clients. Some

highlighted that administrators often did not even look up to them from the documents they were dealing with or from the computer. Several times the discussion between the administrator and the client was suddenly interrupted by another administrator, another client (often someone with connections in the office), or a phone call, in some cases evidently private calls from the official's family. What made these cases particularly significant was that even though these meetings were about clients' hardships and their – often only – livelihood, administrators did not apologise for interrupting these discussions.

On the other hand, the participant observation demonstrated that some recipients were scolded by administrators for not asking for help. 'Why didn't you come in if you hadn't understood the decision?', an administrator in P asked a recipient. 'That is why you should think responsibly and come in when you don't understand something', another administrator lectured a recipient in P, in spite of the fact that they clearly communicated to the clients that they resented their inquiries as demonstrated in Chapter 7.

Furthermore, in some cases administrators talked about clients – in their presence – as if they were not present. It happened both in S and in P that the administrator was making a call concerning a case while the client was still in the office and she did not refer to the recipient by their name, or as 'the client', but by a belittling form of the word 'person' [*emberke*]. In another case, while I was recruiting interview participants in P, an administrator told me 'Oh, he will be a good subject!' – referring to the client I was talking to as if he were not

there.

Citizenship affected

Such interactions clearly 'left a mark' on recipients – to borrow a phrase one of them used. Interview participants not only resented administrators' indifference and/or their harshness, but some also made an explicit link between how they were treated in the welfare office and their perception of their citizenship, as the following excerpt compellingly demonstrates:

Researcher [after having discussed the participant's understanding of citizenship]: Do you feel as though you are a citizen, when you come to the welfare office?

Recipient: Not really, perhaps because of the treatment we get there.

A number of recipients asserted that they did not perceive themselves to be citizens in general or in the welfare office, because they were not taken care of. Their reasoning was that administrators did not care about them, and they felt that they were 'just a number', 'a task to be done', or 'as if [they] did not exist', which resonates with the de-humanising treatment I observed and discussed in Chapter 7. Others felt incompetent, inadequate and neglected due to the infantilising, offhand, or negligent treatment in the office. Still others felt that administrators did not care about the hardships clients turned to them with, did not listen to clients' problems, and did not take recipients' situation into consideration; even though 'a few words of compassion would [have] mean[t] a lot' to them, as one of the interview participants explicitly argued. Erika, a 32-year-old white woman in S asserted, for instance, that she was a citizen only

formally, but in her everyday life she did not feel that she was one, because she felt that she was 'only a loser in this miserable country'.

Furthermore, undergoing such experiences of being reprimanded in the welfare office, it is no surprise that recipients blamed themselves and/or other recipients for the treatment they received there. A number of participants rationalised the grumpy behaviour of welfare administrators by the irritation caused by clients' behaviour, especially if clients lost their temper. However, the participant observation did not confirm this reasoning; in contrast, they showed that recipients very rarely lost their temper in front of the officials, and hardly ever talked to them in a disrespectful manner. The actual process of this self-restraining is eloquently demonstrated by the reasoning of a recipient in S

It might be just me, but I think it would strike back at my daughter. Let's say I behaved in a way, say I made a scene, I went in [to the welfare office] and started yelling, then I believe they [the administrators] would treat the girl unfairly, they would stop providing her book voucher, but it is not the girl's fault (Ilona, 53-year-old white woman).

However, administrators did talk to recipients rudely quite often, especially in P, and especially in the case of recipients whom they viewed as undeserving of public support, namely Roma people and people of low social status. And such experiences of humiliation not only moderated recipients' temper, but also had further-reaching consequences such as the 'co-construction of the shame of poverty' (Chase and Walker, 2013) discussed in Chapter 5 and 7.

Recipients responded to the infantilising treatment by the administrators in different ways. Some of them clearly behaved in the office as if they were incompetent or children, such as greeting or addressing administrators in terms that children use with adults, similar to calling Ms X 'Aunt X'. A couple of recipients did in fact ask the administrator to tell them what to put in the declaration form – why they needed crisis support, for instance, which they clearly knew best themselves. In addition, recipients' verbal communication with the administrators was also clearly affected by the treatment they experienced in the welfare office. The participant observation suggested that even the recipients who talked in an assertive manner in the interviews and/or in the waiting area were often very quiet while being received in the administrators' office. Most of them talked very briefly, in a low voice, often in a defensive or submissive manner there.

Moreover, many spoke overly apologetically: they apologised not only for losing their temper (which they hardly did in fact), but also for knocking on the door as discussed above and for visiting the office at all. 'I'm outta here now, I don't bug you any longer' – said an elderly woman while leaving the office. Along the same line, indicating the perceived power differences between the case managers and the recipients, a number of clients thanked administrators for their 'efforts' (as some literally put it) excessively – as if managing their cases was not their right as citizens and therefore the basic job of the administrators, but instead officials were acting out of favour or charity. In one

occasion in P, a man (white, middle-aged, of higher status before he lost his employment) brought chocolate to the administrator after returning from abroad where he was seeking employment. The administrator was first hesitant to accept the gift and said: 'We do not do our job for this', but did accept it in the end. The fact that a client tried to buy off the administrator in this way indicates the insecurity of his position as a citizen – instead of feeling confident about his right to certain services and benefits in the welfare office, he felt the need to 'earn' or buy this right. And the fact that the administrator accepted the gift reinforced this image of the functioning of social assistance provision in contemporary Hungary. However, this example also indicates the weight of the differences among the recipients' socio-economic background, as many interview participants would not have been able to buy such a gift to please the administrator. Lastly, such self-perceptions not only had repercussions on recipients' sense of their citizenship but also on the ways in which they exercised their citizenship in practice, as demonstrated below.

Explanations - Prejudices

The participant observation data suggested that such treatment was partly explained by the administrators' prejudices. During lunch breaks (in S), and while pursuing administrative tasks on non-client days (both in P and S), the officials often referred to ESB recipients in derogatory, sometimes vulgar, terms, such as 'stupid' or 'illiterate Gypsies' in general, and called particular clients

'bastard', 'stinker', 'fucking beggar' amongst one another. In addition, in P, administrators also attached derogatory nicknames to certain clients, which made fun of their social status or ethnicity, such as 'Mr I fink' or the 'big-boob Gipsy girls'. Such language was clearly more prevalent in P, but I observed it in S as well on some occasions. Such differences between the two offices are discussed later in this chapter.

Apart from such recurring remarks, administrators demonstrated a derogatory view of ESB recipients' overall morality and work ethic in particular on a number of occasions. The general view of the staff in both offices – with important nuances, demonstrated below – was that recipients did not want to work and therefore, used all kinds of tricks to abuse the welfare system. 'The only verifiable thing is that they come in' – said one of the administrators sarcastically in the P office. 'See, he did manage to make the doctor claim he was incapable of doing public works in the end!' – remarked the acting head administrator in S indignantly about a recipient, implying that even though the man was in fact apt for public works, he made the doctor claim that he was not. In both localities, the officials were continually discussing that recipients were always late from public works, often did not show up at all, went on sick leave all the time, and did informal work that they tried to hide from the office. In certain cases, they also confronted the recipient directly with these preconceptions. For example, a 25-year-old white woman in P expressed how offended she was when the administrator told her; 'You are a young woman,

you have to go to work. It is not true that you cannot find a job.’ Whereas, her age and the resulting lack of work experiences, together with her low level of education made it very difficult for her to find stable employment.

In addition to the supposed poor work ethic of recipients, the staff viewed the majority of ESB recipients as unfit for meaningful work, due to their insufficient capabilities. Soss et al. (2011) compellingly demonstrate that the welfare regime that they define as ‘neoliberal paternalism’

identifies the poor individual as one who is suitable for incorporation as a responsible worker- citizen but who will be unlikely to make this transition unless the state acts on its obligation to impose social order and instil self-discipline. Neoliberal paternalism promises that, by becoming self-disciplined workers, the poor can achieve full societal membership. Their current marginality reflects the fact that they are undisciplined and irresponsible; their work ethic is underdeveloped; their sexuality is unrestrained; and, as a result, their communities are plagued by disorder and pathology. (p. 81)

As the above examples demonstrate, such views were prevalent among welfare officials in post-transition Hungary; and these preconceptions played out in their interactions with ESB recipients. ‘These ones for an assembly plant? Don’t they [the mayor and the employment centre] know who we deal with?’ – asked the director of the welfare department in S with a dramatic surprise when the employment centre asked them to recruit ESB recipients for an assembly plant as public workers.

Recipients’ alcohol abuse was also a recurring topic of discussion among administrators, yet another issue that demonstrated for them the undeserving

character of their clientele. In S, it was scheduled that the director of the welfare department would visit public works sites in the city and check workers' blood alcohol level with a breathalyser; and this plan was unequivocally supported by the administrators in the office. Later, when it turned out that workers had been checked (by their supervisor, not the director in the end) and no evidence of alcohol abuse was found, administrators were rather upset and disappointed by supposedly the missed opportunity. One of them remarked that testing 'shouldn't be announced in advance, as if it was not, then many [recipients] could be thrown out [of the social assistance system]', which they regarded a favourable state of affairs. In addition, the administrators were similarly frustrated with the fact (or what they believed to be a fact) that in many cases the recipients claimed benefit while they were in fact not eligible for it, but they did not have the means to do anything about it. 'The law does not allow us to check these things', as an administrator in S expressed their general resentment.

Dunn (2014) argues that in the UK context many UK-born citizens are unwilling to undertake the less attractive jobs and in fact prefer living of welfare provision, however, the dominant narrative of social policy literature has overlooked this fact and explained high levels of unemployment exclusively by structural factors. Dunn however contends that claimants' testimonies are a poor evidence of their actual behaviour, since they have an interest in claiming that they want to find employment, and therefore suggests that instead of their testimonies case workers' views should be studied in order to gain a valid

picture of the real attitudes of unemployed people towards employment. However, this research relied not only on recipients' testimonies in this regard but also the quantitative evidence available that clearly demonstrated that there were not enough employment opportunities in contemporary Hungary, and the clientele of ESB provision – many of whom were highly disadvantaged people, long-term unemployed, with low levels of education, facing multiple health problems – was particularly prone to not being able to find employment (Kertesi, 2005; Köllő, 2009; Scharle, 2012). The research of the ombudsperson also found that even within this particularly marginalised group (that is, ESB recipients), the most vulnerable – women, people with weaker physical capacities or Roma people, who faced severe discrimination on the Hungarian labour market based on their ethnicity – were further disadvantaged in terms of finding formal employment (AJBH, 2013). Even though the main conclusion of this investigation is similar to the above views of welfare administrators, that is, the recipients acute lack of capabilities, the ombudsperson's explanation differs from that of the staff in that it highlights structural factors, whereas the staff seemed to focus on the deficiencies of their clients and the derogatory stereotypes they had about them.

Another recurring theme of the conversations among administrators was, in both localities, that Roma women 'do not work a minute in their lives', they 'start giving birth' at as early an age as possible and after that this was the only thing they did in life, so that they could claim family and child benefits and live

on them. This was a prevalent view in Hungarian public discourses in general (Durst, 2001), while statistical data have clearly demonstrated that having children is an attribute that significantly increases the risk of poverty in contemporary Hungary (KSH, 2010).

In addition, one of the officials in P was recurrently complaining about ESB recipients ignoring their arrears (of rent or utilities). In her understanding, recipients knew that such liabilities were not deductible from their benefit and abused this policy, while others – conscientious citizens like herself – worked hard to make a living and gave up on a number of conveniences to be able to pay all their dues. Both administrators whose work I closely observed in P resented the fact that people in arrears could be eligible for welfare benefits at all. In other words, on the one hand the law guaranteed recipients' right to 'a modicum of economic welfare and security' by ensuring that certain forms of provisions were not cut by deductions in any circumstances. On the other hand, certain street-level officials had misgivings about the fairness of such a right, which affected their behaviour with the clients and in this way the substance of this right in practice. For example, if the recipients agreed to receive the benefit in cash, the officials could and did pay an amount reduced by the client's dues.

In addition, another form of benefit abuse often suspected by the administrators was that clients cheated on the "one household – one benefit" rule (see Chapter 5). That is, couples either divorced on paper or one of them registered an address different from that of their spouse only in order to be eligible for two

sets of benefits (one each). In some cases, administrators confronted ESB recipients and claimants with this accusation in a patronising and prying manner: 'But you sleep together, right?' – the administrator asked a Roma couple in P when they told her that they were divorced. But even if administrators did not express their disbelief so explicitly, their tone or their facial expressions often suggested that they did not believe the clients. This was perceived as highly derogatory by some recipients. For example, an elderly couple came into the P office on one occasion, and the man indignantly asked the administrators why they had suggested to his wife – who had mental health problems – to get a divorce when she had come to the office earlier by herself. That is, this was how she had understood the administrators' explanation of the "one household – one benefit" rule. I had not observed that particular interaction, however, the participant observation did demonstrate that the implementation of this particular piece of regulation by the officials was indeed inappropriate on some occasions as discussed below. The man explained that he had been supporting his wife for a long time and would not separate from her just because of the benefit. Such interrogations, apart from their humiliating effects, also violated recipients' right to privacy. When the administrator told a recipient 'You need to fix your family. It does not work that you are shifting all the time [being together or separated], the law does not recognise that', she clearly went beyond her remit and meddled in the client's private life. Most of the recipients who experienced such a treatment happened bore this silently.

And as the above examples demonstrate, this silence was – at least partly – explained by their extreme financial and political vulnerability as recipients of ESB.

In addition, the husband in the above example was clearly very offended and pointed out that they had never asked for any support from the municipality before, as an evidence of his capability in general to maintain his family. The fact that someone was claiming benefit for the first time was highlighted by many people claiming or receiving ESB both in the interviews (to me) and during the participant observation (to administrators). It demonstrates the shame recipients felt about claiming benefit and the internalised social norms that a citizen should not live on welfare transfers but on labour wages – as many people explicitly asserted in the interviews. Such preconceptions reflect the damaging stigma attached to people receiving social assistance in contemporary Hungary in general and hence, reinforce the humiliation and delegitimisation of people in need of this assistance. When such stigmatisation is being imposed by welfare officials, who represent the political community in these interactions, recipients' sense of being citizens easily gets damaged, as the interviews powerfully demonstrated. Several recipients asserted that their claims were called into question by administrators, which they felt to be humiliating. For example, a young Roma man in P accidentally pierced himself with a used injection needle while cleaning the park as a public works assignment. Later when he requested first aid and claimed reimbursement for

the costs of disinfectants that he needed to buy, he was accused of piercing himself on purpose – not to have to do the job. He strongly resented the supposition, which made him feel unjustly accused and like a fraudster.

In S, Erika, a 32-year-old white woman was also very offended by the fact that she had been accused by the administrator in the welfare office of violating the rules of ESB eligibility. In the end it turned out that the problem was in fact the result of a mistake by an administrator in the office. She mentioned this case several times in the interview and conveyed that it was a deeply humiliating experience for her to have been disbelieved. Thirdly, a middle-aged Roma woman in P asserted that she felt truly hurt when the administrator in the employment office did not believe that it was the first time she was unemployed in her life, which implied a questioning of her work ethic.

The above findings demonstrated administrators' overall prejudiced perception of ESB recipients. But more specifically, the participant observation also revealed that the officials' discourse had a racist tone in many cases. This racial bias was clearly more prevalent in P – where the Roma population was higher – but repeatedly occurred in S as well. One of the administrators in P often talked in a xenophobic way in general, asserting, for example, that 'in Brussels, Arabs are begging everywhere, they don't work, they don't adapt [to the local culture]', but especially concerning Roma people in Hungary. She often complained about Roma people not working but 'having lived on welfare for generations by now', 'fill up the country with their babies', 'populate the entire

world'. She referred to Roma women as 'childbearing machines' who 'have not worked one minute in their life', but rather, 'as soon as they are old enough, they come to the office for the benefit'. It was the same administrator as the one mentioned above to have biased views about the Roma women's childbearing, however, her biased views clearly influenced the attitude of her colleague as discussed below.

In the present research, the interviews did not indicate significant differences in how Roma and white recipients perceived their treatment in the welfare office. However, there were a few Roma participants who suspected biased treatment. A more robust finding is what the participant observation data (especially the informal conversations between administrators and department managers discussed above) suggested, namely that racial prejudice was so deeply ingrained in the cognitive structures of welfare administrators at the front lines of implementation that, even in the absence of overt racial discrimination, race proved to be a powerful force that shaped administrative interactions and guided street-level decisions about ESB provision both in P and S. A consequence of this was the differential treatment that a number of recipients sensed and the participant observation confirmed in both offices.

There were clients whom administrators dealt with in a compassionate manner: those whom they found deserving for some reason – for example widowed elderly women living on small pensions; people who had been of higher status earlier; or those whom they knew personally. None of these favoured categories

consisted of Roma recipients, however. When administrators saw such 'deserving' clients, they very clearly demonstrated their empathy and made efforts to help them gain meaningful support, which often succeeded. In P, for example, the administrator gave advice to certain clients about how to get round the 'one household-one benefit' rule on a couple of occasions, while rebuking a number of people for supposedly having abused this rule, as demonstrated above. But even if their attempt to help a particular client did not succeed, administrators communicated the bad news in a sensitive and supportive manner in these cases.

For example, on one occasion a white middle-aged couple came into the P office with a child in a stroller. While they were waiting outside, the man told his partner that: 'This is not your shame, this is the shame of this society that you cannot find a job with two children'. When they entered the office, it soon turned out that they were not eligible for the ESB that the woman wanted to apply for, and the man became quite irritated. However, the administrator did not react to this in a paternalistic, reprimanding way as she did in many cases according to the participant observation data. Instead, she acted in a very understanding and supportive manner – she devoted time to talk to them and to calm the man down, and recognised their efforts to provide for their children. In the end the man's anger was tempered, and he apologised for his outburst. This case suggested that, even though the administrator did not have the power to actually help the couple to get financial support from the municipality, with

minor effort (that did not require significant institutional resources, only a couple of additional minutes from her working time and some emotional work) she could actually provide meaningful support for them.

Gaventa (2002) demonstrates that

How people perceive themselves as citizens, and how (or indeed, whether) they are recognised by others, is likely to have a significant impact on how they act to claim their citizenship rights in the first place (p. 5).

That is, support of the kind that the above couple and other, favoured, clients received in the welfare office is crucial for maintaining one's sense of citizenship – as an external affirmation of one's efforts and aspirations, and an institutional recognition of one's membership in society, even if not manifested in actual benefit provision. However, the present research demonstrates that such empowering treatment was not available for every client - neither in P nor in S.

Soss et al. (2011) compellingly argue that

At the front lines of implementation, race proved no less important. It operates today as a powerful force shaping administrative interactions and guiding street-level decisions about who should get what, when, and how. ... The problem is not that a few bad apples act as racists within the system. To the contrary, race is central to how the system operates; core features of the system contribute reliably to the production of racial disparities; and they do so regardless of whether specific actors in the system consciously approve of racially unequal treatment. (p. 16)

That is,

race provides a key cultural resource for the production of poverty governance. ...

[R]acial schemas can operate as powerful cognitive structures guiding perception and choice in poverty governance—even in the absence of overt prejudice, ingroup favouritism, or intentions to discriminate. (p. 14)

This chapter provides ample evidence of stigmatising racial schemas on the part of the case managers in both offices, and I argue that these ‘cognitive structures’ played a part in producing recipients’ very different experiences of ESB provision. A powerful example of the differentiation between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ recipients by administrators was when an official in S told me: ‘I cannot help people who really need support, while these ones abuse the system’. In this comment the administrator not only explicitly categorised recipients as ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’, but also dehumanised the ones she conceived of as undeserving by referring to them as *ezeke*, that is a Hungarian term usually used in relation to objects and not people. Moreover, in P, one of the administrators admitted once that ‘I am prejudiced sometimes, though I am not so really, it’s just because of my experiences, I’ve seen many things’.

Furthermore, another crucial finding of the participant observation, closely related to the above point, is that, even though welfare officials clearly differed in their attitudes towards recipients – in particular Roma recipients – a powerful socialisation mechanism operated among them. That is, it was not only the recipients who were socialised in the welfare complex to view themselves and behave in certain ways, but the administrators also picked up certain attitudes and behaviours from their colleagues, their supervisors, the

regulations that governed their job, and/or the decision-makers who issued these regulations. In other words, case workers learned from one another how to view and treat recipients, and one medium of this mutual learning process was the language they used in the office, both with the recipients directly and behind their backs. A notable example of this socialisation process was when one of the two administrators working in the same office room in P explicitly said when she was vulgar about a client that 'I was not always like this, I didn't used to speak like this', and her colleague replied 'You learned it from me'. 'Yes, I learned from you' – she responded in agreement. This socialisation process is a possible explanation for the differences identified between the Hungarian and the US context in terms of how the administrators view working directly with the clients discussed below.

Also, in S, where I had the chance to observe the work of five administrators not only two as in P, I found that most of the officials were not particularly biased in terms of recipients' ethnicity; but the harsh racial prejudices of one worker strongly informed the general atmosphere in the welfare office in terms of race. This particular staff member used harsh, derogatory words referring to the recipients, often doing so in a loud voice, sometimes even when the recipient was in earshot. She was not a case administrator but a welfare assistant; therefore, she was not supposed (or authorised) to handle clients' cases directly, only to help administrators with purely administrative matters. She had not completed any education relevant to welfare practice at the time of the research;

she was considering applying to an evening school from the upcoming fall. Nevertheless, she constantly interacted with clients – handed out documents to them, talked to them in the waiting area, and sometimes even picked up the phone and gave them information or advice. Also, she was a full member of the staff community – worked with the caseworkers in the same offices, had lunch with them and so on – and thus, she talked with them about recipients a lot. Therefore, her demeaning tone could easily have an effect on the entire office – on administrators as well as recipients.

On one occasion, two administrators in the office were explicitly complaining about the assistant's vulgar language, expressing their worries about 'the image she conveys of the office'. Eventually, the acting head administrator asked her not to speak directly to the clients, either in person or on the phone. However, the participant observation showed that she continued to interact with the clients in person and I have no knowledge of administrators officially reporting her attitude to the head of the department or talking to her about how to behave in the office so that she conveyed a better image of it. This, I argue, points to systemic problems in the office, namely that the acute lack of institutional capacities (discussed in Chapter 7), paired with a consistently large volume of work, made administrators grateful for having an assistant, and even if they were clearly not satisfied with her work this made them cautious about losing her help.

On the other hand, there were nonetheless clear differences among

administrators in terms of how they treated recipients. In the interviews, many recipients asserted that the treatment they experienced in the welfare office and the actual support they got there very much depended on which administrator saw them. Some told me that they would rather wait for a particular administrator – whom they found nicer and more supportive than the others – or even come back on another day if she happened to be out of the office. While such accounts point to a certain extent of individual agency on the part of recipients (namely, that some did make choices concerning administrators), on the other hand, this was an option only in S, since in P clients were assigned to administrators by their initials, as discussed in Chapter 5. Furthermore, these experiences also indicated recipients' perception of their high level of vulnerability (on the personality, helpfulness or daily mood of an administrator) rather than a sense of being citizens with stable rights to certain provisions and fair treatment.

Institutional failures

The last point leads on to the institutional failures that I identified as another key explanatory factor of recipients' disempowering treatment by administrators, in addition to the deep-rooted prejudices discussed above. Research have shown that street-level bureaucrats have conflicting emotions about their work in many cases. They are employed to help people; however, institutional constraints often prevent them from actually supporting their

clients in any meaningful way (Lipsky, 1980; Haney, 2009). Related to this, Soss et al. (2011) powerfully demonstrate that

Case managers do not “buy in” to the neoliberal agenda, internalizing it as a hegemonic ideology and enacting it as their own free will (Ridzi 2009). They experience it, sometimes with pride and sometimes with dismay, as the organizing reality of their daily routines. Most feel torn by conflicting emotions when they reflect on the business model and its implications for the work they do. (p. 203-204)

For example, on one occasion the acting head of the welfare department in S regretfully explained in an informal interview that the extreme workload was very tiring and ‘then you often don’t talk to others as you ought to’. Besides, administrators in S asserted that they did not have enough time to deal with clients appropriately, as they were aware of the long line of clients in the waiting area. As I discussed in the previous chapter, to a certain extent the time constraints were caused by the inefficient work management in the offices and in some cases the staff over-reacted to the volume of the client caseload, and further distressed one another by this. But it was clearly demonstrated by the research data that the administrators had to deal with a large and increasing caseload (for example, the volume of public works employees quadrupled between 2010 and 2015 in Hungary), and the administrative burden on casework was very high, as demonstrated in Chapter 7. Nevertheless, while the administrators in S recognised in some cases that the heavy workload sometimes prevented them from treating recipients appropriately, it was more characteristic of their approach to their job in both locations that they prioritised

paperwork over the casework with clients. They often complained about being kept back from 'actually doing their job' – that is, doing paperwork – by 'having to deal with' clients. A typical expression of resentment about this was when an administrator in S said that 'I wish there were no clients so they would not bother us'.

This finding is especially revealing in the light of the fact that in other local settings – albeit in the same broader context of the global expansion of a neoliberal political economy (Gough, 1979; Wacquant, 2009; Schram and Silverman, 2012; Gustafson, 2011; Piven, 2012), discussed in Chapter 2 – street-level case managers of welfare provisions resent the increasing technicalisation of their job. For example, welfare officials in the US argue that

The job's all about time, accuracy, and files now. There's a person [client] down there somewhere. But the technical stuff is what matters. ... If you talk to any case manager here, they will tell you they're not a case manager; they're a technician. They spend about 10 percent of their time on their clients. Their time is about being a technician, and that's the way the program is written. They're doing what they have to do under this system. (Soss et al., 2011, p. 224)

The present research demonstrates that resenting one-on-one case management became part of the office culture both in P and S. This was partly the result of the influence of administrators on one another, discussed above. However, as the latter example persuasively shows, in other contexts different attitudes prevail. It indicates that institutional safeguards, such as supervision for front-line administrators, adequate control and regular assessment of their work or

self-assessment reports could guarantee that the positive practices and attitudes become socialised in the office.

Such an attitude to direct work with clients necessarily had an effect on the ways in which the staff treated recipients. One consequence was rushing this part of their job, and recipients for that matter, so that they had more time for doing what they considered more important. And this, in turn, had an effect on recipients as well – on their self-perception as clients, as well as on their behaviour in the office. In addition to feeling devalued and neglected, many recipients expressed in the interviews their feeling that they were a burden for administrators. ‘I can see that she [the administrator] cannot wait for me to leave the room’ – as Viktória described bitterly how she felt in the S welfare office. Others highlighted that they were not listened to during the appointment; they were hastened, if not as explicitly as above, then implicitly, by the administrator being very brief and/or half-hearted, as the following examples demonstrate:

I feel as if I disturbed them [the administrators], whereas they are there for us [the clients.] (Lilla, 23-year-old white woman in S)

I can sense her thinking “why did this come here?” (Béla, 48-year-old white man in P)

The latter example also indicates that the way in which the administrators communicated with the clients had a dehumanising effect on some recipients, discussed above.

The participant observation data confirmed and explained these perceptions of

recipients. The staff often talked about their job half-heartedly in both offices and they treated recipients accordingly in many cases. They were very brief when talking to recipients most of the time; they were often impatient when listening to the clients and therefore hurried them, if not explicitly (by their brevity, for instance) then through their meta-communication – their facial and bodily gestures, or the annoyed tone of their voice. In a number of cases, administrators tried to save time by refusing to give substantive answers to the questions of recipients, and instead gave them brief and evasive responses, such as ‘it’s written down’, ‘it will be explained in the mail’, or ‘just go there [to the public works site] and they will know’. Moreover, administrators often responded to recipients’ questions by a short but outright ‘I don’t know’, often without making any effort to find out the real answer.

That is, as a result of thinking of recipients as a burden, administrators often treated them as such. This, in turn, not only communicated that recipients were a burden or an irritation to the officials, but also led to administrators being less informative with recipients and/or recipients being less capable of comprehending the information they received. ‘Compressed in two sentences, in this bureaucratic language, I do not understand [what administrators say]’ – Erika frustratedly summarised the experiences of many recipients. Such experiences show that the institutional circumstances made administrators go through the paperwork as fast as they could which, in turn, put pressure on recipients to hurry up that made them unable to ask questions, and

administrators could not provide them with adequate – detailed and intelligible – information. The staff could not meaningfully explain the regulations and recipients' obligations, and they could not dedicate the time necessary to thoroughly assess clients' needs and opportunities to satisfy those needs. Consequently, recipients were not aware of even the basics of ESB provision. In addition to the evidence of recipients' lack of information discussed above, only 3 interview participants were aware of the official name of the provision they received. Moreover, many recipients did not know the name of their own case manager either – a remarkable finding that was corroborated by my observations, as I did not note a single event when the case worker introduced herself to the client, even if the client came to the office for the first time.

Besides the hastened treatment, the use of jargonistic language in the office was also a difficulty many recipients had to face both in person and through the official documents. In addition to remarks about this in the interviews such as the above, the participant observation also demonstrated that administrators' communication in person was not only brief and indifferent in many cases, but also incomprehensible to lay people due to the use of bureaucratic jargon without adequate explanation, such as: 'This is all I have, I printed it from FOKA'¹⁷ (administrator in the S welfare office). Or

Administrator (in the S office): It is administrative break today.

ESB recipient: What does it mean?

¹⁷ FOKA is the abbreviation of the name of the software used both in the municipality welfare office and the employment centre to register clients' employment history, including public works employment too.

Administrator: That there are no office hours today.

In addition to such conversations in person, a number of participants complained in the interviews that they did not understand the documents the welfare office sent or handed to them; and these personal accounts were corroborated by the participant observation: the documents indeed used a bureaucratic, often legalistic jargon that was very hard to understand for someone who was not a professional. As Péter, a 23-year-old Roma man in S eloquently put it

There is not much written down in popular language. I mean, for example 'on the basis of Article 15 Section 32'. I do not understand that, and if I ask, it is possible that the welfare administrator doesn't understand it either and can't tell me what it is about.

That is, this recipient not only resented the unintelligibility of the documents provided by the welfare office, but also demonstrated his lack of trust in the competence of the case managers – a prevalent view among recipients in both locations. However, the case managers were the representatives of the local authority, and ultimately the state, in these interactions; therefore, recipients' disappointment in their professional capacities was likely to contribute to recipients' general lack of trust in the state administration, as confirmed by the findings presented in Chapter 4.

As discussed in Chapter 3, it is a key principle of institutional ethnography as an analytical framework to highlight the importance of texts in the functioning of institutional structures and devote due attention to them in the analysis.

Therefore, textual analysis was a crucial feature of the present research, which found that official documents indeed played a significant role in social assistance provision in post-transition Hungary. The immense and often superfluous administrative burden on the officials and its consequences was demonstrated in the previous chapter. Moreover, the research data shows that interpersonal communication with clients was often replaced by issuing and/or circulating documents. One example of this practice was when the case worker in the employment centre issued a document and ordered the client to take it into the welfare office, instead of informing them about the steps they needed to take. Some interview participants interpreted this practice as being neglected by the office and resented it. This institutional practice reduced recipients to the instrumental function of data transmission, as opposed to enhancing their ownership of their own 'cases' and their capabilities of handling their benefit as their due citizenship right.

And both the interviews and the participant observation showed that the documents through which communication between the institution and the individual was accomplished was often unintelligible to the latter – they were in many cases lengthy and complex, cited the exact, legalistic wording of the law, and/or used bureaucratic jargon without explanation. A compelling example of this institutional practice and its consequences was the way in which ESB recipients were informed about the possibilities of meeting the 30-day work condition by doing volunteer or household work (discussed in

Chapter 5). There was a clear difference between the two locations in this regard. In S, only one participant mentioned registered household work in the interview as an option to fulfil the workfare condition; however, even his account was an indication of his overall lack of adequate information about the provision, which was exemplary of recipients' general level of (not) being informed, as demonstrated above. When I asked the participant what happened when he asked a question of the case manager in the welfare office, he said that often he did not really understand the response.

She said the other day, for example, that I should have ... household work ... I say, I brought a paper [a document] with me ... I do household work ... at home and all that ... and she says 'not that kind of household work, but *apeh.hu*¹⁸ and whatnot I should check. Oh, I say, dear God, I say, it must be about working in the backyard of a politician like a gofer or something like that, and this is nuts, I tell you, and then they took it [the assistance] away. (István, 47-year-old white man in S)

This account is a reflection of the recurring news in the Hungarian media about compulsory public works being used to mandate people to work on mayors' private premises. But it also reflects the deep sense of powerlessness on the part of recipients vis-à-vis political decision-makers and the welfare authority, which was reinforced by the harsh workfare conditionality of ESB provision and the number of cases revealed to the public in which mayors were found guilty of using public works employees for their tasks.

¹⁸ *apeh.hu* is the website of the National Tax and Customs Administration of Hungary. Citizens who intend to do paid housework have to register on this website.

In contrast, however, in P, 4 out of the 19 interview participants demonstrated an awareness of the household work option. The reason for this was partly the fact that the written decision recipients received concerning their benefit claim explicitly mentioned this possibility in P but not at all in S (there, only volunteer work was mentioned as an option to fulfil the condition). However, the information provided in the document in P was not accessible for the recipients – it cited the exact wording of the law, which a highly educated person would find difficult to understand, let alone clients, who have low levels of education in general, as demonstrated in Chapter 5.

The other reason for the difference between the two sites in this regard was the fact that the comprehensive analysis of the public works programme conducted by the ombudsperson discussed in the previous chapters, selected P as a subject of the analysis, and found controversial elements in the local regulation; as a result, the ombudsperson prescribed recommendations to the local authority. An administrator in the P office explained that they made changes in their procedures following the report; and one of these changes was the inclusion of the household work option in the official decision sent out to clients who were declared eligible for receiving ESB. That is, the report resulted in the improvement of P's practices, which in this way were more client-friendly than in S in this regard.

Nevertheless, if we conceive of following regulations and fulfilling obligations as important components of citizenship – as many interview participants did –

then recipients' lack of information about the regulation of ESB seems counterproductive. Griggs and Bennett (2009) argue that if someone did not understand eligibility conditions and sanctions, the regulation could not achieve the desired effects. Moreover, Gustafson (2011) powerfully shows that if we want people to act as citizens we need to treat them as such; and adequate information is the cornerstone of such treatment – in regard to welfare provisions, just as in any other domain of civic life. Gustafson's ethnographic research of contemporary US welfare policies persuasively demonstrates that the prevalent lack of valid information on the part of recipients of social assistance is not only harmful for the recipient personally but also impairs the effective functioning of the given provision as recipients not fully aware of the regulation and the sanctions of non-compliance are by no means able to fully comply with the rules and meet policy-makers' expectations.

In addition to feeling second-class as citizens and not being adequately informed, the derogatory treatment in the office and/or the feeling of being a burden to the officials also made some recipients more reserved and less assertive and in this way curtailed their actual civic efforts, such as inquiring about available provisions. Erika said, for example, that 'I wanted to ask something once, but the style in which they spoke to me, I felt, no, that's it, let's get out of here.' Jolán said she was explicitly told by the administrator that 'they cannot be burdened this much, they do not deal with such things' when she asked for help in the office, and she asserted that this was the reason why she

did not ask for help from the case managers. In addition, Lilla explained in the interview that it was possible to ask administrators questions; however, she felt discouraged by their half-heartedness: 'Well, I don't know. When you see that she [the administrator] is immersed in the computer and just puts things down there and whatnot, so you have the feeling as if you disturbed them, while they are there for you after all.' In the end, this experience made this woman prefer not to ask any questions in the office. Even though it was mostly women who expressed such restraints as a result of the treatment in the office, a young Roma man in S also asserted that 'You can ask questions, but they get rid of you quickly and respond flatly if you inquire.' As a result, for example, participants asked me, worrying, what I knew about prospective further cuts of ESB about which there had been rumours in S. They did not dare to or did not see the point of asking the officials about it, which caused them a lot of anxiety and also left them helpless concerning the issue of potential benefit cuts. That is, even though (some) recipients were aware of having a right to the full services of the welfare office, the hasty and sometimes harsh treatment resulted in their not fully exercising this right.

Moreover, when I asked Erika about her experiences with making complaints, she referred to both her lack of information as to the complaints procedure and to being afraid of a rebuke:

Last year I would have done it [made a complaint], had I known how to and to whom, but I didn't. There is no information as to whom to turn to, if you can do it at all, and

also perhaps that person would bite my head off too, so I didn't.

Another client, also in S, asserted that she did not make a complaint, because she thought that no-one would listen to her. These are particularly important examples of recipients' basic civil rights having been curtailed by the harsh, condemning or indifferent treatment they experienced in the welfare office. In these cases, the interview participants themselves made an explicit link between being treated in a condescending or uninterested manner in the office and deciding not to exercise their right to legal remedy. These findings allow for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms – the institutional and mental processes – through which this effect came about.

For example, a number of interview participants linked their practice of signing documents without actually reading or fully understanding them with these experiences. István explained that some recipients 'simply don't want to understand' the rules and therefore, the administrators cannot help them; and in such cases, he argued, administrators 'just turn the sheet and say, "sign it here" and that's it'. In addition, Lilla said: 'She [the administrator] had me sign a paper, I did not even know what it was. ... So I did not get any information [about the details of the provision.]' Similarly, Erika reasoned that 'No, you just sign and then it [the document] is taken away from you straight away. There is nothing like you read it, at least they [administrators] have never given me [the opportunity]' (32-year-old white woman in S). An extreme example of this was when an illiterate elderly Roma woman was made to sign documents without

them having been read out loud for her and without the presence of witnesses or her legal guardian¹⁹.

And the participant observation corroborated this account – it was only a few clients whom I saw taking the time to read the documents before signing, getting any help with reading the documents or challenging the content thereof during the two one-month periods of the participant observation, and most of them were higher status clients (white men with higher levels of education). Moreover, I also witnessed one occasion when an illiterate recipient was made to sign a document (by three Xs) while neither his guardian nor any witnesses were present to approve of the fairness of the procedure.

Coping mechanism

In addition to prejudices and institutional failures, a third explanation for the indifferent, and often harsh, treatment of ESB recipients in the welfare office that the present research identified is that it was a coping mechanism for the officials in a situation in which they 'are positioned to experience most intimately the clash of social needs and market pressures' (Soss et al. 2011, p. 202). Soss et al. (2011) compellingly demonstrate that 'Some [case managers] find it painful to think about the gap between their hopes of helping the needy and their daily experiences implementing TANF policy' (p. 203). And as a

¹⁹ If someone is illiterate in Hungary, her/his signature is legally valid only if it is confirmed by their legal guardian or by two witnesses.

result, caseworkers sanction clients out of frustration as many admitted in their research (2011, p. 228). The findings of the present research show that this pain and frustration was also manifested in the contemporary Hungarian welfare complex, with similar repercussions to what Soss et al. (2011) described.

In the interviews, a number of participants themselves reasoned that the administrators were 'tired or apathetic about dealing with the benefit all the time' and that was why they did not treat the clients as they were supposed to. Working in a system that does not make it possible for case managers to provide meaningful support to their clients, viewing recipients as undeserving of the support of the community can help the administrators to distance themselves from the recipients and to avoid the psychological burden of not being able to help. The participant observation demonstrated on several occasions that even in relation to severe hardships, such as death in the client's family or the loss of their ESB eligibility, administrators often responded to them in a flat, unemotional manner. In some cases, they even became cynical – such as when someone claimed crisis support to do some essential renovation on their house, and the administrator told her to come back if the house was demolished. I argue that renovation may not be a legitimate reason for claiming crisis support, nonetheless the status of being a citizen, which establishes the client status, would require that the client is answered in an objective, professional manner, referencing the regulation rather than being mocked by the staff. In other cases, administrators tried to completely avoid the clients

whom they feared would complain about their hardships. For example, when the acting head administrator in S heard that a woman 'who always complained a lot' (in her view) was coming to see her, she told her colleague: 'No, don't let her come here, tell her to sign [the document] and go to the cashier'.

In addition to avoiding hearing about the problems of ESB claimants and recipients, another way for administrators to distance themselves from the hardships their clients faced was to blame recipients for their plight or minimise the potential repercussions of their situation. For instance, when I asked an administrator in P why so many people had not fulfilled the 30-day workfare condition, she told me that 'they will live on the family allowance of the wife' and that ESB was in fact so meagre that it was 'only pocket money for them anyway and they keep on hustling [get involved in illegal or informal activities] while taking it'. (See further examples of such views in Chapter 7.)

Again, this is not about a few 'bad apples', i.e. incompetent or mean officials in the system, but primarily about institutional deficiencies. The participant observation demonstrated that administrators not only had to work in near to impossible institutional circumstances, but there was also an overall lack of recognition of their efforts in the system. In P, both administrators whose work I closely observed frequently complained about their very low salary that had not even been adjusted by the inflation. On the one hand, it made them feel that their work was not recognised; and on the other, being underpaid contributed

to their resentment at their clients' receiving a transfer from the very institutions that failed to pay them a decent salary. Furthermore, they also felt that their work was not recognised in other ways either. The day after Civil Servants' Day²⁰ one of them explained bitterly that that year there had only been a modest ceremony the day before, and no longer a reception or an annual bonus as it used to be in the past.

Being underpaid was also a recurring topic in the S welfare office. The participant observation demonstrated significant differences among administrators' livelihood – some of them never mentioned any personal financial difficulties, while others complained that 'people earn more in Tesco than us here'. What is more, some of the administrators were themselves eligible for certain benefits provided by their own office. And they were also resentful of the lack of recognition and/or rewards of their work, especially as compared to other professions, as the following conversation between two administrators in the S office demonstrates:

Administrator1: In a school, people are at least given love, and recognition.

Administrator2: Children make you younger, while we are just getting older here.

The department director in P explained that welfare administrators had to work a lot in the office due to the capacity constraints and often stayed longer hours voluntarily so that they could finish what needed to be done without any form of compensation. She confirmed that there were no institutional protocols or

²⁰ Civil Servants' Day is an annual celebration of the work of civil servants in Hungary on 1 July, the day on which the Act on civil servants came into power in 1992.

procedures against the burn-out of case workers, and explained that they tried to make up for such systemic deficiencies as best they could. For example, they 'stole' a bit of the working hours – when it was not a client day – to celebrate personal anniversaries, so that they could 'recharge a little bit'. Also, they tried to compensate for the unpaid overtime by being flexible if the administrators had to run errands during office hours. In addition, the head of the welfare office confirmed the lack of supervision or any other form of institutional emotional support for administrators, and lamented that sometimes she had difficulties dealing with case workers' inappropriate behaviour and the conflicts among them. The institution clearly did not provide any tools for her to handle such situations. The S department director linked these institutional deficiencies directly to the stigmatised social position clientele of the office. She argued that

ours is the department that drains the municipality budget. We have a lot of clients, who are ... they are not elite people. So I feel ... or I believe that [our position within the municipality] is quite unfavourable.

Powerlessness

The above findings lead on to a discussion of the messages that administrator-recipient interactions conveyed to recipients regarding their powers as citizens. The vulnerability of recipients was eloquently indicated by the way in which a recipient in P said he felt about his citizenship in general, in particular when he came to the welfare office:

I don't [feel like a citizen], not even there [in the welfare office], not at all, it does not make any difference that there are helpers there, they have their bosses too, so they can annul everything if they need to. (Tibor, 54-year-old Roma man)

The present research identified a number of ways in which such a sense of powerlessness was elicited or deepened by the interactions between ESB recipients and their case managers. First of all, recipients were kept in uncertainty concerning their benefit provision in a number of ways. A number of participants highlighted in the interview as an annoying difficulty that administrators did not tell them when they were going to come to their place for the home check that was a condition of ESB receipt, while some people got exact appointments, as demonstrated in Chapter 7. It could hardly be conceived of as adequate treatment by an authority when a client, inquiring about the exact time of the visit, gets the response from the administrator 'when it will be your turn'. But neither was the date of the payment of public works wages known by recipients in many cases.

Furthermore, administrators often withheld information from the client not only by responding to them very briefly or by simply saying 'I don't know' as demonstrated above, but also by leaving recipients with indefinite answers. On one occasion in P, a recipient brought in a document confirming that he had worked for 30 days, only to be told by the official that 'I don't know if this will be sufficient'. When someone's livelihood depended on that certificate, such a response clearly reinforced their vulnerability; and the fact that the

administrator did not help him by any advice as to how to check whether the document would be sufficient, or what kind of document he had to provide instead, indicates the recipient's lack of power vis-à-vis both the particular official and the system of ESB provision as a whole. Moreover, during the participant observation, a man in S came back to the office three times on the same day, increasingly anxious, because the administrators could not work out whether the job contract he provided was satisfactory for him to maintain his ESB eligibility. He was first sent back to his employer for a different document, then to the employment centre, and at the end of the day he was still not absolutely sure that he would be all right.

In addition to such messages of uncertainty, another form of staff-recipient interaction that communicated recipients' powerlessness was when administrators abused their power or went beyond their remit. An extreme example of this was when the official in P was collecting 'class money'²¹ in the office from parents of the classmates of her son, who happened to be her clients as well. In a discussion with her colleague, she said that she had been insulted by a client who questioned this practice as it was easy to abuse, namely by pressurising clients to pay the 'class money' by using her power as benefit provider. I argue that such interactions as the staff levying private obligations in the welfare office conveyed the message that recipients were highly vulnerable

²¹ Money collected from parents in elementary school classes in Hungary for all sorts of extra expenses that may occur in the class. It is usually members of the so called parents' working groups who collect these monies.

to the authority – administrators had the power to pressure recipients to do certain things, and recipients had very little power to resist this pressure. To my knowledge, none of the recipients directly affected by this practice filed a complaint about it. A powerful account of how this vulnerability affected recipients' actual exercising of their citizenship rights was when a Roma man argued in the interview that he would never request to be seen by a different case manager because 'we [recipients] are afraid, they would easily have your money, what you receive, cut, they would do anything.'

Thirdly, the participant observation demonstrated that the administrators often reasoned to recipients that they were not able to help them, even if they wanted to, since their hands were tied by the regulation, and the actual decision regarding the benefit was made at 'higher levels', which they did not specify. This reasoning was resented by a number of recipients in the interviews as a sign of their powerlessness. Lipsky (1980) argues that bureaucratic processes push street-level officials to use their discretion in ways that often lead to rationing, silencing, and disempowerment. Both the interviews and the participant observation demonstrated that this practice of pointing to the higher echelons of power did have a silencing effect on most recipients who experienced it, as the experience of many of them was that they did not have access to those higher echelons.

Even though Act CLXXXIX on the Local Governance of Hungary requires municipality representatives, including mayors to keep in direct contact with

local citizens, the overwhelming majority of the interview participants were denied the opportunity to meet the mayor and inform him directly about their grievances in both locations, no matter how hard they tried as discussed in Chapter 4. What I want to highlight here is the way in which recipients were refused to assert this right. Aranka, a 48-year-old Roma woman was told by the mayor's secretary in a derogatory manner that the authority did not have time to deal with such cases. This response was interpreted by the recipient as indicating that her case was not worth the time and attention of the political representative of the local community. Furthermore, on one occasion a staff member in the S welfare office told a client half-jokingly that 'You cannot have an appointment with the mayor, you can only have one with me.' And indeed, some recipients have already internalised the messages sent by such statements – for instance, the recipient, who said that the mayor 'has more important things to do than dealing with our employment' as a reason why she did not turn to him with her hardships. Consequently, learning that the most important decisions concerning their provision were made at these levels of power made the recipients fatalistic and feel helpless about improving their situation. For example, one woman asserted that certain things did affront her, but she knew that on this level – that is, in the welfare office – there was nothing to be done about her situation.

Nevertheless, some recipients did receive help from the mayor's office directly. For example, a previously higher status white man in his 40s got a temporary

employment opportunity as a driver for the S city hall when he was previously unemployed, after he 'caught' the mayor on the street and asked for his help. Besides, in P, a white woman in her 50s had trouble with her sick leave payment and after having an appointment with the mayor, the problem was immediately sorted out. In addition to these two relatively higher status recipients, one multiply disadvantaged recipient, a Roma woman, a single mother of two, also had positive experiences with the mayor. She said to have had several personal appointments with him in the past and on the last occasion the mayor helped her with her social assistance which was due to her but which the administrators had first refused. These exceptions to the majority experiences of recipients point to the lack of institutional guarantees to exercise their rights on the mayoral level. The fact that a number of people were prevented from having a personal appointment with the mayor in one way or another demonstrates that recipients' right to appeal and/or have a say in local matters was systematically curtailed, despite the fact that law theoretically guaranteed it.

The reasons that recipients gave for not wanting to contact the mayor were: 1) they did not know how to do it; 2) they felt that it was futile, as they were convinced that nothing would be changed even if they did so; 3) they were afraid of losing their benefit; 4) they felt that their difficulties were not worthy of mayoral attention. These reasons indicate recipients' impaired sense of citizenship, as they reflect an inadequate level of information about how to

assert their rights, considerable financial vulnerability, as well as a damaged self-regard and as a result, a broken sense of their powers as citizens.

The fourth way in which staff-client interactions enhanced ESB recipients' powerlessness was when the administrators communicated to recipients that they should be grateful for whatever they were provided with by the authority, be it the benefit itself, or information about the provision. This practice was prevalent in both welfare offices that I examined. For instance, a Roma man highlighted in the interview how it offended him when the administrator told him to 'Be pleased that public works exists at all!' And this notion was confirmed by the participant observation – as officials made this argument amongst one another a number of times. And some recipients were in fact contented and even felt their citizenship confirmed by the mere fact of being dealt with in the welfare office, as the following conversation with a 45-year-old white man in S demonstrates:

Researcher: And do you feel like a citizen, when you come to the welfare office?

György: Sure.

Researcher: Why or in what ways?

György: Because they [administrators] received me, they dealt with my case, they did not turn me away, not even once. So I got what I got, it was okay, it's true it was a small amount, but I have to say I have to be grateful to them for giving me anything at all.

These views imply that some of the recipients internalised a neoconservative conception of citizenship as defined in Chapter 2; that is, a conception in which citizenship rights, including social rights, were limited to compensate for one's contribution to society. For example, when, after being summoned for public

works, an ESB recipient asked how many days off they would have, the head of the S welfare office responded 'you should do your job first'. This answer is not only coarse and intimidating, but also implies that recipients' rights were directly linked with, and in fact dependent on, their responsibilities. In other words, their basic labour rights, such as their right to paid vacation days, were in fact not rights, but a compensation for fulfilling their duties.

I argue that the neoconservative approach has a limiting effect on recipients' assertion of their citizenship rights. Such comments as the above were not only humiliating, but also had the power to make recipients lower their expectations regarding their rights as citizens and suppress their voices as citizens. If someone internalised the powerlessness communicated by such interactions, they would feel grateful for whatever they received and think twice about how assertively they wanted to claim their rights. Furthermore, the participant observation demonstrated that the officials viewed their job, or certain core aspects of it, as exercising benevolence towards recipients and they often explicitly pointed out to their clients whenever they made a benevolent move – e.g. made an extra effort to help them. For example, the case manager in P highlighted to a recipient that they had sent him a letter to warn him about the approaching deadline to fulfil the 30-day workfare condition 'merely as a favour, as other municipalities don't do that'. As a result, recipients too would conceive of their services in this way, rather than as their due right grounded in their citizenship to particular provisions and services that generate certain

institutional functions and duties.

Last but not least regarding recipients' powerlessness, both the participant observation and the interviews demonstrated that the administrators often told recipients word by word what to put in the documents they were supposed to fill in. It was especially controversial when the recipient was made to make a statement that had an adverse effect on them, such as claiming that they had not fulfilled the 30-day workfare condition, which would result in their losing the benefit. Some felt offended by this practice, such as István who said anxiously in the interview that 'They told me what to write, I had to write it down myself that I was not eligible for this social benefit, you know'. On the other hand, some of the clients explicitly asked for such assistance, as they could not – or felt that they could not – formulate the sentences themselves.

Those who felt frustrated by this practice felt so because of the helplessness it communicated to them – that they could not do anything but docilely write down what they were told and bear its consequences. Whereas in regard to the people who were grateful for such assistance – as they perceived this practice – their attitude suggests a high level of uncertainty regarding their civic capacities such as making an official statement, even if it concerned their personal situation. This practice was in line with the officials' views about ESB recipients' lack of competence in general, demonstrated above. However, Gilens (2012) compellingly argues that democracy is a political system in which 'the power to shape public policies should be widely and more or less equally shared among

citizens' (p. 12), and this understanding of democracy is based on the idea that every citizen is competent by default. Therefore, the fact that welfare governance on the street level conveyed messages otherwise, namely that recipients were lacking in the most basic capacities to exercise their rights, had adverse effects on recipients' citizenship and therefore on the quality of Hungarian democracy in general as well.

Furthermore, the interviews demonstrated that in many cases recipients' sense of their lack of power not only damaged their perception of their citizenship as indicated above but also prevented them from actually exercising their citizenship rights. For example, a recipient in S argued that since she had always had refusals in the past in the welfare office, she no longer wanted to make a complaint at all. Or a white homeless man, also in S, argued that he did not make an official complaint, because it would only make things worse for him.

I go to the welfare office and tell them [the administrators] what my complaint is, than it goes to the notary, and then ... I think ... I just get into an even more inconvenient situation.

And besides the various indirect ways in which staff-recipient interactions communicated recipients' powerlessness demonstrated above, these interactions also directly curtailed recipients' consciousness of their rights in some cases. First of all, some recipients complained in the interviews that they were sent out of the office, because they 'talked back' or tried to assert their

interest, just as the Roma woman who tried to advocate for her son in the office discussed in Chapter 7. This is a particularly controversial measure, as it nipped in the bud any form of advocacy or self-assertion.

Exercising citizenship

In spite of the circumstances and mechanisms that seemed to constrain ESB recipients' civil/political citizenship discussed above, this study also found evidence of recipients' asserting their rights and interests in the welfare office – both in P and S. In addition to their alternative practices of receiving help and/or obtaining pertinent information with regard to ESB provision demonstrated in former chapters, some clients came to the office repeatedly (quite often), to push their claim again and again, or simply to keep informed – if not by administrators, then by other clients in the waiting room. Some interview participants explained that this was the only way in which they could have some level of control over the procedure. According to the participant observation, this strategy was most often practised by women, especially Roma women, suggesting that this strategy functioned as a resort for clients with the least socio-economic resources and hence a lack of other opportunities to assert their interests. In terms of gathering information, 'bugging' officials proved to be a successful tactic, as these recipients were fairly well-informed about the benefit; however, as to pushing their claims, it did not seem to work very effectively. There were recipients who did use this strategy and still faced

serious difficulties with ESB provision.

Another tactic – also mostly of women – was to explain their hardships in detail, demonstrate the severity of their situation and in this way gain administrators' empathy. However, this strategy did not seem to be very efficient in practice either, as administrators kept on referring to the law and higher authorities that prevented them practising any 'mercy'. Nevertheless, it did work in some cases – mainly when the client was member of a social group that enjoyed social recognition and was considered deserving in contemporary Hungarian political discourses, such as single pensioners or white couples of higher status with small children. In these cases, administrators merely used their discretionary powers and/or made extra efforts to cater for the client's needs (i.e. did not fail to comply with the regulations), which was in many cases enough to actually help them overcome a difficulty, such as in the cases demonstrated above.

A more effective form of self-assertion was to come to the office accompanied by someone with substantial experience in assistance procedures, or a generally more assertive person (e.g., a friend, a relative or, in the case of Roma clients, someone from the LMG). The interviews and the participant observation demonstrated that this strategy was in fact effective in some cases; that is, recipients who came to the office with support did actually get what they came for. However, this was an option only for recipients with social ties; therefore, the most vulnerable clients, who lived in social isolation could not fall back on

this strategy.

Furthermore, even though these were important and in some cases effective practices of self-assertion, they circumvented the formal, civic route of asserting one's interests – that is, the procedures defined, and hence protected, by the law. Therefore, such practices made recipients vulnerable to the specific circumstances and the benevolence of administrators, which is just the opposite of the ideal of citizenship as recipients themselves defined it in the interviews. In fact, only two clients referred to their rights as citizens or the rules of democracy when they made claims in the welfare office during the periods of the participant observation. On one occasion, a Roma woman in P cited a know-your-rights booklet about public works regulation when she was complaining to the welfare administrator about her treatment as a public works employee and asked the administrator to name the Act that she based her argument on. In another case, an elderly white woman in S confronted the administrators quite vehemently by making a direct link between democracy and welfare provision: 'It cannot happen that someone remains without any provision. This is not what democracy is about.' Nevertheless, such examples of clients explicitly referencing their citizenship rights and the democratic framework of Hungarian society were very rare in the course of this research and they did not seem to bring much benefit to recipients either. In neither of the above two cases did administrators respond in any way to the argument of the client, which reinforced recipients' view that it was futile to complain or argue in the office,

since their opinion did not matter anyway.

Summary

Rothstein (1998) compellingly demonstrates that ‘just institutions matter’ that is, the everyday functioning of government institutions shapes people’s conception of both their own interests and their idea of what is good or fair, and as a result institutions influence the prevalence of social norms in governance, i.e. the mental map of what we think others are and would do in the given social context. Consequently, Rothstein shows that in some institutional settings social norms are the crucial driving force, while in others different forms of reasoning will prevail (e.g. market logic); and he argues that procedural justice – that is, just procedure in terms of the implementation of government measures – is a crucial condition of the prevalence of social norms that establish democratic procedures locally.

In this chapter, I demonstrated that the interactions between ESB recipients and the administrators in the welfare office communicated recipients’ second-class citizenship in many ways. As the few positive examples of such interactions discussed in this chapter demonstrate, face to face or textual interactions with the state’s street-level representatives could have a positive impact on how recipients conceived of their potential as citizens and the ways in which they made use of this potential. However, the majority of the evidence provided by the present research demonstrate that staff-client interactions were more likely

to suppress recipients' civic consciousness in Hungarian welfare offices. The often derogatory, commanding, and/or uninformative language of the administrators; the jargonistic terms used by the officials, as well as the documents they hand to the clients; the indifferent, unhelpful treatment of recipients and the lack of empathy they often experienced sent disempowering messages to recipients. Being treated in such ways implied that their formal rights did not matter much in reality, and that they had better not ask any questions, let alone 'talk back' or file a formal complaint, because if they did, they risked being reprimanded, or even forfeiting their chance to do their business in the office at all or that nothing happened at all.

The above analysis also showed that often it was the derogatory views of the administrators that played out in their interactions with the clients. In other cases, it was institutional failures and capacity constraints that made the officials treat recipients in an inadequate, disempowering manner. In addition, this chapter also identified significant differences in how different administrators interacted with the clients and also in the ways in which the two welfare offices communicated with ESB recipients through the documents they released. This finding demonstrates that the contemporary Hungarian welfare complex did not offer sufficient institutional guarantees that would ensure the right to respectful treatment, adequate information, and equal access to legal remedy of each and every recipient of social assistance, independent of their demographic, their place of living or the official that handled their case.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

Contemporary Hungary has been in a liminal position among democratic welfare states ever since the transition in 1989-1990. On the one hand, between US and European models of welfare provision; and on the other, simultaneously undergoing the establishment of democratic citizenship and the fundamental rearrangement of welfare provision in the context of neoliberal economic restructuring, in an era when both democratic and welfare institutions have been facing historical challenges on a global scale. The aim of this thesis was to understand the interplay between the newly emerging apparatus of social citizenship in post-transition Hungary and people's freshly gained civil and political citizenship status.

In order to accomplish this goal, this study explored what individuals learned about their democratic subjectivity from their experiences of the social assistance subsystem of the contemporary Hungarian welfare complex – namely, receiving Employment Substitute Benefit (ESB). In other words, I explored the role of social assistance provision in recipients' citizenship socialisation. This research used an institutional ethnographic methodology that allowed for an exploration of the nuances, the everyday, street-level factors and procedures through which this interrelationship has come about in terms of the reality of the people who lived on social assistance. I conducted two case

studies of the municipality welfare offices of two medium-size townships in Northeast Hungary: P and S. In each municipality I interviewed 19 people who had been receiving ESB for at least 6 months at the time of the research and I conducted participant observation of the everyday functioning of the offices for a one-month period in each location. These two types of data were complemented with the analysis of the policy documents that regulated ESB provision at the time of this study and individual interviews with the managers of the welfare offices that I investigated (a department and a unit director in P and a department director in S).

This thesis first explored ESB recipients' interpretation of citizenship and democracy in general and the ways in which they experienced these political institutions in their own lives. An important finding of this study was that most of the recipients laid much greater emphasis on the duties than on the rights attached to citizenship in the interviews. On the basis of the literature that demonstrated that social policies and the institutions that implement them have a significant impact on beneficiaries' rights consciousness (Landy, 1993; Campbell, 2003; Mettler and Soss, 2004) I interpret this finding as partly being a result of the neoconservative conception of social rights in the contemporary Hungarian welfare complex. This conception was conveyed to recipients both by the policies governing ESB provision (especially the fact that it was directly linked to the highly controversial public works programme) and by the popular discourses about 'deserving' and 'undeserving' members of Hungarian society

(Szalai, 2007) and what was considered as 'contribution' to the common good (see the wording of the Fundamental Law), which many recipients seemed to have internalized.

In addition, even though a number of participants had difficulty articulating their view about democracy, the majority of those who did express an opinion about it described democracy as an appealing system, due to its functional characteristics, as well as its substantive merits. This finding offers a counter-narrative to the popular view in Hungary that socially excluded people, and benefit recipients in particular, were only interested in material goods and did not care about the abstract or instrumental values of democratic institutions. The merits of democracy highlighted by recipients included the multiparty parliamentary system, freedom, the protection of human rights, and the possibilities of active civic participation. However, in addition to pointing out these values, many recipients also made a direct link between democratic subjectivity and social security – that is, they indicated that a certain level of social rights was a prerequisite of a truly democratic political establishment, and of the ability to be an active member of it.

Nonetheless, my research found a considerable discrepancy between participants' conception of citizenship and democracy and their lived experiences of these institutions. Most of the recipients who conceived of citizenship in substantive (in contrast to neutral, administrative) terms felt that their citizenship was compromised, and when they discussed the ways in

which they exercised their civil and political citizenship in practice, the overwhelming majority of the participants reported a low level of civil and/or political participation. The only exception was voting which was an important, and in many cases the only, manifestation of their citizenship.

Some people linked their curtailed agency as citizens directly to living on social assistance, for various reasons: the stigma attached to ESB receipt and the shame that it induced; the lack of resources that hindered their participation, which resulted from the meagreness of the benefit and/or public works wages; their fear of retaliation, especially losing the benefit, if they were involved in civil/political activities; and finally their sense of not being listened to by politicians. This is a significant finding of this study as the literature was previously lacking evidence of *how* exactly recipients' democratic subjectivity was curtailed by their experiences with (certain types of) welfare institutions (Mettler and Soss, 2004; Wright, 2015). The rest of this thesis further investigated these processes with a specific focus on the above themes that were explicitly pointed out by the interview participants.

This analysis found that a key factor that limited recipients' exercising of their citizenship was their acute lack of information, in relation to social assistance provision and about their civil and political rights, as well as current political events. This was caused partly by the policies that governed ESB provision, and partly by the ways in which these policies were implemented in reality. The regulation of ESB provision is infamous for being highly contingent and chaotic

(Gyulavári and Krémer, 2006) and my research demonstrated that most recipients did not get adequate support in the welfare office to fully comprehend the regulations either. The written documents they received, the information posted in the waiting area of the office and the administrators' spoken communication were in most cases incomprehensible for the clientele – it was often jargonistic; and the law did not provide sufficient guarantees for the recipients to be adequately informed about the rules of provision and their rights in relation to it. Consequently, the majority of recipients were, or felt that they were, unable to actively manage their benefit. Furthermore, recipients' lack of information, or the wrong information they received, also resulted in their going to the office or waiting there in vain in many cases. Last but not least, being lost in the 'legislative anarchy' of ESB provision – as an office manager eloquently called the regulatory system of social assistance provision in Hungary – was one of the factors that made recipients feel incompetent (even to manage their own case) and neglected by the administrators, and it also had a dampening effect on their ability to be assertive.

Another factor that both the interviews and the participant observation found to be crucial in recipients' citizenship socialisation was their deep poverty resulting from the meagre income they had from either ESB or public works employment, which was directly linked with ESB provision. Firstly, the lack of money constrained recipients' democratic subjectivity in very practical ways: some could not make phone calls, use public transport or initiate legal remedy

procedures on the court level because of this. In some cases, the lack of adequate income even prevented recipients from participating in elections, which the majority considered to be a symbolic act of citizenship; and my research found that it disproportionately affected recipients in the most vulnerable position (for example, women who had been victims of domestic violence and did not have enough money to change their address after having fled their abuser, or a homeless man who could not have an adequate address in order to cast his vote).

Secondly, the fact that ESB was set at such a low level, and the low and differential level of public works wages as compared to the regular minimum wage, communicated to recipients that decision-makers considered them as deserving only this much, and hence looked down on them. These sentiments impaired recipients' sense of political efficacy: many argued that politicians who set these amounts did not know what hardships they had to face and did not care to listen to them. Many recipients reported strong feelings of shame because of living on such a meagre provision or receiving discriminatory wages for their work. This leads on to another theme that this study found to be key in relation to participants' democratic subjectivity – namely, the feeling of shame.

My research identified a number of component elements of the social assistance system that induced shame in recipients. Apart from the very low level of the benefit and public works wages, certain conditions of receiving ESB also made recipients feel humiliated – especially being ordered to do menial jobs in public,

often in distinctive clothes, and their home being inspected and judged by officials. In addition, the ways in which their privacy was institutionally violated while they claimed and/or received ESB – the home checks, having an appointment with the administrator in the same room as another client, being interrogated by the case manager in the waiting area, or having to disclose information about the benefit they received at the registration desk – were also considered humiliating by many participants.

Treatment in the welfare office by the administrators was also considered derogatory in many cases (both by the recipients in the interviews and by myself on the basis of the participant observation) – recipients were reprimanded, infantilised, and talked to harshly or in a clearly indifferent manner. Furthermore, recipients' assertiveness, in terms of expressions of their dissatisfaction or outright assertion of their interests, made the treatment even harsher in many cases – if such behaviour brought about any response from case managers. Being treated in such ways not only made recipients feel humiliated, but also taught them important lessons about the potential repercussions – or the absolute futility – of being assertive.

The spatial organisation of ESB provision also communicated a disparaging view of recipients, although in different ways in P and S. The physical state of the waiting room and the client toilets in the P office, and the lack of even the most basic furniture and equipment, conveyed a message of neglect. On the other hand, the CCTV camera, the vigilant security guard and the newly

established registration desk in S suggested that recipients were considered a potential threat to the municipality, which made many feel uneasy.

Furthermore, the interview data demonstrated that the popular degrading discourses about recipients of social assistance (Szalai, 2007; Rat, 2009) were internalized by many participants, which had a strong negative impact on their sense of dignity and social recognition. And these discourses were reinforced not only by public statements of politicians, but also by the rules and conditions of receiving ESB, and certain derogatory, infantilising or disrespectful comments of the administrators in the welfare office, as well as their often indifferent or reprimanding behaviour. Two types of responses to these discourses and behaviour were common. Some recipients made efforts to comply with the prevailing norms of 'deservingness' and in this way protect themselves from the damaging feelings of shame and unworthiness. And my analysis demonstrated that many recipients considered acquiescence and submissiveness to be part of this norm; hence, they did their best to temper their anger and their complaints.

On the other hand, others reacted to these discourses by actively distancing themselves from other recipients by transferring the stigma attached to ESB, especially concerning impaired capabilities and unwillingness to work, to their fellow recipients. The latter response was characteristic mostly – but not exclusively – of participants of higher social status, and anti-Roma sentiments – expressed primarily by white (but also by Roma) interview participants – were

especially frequent in this regard. In this way, these participants attempted to differentiate themselves from the stigmatised group of 'people who live on assistance' and thus protect their sense of dignity and worthiness – traits closely related to citizenship, as participants defined it in this study.

That is, on the individual level the internalisation of social norms and passing the shame of ESB receipt to others was a rational means of adaptation to the predispositions of the current socio-political setting and – more closely related to recipients' everyday experience – the welfare complex of Hungary, especially the neoconservative conception of the relationship between welfare provision and citizenship that the regulations adopted. These mechanisms have been compellingly demonstrated by research evidence (Lister, 2004; Chase and Walker, 2013; Patrick, 2015); the contribution of my findings to this body of scholarship is, on the one hand, the exploration of the nuances of *how* such feelings of shame was generated in the welfare complex, and on the other hand, the analysis of these mechanisms in terms of recipients' democratic subjectivity.

In this sense I found that by adapting to the exclusionary norms institutionalised in the Hungarian welfare complex, recipients were prone to internalise an exclusionary concept of citizenship that was based on differentiation rather than broad, inclusive membership in the political community. This in turn jeopardised social solidarity and collective civic action on the community level and ran the risk of social isolation on the individual level. Social isolation was an experience or a fear shared by many participants.

This made them disappointed in the concept or the realisation of democratic citizenship in Hungary, or made them feel that they were unable to live and act as full citizens. However, with regard to solidarity my findings were mixed. A number of recipients did experience acts of solidarity with their friends and relatives; however, I found little evidence of such acts among ESB recipients in particular. And I did not find any evidence of collective activities of recipients, even though the welfare office allowed for their meeting in person. In P, recipients did not even talk to one another in the waiting area, and in S, they mostly complained about the benefit and their difficulties; however, in a few cases they also helped each other with advice. Nevertheless, these discussions and acts of solidarity did not lead to concrete collective activities, even if some recipients explicitly expressed their wish to participate in such activities in the interview. This finding also suggests that the considerable difference between the state of the two waiting areas could have an effect on how recipients made use of that space.

The last theme that this research identified in relation to ESB recipients' sense of citizenship was their strong feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness – vis-à-vis both the staff in the welfare office and politicians and decision-makers in general. Looking at recipients' experiences of ESB provision closely, I found a number of component elements of the system that contributed to these incapacitating feelings. Firstly, the futile administrative cycles in which recipients were repeatedly entrapped made many of them sense an absolute

lack of control over the claiming process. My study found that recipients' potential to make decisions concerning the benefit was practically non-existent, let alone the possibility of having a say in how provision was administered or regulated. In addition, even if they complained about or asked for something in the welfare office (which happened quite rarely), they could not substantively change their situation in most cases, as the administrators pointed to the rigidity of the regulations and their own powerlessness, or often simply shrugged their shoulders. These responses had similar effects on recipients' assertiveness: it typically made them resigned and fatalistic.

The conclusion of Soss *et al.* (2011) seems particularly pertinent here, as they argue that

paternalism fails, in part, because it reinforces some of the most debilitating and repetitive experiences associated with poverty: feeling that your fate rests in other people's hands, experiencing yourself as an object rather than an agent of authority, realizing that others do not trust you with the reins of control and that the available responses have been defined as compliance or failure. (p. 305)

On the other hand, my research demonstrated that there was a high level of discretion in ESB provision – most importantly regarding who was involved in public works employment or in a supported training course and in the assessment of the results of the home visit. And it was exacerbated by the administrators' wide scope for interpreting the regulations, due to their often imprecise wording. As a result of the administrators' discretionary powers, it was a firm perception – and in many cases the lived experience – of recipients

that they were discriminated against in the course of ESB provision; and these experiences were confirmed by the participant observation in a number of cases.

This may sound contradictory to the above point (namely, the rigidity of the regulations), however, I argue that this bipolarity was a crucial feature of social assistance provision in Hungary and it played a significant part in enhancing recipients' feeling of powerlessness. As a general rule, ESB was regulated in state-level laws that in fact limited the administrators' possibility to support their clients; and, as the participant observation demonstrated, they could point to these regulations if they wanted to end the meeting with a client. However, the high level of discretion that the administrators had in some – crucial – aspects of provision allowed them to support the clients whom they chose to. This binary feature of ESB provision seemed to work as a double trap for the recipients, which made many feel highly vulnerable and lacking any control in managing the benefit; moreover, as for the majority it was their only stable income, some recipients even felt having lost control over their own lives. Furthermore, this arrangement further increased the perceived power gap between recipients and the welfare office.

To explain these effects of ESB provision I turn to Rothstein' (1998) argument about procedural injustice. As discussed above, Rothstein argues that in order to build a democratic society, decision-makers need to design democratic institutions, since institutions have a strong feedback effect on the norms and

political concepts that shape society. Therefore he suggests that institutions have to comply with the principle of procedural justice, among others, if they want to promote a democratic citizenry. From this Rothstein concludes that universal institutions are more legitimate than discretionary ones from a democratic point of view, as discretion entails a form of selectivity that is difficult to justify on the social level and therefore, violates the integrity of the citizen.

In addition, the fact that many feared retaliation (especially losing their benefit eligibility or their public works job) if they complained or asserted their interests – in or beyond the welfare office – also discouraged recipients from being engaged in civil/political activities. These perceptions also demonstrated that recipients did not have a stable consciousness of their rights regarding ESB discussed above. What is more, this finding also indicates that they did not have access to adequate legal remedy either – partly due to the discretionary character of the law in this regard, and partly because many did not have sufficient information or were unable to fully comprehend the available information about the possibilities of seeking redress.

Feeling powerless in relation to the provision on which their livelihood depended increased recipients' self-perceived lack of capacity and competence, which was already eroded by their experiences of social marginality. This, however, was in contrast to the ideal of the citizen as recipients themselves defined it and in this way made it even more difficult for many to identify as

such. In addition, recipients' insecurities in their capabilities and their lack of confidence hindered their civic/political involvement in practice in many cases – such as when they did not attend a public forum because they thought they were unable to articulate their views, or when they felt that they were not intelligent enough to be involved in deliberation on community matters. Furthermore, these sentiments also contributed to recipients' sense of limited political efficacy – that is, to their perception that neither the administrators in the welfare office nor higher level decision-makers cared about their problems or listened to their voice. In conclusion, just as previous research has demonstrated that programmes with participatory elements induce more positive orientation towards political involvement (Valley, 1993) – or that, as Rothstein (1998) eloquently put it, democratic institutions create democratic citizens - this study suggested that undemocratic, disempowering institutional practices had a diminishing effect on recipients' willingness and capability to actively exercise their civil and/or political citizenship.

On the other hand, the findings of this thesis confirmed Walker's (2014) point that 'not every service is poor nor is every person receiving a service badly treated' (p. 150). This research also identified a number of positive experiences that participants had with regard to ESB provision. There were recipients who were treated with care and a genuine willingness to help and – of particular relevance to the subject of this study – a number of participants considered the fact that they received ESB, and the very existence of the welfare office whose

primary task was to provide a service for people like them, as a manifestation, or indeed a reinforcement, of their citizenship. This finding confirms what previous research has argued – namely, that the institutions of welfare provision can provide the physical space, as well as the capabilities (primarily consciousness of rights, information, and monetary resources) that strengthen recipients' democratic subjectivity (Piven and Cloward, 1977; Kumlin, 2002; Campbell, 2003; Walker, 2014).

Nevertheless, my research showed that such good experiences were sporadic, and that those recipients who learned positive lessons in the Hungarian welfare complex about their citizenship were primarily in a slightly better position than their fellows – that is, white recipients, people with a higher level of education or people with connections in the office. Nevertheless, as Walker (2014) suggested, the positive attributes of the system, however infrequent and uneven they were, 'could constitute the basis of model provision or serve as performance indicators that might be used to hold providers to account' (p. 150).

Furthermore, this study also showed that although recipients' civil and political engagement was very low in general, certain forms of civic engagement were characteristic of a number of recipients. As discussed above, many used informal networks of solidarity to make up for institutional deficiencies – they turned to friends or relatives to obtain information, or actively seek help, in relation to ESB provision. In addition, it was quite common among recipients to

be involved in a church or charity organisation, or to take up charity activity individually, because they considered helping others to be an important responsibility towards the community, and fulfilling it caused them a feeling of satisfaction. However, although the institutional system of ESB provision – both the legislation and the attitudes of its administrators – clearly promoted the principle of serving the community and 'contributing to the common good', my research demonstrated that not every act of doing so was recognised by the system. Even though community work was in theory one of the ways in which the 30-day work condition of ESB eligibility was able to be fulfilled, the law recognised only certain types of activities as community work and most of the activities in which participants were in fact involved did not count as such. This finding shows the limitations of recipients' agency in relation to meeting eligibility conditions; but it also indicates that their capacity to act, and be recognised, as citizens was directly constrained by the regulation of ESB provision.

Nonetheless, this thesis also demonstrated that the above characteristics of the contemporary Hungarian welfare complex and their repercussions were not the result of the intentional malevolent decisions and behaviour of individual administrators. Although the staff did play an important role in the puzzle, this is clearly not a story of a few 'bad apples' who acted inappropriately. Instead, this thesis put together the various component elements of an institutional 'message machine' (Piven, 2012) that had direct, as well as indirect, effects on

the democratic subjectivity of ESB recipients. My analysis found that some of the administrators and even one of the managers who were part of this research did have derogatory sentiments towards ESB recipients, and in particular against Roma recipients, and they also acted on these sentiments in many cases. However, these individual traits and behaviours were part of an institutional complex that did not provide sufficient institutional guarantees to prevent these acts or to correct their repercussions. Moreover, in many cases it was the result of systemic failures or the lack of institutional capacities and competences that resulted in the disempowering views or acts of the staff.

On the other hand, Walker's (2014) argument seems pertinent in this context:

It was often difficult for respondents to determine whether the hassle that they encountered with officialdom was the product of limited investment or deliberate attempts to deter or humiliate them. Either way, it added to the stigma of benefit receipt; lacking privacy and on display in queues, it made even more public their confession of failure while demonstrating that society did not care enough to meet their needs adequately. (p. 155)

Another significant finding of this study was that it was not only the recipients who were socialised in the welfare complex; the administrators also imbibed the 'office culture' – that is, they learned how to view and treat recipients from the attitudes and behaviours of their colleagues and supervisors, as well as the regulations that governed their job, and the statements of decision-makers who issued these regulations. The methodological framework of institutional ethnography allowed for an investigation of these mechanisms as well. By the

holistic approach offered by this framework and the various methods of data collection I used I could explore these mechanisms as well – the regulations, the interactions between the administrators and the office management, as well as the ways in which the staff interpreted the statements and decisions of the mayor and the local representatives of the municipality.

In this regard, my research showed that the socialisation of the staff in both offices led to increasingly derogatory views about recipients of even those administrators who had previously had a more balanced view of them; and they also became less understanding and helpful with their clients. It indicates that the system of ESB provision in Hungary was lacking the institutional mechanisms that could manage these processes and guarantee that only the constructive and empowering elements of client service were encouraged in municipality welfare offices. Since case managers' socialisation on the job was beyond the core subject of this study, I could not pursue an in depth analysis of the exact institutional factors and processes that played a part in it; however, this topic would repay further investigation.

This point leads on to another key finding of this research – namely, that there were considerable differences between the operation of the P and S welfare offices. Not only was the spatial organisation of the two offices very different (as discussed above); the bureaucratic procedures employed by the two municipalities and the interactions that occurred between the staff and recipients in the two offices also differed significantly. This finding also points

to the lack of institutional guarantees that could ensure that recipients enjoyed equal and fair treatment in all the welfare offices in the country, irrespective of their own demographic characteristics or the attitudes of the staff towards their clientele. An important issue in this regard was the extent to which the operation of the welfare office and the behaviour of the staff was influenced in each case by the views and attitudes of the management. Due in part to the small number of the case studies, this research could not come to conclusive results about this. Although there was a marked difference in the ideas of the two office managers whom I interviewed with regard to the overall functioning of social assistance provision in Hungary, as well as in their attitudes towards ESB recipients in particular, I did not find any clear indication of whether these views had an impact on the local implementation of ESB provision in practice. This topic would also be worth further investigation on a larger scale.

In addition, another topic that would call for further research is the difference between the experiences of white and Roma recipients of social assistance provision and the ways in which these experiences informed their civil and/or political citizenship. This research suggested important patterns in this regard. Firstly, that there might be a link between how Roma recipients experienced ESB provision and to what extent they perceived their citizenship in substantive terms. Secondly, that Roma women had stronger social ties than any other subgroup of recipients and used these ties more effectively to assert their interests. Moreover, Roma women seemed to be the most active group of

recipients politically. Due to the small number of cases studied in this research I cannot come to general conclusions regarding these issues; however, they seem to be fertile ground for further research.

Such future enquiries could add further pieces to the mosaic that this thesis attempted to construct from the various component elements of the institutional system of social assistance provision in contemporary Hungary – elements of both the legislation and the nuances of implementation – in order to explore the part each played in recipients' citizenship socialisation.

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Annex 1: Topic guide for recipient interviews

[Note1: to be translated into Hungarian by the researcher.]

Introduction

1) Info about the interview:

- Purpose of the interview (mostly interested in previous experiences as social assistance recipient)
- Confidentiality – info sheet, consent form, possibility of withdrawal
- Anonymity – individual as well as the municipality will be anonymous in the thesis
- Tape recording to be emphasized, along with the possibility to have it turned off
- Duration (approx.) of interview – approx. 1.5 hour

2) Information about the interviewee:

- ‘Tell me a little bit about yourself!’
- Where does the participant live? How old is the participant? What kind of family does the participant live in? How long has the participant been claiming FHT? Why did the participant start claiming?
- sensitive issue: ethnicity (‘What ethnic group do you belong to?’ prompt:

e.g. Hungarian, Roma, Hungarian Roma, German)

I. Social assistance recipients' long-term experiences with social assistance provisions

1) Setting – welfare office:

What does the participant think about the office's environment? in terms of its separation (if relevant) from other municipal offices (is it functional/useful or rather segregating)? its general physical conditions? the waiting room? its facilities?

2) Information:

- How clear is the regulation of social assistance provisions for the participant?
- How does the participant learn about provisions? – who is eligible, how to claim them, how to actually receive them?
- What does the participant know about complaint procedures? – as to treatment, as to decision

3) Conditions: How clear are the conditions? Are conditions the same for every recipient? Does the participant find conditions fair/acceptable? Do conditions respect recipients' privacy? Do conditions mean any form of control on their lives?

4) Treatment:

- Does the participant need to make an appointment or just comes and wait? How much does the participant need to wait? Does the participant need to queue at all?
- How does the participant find the way in which welfare officials treat them? What about their way of talking to the participant? Are officials open to problems, requests? Are they helpful in resolving difficulties? How supportive are they?

5) History of reciprocity:

Referring back to particular stories the participant mentioned earlier, ask how typical that case is:

- whether it happened often, recurrently to the participant
- how much does the participant views the actual treatment depends on the particular staff member/office. Does the participant think it would be different in another office/with a different officer?

ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

II. Social assistance recipients' perception of their citizenship (membership + participation)

Sense of social position (How would the participant describe their position as a social assistance recipient in society?) prompt:

- General attitudes towards S.A. recipients in Hungarian society
- What does the participant think 'people' think/feel about social assistance recipients? What does TV/media suggest? What other local people think? What local decision-makers and bureaucrats think?
 - o Social participation
 - o In what ways does the participant participate in the local/general community? Do they have any specific role? Are they active in any groups/initiatives/activities? What do they regard participation?
 - o In what ways does the participant feel they contribute the local/general community?
 - o Does the participant participate in local/general elections?
- What does the participant do if they experience injustice or inappropriate process in relation to authorities (prompt: e.g. police, public space authority, court)?
- 'Citizen' – What comes to the participant's mind?
 - o good/bad thing?
 - o Is the participant a citizen? (If yes, what makes the participant one? If no, what is the difference between the recipient and a citizen?)
 - o situations in which the participant is/acts as a citizen:
 - welfare office?

- other state/municipality offices?
- what elements/aspects of these institutions make the participant feel so?

ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR DEVOTING YOUR TIME TO THE
INTERVIEW!

Annex 2: Topic guide for management interviews

[Note1: to be translated into Hungarian by the researcher.]

1) Introduction

1.1) Info about the interview:

- Purpose of the interview (mostly interested in the functioning of the office as an institution, i.e. as a system)
- Confidentiality – info sheet, consent form, possibility of withdrawal
- Anonymity – individual as well as the municipality will be anonymous in the thesis
- Tape recording to be emphasized, along with the possibility to have it turned off
- Duration (approx.) of interview – approx. 1 hour

1.2) Information about the interviewee:

- ‘Tell me a little bit about your professional background, how did you end up as [current title]!’
- How long has the participant been working in the office?

- Does the participant live in the municipality concerned?
- [leading to the substance of the interview:] What is the participant's role in the functioning of the office?
- What are their main jobs?
- What are their responsibilities?
- What is the most difficult aspect of the job for them? Why / how?
- What is the most enjoyable part of their job? What do they like in it the most?

2) Social assistance in the post-transition Hungarian context:

- How does the participant define social assistance?
 - o What are the aims of social assistance (in the Hun context)?
 - o What are the functions of social assistance (in the Hun context)?
- How does the participant view the way in which social assistance actually functions in the post-transition Hungarian context?
 - o Does it fulfil its aims? How? / Why not? / To what extent?
- How would the participant locate social assistance in the broader system of the Hungarian welfare state / redistribution?
- How does the participant view FHT in particular?
 - o What is the aim of FHT provision?

- How does it function?
- Does it fulfil its aims? How? / Why not? / To what extent?

ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

3) Regulation of social assistance provisions in contemporary Hungary:

What does the participant think about the regulation of social assistance in contemporary Hungary?

- government/municipality/welfare office devolution of power
- autonomy of the office/office management in the management of social assistance provision: guidance they get from the municipality/government; institutional powers; control from 'above'
- actual content of the regulation (social code, local orders, recent changes of the regulation)

What does the participant think about the regulation of FHT in particular?

- is it well designed in terms of meeting professional principles and effectiveness?

What does the participant think about the resources, working conditions of the office?

ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

4) Ground-level agents of social assistance:

How would the participant describe the office staff? (number, training)

How does the participant view the clients of the office?

- Who are the clients of the office? Who are the ones who receive FHT?
- Is there any segmentation within the clientele?
- Are there any specific groups overrepresented among FHT recipients?

Does the participant have an idea how many of the FHT clientele are of ethnic minority background? Do they form a specific group of recipients in any sense? Do they need differential treatment?

- What does the participant think about the public representation of social assistance recipients? What about the public representation of FHT recipients in particular? Does the participant find these pictures valid? In what ways? Does this public representation in any ways effect the functioning of the office?

ANYTHING ELSE TO ADD?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR DEVOTING YOUR TIME TO THE
INTERVIEW!

Annex 3: List of regulations

Act III of 1993 on Social Governance and Social Benefits

Act CLXXXIX on the Local Governance of Hungary

Act CVI of 2011 on Public Employment and the Amendment of Laws Related to
Public Employment and Other Laws

Act IV of 1991 on Promoting Employment and Provisions for the Unemployed

63/2006 Government Order on the Detailed Regulation of Applying for,
Granting and Providing Cash and In-kind Social Benefits

Act CXL of 2004 on the General Regulation of the Procedure and Service of
Public Administration

The Fundamental Law of Hungary (2011)

Order of the City Council of P on Cash and In-kind Social Provisions

Order of the City Council of S on Cash and In-kind Social Provisions