

ATYPICAL POSSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYMENT EXPANSION IN THE UNDERDEVELOPED REGIONS — TELEWORK

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Employment Strategy of the European Committee issued in 2003 had to face such novel challenges as accelerating economical changes, or the problematic of an aging population. In accordance with it, the main objectives of the strategy, besides the expansion of employment, are the increase in the quality and efficiency of labour and strengthened social cohesion. Among the priorities, we find the raised employment level of women and the retained working places of the elderly employees. The future expansion of employment will depend—among many factors—on the rate at which enterprises can organise labour with flexibility. Similarly to certain atypical employment forms, it is true for telework as well that problems arise in connection with the supply of flexible labour and not with the demand.

For 2006, the Government of the Hungarian Republic set it as an aim that the country should reach the European level of 6% in the field of telework. In autumn, 2002 the minister of employment and labour and the minister of informatics and communication gave a report on the tender designed to establish some one thousand places of telework announced in the program „Eszélyt a jövőnek” (“Give future a chance”). In terms of this program, the employee gaining a fund of 500.000 HUF for establishing info-communicational infrastructure within the scope of creating new places of telework, is entitled for a further, additional fund offered by the Ministry of Employment and Labour (MEL) within the same tender. This complementary fund can be adjudged in the frame of the central labour market program of the ministry, and it encompasses, on the one hand, a benefit of 50.000 HUF/person/month (+its dues) for creating jobs for a maximum term of six months, which is paid by the regionally competent labour centre on the basis of a tender decision. On the other hand, it means a training fund of maximum 60.000 HUF/person (+travel costs). The applicant is to declare his claim for training funds, which is constituted of two modules.

The claim for funds of general computer training (maximum 30.000 HUF/person) and of telework-specific training (maximum 30.000 HUF/person) must be declared in the application along with indicating if the employer acknowledges the commencement of the training and in what ratio he plans general and specific trainings and telework.

It was also an important objective to grant telework jobs to the employees preferred from the point of view of labour: the handicapped, the disabled, Romas, those over 45, single parents with children, those day nursing handicapped or elderly individuals; and those living in under-developed regions.

While Hungarian materials analysing atypical forms of employment—except for a few sociological works—were published in large numbers from the middle of the 90s, experts on the expansion of telework in Hungary have been studying the potentials and hazards of this form of labour only since the second half of the 90s. Already back then the professional disputes arose juxtaposing negative and positive aspects. Though trade unions assumed it was only a means of discharging female and unskilled employees, in the beginning it was indeed women to profit from this form of employment (MIHÁLY I. 1998). Further fears have been outlined in connection with the risk of self-exploitation, since it was rightly assumed that teleworkers would work extra hours for a better performance. Thus, the borderline between family life and professional career may get blurred. Among additional difficulties, the self-dependency of the employee and the rigidity of the work are mentioned. Among the advantages of experimental telework, the reduction of office space and capacity and the increase in the efficiency of work are recorded. Employees can follow technical advances through correspondent education programs, so telework improves not only the quality of life but also labour market prospects. The importance of telework is increased by the potential employment of the disabled (especially the handicapped) besides the realized environmentalist aspects of relieving the roads between the living- and working places (MIHÁLY I. 1998).

Studies published at the turn of the millenium have examined the structural and regional characteristics of telework (NEUMANN L., MARTON T., ÉKES I. 2000). The over-representation of elderly women, young men, the retired with dispensation from the economically inactive category, and those receiving any of the forms of child care benefit is one of the structural characteristics to be reckoned with. While telework was selected by women for the potential of home labour, men preferred it primarily as a supplement to incomes. Through the specification of the employees' structural characteristics, it became evident that there are great differences in qualification between the unemployed and those applying for telework. Should the applicants have no special disadvantages in connection with their health, living place and social conditions, they could with a fair chance get a work considered typical. So, the majority of teleworkers are not residents of under-developed regions and settlements. Thus we can ask how telework can be expected to reduce the unemployment data of under-developed regions (NEUMANN L. 2000).

MARTON T. (2000) believes that besides the lack of technical conditions, the insufficiency of personal conditions has to be underlined as one of the reasons obstructing the expansion of telework. A manager wishing to control the employees personally and regularly is not appropriate for leading telework. Creative managers are needed who use a strict system of criteria when selecting the employees, but strongly trust the ones meeting these requirements. According to the findings of BOKOR L. (2003), managers primarily fear that they cannot exercise their power directly over the employees. It requires a change of point of view to accept that the end product of knowledge or intellectual work qualifies the doer and serves as proof of carrying out the work.

Among the several reasons for the indifference of employers in Hungary, one can name the trifling stimulating force of funds so far, the directions on the employment of special groups, and the criteria of retained employment, which can evoke antipathy along with the uncertainty of commissions (ÉKES I. 2000). In examining the obstacles of expansion in Hungary, it came to light that employees cannot work tranquil in flats of small size, a separate working area cannot be isolated. There is a further particularity about the promotion of telework in Hungary: the significant differences between the achievement of teleworkers and that of those working in traditional employment are not detectable. The research of ÉKES I. (2000) points out that the majority of teleworkers, at the turn of the millenium, were not employees but entrepreneurs by force, who took out their licence to venture in order to get employed. ECKERT B. (2001) finds that most of the obstructing factors of the promotion of telework in Hungary appeared in Western Europe in the middle of the 80s, and their characteristics share a lot of similarities with those of France and Spain.

On the basis of earlier research, it can be summarized that the need for telework very often supercedes by far the opportunities, yet, the majority of the employees do not initiate, while employers, in lack of experience, reluctantly apply telework. Hungarian telework does not require highly qualified work, yet; so it can be seen as an experimental co-operation between routine and low level knowledge workers (NÉMETH B. 2004).

The objectives of the present study are to explore the results and developmental potentials of the telework program of the MEL-MIC (Ministry of Informatics and Communication), to specify the motivation of employers and their criteria of selection, to assess the choice of activities fit for telework, to describe their manageable advantages and disadvantages, and to specify the communication channels of the employment form and the social situation of the employees.

At the turn of the century, the majority of Hungarian teleworkers did not arrive from settlements in critical conditions, thus one may ask if we can expect telework to reduce the indices of unemployment and consequently to even the local inequality of the labour market in the underdeveloped regions at the time of research. Asking differently, have the results of the initial experimental programs at the turn of the millenium popularized telework properly among the otherwise educated employees (mostly having a secondary school or college degree) in areas with disadvantageous conditions and under-developed infrastructure.

A further question with paramount importance to answer: has the telework program—initiated by the MEL-MIC terminating in 2004—been stimulating enough to break through the former indifference of employers, making way for the expansion of telework and increase of its popularity.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The present study draws from the following sources: secondary analysis of Hungarian studies dealing with the interpretation and expansion of telework, its advantages, disadvantages and obstacles; and the Internet versions of data by the Telework Project Office, the labour market organisation and MEL-MIC telework program.

Non-interruptive research was amended by a questionnaire filled in by the 299 winning enterprises of the first round of the telework tender, a further 76 enterprises and more than 1300 teleworkers employed by them. It was inevitable to process the results of personal interviews carried out in Baranya in order to discover the employers' experience, motivations and impeding circumstances already revealed in connection with telework.

The authors would like to thank here the director and employees of the Baranya County Labour Centre for their collaboration in the evaluation of the role labour market organisation played in the expansion and co-ordination of telework. A further acknowledgement is due to the director of the Telework Program Office for the assistance in collecting data and processing questionnaires.

3. RESULTS

3.1. The characteristics of the winning applications

Structural and regional characteristics

The incoming and positively evaluated applications—in a number higher than expected—undertook the creation of 1378 new jobs. On the basis of the registered central branch office of those gaining support, an interesting picture evolved, since half of all the successful applicants were from Budapest. Winners from only two further counties, Hajdú-Bihar and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok undertook the establishment of new telework jobs in a number exceeding one hundred. It shows a curious ratio, considering the preliminary expectations—since underdeveloped areas were to be supported. Questionnaires partly modify this picture (see below). The smallest number of telework places—below ten—were created in Győr-Moson-Sopron, Komárom-Esztergom, Nógrád and Tolna (Figure. 1–4.)

It was already evident from the list of the successful applicants that winners went for purchasing equipment. Almost all winners wanted to make use of the salary and dues support funded by the MEL to a lesser degree than of the opportunity of acquiring computers with their hardware and software. Winner telework employers aimed at making up for their missing equipment in the first round. Earlier, teleworkers—amounting to an insignificant number—fulfilled their tasks with their own equipment. It brought along a certain disadvantage because those not possessing a computer at home, but otherwise having the skill and aptness for telework, could not participate in this employment form. The expenses of purchasing a computer is so high compared to the average income in Hungary that the persons already in need (unemployed, retired, on child care leave, disabled, handicapped) could not afford it. There were hardly any winners among the applicants who did not take the chance of opting for a hardware-software support. In comparison, the "salary-dues support" took up half of the applications and the training support was one-third.

The favoured group

The ministries issuing the tender did designate the circle of those whose employment would render the applicant privileged in the course of decision making. The basic idea was to have those employed as teleworkers at the new telework places who would find it more difficult to get a job. On the other hand, practical life did not prefer this objective. In the selection of teleworkers, firms, enterprises and organisations with an interest in business did not favour the socially needy; but rather those with such valid knowhow and work that can bring profit to their firms and enterprises. This tendency was already detectable when applications were handed in; but it became more evident during actual employments.

From the winning applicants, only 122 telework places were designed for the handicapped, and only in the capitol, and the counties of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok showed a higher ratio. Less applicants wished to employ those over 45 (80), those in an underdeveloped region (48), and single parents (27) as teleworkers. Employment of Romas was planned in a scarce number (20). These figures are from the winning applications; but during realisation, teleworkers came from the designated group of the favoured in an even smaller number. The authors wished to find answers to this problem in the research.

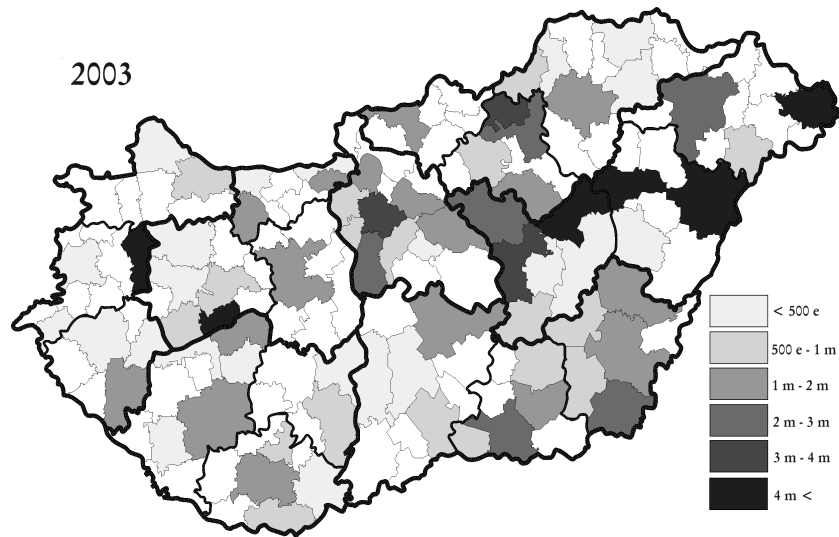


Figure 1.
Support from telework competition in the microregions
(Ed.: Tésits R. 2004)
Source: Ministry of Employment and Labour

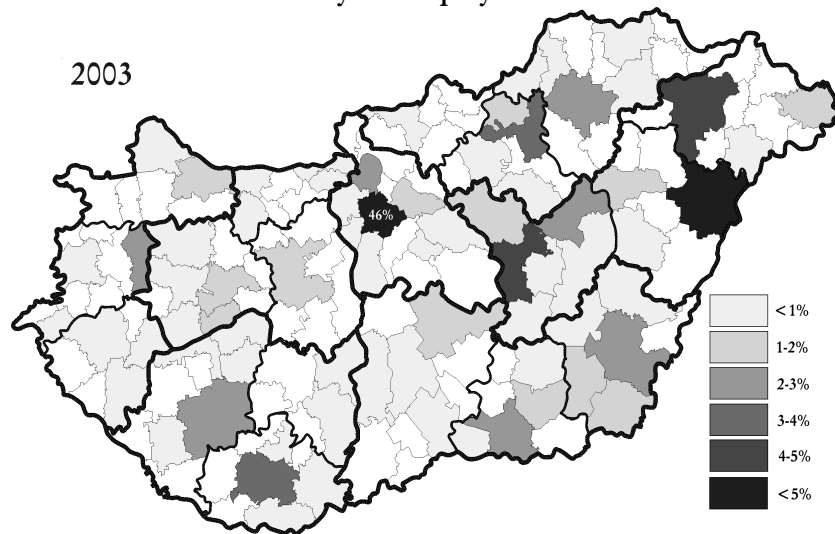


Figure 2.
Regional distribution of support in telework competition (in the rate of total support)
(Ed.: Tésits R. 2004)
Source: Ministry of Employment and Labour

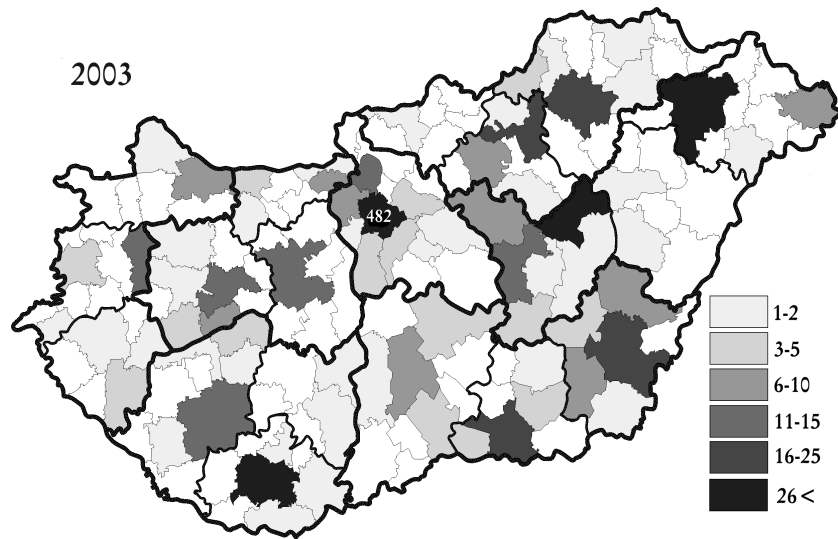


Figure 3.
Number of winning telework places in the microregions
(Ed.: Tésits R. 2004)
Source: Ministry of Employment and Labour

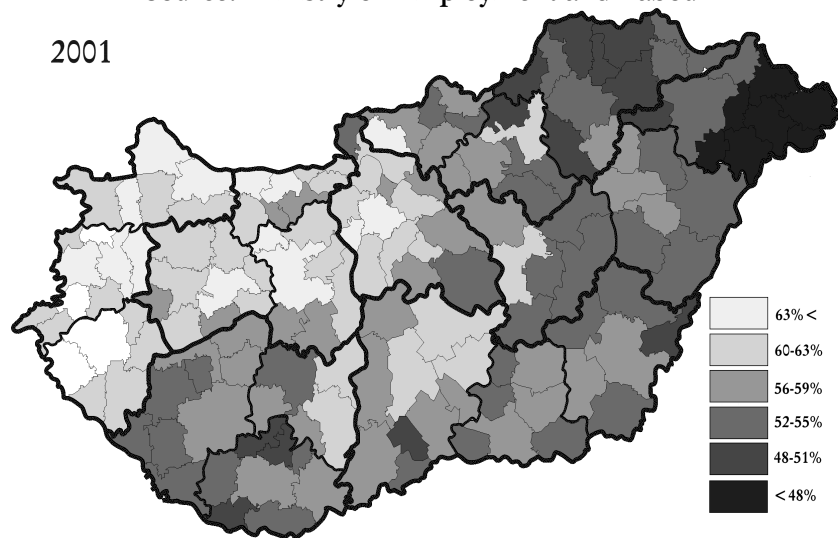


Figure 4.
Distribution of the economically active population
(Ed.: Tésits R. 2003)
Source: Central Statistical Office

3.2. Characteristics of teleworkers

Aspects of selecting teleworkers

In the selection of teleworkers, employers preferred independent problem-solving, precision, reliability and flexibility from the choice of personal characteristics. Neither ethnic affiliations, nor previous telework experience were considered important at all among the aspects of selection. Yet professional expertise was judged central and it was not bound necessarily by school qualification. Nor did age play any significant role in employment.

Teleworkers were mostly employed on a basis of reference and familiarity. Many firms had previously worked with those whom they employed as teleworkers in the scope of the tender. It was also a frequent procedure to employ the relatives or acquaintances of the employees. It was an extra characteristic if the person was unemployed or inactive. Telework employers working in rehabilitation were primarily the ones to turn to the Labour Centres in order to select their employees from the unemployed.

Since the scope of derivation equalled the employers' environment of familiarity, it also influenced the applicable techniques of employment. Many applied no methods, those who actually did use any, found personal interaction, i.e. interview the most suitable. Curriculum vitae came only second or was used along with the interview.

Structural characteristics

The national economy categorization of the interviewed winning applicants was quite limited. New telework jobs were filled in by those acting in the following areas: processing industry, trade, repairs, financial activities, real estate, market service, education, health and social service, and other communal, personal services. In the country, further areas appeared: mining (Baranya), agriculture, game and forest industry, fishing (Somogy, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok), transport, mail, telecommunication (Győr-Moson-Sopron), lodging service, catering (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg), and civil service, security, obligatory social security (Veszprém). But these were present in a slight number compared to the whole. Belonging to a branch of state economy also determined the actually existing and potential future locations of telework.

It was all surprising that civil service, security and obligatory social security hardly participate in the creation of telework jobs. One reason for it is that they were not among the applicants. A further reason is the "inseparability" of presence and labour in these types of office work. The terms e-government and e-democracy have appeared in professional vocabulary and everyday life; but so far they have not meant the telework employment of the officials but rather getting information, administration and downloading forms and decrees on the Internet.

Here, the officials are "stiffly" present in office and this presence is not inseparable from the location of the employer. While the most significant progress could be made in this area, since the data processing and data service of the civil servants cover such a large scope that they do not necessitate constant physical presence in the offices. Employers' aversion to telework is so strong that managers are not willing to lose their employees from sight.

True e-democracy does not only stand for having the clients sit in front of the computers; but it requires the officials as well to fulfil their everyday tasks. This does not call for an eight hours' presence in the office. The slenderization of the state apparatus always commences with discharges and mostly ends in taking new employees. Work is not really reorganised, only its steps are re-structured. Yet, this sphere—where administration is so pervasive—could serve as a marked area of telework. Civil servants with higher qualification and vast experience could really do their work in the form of telework, or at least a great share of it.

The interviewed firms and enterprises come majorly from the circle of legal entity. Among them, enterprises and non-profit organisations are in the highest number. Here, the two dimensions are from 20 to 100 and above 500 employees. Institutions with central and local government budget are in a scarce number. They are usually from the local governments of villages with little population (e.g. Bükkösd). Research indicates here that the expansion of telework is an important form of work with a bottom-up initiative. Mayors of those local governments where there is no chance of creating and maintaining new offices, where money has to be raised from month to month in order to run the office are the most willing to open up for operating through telework.

Private entrepreneurs have appeared among the winners in a significant number. For this layer of employers it is really essential for survival to have such background employees who carry out their daily, weekly or seasonal work not at the branch office of the enterprise but in their own homes. Private entrepreneur applicants have a firm dimension of the smallest size—1 to 5 persons. They also took use of the tender issued by the MIC for funding the purchase of computer equipment, since the enterprise is in the lack of capital and with the help of this 500.000 HUF/telework

place a telework position can be created where the employees carry out the background work of the firm. Along with this, the least number of applicants are from this area when it comes to salary and dues support, and they hardly opted for the opportunity of basic or specialised computer education. A reason for the latter phenomenon is the requirement according to which the telework employee is to be fully employed in eight hours and with a labour contract, but an entrepreneur with few employees cannot offer enough tasks for the employees for such a duration of time. Part-time employment and moonlighting were popular in this area. The enterprise became so flexible through these two atypical employment forms that it can cope with the incoming commissions or their temporary lack on a daily basis. The fact that they did not draw on the support gained arises from the circumstance that they had primarily employed qualified telework employees with computer skills.

Regional characteristics

The view (NEUMANN L. 2000) that the difference in qualification among the unemployed and those applying for telework is significant, still holds. Thus, though neither in the past, nor after the turn of the millenium can we expect the indices of unemployment go down; yet the exemplary programs, and the succesful employment experience might enhance the expansion of this form in the favoured regions.

The living places of the teleworkers (and equally, their place of work) and the central branch office of the employer are near one another in the majority of the cases. It postulates a communication network within a village, a microregion or occasionally within a county. It can be accounted for by the fact that the selection of employees is based on previous acquaintance or work connection. The guarantee of reliability is supposed to lie in it according to the employers in the circle of the profit-oriented enterprises. The only exceptions to this are non-profit enterprises or the enterprises employing those disadvantage (disabled, permanently unemployed). In this latter case, the distance between the central premises and the living place of the employee can take greater dimensions: selection might reach a national level, and the employment becomes fit for reducing unemployment and for soothing the problems of the underdeveloped regions (Figures 5 and 6).

3.3. Characteristics of telework places

Former telework experience of employers

The number of Hungarian teleworkers, compared to the total number of employees, can be expressed in a few percentages. Unfortunately, only few employers had applied this form of employment before the tender. The exceptions to this are the company of rehabilitation in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, the society of transport in Győr-Moson-Sopron, the already mentioned society of rehabilitation and employment in Baranya and the firms of Internet service and engineering consulting. In the case of the latter, the situation is inverse. Earlier, the firm had not had teleworkers; but the person employed through the tender proved so successful that several employees of typical employment form asked to be permitted to carry out their work as teleworkers. Meeting this need, the number of employees working outside the premises of the firm has risen.

Two extremes have appeared concerning the ratio of teleworkers within a firm. The ratio is very high in firms working with 1 to 5 employees, it is especially true for private entrepreneurs; and this ratio has occasionally reached 100 per cent. While it is 1–2% at firms with 100–500 or more employees. Also the field of business activity of the firm, beside the size, determines the ratio of teleworkers and employees of typical employment form. At a firm interested in web design, Internet data search, translation or accounting, this ratio might be inverse, favouring the teleworkers. Based on the judgement of those replying, every single employee carries out knowledge work, or fills in a position where his activity can be categorized likewise.

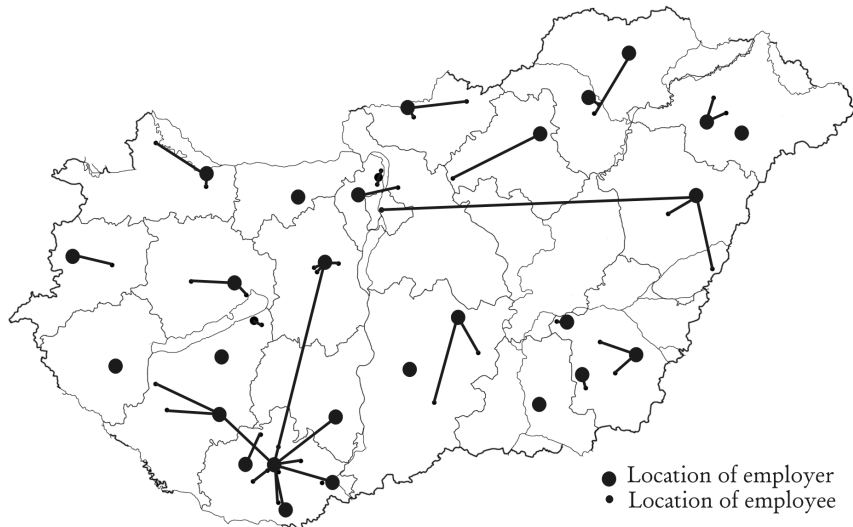


Figure 5.
Relation system of telework employers and employees
(Ed.: Tésits R. 2004)



Figure 6.
Spatial relation between teleworkers and telework employer giving work to underprivileged persons
(Ed.: Tésits R. 2004)

Reasons for the application of telework

Most employers found the financial support of the tender the most important element of motivation. It is most obvious, since had this opportunity been unimportant for the applicants, they would evidently not have applied at all. They also considered it important to try teleworkers and telework itself. But this implies that, fortunately, more and more are open to this form of labour still fresh in Hungary. The two possibilities, i.e. financial support and the need for the new form of labour, bound together were sufficient to turn the employers into telework employers. Unfortunately, this form expands with great difficulty in Hungary. Mistrust is pervasive, there is little technical equipment to back up the employment of teleworkers as extensively as it is rendered possible from the side of employees.

Teleworkers have been employed in considerably few cases, so no experience of sufficient measure has been available in connection with the potentials of this form of employment extension. The number of those applying firms with already employed teleworkers is below ten. No doubt, teleworker employers of great dimension have not applied for this experimental tender (for example MATÁV, the Hungarian company of telecommunication).

Gaining qualified labour force was ascribed a low value among the motivational elements. It implies that there is an over-supply of qualified employees, and it is not the working places that show great lack. Keeping the qualified employees, as a motivational element, is also under-represented. There was only one exception, an organisation working in a social field, carrying out charity work, where many volunteers have worked for several years or even for decades. Many have retired to old-age pension in the long run, or they have lost their jobs so their free time could be dedicated to charity only with difficulty. In this case, the fact that the persons well-versed could be turned into teleworkers helped extensively both the organisation and the employees. There is a layer of society whose free time has been marked up, and who would work at home with pleasure, since their intellectual capacity could be best put to use when they are mentally the most active: translators, designers, journalists, etc.

Contribution to the expenses of training and coaching was not a satisfactory motivation, either. Teleworkers selected already had the necessary computer and vocational skills. Only those larger firms—usually employing the disabled and the handicapped—stressed this question whose field is the integration of these people. Such firms were societies and institutions of employment and rehabilitation employing the handicapped in Budapest and Pécs, and the rehabilitation Centre in Szabolcs county. Also a few local governments have taken use of this opportunity.

Enterprises of smaller dimensions and private entrepreneurs characteristically opted for an opportunity reducing their costs or replacing actual investment, since telework does not need new offices, or premises for increasing the number of employees. Placing the new staff truly means great difficulty for these economic units of few employees. Rent is high, enterprises of small dimension often operate in a flat of one's own, in a transformed garage, or in a very small rented place. Here, efficiency is put at risk if in the hope or reality of a larger commission new employees are taken, and the costs of placing have to be earned as well. But also larger firms—with over 500 employees—employing more teleworkers parallelly, gave positive feedback (many especially in connection with this tender).

Reducing the costs (travel costs, bills, etc.)—as a motivational element for firms—was marked by two thirds of the interviewed. So it appears that these costs proved more comprehensible for the firms than the earlier costs referring to uneffected investments. Actual figures—supported by data from international research—ment real reductions in their budget.

Professions fit for telework

The winners of the tender listed the following professions as the activities of their teleworkers: data maintenance, data collector, data saving, accountant, computer digitalizer, tender writer, publicity manager, real estate executive, geometer, computer programmer, quality inspector, office assistant, operator, system operator, IT-expert, graphic artist, training organiser, trainer/instructor, consultant, editor, casting-coordinator, real estate estimator, shorthand writer and typist, website editor, architect, tender browser, journalist, translator, Internet assistant, customers service clerk, trainee, call-center operator, computer magazine editor, business contact person, study writer, abridger, project coordinator, project manager, poll researcher, cost estimator, media documentator, telework manager, tachograph data processor, regional coordinator, settlement developer.

It is all clear from the abundant list how vast the potentials of telework employment can get. There are hardly any office works that could not be carried out in the form of telework. These fields were not created on paper, but they stand for actual, already functioning tasks done by real individuals. It would be worth considering how many tasks and how much work a firm, organisation or enterprise fulfils that need not be carried out bound to an office in eight hours' presence.

Not many answers were given concerning the gross monthly salary ascribed to a certain task, but it can be deduced from the feedback offered by the interviewed that at least 80 per cent of the teleworkers are paid the minimum wage by the employers. This answer is at least thought-provo-

king. If we accept this data unconditionally, then it can be originated in the fact that the tender's financial support is constructed of contributing to paying minimum wage and its dues. This amount could be claimed for six months. It can be considered as a period of training or coaching for the teleworkers, since they do not work to a 100 per cent during this period. It is a training period for employers as well, since they organise work, select from the important and less important tasks meeting the profile of the firm, fitting them for telework. It was also the probable goal of the tender. It offers the employer a chance to lift off the burden of the training costs in this initial—non producing—stage. Hopefully, the salary fitted to the minimum wage shall rise after the six months of funded support. Naturally, firms employing teleworkers with a university degree—or for that matter, with more degrees—give a salary higher than minimum wage as it is ordained.

Telework places and keeping contact

Teleworkers of the interviewed—with a few exceptions—work in their own homes. Only a very few employers organise work in a telehouse or in a telework center (local government, state institution, non-profit foundation), in firm premises (data processing, structure building firms, local government society), in a mobile working place (society of stock breeding and improving) or in other places, e.g. at the customers (enterprise of management). This build-up of the answers proved a bit different from the expected, because this may also mean that the Internet availability is getting wider and wider in Hungary, teleworkers possess the necessary equipment in their homes. It may also indicate that teleworkers are employed only where there is a facility to have the teleworkers log in on the Internet from their homes. There is a third explanation: teleworkers do such work that does not necessitate an Internet access and the hardware is provided by the employer. In this case electric mains connection would suffice.

On the basis of interviews with teleworkers, working at home is favoured because employees prefer designating the ratio of their working hours and free time, or they can divide their time among housework, family to be taken care of, children, work around the house, or feeding the stock, etc. It may occur that some teleworkers can only manage any travel outside their homes with assistance, so they are bound to their homes.

Keeping touch between the employer and the employees can take various communication channels. Distributing work happens on the phone or in person in most cases. Personal meetings take place regularly, in fixed appointments at the branch office or headquarters of the firm. Since distributing work happens parallelly to handing over the documents and paperwork to be proces-

sed, and the vouchers and surveys in single original copies cannot be transferred on the Internet. Where the working place is not tied by such demand, this procedure takes place on the phone and Internet transfer comes only second.

Problems occurring during work are dealt with on the phone and on the Internet in most cases by the employers and employees. Quite often, teleworkers are offered prefixed consulting hours or if the problem is without precedent and the solution cannot wait, it can be discussed in a time and place agreed upon. It characterises rather smaller firms and enterprises with few employees, since the participants know one another well and it is more convenient to adjust in time and place.

Control over work does not mean great difficulty for many firms. It usually—especially in the form of control during process—does not come about. Where it does, it involves all communication channels (e-mail, phone, personally and regularly, personally in an individually fixed time).

Reporting on and receiving work happens in person at more than half of the firms interviewed. Many have put down e-mail as the form of receiving. Those preferring this channel for distributing and receiving work employ teleworkers in such fields where they work independently from the vouchers of the firm. Most telework places belong here. It may occur that the type of work would not necessitate personal contact when distributing and receiving, yet this method is preferred because this way the complete isolation of the teleworkers is prevented and their attachment to the firm is maintained. The number of those willing and wanting to work in complete isolation—from the employer—is not significant. These appointments are necessary not because of the nature of the work but for psychological reasons.

Employers almost in all cases find it necessary to have their teleworkers keep in touch with one another, except if the fields the teleworkers work in are fundamentally different. Contact works along different methods. Where work is carried out on the Internet, e-mail is the favoured form of information exchange; but phone owns the leading role in many places. Contact between teleworkers is rarely kept personal, and it is rather linked to the nature of work. It majorly happens at the branch office of the firm and on prefixed appointments.

Hardware is almost exclusively provided by the employer (lending out property). The tender offered an opportunity for purchasing computers and configurations, thus the freshly employed could start working on the newly acquired computers. Many employers could not have employed teleworkers had they not been given the chance of purchasing. Teleworkers working on their own computers are in scarce number (1–2 per cent).

Risks of telework

Survey examining disadvantages, aversions and technical problems involve three observation topics: problems relating to firms, to teleworkers and to the operations of the computer.

In the first topic, insufficient change of view from the side of the management was cited as the leading risk. Employers' views on telework change with great difficulty, even at firms where the proprietors or the managers are open enough to have actually created positions of telework. Along with this, the change in the subjective relations of the traditional status quo of boss-employee-colleague can turn problematic. Change is slow, but is inevitable in this area as well. The above mentioned temporary solution justifies it: distributing and returning work is still carried out in person in most cases. This retains the link that physically binds the employees to their working places and directly to their executives.

The second topic—concerning the teleworker employee—loss of motivation, isolation or potential discontent may cause problems (especially when not the right teleworkers are selected). Actually, not everyone is fit for telework. Those who cannot work independently, whose time is frittered away, or who require constant control are not to choose this form of work. Employees only with such personalities can fulfil the job to their own and the employers' satisfaction who are determined, professionally confident, independent and have a good handling of time. It is also important that they should be able to stand the psychic stress of working alone. They should be able to feel that their work is important despite the fact that they do not work in a community and have no feedback concerning their daily duties.

Losing control over teleworkers, the difficulty in measuring personal merit meant a problem for few of the interviewed. In this case, the inappropriate manager or inappropriate position may prove problematic. Both problems can be solved "at home". It is to be considered carefully who the person leading teleworkers should be, or for that matter, if it is worth continuing in this traditional organisational form in the future. Yet, measurement of personal achievement can be linked to the fulfilment of duty in the right position.

Among other parameters, secrecy, computer data and virus protection may cause problems. In the first case, it is a legal problem; in the second, it is the application of such software that can serve as sufficient defense against unauthorised intruders. Unfortunately, softwares offering appropriate defense are quite expensive and smaller firms cannot afford them. So, here, the problem is solved by portable equipment and more frequent personal contact.

The amendment of the Labour Code concerning telework was issued at the time of the interview, that is why the particular importance of protection of labour had been indicated by many. This question has already been regulated through the act coming into effect on May 1, 2004[1].

3.4 Tender experience of telework employers

Experience on efficiency

The influence of telework on the economy of firms (costs of creating new working places) effected through tenders was considered highly important according to the interviewed. This preference can be attributed to the purchase of computers and its equipment. Here, applicants obtained hardware of excellent quality, could purchase legally clean software, carried out updated improvements in accounting or in other special professional fields. For larger firms with more employees, it meant great relief to have salaries and corresponding dues taken care of from the winning tender as financial support for six months. In the meantime the disadvantages of the initial period came to light, firms suffered and recovered from the children's diseases of employing teleworkers, and by the time the period of training (both for the employees and the employer) along with the funded six months expired, they could work together successfully. Then telework became efficient and both profit and income increased.

Unfortunately, few applicants took advantage of employing teleworkers from all around the country. They are still employing new labour force from their immediate environment (village, town acquaintance, labour center). So, the open geographic potentials of telework utilization remain unexploited.

The whole range of evaluation of the interviewed is used in the consideration of task management within the firm and in the introduction of new labour methods. It is yet a mistake to think that the introduction of new labour methods are indifferent to the applicants. Since this great range can be ascribed to the great range of firm sizes. The employment of teleworkers means a fundamentally new task-management for smaller firms. Such positions and tasks are introduced through this form of labour that have never been listed among the business activity, or—in the lack of computers—have been carried out manually.

These tasks were already present on an everyday basis for larger firms; now only the place of work has changed. Since carrying out the work had not been an essential part in the daily routine, it was rather linked to a constant but regular activity, having it done by a teleworker did not bring about fundamental change. Personal presence was not called off, only its duration and frequency was altered. Teleworkers appear at the firm on a daily or weekly basis, and they usually receive new work personally. Security and data protection problems are done away with, for confidential documents of accounting do not have to be "transported" on the Internet between the working places; but they are handed over to the employer on a computer data medium (winchester, floppy, CD). This method works only where the living place of the employee is fairly close to the branch office of the firm. For employers with a wider geographic range, a safe internet network has to be installed which technically prevents the unauthorized from intruding in the flow of data. Not only is this method introduced for teleworkers working from a larger distance; but rather its cheaper and less complicated version is applied. Teleworkers are employed in those positions where internet access is necessary, but internal, confidential data are not used. For example, web-page designer, economic analyst, price estimator, press observer, or a tutor taking part in correspondent training.

General remarks

The interviewed found this government initiative extremely pleasing. They considered this method of expanding telework a pioneering idea worth continuing. The public sphere could have a great role in the future employment of teleworkers, since several positions and tasks can be found here and in public administration that could be dealt with applying this method. Joining the EU should bring along changes in this area, considering the fact that many employees become fit for this type of work through their qualification, training and language skills. There is an existing demand for administration via the Internet (e-government, e-democracy), and hopefully, institutions of state and local government will soon prepare for this role.

Many of the applicants had already heard about this form of atypical employment, what is more, a few had already applied it. Many see telework as the main way to improve an enterprise, since such tasks can be done as marketing, market research, price correction, and co-ordination between the firm, the clients and the transporters. Employers can primarily be held back by the lack of commissions. Many firms employ teleworkers for only part time work of 2–4 hours daily. This might be the reason for the phenomenon that many have gained salary support, yet used only a share of it. This applies for training support as well. The reason for not using this support is that

telework positions were filled in by persons—already familiar—who had computer skills, or had earlier contacted the firm through work, so there was no need for a special—workplace-oriented—training, either.

From the winning applicants no one had to refund the financial support on claims of not meeting the prescribed requirements of the tender. By the conditions of the salary support, the newly created working places could not be terminated within six months. This did not happen, yet it occurred that teleworkers failed for various reasons. In certain cases the employees resigned because they did not turn out to be fit for this type of work. The other party dismissed employees, too because—according to their view the employee could not meet the tasks as it was required. The telework place itself was filled in again in both cases.

The interviewed generally found the tender arrangement good, but several critical remarks have been made. A great share of the applicants had no knowledge about the salary support and the training opportunity, so, they did not apply for that. Many complained to have been under-informed about the possibilities and obligations of special training. Several applicants had thought about quitting because of the lack of information. It took them a while to decide, and they could not find the the right persons to give them the essential information about the tender. No help was available in connection with the labour contract nor with arrangements of the special training. They had no information about what can be funded from the tender and what they cannot claim for. Consequently, the next tender should have a better propaganda, it is far from sufficient to have the opportunity appear on the Internet or in the daily papers.

The deadline of the tender, according to the interviewed, does not have a good timing, since balancing and the annual closing of accounts take up much of the last months of the year. Getting the required documents to be enclosed in the application was also problematic, since offices are available in certain periods of the month.

The fact that applicants had to wait for nine months for the worth of their bills handed in meant a further difficulty. In connection with the arrangement, they also complained that the money won had been handed over very slowly and the time of processing had been unreasonably long. It makes especially investment of a larger scale impossible. Funding in advance was suggested as a solution. It happened in one case that the winning applicant could not tolerate to wait for the administration taking months so he quit and carried out the improvement from his own finances.

As a negative side, the lack of possibility to re-structure the existing jobs was mentioned, since the tender insisted on creating new places.

The wording of the tender was not precise, and what is more, it does not completely prevent abuse (e.g. change of address, obligation of reporting translocation).

Most of the applicants found it important to include cost contribution or cost funding in the tender. Here, the use of Internet and telephone bills are meant primarily. It is all true that the costs of the employer are reduced if the calls are not made on the spot; but teleworkers working for minimum wage are disproportionately burdened. One potential solution is to pay directly for the telephone or Internet company in turn of the signed contract. The worth of the bills could be set on a lump depending on the working hours. This financial support could be ascribed not only to the new but also to the existing telework jobs. Based on experience, training support is not as popular in most cases—exactly because of the preference for the employees with computer skills—as it could be for its cost funding potential. Both teleworkers and employers missed a record on the basis of which it would be evident who of the registered unemployed would apply for telework. It would not mean extra costs for the labour centers, since files would have to be extended by one question and answer. And, through this one extension, propaganda is carried out, too. Personal propaganda, information would contribute greatly to the increase of telework employment. For this reason, both the employees and employers are to mark their willingness for telework in the records in the future.

Altogether, winning telework employers would welcome similar tenders supporting telework in the future. This experimental tender was esteemed successful, and a proof of it is the number of the employers applying with their ideas for the new tender—closed down in the meantime—of 2004.

Teleworkers are not completely satisfied, either. They explain it with the lack of computer equipment, the ratio of costs burdening them, and the technical problems of Internet access. True as it is that the costs of the employer are reduced through employing teleworkers, yet these costs appear on the side of employees. In many cases it was suggested that a new telework tender creating further jobs should be issued; but the costs of operation are to be included in it by all means. It is general to employ teleworkers for minimum wage, as the interviewed report. But this minimum wage does not allow for the telephone and Internet bills, nor does it allow for travelling occasionally to the branch office of the employer.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The authors have examined the slow, sectional and temporary expansion of telework from three sides equalling the three participants of labour market: exploring the relations between the government, telework employers and employees.

The government has up till the issue of this tender been a passive contributor to the expansion of telework. Both legal and economic background have been missing from Hungarian economy, and along with this, the problematics of telework has not been present in taxing (VAT, personal income tax, social security), legal regulations of information technology, either; but mostly important of all, it had no legitimacy in the law of labour.

Since then, telework has appeared as an individual chapter of supreme legal regulation, in the Labour Code. Having come to effect, the act opened the way that offers legitimate paths for telework on the labour market.

And this tender, offering this significant sum, assisted it to get strengthened in the economy and to take its first feeling steps. The make-up and intention of the participants is a proof that there is a minimal demand with which this special form of work brought to life by our days can be set off.

Unfortunately, there is still lack of information in this field, concerning both the nature and the application of telework. There should be more briefings, presentations and personal trainings on the advantages of telework, naturally, not hindering the problems, either. Society is still learning about telework knowhow, both from the part of the employees and employers. That is why this task is to be taken under by the government and its institutions. Both the business and non-profit sectors specialised in this topic are helpful.

Teleworkers show a far greater interest in this type of work than employers. Unemployment, and especially its regional deconcentratedness are still high. Many employees have good qualifications and computer skills. They are the ones to become potential teleworkers. Even if the ones unfit for this type of work are filtered—ones not standing isolation, monotony, or those with too much ambition—there is still a significant number of applicants. But we do not know where these potential teleworkers can be located. Because there are no records or database collecting, propagating and pre-selecting applicants of telework on the basis of aptness. Telework Nonprofit Company has made several efforts to set up a database of tens of thousands of applicants; but, in the lack of

maintenance, it turned outdated and useless. The company has closed down, and the Távmunka Programiroda (Telework Project Office) still working does not hold it in its competence. Unfortunately, employment centers have no similar records, either. Filtering teleworkers in advance is not solved by database of telework portals on the Internet, and consequently, those applying for telework are of a much higher number than those actually apt for it. Aptness for telework means the right mixture of computer skills and professional knowledge, a database consisting of employees fit for isolated and disciplined work with a capacity to work independently keeping deadlines.

The future and the—few—already existing telework employers are the most difficult "to mobilize" considering the participants of the labour market. They show the deepest disinterest and aversion to employ teleworkers. They can hardly detach themselves from employing workers who have personal and daily contact to the firm (boss, colleagues). Here, one would need a fundamental change of views.

The appropriate aspect bringing the right type of motivation could be economics. Here—as the current research indicates it—two segments of employers might crop up: large and medium firms, and enterprises operating in the microsphere. Large firms are open to telework because they possess those means of informatics that, handed over to the employees, enable teleworkers to work from their homes. They also have their potentials of organisation and analysis to group the tasks that are the most cost-effective to distribute among teleworkers. Their flexibility and speedy reaction time allow micro-enterprises to be partners in the application of telework. This is the segment that can switch from one task to the other, that is the most open to changes, that reacts to the demands of the market with the least investments in material and human resource management

Though the tender suffers from children's diseases; but the first initiative of the government has set an important goal: it shed light on the practical potentials of telework and it has encouraged the interests of both the employers and employees in this specific form of labour. One can also deduce from the research that unemployment will not soon be wiped out, nor reduced by this atypical form of labour; but it can help small enterprises and non-profit organisations, foundations and local governments lacking equipment and offices to employ those employees who can work independently and this is the most convenient or even the only way to types of work fitting their life conditions.

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[11] The Act XXVIII of 2004 on the amendments of singular acts in connection with employment, pursuant the amendment of Act XXII of 1992 on the Labour Code and Act XCIII, was completed with a new VII/A chapter, new title and paragraph 86/A which regulated the protection of labour concerning telework. With this legal regulation, this question is transferred into the field of specialized law.