Women and Work in the Civil Society Sector: The Case of Romania and Poland

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Abstract: This article analyses the roles of women leading women rights nongovernmental organizations (NGO) in Romania and Poland. In the twenty-seven years that passed since the fall of communism, both countries have benefited from many improvements concerning the status of women. Yet, both countries experienced a "fast-line" feminism, in which generations, ideologies and institutions that have been developed for long periods of time in the West had to be fast-forwarded in post-socialism (Grabowska 2009). Within this context, how did women's leadership roles evolve in the civil society sector in two Central and Eastern European countries? How are women working in non-governmental organizations affected by flexible programs, fluctuations in wages, shifts of personnel and demands of funders? In order to offer some insights on these issues, in the first part of the article I explain how contextual elements determined women's effectiveness as leaders. To substantiate the findings, in the second part I focus on women's experiences inside civil society organizations (CSOs), the difficulties and lessons learned, the internal dynamics, roles and strategies that they employ both in their relations with states and with funders. I focus on the micro level of the organizational cultures, how work inside CSOs differs from other types of work due to activities, relations, time spent and wages and highlight the diversity of women's organizations and roles. The dynamics of these processes are captured by a two year comparative analysis, through a collection of 30 interviews in Romania and Poland. The findings highlight the particularities of women's leadership roles, mechanisms and tactics in creating a fairer workplace culture through participatory decision-making, which in turn stimulates employees; and develop negotiating, resisting and decoupling strategies with state representatives and funders to maintain their autonomy, voice and strengths, at the intersection of local context and international normativity, in their quest for gender equality.

Keywords: women's leadership, civil society organizations, Romania, Poland.

Introduction

Women, in different historical and cultural contexts, entered the civil society sector due to marginalization from state institutions or male-dominated politics, to influence public policies and societal perceptions concerning gender equality (Howell 2005; Miroiu 2010). Inside the civil society sector, women articulated their demands and strengthened their voices, mobilized around issues of domestic violence, equal pay, gender discrimination, created networks of solidarity, articulated counter-hegemonic discourses and contributed to a fairer working environment (Howell 2005; Hoare and Gell 2009).

The majority of the literature on the topic of civil society has focused on the number, activities, roles or effects of civil society organizations and less on the people that make up these organizations. However, existent research on the topic of women and civil society has shown that women's organizations develop parallel power structures (McCharty 1990, 1991), different political cultures and place a great importance on employee's gender needs (Einhorn and Sever 2005, Hassan and Silong 2009). Social movement theory draw attention to women's roles to inspire and organize (Brown 1989; Disney and Gelb 2000), especially in Western countries.

The main research questions of the article are: how does women's leadership role evolve in the civil society sector and what are its particularities in post-communist, religious and traditional countries? How are women affected by the lack of a fixed program, a feminized sphere of the civil society sector and fluctuations in wages, due to the demands and shift of funders? By focusing on the specificities of the civil society sector in Romania and Poland, I answer these questions and at the same time highlight the diversity of leadership roles, styles and strategies that women in NGOs developed, while facing pressures from funders, governments, communities and members.

In the first part of the article, I present the research methodology. In the second part, I focus on contextual elements that shaped women's NGOs differently in the two countries, while in the third and fourth part I analyze women's leadership roles, styles, communication and decision-making strategies and how flexible work affects them. Conclusions are drawn to highlight how several aspects of women's roles can shape a gender-friendly, inclusive and horizontally structured working culture. At the same time, the paper highlights the numerous issues women face when working inside the 'third sector'.

Research tools

The current research is based on a two-year analysis from Romania and Poland[1]. The two countries were selected following the "most different system design". Women's roles inside the civil society sector are analyzed by tackling the macro-level (country-contextual variables), meso-level (civil society organizations) and the micro-individual level (motivations of activists) approaches. Political opportunity changes at the regional level (such as the democratization in Eastern Europe) shaped women's NGOs differently in Romania and Poland. For both Romania and Poland, I consulted the public data bases[2] in regard to NGOs and selected the organizations with the following missions: feminists/women rights oriented, reproductive and sexual rights oriented, violence against women, sex worker rights, lesbian rights, Roma women, associations of/for mothers and that have women beneficiaries, victims of human trafficking and vulnerable groups.

After making my own database composed of the information from both Romanian and Poland databases and public information[3] I contacted the NGOs by telephone and e-mail. In the selection stage, I have tried to keep the diversity of the organizations (e.g. from new ones, to the ones with a long history; different locations; different assumed ideologies; feminist and not feminist; with few members and with more than 10; with few volunteers and with more than 20; academia based and grassroots; service provision and advocacy).

I have opted for keeping this diversity to grasp the patterns of similarities in leadership roles. A number of 30[4] semi-structured interviews were taken, 15 in Romania and 15 in Poland with women formal leaders – presidents, directors and vice-presidents of women NGOs. The

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[1] The Romanian NGOs that participated in the research have their headquarters in Bucharest, Sibiu, Iași, Suceava and Timișoara, Arad while the Polish ones are based in Warsaw, Poznań, Gdansk and Krakow. More than half on the interviews (19) have been taken at the offices of the organizations and first glance observations have been noted afterwards in regard to the relations inside the organizations and the atmosphere, the headquarters and several specificities.

[2] For Romania: http://www.just.ro/MinisterulJusti%C8%9Biei/RegistrulNa%C5%A3ionalONG/tabid/91/Default.aspx; http://database.ngo.ro/indexro.shtml; http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/posdru/index.php/implementeaza/plati; http://www.cdep.ro/informatii_publice/ong.pe_dom?dom=62
For Poland: http://bazy.ngo.pl/search/english.asp; http://www.distel.ca/womlist/countries/poland.html; http://mith.umd.edu/WomensStudies/GovernmentPolitics/InternationalDirectory/Europe/poland; http://womenst.library.wisc.edu/resources/organizations;

[3] There are 500 Polish women based NGOs and more than 60 women based Romanian ones, according to the official databases.

[4] The negative answers I received from members of the organizations that were not interviewed had to do with the lack of time, the fact that some organizations ceased to exist or the language barrier that occurred in Poland.

interviewees are between 29 and 67-year-old and belong to different social environments: academia, entrepreneurs, employees of the private sector, lawyers, retired etc. A third of them work part-time, while the rest have devoted their careers to this sector and to women's rights.

I have opted for keeping the respondent's anonymity, since several 'sensitive' topics were addresses (e.g. relations with funders, survival methods) that could affect the organization. In this sense, for each organization I have used a similar coding technique: the function of the person I have talked to (e.g. president or vice-president), following the country of origin (the interviewed NGOs from Romania with "ro", while the Polish ones with "pl") and a number from 1 to 15. In this sense, the code *president, pl-06* means that this is the sixth Polish NGO president I have talked to.

In Romania, the organizations' missions vary between combating urban discrimination against women, raising awareness and changing public policies, street activism, gender equality, gender equality in the labor market, helping rural women or women at the local level, protecting women from domestic violence and sexual abuse, anti-mobbing or empowering Roma women.

In Poland, the majority of women's NGOs have a close connection with the topic of reproductive rights and violence against women, and less with academia (Mrozik 2010). Their missions consist of raising awareness and changing policies in regard to reproductive rights, sex education, monitoring the government in regard to gender equality policies, violence against women and gender discrimination, gender equality on the labor market, campaigning for women with disabilities, gender and culture or mother's rights.

The research also relies on secondary literature on the civil society sector, social movements and leadership theories. Content analysis of the NGOs' websites and materials allowed me to include the macro and meso-level variables in the analysis, which I present in the following pages.

The paths of women's organizations in Romania and Poland

Women's movements vary across time and regions: some feminist groups emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as part of the anticolonial revolutionary struggles; some emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the democratization movement (Ewig and Ferree 2013). In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) second wave feminism was born in a very atypical relation to feminism from Western countries. Here feminism had a similar fate with first wave feminism, concerning civil

and political rights (Bucur 2008; Miroiu 2015). It was built on theories developed in the West and was greatly supported by transnational feminist advocacy networks (Moghadam 2005).

During the socialist regime from the 1950s to 1989, women in Romania and Poland were relatively economically independent from men. Their participation[5] in the CEE labor market was the highest between any economy in the world, as well as their representation in professional managerial levels, compared to their European equivalents (Metcalfe and Afanassieva 2005, 39).

At the same time, due to ubiquity of the authoritarian socialist regimes, women were not autonomous and did not have the power of ruling over themselves, their lives and plans (Miroiu 2007, 200). In the 1980s in Poland women's movement was embedded in the labor union movement of the Solidarity, where women lead most of the underground activities (Penn 2005). Like in the United States and Europe, labor women gained organizing experience in union activities (Ewig and Ferree 2013). Nevertheless, after 1989 women's role was marginalized in the Solidarity 'myth', due to the growing role of the Catholic Church in the political and social spheres.

In the 1980s in Romania, the few isolated women activists could not make up for a whole movement, like in Poland. Here, women organized a rather "private solidarity" (Klingman 1998; Miroiu 2004a, b). The control of socialist government over civil society and the claims that communism has solved "the women's question" eroded any solid women's movement during the 1980s (Waylen 2007).

After 1989, the status of women in post-socialist countries varied and was contradictory. Empirical studies focused on the negative effects of neoliberal reforms on women (Spehar 2005). Some concluded that women did not suffer major setbacks in the labor market (Fodor & van der Lipe 1998), especially highly educated, middle-class young women (Spehar 2005). However, in both countries women's unemployment rates exceeded those of men (UNECE 2002).

In the 1990s, both Romania and Poland witnessed women organizing outside political parties and in various NGOs, to persuade politicians to vote for laws against discrimination and domestic violence, and for equal opportunity and gender parity in the electoral lists (Miroiu 2010, 162). The first autonomous women's groups emerged, similar to those in the 1950s to 1970s in the United States and Europe (Ferree and Hess 2001). These groups were independently led, but often worked with other movements, state agencies, and NGOs at scales from the local to the

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[5] In communist CEE countries, women beneficiated by extensive childcare policies, generous maternity allowances and flexible working arrangements (Metcalfe and Afanassieva 2005).

transnational (Ewig and Ferree 2013). They include formal organizations, grassroots or women only collectives (Ferree and Hess, 2001).

However, women's movements in Romania and Poland differ in the way they emerged, in women's NGOs strategic orientation and organizational styles. In Romania, women mobilized material, moral, social-organizational, human and cultural resources (Edwards and McCarthy 2004) without any previous experience. Here, the "private solidarity" transposed into the creation of several women NGOs, but in a fragmented way (Kriszan and Zentai 2012, 186). Their development as formal organizations happened when women "met" Western feminist literature, through academia (Molocea 2013). Due to a conservative political culture which promoted interests of men (Watson 1993; Coyle 2003, 59) and a "preventive anti-feminism" (Miroiu 2004 a,b; Miroiu and Popescu 2004; Grunberg 2000a, b; Sloat 2004), women's NGOs from Romania were isolated from the public sphere.

In Poland, the underground actions during the 1980s translated into cooperation between women and women's newly established NGOs and their struggle to push for the law regarding abortion not to pass (Baldez 2003; Grabowska and Regulska 2011). Here, women's movement emerged on the streets. Women's NGOs could be distinguished by two features – whether they were linked to the Catholic Church or not; the latter being less traditional, feminist or gender-based organizations. Their divergences arose in issues regarding abortion, family and particularly on the roles played by women in the family unit (Fuszara 2005, 1065).

During the transition period (1990 to 2007 when Romania accessed the European Union and from 1990 to 2004 when Poland accessed the EU), the benefits of the socialist regime's policies were eliminated, due to the drastic cuts in the social programs (Bozena 2008). Closing down communist enterprises meant closing their majority of social functions, from nurseries, kindergartens, canteens, to organizing holidays and enterprise polyclinics (Metcalfe and Afanassieva, 2005). However, inside the civil society sector, women's NGOs were not resistant to capitalist transition (Pollert 2003), nor have proposed a feminist agenda for reform (Metcalfe and Afanassieva 2005, 398).

The hostile political climate, similar to the one encountered by Western feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, encouraged the development of broad coalitions and consolidation between women's groups. The differences between the varieties of feminism were less important, ideologically women's NGOs were rather complementary (Ferree and Hess 2001, 183). Moreover,

external funders imported development models, such as jargons, rituals of training, workshops, roundtables and seminars, or fundraising (Grunberg 2000a, b) that further affected the organizational culture similarly.

International funding, lack of local and national support and lack of a voluntarism tradition affected women's NGOs by pushing them into the "NGO-ization" phase. This made women's NGOs less inclusive and more open to highly educated women who could offer expertise and implement projects (Alvarez 1999).

Europeanization brought a reduction in state involvement in the economy and further liberalization of the means of exchange (Grabbe 2002, 252). It was not substantive about women's position, rather in many respects, gender inequalities were exacerbated with the economic transition to a free market economy in both countries (Staszewska, Esplen and Dion 2010, 10). Despite the European Union's pressures for change, national institutions have not only retained, but also visibly strengthened their power and their ability to forge patriarchal discourses (Regulska and Grabowska 2008, 140).

European funding and institutional changes that occurred in the equality agenda have been "strongly embedded in both the post-communist legacy as well as the process of EU accession", but with variation to the patterns of institutionalizing and different engagements of intersectionality (Kriszan and Zentai 2012, 178). The differences in regard to the transportation of legacies in present institutions and practices (Saxonberg and Selewa 2007) and the political opportunity structure lead to divergent policy outcomes, as well as organizational types and strategies of the feminist civil society (Spehar 2005; Glass and Fodor 2007).

After the two countries' accession to the EU (2007 in Romania, 2004 in Poland) women's NGOs started to develop more diversely. In Romania, the movement cooperated with the sexual minority organizations, unlike Poland where this cooperation began in the 1990s, similar to the women's movement in the 1980s in the United States.

Intersectional concerns grew inside the movement, as the concept became vernacularized, and an explicit norm for feminist organizers in the United States, Latin America, Africa, the Balkans and other ethnically divided contexts (Ewig and Ferree 2013, 416). In Romania, this translated in the consolidation and inclusion of Roma women's NGOs and the birth of grassroots groups at the local level. In Poland, Jewish feminists, grassroots and young feminists that adopted 'grrrl power' played a key-role in the diversification of the movement.

Therefore, the pressures from women's NGOs, political parties initiatives, the UN Conferences and preparations and harmonization of EU regulations on equal opportunity policies have transformed women's positions in the political, economic and social spheres in the two countries (Jalusic and Antic 2000; Metcalfe and Afanassieva 2005).

Women's NGOs have pushed to create more sensitive legislation concerning women's needs, to protect victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse, trafficking, living conditions, hiring practices, and the overall welfare of women.

However, to date, both countries encounter issues in the employment rates of women (53% in Poland, 52% in Romania – European Commission 2012[6]). In both countries traditional family models and the lack of sufficient childcare education, along with the low stimulation of both parents to take maternal/paternal leave, as well as the pay gap between women and men (9.8% in Poland and 12.5% in Romania – European Commission 2012) have had an important impact on women's lives (Kwiatkiewicz and Wild 2011) and the way in which they have chosen their jobs and further advanced in their careers. In this manner, women moved jobs, professions, became self-employed or took on casual work (Wallace 2003, 777).

In this section, I have mapped the most important macro and meso-level elements that differentiate women's NGOs in Romania and Poland. Due to spatial limitations, I have broadly referred to "women's NGOs" or "women's movement". However, under these concepts lies a diversity of feminist and women based organizations, a diversity in goals and approaches, of focus and organizational flexibility that I describe in the following sections. These sections can stand as a point of differentiation between Eastern and Western feminist organizing. Eastern feminist organizations have developed with delay in the region, but encompass several particularities in regard to activities and workplace culture. Before presenting such particularities, a focus is placed on leadership and women's roles in the market place.

A kaleidoscope made of women's leadership styles and roles

By influencing groups or followers to achieve certain objectives, leaders need to perform specific roles (Yukl 1994). These roles are performed in certain contingencies and situations, with various subordinates (Hassan and Silong 2008). New approaches stress out that leaders seek to promote good interpersonal relations, team leadership, and worker participation in decision

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[6] https://data.oecd.org/emp/employment-rate.htm

making, establishing a climate of openness, mutual trust, respect, concern and receptiveness (Polnick et al. 2007; Ritt 2004; Noble and Moore 2006, 601).

Empirical research in regard to how women and men diverge in leadership styles point out to the following aspects: women tend to lead more democratically and involve employees in decision-making (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001); women adopt an interpersonal orientation, they keep the morale of their subordinates high and show concern about their welfare at work (Melero 2011). Women are a source of inspiration and create different roles for their subordinates (Bass and Riggio 2006). Female managers are more prone to lead with an interpersonal orientation, while male managers might be more likely to apply a task-oriented style (Melero 2011, 386).

Social movements theories on leadership draw attention on leader's actions to organize others to participate in social movements within structural contexts, their numerous roles and multiple layers (Morris and Staggenborg 2004), or conflicts over leadership tasks and changes over time (Morris and Staggenborg 2002).

Both approaches – leadership and social movements' studies – stress out that women face numerous challenges when advancing in their careers. These challenges are stemming from family responsibilities, traditional family models, cultural attributed work roles, differences in socialization, lack of childcare provisions, human resources practices, lack of influential social networks, role models and gendered organizational cultures; legislation and political support, economic status or class, race and age (Kwesiga and Bell 2004, 4-5).

In this manner, studies point out that women leaders are more attentive to processes, have holistic goals, humanistic values, engage in building consensus and have a facilitating and participatory style at the same time paying more attention to women's numerous challenges (Mizrahi and Lombe 2006). Mizrahi and Lombe (2006, 312) suggest that women's perceptions of the workplace culture are formed by their encounter with an existing male-dominated organization and partly by their systems of norms, expectations, and experiences. Therefore, the core dimension of this culture describes a psychosocial phenomenon that exists at work, or the norms that a woman meets when she enters a male-dominated organization (Mizrahi and Lombe 2006, 312).

In this article, I show that women's leadership particularities inside NGOs come from two dimensions: activities they are involved in and a certain workplace culture. The workplace culture is based on autonomy and absence of hierarchy and it is similar to Western feminist organizing, in

the pursuit of creating an alternative to the logic of many workplaces. This includes rejecting or minimizing organizational features such as hierarchical relationships, sexual harassment, separation of public and private and male-biased norms of expression, conflict, decision-making, self-promotion and humor (Ashcraft 2001, 80). However, specific particularities are met, particular to the region. In the next sections, I describe and analyze these particularities.

A "double edged sword": women and work in the civil society sphere

One of the first particularity of women's leadership comes from the motivation behind assuming such a role in the civil society sector, as formal leaders of NGOs. The majority of women working here have pointed out that their roles as presidents, vice-presidents or directors have a "deeper motivation", a "cause" or a "strong belief" for implementing projects or actions that aim social change for a more inclusive society. They consider their work different, confrontational, and mostly one that *it does not make you rich, it does not bring you fame and it mostly takes all the time you have* (president, pl-06).

Another aspect comes from the educational background. Women directors have backgrounds in Social Sciences, Law, Psychology or Public Administration. In this sense, the educational background highly affects the organizational structure "in accordance with their previous experiences, influencing the mobilization, strategies, and outcomes of movements" (Morris and Staggenborg 2002, 5). As other authors pointed out, leaders from middle and upper classes have more education than their follower (Rejai and Phillips 1988; Veltmeyer and Petras 2002) and the people they are representing.

According to Morris and Staggenborg (2002, 8-9) educational capital represents a key resource that leaders derive from their privileged backgrounds, because many of the activities which organizations undertake consist of framing grievances and formulating ideologies, debating, interfacing with media, public servants, developing strategies and tactics, innovating, manipulating symbols and so on. Project writing and implementing, as well as the increased need for expertize push the boundaries of a normal 'nine-to-five' job in two manners: constantly learning and working outside contractual hours. One president suggests that:

> *I have to learn the legislation, the financial mechanisms, there are many things that I should've known, but I don't. And the organization cannot do better; improve if I don't take the responsibility to do these things as they should be done, if I don't have the*

required knowledge. Therefore, I always read and learn and if the time isn't right, I find key people to fill these gaps of expertize (president, ro-06).

Moreover, working hours *mean working during the weekends, at nighttime, whenever it is asked* (vice-president, ro-01), because *you can't put the pen down and leave* (president, pl-15). The lack of a fixed program and affects women's time devoted to other domestic, care and social cultural activities (Irimie, Baleanu and Boatca, 2013). Thus, working inside this sector can be described as *unconceivable, incomprehensible and stressful* (president, pl-15).

Although longer hours are usually associated with higher income, it is not the case in the civil society sector in Romania and Poland (Wallace 2003, 782). All organizations have generally two types of working systems: one with individual working contracts in financed projects, in which people are hired on some roles, on a job description and on a fixed income in conformity with working contracts; and the other, which entangles activities that are not financed, in which people do voluntary work. Individual working contracts can consist of service providers or copyright contracts that are part-time.

In Poland, the majority of part-time contracts are in public and NGOs sector (Kwiatkiewicz and Wild 2011, 7). Both Romania and Poland have lower rates of part-time work, and higher rates of working long hours (Plantenga and Remery 2009, 52). The flexibility[7] of work is consistent in terms of time (working hours), place (place of work) and conditions (contractual arrangements) (Wallace 2003, 774). This has been portrayed by activists as a blessing, when they are in control of the hours, places of work and condition; and a curse when it comes to job protection and social security:

> *(…) What makes the work in NGOs precarious? Everyone here has short-term contracts, depending on the projects we are developing. It puts people in a precarious situation, but at least it includes health insurance* (vice-president, pl-07).

It's a blessing when *it's by choice* (vice-president, pl-02) because women have to divide their time to domestic and care activities, *some of them have children so we decided to have a more flexible approach to office hours* (vice-president, pl-12), others work in other organizations

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[7] This is consistent with the literature on flexible work, which has emphasized on the negative effects it has on low-paid employees, often women and young people and the positive effects on the development of the family-work balance for women (Wallace 2003, 774-5). Research shows that women value more than men flexible work arrangements and that women emphasize benefits derived from flexible work arrangements (Grabowska 2014, 19).

combining several sources of income (pl-01, ro-01), others are doing their studies (Masters, Ph.D.). It is a curse when it disorganizes their personal lives and family time (Mazur 2008) and when it consists of precariousness, lower salaries, and insecurity (Kwiatkiewicz 2011, 7).

The amounts of time spent and the job insecurity tied to project-based contracts affects the fluctuation of employees. *People come and go* (vice-president, pl-07), some of them left and some found other jobs, while others help when they can in their free time. Thus:

> *it is quite impossible to keep all these people here for long periods of time, or have a plan for human resources. All I can do is try to keep them motivated, even if that means finding ways to motivate them without financial resources* (president, ro-15).

Therefore, another important aspect of particularity in regard to women's roles comes from the issue regarding the constant fluctuation of employees and the need to keep the remaining ones motivated. Here, women employ several activities that are not found in the private or the public sector. Motivation without financial resources translates to offering employees opportunities to work in other NGOs; and when they win external funded projects, they facilitate other women NGOs activists to take part. Moreover, they get involved in informal self-help networks and barter for goods and services.

In this manner, leaders usually act as facilitators and mentors and less like formal presidents or directors: *we don't deal with hierarchies, but responsibilities* (vice-president, ro-01). None of the organizations has working guidelines or procedures, only with knowledge-transfer from the more experienced colleagues to the younger or less experienced ones (vice-president, pl-02). Rejecting power structures builds consensus, ownership of work and dialogue. This can be easily seen when visiting these organizations, in which open spaces and roundtables create more personal interaction and room for negotiations.

According to Morris and Staggenborg (2004, 181), feminist groups have experimented with structures that allow for both participatory democracy and effective and accountable leadership (Disney and Gelb 2000 *in* Morris and Staggenborg 2004). Encouraging employees to participate in decision-making is a strategy that leaders use over time, because it increases the level of ownership of work:

> *We have collaboration relations, rather than hierarchical ones, because working for so many years in this field and being on a coordinating position I have realized that when*

people have control over their work and have decision-making power, they also perform better (president, ro-13).

This is a common practice and strategy that is found in many women-based NGOs, and it is considered a key-stimulating factor in welfare, performance and morale of the employees. It also creates a sense of responsibility and independence that *gives a little space to people, especially when we have to deal with complex problems* (president, ro-08).

Another aspect of the particularities that women leaders embrace in regard to activities are related to engaging in less formal channels of communications and having more personal interactions. Informal activities outside work consolidate the team, motivate people and *help our colleagues deal with their personal and professional issues. They create solidarity and relations based on trust, respect and reciprocity* (president, pl-05). They also offer *a personal value to the group; things are shared, valuing our political experiences, as women, on daily basis* (president, ro-04).

Considering the values and beliefs shared with their employees, as well as the nature of relations that tend to be less formal, women use these attributes to encourage employees and volunteers to work inside the civil society sector and thus balance between the negative and positive aspects of this type of work. Despite the low-paid and sometimes precarious conditions (including wages, working conditions, relations with local and national governments and funders), women have developed strategies to offer their employees some rewards, motivations and advice.

Women workplace culture(s)

Like their Western counterparts, most women NGOs can be analyzed as "flattened hierarchies," in which some division of labor and authority structure are present, while power differences are minimized (Ferree and Hess 2001, 103). The level of bureaucratization depends on the strategic forms of associations. Hierarchies exist due to project and formal requirements, but there are certain degrees of flexibility (ro-11, pl-05), everyone is involved at the level of project writing, decision-making and strategies because everyone is multi-tasking (president, ro-12). Service-provider NGOs need a certain degree of hierarchy due to the large number of beneficiaries and the need for keeping up a procedure, but all decisions are made consensually. Volunteers participate in meetings; everyone is involved in all matters of the projects (vice-president, ro-14).

In this manner, the symbolic power of being a president is rather used outside the organization, in negotiations with funders, in contact with public officials or the media:

> *So from the outside it looks professional, and it is good that it still looks like this, yet on the inside the rules are flexible, decisions are made consensually and participatory and everyone is her/his own boss* (vice-president, pl-12).

Besides making decisions consensually, women leaders have other strategies in maintaining a workplace culture that is more tailored to employees' needs. These strategies imply creating career opportunities by offering trainings outside the country and bringing external experts in the organizations, sending them to classes and courses, mentoring or flexible working hours.

In Romania, some women managers along with their teams have negotiated with government representatives to create the occupation for gender equality expert (ro-01 and ro-02) that in turn offers employees more career opportunities and legitimizes their work in relation to governmental and political officials. This approach has made collaboration with certain institutions more formal and serious.

In both Romania and Poland, even if organizations are bureaucratic, presidents have "dressed up" or "sneaked in" some activities in external funded projects to offer employees the liberty to follow their own agenda (ro-06, pl-12). From the outside, the organization can be seen as playing the funding rules, but in fact, this procedure was done to maintain its identity and to help people that the organization was working with.

This idea was grasped by a Polish NGO president that has even more difficulties in accessing funding, due to the area in which it activates, sexual reproduction.

> *And as you probably know it can be an issue, because funders have their own agenda and their organizations have their own agenda and we don't want to be driven by the funder's agenda so it's like this game of cat and mouse, we have to write grants, we have to win grants and write them in a way that donors want to see, but also do our own thing in a way* (vice-president, pl-02).

This issue translates in making compromises and finding mechanisms through which activists manage to 'sneak in' certain activities or practices allowing them to follow their own interest or in the interests of others inside the community. As one president suggests:

in this field we work with emotions, the beneficiaries', the clients' emotions and our emotions as well, our feelings about what we are doing, our emotions about each other (...) this is not just something made on papers, we deal here with sensitive issues (...) each change affects these people, they are already in a sensitive situation, we don't want them to feel the pressures we are feeling so we find ways to sneak in some activities, either in the project proposal, or inside other developing projects (president, pl-06).

"Sneaking in" is a strategy of decoupling, in which women leaders take risks in order to keep the needs of the employees and the beneficiaries in an equilibrium. In this sense, an organizations' identity is dynamic and is not chiseled in stone. It is built through negotiation, both by insider perceptions and outsider impressions (Fiss and Zajac 2006, 1188). The "sneaking in" strategy is more prone in Poland, where women had a longer organizing experience, than in Romania.

According to Fiss and Zajac (2006, 1188) when organizations "talk the talk" but not "walk the walk", this is not due to enforcement of certain rules, procedures or norms, but also because employees experience such norms and further transform their identities. Both identity transformation and agency play a crucial role inside both Romanian and Polish women based NGOs, even if sometimes it would seem that these organizations are absorbed and co-opted by the funding schemes.

Decoupling strategies used by women managers are mechanisms that enhance organizations' autonomy (Rauth 2010). Thus, many times NGO managers find themselves between conformity and resistance, passivity and agency, internalization and manipulation (Oliver 1991) and in a constant state of 'negotiation' and compromises.

Negotiations*, even mental negotiations, our ideological ones, where we draw the line, where we are compliant with our ideas and mission and where are we not, where we wouldn't be* (president, pl-15) is a process that shapes the workplace culture of women's NGOs. This is a particular aspect of these organizations, in which the fluidity of needs is always transposed into the daily working routine.

In both countries, women managers mobilize resources in creative ways. Lack of money means doing several actions and activities differently, resorting to informal self-help networks like bartering through private networks.

Being creative is a matter of doing things differently, as an alternative route to lacking money. Managers use informal networks to exchange information, expertize, professional advice, political access, international support and material resources (Kwesiga and Bell 2004, 10). They use their ties to local communities that foster consciousness rising, acting strategically and challenge existing relationship with the state and other institutions (Morris and Staggenborg 2004).

Conclusions

In both Romania and Poland, the civil society sector encounters many issues in regard to stable wages, job security and career opportunities. However, research shows that despite major challenges and barriers, women are agents of change in their workplace, communities and societies. In both countries, the civil society sector is a 'double edged sword' for women – on the one hand it allows them to organize more inclusive and less hierarchical, while on the other hand it places them in low-paid, part-time, insecure and untypical work forms.

The different starting points and composition of women based NGOs, path dependencies, civil society development, economic opportunities, political factors, cultural perceptions and ideologies, as well as the interpretation and translation of various international rules and norms are some of the key factors that enhance heterogeneity in the structure of these organizations.

As described throughout the article, women's leadership roles evolved differently in the two countries. In Romania, the manner in which women perceived socialism and their relation with politics affected the civic and political participation in the transition period. Women became feminists and entered the civil society sector based on the encountering with Western feminist literature, through academia. Due to the 'private solidarity' during socialism, and the close ties to the academia, women's NGOs developed scattered, fragmented and mostly collaborated with external funders. However, the second generation of feminists challenged the institutionalized and formalized ways of organizing and were more involved at the grassroots level. The organizational type (mostly bureaucratic) that women's NGOs developed throughout the years in Romania and the strategic orientation (educational, self-help) has been turning its point in the last couple of years to a more collectivist, cultural approach.

On the other hand, Poland experienced a 'street-level' feminism during the 1990s, where women demanded changes in regard to their reproductive rights. They collaborated with each other and the sexual minority movement, and with state institutions, rather than external funders.

Moreover, the implication of women on behalf of civil society and political parties for the improving of their representation has had a great impact on women's NGOs in becoming powerful actors, independent and with clear agendas.

Despite the many differences, I have described and analyzed similar patterns of women's formal leadership at the workplace and how they can facilitate a more inclusive, participatory and stimulating work environment. Against numerous issues regarding flexible programs and contracts, fluctuations in wages or shifts of personnel, women employ styles and strategies that focus on mentoring activities; they develop opportunities for their employees, foster inter-personal relations based on trust and reciprocity, encourage employees and volunteers to take responsibility and share their work.

These approaches can stand as models in the public and private sector because they create fairer working environments and focus on women's empowerment at work. However, these models are not enough for fostering gender equality in the labor market if they are not sustained by political actors, gender sensitive legislations and managers themselves.

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