

EVERYDAY

LIFE UNDER COMMUNISM AND AFTER

Lifestyle and Consumption in Hungary,
1945–2000



Tibor Valuch

 **CEU PRESS**

Everyday Life under Communism and After

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Tibor Valuch

Translated by Maya J. Lo Bello



Central European University Press
Budapest–Vienna–New York

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Published in 2021 by

Central European University Press

Nádor utca 11, H-1051 Budapest, Hungary

Tel: +36-1-327-3138 or 327-3000

E-mail: ceupress@press.ceu.edu

Website: www.ceupress.com



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Translation is based on Tibor Valuch, *Magyar hétköznapok: Fejezetek a mindennapi élet történetéből a második világháborútól az ezredfordulóig* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2013). Translated and published in English with the permission of Napvilág Kiadó.

ISBN 978-963-386-376-3 (hardback)

ISBN 978-963-386-377-0 (ebook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Valuch, Tibor, author.

Title: Everyday life under communism and after : lifestyle and consumption in Hungary, 1945-2000 / Tibor Valuch.

Other titles: Magyar hétköznapok. English

Description: Budapest ; Vienna ; New York : Central European University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Translated from the Hungarian.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021054280 | ISBN 9789633863763 (hardback) | ISBN 9789633863770 (adobe pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Hungary--Social life and customs--20th century. | Lifestyles--Hungary--History--20th century. | Social change--Hungary--History--20th century. | Consumption (Economics)--Hungary--History--20th century. | Hungary--Social conditions--20th century. | Hungary--Politics and government--1945-1989. | Hungary--Politics and government--1989- | Hungary--Economic conditions--20th century. | Hungary--History--1945-

Classification: LCC DB920.5 .V25513 2013 | DDC 943.905--dc23/eng/20211123
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021054280>

To my family

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Acronyms

BKM: Ministry of Internal Trade (Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium)

KISZ: Hungarian Young Communist League (Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség)

Közért: Municipal Food Trading Company (Községi Élelmiszerkereskedelmi Vállalat)

KSH: Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal)

MÁVAG: Hungarian State Iron, Steel, and Machine Works Limited Company (Magyar Állami Vas-, Acél- és Gépgyárak Részvénytársaság)

MNL BAZML: National Archives of Hungary Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltára)

MNL HBML: National Archives of Hungary Hajdú-Bihar County Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Levéltára)

MNL HML: National Archives of Hungary Heves County Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Heves Megyei Levéltára)

MNL NML: Hungarian National Archives Nógrád County Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Nógrád Megyei Levéltára)

MNL OL: National Archives of Hungary (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára)

MNL PML: National Archives of Hungary Pest County Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Pest Megyei Levéltára)

MNL SML: National Archives of Hungary Somogy County Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Somogy Megyei Levéltára)

MNL SzSzBML: National Archives of Hungary Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Levéltára)

MNM TF: Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Történeti Fényképtára)

MSZMP: Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt)

OTP: National Savings Bank (Országos Takarékpénztár)

SZOT: National Council of Trade Unions (Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa)

UNRRA: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century and particularly during the latter half of this period, Hungary experienced multiple waves of political change that caused a series of political, economic, and social transformations which fundamentally influenced how Hungarians conducted their everyday lives.¹ Even if this analysis were only to examine the years during World War II or the two periods marking the greatest shifts in Hungary's political atmosphere—namely, the communist takeover and subsequent adoption of a state socialist system in the late 1940s and early 1950s, or the shift to democracy that began at the end of the 1980s and brought about a return to a market economy—these historical events would amply demonstrate the depth of change that took place. In accordance with the rest of Europe, the kind of modernizing and civilizing processes that occurred during the twentieth century in Hungarian history were not only technological in nature, but also resulted in societal transformations and shifts in mentality. This volume comprises my attempt to trace, analyze, and interpret this genuinely complex process of transformation. To do this, I have adopted a unique perspective achieved via an interdisciplinary approach combining aspects gleaned from history, sociology, anthropology, ethnography, and statistics, for the purpose of reconstructing “from the bottom up” how everyday people from various social groups experienced these changes.

Within the fields of social history and sociology in Hungary, research regarding the phenomena and historical changes related to everyday life has received less attention in the past few decades than the topic either necessitates or is due. This remains true in spite of the fact that the historical changes displayed by family, household, or

¹ This volume does not aim to provide a historical overview of Hungary's entire political and economic history during the period under examination. As necessary, background information will be added in order to aid the reader's understanding. For a more comprehensive examination of this period, see Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina-Osiris, 1999). For an overview of Hungary's most recent history, see Árpád von Klimó, *Hungary Since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

everyday activities play a definitive role in influencing social processes on both the micro and macro scales. Interpreting either the past or the present cannot be imagined without possessing some knowledge of how individuals live, organize, plan, and conceive of their lives. Such considerations invoke the corollary questions of what maintaining an existence demands on a daily level, what social conditions and surroundings are required, what types of objects are used in the course of everyday activities, and how all of these circumstances change.

Although the 1930s saw the partial emergence of a Hungarian middle class, the 1948–1949 communist takeover rendered it impossible for this type of social class to continue expanding. Once this occurred, the loss of property and general decrease in economic opportunities negatively impacted lifestyle, consumer patterns, social relations, and behavioral norms in a way that led to their homogenization. Within a set of changed circumstances, the late 1960s marked the initial regeneration of the kind of lifestyle differences that could meet a “quasi” consumer society’s norms at a higher average level than that previously experienced. After the nation shifted to democracy, these differences grew within the conditions brought about by a market economy.

As these waves of change and transformation occurred, it is therefore highly necessary to determine where some form of continuity can be detected in relation to where a state of discontinuity proved stronger. I strive to answer the question of what consequences emerged due to the ruptured spread of a middle class in Hungary and how these circumstances impacted everyday life, as well as the ways in which members of various social groups adapted to Sovietization while simultaneously exploring how the process of reestablishing a middle class emerged and developed in the decades marking Hungary’s post-communist period. Although the issues of culture and leisure activities naturally form an essential aspect of everyday life, examining these areas would have exceeded the limits imposed by an exploration that essentially takes the history of consumption as its focus.

Within the period under examination, in many respects the late 1960s and early 1970s represent a turning point given the fact that these years saw the unfolding of an infrastructural revolution characterized by the emergence of modern mass communication, the spread of motorization, and the improved comfort level of homes. Beyond

these factors, increased access to electricity altered the basic quality of life in a way that was both fundamental and extensive. An additional significant turning point that occurred toward the end of the last century was the transformed culture and spread of infocommunications, a process that engendered multiple, complex layers of social and lifestyle changes. Although I only touch upon these issues at this point, the first chapter of this volume contains a thorough and detailed examination of the theoretical questions and interpretations attached to their discussion.

As the present work explores the larger topics mentioned above via the parallel histories of consumerism and modes of lifestyle, in some cases it consequently proved difficult—or perhaps even impossible—to maintain a separation between certain subjects. Given the very nature of the phenomena under examination, my analysis cannot be linked to exact dates or moments in time due to the fact that daily life patterns alter in ways that both emerge from and build upon a variety of intersecting processes.

Consumer consumption lies at the core of daily life while simultaneously occupying a definitive role in the fulfillment of material demands. Among other factors, the manner in which given individuals or social groups consume demonstrates how they interpret their own culture, as well as indicating the social parameters that determine their potential opportunities. Consumer habits generally display a direct and palpable connection to the ways in which consumption contributes to the formation of personal identity. In his classic work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen argues that levels of consumption and the possession of objects that signify prestige also act as suitable indicators of social status. In other words, commodity goods not only serve the purpose of satisfying one's demands and desires, they also demonstrate a sense of personal significance to the outside world. Consumption therefore comprises an aggregate of signs and symbols that are connected to the given culture, society, and economy. Beginning in the late 1960s, this type of "conspicuous consumption" increasingly came to the fore in Hungary and was accompanied by the parallel rise of an ever-stronger rivalry that shaped the lively and lasting race to "keep up" with the consumption of others. These factors paved the way for a relatively broad section of individuals—those capable of attaining a newly won degree of social mobility—to strengthen their positions and sense of social consciousness.

In this compilation of the research I have conducted in these areas, I introduce the characteristic trends and changes that defined everyday life during the lengthy half-century that followed World War II without employing the conventional kind of periodization that typifies a traditional reading of historical events. The resultant question to be posed is that of what—from a political and historical viewpoint—precisely connects various periods; what underlies the decision to choose the late 1930s and early 1940s as the starting point for this overview of the history of lifestyles in Hungary? One possible answer to this question lies in the process of modernization that began roughly in the 1930s and (due to its life-changing contributions in the areas of electrification, transportation, communication, and housing conditions) continues to influence our world even today. Another important factor can be found in the level of adaptivity and creativity with which some social groups in Hungarian society adjusted to the changes caused by politics and modernization during specific eras. The third reason for choosing to examine such a lengthy period is explained by the fact that certain political systems and events affected quality of life differently: at times, political conditions enforced limitations that led to noticeable alterations in both lifestyle and the manner in which daily life could be conducted or arranged. In essence, however, social habits, tradition, expectations, value systems, and individual creativity determined how innovations were accepted or developed and the trends that defined Hungarians' quality of life. These factors in turn gained a long-lasting hold upon Hungarian society.

Organizing the structure of this book in a way that would integrate both this volume's thematic and chronological demands presented a definite challenge. Of all the available possibilities, I eventually chose to situate single thematic units—such as consumption, norms, and processes—within the analysis of long-term trends, thereby reducing the chance that the same themes would be repeated.

I would like to express my gratitude to all of the institutions (including the 1956 Institute, the Department of Social History at Eötvös Loránd University's Faculty of Social Sciences, the Hungarian Academy of Science's Research Center for Social Sciences at the Institute of Political Sciences, the Department of Sociology and Social Politics at Debrecen University's Faculty of the Humanities, and the Institute of Historical Sciences at Esterházy Károly University) which have provided the intellectual resources necessary for the writing of both

this book and its precedents. I thank Árpád von Klimó and Krisztina E. Fehérváry for their thoughtful insights and suggestions throughout the preparation of the English-language version of this work. The following individuals aided me in the collection of data: Zita Cseh, Csaba Csóti, Sándor Galambos, Julianna Héjja, György Majtényi, András Rozs, Livia Rőcsei, Zoltán Szatucsek, Mihály Szécsényi, Anita Tóth, and Sándorné Úri, in addition to many others without whose contribution my research would have been impossible. Research, production, and publication of the volume's Hungarian-language manuscript was financed via grants issued by the National Program for Research and Development (NKFP), the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA), the National Cultural Fund, and the János Szentágothai Grant Program for Experienced Researchers at the National Program of Excellence. I thank these programs for their support. The photographs that are not only used in my research but also partially featured in this volume were collected by Marianna Kiscsatári and Katalin Bognár, employees of the Hungarian National Museum's Historical Photo Archive, together with Ildikó Simonovics and Street Fashion Budapest, the program under her directorship. The English translation is the work of Maya J. Lo Bello, whom I thank for her accuracy and suggestions.

Generous and essential support for the translation of this volume was provided by means of the EFOP grant (efop-3.6.1-16-2016-00001, "Complex Improvement of Research Capacities and Services at Eszterházy Károly University") made available by Eszterházy Károly University as well as by the Institute of Political Sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Science's Center for Social Sciences. I express my sincere gratitude for their aid.

This book would have been impossible without the extremely thorough and exact contribution of the staff at CEU Press, whom I also thank for their work. Special thanks to József Litkei, editor at CEU Press, for his suggestions and precise work. In closing, I would like to thank my family for their endless patience and support throughout my research and the writing of this book.

Tibor Valuch
June 25, 2021, Debrecen

Chapter One

The Study of Hungarian Everyday Life: Historiography, Methods, and Concepts

In contrast to the relative scarcity of academic works in Hungary that utilize a socio-historical approach to the investigation of daily life, international scholarship has long been occupied with the study of everyday life and considers its research one of the most significant questions in the field of history. From many points of view, the historians from the *Annales* school in France played a groundbreaking role in developing this field even if it was only later, during the 1970s and 1980s, that the many attitudes and approaches utilized in focusing on this type of research method were systematically organized. Merely listing the names of researchers, such as Fernand Braudel, Alan Macfarlane, Natalie Zemon Davis, Carlo Ginzburg, Philippe Ariès, Michel Foucault, Alf Lüdtke, and Hans Medick, amply demonstrates the extent to which micro-histories represent a justified approach toward exploring the past. During the past decades scores of academic works have continued to examine the daily lives of everyday people in order to demonstrate how a given historical period can be reconstructed via the study of everyday objects, demographic processes, cultural habits, the private sphere, technical developments and their effect on society, the habitation of settlements, dress, nutrition, living spaces, furnishings, the usage of social spaces, and the gender-based differentiation of society. The research results garnered by examining these seemingly marginal topics have brought us much closer to understanding a particular social phenomenon or analyzing social change than would have otherwise been possible through the utilization of the tools and techniques related to a more conventional approach that focuses on a more traditional interpretation of the era's political context.

Unravelling the threads that create the fabric of daily life has become the mutual research field for disciplines such as history, sociology, historical and cultural anthropology, social ethnography, and social statistics throughout the past few decades. Given the nature of

the topics under examination, viewing history through the lens of the everyday opens the way to a type of interdisciplinarity that allows for a multifaceted approach and interpretation.¹ The story of daily life has also gained the attention of comparative historical analyses, as can be seen—to mention just one such source—in the volume *Europäische Konsumgeschichte* edited by Hannes Siegrist, Hartmut Kaelbe, and Jürgen Kocka. Other works that provide similarly striking examinations of the role played by luxury in state socialist states or the unique nature of consumer habits in former state socialist nations also deserve mention.² The presence of these examinations clearly indicates that the history of consumerism has become a unique, independent branch of social history.³ It naturally goes without saying that both

¹ Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Ursula A. J. Becher, *Geschichte des modernen Lebensstils* (Munich: Beck Verlag, 1990).

² Hannes Siegrist, Hartmut Kaelble, and Jürgen Kocka, eds., *Europäische Konsumgeschichte: Zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des Konsums (18. bis 20. Jahrhundert)* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1997); David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010); Mary Neuburger and Paulina Bren, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³ See Wolfgang König, *Kleine Geschichte der Konsumgesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008), 294; Michael Prinz, ed., *Der lange Weg in den Überfluss: Anfänge und Entwicklung der Konsumgesellschaft seit der Vormoderne* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2003), 578; Christian Kleinschmidt, *Konsumgesellschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2008), 192; Suzanne Breuss and Franz X. Eder, eds., *Konsumieren in Österreich: 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Innsbruck-Wien: Studien Verlag, 2006), 276; Frank Trentmann, "Beyond Consumerism: New Historical Perspectives on Consumption," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3 (2004): 373–401; Djurdja Bartlett, *Fashion East: The Spectre That Haunted Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010); Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, eds., *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); Crowley and Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010); Frank Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Hannes Siegrist and Manuel Schramm, eds., *Regionalisierung europäischer Konsumkulturen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Leipziger Studien zur Erforschung von regionenbezogenen Identifikationsprozessen 9 (Leipzig: Leipziger Uni Verlag, 2003); Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, and Claudius Torp, eds., *Die Konsumgesellschaft in Deutschland 1890–1990: Ein Handbuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2009); Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, "Consumption History in Europe: An Overview of Recent Trends," in *Decoding Modern Consumer Societies*, ed. H. Berghoff and U. Spiekermann (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 17–36.

methodological and theoretical aspects of my research have been inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's works regarding types of capitalism, consumerism, social stratification, and societal differences. Social historical analyses of daily life in East Germany have proven similarly influential to my interpretation.⁴

In Hungary the field of everyday life as a branch of historical research has long been a matter primarily reserved for study by ethnographers, sociologists, and social statisticians. This proved particularly true in the case of studies focusing on the second half of the twentieth century; as regards previous eras (the Middle Ages or modernity) historians played a definitive role in analyzing, for example, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or the early part of the twentieth century. The first thematic collection of documents was finally published in 2000.⁵ Furthermore, Hungarian social histories of everyday life have centered on topics such as the family, the household, or the private sphere, while heightened attention was turned toward trends in middle-class home interiors during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries or the examination of the middle-class lifestyle.⁶ Some attempts were also made to reconstruct the lifestyles led by working-class individuals during this same period.⁷ Most of

⁴ Thomas Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1999); Evemarie Badstübner, Felix Mühlberg and Christel Nehring, eds., *Befremdlich anders: Leben in der DDR* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2000); Ina Merkel and Felix Mühlberg, eds., *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR-Konsumkultur in 60er Jahren* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1996); Arnd Bauerkämper, *Die Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 2005).

⁵ Rózsa Fazekas and Éva Kujbusné Mecsei, eds., *Mindennapok Szabolcs és Szatmár megyében a XIX. században* (Nyíregyháza: Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Levéltár, 2000), 426.

⁶ For a historiographical overview of these issues, see Gábor Gyáni, "A hétköznapi historikuma," in *A hétköznapi historikuma*, ed. József Dusnoki-Draskovich and Ádám Erdész (Gyula: Békés Megyei Levéltár, 1997), 11–27.

⁷ See among others Mária Mialkovszky, "Egy budapesti szervezett szakmunkás lakása a századelőn," in *Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Múzeum Évkönyve 1975–76*, ed. Alfréd Hollós (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1977), 54–94; Mária Mialkovszky, "Adalékok az otthonkultúra-kutatás kérdéséhez az Allt-féle hagyaték kapcsán," in *Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Múzeum Évkönyve 1979–1980*, ed. Alfréd Hollós (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1981), 43–121; Vera Peterdi, "Az Allt-család háztartási eszközei," in *Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Múzeum Évkönyve 1979–1980* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1981), 151–95; Vera Sallayné Peterdi, "A MÁVAG kolóniái 1865–1989," in *Tanulmányok a MÁVAG történetéből*, ed. Géza Bencze (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1989), 209–33; Vera Peterdi, "Gyáripari termékek a budapesti polgári háztartások konyháiban (1880–1945)," in *Néprajzi Értesítő*, vol. 76 (Budapest: Néprajzi Múzeum, 1994), 259–78.

this research emerged during the 1980s, the same decade that also marked the arrival of the methods and approach related to the writing of microhistories and historical anthropology in Hungarian scholarship.

To mention just a very few of the historians and researchers who have contributed to the research of daily life in Hungary, the books and studies written by Gyula Benda, Tamás Faragó, Erik Fügedi, Gábor Gyáni, Károly Halmos, Péter Hanák, György Kövér, Zsuzsa L. Nagy, Zoltán Tóth, and Károly Vörös remain worthy of our attention. The fields of sociology and social statistics include researchers, such as Rudolf Andorka, Béla Falussy, István Harcsa, István Kemény, Ágnes Losonczi, Katalin S. Nagy, and Elemér Hankiss, whose work has provided the foundation for analyses of social, lifestyle, and mentality histories of post-1945 Hungarian society. Among those researching social ethnography, studies by Eszter Kisbán, Péter Szuhay, Kata Jávör, and Mária Flórián have primarily led to new breakthroughs. A further source demanding mention is contained in the fourth part of the eight-volume handbook *Hungarian Ethnography*, a monograph that surveys and summarizes the changes that village life underwent in Hungary during this period.⁸

As regards the five decades that followed 1945, the history of daily life has not received equal attention on the part of researchers. It is for this reason that very few sources can be found among the social sciences (whether historical, sociological, or anthropological in nature) in Hungary regarding the history of nutrition, one of the topics discussed in this volume. My discussion of public supply, the consumption of foodstuffs, and eating habits is therefore an attempt to fill some of the gaps left in this particular area.

The historiography of the research conducted in connection to Hungary's contemporary past reveals that examinations of everyday life have only come to the foreground during the past two decades. My first experiment in doing so comprised a short compilation in my book, published in Hungarian, entitled *A Social History of Hungary During the Second Half of the Twentieth Century*.⁹ The early 2000s saw the publication of a number of new scholarly works on the history of everyday life. The first to mention is Sándor Horváth's work on the

⁸ Iván Balassa, ed., *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997), 904.

⁹ Tibor Valuch, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a XX. század második felében* (Budapest: Osiris, 2001).

industrial town of Sztálinváros (Stalin-City), which utilized a broad array of microhistorical techniques when analyzing how everyday life changed during the first decade of the city's founding.¹⁰ The second is Eszter Zsófia Tóth's case study on the life of working women in the Kádár era, which describes the life story of a socialist women's brigade employed at a stocking factory and examines their identity within the context of the role consumerism played in everyday life at the time.¹¹ The third monograph deserving mention is Gyula Belényi's study on the social transformation of Hungary's industrial working class between 1945 and 1965, in which he examines in detail how consumer habits, living conditions, dress, nutrition, and free-time activities changed within the working class.¹² The author of the present volume examined the history of dress in Hungary during the second half of the twentieth century in a short monograph *From the Loden Coat to the Mini-Skirt* which was published in Hungarian in 2004.¹³

In the 2000s, a series of studies published by the 1956 Institute in conclusion of the research project *A hatvanas évek Magyarországon* (The Sixties in Hungary), gave precedence to interpretations that analyzed shifts in everyday life.¹⁴ Following the conference on the social history of consumerism that it organized in 2004, the István Hajnal Society, an association of Hungarian social historians, published the material from this conference in 2007, thereby establishing another milestone in the growing volume of microhistories examining late twentieth-century Hungarian society.¹⁵ The heightened sense of awareness surrounding the importance of this approach is further demonstrated by the fact that *Korall*, Hungary's only journal for social history, published a thematic issue examining daily life and changes

¹⁰ Sándor Horváth, *A kapu és a határ: Mindennapi Sztálinváros* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2004); for the English-language version of this publication, see Sándor Horváth, *Stalinism Reloaded: Everyday Life in Stalin-City, Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

¹¹ Eszter Zsófia Tóth, "Puszi Kádár Jánosnak": *Munkásnők élete a Kádár-korszakban* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2007).

¹² Gyula Belényi, *Az állam szorításában* (Szeged: Belvedere-Meridionale, 2009).

¹³ Tibor Valuch, *A lódentől a miniszoknyáig: A XX. század második felének magyarországi öltözködéstörténete* (Budapest, Corvina, 2004).

¹⁴ János M. Rainer, ed., *Múlt századi hétköznapok* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2003); János M. Rainer, ed., *Hatvanas évek Magyarországon* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2004).

¹⁵ József Hudi, ed., *A fogyasztás társadalomtörténete* (Budapest: HIK-Pápai Református Gyűjtemények, 2007).

in the history of consumerism,¹⁶ while in 2005 the publishing house Corvina launched a book series entitled *Mindennapi történelem* (Everyday History) which contained volumes surveying—among other topics—daily life under the rule of political figures such as Regent Miklós Horthy, the country's interwar head of state, or János Kádár, leader of the Hungarian communist party from 1956 to 1988.¹⁷ A thematic issue discussing the history of consumerism then appeared in the journal *Múltunk* (Our Past) in 2008.¹⁸ By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, a variety of significant works were published in the field, including György Majtényi's survey of the elite lifestyle of the ruling class, József R. Nagy's historical-anthropological analysis of the living conditions found in Hungarian workers' colonies, and Béla Tomka's monograph detailing the unique aspects and changes related to economic growth, consumerism and quality of life in twentieth-century Hungary.¹⁹ Krisztina Fehérváry's volume on the material circumstances and living conditions experienced by mid-level social classes during the Kádár era represents another important addition to the discipline.²⁰

About the sources used for this volume

Throughout my research, I have based my interpretation on statistics, various analyses, national and local archival documents connected to domestic trade and the supply of goods, materials related to market research, estate inventories, and print media. The issue of to what extent it has been wise to utilize various statistical sources and data

¹⁶ See "Divat, Fogyasztás, Anyagi kultúra," *Korall* 10 (2002): 57–162.

¹⁷ See Gábor Gyáni, *Hétköznapi élet Horthy Miklós korában* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 2006); Tibor Valuch, *Hétköznapi élet Kádár János korában* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 2006).

¹⁸ See the thematic issue published in *Múltunk* 53, no. 3 (2008) which includes a selection of studies examining lifestyle and consumerism.

¹⁹ See György Majtényi, *K-vonal: Uralmi elit és luxus a szocializmusban* (Budapest: Nyitott Könyvműhely, 2010), for the English version, see György Majtényi, *Luxury and the Ruling Elite in Socialist Hungary: Villas, Hunts, and Soccer Games* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2021); József R. Nagy, *Boldog téglafalak között: Munkáskolóniák antropológiai vizsgálata Északkelet-Magyarországon* (Miskolc: Miskolci Galéria, 2011); Béla Tomka, *Gazdasági növekedés, fogyasztás és életminőség: Magyarország nemzetközi összehasonlításban az első világháborútól napjainkig* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2011).

²⁰ Krisztina Fehérváry, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

collections has arisen throughout my work due to questions concerning the reliability and applicability of the data itself. The practice of distorting, “skewing,” or concealing data primarily occurred during the 1950s, even as some classified data collections prepared solely for internal usage were actually able to present an accurate description of the situation. Yet another important question to consider is the extent to which statistics were capable of representing the actual reality. To mention one such example, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, KSH) was obviously only able to record data regarding income and consumption that occurred within the framework of official employment and trade: determining the value of the sums that were generated via informal trade, the unofficial exchange of goods or work, and unregistered employment that took place among various social groups are categories that fall outside of the capacity of the KSH. It can also be clearly seen that the data related to less ideologically sensitive issues—such as household statistics—is reliable.

In the case of the archival documents which record consumer consumption, it was necessary to take into consideration the fact that (for example) throughout both World War II and the state socialist era Hungary’s political apparatus was intent upon minimizing the extent of genuine problems, an aim that is clearly obvious in the wording that was used. This circumstance also means that the existence of documents mentioning prolonged tensions in supply or inconsistencies in supply quality (the phrases applied most often to describe supply shortages) can be taken as a reliable indication that the shortage experienced within the given area or in reference to a given consumer good was truly severe.

My survey of the history of dress during this period was based on sources originating from the press, governmental and local analyses examining retail trade in clothing and the supply of garments, archival documents, statistical data collections summarizing figures for consumption, internal analyses of consumer habits, publications on market research, and collections of household tips that were not only published in large numbers, but also offered advice on style and fashion. Other than these sources, women’s magazines, fashion magazines, household statistics, photos, and—to a lesser extent—estate inventories provided alternative avenues for following the changes clothing and dress norms underwent in the latter half of the twentieth

century.²¹ It must be mentioned that these available sources only proved sufficient for a differentiation based on community type; analyzing the dressing habits of separate social strata or professions could generally not be done in detail.²² Mainly due to peculiarities in how data was collected, a more in-depth, comparative discussion of the dress habits exhibited by different social classes was only partially feasible.²³ When, however, it came to tracing the history of nutrition, the data collected at the time in connection to nutrition, statistics analyzing food consumption, domestic trade and administrative documents discussing the local or national trade in foodstuffs or food supply, and the collections of household tips published at the time provide essential sources of information.

Within the framework of a historical overview, I made sure to utilize microhistory sources whenever possible. As regards the history of dress, for example, I applied as broad a spectrum of estate inventories detailing garment lists as was possible; estate inventories and value

²¹ In this respect it must be noted that the rules and customs surrounding the preparation of estate inventories changed quite a lot through time. Estate inventories containing a greater amount of detail generally stem from the 1930s and 1940s; the content of information found in inventories steadily decreases throughout the 1950s. Estate inventories that either allow for the approximate reconstruction of a personal wardrobe or supplement this type of goal are relatively rare and primarily occur in the case of urban intellectual families. In the case of most peasant or working-class households, notes recording the clothing found in the estate are rather laconic in nature: the typical remark is that of “some garments for wearing,” a summation that renders further study nearly impossible.

²² Another reason why it is difficult to ascertain how certain social strata dressed stems from the fact that domestic trade at the time, statistic surveys, and data collections only applied the simplified categories suitable for a Marxist view of society, which consisted at best of a differentiation between working-class/employed and various social classes of peasants. Classification based on income can only be accomplished by comparing expenditures for garment items. The situation is somewhat better in reference to Hungary’s historical peasantry or rural population since some social and ethnographical analyses of traditional clothing and dress norms were careful to consider the peasantry’s internal stratification. Once traditional dress became modernized, differentiating between layers of these social groups also grew more challenging.

²³ The data regarding household statistics which the KSH collected and published every year only refers to the large social groups used at the time: workers, employed/white-collar workers, or (collective farm) peasants. A more nuanced separation of categories was generally not applied. In some cases, differentiations were made based on the size of community, employment status (actively employed or inactive), marital status, or age.

assessments were used to support the analysis and description of home interiors and spaces as well. Relevant sections found in various inventories and records additionally proved essential for describing the history of nutrition, particularly in connection to changes in the type of the equipment and appliances found in Hungarian kitchens.

When examining the topic of dwellings, other than the municipal and state documents that reported on the construction or sale of homes, Soviet-type tower blocks, and home fittings and furnishings, I also utilized residential statistics found in censuses, the KSH's internal surveys, and forms of print media that focused on home décor. Photos taken at the time formed a specific, yet significant source of material which naturally aided the interpretation of other topics as well.

The concept of daily life, correlations between lifestyle and changes in society

Throughout the twentieth century, the relationships that alternately formed and bound the structure of everyday life, customs, mentality, and political changes underwent a unique type of transformation in Hungary. Political changes were swift and violent; while the distance between the formal and informal aspects of the customs and public mentality determining cultural behavior grew, the transformation of norms and values lagged behind. It is sufficient to point to the changes that occurred in religiosity and cultural behavior or the stubborn continuation of the practice of self-sufficiency to demonstrate the peculiar hybrid of old and new that arose. The confusion expressed in the course of social contact is a good example of this: throughout the 1950s and 1960s, it was not unusual at all to find a mixture of pre-war and postwar address systems in letters addressed to officials. The usage of formulas such as *Méltóságos Elvtárs* (Right Honorable Comrade), *Tekintetes Elvtárs* (Comrade, Esq.) or *Igen Tisztelt Elvtárs Úr* (Truly Respected Sir Comrade) indicates the mental continuation of previous social contexts and a resultant confusion regarding the appropriate form of address. As old expressions of politeness or greeting were forced out of official usage, past norms continued to endure in private communication. Addressing one another as "comrade" began to spread through official channels at the end of the 1940s, following the consolidation of communist rule in 1948; in the early

1950s, however, it was more common to hear the salutation of *kartárs* (fellow worker) in official offices or stores, not to mention the fact that the traditional *úr* (sir) continued to exist as a form of address. This circumstance obviously illustrates the fact that “lifestyle is itself a historical phenomenon, one that is not merely structured by rationality and ruled by practical, useful objects and phenomena; the mentality and value system that these elements comprise are also factors.”²⁴ An additional example worthy of mention is the determining role played by household farm production in everyday life throughout the twentieth century: the practice of producing one’s own foodstuffs not only survived the communist takeover that took place in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but also remained (to varying degrees) an essential aspect of daily life throughout the era of state socialism.²⁵ In fact, it was only at the turn of the new millennium, as Hungary’s increasingly consumerist society led to widespread changes in behavioral norms, that self-sufficient food production lost its significance. This example additionally indicates that examining this entire question—or some of its aspects—provides an excellent means of illustrating the issue of continuity and discontinuity in social history. Similarly, light is suddenly cast on certain social transformations that would either be impossible or extremely difficult to describe via traditional historical methods or statistical analyses. Among its other advantages, the examination of the structure of everyday life aids the reconsideration and (re)interpretation of the shifts in social formations that occurred in modern Hungary.

As regards each and every aspect related to daily life, it is practically impossible to introduce in its entirety how everyday life was conducted during the period under investigation. With this reality in mind, I determined which areas hold the greatest significance accord-

²⁴ Péter Hanák, Introduction to *Polgári lakáskultúra a századfordulón* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 1992), 5.

²⁵ Following the completion of the aggressive state-led process of forced collectivization, members of the collective farms could keep one small plot of land which could be used for producing foodstuffs that they were then free to sell. Known as *háztáji* plots of land, at the end of the 1960s these minimally-sized farm holdings mainly served as an independent source of food production; later, however, the families with access to a *háztáji* plot sold their fruit and vegetables at markets. Since these plots of land could also be combined to form a larger area, the *háztáji* phenomenon eventually led to the emergence of semi-illegal agricultural businesses. By the end of the 1970s, sixty to seventy percent of the fruit and vegetables being produced in Hungary originated from these private farm plots.

ing to my opinion. These areas are the following: changes in financial circumstances and consumer habits, the construction of homes and types of dwellings, the usage of living space, home décor, furnishings, fashion, changes in clothing and dress, nutrition, the supply of foodstuffs, and changes in eating habits. In short, these are the changes which I aim to analyze and interpret in this book; where possible, I have attempted to investigate these topics based on type of community, or as reflected by the unique characteristics and differences found within various social groups. Priority was not given to tracing these processes based on a linear, chronological order: my aim was rather to investigate the given question in the most comprehensive way possible.

From a methodological standpoint, my interpretation of processes that stretch back to the interwar period naturally found a rich source of inspiration in works written by Gábor Gyáni,²⁶ Zoltán Tóth,²⁷ Gyula Benda,²⁸ Péter Güntner,²⁹ Katalin S. Nagy,³⁰ Katalin F. Dózsa,³¹ Mária Flórián,³² and Eszter Kisbán,³³ as well as others. These volumes have provided, among other topics, overviews of styles in home décor, the usage and furnishing of private spaces, and changes in

²⁶ Gábor Gyáni, *Az utca és a szalon: Társadalmi térhasználat Budapesten 1870–1940* (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 1998); Gyáni, "Polgári otthon és enteriőr Budapesten" in *Polgári lakáskultúra a századfordulón*, ed. Péter Hanák (Budapest: MTA TTI, 1992), 27–60; Gyáni, *Parlor and Kitchen: Housing and Domestic Culture in Budapest, 1870–1940* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2002).

²⁷ For further details, see Zoltán Tóth, *Szekszárd társadalmá a századfordulón* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989).

²⁸ Gyula Benda, "Az anyagi kultúra történeti vizsgálata: inventárium, kvantifikáció, osztályozás," in *Közelítések: Néprajzi, történeti antropológiai tanulmányok Hofer Tamás 60. születésnapjára*, ed. Tamás Mohay and Gyula Benda (Debrecen: KLTE, 1992), 383–86.

²⁹ Péter Güntner, "A soproni polgárság vagyoni viszonyai a századfordulón a hagyatéki leltárak tükrében," *Soproni Szemle* 49, no. 3 (1995): 244–60.

³⁰ Katalin S. Nagy, *Eredmények a lakáskultúra-vizsgálatból 1974–1978* (Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, 1979); Katalin S. Nagy, *Lakásmód, lakáskultúra Telkibányán 1975–1978* (Budapest: Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, 1979); Katalin S. Nagy, *Lakberendezési szokások* (Budapest: Magvető, 1987).

³¹ Katalin F. Dózsa, "Magyar divattörténet 1945–1949," *História* 13, no. 4 (1991): 22–24; Katalin F. Dózsa, "Magyar divattörténet 1949–1958," *História* 13, nos. 5–6 (1991): 50–52; Katalin F. Dózsa, *Letűnt idők, eltűnt divatok 1867–1945* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1989).

³² Mária Flórián, *Magyar parasztoiseletek* (Budapest: Planétás Kiadó, 2001).

³³ Eszter Kisbán, "Táplálkozáskultúra," in *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód*, ed. Iván Balassa (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997), 422–85.

dress and diet while—in many instances—additionally offering analyses of certain aspects related to the issues I examine in this volume.

A fundamentally important question from the point of view of my research and interpretation is how frequent and radical (political) changes affected private households, the basic foundation of daily life. Throughout these macrostructural transformations, the social and economic role possessed by the family and its household obviously grew in importance. It cannot be denied that households are historically structured formations: the family as well as the household within which it lived therefore represented a private escape at a time when the sometimes violent attempts to reorganize society demanded the development of new, adaptive strategies. The greatest change was most definitely the way in which everyday circumstances became completely erratic at times due to the uncertainties brought about by repeated losses of property and ownership. Later, beginning in the 1960s, the gradual shift away from the values and norms enforced by state socialism created new challenges; after the Iron Curtain fell and the government began the transformation to democracy between 1989 and 1990, Hungarian society found itself adapting to the circumstances created by a market economy and new shifts in ownership. To name just a few methods that emerged, public expressions of society's ability to adapt and survive can be found in the rise of a black market economy during World War II, the nation's swift regeneration following the war, the way in which a portion of household farms were able to conduct—as of the late 1960s—a form of small-scale agricultural production that was sold at local markets, moonlighting (*fusizás*)³⁴ which (at certain times and in certain places) approached large-scale production, and the wide array of quasi-legal and illegal activities used to supplement incomes, from shopping tourism or the under-the-table exchange of foreign currency to smuggling. An important way by which Hungarians compensated for the general lack of capital—which characterized the operation of the state socialist economy to a varying extent for decades—was to make intensive use of their own labor resources. Examples of the latter can be seen in the “institution” of the *kaláka*, a voluntary, informal exchange of labor among friends and relatives for the purpose of constructing

³⁴ Although moonlighting is probably the closest translation, *fusizás* was usually done not as a secret second job after the regular one, but during the regular work time on one's official job while using the employer's equipment and resources for private purposes.

a private home; for the most part, Hungarians did their best to circumvent or outmaneuver the rules and regulations that presented the most common obstacles.

The question which I am examining can be divided into several further areas of study: how, for example, did the order, organization, and cultural objects governing everyday life in Hungarian society change in the latter half of the twentieth century? What impact did this transformation have on financial circumstances, consumer consumption, dress, diet, and private dwellings? As may already be obvious, within this period the late 1960s and early 1970s marked a sort of turning point from a number of perspectives. The growing emphasis placed on consumption and the increased role played by the consumer starting from the late 1960s and early 1970s represents a similarly important factor. To mention just one element of this question, the family and household came to possess an increasingly significant influence as a unit of consumption at a time when consumption became a means of expressing—on both the micro- and the macro-level—self-identity and social difference throughout the 1970s and 1980s. As a reflection of this process, the following question of how certain families or social groups were able to represent their social status with the aid of consumption also arises. Dress, durable consumer goods, automobiles, weekend plots of lands used as “retreats” for rest and relaxation, and the construction of new homes obviously played an influential part in this process of representation since these objects or possessions were suitable tools for projecting either an actual or only much-desired position in society. For a broad array of social groups, the speedy procurement and subsequent possession of prestige-bearing consumer goods demonstrated an openness to modernization and the ability to “keep up with the rest” beginning in the 1960s, when these types of goods became more widely available in Hungary.

Choosing a topic that spans political history’s traditional treatment of this era also provides the opportunity for me to examine how the political, economic, and social changes that emerged after World War II impacted the daily lives of certain social groups. What changed, for example, regarding the financial situation or ownership of property for these social groups? What adaptive strategies were employed when facing the anti-Jewish decrees or the communist takeover of power? What exactly was it like for former social groups, such as the lower middle class, the middle class, or the upper middle

class, to lose their social status? To what extent did their previously acquired capital—whether financial, cultural, or symbolic in nature—aid their continued survival?

Generally speaking, the political, economic, and social changes that occurred during the period that forms the focus of this book altered the circumstances surrounding everyday conditions with a swiftness that was, at times, profound. During this period, the first crack to appear in the predominantly normal order of a life that had been based upon tradition was caused by World War II. This was then followed by the communist rise to power in the late 1940s and early 1950s, together with the (dis)continuity that this political shift implied. In contrast to approaches that emphasize the break with continuity that this historical event seemingly entailed, I pose the question of whether politics truly had a fundamental impact on events relating to everyday life in Hungary during the mid-twentieth century or not. The first, automatic answer to this question is yes: out of either necessity or as a result of the nature of totalitarian systems, the political powers governing Hungary throughout this era strove to maintain complete control of every aspect of life. At the end of the 1930s, the marginalization of Hungarian Jews was a political decision that resulted in the confiscation of their property, the disenfranchisement of their civil rights, and their subsequent genocide. In the 1950s, drastic limitations were placed on what (and how much) the nation's population was allowed to consume and earn. For reasons related to both politics and legitimacy, the standard of living became an issue that dominated the Kádár era. Once communism fell, politics continued to play a predominant role in determining the reprivatization of state property. It cannot be denied that all of these changes generally forced a high level of adaptation from the population; in spite of this pressure, it can equally be argued that self-determination still had a part in defining the structure of everyday life. Even as self-determination was removed from the visible world formed by political and ideological expectations, the ability to enact independent, albeit small, decisions became all the more important during the course of private interactions and the symbolic representation of personal and social expression.

The history of consumption and shifts in consumer attitudes therefore provides an excellent example of these processes; while consumption's role was not an overly significant one in the 1930s and

1940s, beginning in the late 1960s consumerism became a means for expressing social representation. As an aside, it must be mentioned that the historical sociological examination of consumer consumption in Hungary has not been an extremely popular avenue of research despite the fact that addressing this topic in detail remains an essential aspect of any nuanced evaluation of the social and economic changes that took place in modern Hungary. This factor partly explains the relative scarcity of sociological works that explore Hungary's history of consumerism.³⁵

The following contains a brief summary of the specific areas related to everyday life (diet and consumption, for example) and the historical sociological approaches and interpretations applied to the investigation of structures in daily life. When initiating discussion from the position of nutrition and diet, the basic requirements for everyday survival, it quickly becomes obvious that the degree to which a population has access to food—the availability or lack of foodstuffs—is a factor that informs the dominant socio-psychological mood and circumstances of an era. While nutrition and eating habits are primarily determined by an individual's social position and economic situation, the requirements and opportunities provided by different professions obviously render their own impact. Other than these factors, the nutritional habits, methods of food preparation, consumer customs, or even regional traditions that originate from a previous time period all continue to influence the dietary norms exhibited

³⁵ The Hungarian literature discussing the topic primarily consists of sociological and historical sociological analyses. See among others the compilation prepared by the journal *Replika*, published under the title "A fogyasztói szocializmus" [Consumerist Socialism], *Replika* 26 (1997): 17–68. It contains Miklós Vörös's study regarding the politics of consumerism research, Ferenc Hammer and Tibor Dessewffy's paper on consumerism's phantom, Katalin S. Nagy's examination of consumerism and home decor in the 1970s, and Ina Merkel's analysis of the path leading to a consumer society. Tibor Dessewffy has made the most consistent strides in rethinking and reexamining the role played by consumerism in the social and political changes that took place during the Kádár era. See Tibor Dessewffy, *Kedélyes labirintus* (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 1997). In the late 1970s and early 1980s Istvánné Hoffmann, Mária Heller, István Bessenyei, and Ágnes Utasi investigated the changes undergone by consumption from either a sociological or economic standpoint. It must also be mentioned that the Research Institute of Internal Trade and the National Institute of Market Research conducted a wide variety of research on this topic beginning in the 1960s. A portion of this work possesses value as a historical source and can be used for further research.

in a given era. Religious requirements or the customs dictated by allegiance to a religious denomination also determine nutritional and eating habits. Not only do nutritional differences emerge in the habits each social stratum has regarding the consumption of foodstuffs and their dietary norms, they also express financial inequalities.

Beyond forming a fundamental necessity, nutrition is also a symbolic act: an abundant table signifies plenty or even wealth while the hosting of guests has always served a representative purpose for the members of smaller or wider communities. The given community in turn provides fairly exact boundaries for the elements of culture and nutrition that it accepts as a part of its lifestyle. Food occupies a central position in daily life, which is precisely why it is so very difficult to alter the beliefs and practices connected to food even when the ability to access sufficient nutrition has been impeded: "It could be said that 'eating' comes first out of all other material necessities here in Hungary, where it is the most important thing of all. It truly has evolved from a biological necessity to a social one that has been redefined as a social and differentiated necessity."³⁶

To place this issue within a broader context while applying the term coined by Natalie Zemon Davis, not only nutrition and eating habits but also dress, home décor, the usage of residential spaces, and consumer habits provide a type of "cultural document" which can and must be interpreted, no matter how routinely ordinary all the objects and aspects that are connected to these topics may appear to be.³⁷ "Reconstructing daily life does not mean the mere iteration of its content based on documents and including the details pertaining to its material world and events. By means of our reconstruction the true task is to embed the past's banal particularities within their original meaning and natural interrelations so that they can then be made known according to the import, function, and meaning that they possessed at one time and in one place."³⁸ The level of quality exhibited by eating, dress, and living conditions expresses a given social group's cultural standards, a factor that bears heavily on the

³⁶ Ágnes Losonczi, *Az életmód az időben, a tárgyokban és az értékekben* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1977), 350.

³⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Shapes of Social History," *Storia della Storiografia* 17, no. 1 (1990): 28–32.

³⁸ Gábor Gyáni, "A hétköznapiok historikuma: Az új narratív történetírás," in *A hétköznapiok historikuma*, ed. József Dusnoki-Draskovich and Ádám Erdész (Gyula: Békés Megyei Levéltár, 1997), 11–28.

course of human relations since a well-laid table, appropriate outfit, and living space possess both genuine and symbolic social content and significance. After all, taste reflects the extent to which an individual complies with or deviates from his or her social environment.

To continue the aforementioned example, eating also acts as a type of ritual that—among its other benefits—enables the continuation of human contact and the expression of human emotions, such as love or a sense of welcoming. In peasant families how meals were taken reflected the relationship between men and women as well as social prestige: women served the male members of the family and ate only after the men had finished or while standing in a place separate from the men. Irrespective of social position, the general aim was to guarantee a secure source of food, a situation that went far from ensuring the same level of quality for everyone, beyond the satisfaction of basic needs. In the mid-twentieth century (as well as the later part of the century, to a certain extent) broad swathes of Hungarian society experienced a lack of adequate foodstuffs and even malnutrition. During the final years of this century the situation reversed itself as obesity and overnutrition became increasingly serious problems. As far as public opinion in Hungary was concerned, eating remained one of the most important daily necessities, and one for which money should not be spared.

Another interesting question is how changes in public opinion and mentality were influenced by everyday life and consumption, not to mention how these changes were reflected by Hungary's material culture. How a living space is arranged both in terms of its location and furnishings, the way one dresses, and the amount and quality of food one consumes all provide a rather clear expression of the owner or wearer's social position, sense of identity, and affiliations. Taking the roles that different lifestyles and material cultures have into consideration obviously provides an important contribution to the historical analysis of changes in social structures.

From the latter half of the twentieth century, the ability to obtain objects that expressed group affiliation became increasingly important in Hungary. The example of how one of the period's defining social groups, the urban working class, transformed itself during this period perfectly illustrates consumerism's role in stratification. While the availability of a supply of mass consumer goods among this social group was not common during the 1940s and 1950s, starting in the late 1960s, urban working-class households owned a growing number of

appliances—including televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, and spin dryers—as homes increased in size and became better furnished. The typical “proletarian live-in kitchen” (*lakókonyha*) as the center of the family’s life was replaced by a separate living room, as owning an automobile or spending the weekend at a plot of land (*telek*) outside of the city—which originally was bought mainly for the production of fresh fruit and vegetables but became over time a place for a second home and recreation—became increasingly common and invested with a symbolic value of private ownership. Other than the traditional factors that determine group or strata formation, the presence—or lack thereof—of personal property therefore came to have a growing influence on the internal configuration of Hungary’s urban working class. In terms of its trajectory, this process may appear to resemble the transformation of the working class in the West, yet it cannot be forgotten that it occurred at a later time and under fundamentally different circumstances. In Hungary attaining even the bare minimum of a “prosperous” consumer lifestyle demanded, for instance, an incomparably higher amount of individual sacrifice and effort.³⁹

Nor can it be denied that the structures of everyday life gained an increased sense of value due to the political system’s peculiarities during the state socialist era: an individual’s social life provided the only sphere where political changes or reactions to political interventions could be expressed, a circumstance that became particularly true in the mid-sixties, when politics enacted less of a direct presence and individuals or groups could preserve some amount of autonomy, at least to a certain extent. From this point on, my examination utilizes a unique perspective in describing an age, one that is introduced via an exploration of how individuals and groups conducted their everyday lives within the atmosphere and mood that pervaded this time in Hungarian history.

I additionally argue that consumers’ genuine role in society offers further interest when examined within the circumstances created by a planned economy: due to the lack of a market, the emergence of secondary markets led to a rather unique set of conditions that

³⁹ This form of quasi-equalization that occurred between 1950 and 1970 via the emergence of a consumer attitude and resulted in homogenization has been described in the case of members of West Germany’s working class. See Josef Mooser, “Abschied von der ‘Proletarität’: Sozialstruktur und Lage der Arbeiterschaft in der Bundesrepublik in historischer Perspektive,” in *Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, ed. Werner Conze and Rainer M. Lepsius (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983), 143–86.

determined life in Hungary just as much as a similar situation did in other state socialist countries. When discussing the decades that followed World War II, it is customary to refer to various states located in Western Europe as “consumer societies” rather than Hungary or the other countries located within the Soviet bloc; it must not be forgotten that, even if this process emerged at the end of the 1960s, Soviet satellite nations also underwent an undeniably idiosyncratic type of “consumer revolution” which enabled—to various degrees in different countries—communist parties to stabilize and lengthen their control over the region.⁴⁰ As in Hungary, the political leaderships in other state socialist nations viewed the guarantee of public welfare as a basic element legitimizing their power and therefore placed the stabilization of the supply of goods and the expansion of consumer options within this category. Once the state gradually began to intervene less in these areas, consumerism’s significance grew in the eyes of the population.

In Hungary, advertising only had a slight influence on the emergence and evolution of consumer attitudes due to the fact that trade propaganda supplanted the presence of ads in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As a result, genuine advertising only began to appear in the 1970s.⁴¹ Initially only a mild impetus, the steadily intensifying compulsion to consume was fed far more by the fact that the forms that consumption took in Hungary—constructing a home, buying a car, or purchasing a plot of land as a weekend retreat—were legitimate means for procuring and accumulating property that possessed a relatively stable value.

From the point of view of the era under examination, consumerism’s history can be divided into four periods: the first comprises the decade between 1938 and 1949, during which Hungarians struggled for survival while facing the damages of war, shortages, and prolonged privation, followed by the gradual improvement of these conditions as industry’s trade capacity regained its footing, supply

⁴⁰ For a detailed comparison of other nations in Central Europe, see Stephan Merl, “Staat und Konsum in der Zentralverwaltungswirtschaft: Russland und die ostmitteleuropäischen Länder,” in *Europäische Konsumgeschichte*, ed. Hannes Siegrist, Hartmut Kaelble, and Jürgen Kocka (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1997), 205–44. For a more recent examination, see Neuburger and Bren, *Communism Unwrapped*.

⁴¹ For a more general interpretation based on an anthropological and sociological view of the role played by advertising in consumerism, see Douglas and Isherwood, *The World of Goods*.

stabilized, and a wider selection of goods became available.⁴² The fifteen years that spanned 1949 to 1965 were once more characterized by an incredible degree of scarcity and the drastic and enforced restriction of consumption; following the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, this situation was slowly remediated. The third period emerged in the latter half of the 1960s and lasted for two decades. This era began with the stabilization of supply quality while shortages also became less frequent. Satisfying the quantitative aspect of consumer demand was followed by broadening the variety of consumption options, resulting in an increased selection of goods. Toward the end of the 1970s, the expanded availability of goods was further supplemented by the emergence of shopping tourism as a common practice. As consumption received a greater role in everyday life, the general scarcity of goods that had typified previous decades became all but unknown during the 1980s; this, however, did not mean that shortages did not occur in the case of articles that were either seasonal or in high demand. The consumer demands held by certain individuals and groups increasingly turned to satisfying the need for quality as well as the requirements of fashion. Hungary's transformation to a democratic system marked the fourth period discussed in this book, at which time consumerism not only came to occupy a natural place in the culture of everyday life but also formed an organizational element in the restructuring of Hungarian society that thereby led to a renewed type of differentiation in the area of consumption.

"The collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe was directly connected to the system's low level of effectiveness, in that it proved incapable of delivering on, maintaining, and financing the level of consumption it continuously promised. Due to a lack of capital and the working force's low level of performance, the state support needed for keeping consumer prices low increasingly exhausted the resources that would have been essential for realizing economic growth."⁴³ While the system strove to limit consumption for the sake of economic planning, in contrast to the 1950s, in Hungary the consolidated Kádár regime not only used economic policy, but also "scientifically established norms" to influence the consumer demands that were deemed "worthy of a worker building a developed socialist state." This aim subsequently prompted propaganda campaigns that targeted

⁴² For more details, see Chapter Three in this volume.

⁴³ Merl, "Staat und Konsum in der Zentralverwaltungswirtschaft," 213.

frugality, economizing, healthy eating habits, and the condemnation of wastefulness.

As the country's borders became more open and tourism grew widespread, experiencing "Western" examples of consumerism obviously instilled new desires and aims in Hungary's population while additionally promoting further shifts in the mentality of various social groups. When evaluating their own circumstances, a decisive majority of Hungarians used the opportunities found in Western Europe as their source of comparison. Within the confines of a state socialist economy, this factor was a source of lasting tension mostly because goods producers were directed to fulfill the quotas laid out in various economic directives, meaning that quantity was far more important than quality. Nor did the lack—and even restriction—of competition improve the standards of quality; since production could not always cover the degree of demand, it was practically possible to sell anything in Hungary.⁴⁴ Manufacturers mainly enjoyed a monopoly on the goods they produced, a situation that "naturally" included bad service and inferior goods.

It must also be mentioned that the level of consumption found in various state socialist countries after World War II was quite disparate. In the beginning Czechoslovakia and East Germany understandably headed the list since a consumer culture that was more developed than the Central European average had already existed in these parts of the region during the interwar period. The fact cannot be denied that in the 1960s and 1970s most Soviet bloc countries underwent a significant rise in the standard of living; although the extent of this improvement varied from country to country, the communist parties in power at the time used this improvement to bolster their own legitimacy. To differing degrees, each society was meanwhile experiencing a heightened interest toward consumerism as a part of daily life.⁴⁵ The communist system eased access to homes, local transportation, basic foodstuffs, and cafeteria dining as a form of social welfare that cost far less for the majority than the actual asking price. In contrast to this, the price of luxury or prestige items was

⁴⁴ For a discussion of this issue, see research by János Kornai, *Economics of Shortage* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1980); and Kornai, *A szocialista rendszer* (Budapest: HVG, 1993).

⁴⁵ Merl, "Staat und Konsum in der Zentralverwaltungswirtschaft," 214. For further discussion on the topic, see Béla Tomka, *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

quite high compared to the salary most people earned; for those living on an average income, this type of expenditure was either out of the question or nearly impossible. Due to the fact that the prices of basic necessities were kept artificially low in Hungary as well as in other Central European nations, it was not uncommon, for example, that the bread sold at the state-supported price was sometimes used by private animal breeders to feed their stock. The cost of household energy—for decades kept at low prices that did not even cover the expense of production—similarly drove many to waste resources.

The politics surrounding the practice of centrally fixed prices determined the attitudes of both producer and consumer. Since manufacturers had no need to battle the competition, there was no motivation either to improve quality or decrease prices. Compared to the state-owned production and trade system, the narrow area occupied by a limited private sector provided an alternative. When possible, consumers preferred to buy privately made products; due to the restrictions placed on private industry and small-scale trade, the opportunities to do so, however, were few. Thanks to shortages, even shoddily made goods could be sold in large amounts. At the time, as far as trade was concerned the customer was little more than a kind of “nuisance” intent on “bothering” the employees who consequently had no reason to provide effective service or even polite behavior. For decades acquiring more valuable items could only be accomplished via the development and operation of a network of personal connections. Even within the conditions determined by local differences and the relations of the socialist state system, “consumer decisions become a course that invigorates the given culture. Individuals who have grown up in a given culture value all of what this entails as a change in their own lives: new words, new thoughts, new methods. . . . Consumerism is the territory where culture is struggled for and poured into a new mold.”⁴⁶ Based on historical processes, it is quite clear that consumption is not primarily founded on economics, nor is it a matter of strict rationality in every case. From many points of view, the interpretation of consumerism as a phenomenon that is also dependent upon culture and social group describes Hungarian society during the postwar era.

Compared to the hardship endured during previous decades, the latter half of the 1960s meant the start of an era that offered “limited

⁴⁶ Douglas and Isherwood, *World of Goods*, 37.

plenty” in Hungary. Experiencing this change had a definite impact on thought patterns, mentality, and value systems. Either temporary or constant social differences emerged between those who already owned a television set or automobile and those who did not. The same schism appeared in connection to whether a family opted to modernize their kitchen or continue using traditional tools, belonged to a rural, urban, white- or blue-collar household, and managed to build a new home on their own or was forced to make do with whatever shelter was available. The ability to follow the latest fashion in clothing or immediately buy the “trendiest” objects also became an important matter for families.

Fashion, in this sense, remained a means of social differentiation, in a way similar to how Georg Simmel explained the phenomenon in his essay on the philosophy of fashion:

Fashion . . . is a product of class distinction and operates like a number of other forms, honor especially, the double function of which consists in revolving within a given circle and at the same time emphasizing it as separate from others. . . . [H]onor owes its character, and above all its moral rights, to the fact that the individual in his personal honor at the same time represents and maintains that of his social circle and his class. Thus fashion on the one hand signifies union with those in the same class, the uniformity of a circle characterized by it, while at the same time separates this group from those below by defining these as outsiders. Union and segregation are the two fundamental functions which are here inseparably united, and one of which, although or because it forms a logical contrast to the other, becomes the condition of its realization.⁴⁷

The question that must be posed is whether—within a private sphere that was determined by the conditions of a state socialist system—it is even possible to discuss the emergence of a new type of “honor culture” that was rooted in the ability to consume or the quasi-consumerist culture that existed at the time. If the term “fashion” does not simply delineate the matter of dress, but rather refers to a broader, social interpretation, then it is quite clear that starting from the late 1960s the ability to sport a well-dressed appearance, acquire and own durable consumer goods, modernize homes, and construct residences or weekend getaways with an increasingly larger surface area became a social trend in Hungary. All of these “fads” served the

⁴⁷ Georg Simmel, “Philosophie der Mode,” *Projekt Gutenberg*, <https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/simmel/philmode/philmode.html>. Translation is based on Georg Simmel, “Fashion,” *American Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 6 (May 1957): 544.

purpose of creating and maintaining outward appearances. To quote Giovanni Levi,

The primary interest of a study of consumption seems to me to be that it compels us to take account of cultural elements that complicate our image of social stratification. The contemporary fragmentation of the social world at least has the merit of forcing us to reflect on the way in which social solidarity is constituted. The mechanisms of distribution break the social uniformity generated by production. Intergenerational relations, lifestyles, ethnic and cultural affiliations, and family traditions are at the origin of forms of solidarity that are not superimposed on those based on production relations. It is in this perspective that the study of consumption patterns is decisive: it can allow us to understand on which social scenes do envy, imitation, solidarity, and conflict play a role. In a society segmented into bodies, conflicts and solidarity often took place between equals. . . . The study of consumption is therefore not intended as an alternative to that of production relationships for those who want to characterize forms of social stratification. . . . the important thing is the coexistence of separate spheres of consumption.⁴⁸

In Hungary consumption was restricted for both political and economic reasons during the latter decades of the twentieth century. These obstacles and limitations were, in fact, overcome by the emergence, strengthening, and synchronous existence of consumerist spheres. Similarly, consumption acts as an important factor in social stratification, just as it contributes to the development of social strata. In Hungary's sociological literature, a monography by Ágnes Utasi in the mid-eighties attempted to interpret the social processes that took place in the late Kádár era from the perspective of consumer preferences.⁴⁹ After the 1989 democratic shift, consumption and consumer structures figured as two of the main, essential elements in structural examinations.⁵⁰ In his classical work, Pierre Bourdieu also assigned a prominent role to the ownership of various types of capital,

⁴⁸ Giovanni Levi, "Comportements, ressources, procès: avant la 'révolution' de la consommation," in *Jeux d'échelles: La micro-analyse à l'expérience*, ed. Jacques Revell (Paris: Seuil-Gallimard, 1996), 195

⁴⁹ Ágnes Utasi, *Életstílus-csoportok, fogyasztási preferenciák: Rétegződés-modell vizsgálat*, vol. 5 (Budapest: MSZMP KB Társadalomtudományi Intézete, 1984).

⁵⁰ See among others Zoltán Fábíán, Tamás Kolosi, and Péter Róbert, "Fogyasztás és életstílus," in *Társadalmi Riórt 2000*, ed. Tamás Kolosi, György István Tóth, and György Vukovich (Budapest: TÁRKI, 2000). More recently: András Csíte, Imre Kovách, and Luca Kristóf, "Fogyasztói csoportok az ezredforduló Magyarországon," in *Társadalmi metszetek*, ed. Imre Kovách (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2006), 253–92.

taste, and consumption.⁵¹ According to Bourdieu, the possession of cultural and material capital is one of the principal factors engendering structuration. Material capital, income, determines society's vertical articulation while cultural capital defines the horizontal distribution. The situations experienced by individuals and groups as well as their relationships to one another or resultant inequalities are influenced by a combination of types of capital. At the same time, Bourdieu also believed that taste is what marks and maintains the borders between social classes. More recent interpretations, however, have demonstrated that the tastes or preferences displayed by social classes or groups dissolve into modern mass culture, a process that the spread of electronic mass communication has accelerated.⁵² How certain patterns are followed is therefore not only the result of social status, but is also related to an individual's age group. Consumption's role has also changed given the fact that it no longer encompasses merely the purchase of goods as determined by financial position; consumption has become a crucial part of self-expression and social representation. The expanded selection of goods has rendered a wider array of choices possible: the way in which certain objects or goods signify prestige has transformed consumption into a tool of self-expression, while also indicating social differences. In this instance the *habitus* which has become embedded in individuals in the form of the mental and physical schema used to observe, assess, and act enacts a heavy influence and can be defined as those collective circumstances that evolved throughout the course of history. *Habitus* forms the foundation for the emergence of various strategies or reactions that enable an individual to face a variety of situations while moving within the "field." To summarize Bourdieu's interpretation, the "field" is designated by objective historical circumstances that occur among positions fixed in forms of power or capital and can be viewed as a type of network in which the relationships among positions determine the individual, group, or institution occupying a given position. According to this concept, social reality can be traced in individual minds as well as in objectified structures, institutions, and mechanisms.

Socialization, of course, possesses a significant influence on all of this, for socialization is how social structures become internally

⁵¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 640.

⁵² Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters, *The Death of Class* (London: Sage, 1996).

defined. *Habitus* and the field therefore represent factors that simultaneously structuralize while also being structured. In the course of determining or changing social position, the movement of certain individuals or groups is not only impacted by objective, exterior, and historical factors, but also by the social world which—based on its qualities and how these are distributed—also encompasses a symbolic system constructed according to the logic of differences. Many types of practical activities can function as an indicator of differentiation; this, however, necessitates that difference be both noticed and acknowledged. People are both capable of as well as inclined to emphasize indications of their difference deliberately; attempts to do so result in the type of separation that members of society will later accept as legitimate difference. In society as a field, from the objects that surround us, to weekday forms of contact or the consumption of either basic essentials needed for survival or cultural goods, everything is interwoven with a network of meaning that is instrumental in the creation of differentiation. Bourdieu's social theories provide a basis for analyzing the changes that occur within the interrelated systems of action and structure, culture, and society. In my estimation, the most interesting question to be raised is whether the symbolic content of objects and actions—the formation of the meaning that is connected to the material world and social situations—can be traced throughout the highly tumultuous historical periods that are the focus of this book. If possible, will this type of examination succeed in emphasizing the impact individual and collective identity has on the mechanisms based upon which society is organized? The following chapters of this volume strive to answer these issues through my interpretation of certain aspects that are closely related to the norms and habits which form the basic foundation of everyday life.

Chapter Two

Two Hundred Pengős a Month, Five Hundred Forints, Two Thousand Forints...: Financial Circumstances, Prices, Wages, and Income Inequalities in Everyday Life

National revenue, real wages, and changes in the standard of living

World War II left Hungary's economy and infrastructure devastated; occupation by both the German and the Soviet armies had bled the nation's resources dry, leading to a state of economic and financial ruin by the end of the war.¹ From 1944 to 1945, the need to rectify and repair the damage brought about by wartime destruction determined Hungary's situation. During the war forty percent of the country's national wealth (calculated according to 1938 rates) had been destroyed, a factor that not only defined Hungary's economic opportunities for many lengthy years to come, but was also further compounded by

¹ In accordance with this book's focus on the history of consumption, my primary aim is to summarize the tendencies that characterize changes in income conditions; a more detailed economic and historical analysis of this issue would have overextended the confines of this work. It must, however, be mentioned that property conditions, the system determining the distribution of income and economic circumstances underwent fundamental change in Hungary beginning at the end of the 1940s, when the planned economy system implemented by Hungary's socialist state transformed market conditions. A similarly significant change occurred again in the course of the 1989/1990 democratic shift that marked the end of state socialism while simultaneously transforming Hungary from a planned to a market economy. For a comparison of the economic development of state socialist states found in Central and Eastern Europe, see Iván T. Berend, *An Economic History of Twentieth-Century Europe: Economic Regimes from Laissez-Faire to Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Derek H. Aldcroft and Steven Morewood, *Economic Change in Eastern Europe Since 1918* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1995).

the obligation to make wartime reparations.² In the years following the war, the primary task was to halt hyperinflation—that virtually wiped out the value of the Hungarian *pengő*, the country's currency since 1927—and establish a form of currency possessing a stable value.³ Due to the way in which Hungary's price and wage systems were distorted in order to bring about the financial stability that resulted from the introduction of a new currency named *forint* on August 1, 1946, numerous sources of tension and friction remained within Hungary's postwar financial system, where they continued to test the strength of the nation's economy throughout future decades.⁴

In 1938, Hungary's per capita national revenue amounted to 120 US dollars, a sum that was somewhat lower than two-thirds of the European average at the time.⁵ Since national revenue naturally fell as a result of World War II, it was not until 1949 that Hungary was able to regain the level it had possessed in 1938. During the 1950s, national revenue fluctuated, but showed overall growth in comparison to 1949. This rising trend continued to climb steadily until the first half of the 1970s. Yet despite the forced rate of economic growth, the

² For further details regarding this issue, see Iván Pető and Sándor Szakács, *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története*, vol. 1 (Budapest: KJK, 1986); Sándor Szakács, *Gazdaságtörténet*, vol. 2. [1849–1996], 2nd amended ed. (Budapest: Számalk Kiadó, 2002); Zoltán Kaposi, *Magyarország gazdaságtörténete 1700–2000* (Pécs: Dialog-Campus, 2002); Béla Tomka, *Gazdasági növekedés, fogyasztás és életminőség* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2011), 306.

³ As a result of the destruction wrought during World War II, inflation peaked in July 1946 when prices doubled every fifteen hours on average. Between 1945 and 1946, money was therefore issued in increasingly larger denominations. The *pengő*—a form of currency introduced in 1927 as a means of replacing the *korona*, the currency that devaluated during the economic crisis that occurred in the aftermath of World War I—was rapidly followed by the *milpengő*, i.e., the one-million-pengő bill. Once a billion-pengő bill had already been released, a bill worth one thousand times a billion—the *bilpengő*—was put into circulation. By June 1946, even the *bilpengő* had reached the denomination of one hundred million, equaling a hundred trillion (10^{20}) pengő, a sum that continues to hold the world record as the largest bill ever issued by a bank. With the introduction of a new form of currency known as the forint in 1946, this period of hyperinflation was brought to a halt and Hungary's economy became stabilized. A single one-forint coin was the equivalent of 4×10^{29} pengős.

⁴ On the introduction of the forint, see Ernő Huszti, "Hetven éves a magyar forint," *Pénzügyi Szemle* 4 (2016): 447–58.

⁵ In 1938, 1 USD equaled 5.3 pengős. When adjusted to account for inflation, one US dollar in 1938 would be equal to \$17.85 USD in 2020. For more info on the USD value of Hungarian currencies, see Appendix.

gap between Hungary and more economically developed countries—did not become any narrower during the postwar decades.⁶

The development of the Hungarian economy, and, consequently, the changes in the standards of living during these decades were largely determined by the role of the Hungarian Communist Party, which, under various names, dominated the nation's political, economic, and cultural life until 1989.⁷ Emerging from the war as a major political player—a role that had less to do with the communists' popular support than with the influence of the Soviet Union and the presence of its occupying army in Hungary—the Communist Party under the leadership of Mátyás Rákosi first gained a governing role as a member of a postwar coalition of democratically elected parties.⁸ Gradually occupying key political, economic, and security positions, the communists within a few years managed to eliminate their political opponents one by one, and gain by 1948–49 total power over the country.

⁶ See Éva Ehrlich, *Országok versenye 1937–1986* (Budapest: KJK, 1991). According to indicators that are based on combined calculations, Hungary's developmental backwardness (compared to the USA) declined somewhat in 1980, which was due to progress that mostly occurred during the 1970s. Despite this, the difference actually grew compared to Austria, previously one of Southern Europe's less developed nations: "within thirty years (1950–1980) and based on different calculations the economy of the Hungarian socialist state increased its per capita GDP by three to four times its previous rate. Lacking any sort of historical precedence, this yearly growth rate of 3.7 percent to 4.7 percent was only slightly above average during the given era and within the European context. This is why Hungary's international rank did not change based on its economic performance." Éva Ehrlich and Gábor Révész, "A magyar gazdaság a 20. században: Integrációs és dezintegrációs tendenciák," *MTA Világgazdasági Kutató Intézet Műhelytanulmányok* 31 (2001): 14.

⁷ Established in 1918 as the Party of Communists in Hungary (Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja, KMP), the party changed its name to Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Párt, MKP) in 1944. After merging with (or basically annexing) the Social Democrats in 1949, a new entity named the Hungarian Workers' Party (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja, MDP) was established, which became the ruling party until 1956. During the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the party was renamed again as the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP), a name which it kept until 1989.

⁸ Joining the communist movement in 1919, Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971) became the leader of the Hungarian Communist Party in the early 1940s. As an ardent Stalinist, he was one of the main architects of the Sovietization of Hungary and the de facto leader of the country from 1948 to 1956. After his fall following the 1956 revolution, he lived in exile in the Soviet Union until his death. On the Rákosi-era, see György Gyarmati, *A Rákosi-korszak: Rendszerváltó fordulatok évtizede Magyarországon, 1945–1956* (Budapest: ÁBTL–Rubicon, 2011).

The following years, which are often referred to as the Rákosi era, were characterized by the implementation of Stalinist methods of government, including economic policies. After 1949, a Soviet-type model of planned economy was introduced which concentrated on the rather one-sided development of heavy industry, a move that ushered in the period in Hungarian history known as the period of “enforced industrialization.” In response to Stalin’s expectation that the Soviet Union and its satellites be prepared for the outbreak of World War III, overly disproportionate capacities for the manufacturing of iron, steel, and machine equipment were established. While collectivization disrupted agriculture, all available economic resources were primarily directed toward the military, thereby diminishing advances in all other areas of the economy.

As a consequence of a decrease in the standard of living that lasted for three years in the early 1950s, the real wage value for 1952 was twenty percent lower than that for 1950. If, for example, we assign the 1938 level the value of 100, the real wage value for 1952 only amounted to 66 percent of this, while the 1956 value was 93 percent of that for 1938.⁹ These facts alone are enough to disprove the claims spread at the time via propaganda that the population’s living circumstances had improved and wages had risen after the Communist Party took control of Hungary. Precisely the opposite was true: even compared to the final year of peace before the outbreak of World War II, a great decline occurred which conserved social tensions. Based on opinion polls taken at the time, in the late 1940s the majority of those surveyed felt that the normalization of living conditions had slowed down, with standards of living stagnating, or even worsening.¹⁰

In the early 1950s the ratio of capital investments was increased by nearly 30 percent, to the detriment of civil projects that would have improved the population’s standard of living. Most of these investments were either directly or indirectly related to military purposes. As a result of the economic priorities that were established in the name of “building socialism,” incomes were severely reduced; the most important means for accomplishing this reduction included the maintenance of low wages, prices that were high in comparison to wages and rose virtually continuously, drastic growth in the taxes

⁹ György Gyarmati, “A társadalom közérzete a fordulat éveiben,” in *Fordulat a világban és Magyarországon, 1947–1949*, ed. István Feitl, Lajos Izsák, and Gábor Székely (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2000), 118–37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

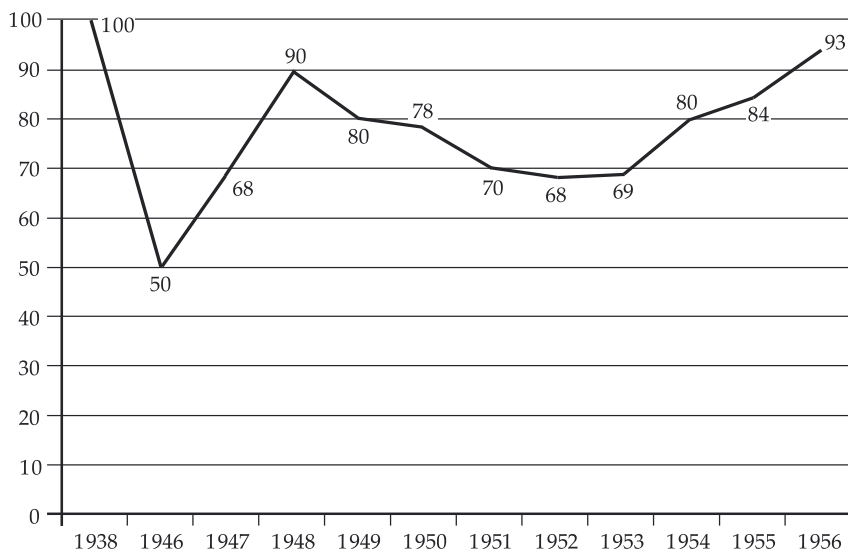


Figure 1. Changes in the average monthly salaries for government employees in Hungary from 1938 to 1956 (1938=100 percent). Source: Gyarmati, "A társadalom közérzete a fordulat éveiben," 133.

and the amounts of agricultural produce that farmers were compelled to hand over to the state, other curtailments that were withheld from earnings, and the subscription to a government loan known as the *békekölcsön* (peace loan), which was officially touted as voluntary, but was actually mandatory in practice. Between 1949 and 1954 subscription "drives" for peace loans were held on six separate occasions which led to a total of 5.6 billion forints being deducted from the population's earnings (this amount corresponds to roughly 477 million US dollars in 1949, or 5 billion US dollars in 2020). During this period the government's approach to economic policy was one which viewed the population's income as a source of economic growth. The combined impact of enforced industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture led to severe food shortages from 1951 to 1952; by 1953, the situation was no longer tenable.

A significant change in these policies occurred after the death of Stalin in March 1953, with the new Soviet leadership experimenting with reforms to ease tensions within Eastern Europe under their control. In Hungary this led to a change in government, with the less dogmatic politician Imre Nagy becoming the new chairman of

the council of ministers (de facto prime minister) in July 1953.¹¹ In the following period referred to as “the new phase,” the population’s income and subsequent consumption grew from the low level mentioned above until it finally peaked in the first half of 1956. By the spring of 1955, however, Nagy fell out of favor due to a reversal in Moscow’s policies, resulting in Rákosi’s return to power. The tensions created by the Stalinist restoration led to public dissatisfaction. Pro-reform demonstrations by university students on October 23, 1956, ultimately turned into a society-wide protest and, after the intervention of Hungarian security forces and Soviet army units, into a full-scale uprising.

Although the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was short lived, it had a long-term impact on Hungary’s economic and welfare policies. In response to the eleven percent decrease in the country’s national revenue in the second half of 1956, and corresponding drop in consumption, and in an effort to stabilize its rule, the new communist leadership, headed by János Kádár, increasingly made the growth of Hungary’s standard of living a core part of its political agenda.¹² During the decades that spanned from 1957 to 1978 (and particularly during the period between 1965 and 1975) this change in attitude resulted in noticeably better material circumstances and income for a broad section of Hungarian society. The extent to which this improvement was actually due to political initiatives is naturally debatable, just as assessing the size of the role played by social coercion and

¹¹ Until he was ousted in the spring of 1955, the communist politician Imre Nagy (1896–1958) cautiously initiated reforms and eased the grip of dictatorial policies, thereby earning himself a reputation as an authentic and trustworthy politician who opposed Stalinist policies. The popularity that Nagy earned as a result of these attempts contributed to him becoming Hungary’s prime minister again during the short-lived 1956 Hungarian Revolution. For his role in the revolution, he was sentenced to death in a show trial and executed, then secretly buried in plot 301 of the New Public Cemetery in Rákoskeresztúr under the misleading female name Piroska Borbíró. His reburial on June 16, 1989, became one of the most emblematic events of the change of regime in Hungary. For more on Imre Nagy, see János M. Rainer, *Imre Nagy: A Biography* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

¹² The communist politician János Kádár (1912–1989) was brought to power with the aid of the Soviet Union following the defeat of the 1956 Revolution. He was the first secretary of the newly-formed Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, then later was its president until his death in 1989. Kádár was prime minister of Hungary between 1956 and 1958 and then served in the same position from 1961 to 1965. For more than three decades, he was the most important politician and leader of the socialist state system in Hungary.

exertion is similarly impossible. The question of what price society meanwhile paid for a higher level of economic security also remains to be answered. Based on official statistics it is, however, clear that Hungary's national revenue mostly showed a trend of steady growth while the value for real wages increased slightly more than twofold during this period.

Table 1. Real wages and developments in per capita real income and consumption between 1950 and 1995 (1950=100 percent)

Year	Real wages	Real income	Household consumption
1950	100	100	100
1955	105	115	115
1960	154	154	152
1965	168	181	175
1970	199	245	228
1975	234	306	281
1980	243	333	316
1985	233	363	342
1990	219	378	362
1995	182	332	317

Source: András Klinger, *Társadalomstatistikai alapismeretek* (Budapest: KSH, 1998); and *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága: Múlt és jelen* (Budapest: KSH, 1996).

One of the consequences that came about as a result of Hungary's "quasi-modernization"¹³ was the fact that material living conditions naturally underwent a significant change: compared to 1950 (100) the index for per capita real income in 1960 was 154, consumption had risen to 152, and real wages had reached an index of 154. This improvement in economic indicators underwent its most dynamic period between 1965 and 1975. The fact must not be forgotten, however, that during the given period the rate of real income that was evaluated statistically always diverged from the actual state of things, albeit to differing degrees. One of the period's most characteristic features was the widespread habit of procuring various sources of income via activities that significantly contributed toward the emergence and

¹³ For an explanation of this concept, see Elemér Hankiss, *East European Alternatives* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), 336.

maintenance of Hungary's shadow economy. Similarly, when comparing the level of real wages to that of 1938, it can be seen that a much slower rate of growth took place throughout the entire period under examination in this volume. The decline (including its extent) that occurred after 1990 is also striking: the price Hungarians paid for the shift from state socialism to democracy and the economy's subsequent transformation is clearly reflected in this data.¹⁴ When analyzing the evolution of income conditions, it is noticeable that the gross value of the earnings from salary and wages, which represents the largest item in the population's income and was 10,600 forints in 1989, rose to be nineteen times higher by 2009. Average net earnings, however, grew to a smaller degree from 8,200 forints to fifteen times this amount. The real value possessed by earnings—within a trend of large-scale, nominal growth and increases in consumer prices—steadily fell until 1996, at which time it was 26 percent less than the value for 1989. This was followed by a nearly unbroken trend of growth that lasted throughout the following ten years, while a decline or only slight increase characterized the years that came after the peak year of 2006. The 1989 level for real wages was reached in 2002; in total, the 2009 level for real wages surpassed that of twenty years earlier by thirteen percent.

Among the population income components that were present during Hungary's state socialist period, the growth of monetary social benefits proved the most dynamic. Between 1960 and 1980 the amount spent on these benefits grew to be ten times higher, a circumstance that was brought about by an increased number of pensioners, increases in the average pension and the amount bestowed on families for child benefits, and the introduction of childcare support for mothers wishing to care for their children at home during the first years of their lives.¹⁵ In 1965, as the Kádár regime first began to consolidate, the KSH conducted a survey of 4,000 families in an attempt to examine what changes had occurred in Hungary's standard of living

¹⁴ János Kornai, "The Great Transformation of Central Eastern Europe: Success and Disappointment," in *Institutional Change and Economic Behaviour*, ed. János Kornai, László Mátyás, and Gérard Roland (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 207–44.

¹⁵ For working-class and employed families the child benefits issued in the case of two children was 37.5 forints per child in 1960, followed by 150 forints in 1970 and 490 forints in 1980. See *Életszínvonal 1960–1980*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 488 (Budapest: KSH, 1981), 108. In 2010, the amount of child benefits issued per child was 12,200 forints.

and living conditions. According to the data gathered, nearly half of the working-class/employed, peasant, and “double-income” (a term which referred to those who worked in both agriculture and industry or also earned income from the service sector) households that participated in the survey felt that their living conditions had not changed during the 1963/1964 year. One-sixth of both groups registered some degree of deterioration; less than one-third of working-class and employed households expressed the presence of a slight improvement compared to the one-fourth of peasant households that answered similarly. Within both groups only six to seven percent of the participating households felt that significant improvement had occurred.¹⁶ Based on the data collected in similar surveys that were repeated in 1973 and 1976, an “upswing phase” and differentiating trend can be clearly traced up to the mid-seventies. In 1973, a definitive majority of households indicated an improvement in their standard of living and income conditions; in 1976, however, with the exception of “peasant households conducting collective farming,” virtually every social group reported a decline in their circumstances. The data gathered between 1964 and 1976 amply illustrates that only one social group (members of collective farms) contained a growing percentage of households whose standard of living displayed progress. A steadily high percentage of families (nearly 50 percent) in each group registered a state of stagnation regarding their living conditions while the ratio of those who felt their circumstances had actually deteriorated (16–17 percent) remained similarly constant. With the aid of household statistics, it is also possible to conclude that the per capita, average net income for working-class and employed families throughout the early 1960s increased by 4 percent annually while peasant and double-income households averaged a yearly net income growth of 5 percent. The dynamic of income growth, however, was not steady since—in the case of both groups—income rose at a faster rate in the three years spanning 1962 to 1965. Roughly half of this upswing originated from a raise in wages; one-third was due to the circumstance that certain families came to have multiple earners and one-fifth was ensured by income over wages that stemmed from the increase in social benefits.¹⁷

¹⁶ For further details, see *Vélemények és tények (4000 háztartás életszínvonalának alakulása)* (Budapest, KSH, 1966).

¹⁷ *Háztartásstatistika: 4000 háztartás jövedelmének és kiadásának alakulása 1960 és 1965 évek között*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 97 (Budapest: KSH: 1967).

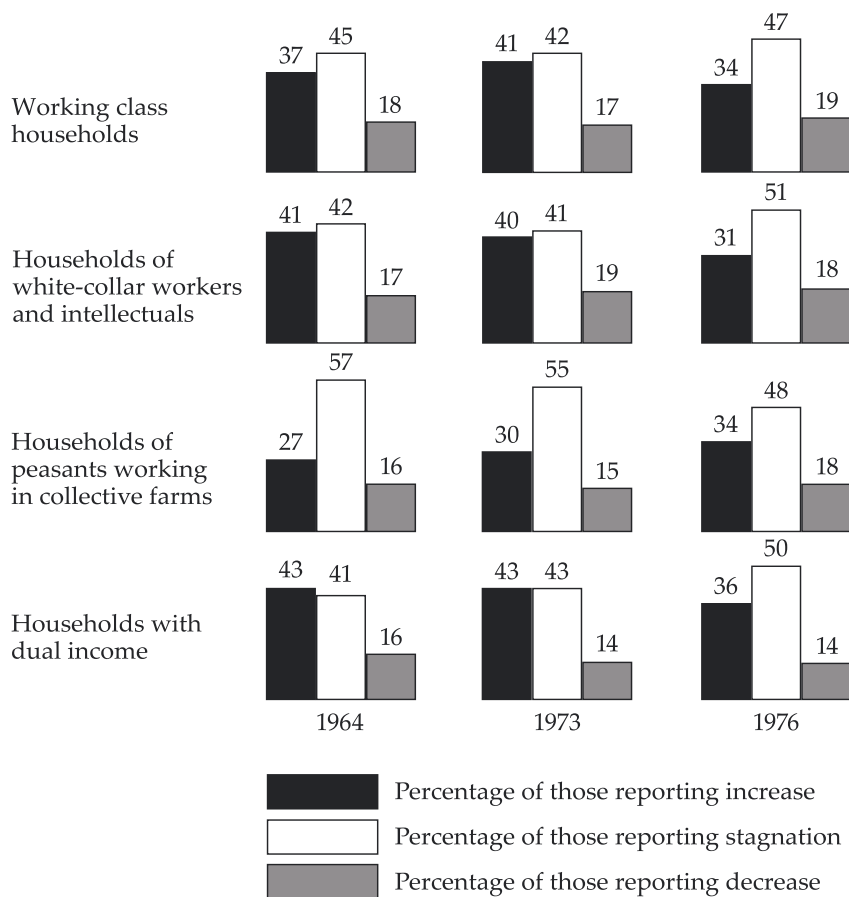


Figure 2. Evaluation of changes in the standard of living—compared to the previous year—in 1964, 1973, and 1976, respectively. Source: *Életszínvonal*, vol. 2, *Az életszínvonal alakulásának lakossági megítélése*, Statisztikai Közlemények, no. 22 (Budapest: KSH, 1978), 11

In Hungary between 1960 and 1980 the per capita personal real income rose annually by an average of 3.8 percent. During the first half of the 1960s the rate of growth was a relatively low 3.1 percent; in contrast to this, the latter half of this decade saw an extremely high rate averaging 6.4 percent per year. Between 1970 and 1978 the yearly average for this indicator was 3.7 percent.

It goes without saying that this period of growth did not affect everyone in the same way, as the relatively high ratio of those living

on low incomes compared to the number of high-income individuals remained remarkably constant, a factor that demonstrates the relative continuity of social inequalities.¹⁸ Hungary's transformation from a state socialist to a democratic system had a strong impact on the income conditions of families.¹⁹ While it comes as no surprise that introducing a new economic system raised financial difficulties, it must not be forgotten that this process was preceded by the fact that real wages had existed in a period of stagnation since the early 1980s, which was then followed by a slight decline. The dynamic of this change is amply illustrated by the data: between 1990 and 1992 real wages fell by 12 percent, a decline that returned the nation to the same level it had exhibited in the 1970/1971 year. The situation was made even more severe by the fact that child benefits and average pensions lost one-fifth of their real value during the same time period. This situation would only change in the latter part of the 1990s, when policies effectuated in 1995 for the purpose of stabilizing the economy began to make their influence felt. Once this occurred, real wages increased by an annual average of four to five percent.

Wages, prices, inequalities

When World War II broke out, Hungary experienced an emerging trend of economic growth which stabilized incomes. In the late 1930s a number of social policies were introduced that also influenced the conditions surrounding income. To mention a few of these policies, the lowest working wage was established, paid leave was introduced together with the eight-hour workday, workers raising children were granted child benefits amounting to five pengős per child, and social security was extended to agricultural workers.²⁰ Those whose age precluded them from fulfilling the requirements for social security were uniformly issued an annuity of sixty pengős. In its initial years, wartime expansion led to improved conditions for employees: real wages rose, consumption grew, and unemployment virtually disappeared. The mayor of the Budapest district of Pesterzsébet

¹⁸ For a comparative analysis of the social inequalities found in various systems of state socialism, see Mérove Gijssberts, "The Legitimation of Income Inequality in State-Socialist and Market Societies," *Acta Sociologica* 45, no. 4 (2002): 269–85.

¹⁹ For further details, see Mihály Zafir, ed., *Életszínvonal 1988–1997* (Budapest: KSH, 1998).

²⁰ In 1938, 1 USD was equal to 5.4 pengős.

emphasized the favorable social effect of the developing economic upswing that came with the war:

Significant political action was not taken. There were no strikes. I noticed nothing that would seem disquieting from a national or social policy standpoint. The large-scale decrease of unemployment had a calming effect on the city's working-class population. With the exception of professions that were more of "peacetime" activities (carpentry, masonry, house painting, cabinetry), unemployment completely disappeared in other branches of industry. The Manfréd Weiss Factory in Csepel and the Arms and Machine Factory [Fegyver és Gépgyár] in Budapest completely absorbed the city's unemployed workers and provided them with a living. Operating at full capacity, military manufactories have provided constant and profitable earnings for the inhabitants of Pesterzsébet who have been working there during the past quarter of a year. As a result, a certain degree of economic prosperity has occurred in my district: the consumption of meat and wine has increased and the resultant tax revenues have led to a significant surplus of revenue.²¹

The district mayor's summary provides an ample illustration of the peculiar duality that typified this period: even though war had been declared, everyday life and society was characterized by a relative state of composure and stability that bore a closer resemblance to times of peace.

In the autumn of 1939, worktime restrictions were suspended due to the war.²² Following the war's outbreak, working wages were frozen; minimum wages were also determined in the autumn of 1939, resulting in a 10 percent increase on average. From this point on wages were adjusted every six months to total seven to eight percent (later followed by fifteen percent) of basic earnings. Yet another wage increase took place in July 1943 due to the establishment of a cost-of-living allowance. Rising wartime prices, however, still exceeded this raise in wages as the cost of foodstuffs in particular soared. The situation was further exacerbated by the maximizing of prices, meaning that procuring even the most basic foodstuffs presented a growing concern for those living from month to month. Beginning in early

²¹ "Pesterzsébet polgármesterének jelentése," Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Pest Megyei Levéltára (National Archives of Hungary Pest County Archives, hereafter MNL PML), IV.408.u., November 1940.

²² János Honvári, ed., *Magyarország gazdaságtörténete a honfoglalástól a 20. század közepéig* (Budapest: Aula Kiadó, 1996).

1940, the loss of income caused by constant military conscriptions affected Hungary's peasantry most adversely, dealing a particularly heavy blow to agricultural laborers, smallholder farmers, and the numerous tenant farmers. The financial subsidies that were issued to the families of conscripted troops only supplemented a small proportion of this income loss. As a county administrator reported:

In the communities located in my district, the general conditions for the period of September 15, 1940, to October 15, 1940, can overall be deemed adequate. As a result of military demobilization, heads of households and their family members could return to work and therefore earn more, a situation which has led to a certain degree of improvement compared to the difficult conditions experienced by those forced to depend on the negligible amount issued for the family subsidy. A sense of anxiety, however, exists to a certain extent, particularly as a consequence of the soaring prices for foodstuffs and basic necessities.²³

Table 2. Average monthly earnings for factory employees between 1938 and 1942 (pengős)

Year	Factory Managers	Factory Clerks	Foremen	Workers, day-laborers, apprentices	Servants, drivers, watchmen
1938	639	285	301	96	117
1939	638	298	315	100	121
1940	743	314	337	113	133
1941	810	406	382	132	139
1942	870	415	464	165	145

Source: *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága: Múlt és jelen.* (Budapest: KSH, 1996), 194.

In 1942, Hungary's wartime economic upswing stalled and a state of economic decline was observable beginning in mid-1943. Wartime efforts and burdens began to impact a progressively wider number of social groups: other than the working class and the peasantry, members of the middle class also faced a state of general material decline.

²³ "Alispáni évnegyedes jelentések: Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun vármegye központi járás főszolgabírójának jelentése," MNL PML, IV.408.u., October 21, 1940.

Living conditions grew far more difficult throughout the country. The circumstances and provisions for the workers in military or munitions factories deteriorated significantly during the final years of the war. It must be mentioned that after World War II was declared, munitions workers were placed under the central supply system, meaning that these factories were ensured a separate supply of foodstuffs and those working there were provided an above-average livelihood due to the military supply system. Other than basic foodstuffs, munitions workers were able to get boots, boot soles, and various kinds of textiles twice a year at official prices. Larger firms, such as the Rimamurány-Salgótarjáni Vasmű Rt. (RIMA, the Rimamurány and Salgótarján Ironworks Corporation) maintained their own provision system and frequently kept a private store of foodstuffs or other basic goods purchased directly from farmers and manufactories, a solution that allowed these companies to ensure a more stable level of provision which also functioned as a form of supplementary income for their employees.

From 1943 to 1944, the economic, financial, and social situation of Hungary's peasantry deteriorated dramatically. For the most part, the burden placed on families whose relatives were fighting on the front (mainly agricultural laborers and members of the lowest level of peasant society) became much heavier as it became impossible to produce sufficient grain for their yearly bread supply. Hardship and privation grew as wartime restrictions afflicted all of Hungary's peasant society.

For agricultural workers, the exceedingly low maximized wages that were set for day labor further exacerbated their situation. The two to three pengő that an adult day laborer could earn in one day was just enough for bare survival and fell far from guaranteeing a stable livelihood. In 1943, wages were regulated once again; the lowest level was set at a level comparable to the lowest limit for wages that had been valid in 1941. Since subsequent price increases made it impossible to support a family at these rates, workers were unwilling to perform labor, thereby forcing farmers to pay sums far above the officially determined rate for day labor if they wanted to have their fields worked.

Beyond the economic and social worries, they were already suffering from as the nation experienced severe bombing, Hungary's population faced further obstacles when the burdens that were brought about by the war's immediate military effects began to impact every social layer, even if to differing degrees. Once Germany occupied Hungary in 1944, the 1939 law determining the obligation to work for the

aim of national defense was broadly expanded. On April 12, 1944, a resolution was passed decreeing the introduction of an auxiliary labor service, followed by a second resolution issued on April 24 proclaiming mandatory labor for the purpose of national defense for women aged 18 to 30. According to this directive, primarily “uneducated female laborers” were to be utilized. By May 23, national defense labor cards were already being distributed, thereby ordering women who had not been employed until then to report for labor at munitions factories. For all intents and purposes, these women worked for no pay since the wages they earned were essentially worthless in the aftermath of the wartime destruction that occurred between 1944 and 1945, followed by the economic crisis that consequently resulted.

Table 3. Changes in gross average monthly earnings, consumer price index, and real wages between 1955 and 2009

Year	Gross monthly average wage per earner, or average earnings (forints)	Consumer price index (1950=100)	Real wages per earner (1950=100)
1955	1,080	159	105
1960	1,575	161	154
1965	1,766	165	168
1970	2,222	173	199
1975	3,018	199	234
1980	4,098	270	243
1985	5,961	374	233
1990	13,446	749	219
1995	38,900	2,322	182
2000	87,645	-	-
2009	199,775	-	-

Source: *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága, 195; Magyarország 1989–2009* (Budapest: KSH, 2010).

The trend of inflation that first emerged during the war evolved into a state of hyperinflation in 1944/1945 as a result of the nation’s economic collapse and war losses.²⁴ In circumstances such as these,

²⁴ To offer one example, in August 1945, one kilogram of bread cost six pengős; by the beginning of May 1946, the same item was worth eight million pengős. By the end of June 1946, customers were forced to pay 5.85 billion pengős for one kilogram of bread.

discussing any real value for income or wages was utterly pointless and it took well over a year-and-a-half to bring this state to a halt. After Hungary's financial situation was stabilized in 1946, the differences in salary and wages that existed among various groups of professions decreased; once the Communist Party rose to power, this relative equalization of wages lasted for decades. In 1949, the gross monthly average wage for blue- and white-collar workers was 606 forints. While this sum rose to 893 forints by the end of 1952, real wages in fact decreased by 17.7 percent during the same period. The situation was similar in the case of real income which totaled only 83.4 percent of the 1949 value for real incomes per earner in 1952.²⁵ Thanks to measures taken by Imre Nagy's government, change finally occurred in 1953: by the end of 1954 the real value of working wages equaled the level for 1949.

Based on this data it is also clear that the real value for both job income and working wages either dropped or stagnated in the first half of the 1950s while prices climbed at a dynamic rate. This situation improved in the latter half of the decade, mostly due to the wage increases that were issued after the 1956 Revolution; later, the rate of growth for wages once again decelerated due to the collectivization of Hungary's agricultural system and the enforced shift to industrialization. During the second half of the twentieth century, increases in average and real wages exhibited the swiftest growth between 1965 and 1975. In fact, 1975 represented a turning point as wage growth first slowed, then stagnated at the end of the 1970s. In the 1980s, a quickening pace of inflation was accompanied by a severe drop in real wages which continued until the late 1990s. Beginning in 1997, the real income (per inhabitant) climbed steadily throughout a ten-year period; during the three-year period spanning 2007 to 2009, however, real income once again dropped. While the level for real income was 20 percent higher in 2006 compared to that in 1989, this rate fell again to nine to ten percent in 2008.

During the first half of the 1960s, the average earnings for full-time workers and employees showed an annual increase of 2.4 percent. This rose to 5.2 percent in the latter half of the decade. In the 1970s, this indicator climbed 6 percent on average every year before first stagnating, then falling, and later climbing at the start of the new

²⁵ See *Adatok és adalékok a népgazdaság fejlődésének a tanulmányozásához 1949–1955* (Budapest: KSH, 1957), 341–43.

millennium before declining again. During the state socialist era the ratio between wages and earnings was characterized by a type of compulsory leveling off that was in accordance with the political and ideological aims of the time. Furthermore, workers employed in mining and heavy industry were placed in a privileged position while white-collar, intellectual positions (for example in education or the medical field) were kept at an artificially low level. The average earnings for those employed in trade, the service industry, or agriculture totaled only one-tenth of the average for earnings in industry.

Table 4. Changes in earnings and real income between 1990 and 2007 (1990=100 percent)

Year	Net nominal average earnings (per earner) in percent	Real earnings (per earner) in percent	Real income (per capita) in percent
1990	100.0	100.0	100.0
1991	125.5	93.0	98.3
1992	152.2	91.7	94.9
1993	179.2	88.1	90.3
1994	228.1	94.5	92.7
1995	256.8	82.9	87.7
1996	301.5	78.8	87.1
1997	374.2	82.7	87.8
1998	443.0	85.6	91.0
1999	499.3	87.7	91.7
2000	556.2	89.0	95.7
2001	646.3	94.7	100.2
2002	773.0	107.6	106.8
2003	883.6	117.4	112.4
2004	933.0	116.3	116.1
2005	1027.3	123.5	120.4
2006	1105.3	127.9	122.3
2007	1138.5	122.0	-

Source: KSH "Reáljövedelem – reálbérléssel," https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/gdp_hu/gdp0035.html, accessed on August 10, 2021

This situation changed only after the economic reforms that were introduced in 1968, at which time the practice of material motivation was brought forth, thereby engendering the restructuring of wage ratios and quickening the process of differentiation. Various forms of fringe benefits (premiums, profit-sharing) additionally played an increased role. Similarly, the practice of earning multiple forms of income became more widespread as the number of those who took on second or even third jobs while simultaneously performing a full-time job steadily climbed. It is no exaggeration to say that seeking income from multiple sources became a natural mode of survival in Hungarian society. The late 1960s also marked the period when the difference in the average wages earned by those with a degree in higher education compared to those with only secondary education also grew slightly. Among industrial workers, greater value was placed on skilled workers during the 1970s: in 1975, the average wages for skilled workers were 56 percent higher than those earned by unskilled laborers. During this same period, an average difference of twenty to thirty percent (varying according to industrial branch) grew between the wages earned by semi-skilled and unskilled laborers.

Table 5. Changes in average wages by economic sector from 1960 to 1979 (in forints)

Year Sector	1960	1965	1970	1975	1979
Industry	1,617	1,767	2,271	2,117	3,984
Construction	1,636	1,839	2,536	3,398	4,283
Agriculture	1,381	1,536	2,306	2,907	3,708
Trade	1,418	1,572	2,158	2,773	3,503
Service	1,491	1,695	2,243	3,024	4,049

Source: *Életszírvonal 1960–1980* (Budapest: KSH, 1981).

For those employed in agriculture, marked differences emerged among those working for state farms (*állami gazdaság*), members of collective farms (*termelői szövetkezet*, often referred to as *téesz* in everyday conversation), and private farmers (*egyéni gazdálkodó*) during the period that spanned the latter half of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1960s. Despite drastic increases in taxation and income reductions, private farmers occupied the best position among all those employed within the agricultural sector. Generally speaking, working wages in agriculture were ordinarily lower compared to what was earned

by industrial workers or various types of personnel staff. Between 1948 and 1956 the government tried to place private farmers into a financially impossible situation (an aim that met with some success) by demanding inordinate increases in taxes and the fixed quotas for produce that farmers were compelled to hand over to the state. Private farm owners received a two-year "grace period" after the 1956 Revolution. In 1957 the average yearly income for a privately farming peasant family amounted to 33,000 forints, nearly four-fifths of which originated from agricultural activities (agricultural production and the sales of crops) while one-fifth came from other sources of income, such as day-labor or shipping deliveries. Among farmers the amount of land that was owned, the size of the farm, and the composition of their stock displayed a significant degree of variation. The per capita monthly gross income for those farming on 0.6 to 1.7 hectares was 631 forints, while those who farmed on 4.6 to 5.8 hectares earned 729 forints. The category that farmed on 8.7 to 14.5 hectares could expect 925 forints.²⁶ The yearly tax requirement for the first, smallest category of landowner averaged 1,127 forints compared to the 8,239 that farms in the biggest category were compelled to pay in 1957.

In 1958, the KSH made a survey of the income conditions of private farmers.²⁷ According to this data, the lowest level of annual per capita net income was 4,000 forints, while the highest was over 14,000 forints. In practical terms, this meant that the yearly net income for the most impoverished peasant families (containing five members) did not reach 20,000 forints while those in the highest income bracket did not earn less than 70,000. Three-fourths to four-fifths of this income originated from agriculture-related activities; one-fourth to one-fifth stemmed from non-agricultural activities. The largest proportion of agricultural incomes was earned via the sale of agricultural products; a smaller proportion (that also decreased at a slower rate) was income that originated from the barter of primarily their own crops or produce. A larger proportion of the crops produced by low-income peasant families went toward maintaining the family's own needs instead of being sold at market; the exact opposite was true in the case of wealthier families.

²⁶ *Munkás-, alkalmazotti és parasztcsaládok jövedelme és fogyasztása 1957-ben: 4000 család háztartási feljegyzései alapján*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 22 (Budapest: KSH, 1959), 45.

²⁷ For a contemporary analysis of this data, see Dénes Kovács, "A parasztság élelmiszerfogyasztása és jövedelme," *Közgazdasági Szemle*, no. 12 (1961): 1462–77.

Once collectivization ended in the early 1960s, it took roughly five to seven years for incomes dependent on agricultural production to stabilize, and then display an upward trend of growth. Other than the important role played by household gardens and smallholder farm production in enabling farming families to supplement their incomes, an additional factor in ameliorating the somewhat disastrous economic effects of collectivization was the decision made in the second half of the 1960s to issue regular monetary payments and disband the work unit system.²⁸ These steps also aided the consolidation of the collective farm system.

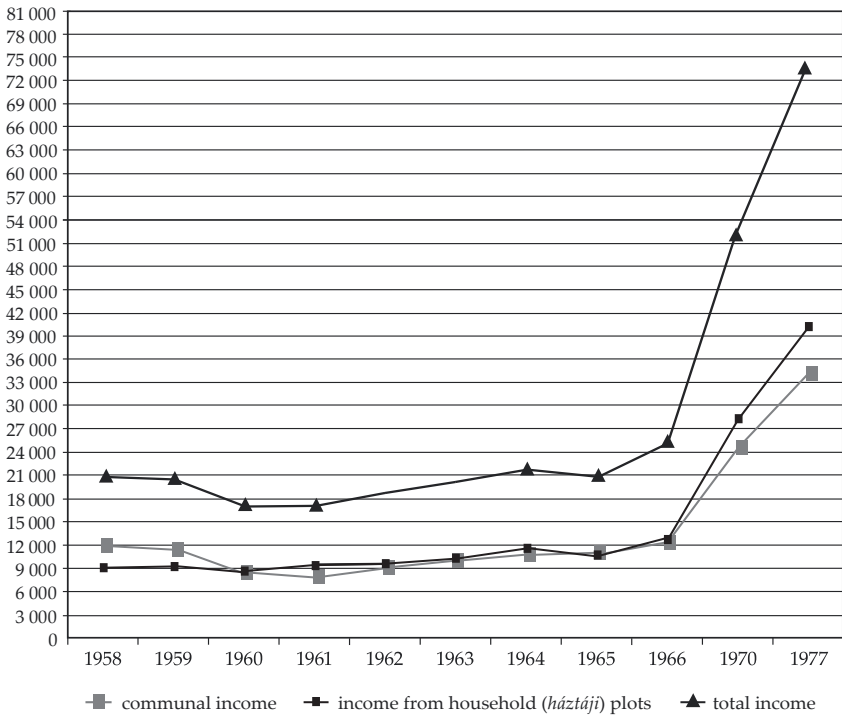


Figure 3. Yearly income of collective farm members from 1958 to 1977, in forints (based on data from household and income statistics published in KSH yearbooks between 1958 and 1977)

²⁸ In collective farms that were established by means of a forceful process of collectivization, members received payment once a year at the closing general assembly, in accordance with the Soviet model. As a result of this, in the first half of the 1960s members were not paid monthly for their work; instead, the value of their work was recorded in “work units” that were then transferred into money at the year-end

It was not until the mid-seventies that the average earnings for the employees of agricultural collectives equaled 90 percent of the average earnings paid to industrial workers. In relation to the social average, the existence of household plots or smallholder agricultural production had a definitive role in easing the income losses experienced by those who lived in villages or — to put it more precisely — earned their livelihoods in agriculture.

The era's characteristic attempts to equalize property and income conditions proved to be only temporarily successful. Based on official income statistics, in 1957 the difference in income between the lowest and highest income brackets was already 5.2 times greater, meaning that families with the lowest income averaged a per capita gross income of 342 forints while this same indicator was 1,788 forints in the case of families in the highest income category. The monthly gross income for an average-sized, four-member family from the first category was 1,368 forints opposed to the 7,152 that were available to the same type of family in the latter category.²⁹ Income conditions were naturally impacted by the size of the family since the larger the family was, the more their income conditions worsened, a fact that was also determined by the low level of earnings. According to data found in official statistics, more than two-thirds of the families existing in the lowest income bracket had three or more children. When comparing the situation of those in the highest income category (appointed to a leadership position) as opposed to that of individuals in the lowest income category (living below subsistence level), even official statistics record the fact that a difference of five to seven times greater could be registered in the case of per capita net income in the mid-sixties.³⁰ Fifteen years later this level had already climbed to

general assembly. If the collective farm had suffered losses, then the losses were divided among the members based on the registered work units; the same occurred in the case of profits. Since this system did not motivate members to perform regular labor, beginning in the mid-sixties collective farms adopted the system of issuing regular monthly salaries in the form of money.

²⁹ *Munkás-, alkalmazotti és parasztcsaládok*, 34–35. On the issue of inequalities, see Zsuzsa Ferge, "Social Structure and Inequalities in Old Socialism and New Capitalism in Hungary," *Review of Sociology* 8, no. 2 (2002): 9–33.

³⁰ "In 1967, for the 500,000 people living in the most favorable circumstances, the per capita income was seven times higher than the income earned by the 500,000 people living in the worst circumstances. In 1962, it was eight times higher." See *Jövedelmi különbségek 1967-ben* (Budapest: KSH, 1969), 12. Based on data collected in relation to income, in 1972 the situation was essentially unchanged. See *Jövedelmi viszonyok: 1972* (Budapest: KSH, 1974).

being nine to ten times greater in magnitude. Based on an analysis prepared in the 1980s, it must not be forgotten that the collection of statistical data in Hungary was incapable of recording 40 percent of the income earned in one year, a circumstance which obviously (or possibly) altered society's actual status as regarded income.³¹ Parallel to the continued presence of social traditions and customs, the spread of money-saving techniques also aided society's increasingly general reliance on the institution of the *kaláka*, a custom in which relatives and friends traded work in order to avoid the need to hire labor. This system of labor exchange acted as an important means for producing sufficient income that could then be put toward increased consumption.

The dynamic way in which the income gap grew is best illustrated by the fact that only 2.5 percent of the population occupied the two highest income brackets in 1962. This number was 4.9 percent in 1967, 3.9 percent in 1972, and 5.1 percent in 1977. Throughout the fifteen years spanning 1962 to 1977 the highest income category consisted of an average of 350,000 to 400,000 individuals. The proportion of those living in the lowest income bracket between 1962 and 1977 remained relatively stable: on average nine to ten percent of the population (totaling 800,000 to 900,000 people) belonged to this group.³² It is also worthwhile to note that the group possessing the largest income in both 1962 and 1977 held one-tenth of total income while those in the lowest level had one-twentieth. In other words, among the various groups belonging to the middle classes, inequalities in income distribution lessened as the number and proportion of those in the highest income bracket increased during the changed circumstances that determined the nation's economy.

Income ratios were distorted by the fact that a wide range of benefits and allowances could be accessed irrespective of output, meaning that anyone employed by the state could or did receive extra forms of income other than their wages. Income conditions during this period were further influenced by the system used to determine prices; the asking price for products and services sometimes significantly deviated from their actual value and cost, thereby placing low-income customers in a more favorable position. From the 1960s to the latter half of the 1970s, prices rose at a rate that was essentially negligible,

³¹ Júlia Szalai, *Uraim, a jogaimért jöttem!* (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 1998), 43.

³² Rudolf Andorka, Tamás Kolosi, and György Vukovich, eds., *Társadalmi Riport, 1990* (Budapest: TÁRKI, 1990), 97–117.

a state which admittedly contributed to the general improvement of society's financial status. At the same time, the artificial regulation of prices and services also deepened the economic strain beginning in the late 1970s. The peculiarities of Hungary's price policies are best illustrated by the fact that prices rose only slightly at the average rate of 2.8 percent between 1970 and 1975, yet by the end of the decade this rate doubled until it reached the annual average of 6.3 percent.

By the early 1960s, the process of stripping citizens of their private property had essentially come to a close; Hungarians were able to begin the process of "recouping" their losses in the late 1960s. Among other indicators, the evidence pointing to this trend can be found in the extent of savings deposits held by the population and the data regarding the supply of durable consumer goods. The number of families who could lay claim to considerable property (or what counted for wealth based on local standards) grew during the 1970s, a trend that proved long-lasting even as income conditions fluctuated. Various factors underlay this phenomenon: relatively speaking, the dynamic growth of real income throughout the 1960s and 1970s established a basis for secure livelihoods. Similarly, this growth owed quite a lot to the role played by unregistered economic activities and the extra sources of income that could be illegally attained via the opportunities presented by Hungary's shadow economy. Due to political and economic constraints, home construction became a mass means of acquiring property during this period. It is also quite obvious that this type of material gain occurred irrespective of social status, with the exception of Hungary's most impoverished social groups. In other words, each social group contained families who were able to save money and attain wealth as well as those who could not. Opportunities for accumulating wealth were naturally determined by the ability to acquire income, employment conditions, and the family's inherited material background. Families that consisted of one wage earner and four dependents all living in a rented home obviously had far fewer opportunities to acquire wealth compared to those who consisted of two wage-earners, two dependents, owned their own home, and were able to supplement their incomes in Hungary's shadow economy.

It must be emphasized that accumulating material wealth during the state socialist era demanded enormous effort on the part of the population. Although the working hours for both men and women

were reduced during the 1960s and the 1970s, the amount of time spent on small-scale agricultural production or the shadow economy in general grew in parallel, and at a rate that was particularly dramatic in the case of men. The high proportion of time devoted to income procurement distinctly indicated a strategic shift on the part of families, namely that (starting in the early 1960s) a majority of families took advantage of an ever-broadening array of opportunities to attain some form of side income. An additional factor that contributed to the emergence and maintenance of household and supplementary farming was that of shortages; until the late 1970s, the nation's relatively disorganized trade network coupled with the poor quality of supply provided a strong argument for producing foodstuffs in kitchen gardens or small plots near the home. Selling a limited amount of whatever surplus foodstuffs arose during the process proved to be an important source of extra income that, in turn, increased a family's financial security and increased their ability to acquire further wealth. Profits originating from household farming or other forms of supplementary economic activities could generally be traced through increases in consumer consumption.

Income conditions and the process of differentiation were naturally influenced by the period's changing policies regarding taxation. Regulating the income(s) earned by those who were not dependent on wages became an aim that was emphasized in the interest of controlling "unjustified" income differences and hindering the emergence of "incomes that did not match the amount of work," or at the very least in an attempt to curtail these phenomena by levying progressive taxes. In the mid-sixties, together with those working in the private sector, home and automobile owners figured among taxpayers, a group that totaled two-and-half million people. During this period, the public tax system consisted of twelve forms of taxation or charges and fees that operated as a form of tax. The income tax levied for agricultural production affected 1.34 million citizens and was set based on the presumed average returns a farmer's land was evaluated as being capable of producing. In 1967 seventy-one thousand tradesmen, ten thousand private retailers, and ninety-four thousand individuals who were otherwise employed were registered as being obliged to pay general income tax.³³

³³ "Jelentés a lakosság adóztatásának helyzetéről," Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (National Archives of Hungary, hereafter MNL OL), XXVI-D-1-c.7.d., Budapest, October 6, 1967.

At the time, public opinion placed tradesmen and small-scale retailers in the category of those possessing above-average income, a generalization that was not true in this exact form. Based on documents, 51 percent of tradesmen who genuinely paid taxes did not earn significantly more compared to those who were employed in the same profession. "It is, however, a fact that a limited number of tradesmen and private retailers (particularly the producers of goods, and especially among those producers who have employees) earn higher incomes than the social average, upon which taxation's role in regulating income does not have enough of an effect."³⁴ The fact that the tax returns for independent actors in the private sector were generally revised based on estimations proved to be a constant source of conflict since this practice often led to tax hikes that could total fifty percent. In some cases, however, it was nearly impossible to levy taxes on other forms of employment (such as an innkeeper who rented his or her premises from the state and worked in the free till system) due to the tax code's peculiar nature.³⁵

Based on a representative survey conducted in 1980, only 2.6 percent of tradesmen had either reached their level of declared income or surpassed the amount of 9,000 forints a month, a sum that was two-and-a-half or three times greater than the average monthly income earned at the time. The monthly income earned by the majority (68.9 percent), however, barely equaled one-third of this sum, i.e., 3,000 forints a month. The income for the remaining 30 percent was scattered between 3,000 and 9000 forints.³⁶ Due to the rise in privately-funded home construction that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, the average income for tradesmen employed in the construction sector amounted to nearly 10,000 forints in 1983, a sum that was two-and-a-half times greater than the average income. Based on tax returns from the previous year, 58.7 percent of the income earned by 123,658 active tradesmen did not exceed the sum of 5,000 forints a month while the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The *gebines* (private leaseholders) held private leases for stores, pubs, or cafes that were either state or collective property. In return for regularly paying the lease, these "owners" could freely run their premises. This also meant that the actual property owner did not inspect the till, a circumstance that came to be known as the free till system. Due to peculiarities such as these in state regulations, some forms of employment (such as this type of private leaseholder) could essentially not be taxed.

³⁶ Béla Gervai, "A magánkisipar fejlődése, helyzete és szerepe Magyarországon," *Közgazdasági Szemle*, no. 3 (1983): 300–308.

income for 25.1 percent fluctuated between 5,000 and 8,000 forints and 10 percent earned between 8,600 and 12,500 forints a month in 1984.³⁷ The rate of income growth that took place in the first half of the 1980s can still be considered noteworthy even in light of the fact that income tax returns obviously did not reflect the actual distribution of income since a high proportion of the population concealed income due to the system's harsh level of taxation. In the early 1980s one-fifth of tradesmen supplemented the income they earned at their full-time job by regularly performing other types of work while two-thirds participated in agricultural production performed on small garden plots in yet another example of the survival strategy known as "standing on more than one foot" in Hungarian society.

The process of stripping private citizens of their property which took place from the end of the 1940s to the early 1960s led to Hungarian society's general impoverishment, even if exceptions obviously occurred during this period as well. Numerous individuals, for example, succeeded in preserving their homes from nationalization; in spite of the difficulties that this involved, there were certainly others who also managed to save some or at least a portion of their previous property as a means of "keeping afloat" during the hard times that followed.

The growing gap between society's lower and upper ten percent continued to expand after state socialism came to an end.³⁸ In 1988 Hungary's upper ten percent earned 5.8 times more compared to the lower ten percent; in 1995 the average per capita income earned each month by high-income individuals was 7.5 times higher.³⁹ Public opinion, however, felt that the income gap was actually much higher than this. Due to the habit of concealing income, the actual situation is just as impossible to reconstruct based on tax returns as it is from surveys, and economic indicators only partially reflect the difference in income. The process of economic differentiation that occurred at this time is perhaps better illustrated by the fact that the total income earned by families in the lowest income bracket was equal to the per capita income available to families in the highest income category. To approach the issue from another standpoint: while the per capita

³⁷ See Katalin Falusné Szikra, *A kistulajdon helyzete és jövője* (Budapest: KJK, 1985).

³⁸ David Lane, *The Capitalist Transformation of State Socialism: The Making and Breaking of State Socialist Society and What Followed* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

³⁹ Ferge, "Social Structure and Inequalities," 9–33.

income earned by those in the lowest income bracket was not even equal to half of what was considered to be the subsistence wage at the time, the per capita income for those in the highest income category was two to three times higher than the subsistence wage. Naturally, if we were to compare the top ten percent's average income to that earned by the lower ten percent, the difference would obviously be even greater. Indirectly, the increase in income inequality and the emergence and strengthening of the financially wealthier class is also shown by the fact that between 1990 and 1996, 53 percent of the homes built in Budapest, 44 percent in rural towns, and 48 percent in villages had a floor area of more than 100 square meters. In the 1970s and 1980s, the number of large size homes was much lower in absolute terms as well.

Unchanging and changing forms of poverty

Even though it remains customary to refer to the Hungary of the 1930s as "the nation of three million beggars," recent historical research provides a more differentiated interpretation regarding this era's social stratification as well as the issue of poverty. During the pre-war years, a radical level of income inequality undoubtedly defined Hungarian society; it must be mentioned, however, that an emerging social welfare system was simultaneously proving capable of operating in the interest of alleviating the direst living conditions for the needy. Nor should it be forgotten that Hungarian society at the time contained both a rural and an urban lower class that was not only large, but also displayed significant differences within a spectrum that extended from respectable poverty to groups who were struggling to remain alive on the fringes of society, in the midst of hopelessly deep impoverishment and misery. Unemployment, poverty, and homelessness were inevitable specters of everyday life during this period.

According to the government decree 4780/1932, an individual qualified as being homeless when "due to his circumstances, he is unable to provide a home for himself or his family," or is single, yet cannot afford to rent a room in a workers' dormitory, sublet an apartment, or rent a bed for the night. Although temporary lodgings for the homeless were set up either by the state, the county administrations, or the local governments, these could only house a small portion of the homeless families. The majority of these families were therefore forced to live in makeshift shanties located in slums that

became known as shantytowns. In Budapest in 1931, 8,648 people (2,148 families) lived in shanties or huts. Since anyone who was single and homeless was not entitled to receive temporary lodgings, these individuals were placed in various nighttime shelters or homeless shelters. In 1930, Budapest's four homeless shelters contained a total of 773 beds. In 1939, this number rose to 2,847, while 2,207 beds were available to the homeless in 1940. As of December 24, 1932, all beds in homeless shelters were free; before this time, a bed could be used for a symbolic fee. Being referred to one of Budapest's homeless shelters was a process that began at a central office found in the thirteenth district, at 2 Angyalföldi Street. In return for one month of room and board, homeless people who were able to work had to perform light labor for six hours a day over a period of ten days at locations determined by the district authorities or the capital city's parks and maintenance office. Nighttime shelters provided every resident with a separate bed, breakfast, lunch, and dinner; these shelters could generally be used from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. the next morning. Other than shelters, the city also established daytime places throughout Buda-



Figure 4. Charity action: queuing for lunch outside a charity kitchen in the 1930s (photo by Magyar Filmintézet, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Történeti Fényképtára [Historical Photo Department of the Hungarian National Museum, MNM TF], 679.1962fk)

pest where the homeless could get warm and partake of a modest meal. The Railway Station Mission operated at all of Budapest's four railway stations and fourteen rural depots. During the 1930s, roughly two hundred charitable welfare associations operated in Budapest; these organizations maintained various shelters and daytime locations that provided heat and inexpensive apartments.

In the city of Budafok social issues were handled according to the usual methods. According to a report made by the mayor in September 1940,

caring for the population's elderly and incapacitated members is partially solved by the city's poorhouse while the rest falls to the Magyar Norma Institute. The poorhouse contained twenty-nine residents whose costs are covered by the 7,800-pengő credit line allotted in the household budget. During the past month, the Magyar Norma cared for eighty individuals, for whom aid is determined based on individual need. This aid takes the form of food, rent, a weekly allowance, clothing, and general physical and spiritual care for the needy. The costs are covered by Magyar Norma funds: in the past month the value for the aid that was given totaled 862.83 pengős. The institute is led—to the satisfaction of all—by the Franciscan Maria Sisters for the Poor [Ferences Mária Szegénygondozó Nővérek].⁴⁰

Managing poverty-related issues posed an enormous challenge and demanded great effort even during World War II, as is clear from a report to the head of a county administration:

16,000 people have not been provided for in my district. For the purpose of easing the level of poverty, Your Honor has issued 72,000 pengős as well as 87,000 pengős to cover the back earnings for soldiers who were called up for emergency arms training. I have divided this evenly among the communities. Since I only received these sums after Christmas, I authorized communities to begin addressing the situation before Christmas, which means that each impoverished family received a few pengős for the holidays. I am aware that these sums must last until spring. I feel it my responsibility to state that—due to severe weather conditions—these amounts will be far from adequate in easing the level of unemployment that will most likely occur in spring. Let us please not forget the fact that my district is the poorest in the county. At the moment daily wages average 2 pengő, 30 fillér, and this is without food.⁴¹

⁴⁰ "Alispáni negyedéves jelentések, Budafok polgármesterének jelentése," MNL PML, IV.408.u., September 17, 1940.

⁴¹ "Alispáni évnegyedes jelentések: A kiskőrösi járás főszolgabírójának jelentése," MNL PML, IV.408.u., January 15, 1941.

The sheer mass of pleas that were sent to the Lord Lieutenant's office in request of aid presents a shocking image of the circumstances and vulnerability experienced by the lower classes, including the family members of soldiers who were fighting on the front, pensioners, and the incapacitated. Wartime Hungary was home to thousands of starving adults and children whose slight income made it impossible for them to gain regular access to food, firewood, and clothing. Mainly families with many children were living in a state of starvation. In early 1940, the town of Pesterzsébet tried to help the impoverished by providing relief work, free lunches, and aid in the form of clothing, food, or money. Between one-hundred fifty and two hundred families received community meals on a daily basis; on average between two hundred and three hundred people required aid. The value of the food parcels that were distributed totaled 6.63 pengő's and contained 10 kilograms of potatoes, 5 kilograms of flour, 1/2 kilogram of salt, 1 kilogram of rice, 1 kilogram of wheat meal, 3/4 kilogram of sugar, 1 kilogram of navy beans, and 1/4 kilogram of soap. Seven-hundred twenty pairs of shoes were given to impoverished school children.⁴² All of these measures were only enough to subdue the greatest tensions and address the most pressing questions: actually, solving the situation was impossible. As can be expected, wartime destruction only caused the nation to sink into poverty at a faster rate.

How the issue of poverty was addressed changed in the decades following 1945. During the 1949/50 year the system of institutions that had overseen care for the impoverished was able to operate and function, albeit to varying degrees of effectiveness. After 1950, poverty was eradicated as far as political statements were concerned as the basic ideological premise underlying socialism stated that all individuals received equal access to the goods that had been produced. In truth, the entire country was once again descending into poverty, a fact that was particularly obvious during the early 1950s, a time when previously accumulated or recently acquired political, cultural, social, and economic capital was already enacting a differentiating effect. Between 1949 and 1956, the system attempted to solve the problem of poverty by equalizing income so that the entire population would earn the same low amount.

⁴² "Alispáni évnegyedes jelentések: Pesterzsébet polgármesterének jelentése," MNL PML, IV.408.u., April 19, 1940.

The state socialist system only took the side of equality on the level of watchwords and rhetoric: daily practice was entirely different. Within “the society of equals” the presence of “some who are more equal than others” was already apparent in the early years of the communist takeover as communist party leaders separated themselves from the masses, enjoyed the privilege of a different trade network that was maintained just for them (until 1956), and received a variety of free benefits. It goes without saying that these advantages garnered widespread condemnation among Hungarians, who were meanwhile slipping ever deeper into poverty. After 1956, during the Kádár era, poverty continued to be ignored as far as policy and propaganda were concerned; the government’s somewhat more active approach to social policy attempted to conceal the phenomenon of poverty by raising the standard of living. Within the reality of daily life, however, it was quite obvious that some people and social groups were “living on air” within abnormal housing conditions and engaged in a daily struggle to remain alive. In other words, they were poor. The partial absence of certain conditions that are vital to survival did, at the same time, ease during these decades. Due to social movements that occurred in the 1960s, a significant number of families who had lived in poverty were able to climb out of their previous situation. While some level of social advancement undeniably occurred, it must also be observed that a large proportion of those enduring a continuous state of impoverishment were unable to alter their circumstances based on their own abilities; in this case, it can be stated that one layer of society that had “inherited” its state of poverty continued to exist.

Establishing exact figures regarding the number and proportion of those living in poverty is not a simple matter. Between 1945 and 1949, 55 percent to 60 percent of Hungary’s population was living below subsistence level; from 1949 to 1956 this proportion oscillated between 65 percent and 75 percent. If we consider those living on two-thirds of the prevailing average income to be poor, then 26 percent of Hungarians qualified as impoverished in 1962. In 1972, 21 percent of Hungarians fell into this category while the same could be said of 16 percent of Hungarian society in 1982.⁴³ Poverty, of course, is not merely a matter of income, but also concerns a form of lifestyle. Based on analyses prepared by István Kemény in 1970 that, incidentally, led to widespread critical debate at the time, based on income,

⁴³ Zsuzsa Ferge, *Fejezetek a magyar szegénypolitika történetéből* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1986).

lifestyle, and living conditions working-class families with three or more children, single-parent families, and a large number of workers who had left behind peasant farming but were incapable of acclimating themselves to city life could be counted as impoverished during the late 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁴ Kemény's conclusion was at least partially confirmed by census data gathered a decade later in 1980. Based on this data, in 1980 eighteen percent of families raising three children and thirty percent of families rearing four or more children lived in a one-room apartment.

Although official and public calculations regarding those living at subsistence level did not exist during the Kádár era until the early 1980s, initiatives within the National Council of Trade Unions (Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa, SZOT) and KSH sometimes conducted this type of calculation. In 1970, the amount of income that represented the social minimum was viewed as "what by rational management and beyond the demands posed by physical survival guarantees a given level of economic, social, and cultural development that allows for a modest but socially acceptable level of consumption regarding goods and services that have come to form a social requirement."⁴⁵ Based on these calculations, in 1968 the average per capita sum that corresponded to scraping the poverty threshold was 660 forints, as opposed to the per capita social minimum that was set at 880 forints.

In 1972 one-tenth of Hungary's population was living at the lowest monthly income level of the time, 800 forints per person. "The average monthly income came to a total of 610 forints per person," a sum that was slightly less than the amount that had been set as representing the poverty threshold four years previously. These circumstances indicate that throughout the period of Kádár consolidation commonly referred to as "goulash communism," not only was it true that not everyone had the opportunity to accumulate wealth, but many also experienced great difficulty in fulfilling their basic everyday needs. Yet it is equally true that many who had never earned a regular income or qualified for national health insurance coverage suddenly gained access to regular financial benefits (such as pensions or allowances),

⁴⁴ István Kemény, "A szegénységről," in *Szociológiai írások* (Szeged: Replika Kör, 1992), 79–83.

⁴⁵ "A társadalmilag indokolt szükségletek minimuma: A KSH Közgazdasági Főosztály munkaanyaga," in *Emlékkötet: Szemelvények a magyar háztartás-statisztika történetéből* (Budapest: KSH, 2000), 191–221.

though these sums admittedly did not reach the poverty threshold. The recipients of “a guaranteed minimum livelihood” viewed this development as an unequivocal improvement. In spite of this, a level of poverty that consisted of a lack of basic living conditions did not disappear during the Kádár era, even if it is incontestable that the number of those living in severe poverty did decrease throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The conditions of poverty were described in a sociology published in the late 1960s in the following way:

Out of a class of twenty-four students, ten have never bathed in a bathtub while fourteen already have. . . . The majority live in a home with one room. Twenty-two live in a house with dirt floors; one student’s home is floored in mosaic tiles and one other student lives in a house with wood floors. Five sleep alone, fifteen sleep with one other person (sibling or parent) and three sleep with two other people. One sleeps in a bed with three others: one sibling beside the student, two at the foot of the bed. Out of twenty-four students, five do not own a winter coat, but not because they cannot afford one, it is only because they are never cold.... The population does not display even a basic degree of personal hygiene: bathing practically does not occur in the community. Only nine bathrooms exist among 2,554 residents, meaning that there is one bathroom per every three hundred residents. According to approximate numbers, an enclosed toilet stands beside ten percent of homes, while twenty-five percent have nothing. . . . Underwear is changed once a week at best, but many children and adults do not even have undergarments. Roughly half of the population does not possess adequate clothing. . . . Inside the house (in which every room has dirt floors) the doors and windows do not close properly. In the upper room, there are two beds next to one another, an empty wardrobe and straw on the bed—without ticking. There is nothing other than a shelf in the pantry. The room where the family lives is to the right of this: two beds, a wide couch-like bench, a cradle, a cooking range, a table, a set of shelves, and photos on the wall. There are a few dishes on the table and two to three chairs on the side. The house has nine residents (seven children and two parents). The family’s monthly income consists of 1,020 forints in family welfare benefits and 1,200 forints earned by the father, totaling 2,220 forints. This comes to 246 forints per person every month and 8.20 forints per person each day. . . . The mother can only spend 90 fillérs per meal per child, or at most one forint on occasion. The family has to manage three meals a day for nine people on 30 forints.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Antal Végh, *Erdőháton, Nyíren* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1971), 22–36.

In the course of her research conducted in Békés between 1968 and 1969, Ágnes Losonczy also categorized those whose per capita income averaged less than 600 forints, lived in homes made of beaten dirt or mudbrick walls, and had inadequate clothing and no household appliances as impoverished. Within this category system, even those were considered to be deprived who earned less than 800 forints per capita, had limited furnishings, possessed adequate clothing, and owned at most one household appliance or radio.⁴⁷ In the 1970s, one portion of Budapest's poor had been born in the capital city, while another portion consisted of destitute rural residents who had moved to Budapest in the 1950s and 1960s. As a 1977 sociological study noted,

Those living at the bottom of Budapest society, the capital city's poor, do not regularly starve. Throughout most of the month the poor also eat multiple times a day and get enough to feel full even if it is not always the food that they would choose. . . . Almost every poor person has at least one set of acceptable clothing and some sort of shoes, even though the latter usually reaches them in second-hand condition. Almost all of them sleep on sheets and their homes are furnished, although the wardrobes and beds were generally acquired "under the table," meaning that they were either thrown out or discarded by others.⁴⁸

Calculating the minimum level of subsistence was introduced to Hungary in 1982 due to a resolution made by the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP); from this point on, relevant statistical data existed based upon which the number of those living at subsistence level could be more realistically evaluated. It must, however, be mentioned that these statistics were primarily capable of registering income that had originated from the "economy's socialist sector" and demonstrated nothing attained via Hungary's hidden economy. This statistical data essentially covered those who were constantly employed as the survey did not (or only rarely) include those who were seasonally or sporadically employed. In 1982, the minimum subsistence wage for one person was set at 1,900 forints a month, a sum that rose to 7,053 in 1990, 34,475 in 2000, and hit 78,736 forints in 2010.

⁴⁷ Losonczy, *Az életmód az időben*.

⁴⁸ Ottilia Solt, "A hetvenes évek budapesti szegényei," *Budapesti Nevelő* 1 (1977): 19–23.



Figure 5. Faces of poverty: mother with children, 1976 (photo by Tamás Urbán, Fortepan, 88845)

At the beginning of the 1980s Hungary contained 72,000 homes that had one room and a kitchen and totaled 6 to 12 square meters in size, while 12,000 “homes” could boast of neither a room nor any type of access to public utilities.⁴⁹ If calculated based on families with four members, this means that roughly 320,000 to 340,000 people regularly lived without heat, running water, or electricity. It can safely be assumed that this layer of society comprised Hungary’s most destitute social class. Throughout this period another trend can be observed which reveals that the poverty threshold steadily rose to a somewhat higher level in tandem with the nation’s increased standard of living; the point remains, however, that the daily struggle to survive remained unchanged.

In Hungary the social composition of the poor constantly changed. In 1977, the majority of the destitute came from village households with either no or only one active breadwinner. Ten years later, in 1987, actively employed, urban households formed the majority of Hungary’s poor. In the years following the end of state socialism, the number

⁴⁹ For further details, see *Az 1980-as népszámlálás lakásstatisztikai adatai* (Budapest: KSH, 1984).

of poverty-stricken people expanded significantly in both urban and rural locations. Describing the direction and characteristics of this shift, sociologist Júlia Szalai noted that

if the typical poor at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s consisted of elderly village people who had essentially withdrawn from the workforce, then the poor of the 1980s and 1990s were characteristically city dwellers who were young adults (between 30 and 40 years of age) who had jobs and children. . . . They were the ones who had dedicated their lives to socialism's watchwords and either learned a profession that would be needed in a "large-scale manufactory" or gained training in skills that are totally irrelevant today, then moved to the city, thereby giving up the hope of earning a little supplementary income by doing a bit of farming.⁵⁰

During the 1980s and throughout the process of ending state socialism and introducing democracy, social differentiation accelerated and the ranks of the poor expanded.⁵¹ In 1992, the per capita subsistence-level minimum was set at 9,500 forints; in 1997, this amount was raised to 17,000 forints a month.⁵² In 2010, the typical subsistence-level minimum needed to maintain a household consisting of two active adults and two children was 228,334 forints a month, while one-member pensioner households required 70,862 forints. Based on the KSH's reports, the percentage of those living below subsistence level in the total population was 7.1 percent in 1982, 9.3 percent in 1987, 15.6 percent in 1992, 20.0 percent in 1993, and nearly 30 percent in 2010.

As mentioned before, both rural and urban communities experienced a sudden growth in the number of poor in the years following the shift to a democratic system. Those who found themselves unemployed or were only able to find temporary work due to the economic restructuring that occurred during this period were mainly

⁵⁰ Júlia Szalai, "Néhány gondolat a szegénységről és a létminimumról," in *Társadalmi Ríport, 1990*, ed. Rudolf Andorka, Tamás Kolosi, and György Vukovich (Budapest: TÁRKI, 1990), 418–29.

⁵¹ For a comparative analysis of the period following the end of communism in Eastern and Central Europe, see Iván Szelényi and János Ladányi, "Poverty after the Fall of State Socialism," *The Analyst: Central and Eastern European Review*, no. 2 (2005): 125–40.

⁵² Rudolf Andorka, "A társadalmi integráció gyenge kötése: rendszerátalakulás Magyarországon," *Századvég*, no. 1 (1996): 5–18; Zsuzsa Ferge, "Az állami szociálpolitika változásának iránya a rendszerváltás óta," in *Politika és társadalom 1989–1998*, ed. Kálmán Kulcsár (Budapest: MTA, 1999), 34–47.

the ones who “lost out” as a consequence of this change. Due to a lack of education or training, or the economic situation and geographic location of their residence, the majority of these individuals remained excluded from the workforce for either a lengthy period of time or (as often happened) for the rest of their lives. Additional social groups who were sinking deeper and deeper into impoverishment originated from the middle class, yet had neither filled leadership positions nor been able to acquire secondary incomes due to a lack of sufficient financial or cultural capital, and also found themselves without the kind of professional knowledge that would have otherwise eased their adaptation to Hungary’s new economic conditions. The income conditions for those falling into deeper poverty or already living in a state of destitution continued to deteriorate during the 1990s. The underlying reasons for this include the way in which incomes (already at an extremely low level) became erratic while the prices for consumer goods such as foodstuffs, household energy, and home maintenance grew at a rate that was far above the average. As a consequence of the nation’s changing social and economic conditions, a level of Hungarian society that continuously did not have access to an income totaling even half of the subsistence-level minimum became a constant presence in the form of 1 to 1.5 million individuals living at the very bottom of society.

Accumulating property and wealth

The wealthiest social group found in Hungary at the end of the 1930s consisted of large-scale businessmen and landowners. Estates comprising over 575 hectares (1,000 *hold*) were owned by aristocrats, meaning that one-third of the nation’s land was controlled by the nobility. Among the families who comprised Hungary’s traditional aristocracy, the Esterházy family alone could lay claim to 3,480 hectares. In addition to the Esterházy family, members of the Zichy, Festetics, Pallavicini, and Széchenyi families occupied positions as the board members of the committees directing various banks, large-scale businesses, and managing directorships; these positions not only ensured access to high incomes, but also formed a point of intersection between Hungary’s landowning aristocracy and its factory-owning plutocracy. Comprising a number that only reached one-tenth of Hungary’s more than five hundred landowners, the nation’s economic elite at this time

mostly consisted of Jewish families who formed a closely-knit group and had a crucial impact on Hungary's economy. To mention just a few names, the Chorin, Goldberger, Kornfeld, Perényi, Vida, Weiss, Aschner, Fellner, and Dreher families numbered among the most well-known members of Hungary's class of industrialists. The figure of Ferenc Chorin provides an excellent illustration of the extent of both social and financial influence this economic elite had within its control, as he was the director of more than a dozen banks, companies, corporations, and mines, including the Salgótarján Coal Mine, Manfréd Weiss's (Chorin's father-in-law) aluminum and canned goods factories, the Pest Hungarian Trade Bank, the National Paper Factory, the Industrial Mortgage and Credit Institute, etc. Based on tax returns submitted in 1935, the representatives of big capital, together with the aristocrats who owned the large estates mentioned above, had in average an income that surpassed—virtually without exception—a yearly sum of 150,000 pengős, in addition to properties that were worth many times more than their declared annual income. Beyond his yearly income totaling 339,000 pengős, Count Sándor Festetics owned property worth 13.5 million pengős; Jenő Vida, head director of the Hungarian General Coal Mines, earned 250,000 pengős a year and owned property worth one million. To provide another comparison, the factory owner Pál Fellner earned 230,000 pengős a year and owned property that totaled 3.7 million.⁵³

Beginning in the 1940s, Hungary's rich and wealthy fell on hard times. Between 1938 and 1944 anti-Jewish decrees paved the way for the confiscation of property owned by Hungarian Jewish businessmen and members of the upper middle class. Later, when nationalization took place in the late 1940s, private property (at least in any serious amount) essentially ceased to exist. If we take into consideration the property seized from Jews from 1938 to 1944 and add to this the financial institutions, companies, corporations, large and small manufacturing workshops, stores, materials and stock, rental properties, apartments, and property that was confiscated (and never returned) from families who were forcibly deported from their homes after World War II, the value for all of this totals a minimum of thousands

⁵³ For a more detailed discussion of the topic, see István Kolléga Tarsoly, ed., *Magyarország a XX. Században*, vol. 1, *Politika és társadalom, hadtörténet, jogalkotás* (Babits Kiadó, Szekszárd, 1996); Gábor Gyáni and György Kövér, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a reformkortól a második világháborúig* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1998).

of billions of forints, even based on the buying power of the forint in 1946.⁵⁴ The following summary provides an excellent indication of the extent of property that was lost or exchanged and the time it took to reach a similar economic footing: the two-and-a-half decades that spanned 1938 to 1965 were characterized by property loss and the society-wide spread of proletarianization. Following this, the latter half of the 1960s saw the beginning of a re-accumulation of wealth and property that was initially embarked upon in an attempt to regain previously lost value, but eventually reached fruition during the reprivatization of state-run property (1988–1995) that resulted in the reappearance of a new plutocratic upper-middle-class layer of Hungarian society. Reprivatization alone resulted in an exchange of billions of forints' worth of property that was transferred from the state to the private sector.⁵⁵

During the state socialist period, accumulating personal wealth was not an activity that was supported by the political system. The reason for this was primarily ideological in nature as owning more property than was necessary for personal usage was a practice that opposed the sense of equality proclaimed by the system. In spite of this, a peculiar process of wealth re-accumulation took place beginning in the late 1960s. This process can be described as a peculiar one because it was rarely conspicuous due to a healthy sense of caution on the part of the participants as well as the circumstances engendered by the political system itself; yet it still attracted the attention of public opinion from time to time. According to an article in the daily newspaper of the Communist Party,

It is quite a question: who has money to shop in the Luxus Áruház [Luxury Department Store], where the prices are sky high? To tell you the truth, I have no idea. But I do know that I saw such a crowd at the Luxus that I thought it better to leave and find a cheaper store. In any event, to continue in a more

⁵⁴ Economic-historical analyses or calculations that would allow for more exact estimations unfortunately remain unavailable at this point.

⁵⁵ See Péter Mihályi, *A magyar privatizáció enciklopédiája I–II* (Budapest-Veszprém: Pannon Egyetemi Kiadó, MTA Közgazdaságtudományi Intézet, 2010). For a contemporary comparison between the processes in Hungary and Poland, see Kálmán Mizsei, "Privatisation in Eastern Europe: A Comparative Study of Poland and Hungary," *Soviet Studies* 44, no. 2 (1992): 283–96. For a broader comparison, see Roman Frydman, *Privatization in Eastern Europe* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 1994), 240; Hans Smit and Vratislav Pechota, eds., *Privatization in Eastern Europe Legal, Economic and Social Aspects* (London: Brill, 1994), 262.

serious vein, the presence of luxury items is not a problem so long as it's possible to get non-luxury items. When all is said and done, the world isn't going to fall apart due to the film recorder being sold for 40,000 forints at the Ofotért or the bracelet going for 17,000 at the Watch and Jewelry Shop located next door.⁵⁶

Within the circumstances of the time, the growth in the number of families who possessed significant means that occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s proved to be a steady trend even in the face of shifting income conditions. A variety of factors underlie this phenomenon: during the 1960s and 1970s real income grew at a relatively dynamic rate, thereby laying the foundation for a comparatively large section of society to acquire a strong financial basis for accumulating property and wealth. Similarly, both legal (second jobs, part-time jobs, household farming) as well as illegal (moonlighting [*fuszítás*], services provided without a business license, shopping tourism, exchanging foreign currency, the black market) solutions for acquiring alternative sources of income continued to expand. The oddities of wealth accumulation did not escape public attention, as is evident from a report in the weekly *Nők Lapja* (Women's Magazine):

If I had a lot of money, I would spend it all in Váci Street [Budapest's most exclusive and expensive street of shops] without one pinch of remorse. I've been absolutely convinced that Hungary's industry produces its most becoming articles for us, too, and not just for the leading stockholders of the Rothschild's bank. This conviction faltered yesterday morning, at 11 o'clock on Vörösmarty Square [another exclusive location where the aforementioned Luxus Áruház, for example, could be found]. All it took was a single price sign that read, "Trench coat with ermine lining, 11,860 forints," discreetly placed in front of an elegant mannequin in a department window. . . . I found myself rooted to the spot. And not just because of the price on the sign. After all, there were even more expensive items in that window, such as another fur coat being sold for a mere 15,000. But the difference between the two was far more than a cool 3,000 forints. I can understand it when someone who has won the lottery or is a top-price film star or has scarfed up money by running an illegal gig selling *lángos* [fried dough, commonly served as street food] from a roadside stand or operating a private tour business without bothering

⁵⁶ István Pintér, "Váci utcán, Váci utcán," *Népszabadság*, January 1, 1970. 6–7. Ofotért was a retail network specializing in cameras and photographic equipment.

to apply for a license decides to invest in a luxury fur coat. Let 'em, for all I care. . . . But who, tell me, puts an entire fortune into a trench coat?⁵⁷

In state socialist Hungary the only legal form for handling financial savings was a savings account. In 1950, the population's total savings amounted to 289 million forints, followed by 5.5 billion a decade later in 1960, and 81.2 billion in 1975. By 1987, this number had risen to 286 billion forints. This rate of growth remains noteworthy even when the effects of inflation and the genuinely low real interest are taken into account. Yet another indication of the relatively widespread increase in wealth can be found in the fact that according to 1975 data, there were already as many as 339,000 savings books that contained more than 50,000 forints. The total value of these savings books equaled 32.1 billion forints, meaning that the average size of the savings accounts held by individuals or families who were capable of setting aside a significant amount of money came close to 100,000 forints, a sum that was the equivalent of three years' worth of average income at the time. The number of savings books naturally cannot be viewed as a direct representation of the people and families who were capable of putting aside significant sums since it can be safely assumed that far larger amounts were found in the hands of certain individuals; even after taking this factor into account, however, it can be estimated that a minimum of 200,000 to 250,000 people or families had access to serious financial reserves.

Beyond financial savings, the other commonly chosen form of wealth was real estate purchased in the form of an apartment, summer home, or small plot of land that could be used for food production. Due to restrictions that remained in place until the 1980s, one person or family was allowed to own one residence and one summer home. These restrictions were frequently circumvented by—to take just two examples—buying a property in the name of an underage family member or after a divorce that only took place on paper. Home construction or purchasing an apartment comprised the most widespread means of accumulating wealth during this period. According to a governmental regulation that became effective in July 1973, a privately built home could only contain a maximum of six rooms totaling 140 square meters in the case of a detached home and 125 square meters for apartments. A property used for holiday purposes

⁵⁷ *Nők Lapja*, no. 4 (1968), 22.

could have no more than three rooms and be no larger than 80 square meters in the case of a single structure or 60 square meters for a property located in a shared building of summer residences. While it is true that many families who were otherwise not overly wealthy could still own a second property that was used for weekend or holiday retreats, in reality the majority of these places only served as small shelters for sleeping and eating; most families spent their time at these locations outside, working in the garden or enjoying the outdoors. (For further details regarding the topic of summer homes, housing, and home interiors, see Chapter Four.) For the most part these restrictions were not taken very seriously as the relevant legal prerequisites for building were only rarely maintained. When these properties could be rented out during the 1970s and 1980s, not only did the economy's rental and subletting sector grow, but an important source of additional income also fell into the owners' pockets.

The third form of opportunity for acquiring wealth comprised portable goods. Within this category, the ownership of production goods (such as machinery, equipment, or trucks) was a negligible phenomenon until the beginning of the 1980s.⁵⁸ Possession of precious metals was also restricted until 1974: one individual could only own a maximum of 500 grams of gold, for example. The fact that nobody paid attention to this regulation is a different matter entirely since—for all intents and purposes—enforcing this kind of limit was essentially untenable. Due to its constant value, gold jewelry proved a favorite on the black market. The share of valuables acquired via inheritance was also relatively significant. Trade in valuables and precious metals naturally fell under a state-run monopoly. As regards portable goods, the percentage of durable consumer goods (primarily in the form of automobiles) displayed dynamic growth. Since these types of products were rather expensive compared to the population's average income in addition to being quite difficult to obtain, vehicles, refrigerators, or televisions enjoyed a temporary role as status symbols representing a family's ability to acquire wealth.

⁵⁸ Until January 1, 1982, it was not possible to own a truck in Hungary; permits for hauling shipments were only issued for horse-drawn conveyances before this date. This circumstance also contributed toward hindering opportunities in private enterprise up to the early 1980s, when more liberal and somewhat laxer rules were passed.



Figure 6. The weekly chance to gain legal wealth, the lottery draw—singer Zsuzsa Cserhádi with lottery numbers, 1972 (Fortepan, 15401, MHSZ)

Within the circumstances of the era, the lottery acted as the most popular legal means for getting rich quickly; this opportunity, however, only offered itself to a lucky few. As a contemporary newspaper article reported,

A complete win on the lottery once again! This year marks a record run in the lottery and not only due to the constant high number of tickets, but also because of the jackpots that have taken place one after the other. The first win happened in March, during the eleventh playing week, soon followed by three more wins in the fifteenth week. Later, in the eighteenth week, two

jackpots were drawn at once. The only jackpot to happen in the nineteenth week was worth 1,758,723 forints that was paid to a Mrs. Ferenc Török, a machine operator at the Óbuda Textile Dying Factory. Including this win, eight players have hit the jackpot in this year alone. Throughout the three-and-a-half years of its operation, a total of nineteen individuals could count themselves among the luckiest of “jackpot” players.⁵⁹

As a sign of the changing times, fifteen years later newspapers only publicized the fact that a jackpot had been won and did not reveal the winner’s name, a practice that continues today. “Jackpot: 2,760,308 forints. According to information from the Directorship of Sports Betting and Lottery, a winning jackpot ticket worth (after deductions) 2,760,308 forints was drawn on March 7.”⁶⁰ While some were able to put their unexpected fortune to good use, once the initial shock and joy had passed, others discovered that their newfound wealth caused more disadvantages than it did advantages.

During the 1970s and 1980s nearly three-fourths of Hungarian families participated in some form of activity that was connected to the nation’s secondary, “shadow” economy. This period marks the era when secrecy formed the basic attitude demonstrated by Hungarian families in connection to their personal income. Between 1987 and 1990 every third Hungarian family took part in the custom of shopping tourism. Anyone who was able to sell shortage goods that were in demand at the time—such as VCRs, VCR tapes, and Western automobiles—could accumulate a serious amount of wealth within a short time.

For those who belonged to various elite groups, the government discretely turned a blind eye when it came to incomes that far exceeded the normal limits of the time or growth in property and wealth. Particularly during the 1950s, many top athletes were able to “supplement” their incomes by smuggling (via “private” import) current items that happened to be unavailable in Hungary, such as Doxa wristwatches, nylon stockings, and silk scarves. Members of the Hungarian football team that was known throughout the world as the Golden Team operated a “serious trade chain” for the purpose of selling products they brought into the country, a fact that was documented by the public

⁵⁹ *Népszabadság*, July 31, 1960.

⁶⁰ *Népszabadság*, March 9, 1975.

prosecutor while investigating the issue.⁶¹ During the Kádár era the majority of top athletes continued to make use of the advantages their position entailed. Many turned their athletic results into economic advantages (a position in sports, a permit for small-scale trade, a business rental, or automobiles or apartments received without having to spend an endless amount of time on the official waitlist), while others gained access to a significant amount of extra income by selling rare items (car parts, clothing, jewelry, “hard” foreign currency) on the black market. It was a well-known fact that the most famous actors, actresses, artists, and even writers earned large incomes. In the case of authors, their earnings can be deduced based on a 1971 account statement issued by the Művészeti Alap Irodalmi Szakosztálya (Literature Department of the Artistic Fund).⁶² Based on this document, eighty-two writers earned more than 100,000 forints a year while twenty-four belonged to a category that reaped over 250,000. Seven authors earned over 500,000 forints a year. Beyond these professions, above-average earnings could be attained by running a private medical or legal practice, making and selling *lángos* at a roadside stand, operating a gas station, repairing cars, fixing television sets, running a private pastry shop, or operating a greenhouse for the purpose of selling fruit and vegetables. Among privately employed white-collar professions, lawyers comprised the group with the highest income. 1,580 lawyers worked on the nation’s 138 legal panels, who—in 1966—earned an average annual income of 57,360 forints, a sum that breaks down to nearly 5,000 forints per month; on average, lawyers paid 10,680 forints a year in taxes.

At the time, taxing writers and performing artists (some of whom belonged in high income categories) also proved a challenge.⁶³ As far as physicians were concerned, only income earned from a private practice was taxed separately; neither their basic earnings nor the cash gifts they received from patients was subject to taxation. In 1966, the person who paid the highest income tax, 39,800 forints, was a doctor

⁶¹ “With the aid of just one of his agents, B. J., a player on the national soccer team, sold smuggled goods that amounted to a value of 390,000 forints between 1953 and 1956.” In “A Legfőbb Ügyész 1956. február 14-i feljegyzése,” MNL OL, XX-10-a.13.d., February 14, 1956.

⁶² Disclosed in Gyula Tóth and András Veres, eds., *Írók pórázon: A Kiadói Főigazgatóság irataiból 1961–1970* (Budapest: MTA Irodalomtudományi Intézet, 1992).

⁶³ This group included performing artists and entertainers, like musicians, who were required to obtain official licenses in order to perform.

working in the city of Debrecen.⁶⁴ Even if this doctor had only paid 20 percent of his income, this still means that he earned a minimum of 200,000 forints a year, an amount that was eight to nine times higher than the average income. A uniform taxation system was finally introduced in 1967.

With the help of their positions, the directors of large corporations, chairmen who managed to run a collective farm with success, and the nation's leading state and political representatives belonged to the highest income bracket. During the 1950s, Party and state leaders were paid between 5,000 and 6,000 forints per month, a sum that was eight to ten times higher than the average wage. In 1957, the monthly salary for a state minister was set at 9,000 forints in contrast to the 6,000 that a minister's first deputy earned. While members of the Political Committee were not allowed to earn more than the 9,000 forints set for a state minister, this sum could still be used as the maximum for establishing personal salaries. In 1973, the first secretary of the Central Committee, János Kádár, was paid 15,000 forints a month. The head of the Directors' Committee earned 14,500, the president of the government received 14,000, the Chair of the Parliament earned 13,000, and members of the Political Committee and ministerial deputies could expect 12,500 forints a month. In 1983, the average monthly income paid to Hungary's leading class was 9,100 forints; the monthly income for one-third of this group exceeded 10,000, an amount that soared above the nation's average income level. State, economic, and collective leaders had the highest paychecks: in 1983, the Minister of Domestic Trade earned 19,000 forints a month, as opposed to the state secretary who only received 16,000, while a deputy minister had to remain satisfied with 15,200 forints. The average monthly salary for department leaders—who qualified as upper-level managers—was 5,957 forints in 1971 and 8,832 in 1979. Nor did the top executives of national corporations take home less than 15,000 to 25,000 forints a month at the time. It goes without saying that these high incomes were accompanied by numerous benefits, such as a corporate car, apartment, telephone, or travel options, in addition to the "increased advantages" that also made it easier to circumvent the official waitlist to purchase an automobile or apartment. As far as those who filled leadership positions were concerned, the expectation that the Chairman

⁶⁴ "Jelentés a lakosság adóztatásának helyzetéről," MNL OL, XXVI-D-1-c.7.d., October 6, 1967.

of the Council of Ministers, Jenő Fock, expressed at the beginning of the 1970s in connection to a bill regarding the benefits granted to state leaders was achieved; according to Fock, leaders should “live modestly but not penuriously.”

Naturally there were also others (such as Ernő Rubik, who gained worldwide renown with his famous cube) whose inventions brought financial success. Others, however, such as the individual called “the cherry pit man” who made a quick fortune by collecting waste from canneries in the early 1970s, were brought before the court for the accusation of committing “economic crimes” and subsequently fell prey to the era’s political mindset. Other than the ability to perform an extraordinary amount of labor, attaining economic success demanded a far greater capacity for risk-taking; as a result, Hungarians were careful to keep their financial successes hidden due to the uncertainty surrounding the official response.

Numerous craftsmen and small-scale tradesmen were able to lead their (micro)-businesses with success in spite of the legal regulations that were meant to thwart this type of activity. Since these burgeoning businesspeople adapted quickly to market demand, they were able to make significant increases in profit; due to the fact that legal obstacles made it difficult to reinvest profits into a business until the early 1980s, the only remaining path was quite logically that of satisfying their consumer demands. Out of the small-scale businesses that opened their door at the beginning of the 1980s, it is worth mentioning the examples of Műszertechnika GMK (Technical Instruments GMK), Kontrax Irodatechnika (Kontrax Office Technology), or Pintér Művek (Pintér Works) located in the city of Kecel. By filling the gaps created by a shortage economy, these companies soon numbered among Hungary’s swiftly expanding private businesses, a niche which brought their owners no small margin of profit during the latter half of the 1980s.

Obviously, quite a few were able to “get rich quick” during the Kádár era by taking creative advantage of a given situation, being “gifted” enough to see the system’s loopholes, or turning into a “lucky winner.” After a time, Hungary’s emerging class of the well-to-do took less care in concealing their wealth: in 1967, the head of the collective farm in Szakcs, I.V., was earning an average of 13,672 forints a month while adding state subsidies by lowering the farm’s planned output, improving the profitability of the collective farm under his direction, and—meanwhile—running his own “barter” business by having the

collective farm either buy back (at inflated prices) crops that it had already produced or purchase potatoes he had grown himself. Eventually, in 1969, criminal proceedings were brought against him and he received a lengthy prison sentence for his deeds.⁶⁵ Naturally, of course, it cannot be said that everyone who took advantage of an obvious opportunity was also breaking the law. In the mid-seventies, as economic reform was being curbed, the leaders of successful cooperatives and the directors of industrial or construction companies that were operating at a profit as ancillary branches of production were particularly in danger of finding themselves facing a lawsuit. The charges in these cases generally included misappropriated funds, fraud, and swindling. From time to time both local and central daily newspapers denounced "fleecers" in the form of a criminal exposé. The leaders of the Háziipari Szövetkezet (Cottage Industrial Cooperative) in Jászberény, for example, were pilloried for embezzlement and bribery in the beginning of 1970 because they had received 1.3 million forints (in the form of a bonus given for innovation) over a period of three years for introducing a new product that had made the company profitable. Due to the subjective tone utilized by newspaper articles during the period, it is difficult to decide whether the accused had genuinely been guilty of committing a crime or not.⁶⁶

Throughout the 1960s, earning a commission as a clerk or salesperson was still considered a censurable form of income. When S. F., a salesperson for the Győri Vagon- és Gépgyár (Győr Freightcar and Machine Factory) managed to accumulate (besides his regular paycheck) 600,000 Austrian schillings in commissions in under a few years, the court sentenced him to five-and-a-half years in prison after confiscating his entire property.⁶⁷ The example of a technical engineer from the city of Szeged demonstrates that it was possible to utilize somewhat legal means in order to earn a monthly income that rose far above the average salary; employed full time by the local construction cooperative, this particular individual took on a second job at the collective farm in Szőreg, where he drafted designs and worked as a foreman for 59,000 forints a month. To his misfortune, six months

⁶⁵ *Népszabadság*, September 17, 1969.

⁶⁶ *Népszabadság*, January 12, 1970. For a historical analysis of this phenomenon, see Zsuzsanna Varga, "Miért bűn a sikeresség? Termelőszövetkezeti vezetők a vádlottak padján az 1970-es években," *Történelmi Szemle*, no. 4 (2012): 599–621.

⁶⁷ *Népszabadság*, December 2, 1969.

passed after his contract had been signed before it was discovered that his contract would have complied with the legal regulations if he had become a member of the collective farm. Due to this detail, the technical engineer and the leader of the collective farm were forced to undergo a lengthy police investigation followed by court proceedings in the early 1970s. In cases such as these, making an example of someone publicly, preserving the supposed (yet in reality nonexistent) level of social equality, and maintaining political and ideological standards and expectations were more important than judging the actual deed.

It is quite difficult to determine precisely what the economy represented from the viewpoint of everyday life. Those who lived in well-to-do circumstances (the era's "rich and wealthy") generally had homes in well-known places, such as the Rózsadomb area of Budapest or the Nagyerdő section of Debrecen. It goes without saying that these individuals did not live in the cramped apartments offered by Soviet-type tower blocks, but rather owned their own home that had been designed to their specifications and usually contained five to six or (in some cases) even more rooms. Another possibility was one of the privately owned apartments constructed by a cooperative.⁶⁸ Instead of the uniform, built-in furnishing units found in tower block apartments, these homeowners could afford interiors in which antique or colonial pieces dominated. For the most part, a Western automobile stood in the garage, a privilege that included multiple automobiles in the 1980s. Under state socialism a well-to-do lifestyle primarily meant independence from the vagaries of a shortage economy since the wealthy could afford to pay the price needed to procure more expensive items either at local shops that only accepted foreign currency or by traveling abroad. The first customers to buy fashionable items that soon emerged as status symbols (color TVs, VCRs) or enjoy the prestige of regularly shopping at the exclusive Luxus Áruház (Luxury Department Store), followed by the Fontana and

⁶⁸ Under state socialism in Hungary three typical forms of home construction existed. These were (1) state-supported home construction; (2) home construction as a private investment; and (3) construction as a collective home, a solution that occurred when private citizens formed a collective in order to construct buildings that contained ten to twelve apartments. The apartments found in this type of a building belonged to the members of the collective. This type of a solution was necessary because private citizens or a building contractor could not receive a permit for the construction of a building containing multiple apartments.

the boutiques on Váci Street, generally came from this social class. These individuals spent their free time at well-known "haunts" (such as Lake Balaton or the Danube Bend) where their summer or weekend houses displayed a comparable level of furnishings and comfort. Another frequent option consisted of joining a tour group to travel abroad. Very obvious displays of expensive jewelry and a fashionable wardrobe comprised of brand-name items also displayed the availability of an above-average income. Employing a cleaning lady was frequently part and parcel of this type of lifestyle.

Due to the lack of reliable data, it remains nearly impossible to determine with any precision just who belonged among the affluent. According to various analyses, as of the 1960s on average two percent of Hungary's population could lay claim to an exceedingly high income. If this percentage is applied to the number of active earners, a minimum of 60,000 to 80,000 people belonged to Hungary's economic elite during the 1960s and 1970s; this number obviously continued to rise throughout the 1980s. In the early 1980s, different surveys categorized as wealthy those "who lived surrounded by financial circumstances that were far more favorable than average" and "admitted of their own free will to owning a family home, privately-owned apartment, or other form of real estate that was not occupied by their own household and contained an automobile and furnishings (together with household appliances and other cultural objects) that can be considered complete." According to an estimate by Zsuzsa Ferge at the end of the 1970s, a minimum of a few thousand or a maximum of ten thousand families totaling between 40,000 and 50,000 individuals could be viewed as wealthy. Ferge placed those whose property exceeded three to four million forints in this category (in 1978, an average Škoda automobile cost 84,000 forints, the average monthly net salary per earner was 3,687 forints, and an average apartment of 54 square meters could be bought for 400,000 to 500,000 forints). The second category of well-to-do families was twenty to twenty-five times larger, if we consider the availability of one-and-a-half to two years' worth of financial savings as a sufficient basis for affluence. A period during which accumulated private capital could be reinvested into production began to emerge beginning in the early 1980s, a change that was brought about by more liberal political policies regarding private businesses.

The dynamic nature of this process of reestablishing wealth is displayed by the fact that the number of bank accounts containing the

largest amount of savings and capital soared from 328 registered accounts comprising more than 500,000 forints in 1972 and amounting to a value totaling 321 million, to 19,000 accounts holding a similar sum and totaling 14.6 billion forints in 1986. An even more striking example can be found to demonstrate the rising curve of financial accumulation if we take into consideration that three thousand savings accounts contained more than one million forints totaling a value of 4.15 billion forints, which breaks down to an average savings of 1,386,000 forints per person. This fact alone indicates that (based on savings accounts) the number of millionaires increased tenfold between the early 1970s and the mid-eighties.

Hungary's "upper ten thousand" obviously existed and reestablished itself throughout the Kádár era since anyone who could lay claim to such princely savings most definitely owned real estate and a variety of portable goods as well. While this counted as a considerable fortune in Hungary, possessing one or two properties, an

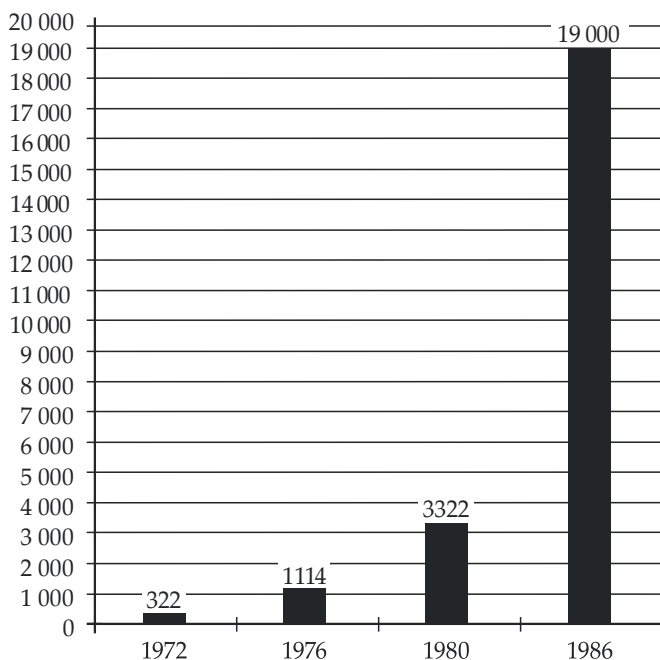


Figure 7. Number of individuals with savings of more than 500,000 forints in Hungary from 1972 to 1987 (based on income statistics published in KSH yearbooks between 1972 and 1987).

automobile, and a few million (or maybe ten million in rare instances) forints in savings meant that these Hungarians had only reached the category of “the poor affluent” compared to international standards.

The situation drastically changed during the period marked by the shift from state socialism to democracy, at which time private fortunes could once more be amassed. In the latter part of the decade following the fall of the Iron Curtain, the presence of a social class that was occupied by tycoons and large-scale property owners was quite obvious in spite of the widespread preference for concealing wealth. According to analyses conducted by György Lengyel, by 1996 a minimum of 120 to 150 individuals owned fortunes that exceeded one billion forints. More and more individuals joined this category following the new millennium; based on some estimates, three to five thousand families possessed fortunes comprising one billion forints. Although the existence of a financial elite became more visible during the 1990s, no reliable statistical data exists that would illustrate the genuine financial circumstances of this group estimated to contain at least 500,000 individuals who possess truly high incomes. Tax returns are basically useless for creating this type of assessment; the most realistic method is to apply the approach of a regressive estimate by establishing the number of durable consumer goods and consumer expenditures. Based on this information, in the mid-nineties, the lowest sum needed for joining the highest income bracket required a monthly income of 400,000 to 500,000 forints (a sum that has risen considerably since then), an amount that was ten to twelve times more than the average per capita monthly income at the time. In 1999, the yearly salary for the directors of large corporations that were not owned by the state and employed 300 to 400 people was between 15 and 25 million forints; the income earned by the top managers of Hungary’s largest corporations and financial institutions exceeded 50 million forints a year. In 1998, the dismissed director of what was Hungary’s largest bank at the time earned 8 million forints a month. Based on the tax bureau’s calculations, in 1999, the highest declared base for determining personal income tax was 1.8 billion forints; the majority of taxpayers belonging to the “one hundred” group declared annual incomes above 101 million forints. In 2009, the annual income for Hungary’s largest taxpayer amounted to 3.4 billion forints, all of which originated from wages, while an annual income of 100 million was already enough to secure a place among the top one hundred

taxpayers.⁶⁹ In 2013, the highest amount of annual income attained via employment was 760 million forints while the annual income for the largest taxpayer reached 5 billion forints. The first one hundred individuals earning the highest incomes (generally via employment or dividends) declared a total of 73.2 billion forints in income. In 2012, the most affluent individual heading the top 100 list was the banker and businessman Sándor Csányi, who owned a fortune totaling 135 billion forints in value. Tenth place on the list could only claim a mere 72 billion while 5 billion forints would be needed to reach the ninety-eighth or one-hundredth place on the list. As Hungary shifted from a planned to a market economy, those individuals who numbered among the wealthiest either had been economic leaders during the 1980s and late Kádár era (such as Sándor Demján), had carved out a sort of career as a “self-made man” (Gábor Széles, Gábor Bojár, Gábor Várszegi) by expanding their small-scale businesses begun in the early 1980s into large-scale corporations by the 1990s, had been able to convert their personal connections into economic capital (Ferenc Gyurcsány, Imre Nagy), or had launched their business careers in the early 1990s (Rudolf Horváth, Lajos Simicska, Gábor Kovács, Csaba Lantos, József Boros, Dezső Matyi). Even today the lifestyle of Hungary’s economic elite is characterized by a peculiar combination of aloofness and concealment mixed with a unique type of exhibitionism that displays a relatively moderate level of social conscience.

⁶⁹ This data was taken from analytical statistics compiled by APEH (the Hungarian Tax Authority) based on individual tax returns for 2009.

Chapter Three

From Plentiful Privation to a Consumer Society: The Changes and Characteristics of Consumer Consumption

Consumption and consumer attitudes

During World War II and the period that followed, consumer consumption in Hungary was defined by the need to acquire and fulfill basic necessities.¹ In the years stretching from 1938 to 1945, consumers found themselves dealing with increasingly strict limitations that eventually culminated in a market that operated under centralized control. While satisfying the civilian population's demands remained important for the purpose of maintaining political and social stability, living in a state of war demanded that priority be given to supplying the military's needs. As a result, a peculiar sort of dichotomy characterized the process of consumption during this period in Hungarian history. On the one hand, privately owned shops, businesses, and trade networks strove to serve the civilian population's needs; on the other hand, the fixed system imposed upon society by a wartime economy increasingly limited the opportunities available to both consumers and tradesmen. As the war progressed and shortages made it more and more difficult to acquire a growing number of goods, trade on the black market flourished; as a consequence of the devaluation of the pengő, precious metals took over the role played by paper currency and barter became the main means of procuring food or other supplies.

¹ For a comparative analysis of the history of consumer consumption in Hungary as opposed to other parts of Eastern and Central Europe, see Hannes Siegriest, Hartmut Kaelble, and Jürgen Kocka, eds., *Europäische Konsumgeschichte: Zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des Konsums (18. bis 20. Jahrhundert)* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1997); Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Once the pengő was replaced by the forint in 1946, supply gradually stabilized.² By the end of the 1940s, shortages of various consumer items had decreased, even though it was undeniably true that the tasks related to rebuilding the war-torn nation's infrastructure temporarily—albeit quite understandably—took the forefront compared to the issues surrounding consumer demands. After the Communist Party seized absolute power, a process of enforced industrialization was initiated in 1950, leading to an unrestrained demand being placed on Hungary's resources that trumped all other needs or concerns; every attempt was consequently made to keep consumer consumption at the lowest possible level. As the 1940s turned to the 1950s, the wartime economy that characterized the Cold War period, combined with the "planned anarchy" that emerged during the shift to a planned economy, swiftly made it impossible for Hungarians to procure the necessities elemental to basic survival.³ As widespread and long-lasting shortages ensued in practically every aspect of life, the struggle to acquire essential foodstuffs once more became a central aspect of daily life. During the first half of the 1950s, overcoming shortages was one of the most important actions to be taken on an everyday basis: the continuous drive to obtain one item or another coupled with the process of constantly having to stand in line at one place or another defined the rather bizarre "consumer culture" of this period. Lacks in the supply of commodities created an atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust—succinctly expressed with the rhetorical question "Who knows whether there will be enough tomorrow?"—

² Between 1944 and 1946 a state of hyperinflation emerged in Hungary, mostly due to economic losses inflicted by the war and the subsequent economic disintegration that followed. In a move to stabilize the nation's financial situation, a new form of currency, the forint, was introduced. For further information regarding the economic and financial background to this process, see János Botos, "A pengő megsemmisülése, a forint születése," *Múltunk* 1 (2016): 160–206.

³ Related to János Kornai's analysis of Hungary's postwar economy, the concept of "planned anarchy" refers to Hungary's unique economic history during this period. In essence, this term summarizes the effects that emerged due to the state socialist system's extreme over-regulation of its planned economy. Since no detail was left to chance, actually realizing these plans became impossible. As a result, those responsible for carrying out the system's orders had no choice but to rely on their own decisions, within the narrow framework at their disposal. Simultaneously, the data and statistics that determined the given plan underwent constant revisions and corrections, a further circumstance which effectively threw the entire economic system into chaos.

that not only characterized the state socialist period, but also integrated itself into general, public opinion and thereby came to represent a basic aspect of consumer attitudes in Hungary. This situation bred a serious sense of social dissatisfaction that was only ameliorated when changes were made in the government in 1953. As investments in heavy industry were reduced, fulfilling the needs of the general population gradually moved closer to the forefront and a significant percentage of the disproportionately large capacities earmarked for the defense industry were redirected to the production of consumer items. While this naturally did not mean that shortages ceased, the situation regarding the supply of goods noticeably improved throughout 1954 and 1955—at least in comparison to previous years. Checkered as it was with setbacks and relapses, this gradual process of improvement remained characteristic and was even present during critical periods in Hungarian history such as the autumn of 1956, when the 1956 Hungarian Revolution erupted. The supply of foodstuffs—together with the broader question of maintaining and restoring Hungary's supply system—was considered one of the most basic means for pacifying the rebellion.⁴

As far as consumption was concerned, the period of deprivation that ensued following World War II did not halt with the end of the initial phase of reconstruction, but rather continued until the middle of the 1960s. Although the consumption of foodstuffs had once again reached pre-war levels by 1950, neither was supply continuous nor could the selection be deemed acceptable. The main reason for this lay in the irrational period of wartime economy that was implemented following the communist rise to power. To varying degrees, the shortages that so typify state socialism's approach to planned economy continued to dog the system throughout its existence. The types of items that were scarce at certain points during this period therefore indicate changes in the system itself. By the 1970s, for example, there were no longer shortages in basic foodstuffs or apparel, yet high-value modern items remained chronically scarce.

⁴ Established as the revolution was taking place, revolutionary committees designated the organization of public supply as one of their basic tasks. After the revolution ended on November 4, 1956, one of the first decisions to be made by the Kádár government was to establish the Government Committee for Public Supply with Rezső Nyers appointed as its leader. Throughout this period Hungary received a significant amount of humanitarian aid from Western Europe and North America, while the Eastern bloc nations contributed various forms of bank loans and support.

During the two-and-a-half decades that stretched between 1955 and 1980, the volume of consumption per person climbed to two-and-a-half times higher than it had been. Ten times more consumer goods were purchased while households were using three-and-a-half times more energy. In virtually every case the period when growth was at its highest occupies the decade between 1965 to 1975. The increase in material wealth that took place under János Kádár's consolidation of power reveals that—out of the nation's entire wealth—the percentage of stable supply possessed by Hungary's households grew to be two-and-a-half times higher between 1960 and 1974, representing an increase from 73.3 billion to 180 billion forints. When examining this unprecedented growth in consumption, it is important to consider the following two factors: during this decade families were finally able to replace items that they had previously been forced to do without, while new kinds of goods (such as televisions or automobiles) were also appearing on the mass market at this time.

For a very long time general public opinion as well as the majority of social scientists have remained convinced that the period of stabilization and consolidation implemented by János Kádár's regime following the 1956 Revolution's defeat was relatively quick and successful because communist leaders had learned from the political errors committed during the Rákosi era and therefore went out of their way to avoid sparking renewed social conflict at a time when the revolution still cast a long shadow over Hungarian society. Instead, Hungary's political leadership gradually altered the power mechanisms used to control the country, changed its approach to the economy, and thereby brought about a certain type of "limited prosperity." While it cannot be denied that the open usage of violence was gradually phased out once retribution had come to an end and amnesty was granted to former revolutionaries in 1963, in the area of economics two smaller concessions were also made. As the collectivization of private property was completed and enforced industrialization continued to flourish, greater attention was paid to consumer consumption, resulting in the governmental order that the production of consumer goods be increased. Secondly, the growth of real wages was made a priority. In contrast to historical memory and public beliefs, both of these changes served the purpose of maintaining Hungary's one-party system and did not represent any deviation from its basic political goals or ideological definitions.⁵

⁵ In his seminal works discussing the state socialist system, János Kornai interpreted this system as a shortage economy. See János Kornai, *A hiány* (Budapest: Közgaz-

Despite this, it must be said that between 1949 and 1953, while the communist system was in the process of being developed and implemented, the policies of the time “succeeded” in inflicting even deeper levels of poverty on Hungarian society, which had already been sorely affected by the war. Since the base level for determining the factors which define the most important living standards had dropped to a genuine low, any change, alteration, or concession that led to a widespread, noticeable improvement in daily living conditions achieved far more social and political significance than it would have otherwise deserved. After 1956, the members of certain social groups presumably experienced their newly authorized freedom as a “tangible” result given the fact that it took less and less effort to procure the foodstuffs necessary for basic survival. As of the mid-sixties, Hungarians even found it possible—within certain limitations—to “stockpile” stores of non-perishable goods. Meanwhile, the Communist Party viewed the fact that it could keep the population supplied with basic goods as proof of its political and economic system’s ability to function; with some difficulty, the acquisition of those non-perishable items that Hungarians deemed “worthy of investment” had even been accomplished.

By themselves, the circumstances discussed above are enough to question the validity of any opinions regarding the concept that some type of “great compromise” had been drawn between Hungary’s political powers and society during the 1960s which resulted in the Party offering material wealth in exchange for the renouncement of political rights. Nor can sufficient evidence be found to support the idea that a form of a “consumerist model of socialism” complete with its own unique array of Hungarian characteristics had somehow emerged. Similarly, the role assigned to the Kádár era’s sense of “judicious policy” has (to a certain extent) enjoyed far more emphasis than it deserves. For given the evidence offered by various sources, it

dasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1980), published in English as Kornai, *Economics of Shortage* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1980). While everything that occurred throughout the 1960s and 1970s can be interpreted as an experiment in freeing the nation from the grip of shortages, it is my contention that the state socialist system’s unique approaches and mechanisms alone are enough to make it impossible to apply the classical definition of a consumer society to Hungarian society during this period. For a summary of the concepts and issues related to the state socialist system’s unique aspects and operating mechanisms, see Tibor Valuch, “A piaci szocializmus: Közelítések, értelmezések, értékelések,” in *Közelítések a kádárizmushoz*, ed. Pál Germuska and János M. Rainer (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2008), 85–108.

was primarily the goal of preserving the system's ability to function that played a defining role in motivating the changes that were implemented. While it cannot be denied that commercial supplies progressively stabilized during the 1960s following the catastrophic period of shortages that typified the first half of the 1950s, establishing a greater balance in the supply of commodities did not put an end to shortages. While a sort of consumerist culture did evolve within this system of "the haves and the have nots," in no way can it be said to resemble the content of the definition of consumerism used by the social sciences in Western Europe or North America.⁶

In Hungary, social and political circumstances essentially defined consumerist culture and consumer norms throughout the period that stretched from the late 1950s to the second half of the 1980s. Although it paid more attention to ensuring the availability of those goods and items that are essential for everyday life than the previous Rákosi era had, the Kádár era's particular brand of politics cannot be "accused" of consciously striving toward the creation of a "consumerist model of socialism," even if the Kádár regime's policies stabilized supply at the beginning of the sixties as the government continued to consolidate its power throughout the following fifteen years. More importantly, from 1957 to 1958 industrialization continued (albeit with a few small alterations) in compliance with the regime's strong ideological limitations while attempts were periodically made to restrict "acquisition and the unbridled practice of hoarding, bourgeoisie aims that are not worthy of any self-respecting communist."⁷ Within the context of Kádár era politics, commodity supply and consumer consumption were primarily important as factors in preserving

⁶ For more details that place this issue in the context of Eastern and Central Europe, see Stephan Merl, "Staat und Konsum in der Zentralverwaltungswirtschaft: Russland und die ostmitteleuropäischen Länder," in Siegfried, Kaelble, and Kocka, *Europäische Konsumgeschichte*, 205–44.

⁷ János Kádár, *A szocialista Magyarországért* (Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 1972), 67. The ramifications of this industrialization is summed up by Sándor Szakács in the following way: "Industrial expansion already continued in 1957: the rates for both production and employment indicated levels that were higher than anything else experienced previously. From 1959 to 1960, the economy periodically displayed the precise symptoms of boiling over; as investments increased at a rate that was far faster than was either desired or planned, the rate of national debt shot up to a height that had never been seen before. Keeping the system in balance became problematic." Sándor Szakács, *Gazdaságtörténet (1849–1996)*, vol. 2 (Budapest: SZÁMALK Kiadó, 2002), 224–26.

political stability and “legitimacy,” for “among other aspects, workers judge their material situation according to how much and what kind of goods they can buy with their earnings.”⁸ During the 1980s, a decade that brought with it the unfolding of the Kádár era’s crisis, the main goal was to maintain—using every means at their disposal—the relative balance between demand and supply that had been established in previous decades.

Throughout Hungary’s entire state socialist era, consumer supply remained a politically delicate issue, the political weight of which gradually decreased as circumstances slowly normalized. Beginning in the 1970s, for instance, it became far rarer for the question of supply to be discussed in detail within the highest political circles. According to documents on domestic trade, at this time specialized branches of bureaucracy were deemed capable of controlling any tensions regarding basic supply or managing the cyclical appearance of temporary or more permanent shortages. Generally speaking, when it came to handling these types of affairs the highest political levels were only required to intervene in the case of particularly critical situations, such as when the cost of products assigned to the fixed price system had to be raised.

Similarly, important social conditions and requirements determined the evolution of Hungary’s peculiar form of consumer culture. Except for the relatively narrow circle of individuals who enjoyed a privileged position regarding supply, most of Hungarian society held the lack of commodities to be a permanent condition of everyday life. Shortages in turn made corruption an elemental part of both daily life and consumption. Various counter-reactions quickly evolved in adaptation to these circumstances. To name one such example, by the end of the 1970s the population’s level of self-sufficiency decreased while “socialist connections” and the reciprocity of services or favors gained a larger role in everyday life. Based on decades of experience, the latest products could primarily be procured from “under the counter,” meaning that shop employees would set aside those items which were in demand for their personal acquaintances and relatives in return for various favors. As a report from the ministry of internal trade complained, “certain unprincipled commercial employees have, in a gross abuse of their consumers’ trust, taken it upon themselves to

⁸ “Aktívabb kereskedelempolitikával a reform megvalósításáért: tézisek,” MNL OL, XXXVI-G-4. 2.d., May 12, 1970.

turn setbacks in the supply of goods to their own advantage. Lately more and more reports and complaints have been made regarding the spread of 'under-the-counter sales' in trade, particularly in the capital city. This phenomenon casts a negative light upon commerce and has earned the workers' negative opinion."⁹

In summary, the quasi-consumerist culture that first emerged in Hungarian society at the end of the 1960s was determined by political restrictions, obstacles in commercial supply, the population's attempts to attain self-sufficiency, shortages, and the corruption that all of these factors brought about; moreover, the impact of the black market, smuggling, and shopping tourism (which refers to the practice of traveling to another member nation of the state socialist bloc where certain items could be more easily attained) must also be mentioned.¹⁰

It is probable that various social groups in Hungary were better able to handle the constant presence of shortages with a higher level of tolerance because many went to great effort to produce whatever items they could—especially when it came to foodstuffs—within the limits of their own household gardens. Evidence of this trend can be found—to mention just one indication—in the fact that 1.5 million Hungarian households participated in some form of small-scale agricultural production during the mid-1970s. Consequently, the average level of consumption was not overly high in spite of the fact that the gap between certain social groups was far greater during this period of Kádárist consolidation compared to the situation experienced in the first ten to fifteen years after the end of World War II. As a result, average consumer demands remained at a relatively low level. It is of course quite fascinating to see that the consumption statistics and archival documents from the fifties, sixties, and seventies unequivocally indicate the differences between certain social groups (at least based on the category of profession), including variations in their consumer preferences as well as differences in the extent to which they had access to supply. All of these factors suggest that the term "consumerist socialism" remains a concept that has not been precisely defined by

⁹ "A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium utasítása egyes keresett áruk értékesítése során elkövetett szabálytalanságok megszüntetése tárgyában," MNL OL, BKM iratai, July 6, 1957.

¹⁰ The following work discusses these trends as regards fashion and apparel in excellent detail: Katalin Medvedev, "Divat és 'bűnözés' az 50-es, 60-as és 70-es években Magyarországon," in *Öltöztessük fel az országot! Divat és öltözködés a szocializmusban*, ed. Ildikó Simonovics and Tibor Valuch (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 1956-os Intézet and Budapesti Történeti Múzeum, 2009), 130–48.

anyone, in spite of its fairly widespread usage throughout a range of fields; the question must be raised whether this term is completely suitable for describing the socio-economic and political processes in connection to which it is commonly applied.

A further issue worthy of examination is whether or not the expansion and consequent spread of consumerism was truly the result of a political initiative during the decades following the 1956 Revolution. In other words: did the era's policies simply place fewer obstacles in the way of obtaining various goods and—as of the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s—even allow for the stockpiling of assets as an attempt to adapt to society's wishes and intentions? Can this process be interpreted as a counter-reaction to the loss of property and restricted ownership of property that had occurred in the preceding years and decades? Indeed, is it even possible to state that a somewhat hidden form of stockpiling assets took place which could only be expressed—up to the beginning of the 1980s—via personal consumption due to limitations placed on the ownership of production? A further issue of examination is the extent to which the slow spread of consumption impacted the increased influence of economic rationality, which thereby became the exemplary attitude to follow. Can it actually be true that the explanation “people had no choice but to be creative” offered the only possible circumstance for the evolution of consumption within the conditions imposed by a shortage economy? Last but not least: what exactly does the term “consumerist socialism” mean?

Since the questions listed above have not been sufficiently clarified by either historians or sociologists, the aim of this volume is to analyze the data gathered from documents and statistics connected to domestic trade, consumption, and supply for the purpose of providing an overview of the most significant issues regarding the history of consumerism during this period in Hungary. My approach to examining consumption is therefore primarily social scientific rather than economic in nature. Within the given limitations of this volume, I subsequently cannot provide an analysis of this period's economic history in connection to consumption; as regards this point of view, I have relied on the existent and available approaches used in the field of economics and its history.¹¹ The fluctuations in income conditions

¹¹ Iván Pető and Sándor Szakács, *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1986); Szakács, *Gazdaságtörténet (1849–1996)*,

and their consequential effect on consumption will obviously remain a question for further examination in a separate study, as I have already referred to in the first chapter of this volume. In this present work I will mainly survey the connection between consumption and social change, the evolution of consumerist attitudes and their variations, and what impact these issues had on daily life and lifestyle decisions. In my estimation consumption deserves close examination for the reason that it reveals how various social groups in Hungarian society attempted to overcome wartime losses and survive the process of proletarianization that took place at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, including the loss of private and—in many cases—personal property that the latter involved. How exactly did people experience the gradual improvement in being able to fulfill their basic needs during the consolidation period of the Kádár era, while further opportunities arose for a limited stockpiling of goods or even prestige consumerism? Once this question has been answered, the next logical issue is how consumerist attitudes changed in the decades following the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Other than ideological concerns, at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s Hungarian politics was mainly influenced by a program known as DIP (*Dognaty i pregnaty*, a Russian phrase that roughly means “catching up and outstripping”), an aim in Soviet politics to overtake and then surpass Europe’s more economically developed nations in the West. In alignment with Soviet policy, the Kádár regime’s leadership formulated its own predictions regarding when Hungary would stand on equal footing with the continent’s economically developed countries. At the Eighth Congress held by the MSZMP in 1962, a resolution was drafted stating that “in 1980 per capita consumption will be higher than that found in developed, capitalist nations.” It naturally went without saying that this goal would be attained via the construction of an initially socialist, then communist society. By its very nature, the forced collectivization and ideal of equality that typified Marxist-Leninist ideology opposed any growth in consumption—together with the accompanying increase in individualism and growth of variations in financial status and ownership that was part and parcel of consumerism. Mainly during

224–26; János Kornai, *A szocialista rendszer* (Budapest: HVG Rt., 1993); Béla Tomka, *Gazdasági növekedés, fogyasztás és életminőség: Magyarország nemzetközi összehasonlításban az első világháborútól napjainkig* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2011).

the 1960s, a series of small- or even large-scale political and ideological campaigns were launched against “the dead-end of aimless materialism” in favor of the “socialist type of man’s” unselfish acceptance of self-sacrifice and an austere lifestyle based on “the needs of everybody” rather than hedonism. In this regard a peculiar kind of dichotomy characterized Hungarian politics at the time. On the one hand, official channels constantly emphasized that “nothing could take precedence over the continuous improvement of the workers’ standard of living”; on the other hand, the system stubbornly clung to lashing out at the lower-middle class, excessive consumer demands, the extravagant desire to stockpile resources, and materialism. As far as economic policies were concerned, heavy industry continued to be prioritized; even though the percentage of investments in agriculture rose during the second half of the 1960s, the heavy chemical industry and mining were also developed. Convinced that the era’s economic and political policies regarding consumption were inconsistent with their own idealistic—or, to put it more accurately, idealized—vision of socialism, intellectuals who faithfully believed in the system provided the intellectual means for making the ideological and political “adjustments” that regularly became necessary. This underlay, for example, the discussion concerning the relationship between socialism and material wealth that took place at the beginning of the 1960s and became known as the “fridge socialism debate.” A few years later, an exchange of views occurred regarding the issue of “a kid or a car.” While the first debate focused on the consequences a state socialist society may face due to consumerism’s influence on individuals and the collective, the second issue discussed the problem of material growth and a family’s willingness or ability to rear children.¹² In the end these debates were less successful than expected in delineating the parameters of a “socialist morality” or the types of consumerist attitudes which fit the criteria for building a “socialist lifestyle.” Beginning from the end of the 1970s, ideological viewpoints were superseded by the more pragmatic approach succinctly expressed by the saying “to live and let live,” a motto that characterized this entire period.

In accordance with this partial shift in opinion that simultaneously maintained the standpoint of state socialist ideology, multiple

¹² The debate regarding “fridge socialism” (*fridszider-szocializmus*) took place in the 1961–1962 issues of the journal *Új Írás*. The discussion commonly referred to as the “Kid or Car” debate occurred in the form of articles published in the periodical *Élet és Irodalom* in 1969.

attempts were made throughout the 1970s to define the concept of a "model of socialist consumerism." Each of these attempts emphatically rejected the role of the marketplace and chose instead the Marxist-Leninist principle of distribution according to everyone's need as its point of departure. More realistic analyses, however, did strive to distance their examination from this principle, meaning that an effort was made to create some form of harmony between genuine trends and ideological viewpoints. As a 1975 study noted,

In Hungary the population's level of consumption is intermediate compared to that found in other countries and in accordance with our economic development. This designation of "intermediate" is due to having an average level which stems from—on the one side—those whose low earnings barely allow them to enjoy the manifold fruits of social progress and generally only purchase the most essential items needed for basic survival, and many times not even according to the needed quantity at that. On the other side we find those whose income is above average and who can spend a growing percentage of their money on better products and services. . . . Today the restriction of disproportionately high incomes instead raises more practical issues. In theory, however, it remains unclear to what extent differences in income can be allowed based on the proportionate performance of work, while simultaneously taking into consideration the requirements of material motivation. Other than the necessity of limiting disparities in income that arise from differences in earnings, we must also calculate with the fact that what—as regards categories of high income—already represents a significant percent of income today will have an even greater power in purchasing certain products and services fifteen to twenty years in the future. This demand must be satisfied with a suitable level of supply. Shortages in consumer goods must not and cannot be used to restrict those with high incomes, including how their incomes are used.¹³

According to economic analyses from the time that occasionally stepped slightly away from the framework of expounding state socialist ideology, "rational consumerism can only be attained within a socialist system that is exclusively founded upon collective property. Within a capitalist society at the very most it is only possible to attain the partial restriction of the serious damage that irrational consum-

¹³ Róbert Hoch and John Ede, "A fogyasztás szerkezetének változása és a társadalmi preferencia-rendszer." part. 2, *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 5 (1975): 5–9.

erism inflicts upon society as a whole."¹⁴ No definition, however, was made in reference to what can be considered rational consumerism or what causes it to become irrational. Most interpretations emphasized that wastefulness and consumerism's anarchic nature could be eliminated via the consistent application of the principle of planning and by enforcing collective control and the practice of moderation. This viewpoint, however, could only remain somewhat convincing so long as the nation's citizens had no (or only little) experience with the range of wares offered in the shops of Vienna, Munich, London, or Paris. The growth of tourism therefore came part and parcel with the spread of shopping tourism.

Neither was the situation helped by the fact that the new economic mechanism introduced in 1968 led to changes on both a small and a large scale in domestic trade. Among other alterations, from this point on small trade businesses were allowed to buy goods directly from the producer and agricultural collectives could operate auxiliary industrial branches where items that had previously been missing from shop shelves could be more efficiently produced compared to large-scale manufactories. Intended to "animate" the market, numerous economic regulations (including the reregulation of reserves management, the introduction of basis risk in connection to prices, and the expansion of foreign trade licenses) encouraged a more efficient level of cooperation between commercial and production enterprises. According to a document prepared at the end of 1968 by the ministry of internal trade for the purpose of summarizing initial observations and possible steps for the future, "implemented with the intent of further improving the supply of goods to our population, our economic policies have proven effective in strengthening the balance of the market for consumer goods as the domestic market has generally shown stable development throughout this year. The supply and stock of trade goods have not only satisfied customer demands but also contributed toward creating a market that complies with the reform's aims."¹⁵ The authors of the situation analysis even mentioned that even the effects of the new reform regulations would not be able to put an immediate halt to shortages in the supply of

¹⁴ Imre Bóc, "Hozzászólás a 'Néhány gondolat az irracionális fogyasztásról' című cikkhez," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 2 (1976): 41–42.

¹⁵ "Aktívabb kereskedelempolitikával a reform megvalósításáért: tézisek," MNL OL, XXXVI-G-4. 2. d., May 12, 1970.

goods. To use the phrase found in this report, "tensions regarding supply" would continue to arise. In the year 1968, for example, construction materials, mass-produced items, furniture, beer, and automobiles numbered among the products that were scarce. At this time as well as during the following fifteen years, beer symptomatically became unavailable every summer. The fact that thirty-three thousand customers were still waiting to purchase an automobile in 1968 represented a far more serious problem, particularly since these individuals had already submitted either a down-payment or the entire purchasing price for the vehicle. This situation did not change noticeably throughout the seventies or the eighties as demand soared far above supply, thereby maintaining the mechanisms of Hungary's secondary market.

According to official explanations, inconsistencies in the organization of consumption and production, technological backwardness, and the monopolistic position enjoyed by certain state-owned enterprises were basically responsible for shortages in supply. Other than the unavailability of certain items, for those who ventured out on a mission to restock their pantry shelves the bad quality and narrow selection often posed another serious obstacle. In order to bring about a higher standard of supply, the leaders of Hungary's trade policies felt it necessary to improve purchasing conditions by progressively decreasing the number of unavailable items, enabling customers to shop in less time and with a greater degree of convenience, training employees to serve customers more politely and attentively, and steadily expanding the selection of various wares. When these ideas for developing commerce were outlined, priority was given to making it easier to procure any items, equipment, or services that facilitated household tasks for women as well as to those that satisfied the new consumer habits and demands that arose out of women's growing amount of free time.

One year later, in the autumn of 1969, according to an examination made of trade policy and the supply situation,

when forming a judgement of the supply situation it must be taken into consideration that at the time of the reform's implementation we temporarily established an excellent selection (via centralized measures such as the formation of reserves, socialist and capitalist import, etc.) compared to what had been previously available. This year industrial and commercial enterprises

have essentially had to rely on their own abilities and initiative. . . . Reform is a slow process, the favorable effects of which can only gradually be felt. . . . Based on their nature certain problems are bound to arise in trade and subsequently slow down the visible improvement of supply.¹⁶

The fact that this was true is well supported by published quarterly analyses that summarized the situation and surveyed the ever-changing concept of domestic trade in relation to the era's ideological politics.¹⁷

Within Hungary's urban population, consumer habits and attitudes changed relatively slowly. The automatic reflexes and instincts that had evolved as a consequence of shortages emerged even when the situation did not entirely warrant them. For the most part, setting aside stores of basic foodstuffs—flour, sugar, cooking oil/fat—that would prove sufficient for at least a few weeks or months was typical of urban households, irrespective of the family's financial or professional status. A similar situation existed regarding some kinds of meat or fruits and vegetables, such as apples or potatoes. Not unexpectedly, the same method was used in the case of items that were temporarily or regularly unavailable. Beginning in the second half of the 1970s, the largest rushes to buy up a supply of goods occurred when the heavily guarded news that price hikes could be expected inevitably leaked out and swiftly spread. This habit of procuring extra food supplies only began to taper off at the end of the 1960s, when a growing number of Hungarian families took up residence in Soviet type tower block apartment houses, structures in which pantries or other areas for food storage were coincidentally not contained, thereby leaving families without enough space for amassing a larger store of foodstuffs. After food, the second most important aim for urban households was to amass a sufficient supply of heating fuel, coal, or wood in time for winter. Since most homes did not have central or gas

¹⁶ "Jelentés a Gazdasági Bizottság részére a lakossági áruellátás eddigi tapasztalatairól és várható alakulásáról," MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 4.d., September 11, 1969.

¹⁷ The various main offices and directorates responsible for supervising different areas that fell under the ministry of internal trade's direction had to evaluate the traffic of goods and developments in supply every quarterly period. These reports regularly provided details concerning goods or types of wares whose supply, as the official jargon stated, "cannot be ensured without difficulties." These documents contained relatively lengthy lists of items that belonged to this category even at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

heating and were kept warm via coal-, oil-, or wood-burning stoves, the sporadic supply of these resources similarly represented a justifiable cause for concern.

Best described as a situation of “plentiful privation,” yet another side effect of the backward nature of Hungary’s commercial system was the decades-long custom of shopping for food on a daily basis. Outside of trying to purchase tropical fruit or some other type of exclusive item that was hard to find, by the 1980s the need to stand for hours in endless lines had gradually faded away into distant memory. In contrast to East Germany, the habit of holding a direct sale of goods at workplaces—and thereby adding another mechanism toward solving the issue of supply—played a far smaller role in skirting commercial businesses in Hungary; it must not, however, be forgotten that a workplace’s support was generally necessary when buying an automobile or home.¹⁸ As regarded trade, while the system of having separate stores which were only open to state or Party leaders came to an end after the 1956 Revolution, years later a network of foreign currency shops was set up to sell items that were chronically absent from shop shelves (jeans, salami, electronic items used for entertainment) and sold at higher prices and only for American dollars, German marks, or British pounds at a time when foreign currency was remarkably difficult for the average person to procure. The only people who could regularly shop at places like these were either regularly assigned to work at foreign locations or were willing to undertake the risk of purchasing a significant amount of foreign currency on the black market. In the case of apparel or non-perishable consumer goods, gaining access to an item that was “all the rage” acted to soothe the strong impulse to acquire something “no matter what” and therefore represented a strong motivation for why such an effort would be made to purchase a cassette player or a stick of salami.

¹⁸ During the state socialist era, the sale of homes and automobiles in Hungary was not done based on a market system. Instead, a state-regulated distribution system determined access to these products. In both cases consumers had to hand in an application which was put on a list; the order and the waiting period for receiving a home or apartment was influenced by the type of recommendation the applicant had gotten from his or her workplace. These recommendations were issued by the Communist Party organization that operated at the given workplace. In the case of cars, a political recommendation was necessary for bypassing the waitlist. Perspective homeowners could apply for a loan from their workplaces which was usually interest free. Auto loans were not available.

In Hungary, the growing trend of shopping tourism acted as one of the most typical means of acquiring goods that were either difficult to find or only available in poor quality. As traveling restrictions eased, most travelers did their best to turn the opportunities that travel entailed to their own economic advantage. Constantly subject to change, the list of countries deemed best for “stocking up” was headed by Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, turned to Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1970s, and was eventually taken over by Austria toward the end of this decade. Trips to Romania or the Soviet Union also held the promise of serious revenue once travelers managed to exchange items that were more commonly found in Hungary—but unavailable in the destination country—for those that could not be bought at home.

When examining how consumer attitudes and habits changed throughout the given historical period—based on the results of a statistical analysis made in 1957—the conclusion was drawn that “as regards the composition of consumer consumption, a sharp line existed between urban and rural populations. Partially due to the given circumstances, the nature of their needs, or a contrast in demands, these differences proved the already well-known fact that rural populations were living in more backward circumstances compared to urban families.”¹⁹ Throughout the following decades, the disparities among social groups and types of location progressively faded.

The analysis of household expenditures reveals that the percentage of income turned toward the purchase of non-perishables grew more quickly than all other types of personal expenditures between 1960 and 1975.²⁰ Within this period, the growth rate was at its highest in the second half of the 1960s, when consumer supply gradually expanded parallel to the increase of real income. Compared to cities, the usage of non-perishable foodstuffs spread more slowly in villages; based on profession, white-collar employees were the primary consumers of canned goods, followed by working-class families. Hungary’s agricultural labor force was the last to procure these “fad” items.

¹⁹ *Munkás-, alkalmazotti és parasztcsaládok jövedelme és fogyasztása 1957-ben (4000 család háztartási feljegyzései alapján)*, Statisztikai időszaki közlemények, no. 22 (Budapest: KSH, 1959), 78.

²⁰ *Életszínvonal 1960–1980*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 488 (Budapest: KSH, 1981), 108.

The consumer habits of Hungary's rural peasant population were fundamentally changed by collectivization.²¹ At the start of the campaign to collectivize privately owned land and farming equipment a significant number of peasant-class families strove to set aside enough money and grain to "tide them over" throughout the hard, lean years that were expected to follow this loss of property. Quite understandably, beginning in 1959 the percentage of money put toward agricultural investments (such as machinery, ploughs, drayhorses) fell; the sums that were subsequently freed up went to savings or were spent. Other than not needing to invest in supplies, rural families received further financial security in the form of compensation given for equipment placed under the aegis of the collective farm, land annuities, or the decrease (or abrogation) of taxes or tax debt that was issued those who joined the collective farm. As rural inhabitants quickly discovered in the first half of the 1960s, the disorganized nature of collective farming and the low level of profitability it entailed justified the accumulation of financial reserves. For a large portion of rural families, their level of consumption and standard of living underwent enormous and predominantly positive changes from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. The underlying reason for this was mainly their successful implementation of adaptive strategies that enabled them to survive the nation's changed social and political circumstances. Some of these strategies included the development of mixed households or the intensive usage of household plots or other forms of supplemental agriculture. While the fact cannot be denied that employing these adaptive strategies placed an enormous burden on rural populations, it was still thanks to these methods that they were able to improve their social situation, and often in opposition to the current political atmosphere.

Consumerist attitudes essentially underwent continuous change throughout this period. From time to time one "top hit" item was exchanged for another. Consumption was naturally influenced by differences in living circumstances, an individual's profession or workplace,

²¹ For more details, see Tibor Valuch, "Változó idők, változó szokások: A tevékenység-szerkezet, a jövedelem és a fogyasztás átalakulása a magyar falvakban a kollektivizálás időszakában," in *Magyar évszázadok: Tanulmányok Kosáry Domokos 90. születésnapjára*, ed. Mária Ormos (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2003), 311–23. For a comparative examination of collectivization in Hungary versus Eastern and Central Europe, see Constantin Iordachi and Arnd Bauerkämper, eds., *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and Entanglements* (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2014).

and the family's place of residence and household arrangements. These factors determined the priorities regarding whether a tool or a consumer good that would raise a home's level of comfort would be bought.

As the number of consumer goods dynamically expanded throughout the decades following World War II, the structure of consumption also changed. Other than the ways in which consumerism transformed, changes in lifestyle were also influenced by the fact that electricity usage became widespread in Hungary after 1948. In 1960, for most Hungarian households owning a bicycle and a radio represented the entire extent of a family's non-perishable consumer goods; few people had automobiles and owning household appliances—such as washing machines, vacuums, refrigerators, hot water boilers, or televisions—was not typical. Throughout this decade gaining access to the items listed above became one of the most important acquisition goals to have, an aim that was obviously connected to the growing trend toward modernizing households. As living circumstances changed, the demand for various home furnishings and equipment (furniture, gas stoves, oil heaters, gas convectors) obviously increased accordingly.

In Hungary household appliances made their first appearance at the end of the 1950s; even though they began to be mass manufactured at the beginning of the 1960s, the rocketing demand for items such as these outstripped the available supply for decades. In 1973, the households of white-collar employees or civil servants averaged four household appliances; working class homes had three while double-income or peasant-class households regularly had only two. As to what items were obtained first, washing machines or refrigerators usually held first and second place in the list, with vacuum cleaners coming in third and spin dryers holding fourth place. Television sets—initially black-and-white, followed by color TVs—became symbols of status and prestige consumption. Since Hungarian households often made superhuman sacrifices in order to procure these items, the differences in the facilities found among various social groups steadily decreased. During the period under examination, the purchase of private automobiles grew the most dynamically among private investments. The extent to which material wealth grew is best shown by the fact that between 1960 and 1974 the percent value of durable goods set aside by Hungarian households compared to national wealth more than doubled in worth, from 73.3 billion to 180 billion forints. The dynamic growth of this trend slowed during the following decade.

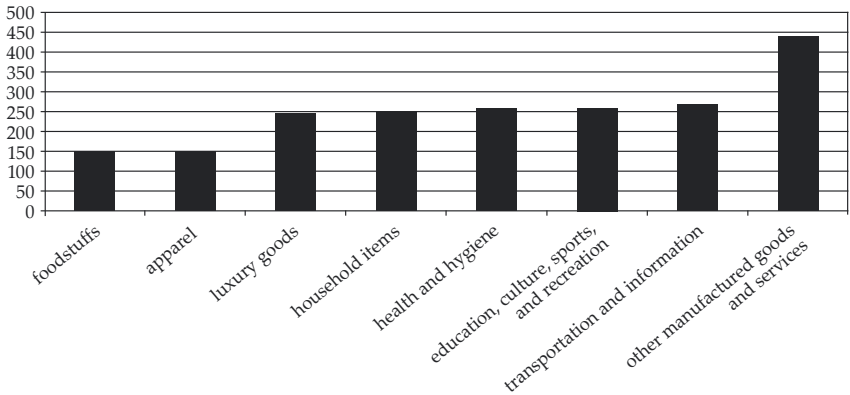


Figure 8. Changes in the structure of private consumption from 1960 to 1980 (in percentage, 1960=100 percent). Source: *Életszírvonal 1960–1980*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 488 (Budapest: KSH, 1981).

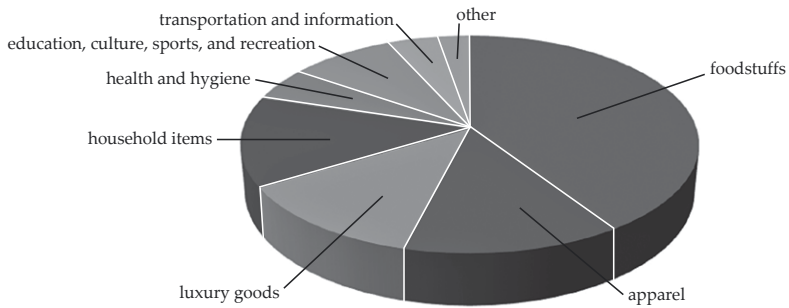


Figure 9. Structure of consumption in 1960. Source: *Életszírvonal 1960–1980*.

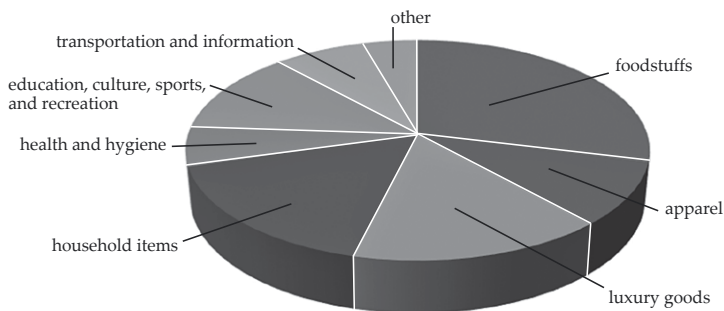


Figure 10. Structure of consumption in 1980. Source: *Életszírvonal 1960–1980*.

As regards the makeup of purchases, the percentage of money spent on foodstuffs continued to play a determining role. In 1960, out of the entire household budget for Hungarian families, 40.5 percent was earmarked for groceries; in 1967, this figure fell to 36. Between 11 percent and 12 percent was put toward luxury items, a percentage that essentially remained unchanged between 1960 and 1967. The same ratio and trend were also true of apparel. The 3.6 percent that Hungarian households spent on non-perishable consumer goods rose to 5.5 percent while between 9 percent and 10 percent of income was dedicated to obtaining other types of manufactured goods. Between 21 percent and 23 percent of household budgets went toward the procurement of other services.²² With the exception of the most impoverished, in the 1980s the percent of costs spent on foodstuffs continued to lessen, as did the amount put toward apparel. In contrast, the percentage of household costs spent on home construction, motorized transportation, and durable consumer goods rose significantly. The period that followed the end of state socialism was characterized by a general decrease in consumption, except for within social groups belonging to the upper echelons of society.

Between 1955 and 1975 the money invested in private transportation increased tenfold, a factor that obviously impacted the more distinct separation between the workplace and home, the mass spread of commuting, and the motorized mobilization of the general population. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the rate of private consumption revealed that the costs for upkeep and maintaining a household more than doubled. This fact alone demonstrates that households had a truly significant impact on Hungary's economic situation during the postwar decades. Beyond this function, given what is known about economic circumstances during this era, it can justifiably be stated that the range of "somewhat" legal or entirely illegal means used to supplement personal incomes was partially conducted within the framework of private households. At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, Hungary's households displayed an intensifying affinity for easing the burden of housework by either modernizing their household facilities or relying more heavily on other services. This change obviously demanded that the reorganization of state and privately-owned service sectors begin functioning after

²² *A lakosság jövedelme és fogyasztása 1966–1967*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 130 (Budapest: KSH, 1968), 48–53.

the process of nationalization that took place in the 1940s effectively smashed small industry and trade to pieces. Similarly, the everyday role played by the services made possible via Hungary's hidden economy must not be underestimated.

According to analyses of household statistics, from 1965 to 1973 the investment goals for Hungarian households (dependent on the extent of disposable income) took the following order of importance: construction of an apartment or home, home furnishings, personal vehicle, a holiday or weekend getaway house, or the purchase of a plot of land. Between 1965 and 1973 the ratio of funds spent on furnishings decreased in the households of white-collar employees, a trend that is explained by the fact that the families within this category enjoyed the highest level of living conditions and were therefore far better equipped than average. In this respect the rate of growth for working-class households had noticeably slowed while double-income and peasant households were earmarking a growing percentage of their budgets to home construction. The increase in construction was naturally paralleled by increased amounts being put toward the purchase of furniture since new or refurbished homes brought with them a more modern lifestyle that necessitated newer and more fashionable furnishings and fixtures that followed urban styles.

It goes without saying that the dynamic spread of automobilization also exerted a huge impact on changes in lifestyle. Despite the progressive rise in car maintenance costs, as owning and using a personal vehicle became widespread, it became possible to commute farther afield to work on a daily basis or transport produce and products that were the "fruit" of supplementary farming activities to markets.

In 1938, an average of 2.3 automobiles were owned for every one thousand people, a statistic that demonstrates how very far behind the process of motorization in Hungary was in comparison to the European average at the time.²³ The destruction wreaked by World War II only made the situation worse; in short, motorization's modernizing impact was stalled for a time.²⁴ In 1950, the supply of personal

²³ In 1940, the number of cars per 1,000 inhabitants was 43 in the United Kingdom, 46 in France, 11 in the Netherlands, and 20 in Germany. See Béla Tomka, *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2013), 235.

²⁴ For the history of automobiles in Hungary, see György Majtényi, "Életstílus és szubkultúra: Az autózás története 1920–1960," *Korall* 1 (2000): 101–18; Orsolya Karlaki, "Autó-mobil? Személygépkocsi-használat a Kádár-korszakban," *Múltunk* 3 (2008): 84–97. For a history of transportation and its role in society and economics, see the

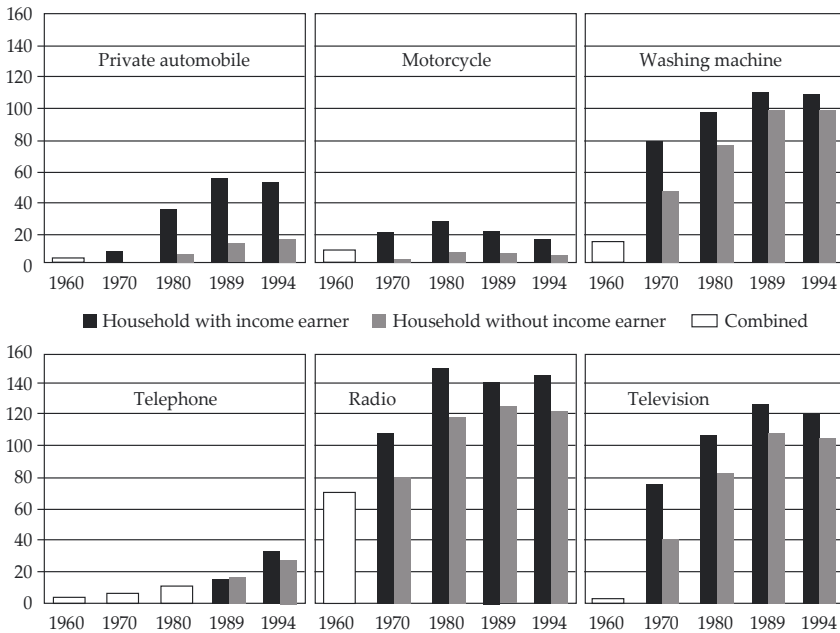


Figure 11. Availability of selected appliances in Hungarian households from 1960 to 1994 (number per 100 households). Source: *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága: múlt és jelen* (Budapest: KSH, 1996).

automobiles in Hungary stood at 13,054 vehicles; in 1960, this figure had risen to 31,268. In 1970, the number of vehicles had grown to 238,563 and reached 1,013,412 in 1980. More than two million automobiles traversed Hungary's roads in 1991; between 2000 and 2005 the number of cars in use grew by half a million. By the end of 2005 a total of nearly 2,889,000 automobiles were to be found, while in 2010 there were 3,013,000 vehicles in use.²⁵

special edition on this topic published in 2013 (vol. 14, number 52) by the journal *Korall*, with special attention to the studies written by Zsombor Bódy, Péter Kalocsai, and Gergely Molnár. For a comparative analysis of the role possessed by cars in state socialist states, see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); and Siegelbaum, ed., *The Socialist Car: Automobility in the Eastern Bloc* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

²⁵ *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv 2005* (Budapest: KSH, 2006); *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv 2010* (Budapest: KSH, 2011).



Figure 12. Advertisement for the East German small car Trabant, 1960s (photo by Irén Ács, MNM TF, 93.176)

Until the mid-sixties the supply of vehicles increased steadily and averaged ten thousand to fifteen thousand automobiles a year; from this time onward, this trend steadily sped up until it hit the number of eighty thousand vehicles per year in the mid-seventies. Beginning at the end of the 1980s, a revival in the import of used vehicles from Western Europe is observable, followed by a slight decrease in the 1990s. As of the turn of the millennium the amount of trade done by car salons was steadily increasing, reaching a turnover of more than one-quarter of a million vehicles in 2006. The automobile trade plummeted in 2008 as a consequence of the economic depression that swept the globe; at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the yearly sale of new cars fell by thirty to forty thousand vehicles.

Cars continued to hold on to their status and role as prestige symbols.²⁶ For certain social groups, access to a personal automobile was not only determined by financial circumstances but also by their different lifestyle needs regarding car usage. The differences between consumer goals and the financial situation of given social groups is best demonstrated by the fact that in 1976 seventeen vehicles per one hundred working-class households were registered, in comparison to thirty-seven per one hundred white-collar households and 12.5 vehicles for every one hundred households that were employed in agriculture. Other than representing an opportunity for accumulating value and thereby fulfilling "investment" goals, automobiles supplemented the available transportation options while additionally enabling their owners to devote more time to free-time activities, a fact that is supported by the increase in national tourism. Beyond these usages, car owners naturally used this method for traveling to work.²⁷ Among high-value consumer items, the situation regarding "trade" in automobiles or the supply of vehicles was peculiar, to say the least. Buying or selling automobiles occurred on two levels: state-owned enterprises held the exclusive right to put new cars into circulation, following the regulations stipulated by the mandatory pre-payment and waitlist system. This meant that potential customers had to pay anywhere from 20 percent to 50 or even 100 percent of the asking

²⁶ For further discussion on this issue, see Karlaki, "Autó-mobil? Személygépkocsi-használat a Kádár-korszakban," 84–97.

²⁷ Iván Koltai, "A lakossági rétegek szabad rendelkezésű jövedelme és felhasználása," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 7 (1976): 23–27.

price years ahead of actually receiving their car and without any hope that these sums would bring them any type of interest. In contrast to new automobiles, the sale of used cars essentially took place almost exclusively on the free market. Purchasing a vehicle during the 1960s and 1970s in Hungary was technically no easy task, not to mention the fact that the relatively high price of cars (at the end of the 1960s a new car cost between seventy and eighty thousand forints, which was roughly three times the average yearly salary) put an incredible strain on household budgets. To make matters worse, throughout the seventies and eighties used cars frequently cost more than new ones due to society's unsatisfied demand for cars. The growth of motorization transformed not only investment targets but also consumer attitudes and habits, as the expenses related to the operation and maintenance of cars (including fuel, repairs, parts, and upkeep) emerged as a new category in household expenditures. It was around the end of state socialism when the selling and repairing of cars evolved into a genuine trade and repair system consisting of features such as manufacturer dealerships and service stations.

Throughout the various "epochs" that characterized consumerism in Hungary, new items continuously appeared on the market. In the category of foodstuffs, this meant the spread of pre-prepared frozen food and canned goods; in the area of electronics, a growing number of devices appeared in relation to communications. In the 1970s even though the selection of wares was further enhanced by the presence of "hard currency" import items, the supply of these goods was never sufficient to satisfy consumer demand. Beginning in the early 1960s, the concept of self-assisted service spread throughout every branch of trade as a network of stores offering a wide range of goods (and therefore dubbed "ABC" stores) popped up around the country, but primarily in urban centers. As of the beginning of the 1970s, the number of packaged goods rose significantly as flour, sugar, rice, oil, and vinegar appeared in pre-packaged form on shop shelves. Previously sold by the liter from cooling tanks or in glass bottles, the phenomenon of "bagged milk" (*zacskós tej*) made its appearance, together with other pre-packaged dairy foods.²⁸ Although the quality of various

²⁸ Unlike other countries, milk in Hungary could be bought in plastic one-liter or half-liter pouches. Until fairly recently, "bagged milk" was virtually the only way in which fresh milk could be purchased as milk cartons were primarily used for shelf-stable ultra-pasteurized (UHT) milk. Before fresh milk became available in

goods that were put into circulation was frequently objectionable even in the 1970s, in the case of foodstuffs the application of modern production methods gradually increased the shelf life of products; the appearance of chest freezers in households added to the transformation of consumer attitudes beginning at the end of the seventies.

As this examination of consumerism and its related issues continues, it must not be forgotten that amassing a supply of goods was not viewed as an acceptable activity during the state socialist era. An excerpt taken from one of János Kádár's speeches given at the end of the 1960s provides an adequate example of the official viewpoint regarding consumerism: "We approve if someone saves money earned through honest labor and then uses it to travel, build a home, or buy himself a television, refrigerator, motorcycle, car, or anything else for that matter. But we don't approve if anyone's views becomes so distorted that the drive to acquire and gather and collect things like a hamster replaces life's meaning as the human joy of putting in an honest day's work and enjoying the respect that follows."²⁹

As regards the consumer attitudes exhibited by various groups in Hungarian society during the Kádár era, both rational and irrational elements were present simultaneously. An example of rationality can be found, for example, in the search for inexpensive sources of procurement or the development of strategies used to combat shortages. A sense of irrationality was displayed in the way incomes were invested; one example of this is the nation-wide trend of constructing grandiose, expensive funeral vaults long before they were needed, a tendency that first appeared in the late 1970s. The way certain consumer goods came to represent social status demonstrates another instance of irrationality.

As Hungarian society shifted from a state socialist to a democratic system, the composition and structure of household consumption changed. The proportion of funds dedicated to stockpiling or investing in resources understandably decreased in the face of growing living costs. With the exception of the well-to-do and the social elite, consumer consumption generally fell during the years that marked

plastic bottles or cartons, the *tejtartó* (milk holder) was an essential piece of equipment in Hungarian kitchens; once a corner of the plastic pouch had been cut open, the only way to pour milk (without spilling it) from the pouch was to place it in a plastic container that held the pouch as the milk was being poured.

²⁹ János Kádár, *Hazaifiság és internacionalizmus* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1968), 83.

this process of political transformation. Between 1987 and 1997 the percentage of average household budgets put toward food expenses rose slightly while the sum spent on housing costs and utilities practically doubled. Together, these two categories took up more than half of household budgets in the mid-nineties. Similarly, the amounts spent on non-perishables, home construction or renovation, and real estate decreased to half of what they had previously been and only started to rise again at the beginning of the new millennium.

While the total sum of private savings grew overall, in the early 1990s households exhibited a highly reduced ability to put some of their income into savings. From 1986 to 1993, the percentage of households able to set aside some of their current income plummeted from 70 percent to 30 percent.³⁰ To offer an excellent indication of the decrease in household investment, 1986 saw the private construction of 61,800 homes while only 20,500 were built in 1993. By the time of the new millennium, the situation had changed as both incomes and consumption showed a strong upward trend. As of 2007, however, measures that were taken with the intent of improving the market's balance combined with the global economic crisis brought about an average decrease of 7.8 percent in actual consumption by Hungarian households. The crisis also led to an increase in unemployment and basic living costs which consequently resulted in a decrease in consumer consumption and further transformations in consumer habits.

Compared to the turn of the new millennium, household expenditures for individual consumption nearly doubled during the first decade of the twenty-first century while consumer prices rose by a total of 73.4 percent. Consumer mechanisms once again underwent considerable transformations; in compliance with international trends, expenditures for food and clothing also fell compared to 2000. In 2009, the total yearly household expenditures for food equaled 2,457,000 forints, thereby representing a 6.8 percent decrease in real value compared to the previous year.

Following the 2.6 percent fall in real value that occurred in 2009, the small trade turnover of foodstuffs (representing nearly one-fourth of trade) grew in real value by 1.1 percent. Expenditures for spirits, alcohol, and tobacco products continued to increase in 2009 and eventually rose above 10 percent. The percentage of income spent

³⁰ Data in this and the following paragraphs are based on *Magyarország 1989–2009: A változások tükrében* (Budapest: KSH, 2010).

on housing costs and utilities rose from year to year; by 2009, this category represented the largest expenditure in household budgets, meaning that families were putting one-fourth of their monthly income toward housing. As the cost of natural gas continued to climb, a growing share of energy expenditures were spent on less expensive heating materials, such as wood or coal.

The year 2009 also marked a decrease in money spent on transportation and communication, while the percentage of expenditures for health costs remained stable. Households devoted a similar percentage of their income to eating at restaurants or frequenting tourist lodgings compared to the previous year. The price level of household energy grew to the greatest extent (almost by one-third) compared to 2007. The consumer price for piped natural gas increased by 57 percent while electricity rose only 26 percent. These price hikes were followed by a 23 percent surge in costs for alcohol and tobacco products. An important factor underlying the fifteen-percent surge in the price for other types of fuel or gasoline was that fuel prices had risen by one-fourth during a three-year period. In the wake of the 2008 economic crisis the cost of foodstuffs was nearly one-fifth higher than previously. The composition of per capita yearly consumer expenditures displayed great variation depending on the type of income group under examination. As is well known, the living conditions for low-income individuals are largely influenced by how much expendable income remains after daily costs have been covered; while nearly one-third of the costs spent by those in the lowest income bracket was spent on foodstuffs and non-alcoholic beverages, those in the highest income bracket devoted only 18 percent of their budgets to the same category. A similar tendency can be seen in reference to utilities and housing expenses. Similarly, households belonging to the highest income bracket spent the majority of their income on transportation, communication costs, health, and a range of cultural activities. The fact that low-income households devoted a higher proportion of their budgets to housing expenses and groceries rendered them far more vulnerable to the effects of inflation brought about by increasing prices in food and energy.

The corner store, the supermarket, and the shopping center: Changes in the locations of consumer consumption

The places where consumption occurred also impacted how consumer attitudes changed in Hungary. In the late 1930s the average Hungarian customer procured all of the most essential foodstuffs and products at the local grocery or general goods store. Both large- and small-scale privately-owned trade operated either independently or in networks that were separated according to specific categories of merchandise. Independent department stores operated by generations of merchant families also existed and either sold their wares in a given town or were able to keep the entire nation supplied in one product or type of products. Modern department stores run by large-scale mercantile businessmen were primarily located in the capital city and less frequently found in larger cities outside of Budapest. It was quite customary for smaller specialized shops operating as family businesses to sell certain types of merchandise. When private property was nationalized during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Hungary's commerce system was completely transformed "in the name of the battle against exploitation," as the official jargon went.³¹ It was quite common for even a village general store run by one person to be seized by the state, then later shut down because its operation had proved economically infeasible. From practically one day to the next the local corner grocer's or the only general store found in the area ceased to exist.

Under state socialism department stores were categorized as large-scale retail operations, meaning that their "fundamental task is to provide a variety and wide selection of goods offered to customers in a professional, cultured, and time-efficient way. Customers must simultaneously be ensured that a wide range of services are put at their disposal."³² As far as daily life in the 1950s was concerned, this concept essentially failed to be realized. In the decade after nationalization, the maintenance and renovation of the country's larger shops or department stores was generally postponed, thereby resulting in the widespread need to conduct major renovations of most Hungarian

³¹ For a discussion on this issue, see György Majtényi and Zoltán Szatucsek, "A kis-kereskedelem és a kisipar államosítása," *História*, no. 1 (2004): 21–25.

³² "Az áruházi kereskedelem fejlesztése: Előterjesztés a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiumához; Szigorúan Titkos! Tük. 002/291959," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-yy. 83. d., February 28, 1959.



Figure 13. Interior of a vegetable, spice, and grocery store in Budapest in the 1930s (MNM TF, 2773.1962fk)



Figure 14. The world of canned food—a shop interior in Dombóvár, 1954 (Fortepan, 14051, Erky-Nagy Tibor)

department stores from both a structural and technical point of view at the end of the 1950s. With a few exceptions, these state-operated department stores could hardly be accused of tempting customers to shop. Established in 1948, the most well-known business chain during the period, the Állami Áruházak Vállalat (State Department Store Enterprise), expanded to include thirteen branch enterprises just one year after first opening, a circumstance that owed much to the fact that the wave of nationalization had hit small-scale businesses. The number of shops in this chain continued to grow; in 1963, when the enterprise's name was changed to Centrum Áruház (Centrum Department Store), the chain consisted of thirty-five branch locations. Between 1957 and 1959 a total of one new department store was opened in the entire country. In 1959, twenty-three independent department store firms operated thirty-three enterprises. During the 1960s, the ministry of internal trade decided to accelerate the construction of department stores and determined that between three and five thousand square meters of space could be allotted for the actual selling of wares. In the end, however, the establishment of large-scale department store chains only took place in the 1970s. At this time state- or collective-owned departments stores attempted to keep up with Western European developments in virtually every major county seat throughout Hungary.

Other than larger department stores offering different categories of goods, a few businesses that specialized in selling one or another type of exclusive product could be found in the 1960s. Precisely this kind of shopping experience was provided by the Luxus Áruház (Luxury Department Store) when it finally opened its doors in November 1963 on Vörösmarty Square in Budapest following a lengthy period of renovation. According to press reports from the time, tens of thousands of shoppers flocked to this department store in the initial days and weeks after its opening.³³ Considered one of Hungary's most exclusive department stores for decades, the Luxus closed its doors in the early years of the new millennium; after the building had once more been remodeled, it was sold to the global brand Bershka, and is currently one of this company's Budapest locations.

For years the department stores found on Rákóczi Avenue in Budapest represented the most elegant and well-supplied shopping locations and were frequented by rural and Budapest residents alike.

³³ Among other sources see *Kirakat*, no. 12 (1963): 5.

In most county seats Centrum Department Stores remained the most important and largest mercantile establishments throughout the 1970s. This “monopoly” was gradually broken by “modern and up-to-date large department stores” that were built in large county centers. It is no exaggeration to state that the Nyírfa (Birch) and Kelet (East) Department Stores in Nyíregyháza, the Unió (Union) Department Store in Debrecen, the Fényes (Lustrous) Department Store in Tata, or the Vértés Department Store in Tatabánya played a significant role in transforming and spreading new consumer attitudes and shopping habits. Opened in 1976 in Budapest, the Skála Budapest Nagyáruház (Skála Budapest Large Department Store) boasted both the largest floor-space and turnover of any department store in Hungary.³⁴ A few years later the Skála Metró Áruház (Skála Metro Department Store) was opened on Marx Square, today known as Nyugati Square. The head of the consumer collective responsible for operating these department stores, Sándor Demján, took great pride and pleasure in showing the new establishments to political leaders, including János



Figure 15. The market at Fehérvári út in Budapest, with the department store Skála Áruház in the background, 1982 (Fortepan, 22505, Magyar Rendőr)

³⁴ This department store was closed and demolished in 2007, when the Allee Shopping Center was constructed in its place.

Kádár himself.³⁵ Refashioning Hungary's retail network can be viewed as an attempt to meet the demands and requirements of a "quasi consumer society." While Hungarians had options as to where they could shop as of the 1970s, the available supply of goods remained far from perfect.

Large international companies only began to make an appearance in Hungary in the 1980s. One indication of this ambition can be found in the agreement made in October 1982 for the manufacture and sale of products bearing the Pierre Cardin brand in Hungary. One year later, in 1983, the first brand-name boutique selling these products opened its doors at 8 Tanács Avenue (known as Károly Avenue today). After establishing its first shop in 1986 in the Skála Metro Department Store, Benetton quickly spread to other locations. Shops proffering exclusive apparel items (such as the S-modell, or Model S, chain) also appeared. In 1983, Fontana Divatház (Fontana House of Fashion) attracted customers in Budapest's most expensive street, Váci Street, where prices very rarely approached anything resembling affordability for the average Hungarian. In short, the modernization and transformation of shopping locations occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s, but underwent a radical shift starting in the 1990s with the appearance of multinational commercial chains and the construction of shopping center networks.

From 1950 to 1990 retail was typified by a peculiar dichotomy caused by the lingering presence of the "old school" mercantile attitude of serving the customer's needs first at any cost that appeared with increasing rarity alongside the forms of behavior and work ethic of employees accustomed to the state socialist "large-scale production" style of commerce, in which the customer was often viewed as an "unavoidable evil" at best. Shopping within the atmosphere created by the latter approach could often be an unpleasant experience. When dissatisfied with the level of service, customers would have their complaints registered in the "complaint book," but these notations only rarely resulted in any consequence of a more serious type. Retail employees had to deal with the ongoing pressure caused by supply shortages while simultaneously handling a growing number of consumer demands. Meanwhile, vendors tried to find and

³⁵ Already a successful and influential economic leader during the Kádár era, Sándor Demján (1943–2018) became a large-scale businessman after the fall of communism in 1989 and became one of the wealthiest men in Hungary.

implement the legal and illegal techniques that would allow them to supplement their already low wages. The opportunities for doing so were manifold, including tactics such as shorting customers when weighing goods, falsifying inventory, or selling hard-to-find products "under the counter."

The combined forces of shortages and ideology frequently led to truly odd contradictions in shops. In the 1950s and 1960s shop windows commonly remained empty while inside banners and posters adorned the walls with Party slogans. Particularly in the early fifties, models made of painted paper or wood stood in place of unavailable items such as kinds of meat or ham. Other than (or instead of) goods, shop windows were regularly filled with the "latest" ideological propaganda for state or Party events. During the 1970s, the outer appearance of shops progressively changed as electronic signs and ads began to spread. Shop interiors, however, evolved much more gradually: in the late sixties and early seventies it was still quite common for customers to be served in retail spaces that originated from the interwar period. By the end of the twentieth century the emergence of self-service and retail radically transformed and modernized the spaces where shopping took place.

For decades items of apparel could only be bought in separate store chains that sold certain categories of products; customers had to go to different businesses to buy children's clothes, fashion items, or haberdashery goods. As a report by the ministry of internal trade noted,

Furnishing the population with a better supply of goods requires the establishment of retail shops in larger towns or county seats such as, for example, retail shops for fine ready-to-wear garments, better-quality ready-made attire, or specially-sized menswear, with names such as "Model House," "Men's Undergarments," "Women's Lingerie Model Salon," "Nylon Stockings," or "Shoe Salon," which are different not only in their exterior appearance but also offer a better selection of goods compared to the shops currently operating in retail. By creating such retail units, the monotony that typifies shop windows and the choice of goods will be no more: providing the population with a better, wider variety of goods will become possible and turnover will increase. . . . The "Model House" (4 Felszabadulás Square) store deals in fashioning truly good-quality women's ready-made apparel. Since its opening this shop has tripled its level of trade.³⁶

³⁶ "Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Főigazgatóságának jelentése," MNL OL, BKM iratai., XIX-G-4-zz. 120. d., March 1956.

The spring of 1957 saw the launching of a new salon run by the Artisans' Apparel Cooperative in Budapest which quickly became known, according to a fashion magazine's report, as "one of the loveliest clothing stores in Budapest." The article also reported that the opening of the apparel manufacturing cooperative—which produced four types of fine ready-made wear—in a shop located on the corner of Váci Street and Kristóf Square generated great interest. This was shown by the constant, lengthy line of shoppers standing in front of it, all due to the broad array of goods and favorable prices.³⁷ Later on even the magazine *Nők Lapja* wrote about the shop in detail:

Early morning in Váci Street. At least fifty customers are already standing in front of a shuttered shop door. No, neither lemons, bananas, any other rare delicacy, nor even cellophane is being offered here. Ready-made clothes are for sale: the type which are not too expensive, very lovely, and only twenty are made of each model. Women are already standing here at 7:30 in the morning, even though the store operated by the Artisans' Apparel Cooperative on Váci Street only opens its doors at 10 a.m. Women snatch the clothes right out of one another's hands and buy up the silk poplin shirtwaist dress being sold for 600 forints as if it were free. And it's not as if we are talking about fashion queens or women and girls with large incomes at their disposal.³⁸

As of the early sixties, this business continued to operate under the name of Párizsi Divatszalon (Parisian House of Fashion).

In the retail of foodstuffs, small, privately-owned groceries were mainly replaced by so called People's Stores (*Népbolt*) in villages. Some of the grocery stores found in Budapest and larger cities around Hungary belonged to the KÖZÉRT enterprise (Községi Élelmiszerkereskedelmi Részvénytársaság, i.e., Municipal Food Trading Company) while the rest—beginning in the 1960s—were run by county small-trade grocery companies. A new form of retail that began spreading throughout the country in the early sixties, the concept of self-service influenced every branch of commerce. Beginning in 1964, retail units known as ABC stores which offered general supplies opened one after another, primarily in cities. In contrast to the retail customs of the period, this type of business provided virtually every kind of item (such as foodstuffs, cleaning supplies, and smaller

³⁷ *Ez a Divat*, April 1957, 4.

³⁸ *Nők Lapja*, July 11, 1957, 11.



Figure 16. The modern shop in the seventies: the local ABC store in Sátoraljaújhely in 1975 (Fortepan, 4332, Tibor Kádas)

manufactured goods) essential for daily life in one retail space.³⁹ With the exception of meat and meat products, customers could select items themselves from the shelves of an ABC store.

As the spread of ABC stores progressively changed the traditional retail system of selling products in specialized shops (such as a butcher shop, bakery, or dairy shop), the latter gradually fell out of fashion and most had been forced to close their doors by the end of the 1980s. Other than these grocery stores, farmers' markets played an essential role in supplying urban households with fruit, vegetables, and "farm-produced" or "homemade" milk, sour cream, dairy products, or poultry. Market sellers usually relied on a stable clientele who faithfully sought out their favorite "milk lady" or vegetable seller whose wares ensured a reliable level of quality.

As far as manufactured goods were concerned, the main categories of items—furniture, household appliances, sporting equipment, toys—were sold by separate retail chains that operated for decades

³⁹ Before the spread of self-service businesses, customers stood in line at the counter and asked a shop assistant for the items they wished to purchase.

and eventually came to represent their own brand of a sort. Household appliances were available at KERAVILL shops (See Figure 24) while sporting equipment and toys were found in TRIÁL stores. Cordwood and construction materials could be purchased at TŰZÉP lumberyards. Small manufactured goods or tobacco products (such as Terv, Fecske, Kossuth, Munkás, or Sophiane cigarettes) were mainly available in the popular form of privately owned or officially leased tobacconist's, bazaars, or tobacco stores.⁴⁰

Throughout the Kádár era gaping differences could be found regarding the supply in consumer goods that were available for urban versus rural residents. The entire retail infrastructure of villages primarily consisted of one grocery store and a pub or a bar. In the seventies it was relatively common to find an ABC store in larger villages; despite this improvement, rural residents generally had to devote far more time and energy to procuring items they needed. In many cases, some products could only be found in the largest town in the vicinity.

Other important shopping sites were sought out just across the border, in shops located in Hungary's neighboring countries, or the "Comecon markets" (commonly also referred to as "Polish markets" beginning in the 1970s, due to the fact that many of the sellers were from Poland) found either across the border, or locally, at flea markets held in the nation's large cities.⁴¹ Throughout this never-ending process of swapping items (done without a license as a part of black market trade) Hungarians who traveled within the Soviet bloc eagerly made the return trip loaded down with shoes and sportswear from Czechoslovakia, cosmetics from Poland, dress material and silk from Bulgaria, ready-made clothing (originally manufactured for Westerners, but anything left over could be bought on the sly) from

⁴⁰ State-owned shops or other types of food service facilities were leased to private citizens; other than having to pay the lease, additional profit goals were also prescribed.

⁴¹ Sites of informal private trade, "Comecon markets" were the places where the citizens of Eastern and Central European nations could sell various consumer goods (including everything from auto parts to alcohol or clothing) at prices that were lower than those in official shops. The profits garnered from this type of trade were usually put toward purchasing items that were shortage goods and could therefore be sold at great profit back home. For further details, see Endre Sík, "A kgst-piachely a mai Magyarországon," *Közgazdasági Szemle* 44 (April 1997): 322–38. For further information regarding informal trade connections between Hungary and Poland during the 1970s and 1980s, see Jerzy Kochanowski, *Jenseits der Planwirtschaft: Der Schwarzmarkt in Polen 1944–1989* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013).

Romania, or brand-name goods such as jeans or Cezar cognac from Yugoslavia, envied as the one “practically Western” country found behind the Iron Curtain. As regarded clothing items, foreigners who traveled to Hungary primarily brought men’s shirts, men’s or women’s ready-made undergarments, leather coats, household textiles, jeans, and sportswear items. Virtually anything could be found at these types of markets, from a wide variety of foodstuffs to auto parts, power, and hand tools, or even color televisions. Due to the unofficial nature of these markets, no precise data exists regarding the amount of trade done at these sites; it can, however, justifiably be surmised that more than ten billion forints worth of goods exchanged hands on a yearly basis, without any payment of sales taxes or customs duties. This sum represents anywhere between fifteen and twenty percent of the total retail done in small trade at the time.

Potential shoppers made sure to be at the “Polish” market either at dawn or very early in the morning when the selection was still the best. Those who had arrived from the neighboring countries to hawk their wares also started the day early; most slept through the night in their cars in order to “snag” the best spot when the market opened.



Figure 17. The “Zsibi” (Zsibogó) second-hand market in Debrecen in 1978 (photo by Lajos Mészáros, MNM TF, 40326-78.849)

The goods for sale were usually put on display either on a blanket spread out on the ground or on the hood of the car. While this form of trade operated throughout the 1990s, by the new millennium it had lost its previous popularity.

Flea markets—known as “tango” markets—were secondary sites for trading used goods or selling clothes, furniture, or household items that were no longer needed. For the poor, these sites were an opportunity to procure needed items at cheap prices; for others, a visit to the “tango” was a means for purchasing goods that were either unavailable via official channels or had been smuggled into the country, such as jeans, music records from the West or abroad, or drinks. Open on a daily basis, the most well-known places—Teleki Square, Garay Square, or Ecsér Street in Budapest, the “Zsibi” in Debrecen—attracted throngs of people who were all engaged in exciting bouts of wheeling and dealing and loud bargaining over the items they wished to acquire. While various household appliances could generally be bought at the “Comecon” markets, the electronics trade owed quite a “debt” to the presence of Soviet troops stationed in Hungary whose method for supplementing their pay included the sale of color television sets, vacuum cleaners, tools, parts for Soviet-made Zhiguli (Lada) automobiles, or other popular items.

As state-officiated trade developed at a relatively slow pace, private retail remained considerably restricted until the beginning of the 1980s and was only allowed in areas where this type of activity was held acceptable, such as in places where state-owned commercial businesses did not operate.⁴² According to an analysis of this topic prepared in October 1960, “there is no need to have merchants selling manufactured goods in urban centers or on main avenues, nor are general goods or greengroceries needed in the vicinity of socialist units.”⁴³ The document’s authors recommended relocating the city’s downtown private retail businesses to the outskirts, where merchants were scarce. In the end, restricting commercial licenses en masse via administrative methods was viewed as an unacceptable solution for

⁴² Further discussion on this topic can be found in Tibor Valuch, “Magánkereskedés Magyarországon a második világháború utáni évtizedekben,” in *Tanulmányok L. Nagy Zsuzsa 70. születésnapjára*, ed. János Angi and János Barta (Debrecen: DUP, 2000), 517–34.

⁴³ “BkM. Kereskedelem-szervezési és Technikai Főosztály. 0016/43/1960. Tük. A magánkereskedelem tevékenysége és a KISOSZ munkája: Előterjesztés a Minisztérium Kollégiumához,” MNL OL, G-4-zz. 7. d., April 7, 1960.

reasons of welfare. Determined steps, however, were to be taken against unlicensed or unauthorized commerce: this type of activity was found punishable for a maximum fine of 3,000 forints as well as the confiscation of all goods being sold without a permit. Despite these types of restrictions, all forms of both legal and illegal private trade played an undeniably significant role in satisfying the consumer demands of Hungary's population.

As an additional form of shopping, boutiques spread throughout Hungary with remarkable speed beginning in the mid-seventies. Privately-owned clothing shops that were usually 10–20 square meters in size, boutiques regularly sold items of apparel that had been made (often at home) based on the sewing patterns published in *Burda* or other types of fashion magazines. This form of “boutique fashion” naturally created its own complete retail network; other than preparing clothing at home, shops with high turnover rates turned to customs previously established by nineteenth-century cottage industries and divided the work process into various stages and delivered the pre-cut pieces to seamstresses who completed separate parts of the garment before it was completed elsewhere. By the time state-owned businesses were capable of fulfilling the public's fashion requirements, private retailers—referred to as the *butikosok* (“boutiquers”) in the everyday speech of the time—had long finished raking in the profit. This success was partly due to the public's commonly accepted opinion that the goods sold by a private cobbler, tailor, or retailer were more reliable. As a result, a few gaps in the system existed where the private sector's percent of trade was higher than that received by state-owned or collective trade.



Figure 18. Boutiques on a housing estate in Orosháza in the early 1980s — the space of small business life (Fortepan, 75777, Attila Jankó)



Figure 19. Privately owned confectonery in the 13th district of Budapest in the late 1970s (photo by István Harmath, MNM TF, 79.2959)

Until the early 1980s, private businesses or small-scale merchants played a relatively restricted role in the national commerce of foodstuffs. In 1960, out of nearly eleven thousand private merchants only 3,396 actually ran a grocery store; in 1965, only 2,525 licenses authorized the sale of groceries out of the total of nine thousand licenses issued for private trade. Out of more than ten thousand private retailers registered in 1970, only 2,793 operated grocery stores. In 1975, 28 percent (2,917 individuals) of nearly eleven thousand private business owners dealt in the food trade.⁴⁴

As part of the political transition after 1989, state-owned businesses progressively closed their doors, paving the way for the emergence of new networks of privately-owned small- and large-scale trade that were marked by radical changes in the spaces and sites where commerce occurred. The early 1990s saw a swift growth in small shops, followed by the appearance of multinational retailers and corporations whose influence brought about new forms, habits, and—to a certain extent—different lifestyle choices as behemoth-sized shopping centers sprung up around the country.



Figure 20. Duna Plaza, the first shopping and entertainment center in Hungary, opened in 1996 with a 9-screen multiplex cinema and skating rink (photo by Misibacsi at Hungarian Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons)

⁴⁴ For further details, see *Belkereskedelmi Évkönyv 1976* (Budapest: KSH, 1977), 145.

Homes, home construction, furnishings, and durable goods

Housing conditions in mid-twentieth-century Hungary were generally far from ideal in that the standards reached by most homes fell below the European average. While the building of urban housing could never really catch up with the rate of urbanization, this trend differed by region as the factories and larger companies located in towns undergoing industrialization often constructed housing settlements for their own workers. This solution was mainly utilized by state and municipal manufactories such as the State Railroad of Hungary (MÁV), the Budapest Capital City Corporation for Transportation (BSZKRT), the Budapest Electric Works (ELMŰ), the Royal Hungarian Iron, Steel and Machinery Factories (MÁVAG), or the Rimamurány-Salgótarján Ironworks Corporation (RIMA). House building undertaken or financed by pension fund companies, insurance corporations, or financial institutions also played a significant role.

With the aid of banks, the National Homebuilders' Credit Association (Országos Lakásépítő Hitelszövetkezet, OLH) formed in 1928 with half of its securities owned by MABI (Magánalkalmazottak Biztosító Intézete, the Insurance Institute for Private Employees) and OTI (Országos Társadalombiztosítási Intézet, the National Institute of Social Security). The National Fund for People's and Family Protection (Országos Nép- és Családvédelmi Alap, ONCSA) built more than twelve thousand homes between 1941 and 1944.⁴⁵ While these measures eased pressures originating from the housing market and housing situation, they still were not able to solve it. The extent to which housing conditions posed serious problems in daily life can be inferred from a report made by the leaders of Pestszentlőrinc in the autumn of 1940:

I will take this opportunity to point out the noticeable indications of shortages in housing. It is nearly impossible to find an apartment for rent in the city, which frequently explains why evicted residents cannot rent a home based on their own abilities, which in turn means they request help from the city in locating some form of accommodations. Thanks to the housing shortage, doing so involves unimaginable difficulties. During the past few years, the growth in industrial work has particularly contributed to the housing shortage as a great number of families have moved from the countryside in favor of living in industrial cities. Unfortunately, in my experience the

⁴⁵ See Dorottya Szikra, "A szociálpolitika másik arca," *Élet és Irodalom* (April 18, 2008).

families who have made this move do not return to their original place of residence—where they might be able to manage better—when a reduction in working hours makes earning a living impossible. Instead, they stay on here and demand that the authorities satisfy all of their needs and wants. Since this naturally cannot be done in each and every case, dissatisfaction or even cases of deliberate incitement against public authority are the end results.⁴⁶

Until World War II, in Hungary social policies for housing only played a supplementary role intended to serve the primary purpose of correcting deficiencies in the construction of privately-owned housing tenements by means of either direct housing construction or the provision of various forms of support for joint groups of individuals. State-supported apartments cost less than the market price; while the policies followed during this era were partially used to provide the “poor and needy” with emergency housing, other aspects targeted certain social strata, such as petty bureaucrats, factory workers, etc. These efforts, however, were only partly effective in reducing the tensions surrounding the lack of housing. In the 1930s larger business firms generally strove to support home construction by providing favorable credit terms. As a consumer aim, it cannot be denied that establishing a household in a private home demanded the largest investment both during the interwar period and throughout the latter part of the twentieth century as well. This circumstance arose from the fact that a significant proportion of homes at the time—particularly in villages—remained in the hands of private owners and were therefore viewed as both a form of durable consumer good and an investment strategy throughout the state socialist era. When apartments and homes were privatized as part of the shift to a democratic system after the 1989/90 change of regime, the role played by private property was reinforced.

Due to their cramped living quarters, most Hungarian families and households targeted the improvement of their housing situation as their primary aim, a consumer preference that then influenced both daily life and the selection of individual strategies. Even though home construction grew, the decades following 1945 were still characterized by a constant shortage in housing quantity and quality since the demand for homes soared far above the actual supply. Among

⁴⁶ “Alispáni évnegyedes jelentések: Pestszentlőrinc polgármesterének jelentése,” MNL PML, IV.408.u., January 14, 1941.

the expenditures put toward the betterment of living conditions, the costs related to home construction and/or renovation represented one of the largest components.

Given the fact that one-fifth of Hungary's housing structures were damaged during World War II, this conflict also extracted a great price from the point of view of the nation's housing supply. To put the situation into concrete numbers, one-fifth of Hungary's housing meant a total of 358,271 homes in need of repair or rebuilding. During the siege of Budapest 13,588 homes were utterly destroyed while an additional 18,755 were damaged to the point that renovation was required before they could once more be habitable. Lesser damage was incurred in 47,322 homes. During the course of the war 36,691 of Budapest's families found themselves without homes.⁴⁷ Other than the effort to rebuild the country, in the late 1940s the need to restore the country's public utilities system represented the most urgent task.

On January 1, 1949, 2,481,000 residences were recorded in Hungary; by December 1955, 148,000 new homes had been built throughout the country while 52,000 were eliminated. During this period in home construction few residences could boast of spacious floor plans; most new apartments or homes consisted of one-and-a-half rooms. The rate of home construction was particularly low between 1951 and 1953, when a total of only 17,000 newly built homes were handed over per year. In a strictly classified report analyzing the state of housing, the KSH (Central Office of Statistics) observed that "The plan regarding home construction has not been realized in any year. The first, increased five-year plan forecast the building of 217,000 residences; only 103,000 homes were constructed, including those that were remodeled or renovated.... To date, residential construction plans have not targeted the complete fulfillment of the actual housing demand; the fact that not even these relatively modest targets have been achieved only contributes to the severity of the housing situation. If the first, increased five-year plan had been fulfilled in its entirety, the 1949 housing conditions would not have deteriorated."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Budapest közállapotai az 1945/46. tél küszöbén*, published by Mayor József Kővágó, compiled by the Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Hivatala (Budapest: Budapest Művészeti és Tudományos Intézet, 1946).

⁴⁸ "Jelentés a lakásállomány valamint a lakásviszonyok alakulásáról és az 1955. évi lakásépítésekről," KSH TÜK. MNL OL, XIX-D-3-b. 30. d., July 30, 1956.

Between 1941 and 1960 the supply of homes only increased moderately, a situation that had been brought about by wartime damages, the process of reconstruction, the communist takeover at the end of the 1940s, the subsequent change in Hungary's economic and social system, and the one-sided focus of political policies that directed funds to investments in heavy industry during the 1950s. According to the KSH's calculations, 17,742 homes were built nationwide in 1951, while this number fell to 15,904 in 1953. The official explanation for this decline was that it had been caused by shortages in materials and insufficient labor force. The residential construction and housing management system began to change gradually starting in the early 1950s. Aspects related to the planned economy also came to the forefront: communities with plans to construct more than one hundred residences with state or municipal council support were obliged to consult with the National Planning Office, the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Urban and Community Planning, and the local



Figure 21. The building of prefabricated panel houses in Óbuda, Budapest in 1970. From the early sixties, the construction of housing estates, based on prefabricated block technology, helped to alleviate the housing shortage (Fortepan, 47344, Óbudai Múzeum)

municipal council.⁴⁹ While residential construction in urban areas was required to be located primarily in or near places with access to public utilities and paved roads as of the mid-1950s, it was a long time before this requirement was actually taken into consideration.

The second five-year plan predicted the construction of more than a quarter-million residences between 1960 and 1965; this time the population was expected to participate in providing the funds for more than two-thirds of this task. In practice, three-quarters of the new homes were already privately funded during this period while barely one-quarter of the residences constructed per year were built via state funding. In the first half of the 1960s, most homes that were constructed as family investments were single, one-story homes usually consisting of two rooms and a kitchen. According to a study prepared for internal use only, these houses "do not display care in presenting façades that add to the formation of an appropriate townscape. Their floor plans are not planned in a way that reflects the standards of modern home interiors. Neither are they based on the economization of materials nor the advantages offered by utilizing pre-fabricated elements."⁵⁰ These as well as other reasons prompted the ministry of construction to charge the Institute of Standardized Designs with the task of compiling and publishing a catalogue that provided potential homeowners with standardized building designs for family residences. While many standardized construction plans were purchased, this effort was only successful from the point of view that building authorities issued construction permits more readily for structures that complied with standardized designs; many, however, objected to these designs because they restricted the expression of individual taste.

The home construction program found in the third five-year plan aimed to put an end to the housing shortage, raise the level of housing standards, and improve housing concerns for the working class.⁵¹ As many apartments as possible were to be created via the construction of medium and high tower block buildings. Built within the

⁴⁹ "Irányelvek a második öt éves terv lakás- és járulékos építkezéseinek tervszerű előkészítéséhez," MNL OL, XIX-D-3-b. 25. d., August 3, 1955.

⁵⁰ "Lakáspolitikánk időszerű kérdései: A HNF Országos Tanács Titkárságának számára összeállította dr. Szamek Tamás a Lakáspolitikai Bizottság vezetője," MNL OL, XX-IV-D-1-c. 1. d., Budapest, 1962.

⁵¹ "A III. öt éves terv lakásfejlesztési tervvázlata," MNL OL, XIX-D-3-j. 6. d., September 19, 1962.

framework of state funding, the greatest number of these residences contained two rooms, totaled 53 square meters in size and were recommended for occupancy by four-member families. As the director of the Committee of Housing Policy reported in 1962,

We want to provide every home built via state funding with electric lighting, running water, sewage drains, and a bathroom. Homes with room for three people or more will usually include a bathtub while 10 percent of all apartments will have a shower tray. The percentage of residences with access to gas utilities is set at 68 percent. These apartments built according to modern architectural methods will generally reflect current standards (central heating, built-in furniture). Due to reasons related to the surrounding cityscape, convenience, health, and economy, structures that are four stories or higher must generally be fitted with central heating.⁵²

From 1960 to 1970 roughly 668,000 homes were built in Hungary. In Budapest and other cities two-thirds of homes were built by the state while less than one-tenth received the same support in small communities or villages.⁵³

Following the difficulties experienced in the 1950s, the decades between 1960 and 1990 were ones of dynamic growth. In a period that lasted until the early 1980s, the number of new homes per one thousand people reached the rate of nine, a figure that meant an average of eighty to one hundred thousand residences were being built every year. Throughout the postwar era the pinnacle year in housing construction was 1975, when 9.4 homes were built for every one thousand individuals. In 1990, this figure dropped to 3.9. From the mid-eighties the number of newly constructed homes declined once again due to the economic crisis.

Between 1949 and 1990 the number of homes located in Hungary increased by sixty-two percent. In certain periods the predicted number of constructed residences was mainly reached (or even exceeded) because certain social groups displayed a significantly higher inclination toward building a house. Regarding both quantity and quality, state-funded residential construction lagged behind private construction.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Az állami lakásépítés volumenének hatása az egyes területeken jelentkező magánlakás-építési igényekre," study by the Institute of Building Economics and Organization, Budapest, MNL OL, XXVI-D-1-C. 6.d., November 1972.

Table 6. Changes in the number of residences from 1941 to 1990 (by unit)

Year	1941	1949	1960	1970	1980	1990
Number of residences	2,397,499	2,466,514	2,757,625	3,122,164	3,542,418	3,853,228

Source: *Népszámlálási adatok, Mikrocenzus 1996: Lakások és lakóik* (Budapest: KSH, 1996).

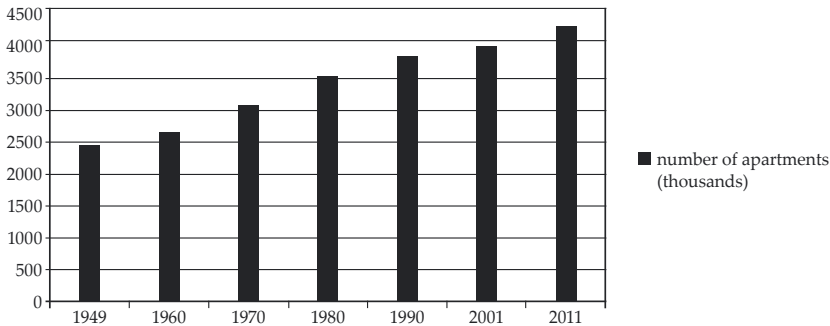


Figure 22. Changes in housing supply in Hungary, 1941–2011 (by the thousand).

Source: *Népszámlálás, 2011: Országos adatok, vol. 3* (Budapest: KSH, 2013).

The materials used for home construction show that traditional building materials such as mud-bricks were steadily replaced by brick structures. Prefabricated concrete panel elements were mainly utilized after 1960. In 1949, forty percent of all residential structures had mud brick, clay, or beaten earth walls and no foundation; in 1990 the same was true of only nine percent of homes. In 1990, sixty-seven percent of Hungary's entire housing supply had been constructed after 1945, a figure that amply demonstrates the level of transformation that took place in Hungary during these five decades.

The fifteen-year home construction programs announced first in 1960, then once more in 1975 focused on cities since Soviet-type tower houses were viewed as the solution to the housing issue. The renewed wave of internal migration that occurred as a consequence of industrialization most likely contributed to this decision since the masses of people who moved into urban centers during the 1960s and 1970s put a serious strain on the housing situation in Hungary's cities.

Except for rare instances like in Sirok or Újfehértó, homes constructed via housing manufacturing techniques were not built in villages.

Regarding expenditures residences built in small-sized communities were generally not included in state home construction plans; in reports assessing the fulfillment of targeted projections, however, these numbers were most certainly added. Another revealing fact is that more than two-thirds (equaling 1.4 million structures) of the residences built in Hungary between 1960 and 1980 were privately funded; one-sixth of these did not even apply for the home construction loan offered by the Országos Takarékpénztár (OTP, the National Savings Bank).⁵⁴ These figures not only reveal the extent of the burden Hungarian society shouldered and the sheer volume of household capital (in the form of money, labor, and time) that the nation's population poured into home construction, but also demonstrate the depth of motivation Hungarians felt in relation to improving the living conditions of their daily lives and attaining the same level of basic civilization that existed beyond the Iron Curtain.

In March 1971, the ministry of internal trade prepared a study reflecting upon past experiences in Hungary's housing situation and the supply of public utilities. Based on this document's findings, Hungary's situation in these areas was unequivocally negative compared to both the population's actual demands and expectations, and international standards. In 1966, for example, the number of rooms per every one hundred inhabitants barely reached four-fifths of the rates found among approximately equally developed countries in Europe. The rate of access to running water was one-third, and the yearly per capita quota for household energy usage barely hit three-fourths of this European standard. When compared to the trans-European average, "the picture is no better regarding either the housing supply or the average home size as calculated based on the number of residents per room. Based on the average number of rooms per home (2.34), Hungary is twenty-fourth out of twenty-five countries. Based on the number of residents per room (1.39 residents/room) Hungary stands in the twenty-second place. On average one residence houses 1.09 households and one household contains 3.1 residents."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Életszínvonal 1960–1980*, 177. The National Savings Bank Corporation (OTP) was established following the nationalization of privately-owned banks and was the only banking institution available to private citizens for decades. After the political shift to democracy, OTP was privatized and became a Hungarian bank of commerce possessing the largest and most significant network of branches in Central and Southeastern Europe.

⁵⁵ "Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium. A lakás és a kommunális ellátás legfontosabb muta-

The ministry of internal trade and its network of connected institutes undertook an examination of changes in consumerism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The following opinion was expressed in reference to the housing supply:

The population's financial capacity must be drawn upon even more and the willingness to construct homes must be supported at all costs. . . . Let us create the conditions that would allow Hungarians to fulfill to the maximum their aim of building a family home, apartment, or multi-family home either entirely or at least primarily based on their own resources. With the increased inclusion of the population's material means we can attain multiple goals: a) we could ease the urgent lack of housing in a relatively short period of time or gradually render its elimination possible, b) we would secure the population's steadily growing purchasing power, or satisfy the need to put their savings toward a suitable form of goods.⁵⁶

It can be assumed that the partial deficiency of state resources also prompted this recommendation. In contrast to its content, Hungarian society's efforts to improve housing conditions had already been occurring virtually unchecked. In reality, this strong trend in private construction was quite wasteful given the method that it employed. Heavily reliant on appropriating help, materials, and labor from others (relatives, neighbors, friends), this highly inefficient approach to building a house essentially meant that the prospective homeowner was not only the customer but also the contractor, the purchasing agent of the construction materials, the assistant laborer, and the handler of administrative affairs.

Taking out a loan in order to construct a home only started to become a widespread practice as of the mid-sixties. Other than the limited credit opportunities and the relatively low level of income, Hungarians' reluctance to turn toward this type of a solution can probably be explained by the instinctive sense of caution that typified how individuals from a rural, farming background thought, as few were willing to risk taking on debt given the uncertain conditions that determined collectivized farming. These factors only reinforced

tóinak alakulása, valamint összehasonlító elemzésük," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-tt. 45. d., March, 1971.

⁵⁶ "Zala Ferenc feljegyzése Keserű Jánosné részére 'A lakásellátás főbb kérdései' című elemző anyag kapcsán," MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 1.d. Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet iratai., January 18, 1970.

homeowners' decisions to construct a house on their own, with the help of friends and relatives who donated their labor in exchange for future aid when they were the ones building homes. While this form of labor exchange reduced costs, it also absorbed every moment of free time for years ahead since it was deemed proper to return the favor for all the friends, family members, neighbors, and acquaintances who had helped throughout construction.

During the 1950s and 1960s it was still quite common to cut building costs by producing the materials for the structure's walls by hand. As a contemporary study noted,

In the first decade following the establishment of collective farms, this was how collective farmworkers were forced to build because the amount of money they received for their labor was still very low; the amount they were paid in kind went toward basic survival, with nothing left that could be put aside for home construction. . . . The stabilization of collective farmworkers' wages . . . increasingly enables rural households to pay for construction in cash; even today, those with low incomes try to exchange labor for construction materials or exchange labor with others while it naturally remains quite widespread for many to construct their homes in stages.⁵⁷

Without possessing the ability to maneuver among the obstacles wrought by a shortage economy, prospective homeowners had little hope of succeeding in building a new home both quickly and cheaply.⁵⁸

Shouldering the task of improving the quality of living conditions genuinely demanded an enterprising spirit. While the exact level of living conditions displayed some differences based on social group, generally speaking the standard of living was unfavorable. According to household statistics taken in 1957, more than 68 percent of working-class families were living in one-room apartments; 31 percent resided in two-room apartments, and a total of 1 percent had access to three rooms. In the case of those employed professionally, 45 percent occupied one-room homes, 48 percent lived in two-room apartments, and 7 percent had access to homes with three or more rooms. While only one-fourth of working-class homes included bathrooms, nearly 50 percent of employed professionals resided in

⁵⁷ Győzőné Kenéz, *A falusi, illetve a családi házas építkezés összefüggése a háztartások fogyasztói adottságaival*, *Közlemények* 134 (Budapest: Szövetkezeti Kutató Intézet, 1978), 68.

⁵⁸ See János Kenedi, *Tied az ország, magadnak építéd* (Paris: Magyar Füzetek, 1981).

homes with bathrooms.⁵⁹ These statistics demonstrate that the divisions caused by class status and income level continued to determine housing conditions throughout the second half of the twentieth century in Hungary.

Modernizing their housing conditions was also one of the most important consumer aims in Hungary's villages: "The peasant class is devoting an increasingly large percentage of its income to home construction, expansion, and renovation. In 1960, thirty-four out of one hundred families living in Győr County were building homes; out of these twenty-six families had spent between ten and twenty thousand forints on this endeavor. This represents a truly high ratio that barely differed when compared to Szabolcs County."⁶⁰ At times the trend in home construction faltered: in 1961, the year that marked the completion of collectivization, 37,454 homes were built in Hungary's villages. This number dropped to 24,461 in 1965, then gradually started to climb upward again in the second half of the 1960s. In the early 1970s (in 1972, to be precise), home construction first reached and then surpassed the 1961 level with a total of 38,263 new residences. After this period rural homes quickly modernized; between 1970 and 1990 the level of comfort found in rural households rose significantly, thereby narrowing the gap between rural and urban averages.

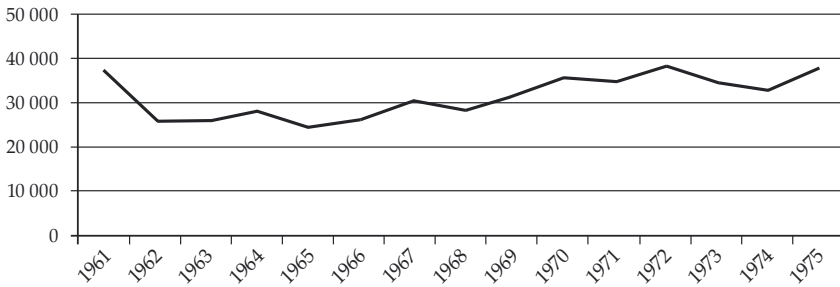


Figure 23. Changes in the number of homes built in villages between 1961 and 1975. Source: Iván Oros, ed., *A falu és a mezőgazdaság főbb társadalmi és gazdasági jelzőszámai* (Budapest: KSH, 1994), 69.

⁵⁹ *Munkás-, alkalmazotti és parasztcsaládok*, 38–39.

⁶⁰ Molnár László, ed., *A parasztság keresletváltozásának elemei és irányzata összefüggésben a termelési viszonyok átalakulásával*, Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet Közleményei, no. 71 (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet, 1962).

As housing conditions in rural households changed, the consumption of energy followed suit. Only a minimal number of agricultural by-products (such as cornstalks) were used for heating purposes as the traditional forms of fuel commonly relied upon in the 1950s (wood, coal, coke, briquette) were replaced by oil. In urban households, oil took the place of solid forms of fuel in the sixties and seventies, followed by electricity and then natural gas. Together these forms of heating fuel covered 62 percent of Hungary's household heating needs in 1972. In 1975, 1.9 million households relied on oil-burning stoves for heat while 2.3 million were connected to public natural gas lines and 1.6 million either heated their homes with gas cylinders or used this source for cooking purposes. In the area of energy usage, the seventies marked the decade when central heating or municipal heating became widespread, a phenomenon that was mostly brought about by the construction of Soviet-style block towers. Partly due to the oil crisis that took place in the 1970s, oil-burning stoves almost completely disappeared from Hungarian households.

Between 1960 and 1975 Hungarians purchased 169.7 billion forints worth of durable consumer goods, meaning that households spent an average of 940 million forints per month on items belonging to this category, with a growth in the sale of automobiles, electric household appliances, and furniture. As a 1975 study noted, "The development of more cultured interiors and the modernization of technical aspects have transformed the type of furnishings that are being sold. Demand for combination wardrobes or the traditional style of kitchen and bedroom furnishings has fallen to minimal levels while the popularity of upholstered furniture and matching sets of furniture has skyrocketed. The 1960 rate for the sale of the aforementioned traditional pieces of furniture was 51 percent out of the total amount of furniture sold while today it is only 7 percent."⁶¹ The growth in demand for electric household appliances is best demonstrated by the fact that 2.4 million washing machines, 2.3 million refrigerators, 1.7 million vacuum cleaners, and 1.3 million spin dryers were purchased during these fifteen years. Sales in telecommunications displays a similar change as 5.5 million radios, 2.9 million television sets, 643,000 tape recorders, and 481,000 record players were sold in legal retail trade. From 1961 to 1975 Hungarians bought 493,000 automobiles, 985,000 motorcycles

⁶¹ István Fördős and Gábor Lacza, "A tartós fogyasztási cikkek forgalma a számok tükrében," *Kereskedelmi Szemle* 9 (1975): 26–29.

of various models, and 3.4 million bicycles.⁶² In 1960, for every one hundred Hungarian households there was one refrigerator, fifteen washing machines, and four vacuum cleaners; by 1975, sixty-eight refrigerators, eighty-four washing machines, fifty-three vacuum cleaners, and forty-eight spin dryers could be found for every hundred households. Fifteen years previously the spin dryer, for example, was so rare that it could not even be included in the statistics. This trend was also reflected in a 1968 statistical report: "Within consumer consumption the items that indicate alterations in the standard of living most dynamically are—in Hungary as well as in other places—durable consumer goods. During the period spanning from 1960 to 1967, the consumption of durable goods demonstrated an average growth of 9.9 percent, more than twice the average growth rate for total consumption. . . . Among other factors, the growth in vehicle imports has contributed to this trend significantly: from ten thousand cars in 1965, this number rose to sixteen thousand in 1966 and hit twenty-one thousand in 1967."⁶³



Figure 24. The spread of modern mass communication: TV and radio sets in a local Keravill shop in Szekszárd, Hungary, in 1967 (Fortepan, 15653, Bakó Jenő)

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *A lakosság jövedelme és fogyasztása 1966–1967*, 57–61.

Out of all the high-value items in durable goods, the automobile “trade” and the conditions surrounding supply were the most peculiar. In Hungary cars were almost exclusively imported from other Soviet bloc countries, where the production capacity and the conditions agreed upon in short- and long-term trade contracts determined whatever opportunities were available. The shortages in vehicles could have been speedily remedied via “capitalist import,” as was mentioned in a report dating from 1969; due to economic and political reasons, this step was not taken then or later.⁶⁴ So-called “Western autos” that had not been manufactured in Soviet bloc countries were only sold within restricted limitations: in a better year on average every sixth car put into circulation originated from western imports. Not only cars, but also the spare parts needed to keep them running were on the list of shortage items, a factor that further aided the emergence of Hungary’s secondary market.

Despite (or perhaps because of) this dynamic expansion in durable consumer goods, shortages in televisions, tape recorders, heating fuel, construction materials, and automobiles were widespread in 1969. As was typical of the planned economy system, within the category of construction materials the demand for bricks or other materials used for wall construction could be satisfied, but cement was nowhere to be found. Serious shortages arose in the furniture supply as well, mostly due to paltry selection and poor quality.

Within the wage and price system utilized in this period, concepts such as costs, income, and savings ability were interpreted in a rather interesting way. To remain at the example of housing, despite the rise in costs for individual and family social reproduction, the officially disclosed increase in wages, and the widespread adoption of the two-income family model, the income earned at a full-time job was still not enough to acquire and build a new home. Due to the depressed nature of wages—which did not reflect the genuine cost of social reproduction—supplementary labor essentially substituted for the state “saved incomes” that belonged to Hungary’s primary economy. As a contemporary sociological study emphasized, “[t]he only way Hungarians can match the wages predicted by the state is by

⁶⁴ “Az áruellátási helyzet javítása érdekében szükségesnek látszik az elkövetkező 3 évben mintegy 24.000 db. személygépkocsi tőkés importja: A lakosság személygépkocsi ellátási helyzete 1969–1970-ben,” in proposal for the Minisztérium Kollégiuma (Ministry College), MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 4. d., September 8, 1969.

working overtime in order to supplement their incomes, which demands the sacrifice of extra time and extra production. The limits of human production therefore demand that this effort be saved somewhere and the primary scene for cutting corners cannot be any other than socialism's primary economy, in the interest of maintaining the function of society's basic income and thereby normal reproduction as well."⁶⁵ Needless to say, these mechanisms and social reflexes survived the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s.

The rate of home construction lessened in the years after Hungary transitioned from communism to democracy. Beginning with the new millennium, a boom in apartment building began to unfold, only to decrease once again as of 2005, following a period marked by fluctuations. The nearly 13,000 homes constructed in 2011 represented one-third of the 44,000 residences built in the peak year of 2004. The most extreme downswing occurred in 2010 and 2011, when the number of newly built homes first decreased by 35 percent, then by 40 percent compared to the previous year. Based on the statistical data, home construction in Hungary did not decline to such an extent either during the interwar years marked by world-wide economic depression or the grinding economic conditions that followed World War II.

Clothing and the consumption of apparel

Throughout the years of the war, supplies of dress goods grew increasingly rare; the full effect of this decrease became truly noticeable beginning in 1944.⁶⁶ Instead of following the latest fashion, matters of basic survival and procuring or retaining a minimal amount of essential clothing became the most important issue for Hungarians. From the moment the war broke out, severe shortages in manufactured goods had already appeared. According to a report written in 1940 by the chief administrative officer of the Monor district, as regarded shoes and materials for shoe soles, "a deep feeling of unrest is making itself known. While each community received the amounts

⁶⁵ Péter Fóti, *Röpirat a lakáshelyzetről* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1988), 139.

⁶⁶ For a comparative analysis of the postwar history of Hungarian dress habits and fashion within the context of Eastern and Central Europe, see Djurdja Bartlett, ed., *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, vol. 9, *East Europe, Russia, and the Caucasus* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2010).

requested within the agreed quota, the agreed quota only covers a small proportion of what is needed. The despair is enormous. The problem is particularly severe for schoolchildren and the *levente* youth.⁶⁷ Poor families with many children cannot provide their children with shoes. As the cold weather continues, children cannot go to school in bare feet, nor can the older boys go to *levente* trainings.⁶⁸ On August 4, 1944, the ration card system was expanded to encompass all items of apparel. Footwear, boots, winter coats, or even socks and stockings could only be procured by voucher.

Dress goods counted as hard-to-get items for years to come, as wartime conflict had wreaked considerable damage on personal belongings, including items of clothing. Replacing lost or irreparable apparel took a long time. In February 1945, a set of clothing cost between six and seven thousand pengő while a pair of shoes was worth three thousand.⁶⁹ Before the war, these same items had respectively averaged between sixty to eighty pengő, or fifteen to twenty-five pengő, depending on the quality. In Budapest “not only were backpacks and all types of armbands added to fashion after the siege, but the trend of red silk shirts also spread. Later villagers were willing to exchange something like this for a goose, which was nothing to sneeze at. The red umbrella silk used in German ammunition supply tanks proved to be excellent material. The more resourceful had already set aside a piece or two of it before the thought even occurred to the rest of us.”⁷⁰ Throughout the 1945–46 period of hyperinflation, any goods that had survived the war became valuable items for barter: a nicer coat, fur, or a piece of women’s or men’s clothing would keep a family supplied with enough food to survive for days, maybe even weeks. The shortage in items of apparel eased somewhat toward the end of the 1940s, albeit only temporarily. As clothing manufactories were rebuilt, fashion salons also resumed work and the system of trade and retail in the textile and clothing industry steadily regained its footing.

⁶⁷ Known as *levente* units, this type of cadet instruction in physical education, military training, and national pride was held for boys and young men who were between the ages of twelve and twenty-one from the 1920s to the end of World War II. *Levente* units filled an essential role in providing pre-military training.

⁶⁸ “A monori járás főszołgabırójának jelentése az 1941. október havi közellátási helyzetéről,” MNL PML, Főispáni iratok, IV-401-e 20.031-1941, October 1941.

⁶⁹ See Krisztián Ungváry, *Budapest ostroma* (Budapest: Corvina, 1998), 287.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 292–93.



Figure 25. Children with worn clothes and shoes in Budapest, 1946 (Fortepan, 128494, Sándor Bauer)

Expenditures for clothing display a rather differentiated image based on financial position and wealth. According to a household statistics survey conducted among families in Budapest in 1948, out of the monthly 1,004 forints owned by the family of a public employee, 116 forints were put toward apparel. Families relying on the 1,349 forints per month earned by employees in the private sector spent 184 forints on clothing. Averaging 942 forints of total income per month, the capital city's working-class families could only afford 107 forints for clothes. To put it differently, employed families living in Budapest spent an average of forty-six forints per capita each

month on buying or repairing clothes.⁷¹ This fact demonstrates the truly significant difference between certain social groups which continued to determine Hungary's social strata, even if events related to the war (battles, the pillaging of military troops) undoubtedly contributed to the widening of the gaps. For social groups hovering near the bottom of society—such as the urban proletariat—gaining access to basic clothing already posed one of daily life's greatest challenges. From spring to autumn, it was hardly common to see impoverished urban or rural children wearing shoes.

Based on household statistics recorded in the late 1940s, rural families in the lowest income bracket put on average one-tenth of their monthly income toward clothing while those earning the highest level of income could spend slightly more than one-fourth of their monthly incomes on apparel. To calculate how much this meant per capita among members of the first group, the monthly sum of ten forints was spent in contrast to the sum of 40–50 forints per person

⁷¹ *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle*, nos. 1–6 (1948): 47–56.

in the second group.⁷² Among the lower echelons of poor peasant families, managing to acquire basic apparel—undergarments, skirts, shirts, shoes, coats, trousers, and children’s clothing—proved the biggest challenge throughout the 1940s and the following decades. It must be mentioned that village dwellers prepared a portion of their clothing themselves; another portion was ordered from local seamstresses whose tastes eventually influenced the given community’s clothing habits. Yet another portion was purchased at shops located in the nearest city, markets, or bought from itinerant peddlers. The women of the household were responsible for replacing clothes that were too worn for use, just as they also oversaw the washing and maintenance of the family’s clothing supply.

Shortages, the quality of any apparel that happened to be available, high prices, and a dearth of selection in sizes and options were the largest hurdles to overcome in daily life during the Rákosi era. As a 1952 report in Csongrád County (which could have been made in other parts of the country as well) alarmingly noted,

widespread complaint surrounds the high price of ready-made clothes, such as the average 350–450 forints for an off-the-rack women’s wool dress. Not to mention the lack of choice in styles: whatever there is, it does not come close to being fashionable. In contrast to this, the customer can have the same dress made for 320 forints. . . . Ready-bought men’s shirts shrink so much in the wash that they are practically unusable afterward. . . . A shirt with a size 40 collar shrank to a size 37, while the length would have only fit a twelve-year-old child. . . . Customers find the cost of dress goods high as well, especially since there are numerous objections to the quality. . . . No matter its type, all the shoes have the same issue in that the nails used to make them were left sticking out of the lining, so the customer is sure to rip a hole into her stockings just by trying one on.⁷³

The price for clothing products was high in comparison to the average income earned by various social groups. In 1952, one meter of cotton cloth cost 32 forints and 10 fillérs while one meter of flannel was 43 forints, 10 fillérs. The price for a men’s wool suit was 1,180 forints, a women’s coat was 1,100; a pair of men’s leather shoes was 259 and one pair of women’s shoes cost 190 forints.⁷⁴

⁷² Júlia Zala, “A háztartás-statisztikai adatgyűjtés első eredményei,” reprinted in *Statisztikai Szemle* 4–5 (1993): 388–94.

⁷³ “A Csongrád megyei Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottságának jelentése,” *A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai*, MNL OL, XIX-G-4. mm. 4. d., February 27, 1952.

⁷⁴ See *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága: Múlt és jelen* (Budapest: KSH, 1996), 209.

According to a household survey conducted among working-class and white-collar households in 1953, on a monthly basis nine percent of the less than 200 forints that represented the monthly per capita income earned by the poorest families was spent on clothing, totaling a monthly average of 75–78 forints per month. Families earning a per capita average of between 300 and 400 forints spent 10.5 percent on clothing, which translated to 145–147 forints per family member. Those with the highest salaries who could spend per capita 600 forints a month spent 13.6 percent of their budgets (324 forints per person).⁷⁵ According to 1952 prices, this meant that a poor family could afford to purchase 2 or 2.5 meters of cotton or 2 meters of flannel cloth for sewing some type of garb while it would have taken 1.5 years to save enough money to buy a men's suit. Procuring a pair of men's or women's shoes would have swallowed up the clothing budget for 2.5 or even three months. While the situation was somewhat better for those earning average incomes, acquiring a costlier clothing item (such as a coat or suit) would have similarly required seven to eight months' worth of saving. The issue of attire obviously proved less of an obstacle for those with the highest incomes since in their case buying a coat, dress suit, or men's suit was only the equivalent of three to four months of their average monthly clothing budget. Despite this, it is still worth taking note of the fact that at this time even the wealthiest had to tighten their belts for several months at a time in order to purchase a more expensive piece of apparel. It can be presumed that having access to clothing only proved unproblematic for those in prominent leadership positions who possessed the right to shop in separate stores.

Within the limitations circumscribed by high prices, low incomes, and shortages, there was simply no way—at least not temporarily—that used clothing could be traded either. A wealth of practical fashion tips and dressing solutions offered suggestions on how to overcome the difficulties caused by the constant lack of goods: “For spring gingham . . . suits every age group. Mama gets a simple, lovely street dress out of the material. . . . Gingham looks fresh and bright on young girls as a blouse paired with a vest or as a skirt with a spring jacket. School

⁷⁵ “Munkás, alkalmazott és parasztcsaládok bevételének és kiadásának alakulása 1953. év: A Központi Statisztikai Hivatal jelentése Ált. 2/1954. 1954. IV. 3.,” in *Emlékkötet: Szemelvények a magyar háztartás-statisztika történetéből*, ed. Éva Havasi (Budapest: KSH, 2000), 93–96.

smocks can be sewn for primary students out of gingham cotton or canvas, which is not only pretty, but also protects their nice sailor's dresses."⁷⁶

Following Imre Nagy's rise to power in June 1953, even the press criticized the shortages and shoddy materials, including the poor quality of various dress goods, the tasteless color combinations, dull patterns, and boring styles. As the women's weekly *Nők Lapja* remarked, "For years there have been complaints about how tasteless some of the dress materials are—and what garish colors! This was particularly true in the case of medium- and large-patterned cottons or canvas materials. Quite often the exact same pattern was used on different types of materials, from cottons to silks. The selection was also limited."⁷⁷ In May 1954, a national exhibit series was held to introduce the public to dresses, shoes, and different types of dress goods for the autumn-winter season. According to a report summarizing the opinions that had been voiced during the exhibits, customers complained of the high cost of certain pieces of apparel (men's coats, suits), the wide range of unavailable goods, and the shoddy quality and generally bad taste exhibited by apparel. "The highest number of complaints surrounded the exhibited shoes. A large number of the shoes and sandals are distressingly ugly. . . . Complaints are arriving from the entire country that decent shoes from sizes 31–37 are simply not to be had for either girls or boys."⁷⁸

Even though in the spring of 1954 the press enthusiastically greeted the increased selection of dress material and increased availability of other goods, there was naturally no quick solution to halting the shortages that had begun wreaking havoc on the entire supply system at the beginning of the 1950s. Complete with photographs, lengthy articles published in *Nők Lapja* and *Ez a Divat* (This is Fashion) reported about "the workers who are happily and contentedly shopping due to the drop in prices" and naturally also grateful to "the Party and Government" for all of the steps taken to improve their quality of life. "The new government program," noted *Ez a Divat*, "has assigned industry a great and important task in the area of consumer utility goods. In full comprehension of the program's significance, the Direc-

⁷⁶ *Nők Lapja*, no. 10 (1951), 9.

⁷⁷ *Nők Lapja*, no. 27 (1953), 4.

⁷⁸ "Az 1954. évi őszi-téli kollekciók bemutató kiállításainak értékelése," Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-14. 1. d., May 26, 1954.

torate of the Industry for Woolen Goods has made it the primary goal of manufacturing companies and the Center of Pattern Design to plan and manufacture materials which will completely satisfy—as regards both quality and selection—the growing demands of our people, the workers.”⁷⁹ A similarly fervent notice relayed the information that the production of plaid loden cloth had not only begun, but would also not cost more than the previous, smooth-woven loden cloth thanks to technological innovations.

On its own, a reversal in political direction was not enough to solve problems in supply, as the reorganization of all production demanded time and at times the attempts that were made to reduce shortages negatively affected Hungary’s general economic situation.⁸⁰ At the end of 1953, the supply of shoes was, according to a report by the ministry of internal trade,

disturbed due to electricity restrictions placed on certain factories which consequently could not produce steadily and therefore fell behind with shipments. For example, the Bőrtex and Bonyhádi Shoe Manufactories were continuously behind by forty thousand pairs of shoes from month to month. . . . Shortages arose in children’s high-laced shoes in sizes 35–38 as well as in women’s high-laced and leather shoes. . . . Supply was hindered by the fact that certain items could not be shipped due to a lack of electricity in certain plants. Shipments of loden coats were continuous throughout December and the shipped amounts immediately appeared in retail shops . . . in spite of this we were not able to eliminate shortages.⁸¹

It is quite typical of the time that the quarterly notices regarding the levels of circulation in trade that were issued by the Center for Trade in Apparel at the ministry of internal trade were rated as classified documents. In reference to the first quarter of 1955, for instance, these reports informed retail firms that “the quality of diapers will be better than it is now. . . . Corduroy will not be available at all during the first

⁷⁹ *Ez a Divat*, March 1954, 2.

⁸⁰ A report made in April 1954 as an overview of the supply of goods lists eight to ten kinds of clothing items that not only comprise virtually every type of garment category but were also scarce on the national level. See “Az Értékesítési Igazgatóság Kereskedempolitikai Csoportjának tájékoztatója az 1954. március hónapról,” Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-14. 1. d., April 6, 1954.

⁸¹ “Az 1953. december havi végleges áruforgalmi statisztika szöveges kiértékelése,” Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati kereskedelmi Központ, MNL OL, XIX-G-14. 15. d., January 25, 1954.

quarter. . . . The supply of blouses, undergarments, and dress silks . . . will only slightly satisfy the current demand. Rayon women's nightgowns, camisoles, and underpants are arriving from East Germany in the first quarter . . . which therefore means that retail firms can be offered rayon panties instead of cotton lace panties. . . . Only a very small number of winter coats and mikados are being produced; the production of loden, spring-and-autumn coats, raincoats, and trench coats was used to fulfill the planned quota."⁸²

In accordance with the "new phase" politics, slightly more attention was paid to public consumption and easing the shortage of certain basic goods throughout the 1954–1955 year.⁸³ Yet as a 1955 report indicates, this did not eliminate all problems:

Although the number of shortages in the area of clothing supply goods has decreased to a minimum, even now there are and were certain items that have not been produced in a quantity sufficient to satisfy consumer demand. These include light, brushed fabrics, bedding sets, brocade comforters, light comforters, wool men's and women's apparel, knitted wool tops, the cheaper type of pink and white cotton material, empire silks, Goldsol camisoles, charmeuse women's undergarments, and leather and sheepskin coats for men, women, and children. The lack of rubber pants for children has also raised difficulties. Since the industry only shipped these items at our insistence and in one amount at a time, certain goods and sizes were sold out on the first day of their arrival.⁸⁴

According to another report discussing preparations for the supply of winter goods, the situation had improved considerably compared to the previous year, but there still remained a few (to use the document's description) "narrow bottleneck items" which could not be provided in a large enough quantity to satisfy consumer demand.⁸⁵

⁸² "A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Kereskedelmi Központ Áruforgalmi Főosztályának 1/B. sz. titkos tájékoztató közleménye," Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Levéltára (National Archives of Hungary Hajdú-Bihar County Archives, hereafter MNL HBML), XXIII. 108/C. 5. d., January 10, 1955.

⁸³ The "new phase" refers to a brand of politics represented by Imre Nagy from 1953 to 1955 that meant to relax political oppression, ease social and political tensions, put a halt to enforced industrialization, and emphasize the need to fulfill the population's consumer demands.

⁸⁴ "Debrecen Megyei Jogú Város Tanácsa Kereskedelmi Osztálya kereskedelmi vállalatainak 1955. III. negyedévi beszámoló jelentése," MNL HBML, XXIII. 108/C. 7. d., October 14, 1955.

⁸⁵ "Nyíregyháza Városi Tanács Vb. Kereskedelmi Csoportjának előterjesztése a téli

The natural consequence of these shortages was that customers immediately bought up whatever happened to be available in the store that day.

The slow tendency toward change was further indicated by the attempt to establish a greater level of conformity between the demands of small- and large-scale retail and production. "For the purpose of better satisfying consumer demands," ordered the ministry of internal trade, "as of the second quarter of 1956 before large-scale retail firms submit their orders to the industry, representatives from both small- and large-scale retail firms will examine the models together and the large-scale retail firms will then place their orders based on the statements made by the small-scale retail firms."⁸⁶ From time to time prices were brought down in an attempt to increase consumer spending. These sales were usually inspired by the need to decrease the supply of items that had piled up and often proven unmarketable.

After the process of nationalization came to an end, advertisements were replaced by "trade propaganda" that certain state-run firms had to organize based on central orders. In the beginning of 1954, for example, a national campaign for the sale of winter goods was launched with the slogan "We Warmly Recommend It." Later a series of posters attempted to popularize products from Czechoslovakia's clothing industry by proclaiming, "Czechoslovak Linens in Every Household!" In the second part of that year the slogans of "First Task: Prepare for the School Year!" and "Let's Dress Better and Brighter!" were issued as part of a centralized "goods propaganda campaign" targeting various seasonal products. The central directives issued in May 1956 called upon the leaders of retail firms to remember that "one of the most important and lasting tools for propaganda is the shop window. Far more attention must be paid to placing new, fashionable clothing items in shop windows and making sure that those wares which are available in sufficient quantity are tastefully displayed. A shop window's cultured appearance is one of the most important measures of the clothing trade's progress. Shop managers must provide every form of support possible to the window dressers so

áruellátásra való felkészülésről," MNL Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Levéltára (National Archives of Hungary Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Archives, hereafter MNL SzSzBML), XXIII. 502., December 16, 1955. This report lists shortage items that include—to mention just a few—children's clothing, fur goods, knit outerwear, brocade comforters, and tracksuits.

⁸⁶ "A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Főigazgatóságának 2/3/1956. sz. utasítása," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 120. d., January 15, 1956.

rural garment shop windows can quickly reach the level of Budapest shop windows."⁸⁷ The ministry similarly urged firms to hold fashion shows more often and use the local council committee's loudspeakers and bulletin boards for popularizing fashionable and modern apparel.

In the first half of the 1950s the general level of Hungarian society's clothing supply displayed quite low standards. In the course of 1954 and 1955 the ministry of internal trade had the population's supply level assessed via a questionnaire. Thanks to changes made in economic priorities following the June 1953 political shift, the government's temporary revaluation of public consumption meant that the purchase of garments in 1954 significantly rose (by one quarter) in both value and quantity compared to the previous year.⁸⁸ Anyone who could afford to made sure to replace goods that had been previously unavailable due to shortages. According to the report summarizing these research results, in 1955

the clothing supply for the surveyed men can be described as good on average. On average the men we asked owned three coats, three suits, and nearly four pairs of footwear, including 2.4 pairs of shoes. Ninety percent of the consumers we surveyed own a winter coat . . . those without one wear sheepskin vests or lighter jackets. . . . The clothing supply among white-collar professionals is generally more favorable compared to other social classes, a factor that stems from differences in dress needs. . . . Among those surveyed the level of bedding supplies is extremely low. . . . On average even the quantity necessary for changing the bedding is not available. . . . Our experiences show that there are many items of which the population does not possess even one. Many of these include essential garments. They own only one or two pieces of other kinds of clothing, even though more of these are needed in the course of average wear.⁸⁹

This proved to be the case regarding shoes as well; according to the survey, one-fifth of those surveyed owned one pair of shoes, irrespective of their social position. Four-fifths had two or more pairs of shoes. Slightly better clothing supplies were reported in the case of women: those surveyed owned an average of nine sets of clothing, most of

⁸⁷ "A ruházati kereskedelem propagandájának központi irányelvei," Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Főigazgatóságának iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 20. d., May 20, 1956.

⁸⁸ *A lakosság ruházati ellátottsága és e cikkek iránti kereslete* (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kereskedelemfejlesztési és Piackutató Intézet, 1956).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

which were simple wool dresses. It was, however, infrequent to find a woman who had summer dresses or dress suits, just as the silk dresses that were in fashion at the time for special occasions were also rare. When comparing the clothing supply for various professional categories, the analysis concluded that the wardrobes of those pursuing intellectual or white-collar careers were more complete compared to those employed as factory workers or farmers. One reason offered in explanation of this phenomenon lay in the fact that white-collar employees had better-quality garments and a significant proportion of the clothing they owned had been purchased before the war. Interestingly enough, the increase in the length of time a garment was worn was characteristic throughout each category, irrespective of profession: "The cloth suit worn by more than half of those asked had been procured before 1953; the same proved true for 40 percent of winter coats."⁹⁰ From this we can presume that a large proportion of these garments had been made before this date.

The general state of a lack of clothing was reinforced by an examination of the minimum level of necessities conducted in 1956 by the National Committee of Trade Unions (*Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa, SZOT*). Based on these findings, "the least favorable conditions exist in ensuring the basic minimum of clothing. According to household statistics, half of Hungary's families fall below the basic minimum for garments. Families with the lowest incomes do not even spend half of the basic minimum sum on buying clothes."⁹¹ According to the calculations made at the time, the monthly expenditure of 88 forints per capita represented the basic minimum needed for clothing; on average more than one-third of the surveyed families were able to put half of this sum toward apparel. The report concluded that "13.3 percent of workers do not own a winter coat while nearly half possess fewer than two wool suits. One-third of women have at most one, or not even one wool dress. . . ."⁹² (The prevailing dress norms at the time dictated that men should have at least two weekday wool suits and one suit for formal occasions while three wool dresses were seen as representing the minimum for women's wardrobes.)

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹¹ Gyula Belényi and Lajos Sz. Varga, *Munkások Magyarországon 1948–1956* (Budapest: Napvilág, 2000), 455.

⁹² *Ibid.* 456.

In a report prepared by the KSH in August 1956, the head of a working-class or employed family who earned an average income could afford to buy himself a suit costing 870 forints every 2.5 years. His winter coat could be exchanged for a new one costing between 1,000 and 1,250 forints every 10.5 years and he could afford a new pair of shoes for 260 forints once a year. His wife similarly had to wait one decade before spending 1,000 forints on a new winter coat yet could consider purchasing a dress suit for 540 forints once every four years. She could expand her wardrobe with a wool dress (400 forints) once every three years and treat herself to an inexpensive, 150-forint cotton shirtwaist dress once a year. Women in this income bracket could buy a new pair of stockings for 50, or undergarments for 80 forints twice a year. For their child buying a coat costing 500 forints took 3.5 years and an inexpensive (120 forints) garment or 100-forint pair of shoes could be afforded either every six months or once a year.⁹³ Based on this statistical data, an average three-member urban family averaging a yearly income of 23,400 forints spent 1,350 on the head of the household's wardrobe, 1,510 on his wife's, and 800 forints on his child's. This totaled a yearly expenditure of 3,660 forints spent on clothing, which represented one-seventh of the family's yearly income. According to the data found in the aforementioned domestic trade survey, throughout the year 1956 the majority of survey participants would have liked to purchase shoes, a winter coat, a wool suit, and undergarments, yet was unable to do so due to a lack of sufficient income and shortages in goods.⁹⁴ Six out of ten felt that the goods sold in shops were of poor quality and most apparel was shoddy. The limited selection, the available yet still insufficient level of income, and the restricted opportunities for procurement conserved the deficiencies in clothing supply that had spread throughout every layer of Hungarian society.

The 1956 collation of household statistics determined that "in the case of apparel it is generally not possible to speak of 'saturation' since the current level of dress standards is rather low, particularly among

⁹³ *Adatok és adalékok a népgazdaság fejlődésének tanulmányozásához 1949–1955* (Budapest: KSH, 1957), 376. Based on its calculations, the KSH counted on "the supposition that goods mainly suitable for average consumption would be available." See also *Ötezer család 1956. évi háztartási feljegyzései*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 5 (Budapest: KSH, 1957).

⁹⁴ "A lakosság ruházati ellátottsága," 14.

low-income groups." The survey considered those individuals whose monthly per capita income was between 200 and 400 forints as belonging to the lower spectrum of earners. Based on these findings, the average yearly clothing expenditure for working-class and employed families was 1,220 forints while peasant families farming on individual plots of land spent 1,000 forints. Peasant families employed by the collective farm, however, averaged 1,151 forints. The clothing budget per family averaged between 100 and 120 forints a month, a sum that only allowed for the very barest of necessities, which were additionally poor quality and the cheapest of clothing items.⁹⁵

It must be pointed out, however, that the statistical average hid rather large discrepancies since urban families in the lowest income bracket could afford to spend 45 forints a month per capita, while those with the highest incomes could spend 215 forints. In other words, in contrast to the 540 forints that could be spent by the poorest families, the most well-off could earmark 2,580 forints a year for expanding and renewing a family member's wardrobe, a difference that is nearly fivefold. Due to the peculiar circumstances brought about by the era's shortage economy, however, it cannot be said with any certainty that high-income families were genuinely able to put their income advantages toward clothing. The same could naturally have proven true for low-income families, although in their case acquiring even basic necessities was at stake.

At the end of 1956 and the beginning of 1957, a rather definite realignment of the political attitudes expressed in reference to dress began to take place in Hungarian society, at least as far as urban styles and dress habits were concerned. The main essence of this irrevocable shift was that dress- and fashion-related issues only became the center of political focus due to supply shortages or if a new phenomenon—such as young men growing their hair long or the wearing of what János Kádár termed "Wild West trousers" (jeans)—was judged as being incompatible with "socialist morals and socialist collective norms."⁹⁶ Throughout this lengthy decade that stretched to the end of the 1960s, the institutional system connected to dress and clothing not only expanded, but also operated in a way that struck a balance between

⁹⁵ *Ötezer család 1956. évi háztartási feljegyzései*, 19.

⁹⁶ At the KISZ Congress held in 1967, János Kádár coined this term for jeans at a time when jeans had just begun to appear in Hungary. "Kádár János felszólalása a KISZ VII. kongresszusán (1967)," in *Hazafiság és internacionalizmus*, 64.

consumer demands and the expectations of a planned economy. In practice this meant that the wisdom behind the current planned directive remained supremely unquestioned and unchallenged while the practice of providing customers with unconditional service simultaneously reigned. Despite increases in the available selection of wares, overwhelming demand continued to characterize the garment trade as certain items remained on the list of shortages. In the end, however, the number and percentage of Hungarians without access to basic clothing decreased.

The next period, which lasted from the end of the 1960s to the mid-1980s, was characterized by the post-1968 conditions of a quasi-market economy and the gradual emergence of a supply-based market. As of the mid-1970s, the rejuvenation of a strengthening private sector had a growing influence on these economic changes. The shortages that had previously affected all types of general consumer goods came to determine—for longer or shorter periods of time—the availability of current fashions, such as jeans in the early 1970s. Since domestic industry continued to prove incapable of satisfying demand, fashionable garments—nylon pantyhose, rayon blouses, and single-breasted trench coats—entered the country as “smuggled goods” via private import in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Items brought into Hungary via this method were usually sold among relatives and acquaintances; even so, indulging in this sort of pastime was a risky business for years since dealing in illegal trade was punishable as a minor offence in the best-case scenario (if the value of the contraband was worth no more than one thousand forints) but was treated as a felony in worse cases.⁹⁷ Despite the serious threat

⁹⁷ According to a government decree prepared in October 1960, “any individual who regularly trades in goods worth less than 1,000 forints without the benefit of a trade permit and in a manner that resembles the earning of income has broken the law and can be fined up to 3,000 forints.” The justification for the statute emphasized the “unlawful trade activities that are—even today—extremely widespread throughout the entire nation’s territory and lead to a great deal of disturbance and difficulties in supply and maintenance of law and order.” See “A magánkereskedelem tevékenysége és a KISOSZ munkája: Előterjesztés a minisztérium kollégiumához,” A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium irata, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 7. d. The 1961 penal code categorized anyone “dealing in trade activities or maintaining a business without the appropriate license . . . or conducting intermediary trade in a way that is economically unwarranted or speculating in a manner that could be perceived as a means of increasing prices” as guilty of speculation and thereby punishable by a three-year prison sentence.

of criminal law, the “private” trade in trendy or shortage items occurred on a daily basis and was quite widespread due to the fact that the only way to get high-prestige clothing items was by means of the common practice of shopping tourism. Those willing to take the risk of selling smuggled wares could supplement their incomes without having to go to a great amount of effort.⁹⁸

The continuous presence of shortages did not affect access only to fashionable goods, but also impacted the availability of basic essentials. According to a domestic trade report prepared in 1957, “The supply levels for home textiles (upholstery fabric, carpeting) has essentially remained unchanged, meaning that these items continue to be scarce.”⁹⁹ Flannel cloth, men’s winter coats, carded women’s fabric, ready-made children’s clothes, and wool knitwear also counted as shortage items. In short, every type of category in consumer goods contained items that were chronically unavailable on either the national or local level. In the spring of 1957 in Szabolcs-Szatmár County a report reviewing the supply situation in villages concluded that “the supply of garments has improved throughout the past quarter, although some items, such as good-quality men’s suits, traditional peasant suits with riding breeches, riding breeches, work clothes, trench coats, and children’s suits with long trousers can only be acquired from the large-scale trade firms’ central distribution warehouses in minimal amounts. The situation surrounding wool dress goods is similarly problematic.”¹⁰⁰

Although 1957 brought obvious income growth for most social groups in Hungary as a political move to pacify Hungarians following the defeat of the 1956 Revolution, this factor did not do much to transform the consumption of apparel. In the most impoverished

⁹⁸ See Eszter Zsófia Tóth, “A munkásság életmódja Magyarországon 1930–1989 között: Egy állami díjas női brigád mikrotörténete” (PhD diss., ELTE, Budapest, 2003), 170–84; Eszter Zsófia Tóth, *Puszi Kádár Jánosnak: Munkásnők élete a Kádár-korszakban* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2007).

⁹⁹ “BkM. Ruházati Főigazgatóság 0011/4/1957. TüK. Jelentés az 1957. második félévi iparcikk ellátási helyzetéről,” MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 1. d. July 11, 1957.

¹⁰⁰ “A Földműves-szövetkezetek Szabolcs-Szatmár megyei Csoportjának jelentése a megye falusi áruellátásának helyzetéről,” Szabolcs-Szatmár Megyei Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottságának iratai, MNL SzSzBML, XXIII. 2. vol. 12, April 2, 1957. The situation was similar in other parts of the country. Based on a report issued by the Committee Council for Somogy County, practically the same goods were unavailable. See “Jelentés a Megyei Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottságának 1957. október 1-i ülésére a kereskedelem őszi-téli felkészüléséről,” MNL SML, XXIII. 1. b., September 24, 1957.

urban working-class and employed families whose monthly income per capita did not reach the sum of 400 forints, only 47 forints a month could be spent on clothes for each family member. Families earning the average per capita income of 800–900 forints a month could afford 151 forints to clothe each family member per month while the wealthiest individuals earning 1,600 forints per family member every month could spend 298 forints on apparel.¹⁰¹ In other words, the difference between the lowest and highest income brackets was more than six-fold. Alone, this one indicator demonstrates the deep differences in lifestyle and standard of living that existed in Hungarian society in the late 1950s.

In the case of peasant farming families, throughout 1957 the factors of income and consumption demonstrated a more robust differentiation compared to that experienced in previous years. In the smallest of smallholding farming families who only owned between 0.6 and 1.7 hectares of land and lived on incomes that did not reach the per capita sum of 300 forints a month, 28–30 forints was all that could be spent on the monthly clothing needs for each family member. Farmers with 8.6 to 14.4 hectares averaged a monthly income of 1,500 forints per person/month and could therefore dedicate 188 forints per month for the same purpose. It can therefore be concluded that large differences did not exist regarding the amount of clothing purchased by urban working-class employed or peasant households throughout the second half of the 1950s while the chasm between the clothing budgets for high-income rural residents and urban families remained.

In this period the range of clothing items slowly grew, retail supply improved, and general shortages in supply eased somewhat, even though temporary or more long-lasting shortages in national or local supply occurred rather often in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In a strange instance of cause-and-effect, shortages had a hand in speeding up transformations in rural dressing habits as was noted in a 1959 report:

The Palóc region in Nógrád County (including the villages of Dejtár, Buják, Kazár, Hollókő, etc.) is one of the nation's most famous regions for traditional folk dress. Manufacturing industry and trade has, however, almost completely managed to terminate the circulation of goods that are necessary for tradi-

¹⁰¹ *Munkás-, alkalmazotti és parasztcsaládok*, 17.

tional clothing, such as cashmere cloth for women's shawls, brocade ribbons, embroidered edgings, cording, small ribbed shawls, and eighteen- to twenty-strand colored bead necklaces. . . . Throughout the Palóc region roughly eight to ten thousand women and girls are affected by supply issues in traditional materials. . . . At the moment those families who cling to wearing traditional clothing have no choice but to make use of the older generation's wardrobes so that at least children can appear in traditional garb on important holidays and occasions.¹⁰²

As far as dress was concerned, shortages also had a bizarre influence on the rate with which fashion trends altered. "These changing fashions," remarked a 1958 report, "cause enormous difficulties in that retail demand and industrial production find it impossible to keep up with the pace in light of the fact that the industry has to be informed at least six to eight months in advance of retail demands, a process that still demands the development of a more adequate evaluation system."¹⁰³ Other than dealing with tensions brought about by the scarcity of goods, commerce also tried to utilize methods that "approached the market" and provided customers with better services. As a mark of these innovations, the Apparel Retail Firm in Debrecen introduced, according to a local report, the

sale of shirts and suits that can be adjusted or tailored to size. The firm has signed a contract with the local small craft cooperative for the smaller alteration of garments sold in ready-made men's stores. . . . Special bags embellished with the firm's trademark have been prepared for the handling of piece goods. Compared to packaging methods used previously, this innovation represents improvement in the level of culture. We have exchanged the old glass shade lighting fixtures found in many of our shop units for fluorescent tubes. For the purpose of displaying exclusive wares, we have procured four metal stands that will make it much easier and far more advantageous to show these items in our representative shops. . . . Instead of the old, dilapidated paper boxes once used to store undergarments, boxes made of metal sheeting have been supplied.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² "BkM. 002/15/1959. Tük. Nógrád megye kereskedelmi munkája: Jelentés a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiuma részére," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 3. d., March 26, 1959.

¹⁰³ "Debrecen város kereskedelmi ellátása a nyári hónapokban, DMJV. Városi Tanács VB. Kereskedelmi Osztályának jelentése," MNL HBML, XXIII. 102/A. vol. 19, May 27, 1958.

¹⁰⁴ "Feljegyzés a tanácsok kereskedelmi osztályai között az 1959. évi munkaverseny kiértékelésekhez a ruházati szakmában: Debrecen Megyei Jogú Város Tanács Vég-

Retail firms constantly took steps to expand the types of services they offered. The Apparel Retail Firm, for example, launched a new business branch for renting wedding dresses and accessories in the first months of 1960. As was characteristic of the era, the explanation for this change—other than the aim of satisfying customer demand—was that twenty private individuals were conducting this type of business already and making a good living out of it, thanks to their high rates. This form of private activity “cannot be allowed within the order of our socialist society and it is in the interest of our people to ensure that this type of rental activity is placed under the aegis of the state sector.”¹⁰⁵

Beginning in the 1960s small-scale industrial activities (including apparel production and design) steadily gained a wider scope of action. Increasingly popular, these “elite salons” only made ten to twenty models of the same clothing pattern at a time. The location of these producers of good-quality pieces often spread by word of mouth. Small industrial cooperatives played a role in producing larger series of fashionable products. In the first half of the 1960s it was not unknown for garment retail firms to have small industrial cooperatives make apparel items that were otherwise not available.¹⁰⁶

Before collectivization, in 1958 a peasant family working on private land and earning 400 forints per person in one month could spend 560 forints a year on attire. In families with 600–800 forints per person every month, 1,150–1,200 forints went to clothing every year. Peasant households earning more than 1,000 forints per person every month put 1,300 forints to apparel purchases in a year.¹⁰⁷ At the time when collectivization took place, virtually every social class within the structure of peasant society spent more money on clothing,

rehajtó Bizottsága Kereskedelmi Osztályának iratai,” MNL HBML, XXIII. 108/C. 7. d., December 15, 1959.

¹⁰⁵ “DMJV Városi Tanács VB. Kereskedelmi osztályának javaslata,” MNL HBML, XXIII. 108/C. 8.d., January 13, 1960.

¹⁰⁶ “Throughout the quarter the managers of both women’s and men’s ready-to-wear garment shops were in Debrecen and Szolnok for the purpose of buying goods, an endeavor that met with results. We similarly had the requested men’s suits produced by the KTSZ [small craft cooperative] in Kisvárdá. The Cipő [Shoe] KTSZ produced the men’s sandals.” “Beszámoló a Nyíregyházi Városi Tanács VB. 1963. július 9-én tartandó ülésére a város iparcikkkel való ellátásáról,” MNL SzSzBML, XXIII. 502, July 2, 1963.

¹⁰⁷ *Az 1958-ban még egyénileg gazdálkodó és 1959-ben a termelőségzövetkezetekbe belépett 340 paraszti háztartás jövedelme és fogyasztása* (Budapest: KSH, 1961).

a phenomenon that can primarily be explained by the transformation in the budget for expenditures that accompanied certain social and economic shifts.¹⁰⁸

A report prepared in 1959 with the intent of examining the connections between the organization of collective farms and the circulation of commodities concluded that the demand for items that formed a part of traditional peasant garb or characterized rural dress habits had dropped, including for example the mikado, wool shawls, or riding breeches.¹⁰⁹ According to a domestic trade inquiry from 1962 that also examined rural dress habits, "throughout the past few years urban dress has become widespread and the percentage of ready-made clothes, knitwear, and garments made of synthetic material in circulation has grown. With it, fashion's impact on demand has also spread to rural populations." The report continues to state that,

the clothing supply for peasant farmers is . . . 20–25 percent lower compared to those living on a wage or salary. Supply is strikingly low-grade in the area of bedding. (Per one hundred family members 150 sheets, 210 pillow-cases, and 150 duvet or comforter covers were recorded, meaning that one change of bedding was not guaranteed. The situation proved even worse in Szabolcs County.) While the supply of outerwear is better than this, it is not satisfactory. For every one hundred male family members out of the total families surveyed, an average of 160 coats, 220 jackets, and 320 shoes (work boots, boots) was found. For the same number of women, the average was 180 coats, 660 dresses, and 350 pairs of shoes. Families in Győr County are 10–15 percent better supplied than those in Szabolcs County.¹¹⁰

Compared to members of the working class or white-collar professionals in particular, rural residents were able to renew their wardrobes at a slower rate averaging every five to six years.

The fact that the times were changing was also demonstrated by household statistics collected between 1960 and 1965, which revealed that expenditures for clothing had steadily increased, albeit at a low rate.¹¹¹ In 1965, attempts were made to promote shopping with

¹⁰⁸ For more details, see Valuch, *Változó idők, változó szokások*, 311–23.

¹⁰⁹ "A TSZ. Mozgalom fejlődésének és az áruforgalom alakulásának összefüggéseiről, a kereskedelem további feladatairól," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 4. d.

¹¹⁰ Molnár, *A parasztság keresletváltozásának elemei és irányzata*, 32–34.

¹¹¹ For further details, see *Háztartásstatistika: 4000 háztartás jövedelmének és kiadásának alakulása 1960 és 1965 évek között*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 97 (Budapest: KSH, 1967).

bargain sales and markets, while a sweeping cut in prices was announced in February 1966. The impact of cumulative market demand and price reductions was summed up by a 1968 statistical survey in the following way: "Based on a comparison of prices, between 1960 and 1967 the consumption of apparel items rose by 20.7 percent per capita. Assuming constant development, this translates into a 2.7 percent increase per year, a rate that was lower compared to total consumption. The yearly development rate, however, occurred rather unevenly. . . . The households of employees spent significantly more on clothing than other professional categories did."¹¹²

In the first half of the 1960s, the clothing costs for children rose faster compared to those for adults. When examining clothing expenditures by professional category, it can be seen that in 1967 employed or white-collar professionals spent the highest sums on apparel, which translated to an average of 1,710 forints per year for children and 2,180 for adults. In contrast, working-class families spent 1,370 forints for children's clothing and 1,730 for adults' clothing. As they slowly began to climb out of the havoc wreaked by collectivization, peasant farming families were able to afford 1,360 forints for children's clothing, a sum roughly matching that spent by working-class families. In the case of adult clothing expenses, however, peasant families only averaged the much lower sum of 1,420 forints throughout the year of 1967.¹¹³

Since the average income continued to remain relatively low, the cost for certain apparel items was high in comparison, particularly as regarded the price for outerwear. In the mid-sixties a men's suit cost between 1,000 and 1,300 forints while a men's winter coat hovered between 1,200 and 1,400. A women's winter coat was 800 to 1,000 forints. In comparison to these prices, at the beginning of the 1960s the average gross earnings per month was 1,500 forints; by the end of the decade this amount was roughly 1,900 forints.

In a repeat of its research originally conducted in 1954, a decade later the Institute for the Research of Internal Trade examined the consumer attitudes and habits exhibited by the residents of a workers' colony established by an aluminum factory in 1949 in Almásfüzitő. In the mid-sixties the only clothing store located in the settlement attempted to satisfy the apparel needs of 492 families totaling 2,100 individuals. Even though the study states that "the clothing store's

¹¹² *A lakosság jövedelme és fogyasztása 1966–1967*, 57–61.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 59–60.

capacity has not been completely . . . utilized," the consumption of apparel had risen by 35 percent in one decade among the colony's inhabitants, just as the average per capita monthly income had climbed from 550 to 965 forints. The

mixed apparel shop located on the settlement primarily supplies the lower-income stratum, i.e., the elderly generation. The pull of Budapest and other nearby cities can be felt more as regards the circulation of apparel compared to manufactured items. Since the shop cannot maintain the kind of selection that could uniformly satisfy the settlement's complex demands, it therefore offers regular commerce items. It does its highest traffic in children's wear but has had a drop particularly in children's shoes and sportswear. A couple of years ago there was a continuous shortage in tracksuits in the store. Today the stock of tracksuits is impossible to sell. The same is true of men's nylon socks; purchases of women's and men's undergarments have also plummeted. . . . This is a general phenomenon in areas near the Czechoslovakian border. Including the cost of travel (10 forints in the case of *Almásfüzitő*) locals can still buy these items for far less in Czechoslovakia compared to the local stores. In *Almásfüzitő* it is also a common and widespread habit to shop in the nearby city of Komárom, irrespective of profession or amount of income.¹¹⁴

Among the local residents, the largest demand was for knitwear, women's and men's shoes, ready-made women's dresses, and children's clothing. Each inhabitant averaged a clothing allowance of 82 forints per month and 984 forints per year.

In the second half of the 1960s, the average level for the basic supply of apparel improved somewhat as the commercial trade system paid greater attention to stocking shortage items. "The firm's current supply of stock is quite favorable. Compared to previous years, this year [1968] we possess a significant quantity of items that were unavailable including undergarments of synthetic material, nylon stockings, and knit tops. At the moment Banlon undergarments, blouses for girls and women, lace-patterned nylon stockings for women, and pantyhose appear to be scarce. The reason for these lacks is that the respective manufactories are only able to produce quantities that are lower than retail demand."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Béláné Batori, Endréné Vilmos, and Józsefné Berberich, *Egy ipari település lakosságának fogyasztói szokásaiban bekövetkezett változások Almásfüzitő példáján 1954–1964* (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet, 1965).

¹¹⁵ "Előterjesztés a miniszteri kollégium részére: A budapesti Rövid- és Kötöttáru

Naturally, significant differences remained regarding the usage and availability of various items based on social, financial, and income-related factors. In the late sixties and early seventies, a three- or four-member rural family earning an average income spent between six and nine thousand forints on clothing in one year. This sum, however, grew exponentially when it became necessary to acquire more valuable items for each member of the family or if the circumstances of one family member suddenly changed, as can be expected in the case of a wedding or when a child began school.

In 1965, the ministry of internal trade repeated its survey from the previous decade in connection to the population's level of supply.¹¹⁶ A decisive majority of urban men had at least one winter coat, an autumn or spring jacket or trench coat, and one wool and linen suit each. Women's wardrobes most commonly contained a winter coat, a fur coat, a trench coat, a short jacket, an English-style dress suit, a cotton dress, and a few varieties of skirt-blouse combinations. On average men owned 7.6 pairs of shoes per person while women had 8.2 pairs per person. As the number of family members grew, the level of supply in home textiles dropped; two-member households had one change plus an extra set of sheets while "families with five or more members did not have sufficient bedding for providing a change of sheets for the entire family."¹¹⁷ The document concluded with the statement that urban residents (with Budapest in the lead) had a far better supply of clothing compared to rural residents while the wardrobes of working-class individuals was approaching the quality and number of garments found in that of an employed professional. White-collar professionals had the largest wardrobes while agricultural workers possessed the fewest items of clothing.

In the course of preparing economic plans, as of 1965, it was expected that the demand for apparel items would rise based on the

Nagykereskedelmi Vállalat 1968. évi felkészüléséről készített beszámoló," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Főigazgatósága, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 128. d., November 14, 1967.

¹¹⁶ Sándor Mártonffy and Gyula Marczell, *Ruházati cikkekkel és lakástextiliákkal való ellátottság* (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet Dokumentációs Szolgálat, 1965). During the survey the wardrobes of two thousand men and women and seven hundred boys and girls were evaluated for the purpose of establishing a representative sample. Similarly, detailed assessments and data collections have unfortunately not been found in reference to later periods.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

very simple reason that various social groups—irrespective of their financial position—had postponed making new purchases throughout the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s; during this period only the most worn out garments were replaced. Beginning with the Third Five-Year Plan, the expansion of the supply and selection of goods was designated a “mandatory” task for the garment industry and retail to fulfill—all while simultaneously adapting to “the demands of fashion and comfort.” In an attempt to realize this expectation, the following order was issued: “The level of supply in ready-made outerwear products must be further improved in the interest of expanding the number of customers willing to purchase off-the-rack garments. Problems with sizing must be solved . . . an adequate supply of clothing for children and teens must be solved while additionally ensuring quality goods that meet the demands of young adults, the group most concerned with outer appearance.” This partial change in attitude was also signified by the fact that attempts were made to take income differences into account when economic plans were being drawn. “For the most part we targeted the task of ensuring the availability of medium-priced items as regards the supply of apparel. Other than this, our additional aim is to provide an increased percentage and selection of inexpensive products that meet the demands of consumers with lower incomes. We have planned a growth in the selection of luxury items for the means of satisfying the special requirements of consumers with higher incomes.”¹¹⁸ From this point on, improving the level of quality, informing consumers about fashion trends, and the widespread usage of clothing retail propaganda and advertising techniques (as requirements of “a modern, fashionable, trendy dress culture”) were requirements that constantly surfaced in documents discussing the supply of clothing.

After 1965, the consumption of apparel showed a relatively dynamic level of growth within the conditions created by slow political consolidation. A determining element in this was the fact that this period marked the time when various social groups (with the exception of the wealthiest) replaced items that had remained out of reach due to shortages and lack of money in previous years. As a result, for most social strata, filling gaps or replacing worn out garments in

¹¹⁸ “BKM. Ruházati Kereskedelmi Főosztály: A ruházati áruforgalom a harmadik ötéves terv időszakában, 1971. Június,” compiled by Lenke Tóth and Júlia Vajnai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-tt. 45. d., June 1971, 15–18.

their clothing supply could no longer be avoided.¹¹⁹ The selection, however, was only partially able to keep up with the growing pace of consumer demand. As incomes climbed, consumer expectations also increased. Regardless of their social status or position, consumers expressed the general expectation that their purchased apparel be long-lasting, practical, and fashionable.

The years between 1965 and 1974 marked a period when (according to research done at the time) “the growing rate of expenditures for clothing items does not display any significant differences between social classes and strata, therefore the differences found ten years ago have essentially been preserved.”¹²⁰ Meanwhile the percentage of clothing expenditures was steadily dropping within certain social groups in comparison to the sum total of expenses: groups with fewer active wage earners generally spent less on clothing. As an analysis from the time described the general situation, “The majority of the population is well dressed, window displays in clothing shops are of high quality, the selection of goods is tasteful, and, for the most part, the quality and appearance of garments meet the requirements of modernity and fashion.”¹²¹ While the supply of goods sold in small-scale retail was steadily increasing, an assessment done by the National Market Research Institute in the winter of 1976/1977 revealed that one-third of the women and one-fourth of the men who participated in the survey had given up on shopping due to the paltry selection and shortages. One-fifth of survey participants had been able to make a purchase after engaging in a lengthy search for the given item while one-third bought something else other than what they had originally intended to buy. Only one-fifth of women and one-fourth of men ended up acquiring the item they had wanted. In the case of women’s apparel, the most common seasonal items that were scarce included winter coats, trousers, pullovers, and dresses. Men had difficulties acquiring trousers, suits, pullovers, and coats.¹²² Once again, the quality of an individual’s clothing noticeably depended on income as social differences were increasingly expressed via the procurement of

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Radmilla Versztovsek, “A ruházati fogyasztás rétegenkénti differenciáltságának egyes jellemzői,” *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 9 (1976): 13–17.

¹²¹ Ferenc Balogh, “Az életszínvonal növekedés és a ruházati forgalom,” *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 11 (1976): 15–18.

¹²² For further details, see László Szabó, “A ruházati forgalom szenzibilitása,” *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 1 (1978): 7–10.

certain garments that acted as status symbols. Initially representative of prestige consumption, fashionable clothes first demonstrated social status, and then became widespread enough to become a part of daily dress, as happened in the case of blue jeans. A shortage item at the end of the 1960s, one million pairs of blue jeans were sold in Hungary in 1976 alone; in 1977, this number rose to 2.5 million in spite of the fact that a brand-name pair cost between 900 and 1,100 forints.

These changes were accompanied by shifts in values and public opinion. Throughout this period dress reemerged as a means of self-expression. After all, clothing's outward nature provides the perfect opportunity for individuals or families to demonstrate the extent to which the rest of their social environment has fallen behind them regarding consumption: while clothing consumption in Hungary was characterized by the aim to satisfy bare necessities during the 1960s, a decisive orientation toward consumption increasingly emerged in the 1970s. Beginning with the Third Five-Year Plan, expanding the available selection of goods while adjusting to "the requirements of fashion and modernity" became a "mandatory" task for the garment industry and retail sector. In order to decrease the scarcity of apparel items, retail and manufacturing firms joined forces to assess consumer demand by means of market research. "When placing orders retail must take into consideration the population's distribution by age and determine how many infants, children, young people, middle-aged, and elderly men and women there are. The question of which age group will be dressed—and to what extent—by the ready-made industry must be weighed, together with the issue of what new clothing styles should be sold to given groups."¹²³ Emphasis was also placed on the connection between consumer expectations and the following of fashion trends.

Consumer consumption gradually took on a new structure in the first half of the 1970s. Within residential consumption, the proportion earmarked for foodstuffs and clothing items slowly decreased while that put toward heating and household energy essentially remained the same. In contrast, the ratio of expenditures for manufactured and durable consumer goods rose sharply. According to 1973 trade policies, "attaining a level of satisfaction higher than that of the previous year for the population's clothing requirements was the aim . . . other

¹²³ "Az új divatvonalak terjedése, a divatváltozások közgazdasági hatásai," A Divattervező Vállalat tanulmánya, MNL OL, XXV-G-4. 22. d., p. 4, August 3, 1971.

than this the other important tasks included the continuous expansion of inexpensive items . . . and the provision of better-quality children's clothes."¹²⁴ The goal of merely fulfilling minimal needs was no longer the exclusive priority in dressing: the steadily differentiating demands and needs of Hungary's consumers were gaining ground.

As a result of these changes, political documents no longer assessed the issue of dress within the context of shortages but began to discuss it in connection with the standard of living: "The guiding directives issued at the Party's Eleventh Congress state that the people of our homeland are living better and dressing better now compared to any other time in our history. We can be genuinely pleased that a high-level forum such as the Central Committee finds the topic of dress important. Even if it is not its most important factor, how people dress is a part of the norms that define the standard of living and plays a role in the quality of our lives that should not be underestimated."¹²⁵ The Fifth Five-Year Plan therefore stipulated that, "the selection of garment items is to propel the development of dress culture forward, make it possible for products that are modern and easily washable to become widespread, and bring about all-important improvements in items that serve the dressing of children and young people."¹²⁶

With the consolidation of Kádár's power came the relatively widespread feeling of existential security as far as jobs and living circumstances were concerned. The general improvements in everyday life situations raised the level of consumer demand as well, as was shown by various surveys and documents used for commercial policies. The fact that changes in income levels and clothing prices did not always occur at the same rate or time is yet another question; it cannot be forgotten that procuring or exchanging more essential garments (such as winter coats) remained a serious challenge for average-income families, just as expanding and renewing the wardrobe of a school-age child at the beginning of each school year was a heavy drain on the budget of any average Hungarian family. A school smock (obligatory at the time),

¹²⁴ "A ruházati áruforgalom az 1973. évben." Compiled by Júlia Vajnai. Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Kereskedelmi Főosztály. A Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet iratai. MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 41. d., June 1974.

¹²⁵ Irén Németi, "Változó életünk és a divat," *Ez a Divat*, no. 1 (1975), 2–3.

¹²⁶ "Az V. ötéves tervtörvény 47. &, 3. bekezdés." Quoted in: "A ruházati áruforgalom alakulása 1976–1977. években." Compiled by György Peremiczky for official use only. Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Kereskedelmi Főosztálya., August 1978.

a pair of shoes, one pair of trousers, one pullover, one shirt or blouse, and a jacket minimally cost between 1,500 and 2,500 forints in 1980, at a time when the average wage for one person was 4,098 forints per month.

By taking advantage of tourism, well-to-do families tried to solve the unavailability of certain luxury items. For those whose professions, positions and financial situation allowed it, traveling from Budapest for a shopping spree in Vienna was already considered quite chic and fashionable in the 1970s. In the same token, anyone who wanted to dress elegantly and according to the latest fashion either shopped at Budapest's well-known, illustrious downtown clothing boutiques or had his or her garments sewn by a personal tailor.¹²⁷ In 1970, the Luxus Model House located on Felszabadulás (Liberation) Square (known as Ferenciek Square today), the Grácia on Martinelli Square, the Elegant on Lenin Avenue (Erzsébet Avenue today), the Dáma on Sándor Petőfi Street, the Kék Duna (Blue Danube) on Kristóf Square, as well as the Ádám-Éva or Clara Salon (previously known as the Specialty Women's Dress Salon) on Váci Street all belonged among Budapest's famous fashion shops. The latter, for example, had regularly been frequented by actresses such as Hanna Honthy, Lili Darvas, Zsa Zsa Gabor, or the wife of the former prime minister, Count Mihály Károlyi. The wives of János Kádár, Josip Broz Tito, and Franz Vranitzky also shopped here. In keeping with the collection sizes and traditions held at the most fashionable fashion houses (Dior, Givenchy), these salons only produced ten to twenty pieces at a time of exclusive garments that were naturally quite expensive. Their clientele primarily included actors, actresses, politicians, TV personalities, doctors, journalists, athletes, and individuals who held leadership positions. Visitors or foreigners who had decided to stay in Hungary for a longer amount of time—mainly members of the diplomatic corps—were happy to purchase their clothing at these types of stores. In other words, anyone who could afford to pay for unique styles at the height of fashion visited these establishments.

¹²⁷ "Since the production of trendy items occurs within costlier circumstances, their price suitably reflects this factor. Those social groups who favor wearing the most fashionable garb are willing to sacrifice more in this case. For this type of customer, always being the first to appear in the latest fashion is important. If this garment cannot be purchased in time in the state sector, then he or she will acquire it from other sources, i.e., from abroad, a small-scale tradesman, etc. "Az új divatvonalak terjedési ideje, a divatváltozások közgazdasági hatása," A Divattervező Vállalat tanulmánya, MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 22. d., August 1971, 34.



Figure 26. Evening lights on Váci Street, 1975 (Fortepan, 206710, FŐFOTÓ)

Based on the increasingly common advertisements found in *Nők Lapja* and *Ez a Divat*, in 1970 the Luxus Department Store located on Vörösmarty Square sold one-of-a-kind women's dresses at prices between 700 and 900 forints, thereby rendering this an additional place beyond the reach of the average wage earner. (At this time the monthly gross income for one person was 1,568 forints and an average ready-made women's dress cost 325 forints.)¹²⁸ The majority of Hungarians were more concerned about whether they could afford to buy the garments that were absolutely needed.

Regarding the decade that followed the 1968 economic reform, it is quite common to characterize Hungary as a model of consumer socialism.¹²⁹ The most acceptable aspect of this description is that consumer-oriented forms of behavior steadily strengthened throughout the 1970s. The opportunities presented by taking tiny steps—"today I'll buy this, tomorrow I can buy that for myself"—continuously

¹²⁸ *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv, 1970* (Budapest: KSH, 1971), 402.

¹²⁹ See Tibor Dessewffy, "A fogyasztás kísértete," in *Kedélyes labirintus*, ed. Tibor Dessewffy (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 1997), 94–114.

reinforced a consumerist attitude. At the end of the 1960s, marked variations could already be seen in the clothing expenditures made by social groups from different professional backgrounds and financial situations. According to the data for 1970 household statistics, the yearly per capita sum spent on clothing in low-income (600 to 800 forints a month/person) white-collar professional or working-class households was 1,240 forints. Peasant farming and double-income households were able to spend 1,090 forints. Among those in the income bracket of 1,200 to 1,400 forints a month per person, urban households could afford 2,140 forints while rural families averaged 1,990 forints per person on yearly clothing costs. Within the highest income category (2,000 to 2,200 forints a month per person) urban families had a yearly clothing allowance of 3,190 forints while rural families spent 3,010 forints per family member.¹³⁰ While the gap between clothing consumption for urban vs. rural families began to narrow as income levels rose, differences based on community type and size continued to remain. In urban households, the difference between clothing expenditures for highest- versus lowest-income families was more than two-and-a-half times greater. In rural households, this same indicator was three times greater. This data demonstrates that consumer expectations and opportunities in the late sixties and early seventies remained rather differentiated, even as consumerist attitudes increasingly gained purchase in Hungarian society. According to a survey conducted by the National Market Research Institute in the first half of the 1970s, the amount of time that passed between exchanging old clothes for new ones was still lengthy: in the case of men's and women's coats this period averaged five to six years, while women's dresses were exchanged every two to three years and men's suits were made to last an average of three to four years.

Even in the late 1970s and early 1980s, shortages continued to be a part of what the system called "trade." A report issued in September 1980 by the ministry of internal trade stated that, "except for one or two types of goods categories, the level of supply has, on the whole, been acceptable within the changed requirements of a different economic system. . . . Retail firms . . . have generally ensured acceptable quantities, however the pace and composition of certain items (such as knit tops, knit materials, stockings, pantyhose, and types of socks)

¹³⁰ *Háztartásstatistika 1970*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 226 (Budapest: KSH, 1971).

have at times resulted in a temporary lack of selection in supply."¹³¹ At the beginning of the 1980s, the nation's crumbling economic situation also affected the supply of clothing. Manufactories capable of producing export items—usually at the cost of national supply—were encouraged to increase their export output at a time when imports were being cut in an attempt to slow down the further decline in economic balance. According to a 1982 report on the garment trade, "the supply of apparel for the autumn/winter season is guaranteed in spite of scarcities in a few items. The quality has developed differently compared to the base period. Many garment categories (sports-wear, leisure wear, home textiles) have improved but the selection of fashion items is in general narrower and more ordinary compared to that of the previous year due to decreases in non-ruble imports and difficulties in national raw materials."¹³² Two years later, in November 1984, even though the flash report on yearly trade circulation stated that the even supply of most items would be ensured, four or five products from virtually every type of goods category were predicted as being scarce, either seasonally or in size and selection. These items were primarily baby clothes, women's and children's pantyhose, tracksuits, children's shoes and underwear, undershirts, and sleepwear for men and boys.¹³³

In an analysis comparing the differences in standards of living between 1960 and 1980, KSH concluded that "the level of standard of living reached by the mid-seventies can be described as one in which the population's overwhelming majority was able to satisfy its basic needs."¹³⁴ The degree of supply and provision for apparel was also deemed satisfactory. According to analyses of the trade and circulation of garments, with the exception of those in the highest income bracket, the percentage of expenditures devoted to clothing (out of total expenditures) had decreased somewhat by the end of the 1970s.

¹³¹ "Tájékoztató jelentés a Kollégium tagjai részére a ruházati kereskedelem 1980. évi őszi-téli felkészüléséről," Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Kereskedelmi Főosztály 10.025/24/1980. sz., MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 97. d., September 11, 1980.

¹³² "Tájékoztató a ruházati kereskedelem 1982. évi őszi-téli felkészüléséről," A Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet iratai, MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 102. d. 10025/13/1982. sz., September 19, 1982.

¹³³ "Áruforgalmi gyorsjelentés 1984. január–november hónapokról," Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Közgazdasági Főosztály Információs Osztálya, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-xxx. 182. d., December 21, 1984.

¹³⁴ *Életszínvonal 1960–1980*, 129.

As regarded clothing, however, total saturation was only characteristic among the wealthiest. Contemporaneous examinations of supply and consumption stated that the lack of basic clothing items had eased, yet "the frequency of purchases of certain items is remarkably low and does not sufficiently include the possibility to replace items that have become physically worn, not to mention factors such as changes in fashion or values."¹³⁵

Within consumption, the proportion of money expended on clothing demonstrated a steady decrease that was partially due to transformations in consumption—as, for example, Hungarian families were spending more money on automobilization—as well as the result of changes in consumer attitudes. "Rocketing prices in apparel blocked increased spending, together with shortages that were made worse by the inflexibility of Hungarian manufacturing, import restrictions, and the growing interest in export. The population was able to reduce clothing costs (a decision prompted by a growth in income that was slower compared to previous years) since wardrobes had already been filled," a statement that was particularly true in the late 1970s.¹³⁶

As can be read in an analysis of consumer trends during the 1960s and 1970s, "when comparing the price level for clothing in all major goods categories, each can be judged as high in relation to world prices. During the fifteen years under examination [between 1960 and 1975] the price level for apparel has grown by 15.4 percent."¹³⁷

By the end of the 1960s, a variety of documents and analyses had already found that "the price level for clothing in our country is truly high. The price level for clothes in the neighboring capitalist countries that Hungarian tourists visit is lower. The cost of apparel items is even lower in a few socialist countries."¹³⁸ While clothing prices rose at a relatively moderate level in the first half of the 1970s, costs began to rise more steeply in the mid-seventies. In 1970, the consumer price index for apparel products was only 98.4 compared to that of a decade before; by 1975, it had risen to 113.9 and climbed to 150.5 in

¹³⁵ Radmilla Versztovsek and József Enyedi, *A fogyasztás társadalmi osztályok, rétegek szerinti differenciálódása Magyarországon* (Budapest: BKI, 1978), 61.

¹³⁶ *Életszínvonal 1960–1980*, 135.

¹³⁷ Ferenc Balogh, "Az életszínvonal növekedése és a ruházati forgalom," *Kereskedelmi Szemle* 11 (1976): 15–18.

¹³⁸ "A ruházati termékek fogyasztása: A Munkaerő- és Életszínvonal Távlati Tervezési Bizottság vizsgálati programjának 11. sz. tervtanulmánya," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-tt. 26. d., August 1970.

1980. By 1985, it had hit 220.2. In other words, the prices for essential clothing items increased one-and-a-half times in the seventies and had doubled by the 1980s. After state socialism came to an end prices increased at a faster pace.

Table 7. Consumer average for selected apparel items between 1950 and 1987 (forints)

Product / Year	1950	1960	1968	1978	1987
Cotton dress material, 80 cm wide (per meter)	13.50	32.10	31.20	30.20	54.40
Blended combed wool material, 140 cm wide (per meter)	162.00	241.50	247.00	283.00	324.00
Men's suit of combed wool material (per set)	910.00	1,080.00	1,260.00	2,680.00	3,460.00
Men's carded wool winter coat (per piece)	1,020.00	1,210.00	1,200.00	1,800.00	3,410.00
Women's winter coat (per piece)	650.00	800.00	836.00	1,890.00	3,140.00
Men's socks (per pair)	6.60	10.00	13.80	26.10	43.80
Women's stockings, synthetic (per pair)	105.00*	65.00	35.10	28.20	24.80
Men's leather dress shoes (per pair)	120.00	270.00	294.00	453.00	1,270.00
Women's leather dress shoes (per pair)	88.50	190.50	-	259.00	887,00

Source: *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága: múlt és jelen* (Budapest: KSH, 1996), 209.

*Data gathered in 1952, since this category was not included in the statistics gathered in 1950.

While white-collar professionals were the least likely to increase their clothing expenses, peasant farmers employed by collective farms put the most money toward this type of cost. Throughout the 1970s, a slight decrease in the differences among various social groups as regarded clothing expenses emerged as a general trend. Compared to the average, a far more dynamic increase in expenditures occurred in the case of children, particularly for those between the ages of eleven and fourteen. As far as adult generations were concerned, young and middle-aged women devoted more money to apparel than men

did, a tendency that could be observed in previous periods. This fact was emphasized by a contemporary market-analysis: "The amount of money women put toward clothing exceeds that spent by men to a larger extent than previously experienced. This is primarily true among white-collar professionals and working-class households and far less typical of peasant households where—with the exception of younger generations—the amount of money spent on women's clothing is only somewhat higher compared to that spent on men's."¹³⁹

Table 8. Changes in average yearly per capita clothing expenditures from 1960 to 1985 (forints)

Household Type/Year	1960	1970	1980	1985
Urban working-class household	1,483	2,312	3,286	4,474
Small town working-class household	1,359	1,980	3,078	4,272
White-collar professional household	2,024	2,929	3,893	5,507
Collective farm peasant household	1,244	1,991	2,998	3,995
Double-income households	1,509	2,465	3,406	4,442

Source: *Háztartásstatistika, 1985* (Budapest: KSH, 1986), 20–24.

Based on data gathered in the household statistics for 1980, expenditures for children's clothing increased parallel to age group; within this category, boys between fifteen and eighteen years of age averaged from 4,600 to 5,200 forints per year while girls' clothing cost between 5,000 and 7,500 forints per year. As far as those older than eighteen were concerned, clothing expenditures decreased in every type of age and professional category with the increase of age. Women were the only exception to this since their clothing costs were far higher than men's in every category. A comparative analysis of different employment categories demonstrates that men and women between the ages of thirty and seventy who were living in white-collar professional households spent far more on clothing than those who performed physical labor did. This phenomenon is further demonstrated by the fact that white-collar professionals living in cities and small towns on average spent 3,900 forints on clothing while urban physical laborers could afford 3,400 and villagers spent 3,000 forints on a yearly basis.

¹³⁹ "Háztartásstatistika, 1980," in *Emlékkötet: Szemelvények a magyar háztartás-statistika történetéből*, 247.

The economic decline that emerged in the late seventies and early eighties unequivocally influenced the decrease in garment consumption: "Trade circulation in apparel [in 1982] has fallen more than planned and this was characteristic of most products, a situation not justified by the selection of goods for 1982. While supply quality deteriorated somewhat during the year, all of the surveyed shop directors stated that the selection of goods was better compared to the previous year. The decrease in clothing demand was affected by the increase in consumer price level that was higher than expected, as well as the fact that the private sector experienced a dynamic growth in the sales of products supplied from non-central [that is, non-state] commodity supplies."¹⁴⁰

When tracing how clothing and dress standards changed throughout the 1970s, the following analysis from 1970 provides a suitable point of departure.¹⁴¹ Based on this source, the clothing supply for Hungary's population had an estimated worth of 100 billion forints. The average timespan for exchanging clothes was four years, a fact indicating that the wardrobes on various social groups contained quite a few worn out and old-fashioned garments. "The per capita clothing consumption has been relatively low in spite of the progress achieved in the past few years. This is demonstrated by the fact that out of every one hundred men in Hungary, thirty-seven working-class/employed and forty from the peasant class buy one knitwear top once a year. Men from the working-class/employed stratum can buy a suit once every three years."¹⁴² The fact that this situation slowly began to change is supported by data gathered on household statistics in 1975: men bought new suits once every three years, trousers or a separate suit jacket once a year, a winter coat or spring jacket once every five years, a trench coat or raincoat every ten to fifteen years, outerwear or coat material once every five years, knitwear tops once a year, shirts every seven to eight months, shoes or sandals every eight months and undergarments three times a year. Women purchased dress suits every 1.4 to 2 years, skirts and blouses every three-quarters of a year

¹⁴⁰ "Belkereskedelem, 1982," Budapest: KSH. For official use only. 502-71/1983., March 1983, 7.

¹⁴¹ "A kereskedelempolitikát megalapozó számítások és irányelvek a vállalatok, szövetkezetek IV. ötéves terveinek elkészítéséhez," Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-ttt. 26. d., June 7, 1970.

¹⁴² Ibid.

or yearly, winter coats or spring jackets every 4 years, a trench coat or raincoat every 12–15 years, and other outerwear or knitwear once a year. Women invested in undergarments on a quarterly basis and bought shoes or sandals every six months, while stockings and socks were acquired one pair at a time every two to three months. It is difficult to define how the content of personal wardrobes changed since very few documents or sources exist that record this type of information.¹⁴³

The continuous growth in the small-scale retail circulation of various clothing items, however, allows us to conclude that personal wardrobes did indeed expand during this period. In the mid-seventies, the author of a publication on dress was of the opinion that the minimum wardrobe required for a child consisted of eight pairs of underwear, four to six undershirts or camisoles, four pairs of pajamas, six pairs of socks, four pairs of tights, four shirts or light blouses, two warm shirts or blouses, two knit coats or sweaters, two raincoats, three dresses and/or trousers, two to three pairs of street shoes and two pairs of house shoes or slippers. The following minimum number of garments was recommended for adults: four pairs of underwear, four undershirts or camisoles, one or two slips, two to three brasieres, one or two pairs of garters, three pairs of pajamas or nightgowns, six pairs of socks and/or four pairs of stockings, three shirts or blouses, three pullovers, two cardigans or knit jackets, two skirts, one jumper dress, one dress, two pairs of trousers for men and one for women, one pair of shorts, one or two suits/dress suits, one raincoat, one sports coat, one bathing suit, one bathrobe, and two housedresses and one apron for women. In both cases, the minimum amount of footwear was set at two to three pairs.¹⁴⁴ During the 1970s, procuring

¹⁴³ To date, research has not unearthed estate inventories originating from the 1970s that could be considered useful from the perspective of dress. Krisztina Ferencziné Sedlmayr has analyzed the uncommonly abundant wardrobe of a female engineer who lived in Budapest during the Kádár era; these items are located in the Textile Collection of the Hungarian National Museum. The engineer who originally owned this clothing was born in 1936 to parents who worked as government officials and devoted particular attention to clothing throughout her life. Her wardrobe forms a fascinating source for continued research on women's apparel during the 1960s and 1970s. For further details, see Krisztina Ferencziné Sedlmayr, "Nemere Éva okleveles mérnökő gazdag ruhatára a Kádár-korszak idején: Gyűjtési tapasztalatok a Budafoki úton," in *Néprajzi jelenkutatás és a múzeumi gyűjtemények változása*, ed. Zoltán Fejős (Budapest: Néprajzi Múzeum, 2003), 69–72.

¹⁴⁴ Mária Pataki, *A család ruhatára* (Budapest: Minerva Családi Könyvek, 1976), 29, 47.

these garments was becoming less and less of a burden for most Hungarian families.

An internal process of reorganization occurred in the consumption of clothing items during the 1970s. The demand for low-quality products steadily dropped while more and more consumers preferred to buy better quality goods.¹⁴⁵ Within a certain context, it can be said that mass consumerism developed into the phenomenon that defined how Hungarians dressed during the 1970s and 1980s. Once the lack of basic clothing items no longer characterized all of Hungarian society but rather remained present only among a decreasing number of social groups, consumerism and the activity of shopping came to be invested with a new role and meaning among daily activities. Similarly, the level of expectations and demands customers held regarding the quality of dress and the products they wanted to buy also rose steadily. According to an internal examination that analyzed the circulation of apparel items from 1976 to 1977, "the population's demands have steadily increased as regards clothing. These demands (in relation to quality, style, modishness) can only be gradually and partially met due to the conditions in national production and the restrictions limiting the increase of imports."¹⁴⁶ Quite understandably, from time to time consumer reflexes that had been honed by the circumstances created under a planned economy took over when it came to attaining the latest fashion apparel or seasonal items. Most families usually took stock of what would be needed before the school year began: "Based on previous experience, this is the time when parents rush to clothing stores, for reasons that only they know. They obviously run into a few sad experiences along the way since the selection in teen suits and coats is absolutely pitiful, there isn't enough knitwear, corduroy trousers are scarce, and anyone intending to buy children's shoes or school smocks may face serious problems in finding the right size."¹⁴⁷

Hungarian society's sharpened desire for consumerism during the 1970s and 1980s can also be shown via the virtual cult following

¹⁴⁵ Tamás Valló et al., "A lakosság fogyasztása és a kiskereskedelmi forgalom kapcsolatrendszerének, valamint fejlődésének fő vonásai," in *A Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet Évkönyve 1975–1979* (Budapest: BKI, 1980), 15.

¹⁴⁶ "A ruházati áruforgalom alakulása 1976–1977 években." Compiled by György Peremiczky for internal use only, Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Kereskedelmi Főosztálya, August 1978, 4, MNL OL, XIX-G-4.ttt. 27.d.

¹⁴⁷ *Ez a Divat*, no. 8 (1980), 2.

that primarily emerged in the 1970s for the thick, heavy catalogues published by western department stores. Perusing these publications with their tempting offers and much wider selection of an array of goods that was mindboggling compared to what Hungarians were used to kept families occupied for entire evenings at a time. It was also common for families to place these catalogues somewhere noticeable, such as in the room also used as the living room. The Sunday afternoon custom of taking a stroll through downtown Budapest or around the main squares in small cities for the purpose of window shopping also emerged as a part of this new consumerist orientation.

As of the late 1970s, the nation's deepening economic crisis affected various social groups to differing degrees, yet still caused a general decrease in consumer demands while simultaneously reinforcing the differences in the consumption of clothing within certain social groups. Based on household statistics collected in 1987, in the mid-eighties the clothing expenditure of families earning below the monthly sum of 2,600 forints per capita was less than 30 percent of that of the highest income families (earning 7,000 forints per month per family member).¹⁴⁸ This means that Hungary's poorest families could spend 1,745 forints a month while wealthier households had 5,625 forints at their disposal to cover the monthly cost of clothing needs for each family member. Due to the increasing cost of day-to-day life, families with an average or below-average income significantly reduced their expenditures, mainly for adult clothing, throughout the 1980s. The money they saved was then put toward other consumer goals or used to maintain their children's living conditions.

As a result of these social and economic shifts, the structure of clothing expenditures once again changed significantly beginning in the late 1980s. Between 1988 and 1997, the consumption of apparel fell by half; in 1996, the per capita consumption of clothing barely surpassed half of that averaged in 1970.¹⁴⁹ The ten percent of the population that respectively belonged to the lowest and the highest income brackets continued to exist in a gap demonstrated by the five-fold

¹⁴⁸ *Háztartásstatisztika, 1987* (Budapest: KSH, 1989), 32. In 1987, the sum set by KSH as the minimum amount earned by active workers was 2,850 forints, as opposed to the sum of 2,640 forints set for pensioners. According to calculations made based on this data, 9 percent of Hungarians were living below the poverty line in 1987 while 8 percent of society belonged to the category possessing the highest income level.

¹⁴⁹ For more details, see Istvánné Mányi-Szabó and Zsuzsanna Szókéne Boros, eds., *A lakosság fogyasztása 1970–1997* (Budapest: KSH, 1998).

difference in the sum of money they possessed for the purchase of clothing. Among these changed circumstances, social groups that were slipping farther and farther into impoverishment tried to cut costs by decreasing their day-to-day expenditures. Other than this, consumption showed a notable increase in used and reduced-price items while the percentage of those who shopped at "Comecon" markets remained significant throughout the 1990s. The appearance of an incredible demand for used clothing exported to Hungary from the West marked a new phenomenon in consumption. As hundreds of shops selling garments "by the bale" opened their doors, members of the middle class joined poorer customers in regularly frequenting this type of store. This was also emphasized in a lifestyle analysis: "Since wearing clothes that had been passed on from other people slowly became a sign of 'the old days' and the image of the subordinate position and misery that was attached to these memories as life gradually improved beginning in the 1960s, hand-me-downs were less common. In the 1990s, however, we see social strata willing to take advantage of the wave in second-hand stores who never would have considered such a thing a few years earlier. . . . This change is not only a sign of the middle class's decline into poverty."¹⁵⁰ Obviously, this habit also indicates the continuous prestige assigned to "Western" used clothes in public opinion, not to mention the personal satisfaction found in being able to assemble a practical and fashionable outfit at a fraction of the price.

Beyond (or instead of) the usual rational or practical reasons, a variety of elite social groups continued to assign a significant role to the type of consumerism that signified prestige and status which obviously made itself felt in dress as well. Instead of (or as well as) more everyday locations, exclusive, or perhaps even extravagant garments were put on display at social events (weddings, balls, receptions, concerts, fashion shows, or even sporting events) that were being organized with increasing frequency during the years following the end of state socialism. At these events, which provided an important opportunity for representing wealth and stature, it went without saying that ball gowns, tuxedos, formal wear, and all the accoutrements of class and elegance would obviously be required.

¹⁵⁰ Ágnes Kapitány and Gábor Kapitány, "Szegénység-gazdagság (presztízjszerek változásai) a '90-es években," in *Látható és láthatatlan világok az ezredfordulón*, ed. Ágnes Kapitány and Gábor Kapitány (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 2000), 13–34.

While a certain section of Hungarian society was occupied with public displays of prestige, yet another visible aspect of daily life in the 1990s was that of an ever-widening level of poverty that was rippling through a growing number of social groups. For those groups who had already been poor before the end of the Cold War or at the beginning of the 1990s, acquiring the bare minimum of clothing frequently proved either very difficult or impossible. As a result, caritative or various social aid associations came to play an increasingly necessary role in easing the gaps in wardrobe necessities that once more became a common sight—along with that of children and adults wearing worn out clothing—in the slums that were “popping up” and spreading virtually overnight.

Among these changed circumstances, Hungary’s middle class continued to follow the particular orientation toward consumerism that had characterized this social group during the ten to fifteen years preceding the 1990s; the appearance of shopping centers and the transformative effect this new form of shopping had on Hungary’s retail network further reinforced this trend. Beyond satisfying basic clothing needs, the role possessed by garments and dress in demonstrating social status slightly—albeit temporarily—declined in significance within these social groups compared to what had been customary during the previous period.¹⁵¹ In the 1990s, the average salary earned by a public servant was just enough to provide for a well-dressed appearance (which in many cases was only appearance), yet still far from sufficient for procuring luxury or prestige-signifying fashion items. Even if a family managed to make this type of purchase, it was primarily done to buy something that their children wanted and essentially served the purpose of maintaining the appearance that the family could still provide a middle-class lifestyle. When shopping, consumers were mainly eager to get the best possible quality at the lowest price, a demand that clothing chains—as they simultaneously transformed the garment industry in Hungary—were eager to serve.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

The consumption and supply of foodstuffs

During the interwar period, Hungary's agricultural system essentially produced enough to keep the nation provided with food. When comparing social position and income, however, vast differences existed between urban and rural populations or the urban working-class and middle-class as far as eating habits and the level of nutrition or opportunities for the consumption of foodstuffs were concerned. Wartime necessities and the introduction of a fixed economic system led to vast transformations in both the habits surrounding food consumption and the supply of foodstuffs. Once the military received priority in supply, severe shortages in Hungary's food supply and trade network already emerged in the first days following the outbreak of the war.

One of the earliest and most widely apparent consequences of the war was the increased state and official supervision of Hungary's food supply in the form of a centralized public supply system. With the war's outbreak, Hungary's energy supply was immediately placed under central control; by September 22, 1941, ration cards for bread and flour had already been introduced in Budapest and its surrounding suburbs while cornmeal was being mixed into wheat and rye flour for the sake of frugality. The per capita daily rations for lard and sugar were decreed and ration books became normalized for the primary purpose of dissuading consumers from buying up shortage items. Other than foodstuffs, various types of consumer items were gradually rationed as well. The leaders of local civil administrative branches kept a close eye on fluctuations in the supply and trade of foodstuffs while simultaneously taking steps in an attempt to avert food shortages, supply disruptions, and scarcities. This effort is well reflected in a local police chief's report to his superior:

In reference to the report made by telephone on the fifth of the current month, I state that in compliance with the authorization received from Your Excellency also by telephone and with the aim of hindering wealthy consumers from hoarding the mentioned essential goods I issued a summons to the leader of the Grocers' Association and convinced him to report demands that surpass the normal consumption of basic goods and ordered the Association to ensure that no one business fulfills disproportionate demands. . . . I have taken steps to influence public opinion by placing censorious articles in the local papers while emphasizing that the unwarranted practice of hoarding

endangers the undisrupted continuation of public supply and causes undue distress for our needier members of society, who could procure neither sugar nor salt for days. . . . These measures had a positive effect and that temporary situation unfortunately brought about by the more well-off and intelligent levels of society has since ceased. The tradesmen have since replaced shortages in their wares and public supply is running smoothly.¹⁵²

Disturbances in supply soon appeared: scarcities in the most varied type of consumer items that were necessary for bare survival were painfully palpable already at the beginning of the war. A report by the mayor of the town Budafok conveys the difficulties caused by these scarcities:

The supply of firewood for the civilian population has only been achieved during the past few months with utmost difficulty. This circumstance has been a constant source of unease among members of the public since nobody has been able to set aside the usual (or even necessary) store of firewood as winter approaches. . . . Coal shipments have been almost completely halted for a month. . . . Unless the shipment of fuel supplies increases immediately and on a large scale, the unexpected appearance of cold weather means that the entire population of the city will suffer great privation. Scarcities have increasingly grown more widespread as regards the food supply; lard cannot be acquired anywhere in the town. The lack of lard particularly affects the poorer levels of society, who have no stores to rely upon and therefore have no choice but to shop daily. Shortages have appeared in other types of foodstuffs; even potatoes have grown scarce since the arrival of new shipments has grown much diminished.¹⁵³

The weather contributed to further difficulties in maintaining public supply during some periods, as occurred in 1940 due to an uncommonly cold, hard winter. This is evident from a report by the mayor of Pesterzsébet:

For the inhabitants of the town of Pesterzsébet, the supply of foodstuffs was ensured despite the large snowdrifts and unusual cold, which made roads impassable. Farmers were barely able to bring their produce from the countryside to our market during the first quarter of the year. The disruptions in

¹⁵² "A nagykőrösi rendőrkapitány jelentése," Főispáni iratok, MNL PML, IV.401.4, September 12, 1939.

¹⁵³ "Budafok polgármesterének jelentése," Alispáni évnegyedes jelentések, MNL PML, IV.408.u., November 19, 1940.

food supplies that appeared on a national level were apparent in Pesterzsébet as well. Navy beans, lentils, and dried peas could only be procured with great difficulty while potatoes were only available in small quantities, partly due to the challenges farmers faced in shipping, but also because the maximum price cap placed on potatoes was so unacceptable for them that only limited amounts were sold. It cannot be denied, however, that the extraordinarily hard winter conditions must be taken into consideration as regards the sale of potatoes at the market: most root cellars could not be opened due to the threat of the contents freezing inside. . . . In the first quarter of the year in Pesterzsébet, particularly when the snow was high, procuring firewood and fuel, soap, and washing soda was a serious challenge. Soap as well as washing soda was not even in stock at shops for a lengthy amount of time.¹⁵⁴

A centralized system of ration cards was put into place in the interest of guaranteeing a steady rate of supply. This decision was relayed in a report made by the mayor of Budafok to the county administration:

As regards public supply, I report that ration cards for sugar have not been counted since June 3 due to a lack of personnel. Ration cards for lamp petroleum have been distributed while the distribution of cooking petroleum will be completed within a couple of days. Ration cards for cooking and lamp petroleum were not issued because merchants were in such short supply that providing the needed amount would have been impossible. Since merchants were recently able to procure a sufficient amount, ration cards for cooking petroleum could be issued. . . . I further report that the situation regarding the lack of firewood, coal, and lard grows increasingly dire throughout the town. I have reported to higher authorities on this issue many times and continuously urge the cessation of these shortages yet have still not reached any noticeable level of success.¹⁵⁵

As 1940 approached 1941, the challenges brought about by the fixed economy's cumbersome mechanisms were daily. Adequate supplies of lard were not available in Kiskőrös, Soltvadkert, and Csengőd while the demand for meat could just barely be satisfied.¹⁵⁶ Throughout most communities, lard, soap, wood, and coal were the most

¹⁵⁴ "Pesterzsébet polgármesterének jelentése," Alispáni évnegyedes jelentések, MNL PML, IV.408.u., April 19, 1940.

¹⁵⁵ "Budafok polgármesterének jelentése," Alispáni negyedéves jelentések, MNL PML, IV.408. u., September 17, 1940.

¹⁵⁶ "A kiskőrösi járás főszolgabírójának jelentése," Alispáni negyedéves jelentése, MNL PML, IV. 408. u., January 15, 1941.

essential shortage items in the autumn of 1940. Issued in 1940, the order allowing for the requisition of agricultural products was expanded to include grains for bread, legumes, corn, potatoes, and dried or dehydrated vegetables. In 1941, this requisition was extended once more and included sugar beets, tobacco, plants used for industrial purposes, and all forms of grain; by March 1941, lard was also being commandeered.

While all of society increasingly felt the effects of the war once the nation entered the fray in 1941, Hungary's peasant class was particularly afflicted during this conflict. The government commissioner for public supply ordered farmers to hand over a portion of their grain harvests on August 1, 1941; those who neglected to do so faced a prison sentence of anywhere from two to six months. The military simultaneously began commandeering necessary foodstuffs, a further injury and burden to peasant farmers. It was common for farmers to be left without sufficient fodder for their animals, thereby endangering farmers' ability to keep their stock alive through the winter. As a result, the government commissioner responsible for national mobilization was temporarily forced to halt the practice of commandeering resources. Since this entire process reoccurred in 1942, the paucity of seeds for planting and lack of fodder became constant. Once again, the government had to dip into radically diminished national reserves to provide farmers with the seeds needed to sow that year's crops.

It goes without saying that the demand for foodstuffs and industrial raw resources grew as a consequence of World War II. An accounting was made of the most essential goods, after which the "surplus" was requisitioned; this practice was followed primarily in the case of grains, legumes, and dried vegetables. In 1942, farmers were ordered to hand over a part of their crops to the government.¹⁵⁷ Called the Jurcsek system, the aim of this solution was to ensure that the state would have a sufficient, steady supply of grain reserves at its disposal. The amount farmers had to submit to the state was based on the registered net income of their landholdings: for every gold korona that the registered net income of their land was worth, the farmer had to provide fifty kilograms of wheat. Twenty percent of this could

¹⁵⁷ See Gyula Erdmann, *Begyűjtés beszolgáltatás Magyarországon 1945–1956* (Békéscsaba: Tevan, 1992); János Honvári, ed., *Magyarország gazdaságtörténete a honfoglalástól a 20. század közepéig* (Budapest: Aula Kiadó, 1996).

be paid in cereal grains that could be used to make bread while lard was accepted in lieu of an additional twenty percent. Farmers could then choose which crop would be handed over to cover the remainder of this "cost." Peasant farmers gained access to consumer industrial goods based on the ratio of points they had been assigned for handing over the required amount of their harvest. One consequence of this system was that smallholders were forced to restrict their consumption. Large landowners, however, found a reliable market for their crops: the regressive method employed in levying the amount each farmer was forced to turn over put large landowners at a distinct advantage since the larger the territory, the less had to be paid.

As the demand for foodstuffs climbed, prices skyrocketed. While one kilogram of bread had cost 38 fillérs in 1939, by 1943 the cost for bread had risen to 58 fillérs. Compared to the 1.60 pengő previously paid for one kilogram of lard, shoppers had to pay 5.60 pengős in 1943. Instead of the 2 pengős paid for one kilogram of pork tenderloin in 1939, by 1943 Hungarians were paying 5 pengős. It must be mentioned that these were merely the officially recorded prices for these goods: on the black market, for example, the asking price for lard was actually 12 pengős, twice the sum mentioned above.

Restricting civilian consumption of certain foodstuffs (such as sugar or lard) had already been accomplished with the introduction of the ration system. The list of rationed goods only expanded: by September 1941 bread and flour were under rationing, followed by milk in May 1942. As of January 1943, meat could only be bought with ration cards. Consumer habits changed as a result: to mention one shift, reductions in the supply of pigs led to an increase in beef consumption.¹⁵⁸ The military's needs were naturally prioritized, and the first regulations immediately affected those with a taste for coffee or tea. Due to the increase in tariffs, the price of coffee increased threefold. Between late 1939 and early 1940, bread also turned "brown" as mills were forced to grind wheat by only 77 percent (later reduced to 85 percent) and rye by 75 percent, meaning that whole wheat and whole rye flour was being produced. Bakeries then used this to make wheat or rye bread. To limit the consumption of meat, beginning in December 1939 Mondays and Fridays were declared "meatless" days.

¹⁵⁸ According to a traditional Hungarian diet, pork represents the most important source of meat, followed by poultry. Beef was consumed in much smaller quantities since few steers were raised for the express purpose of slaughter.

Housewives therefore had no choice but to alter their usual cooking habits and served roux soup, fried pears, and boiled potatoes with tomato sauce for the main midday meal. Cornmeal mush (accompanied by farmer's cheese and sour cream) was then served for dinner. Organ meat replaced better cuts of meat. Instead of adding the usual spicy sausage to *rakott krumppli*, a traditional casserole featuring boiled potatoes, eggs, sausage, and sour cream, the meat was replaced by sliced boiled carrot. Horsemeat could be used to make meatloaf; according to the author of a cookbook entitled *Delicious Military Dishes*, when fried the meat of a colt is just as mouthwateringly tender as a wiener schnitzel made of veal.¹⁵⁹ Ration cards for sugar were introduced in April 1940: the average ration for sugar in the cities was twelve decagrams a week per person. Individuals in rural communities were allowed seven decagrams a week; pregnant or nursing women, children under 12, or medical patients (if certified by a physician) could also receive more. As of April 1940, the weekly per capita ration for lard was set at 24 decagrams; by early 1941 this number had fallen to 20 decagrams, though those performing heavy physical labor received an amount that was one-and-a-half times larger.¹⁶⁰

Virtually without exception, local leaders throughout the communities and areas surrounding Budapest reported shortages in the autumn of 1941:

I respectfully inform you that—similar to the other communities—it is nearly impossible to procure meat or lard in the community of Szalkszentmárton and feelings of discontent are clearly noticeable, particularly among the women. As to whether they threw their pengő notes to the ground and stomped them into mud, this cannot be verified, even though the gendarmerie in their capacity as the local magistrates conducted a thorough and strict investigation at my order. Discontent has grown to extreme proportions over the fact that the community cannot use locally fattened hogs to fulfill the quota of butchered hogs since the Ministry of Public Supply has requisitioned these animals for other cities. The butchers have naturally spread word of this far and wide among the townspeople and this has bred further outcry to which there is undeniably some basis.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Imréné Madár, *Ízletes hadiételek* (Szeged: n.p., 1942).

¹⁶⁰ "A m. kir. földművelésügyi miniszter 1940. évi 153.900. számú rendelete, a zsír forgalmának és fogyasztásának szabályozásáról," *Rendeletek Tára, 1867–1947*, adt.hu.

¹⁶¹ "A dunavecsei járás főszolgabírójának jelentése a közellátási helyzetről," Főispáni iratok, MNL PML, IV. 401-a-143-1941, October 28, 1941.

In the Monor district, lard was also scarce while the monthly ration for flour did not even meet the basic minimum; those performing physical labor, for example, could not be given their extra portion. "The supply of lard is catastrophic. Everyone is simply returning the issued purchasing permits because it is impossible to find a fattened hog anywhere. . . . The reality is that we can distribute five to six decagrams of lard a week. In many cases this amount is not given in lard, it is fatback that will not even produce this much lard when rendered. Unless this situation changes, the consequences will be dire."¹⁶²

By themselves, the diminishing supply, rocketing demand, and wartime circumstances were more than enough to lead to rapidly rising prices. Based on the data, it can clearly be seen that the price of essential foodstuffs climbed at a growing rate and increased to be three or four times their original price within the space of five years. With the exception of bread, the edibles listed below were four times more expensive by 1944. Other than the fixed rates set by authorities, prices rose even faster in the flourishing secondary trade that took place on the black market. In 1943, the price for smoked bacon and lard was 12 pengős, ham cost 10 pengős, and flour was between 4 to 6 pengős on the black market.

Table 9. Changes in the price for selected basic foodstuffs from 1939 to 1944 (pengő)

Consumer good/Year	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
bread (1 kg)	0.38	0.39	0.44	0.46	0.58	0.60
bacon (1 kg)	1.50	1.90	2.64	2.90	4.70	5.50
lard (1 kg)	1.60	1.98	3.30	3.56	5.60	6.90
pork tenderloin (1 kg)	2.00	2.50	3.00	4.15	5.00	7.10
pork haunch (1 kg)	1.80	2.20	3.00	3.50	4.20	5.50

Source: *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága: múlt és jelen* as well as issues (from 1938 to 1944) of the journal *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle*.

In a further attempt to preserve at least a minimal level of supply, per capita bread rations were once again regulated beginning in the summer of 1944. Physical laborers were issued 15 decagrams a day, while those performing heavy physical labor received a supplementary ration

¹⁶² "A monori járás főszolgabírójának jelentése az 1941. október havi közellátási helyzetről," Főispáni iratok, MNL PML, IV-401-e 20.031-1941, October 1941.

of 35 decagrams a day, amounts that could not be deviated from. A per capita ration for meat, however, was not set either nationally or locally given the fact that meat could only be distributed based on the size and state of the butchered animal. Rather than the previous custom of a weekly meatless day, Hungarians were actually holding meatless weeks with growing regularity. Following the frontline's steady advance and eventual march through Hungary, the supply system essentially collapsed; a lengthy amount of time was to pass before it would again be capable of providing even the most meager of necessities.

After the end of World War II, the entire country suffered from a general lack of foodstuffs. Occupation by enemy forces and armed combat had wreaked havoc on an already overburdened system of food production. Food shortages only intensified in the autumn of 1945: the combined effects of farmland left fallow due to the war, the destruction of farmstock, the need to provide reparation, and an uncommonly dry summer meant that national food supplies remained far below that needed to cover even the most minimal nutrition levels.¹⁶³ This situation is well demonstrated by the fact that even bread could not always be ensured on a daily basis. After deducting what was needed for planting and paying wartime reparations, the amount of grain that could be used for national consumption only reached one-fifth of the amount available in 1938. Due to the war's effect on farmstock, guaranteeing a supply of meat also proved irresolvable. Since only (compared to 1938 levels) one-third of Hungary's stock in beef cattle and one-tenth of its stock in hogs and sheep had survived the war, butchering was prohibited. As a consequence, except for poultry, the supply of meat virtually came to a halt in the second half of 1945 while milk production fell to a fraction of its previous levels, thereby leading to catastrophic shortages in Budapest and other cities around Hungary. It was therefore imperative that the public supply system be reinstated as soon as possible, together with the basic conditions needed for agricultural production.

The newly emerging political system targeted the reestablishment of a public supply system and the provision of a minimum level of foodstuffs as its primary tasks in avoiding the threat of famine. Food scarcities added to social discontent and even led to political tensions

¹⁶³ As a nation on the losing side of the conflict, Hungary was compelled to pay wartime reparations as a condition of the Paris Peace Conference, which added an extremely heavy burden to an economy that was meanwhile attempting to regain its footing.

from time to time. Between 1945 and 1946 inflation sent food prices skyrocketing; following the devaluation of the pengő, Hungarians turned to a barter system in which garments and foodstuffs figured as the items of highest value. The lack of food additionally led to the emergence of a secondary market; for quite a lengthy amount of time, gaps in the central distribution system left plenty of room for black market trade. The ration system became one of the most important methods employed by the central food distribution system; access to ration cards for food was made a civil right. In spite of this, from 1945 to 1946 these state-issued rations were barely enough to ensure a minimal level of nutrition. The daily ration for bread, for example, was 10–15 decagrams, while 30–50 decagrams of sugar were issued per month. The ration for lard was set at 40 decagrams. In a move meant to foil corruption, rations were frequently distributed at factories, institutions, or workplaces.¹⁶⁴ The situation was slow to improve; by October 1947, the daily bread ration had only been increased to 20 decagrams. Supplementary portions were issued to those performing heavy physical labor, expectant mothers, and individuals responsible for the support of multiple children. The Economic Supreme Council and the Ministry of Public Supply played a defining role in reestablishing the supply of foodstuffs while basic tasks were carried out by city and community supply commissioners. Having to provide food and supplies for the occupying Soviet forces placed an already critical situation under further pressure.

In the case of famine, Budapest's population was in the most vulnerable position, which was why great emphasis was placed on reestablishing the supply of foodstuffs in the capital city, as is evident from the report of the mayor of Budapest: "The city is rushing to operate soup kitchens for the purpose of aiding its citizens in accessing food. Before the siege, official soup kitchens mainly served the needy, but following liberation these sites have been expanded to include soup kitchens run providing cost-reduced meals for employees at nearly every factory and office in the capital. The importance of these soup kitchens cannot be more obvious as the number of diners has risen dramatically as a consequence of food shortages and the continued deterioration of the real value of earnings."¹⁶⁵ In July 1945, an average

¹⁶⁴ See Gyula Belényi, *Az állam szorításában: Az ipari munkásság társadalmi átalakulása Magyarországon 1945–1965* (Szeged: Belvedere-Meridionale Kiadó, 2009), 32–35

¹⁶⁵ *Budapest közállapotai az 1945/46. tél küszöbén* (Budapest: Budapest Művészeti és Tudományos Intézet, 1946). Published by Mayor József Kővágó and compiled by Budapest



Figure 27. Distribution of food to children, 1946. Setting up soup kitchens was an important way to help the needy across the country in the postwar years (Fortepan, 128510, Sándor Bauer)

number of 55,647 people ate at Budapest's 379 soup kitchens (also known as people's kitchens), which rose to 76,830 by October of that year.

For the 1945/1946 year, the average number of calories consumed by one person per day was only between 1700 and 1800, an amount two-thirds less than what is necessary for survival. The situation was far worse during certain periods: in early 1946, for example, the caloric value of the daily rations for Budapest residents totaled 480 calories.¹⁶⁶ Based on household statistics, in December 1947 the caloric value consumed by a member of a working-class family in Budapest was 2,213, while members of families employed as public servants survived on 1,757 calories a day. Privately employed office workers averaged 2,438 calories and pensioners were able to consume 2,301 calories. According to rates determined at the time, an adult man had to be able to burn an average of 2,400 calories per day, which rose to 3,000 calories in the case of an intermediate level of physical exertion.¹⁶⁷ The extent

Székesfőváros Statisztikai Hivatala (The Budapest Capital City Office of Statistics).

¹⁶⁶ From 1934 to 1938 the average per capita consumption of calories was 2,805.

¹⁶⁷ Gyula Marczell, "Háztartás-statisztikai felvétel budapesti családokról," *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle*, nos. 1–6 (1948): 47–56.

of malnourishment is further indicated by the fact that the average per capita consumption of meat at the end of 1947 was only 64.4 percent of the average reached in 1938. Milk was 33.9 percent while the consumption of eggs, lard, and bread was 72 percent of the 1938 average. Meanwhile consumption of dried legumes nearly doubled; a significantly larger amount of potatoes and fresh fruit was also consumed. By the end of the 1940s, the situation stabilized, even if only for a short time, as later proved to be the case. At this time Hungarians generally ate more and the consumption of sugar, vegetables, fruit, lard, and dairy products increased.

A family's financial situation naturally impacted its access to food. The recorded household statistics for late 1947 reveal that working-class families spent more than half of their average monthly income (835 forints) on food. Public servants spent 44 percent of their average monthly salary (911 forints) on foodstuffs while privately employed office workers put 40 percent of their average monthly earnings (1,271 forints) toward food.¹⁶⁸ In December 1949, the average per capita amount spent by urban families each month was 128.90 forints; rural families only devoted 110.70 forints to feeding each family member for a month. In the case of urban families, this cost represented 43 percent of their per capita monthly expenditures while this same expense equaled 53 percent of the total amount spent per month on one member of a rural family. Since these statistics were only collected according to type of community as opposed to individual social strata in Hungarian society, it can only be assumed that peasant families were able to spend less on food compared to those residing in villages due to the characteristically high level of self-sufficiency farming families maintained regarding their own food supply.

By the end of the 1940s the chaotic conditions surrounding Hungary's food supply system eased somewhat as the nation's economy was rebuilt, trade was reestablished, and agricultural production stabilized. In the early 1950s, however, economic policies that emphasized the need to develop heavy industry led to yet another dramatic downturn as far as the food supply was concerned since incomes remained relatively low while prices soared. These factors naturally contributed to the low level of nutrition that still typified the diet of many Hungarians. A series of pointlessly oppressive measures (high taxes, laws forcing farmers to hand over part of their crops to the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

state, the passing of restrictions on production) struck a new blow against Hungary's agricultural system resulting in the further deterioration of quality food supplies. Throughout 1950 basic foodstuffs disappeared from shop shelves as shortages became constant.

Following the nationalization of small-scale retail firms dealing in groceries, shoppers were also treated to a drop in the level of quality. Other than the daily lack of certain items and the poor quality of the goods that were available, the unacceptable storage of foodstuffs frequently led to health emergencies. According to a report made in February 1952 by Budapest's city council,

From the standing of public health, an objectionable method employed in the selling of frozen foods has been observed. The KÖZÉRT Company has been selling frozen foods to stores that either do not possess suitable refrigeration or only have refrigerators that are too small to hold all of their frozen goods; as a result, mainly bulk goods are not refrigerated. Goods that have thawed due to this unacceptable lack of proper storage are then returned to the factory, where they are refrozen and then placed back into circulation. This practice cannot be allowed: even if the food in question has not become spoiled from a bacteriological point of view, once these frozen foods have thawed, the protein they contain has already begun to decay which not only ruins the level of quality, but also creates a source of food poisoning. The danger of this becomes even greater if the food was contaminated, in which case the bacteria swiftly multiplies once the food has thawed; even refreezing the food will not destroy the bacteria. A good such as this can bring about a severe wave of mass food poisoning.¹⁶⁹

As shortages grew more and more frequent, trying to acquire basic essentials became one of the most important activities in a family's daily schedule. In 1951, the most important foodstuffs were once more placed under a rationing system, which was naturally no guarantee that the set amount could actually be attained.¹⁷⁰ Simply procuring the most basic foodstuffs for everyday survival often resembled a serious battle. At the time, of course, state propaganda claimed that returning to a central distribution system was necessary for the sake of providing a more equal means of dividing the commodity supply.

¹⁶⁹ "Az Egészségügyi Minisztérium átirata a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Élelmiszerárak Főosztályának a Fővárosi Tanács jelentése kapcsán," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-mm. 4. d., February 4, 1952.

¹⁷⁰ See Iván Pető and Sándor Szakács, *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1986), 212–25.

For those who were employed, ration cards were handed out at their workplace together with cards for their family members; for those who were unemployed, the municipal council was responsible for delivering their ration cards. Ration cards were issued for (among other items) bread, flour, sugar, meat, lard, milk, laundry soap, and bath soap. By establishing and operating this system for distributing basic goods, political leaders aimed to create a basic, yet relatively reliable supply of food for Hungary's urban working-class and low-income employees.

When determining whether an individual possessed the right to claim this advantage, a difference was made between the "unprovisioned" (meaning that the individual did not produce food) and the "provisioned" (those who produced food). Most rural residents automatically fell into the latter category, or at least it was supposed that those living in villages would be able to produce the foodstuffs listed in the distribution system. The "provisioned," in any case, were denied access to ration cards. Based on the data regarding who qualified for rations, 4.5 million were granted access to bread, 2.6 million to meat, 3 million to various forms of cooking fat, 1.6 million to milk, and 9.2 million (Hungary's entire population) could receive ration cards for sugar. Those categorized as enemies of the state were denied ration cards: the black or "free" market was the only remaining option these individuals had for purchasing foodstuffs. Workers received the basic per capita ration for each adult family member while a supplementary ration was issued for small children. In the spring of 1951, the daily amount for one ration ticket's worth of bread was 25 decagrams; physical workers not employed in agriculture received an additional ten decagrams while miners got thirty decagrams. Meat tickets were issued exclusively to workers and their families: the basic portion for meat was either thirty or twenty-five decagrams. The basic monthly ration for lard or forms of fat was 60 decagrams, although workers, children under one, and expectant women could receive an added 20 decagrams. Children between the ages of one to twelve had the right to an additional ten decagrams. Despite the fact that supply did not demonstrate much improvement in the 1951/1952 year, the rationing system was terminated at the end of 1951 and the beginning of 1952.

At times scarcities were punctuated by buying frenzies which erupted when Hungarians — no matter their respective social position — went to great efforts to set aside the largest store possible of whatever goods

(particularly foodstuffs) happened to be available. This reaction originated from the fact that nobody could ever be certain when the currently available item could be purchased again. From this standpoint, the period between 1951 and 1953 was the most critical. Once the rationing system had been discontinued, the state drastically raised prices in an attempt to prevent shoppers from buying up whatever could be found on shop shelves: this solution, however, was just as much of a failure as the rationing system had been.

During the 1950s, hog butchering was strictly regulated in another move to centralize the distribution of food. As a result, every owner of a fattened hog had to apply for a butchering permit, based upon which the amount of lard (generally far more than could be fulfilled) that the owner would have to hand over to the authorities would be determined. Many opted not to apply for a permit, known as a "black" or illegal butchering. The penalty for this could be internment or multiple years in prison. As could be read in a report from the countryside written in the beginning of 1952, "customers have accepted the cessation of meat ration tickets with great satisfaction, even though daily notifications state that the community misses veal and pork, which we have not been able to serve them of late. . . . We were able to discern the fact that the cheeses had not been made of fresh ingredients and were subsequently quite rancid as a result."¹⁷¹

Political and ideological viewpoints had a definite role in determining the distribution of Hungary's meager food supplies. As a result, the capital city, areas populated by industrial workers, and mining towns received special dispensation as far as foodstuffs were concerned. Despite this, the industrial center of Ózd, for example, faced a critical lack of food from late 1950 to early 1952. In the summer of 1950 hardly any type of basic foodstuff could be found in the city's Népbolt (People's Shop) businesses. The severity of these shortages in food is best demonstrated by the fact that the local paper, *Ózdi Vasas* (Ózd Ironworker), published two articles in July 1950 about the challenges in public supply at a time when the news was kept heavily guarded. Once the council system had been established, the city council and the meetings of its executive committee continuously debated the topic that

¹⁷¹ "A Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Tanács Kereskedelmi Osztályának jelentése," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-mm. 4. d., February 29, 1952.

In the matter of the grave lack of supply that the workers of the city of Ózd currently face, it is urgent that we turn to the county council and from there to the Ministry of Internal Trade and Ministry of Food Supplies because finding milk, butter, and meat is problematic and accessing a sufficient amount of cooking fats within Ózd is a problem that must be speedily solved. . . . Improving the supply of food for these workers must be a national task. The council is not demanding special treatment, but rather insists that Ózd's workers not be in a worse supply situation compared to any other industrial workers in the nation.¹⁷²

In this city famous for its foundries,

supply is usually always bad. This has been especially noticeable of late. There is a factory cafeteria where food is cooked for 4,000 workers along with a workers' holiday resort that the company also provides with food. Beans, peas, legumes, eggs, and bacon cannot be found in Ózd's Népbolt, flour costs 4.60 forints. . . . The Rákosi Secretariat has already been contacted with the request that the situation be investigated. A staff meeting was called over the poor quality of the food, at which time the cook stated (among other things) that not one vegetable has been used this year and there are times when at ten o'clock in the morning she has no idea what she'll cook for lunch because of the difficulties in acquiring ingredients.¹⁷³

These circumstances led to serious social and political tension in the industrial center of Ózd.

Particularly during the catastrophic scarcity of food that occurred in the early 1950s, the ability to be self-sufficient in the area of food production remained an important factor. According to a report by the ministry of internal trade, "From December 30–31, grave disturbances took place in Budapest in connection to the bread supply. . . . The KÖZÉRT Trade Center is holding an inquiry at our orders. . . . According to their opinion, the disturbances in the bread supply were largely impacted by the emergence of a buying frenzy. . . . Roughly eight wagonloads of bread had remained in the KÖZÉRT store network after the Christmas holidays, an amount that truly influenced

¹⁷² "Az 1951. február 15-i tanácsülés jegyzőkönyve," Ózd Város Tanácsának iratai, MNL Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltára (National Archives of Hungary Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archives, hereafter MNL BAZML), XXIII-526/a 1.

¹⁷³ "Jegyzőkönyv a Kohó- és Gépipari Minisztérium Munkásellátási Osztályán 1952. november 19-én megtartott értekezletről," A MNL OL, Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-mm. 4. d., November 19, 1952.

the orders placed by the store managers. It was, however, extremely improper to sell this days-old bread to consumers when the shortage in bread was discovered."¹⁷⁴ This case aptly demonstrates the many complaints customers had regarding the quality of the goods they were forced to purchase at a time when very few attempts were made to improve the situation.

Throughout the first half of the 1950s, the ministry of internal trade required county councils to submit a monthly report on the situation in public supply and the number of shortage items. Among the other topics that were mentioned, council reports prepared in February 1952 strongly objected to the quality of lard, farmer's cheese, milk, and meat products. "A general complaint has been raised in reference to sausages and cold cuts in that they contain so much water that it is not uncommon for liquid to flow out of them while being sliced, a characteristic that is not pleasing to customers."¹⁷⁵ The scarcity of bread and the quality of that which could be procured was yet another constant source of tension: due to the poor harvest and badly organized production and distribution of bread, the only time bread could be bought was in the early morning. Even so, only some shops had received their shipment of bread. The situation was further worsened by the fact that most privately owned bakeries had been closed down as part of the nationalization process; the usual order for supply and delivery that had once existed in both city districts and smaller communities was consequently thrown into disarray.¹⁷⁶ Variety decreased and the bread factories that were created by merging smaller bakeries were either entirely incapable of satisfying consumer demand or only partially able to fulfill the orders sent them. In Baranya County at the beginning of 1952 "the complaint is constantly being made about the bread factories that, other than the amount, they don't pay

¹⁷⁴ "A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium jelentése," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-mm. 4. d., January 18, 1952.

¹⁷⁵ "A Baranya Megyei Tanács Kereskedelmi Osztályának jelentése az áruellátás jobbá tétel tárgyában," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-mm. 4. d., February 28, 1952.

¹⁷⁶ Between 1949 and 1952, as nationalization was taking place, most private tradesmen shut down their retail activities. The extent of this change is best shown by the fact that in 1947 the number of tradesmen was 70,000, in contrast to the 2,524 tradesmen recorded in 1953. A similar change occurred in reference to small-scale craftsmen as well.

enough attention to quality by sifting the flour. Customers therefore find pebbles, clumps of dirt, bugs, mouse excrement, etc. in it. The subsequent result is that customers genuinely fight for the bread from private bakeries."¹⁷⁷ From 1951 to 1953 ensuring a sufficient bread supply was a national problem, meaning that it was equally difficult to gain access to this most essential aspect of the daily diet in villages as it was in cities. This is reflected by a local report:

The situation was truly grave in December and still is now in Nyíregyháza as far as the bread supply is concerned. Based on what we see, the scarcity is due to the fact that there is no way of knowing if the shops will have a constant supply or not.... It doesn't matter if bread has been shipped. Even though shops get bread at 7 a.m. this only lasts until about 10 a.m., after which there is no bread to be had until 5 p.m. when they start delivering the batch of bread baked during the day. The workers know this and wait in front of the shops at this time. Lately they've begun following the bread wagons from the bread factory. . . . Mistakes are made by the shop employees, too, who don't weigh the bread or write out the receipt for it ahead of time. It's also happened—for example at the Number 50 shop—that the shop manager urged customers to buy bread then because that was when it was there. Two fines were issued at the Retail Trade Firm and disciplinary action is being taken against one worker. Of course, there were multiple instances of customers breaking the shop window. At one point the counter was overturned onto the shop manager.¹⁷⁸

Emotions ran high due to supply shortages: due to the heightened mood of discontent, the resolution made by the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party at the session it held from June 27 to 28, 1953, marked a political turn given that the decision was reached to handle public supply issues as matters of significance while placing great emphasis on stabilizing the supply of foodstuffs.¹⁷⁹ The necessity of this change in policy was stressed by a local party report:

¹⁷⁷ "A Bács-Kiskun Megyei Tanács jelentése," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-mm. 4. d., February 28, 1952.

¹⁷⁸ "A Szabolcs-Szatmár Megyei Tanács VB. Kereskedelmi Osztályának jelentése 06/5/1/1952. sz. 1953. január 7," MNL SzSzBML, XXX. 19. fond. 22. d., January 7, 1953.

¹⁷⁹ The Central Leadership (*Központi Vezetőség*, KV) was a body consisting of roughly one hundred members and operated in theory as the Hungarian Workers' Party's most important collective decision making organ during the interim periods between Party congresses.

Upon examining the situation regarding public supply, the Central Leadership has decided that the circumstances surrounding public supply have deteriorated of late, as is particularly true in smaller communities. More and more of those employed in agriculture find their store of grain has run out, which has led to increased buying of bread and flour from the central stores. The predicted amounts were not sufficient to satisfy every demand therefore less bread and flour could be supplied to the population compared to last year. . . . We can state that last year's drought left an impact on our county as well given that many working peasants and members of the collective farm have had to be supplied from the central stores....¹⁸⁰

Other than bread, meat, milk, and eggs were continuously scarce. Among less essential items, dried noodles, lentils, beans, pickles, coffee, tea, spices, mustard, bottled pickled vegetables, canned meats, fish, poppy seeds, shelled walnuts, and chocolate were also commonly found on the list of shortage items.¹⁸¹ Buying frenzies erupted as a natural consequence of living in a shortage economy: no matter what an individual's social position was, anyone with the opportunity and financial means to stockpile necessary foodstuffs or goods (even if this just meant whatever item that happened to be available) grabbed what he or she could. The supervisory department in the Budapest branch of the Hungarian Workers' Party reported:

In August 1952, more than six months after prices were drastically increased, a panicked wave of buying up merchandise spread throughout the capital city, for example, and lasted for days. People were mainly trying to buy up lard, flour, sugar, textiles, and clothes. In certain stores customers bought eight to ten times more than the usual level of consumption. For instance, at the grocery store located on Flórián Square the average sale of lard for one day was 200 kilograms and on Saturday they sold 2,000 kilograms. In the ninth district on Saturday the 23rd, 3,400 kilograms of sugar were sold only to be topped by the sale of 18,800 kilograms on the 30th. . . . In Budapest's other districts, even in places where fewer people were buying, the level of trade was still three to four times higher than usual.

The report similarly emphasized that the residents of working-class neighborhoods had also rushed the stores. In fact, even "the members

¹⁸⁰ "Szabolcs-Szatmár Megyei Tanács VB. jelentése a közellátás helyzetéről szóló KV határozat végrehajtásáról," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-mm. 4. d., July 5, 1953.

¹⁸¹ "A Bács-Kiskun Megyei Tanács jelentése," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-mm. 4. d., February 28, 1952.

of armed forces (police officers, soldiers, national security officers) numbered among those standing in line.”¹⁸² The steep rise in prices was not even enough to dissuade shoppers from buying up the available stock. To give a comparison, in 1949 one kilogram of bread cost 1.60 forints as opposed to 2.80 forints in 1953. By 1955, a kilogram of bread was three forints. To give more examples, in under five years the price of eggs increased two-and-a-half times while one kilogram of pork rose from 11.90 forints in 1949 to 28.90 by the end of 1953. During this period the price of a liter of milk increased from 1.50 to 3.60 forints.¹⁸³ These factors severely impacted consumers’ ability to access foodstuffs while additionally deepening the gap in the nutritional levels and eating habits of different social groups.

From time to time special consumer demands or different needs in supply emerged. As was mentioned before, the new residents of the state socialist cities that were built around industrial centers faced the same supply challenges as the rest of Hungary even though the supervision and organization of supply for these areas regularly fell under the aegis of a separate chain of command, such as the Ministry of Internal Trade’s Head Office for the Supply of Miners. Those living in these centers frequently tried to use their “privileged position” as leverage when lobbying for their own interests:

The workers of the “November 7” Power Plant (Inota) request the establishment of a Húsért [For Meat] shop in light of the fact that the nearest business of this type is located six kilometers from the power plant. They justify this request by the circumstance that 2,300 workers are currently working in the Plant currently under construction as well as the Aluminum Foundry Works being built in its vicinity, while roughly 500 families live on the site of the Plant. Other than this, 4,500 convicts work here who have permission to buy food once a month. After construction of the Plant and Aluminum Foundry has been completed, an estimated 2,400 workers will be working here while roughly 4,000 of their family members live in tower block units. We ask that this request be met as soon as possible.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² MNL 95. 2/215. ő.e. September 2, 1952. Quoted in Belényi, “Az ipari munkásság társadalmi átalakulása,” 114.

¹⁸³ For more details, see *Az élelmiszerfogyasztás alakulása Magyarországon*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 6 (Budapest: KSH, 1957).

¹⁸⁴ “A Bánya és Energiaügyi Minisztérium átirata a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Élelmiszerárak Főosztályának,” 460759/952. sz. MNL OL, XIX-G-4-mm. 4. d., January 25, 1952.

Although the Hungarian Workers' Party Central Leadership session held on October 31, 1953, with the purpose of reviewing the implementation of resolutions passed in June acknowledged that improvements had been made in Hungary's supply system while simultaneously targeting the next steps to be made, the political shift that occurred in 1953 did not bring about immediate changes in quality.¹⁸⁵ In 1954, the trend of rising prices that had been affecting Hungarian consumers since 1950 finally broke, leading to more moderate prices for basic foodstuffs. Scarcities, however, still remained a customary part of daily life. In the city of Debrecen, the local administration reported that, "the circulation of basic items has increased significantly, although we could not satisfy demands for meat, meat products, and lard within the supplementary quotas provided monthly. We are severely behind in other foodstuffs. In this case shortages mainly impact fruits and vegetables which consumers can find a better and fresher selection of on the free market."¹⁸⁶ Thanks to the slackening of restrictions on agricultural production, more goods appeared on the free market between 1954 and 1955. According to conclusions drawn in a research project conducted at the time, in 1955 more than one-fourth of Hungary's crops was sold on the free market and the quality of goods found there far exceeded that which was available in state-operated stores.¹⁸⁷ Prices rose as a result, but in this case the balance between the arrival of goods and consumer demand was able to keep prices in check. In the summer of 1955, a report reviewing the situation of Nyíregyháza's markets concluded that

our supply of meat can be described as limited, however during the past two months we were largely able to prevent those in agriculture from buying up goods before urban residents could get access to them by regularly putting out supplies and deciding the times for placing foodstuffs into circulation ourselves. Stores of poultry are essentially enough to cover the issue of meat supply. . . . Even though a large number of hogs were butchered last autumn and this year, scarcities in lard are starting to appear in the city as well as on

¹⁸⁵ "A Központi Vezetőség határozata az 1953. júniusi ülésén hozott határozatok végrehajtásáról," October 31, 1953, in Lajos Izsák, ed., *A Magyar Dolgozók Pártja határozatai 1948–1956* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1998), 524.

¹⁸⁶ "Debrecen MJV. Tanácsa Kereskedelmi Osztályának 1955. III. negyedévi beszámoló jelentése," MNL HBML, XXIII. 108/C. 7. d., October 10, 1955.

¹⁸⁷ "Az 1955. évi szabadpiaci áruforgalom," *Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kereskedelemfejlesztési és Piackutató Igazgatóság Jelentések*, no. 44 (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium, 1956).

homestead farms. During the past weeks the need to stand in line appeared at times and the ones standing in lines were mostly peasant workers.¹⁸⁸

At times quite peculiar attempts were made in an effort to decrease shortages. In the early 1950s, for instance, restrictions were placed on how much food could be purchased at one time per person. In the name of "endangering public supply," criminal proceedings were brought against those who stockpiled shortage items while campaigns operated by "people's activists" tried to agitate Hungarians against shopping, as is evident from a local report:

In April 1953, we have joined forces with voluntary public inspectors and retail workers to uncover thirty-one instances of individuals who tried to purchase far more basic foodstuffs than their daily needs dictated. Out of these, in extreme cases we used the method of writing out the names of these people in front of the Small Trade Firm's Shop No. 1 along with what they had tried to buy. A large number of people tend to stand in front of these announcements and judging by the mood that is expressed our announcement has reached its intended goal. We did not report anyone since they were all workers who had been swept up by the enemy's influence. During this month we have reported ten people for illegal trade and also confiscated their wares.¹⁸⁹

Following the political shift of 1953, administrative and criminal justice methods were used less frequently in favor of regulating consumption via techniques that limited trade. The Nyíregyháza city council emphasized, that

Given that there are no restrictions on goods, beyond the work of enlightening our citizens politically no other tool is at our disposal. . . . The working peasantry's movement to buy flour is far greater. In order to curtail it, we have directed stores to put one-kilogram packages of flour into circulation. By doing so we will make it more difficult to buy large amounts of flour. . . . Lately the situation has been the same with bread. In more than one case, the phenomenon of members of village or homestead populations buying 10 or even 12 loaves of bread has appeared. It can be supposed that they are also

¹⁸⁸ "Előterjesztés a piacok helyzetéről," A Nyíregyházi Városi Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottságának iratai, MNL SzSzBML, XXIII. 502., July 29, 1955.

¹⁸⁹ "Nyíregyháza Városi Tanács VB. Kereskedelmi osztályának információs jelentése a havi tevékenységről a Megyei Tanács VB. Kereskedelmi Osztályának," 11-2-1/1953. sz., MNL SzSzBML, XXX. 19. f. 22. d., April 28, 1953. Not unusual during this period, the report was written with spelling errors.

using the bread to feed their stock. We tried to put a stop to this by, first of all, selling bread in the afternoons and, secondly, making sure to sell stale bread, which automatically reduces consumption.¹⁹⁰

It goes without saying that these methods were not always successful. Due to meager reserves, the issue of food supply continued to be one of the most important issues on Hungary's political agenda; throughout this period, scarcities were only temporarily reduced at best. Once it became obvious that food could not be purchased at state-operated stores, Hungarians turned to markets for foodstuffs. In 1955, those who lived from paycheck to paycheck spent one-sixth of their income at food markets. Markets in turn were acutely attuned to even the slightest shifts in supply, demand, or shortages. "In many cases scarcities in shops led to price hikes at the market. In Budapest, for example, from early August to late September the price of eggs rose from 1.61 forints per egg to 2.35 forints because out of ten days in the beginning of August, there were only five or six days when eggs could be bought in stores. There were seven to eight days at the end of September when shops were without eggs."¹⁹¹ Other than the wider selection, the ability to bargain over prices also drew customers to Hungary's markets.

According to a report made by Nyíregyháza's city council in the autumn of 1955,

with the exception of basic food items, the supply of foodstuffs in the city is completely acceptable. The supply of bread and flour has improved considerably as a result of supplementary quotas provided by the central reserves and the initiatives put in place by local trade. In order to improve meat supplies we have made sure that the Fishmarket can offer customers an ample amount of good quality fish at any time of the day. . . . The supply of eggs and rice from central reserves has not been able to satisfy demand. In order to solve this situation, the Farmers' Association will deliver three to four thousand eggs on a weekly basis through the directorate of purchases. When it becomes time to butcher hogs, they will buy four to five wagons of rice from rice-growing regions, in exchange for potatoes.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ "Előterjesztés a piacok helyzetéről," A Nyíregyházi Városi Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottságának iratai, MNL SzSzBML, XXIII. f. 502. d., July 29, 1955.

¹⁹¹ "Az 1955. évi szabadpiaci áruforgalom," in *A BkM. Kereskedelemfejlesztési és Piackutató Igazgatóság 44. sz. kutatási jelentése* (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium, 1956), 6.

¹⁹² "Előterjesztés a téli áruellátásra való felkészülésről," Nyíregyháza Városi Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottságának iratai, MNL SzSzBML, XXIII. f. 502. d., December 12, 1955.

It must be mentioned that within the framework established by a planned economy, exchanging goods was not only rare but also viewed as a politically deviant action.

In the 1950s, the changes brought about by shifts in ownership and the reorganization of private property had a noticeable effect on restaurants as well. The level of quality found in state-owned restaurants and places that served food fell while the few pastry shops or pubs that remained in private hands became increasingly popular. According to a local report on the catering trade,

Compared to the base line, the significant underachievement demonstrated in the circulation of ice cream and pastry products certainly paints a sad picture. Based on our judgement, other than the unfavorable weather conditions this decline is very much due to the fact that five privately owned pastry shops are being operated in the most frequented parts of our city and have a truly strong impact on circulation, even if only because they do not face difficulties in procuring raw ingredients and it is profitable for them to use more raw ingredients to prepare their products than what is laid out in the norm.¹⁹³

The limitations of a fixed economy, shortages in foodstuffs, and the lack of modernization or investment all contributed toward little change occurring in the sector of food services even during the post-1956, early Kádár era, a situation that proved particularly true in the countryside. A report made in 1959 described the following state in Nógrád County and the city of Salgótarján:

as far as the level of civilization is concerned, the council sector's network is below standards. Most of the units are fourth-class taprooms. There is not one first-class unit to be found in the county. Some of the pastry shops in Salgótarján constantly operate with shutters that are closed throughout the entire day. Chipped plates and aluminum cutlery greeted us in the second-class restaurants, even though the storeroom for tableware contained tasteful stemmed glasses and stainless-steel cutlery: these were not laid out for guests because "they might be broken or get lost." Déryné, the most elegant pastry shop in the county located in Salgótarján, looks completely neglected from the outside and inside we found at the time of the inspection that the curtains were utterly filthy. The manager greets guests while wearing a tracksuit. Some of the units operating in mining settlements (Kazár,

¹⁹³ "A Debreceni Vendéglátóipari Vállalat 1955. III. negyedévi beszámoló jelentése," MNL HBML, XXIII. 108/c.7. d., October 19, 1955.

Somoskőújfalu, etc.) were neglected to an unbearable degree, a situation that typifies the rest of the county.¹⁹⁴

One of the era's quite characteristic peculiarities was that—during periods when supply was critical—great effort was made on both the national and local level to ensure the availability of a much higher degree of supply when state holidays were being celebrated. As a 1952 report to the ministry of internal trade noted,

To guarantee the undisturbed flow of supply during May 1, we have sent a circular directing the Budapest Capital City and the county councils' Executive Committee Commerce departments to make completely certain that a quality level of meat is supplied.¹⁹⁵ We have secured a separate 5,000 kilograms of meat for cafeteria catering firms in Budapest. . . . From April 27, 1952, to May 3, 1952, a directed menu is to regulate cafeteria meals. In relation to Budapest on April 21, 1952 the decision regarding what dishes will be served to the workers (based on the directed menu) is to be made at the menu meetings held by cafeteria catering firms.¹⁹⁶

In Debrecen, however, the District Council reported that “during the first quarter of 1956 out of basic foodstuffs fresh meat was somewhat scarce and we were able to meet the demand for lard, sugar, flour, and bread. Throughout the holidays, for April 4 and May 1, the workers were prepared and 50 percent more fresh meat was released into circulation. . . . In connection with the May 1 celebration a directive was issued that the supply of fresh bread and milk be undisturbed during the three-day holiday.”¹⁹⁷

Once the holidays were over, the return to normal workdays included the uncertainties of an unstable food supply, a situation that only underwent gradual change following the defeat of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.¹⁹⁸ Food supplies quite understandably

¹⁹⁴ “Jelentés Nógrád megye kereskedelmi munkájáról,” 002/15/1959. Tük. A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 3. d., March 26, 1959.

¹⁹⁵ The Executive Committee (Végrehajtó Bizottság, VB) was a decision-making organization made up of a small number of local municipal committees.

¹⁹⁶ “Feljegyzés a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Titkársága részére,” 564/IV. 21./1952, MNL OL, XIX-g-4-nn. 3. d., April 21, 1952.

¹⁹⁷ “Beszámoló a Debrecen I. Kerületi Tanács VB. Kereskedelmi előadójának munkájáról,” MNL HBML, XXIII. 108/C. f. 7. d. April 4 was a holiday celebrating the liberation of Hungary by the Soviet Army in 1945.

¹⁹⁸ For more details, see Valuch, “A bőséges ínségtől az ínséges bőséig,” 2003.

reached another critical point during the 1956 Revolution; from the end of October until the beginning of November local revolutionary committees were especially careful to guarantee the continued flow of public supply and the measures they took were generally successful. In fact, before the Soviet invasion on November 4, villages and cities sent aid shipments (with varying degrees of regularity) to the nation's capital. Once the conflict abated, the new government led by János Kádár established a government commissary responsible for organizing the supply of foodstuffs while also accepting and distributing the various aid shipments arriving from abroad.

According to the government commissioner's statement made on November 11, 1956, the situation in the countryside was better than in battle-torn Budapest: "During the recent battles the shipment of supplies and the small-scale trade system almost completely collapsed in Budapest: with the exception of the baking industry, nothing at all operated for a few days. Within this time the baking industry's reserve of flour ran out."¹⁹⁹ Surrounded by wartime conditions, Budapest's residents rushed to store as much food as possible. In the interest of improving supply, the issuing of private trade permits was made easier. As a consequence of shortages and the increased level of demand, prices on the free market skyrocketed: by the beginning of December 1956, the price of one egg had reached 10 forints. The authors of the report were of the opinion that the public supply situation in Budapest would normalize in the second half of December, at which time everyone would be able to procure basic foodstuffs, even if doing so demanded standing in line. The Governmental Commissary for Public Supply remained in operation until January 13, 1957. In a closing assessment of its activities, the conclusion was made that a relatively complete supply of basic goods (bread, flour, meat) had been established by the end of November. This circumstance owed much to the arrival of aid shipments: "The Soviet Union's swift aid made it possible that primarily Budapest would be supplied with essential foodstuffs during the month of November."²⁰⁰

According to statistics collected by the KSH in connection to food consumption, from 1950 to 1954 the consumption of virtually every

¹⁹⁹ "Nyers Rezső közellátásügyi kormánybiztos jelentése a kormány számára a közellátás helyzetéről," MNL OL, XIX-K-24. 1. d., November 11, 1956.

²⁰⁰ "Jelentés a Közellátásügyi Kormánybiztosság munkájáról és a közellátás helyzetéről," MNL OL, XIX-K-24. 1.d., January 28, 1957.

type of important foodstuff (such as milk or dairy products, potatoes, meat) either decreased or stagnated in comparison to the levels registered in 1938; in other words, the quality of nutrition and supply of food had not improved for one-and-a-half decades. In the case of most food products, the greatest regression occurred in 1953. Thanks to the political shift that took place in 1953, by 1955 the situation had improved somewhat. This, at least, was what the columns of data collected during a survey conducted with 1,800 working-class and low-income wage earners showed.²⁰¹ To give some indication of what this meant, families with the lowest incomes earned an average of 320 forints per person per month, while a medium-level income was 600 forints. A high income averaged 1,070 forints per person. In poorer families, nearly two-thirds of this sum went toward nourishment. The better off spent half of their income on food while the wealthy only had to dedicate one-third of their earnings toward nutritional needs. Based on the survey's data, the average daily calorie intake per person hardly showed any change from 1950 to 1954 and normally hovered between 2,840 and 2,957 calories. Later, in 1955, this sum rose to 3,122. In any event, the numbers above prove that food consumption as well as the amount and quality of food were strongly dependent on financial circumstances. The statistics from 1955 show that the yearly consumption of meat was 17 kilograms per person in poor families while those with the highest incomes ate 46 kilograms of meat per person in a year. The situation was essentially the same whether discussing milk, dairy products, sugar, vegetables, or fruit: low-income individuals consumed nearly half as much food in the categories listed above compared to what was eaten by high-income individuals. Interestingly enough, both groups consumed almost the same amount of bread and flour.

The household statistics for 5,000 families collected in 1956 demonstrate that among the survey participants the average per capita monthly income was 636 forints. Those with the lowest income earned 339 forints per person per month while those with the highest income had 1,178 forints a month at their disposal. Among low-income families per capita food expenditures averaged 215 forints a month; wealthy families could afford to spend 457 forints a month per family member while families earning an average income

²⁰¹ *Az élelmiszerfogyasztás alakulása Magyarországon, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények*, no. 6 (Budapest: KSH, 1957).

usually spent 316 forints a month.²⁰² These financial factors naturally appeared in the average calorie intake that individuals consumed on a daily basis: the difference between the lowest and the highest earners was one-and-a-half times greater. According to the data, differences in income were also reflected in the consumption of milk, dairy products, eggs, meat, and meat products. Other than what amount could be accessed, a difference in the level of quality could also be observed: families with low or below-average incomes regularly consumed larger amounts of cheaper cuts and types of meat (such as mutton or horsemeat) that were generally poorer in quality as well. Due to consumer habits and the narrow selection of available meat, very little beef was eaten as people looked to poultry and pork instead as a source of meat. As an indication of the circumstances and habits that characterized the time, it is important to mention that nearly every second family out of the 1,700 working-class and low-wage employee households that participated in this survey was fattening a hog in 1956, whether the family lived in Budapest or in one of the larger cities located in the countryside.

In 1956, the nutritional inequalities that emerged as a result of a family's financial circumstances were far less marked among village residents compared to that seen in the urban families illustrated above. In peasant families earning the lowest wages, the monthly sum put toward food expenses was 311 forints as opposed to the 371 forints spent by the wealthiest peasant families. When comparing the food expenditures made by peasant families as opposed to working-class or low-wage employed families, it is starkly obvious that the level exhibited by the very poorest did not demonstrate much deviation; in the case of high-income families, the food budget for the most well-to-do peasant families was only four-fifths of that at the disposal of urban families. On average poor peasant families had 586 forints per family member, while those living in the best circumstances earned 796 forints per person. In short, based on the statistical data, income differences were more moderate among members of Hungary's peasant class compared to what working-class people or employees earning a low wage experienced. It is also apparent that the level of self-sufficiency was high enough among peasant farmers that these families spent only 40 percent of what other social classes had to expend on per capita food costs. According to a KSH report,

²⁰² *Ötezer család 1956. évi háztartási feljegyzései*, 39.

in 1956 small-holder families farming on 0.5 to 1.5 hectares of land were able to produce half of the bread, flour, and baked goods they consumed while families farming on 7.5 to 12.5 hectares produced enough grain to cover three-fourths of their needs. Fattening and then butchering a hog was similarly widespread: no matter the number of hectares at their disposal, out of 100 farming families 110–120 hogs were butchered in the course of 1956. This indicates that one-tenth of peasant families maintained their own supply of meat by butchering two hogs a year.²⁰³

Based on an analysis of Hungary's poverty conducted by the National Committee of Trade Unions in the summer of 1956, a minimum of 580 forints was necessary for one adult to survive one month; a three-member working-class family required a minimum of 1,440 a month, while four-member families needed 1,900 forints a month in order to survive.²⁰⁴ Families living below the poverty line spent two-thirds of their entire monthly earnings on foodstuffs. Within this category, horsemeat or mutton was the most common source of meat and fat since these were the cheapest possible types of meat. From the point of view of which foods were consumed as substitutes for more nourishing ingredients, this social group displayed the highest consumption of bread. According to this survey, adult men required an average daily calorie intake of 2,825 calories.

When gathering the household statistics for 1957, attention was paid to assessing the habits and characteristics of food consumption based on different types of employment. The concluding KSH report established that

Within the generally higher level of food consumption exhibited by peasant families, some differences were shown regarding certain kinds of food. In spite of possessing the same level of income, with the exception of sugar, peasant families consumed more of the most basic food groups compared to urban households. The fact that peasant families eat more flour-based dishes and far more legumes and bacon than urban families do is related to differences in lifestyle and consumer habits. Yet peasant families also eat significantly more meat, poultry, vegetables, fruit, and dairy products in

²⁰³ Ibid. 37–42.

²⁰⁴ "A munkás és alkalmazotti családok létminimuma: A SZOT Közgazdasági és Statisztikai Osztályának elemzése, 1956. július 23," MNL OL, M-KS-276. f. 66/36., July 23, 1956. Quoted in Gyula Belényi and Lajos Sz. Varga, *Munkások Magyarországon 1948–1956* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2000), 433–471.

comparison to urban households.... The lifestyle differences between a privately-employed peasant family and a working-class or wage-earning family grow starker as the level of income increases: in both directions the level of divergence grows larger parallel to increased earnings. In this case the amount working-class households spend on food falls even farther behind the consumption of foodstuffs found in peasant families. . . .²⁰⁵

This particular collection of data also demonstrated that households with the lowest incomes (with less than 400 forints per family member) spent 205 forints in one month on food for each member of the family; average-income (800 forints/month) households spent at most 356 forints while those earning more than 1,600 forints per family member could afford a per capita sum of 613 forints. The average daily calorie intake per family member of a household possessing a more modest income was 2,341 calories as opposed to the 3,388 calories consumed in Hungary's wealthiest families.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s a large percentage of foodstuffs consumed in peasant households originated from their own farms, as farmers produced three-fourths of their consumption of foodstuffs and half of their entire consumption. Within Hungarian society as a whole, this latter indicator was 30 percent at the time. There were, of course, a few items (mainly consisting of foodstuffs and meat in particular) which remained in the realm of self-production for a longer period of time. A report made in Hajdú-Bihar County in 1958 for the ministry of internal trade states that

serious issues continue to surround the supply of meat even though the yearly sales of meat in 1957 were more than double that reached in 1955. . . . Every firm finds fault with the shipping methods employed by the Debrecen Slaughterhouse and Meat Packing Company. It frequently happens that meat shipped to locations farther away from Debrecen arrive 12–14 hours later at shops, even in summer. It is not rare that the goods have spoiled and cannot be sold or used for human consumption by the time they reach the store that ordered them. From the point of view of hygiene, it is also reprehensible that the shippers stomp on the meat loaded on their conveyance in their boots.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ *Munkás-, alkalmazotti és parasztcsaládok*, 80.

²⁰⁶ "Beszámoló a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium részére Hajdú-Bihar megye és Debrecen kereskedelmének helyzetéről," *A Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Tanács iratai*, MNL HBML, XXIII. 108./c. 7.d., 1958.

Reducing meat shortages, however, proved a difficult task. In May 1960 the supply of meat shipped to most butcher shops in Debrecen was already depleted before noon. "The sight of customers standing in lines outside of butcher shops at dawn in order to wait for the store to open is a common one. Central headquarters gave the order that selling can begin at 6 a.m. . . . Major exceptions are usually not made at butcher shops, even though it can happen that the butcher sets aside some meat for the staff in the neighboring grocery or dairy store, or even hands it over to the other shop owner in front of the customers."²⁰⁷

In 1960, based on a survey analyzing habits in food consumption,

a decisive majority of peasant families produced 90 percent of their own meat consumption . . . the yearly consumption of meat in peasant class families fluctuates quite a bit. While each individual consumes an average of 63 decagrams of meat per week, when this survey was made (in the third week of May) participants were only eating 39 decagrams of meat per week, all originating from their own production. The collected data displays a prominent rate of poultry consumption, particularly meaning hens. According to the data gathered at the time of observation (May), 67 percent of the meat families consumed consisted of this. This high percentage far surpasses the consumption found among those living on wages and earnings. In 1960 it was 2.2 times higher. (At the time of the survey as well as at present [in 1961] it was relatively rare for peasant families to purchase fresh meat. Based on the answers we received, 23 percent of the surveyed families were planning to buy meat "within the next few days" and 18 percent had last purchased fresh meat one to two weeks before answering the question.)²⁰⁸

In the winter of 1960/1961, sixty-nine percent of the households located in small communities had butchered a hog at least once. "Especially in 1960 the market price for a live hog was at such a level that fattening and butchering a hog at home was more affordable than paying the prices for lard, meat, and meat products at the butcher's shop; the (at times) continuous lack of meat also had an impact on the rise in private hog butchering."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ "Feljegyzés az élelmiszer-kiskereskedelmi vállalatok húsboltjairól," A Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Tanács iratai, MNL HBML, XXIII. 108./c. 7. d., May 21, 1960.

²⁰⁸ Molnár László, ed., *A parasztság keresletváltozásának elemei és irányzata, összefüggésben a termelési viszonyok átalakulásával*, Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet közleményei, no. 71 (Budapest: BKI, 1962).

²⁰⁹ István Makay, *A bérből és fizetésből élő családok néhány élelmiszerfogyasztási szokása*, Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet Közleményei, no. 53 (Budapest: BKI, 1962).

As of the end of the 1960s, a significant increase in the amount of food prepared and consumed represented a marked change in Hungarian society. Based on a governmental analysis in 1960, “changes in the structure of social groups had more of an effect on the structure of trade circulation. The decrease in peasant farmers and growth of workers and low-wage earners increased the circulation of foodstuffs by 700 million forints. This allows us to estimate—based on our calculations—the decreased consumption of self-produced foodstuffs in favor of buying basic goods in stores.”²¹⁰

Statistical data collected during the final years of private (as in non-collective) farming showed a direct connection between food consumption and the amount of land owned by a family:

As regards personal consumption, a larger deviation can be found among the families who farm different-sized properties in relation to the ratio between the consumption of goods the families produced themselves as opposed to store-bought wares. Larger farms demonstrate a higher frequency of consuming foodstuffs resulting from their own labor . . . when examined in comparison to how much farmland a family possesses, the data shows that the percentage of food consumption grows, together with a certain increase in income. This is explained by the fact that more kinds of foodstuffs can be produced on larger farms, which naturally means that larger amounts are available for consumption. The extent to which the consumption of certain self-produced foodstuffs has grown displays some variation: among farmers virtually all the vegetables they consume, for example, originate from their own land, no matter how large that may be. . . . Potatoes are a similar situation. Likewise, the amount of milk and dairy products that are consumed increases sharply while the amount that has been purchased steeply drops.²¹¹

Based on the 1961 survey it can be surmised “that the nutrition levels exhibited by the social groups with the lowest incomes (working-class and low-wage employees, equaling one-tenth of society) is very similar to the national average experienced before Soviet liberation. This allows us to conclude that the level of nourishment found among the lowest wage-earners is by no means acceptable.”²¹² Nor was the situation appreciably different among the poorest level of peasant farmers.

²¹⁰ “Jelentés a belkereskedelmi forgalom három éves tervének teljesítéséről,” A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium irata, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 7. d., May 1960.

²¹¹ *Munkás-, alkalmazotti és parasztsaládok*, 63–67.

²¹² István Pálos and Mihály Zafir, “Az élelmiszerfogyasztás természetes mutatói,” *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 3 (1961): 124–28.

Although the social and regional differences among Hungary's various classes gradually began to decrease at the end of the 1960s, leading to the emergence of numerous unified qualities in the eating habits of both urban and rural households, few signs of this approaching trend were visible at the end of the 1950s. As a KSH report emphasized,

The calorie intake and nutritional consumption exhibited by privately employed peasant farmers . . . is not only higher than that found among working-class or low-income employed families, but is also composed more favorably in that the level of better-quality protein and fat exceeds the level consumed by working-class and low-income employed families and occurs in higher amounts than the consumption of carbohydrates. . . . Another indication of the complete change in the consumption by peasant farmers is that there is no distinct deviation in the distribution of resources as far as the amount of calories they consume is concerned: on the whole, peasant farmers consume a similar percentage of the most valuable, essential foodstuffs as urban families do.²¹³

The collectivization of Hungary's agricultural system impacted the habits surrounding food consumption and the nation's ability to supply foodstuffs in many ways and on multiple levels. On the one hand, placing farmland under state control decreased the number of citizens who would have otherwise been capable of producing their own food supply. On the other hand, transforming agricultural production resulted in the constant scarcity of certain foodstuffs. These issues did not go unnoticed in government documents:

During the process of enacting the socialist transformation of agriculture, the number of those dependent on central food reserves has grown while the tendency to stockpile foodstuffs can be observed among private farmers. In contrast to this, a favorable phenomenon can be found in the increased percentage of goods sold by collective farms. These trends reveal that the current issues regarding the food supply are primarily due to the enormous social changes occurring in agriculture. . . . In 1959 and 1960, the consumption of grain used to make bread could only be satisfied by significantly increasing the level of imports. Within total consumption, the percentage of those reliant on central supplies has risen substantially.²¹⁴

²¹³ *Munkás-, alkalmazotti és parasztszaládok*, 84–85.

²¹⁴ "A lakosság téli áruellátása, különös tekintettel az élelmiszerellátásra: Az Országos Tervhivatal Előterjesztése a Gazdasági Bizottsághoz," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-K-8-b. 11.d. December 12, 1959.

The population's wintertime supply of basic goods was judged as adequate: "in Budapest and other priority cities the supply of meat is sufficient. The supply for agricultural regions, however, is poor. . . . Due to the temporary scarcity of butter, trade in margarine has quickened. . . . For years we have not been able to fulfill the complete demand for eggs. Compared to previous years, the supply for the current year is even worse."²¹⁵ On the free market, the egg shortage led to a forty percent increase in price, from 2 to 2.80 forints.

A KSH report analyzing household data that was continuously collected between 1958 and 1962 from 800 peasant farming families living in various locations throughout the country offers an insight into the basic trends that marked the period of collectivization in Hungary:

Between 1958 and 1962 among families that only farmed and those with two incomes the consumption of store-bought goods grew at a tempo that was more substantial compared to that of home-produced goods. At the same time, among families who switched from only farming to earning two incomes, the consumption rate of home-produced goods fell while the rate for store-bought goods grew more than 80 percent. In contrast to this, among families who went from earning two incomes to just farming, the consumption rate for home-produced goods rose significantly since the income they earned based on agricultural production increased at an above-average rate, thereby allowing them to access far more goods than had been available to them previously. For these families the ratio of home-produced consumption compared to net expenditures also rose, while this ratio fell sharply among all the other types of families. An especially substantial drop occurred in the consumption rate of home-produced goods among families that went from only farming to earning two incomes. . . . The significant differences in the food consumption of the present social groups therefore stem from the consumption of home-produced food. The 1962 high level of food consumption among families who had previously had access to large territories of land demonstrates a ratio for store-bought foodstuffs that was smaller in total and percentage compared to that found among families who had farmed smaller amounts of land. It must be mentioned, however, that the former group had increased their purchase of store-bought foodstuffs more than the latter, in comparison to the levels measured in 1958.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ *A parasztság egyes rétegeinek jövedelme és fogyasztása a mezőgazdaság szocialista átszervezése előtt és után* (Budapest: KSH, 1963).

The 1962 data summary found in a flash report for the circulation of goods demonstrated the dynamic growth of store-bought foodstuffs while barely any alterations in Hungarians' level of food consumption could be seen. This increase in trade was primarily the result of the fact that certain social groups became regular customers of store-bought edibles during the period of collectivization (or slightly afterward) who had previously produced either all or at least some of their necessary food supplies. Additionally, the income for peasant families who had become members of a collective farm temporarily increased and was—for the most part—subsequently spent on foodstuffs and consumer durable goods since their usual overhead expenses for running a farm greatly decreased once private farming was terminated. A further consequence of radically transforming Hungary's agricultural system was the drop in the free market trade of foodstuffs from 1958 to 1962, which further added to the state's burden in keeping the network of small-scale retail supplied with an adequate stock of foodstuffs. In 1962, family farms still played a substantial role in maintaining Hungary's meat supply: it is estimated that nearly 2.5 million hogs were butchered within Hungarian households throughout this year, meaning that approximately five-sixths of Hungary's families turned to providing their own meat supply as a solution to shortages.²¹⁷

In the autumn of 1962, another shopping frenzy emerged as Hungarians rushed to set aside a store of basic foodstuffs in the face of an increasingly tense international political situation that threatened the approach of another war. Although the war thankfully did not break out, this urge to stockpile food caused a temporary increase in supply-related difficulties. In 1963, the largest scarcities occurred in meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products. To quote the official description made at the time, "the low quality of agricultural production did not make it possible to satisfy the domestic demand for animal-based products."²¹⁸

Collectivization and the lifestyle alterations it entailed also resulted in changes in the consumption of bread during the mid-sixties, as primarily villagers increasingly stopped baking their own bread in

²¹⁷ For further details, see "Áruforgalmi jelentés az 1962. évről," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-f. 85. d. January 29, 1963.

²¹⁸ "Jelentés a közellátási helyzetről a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiuma részére," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-yy. 83. d., March 24, 1964.

favor of buying it in a store.²¹⁹ (It cannot be forgotten that when used in reference to foodstuffs, the adjective “homemade” as opposed to “store-bought” represented a difference in quality for quite some time. As far as shoppers were concerned, it went without saying that homemade bread, cakes, or sour cream would automatically be better in quality.) It was, however, quite a long time before state-owned groceries were genuinely capable of satisfying villages’ growing demand for bread at a time when Hungary’s bread industry shipped fresh bread to most villages only once or twice a week. Yet it is also true that most parts of Hungary’s cities only received fresh shipments of bread or baked goods late in the afternoon. Keeping Hungary’s families supplied with bread over the weekends remained a national issue: since many places sold pre-baked goods that customers were understandably not very willing to buy, the sight of long lines snaking in front of shops selling fresh bread on Saturday afternoon was quite common. Complaints were very frequent regarding the quality and amount of bread: it was quite common for a two-kilo loaf of bread to hover around 1.5 kilograms, bread and baked goods were often either burnt or still raw, and packaging materials were regularly unavailable in stores, which meant that only a piece of paper protected the cut edge of bread that had already been sliced. In the late 1950s and early 1960s shortages in basic foodstuffs were a natural part of everyday life even in industrial areas that enjoyed the political “spotlight.” For example, a report made in March 1959 describing Nógrád County states that “from the standpoint of products from the baking industry it is nationally one of the least supplied regions,” a statement that was particularly true in the industrial area of Salgótarján: “For years keeping the population supplied with an acceptable amount of bread and baked goods has been an unsolved problem. . . . Bread shipments to industrial areas are completely irregular. In some places inhabited by miners, bread often arrives either as the store is closing or afterward. . . . It has happened more than once that they were left without bread from Friday afternoon to noon on Monday. . . . The quality of bread also raises serious objections: it was not left to rise long enough, is gummy in consistency, and contains foreign objects.”²²⁰ The same

²¹⁹ “A kenyér és péksütemény továbbá a tej és tejtermék ellátás alakulása a mezőgazdaság szocialista átszervezése után: Előterjesztés a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium kollégiuma részére,” MNL OL, XIX-G-4-yy. 83. d., September 11, 1963.

²²⁰ “Jelentés a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiuma részére,” Nógrád megye kereskedelmi munkája, BkM. 002/15/1959. Tük. Nógrád megye kereskedelmi munkája,

situation was true of milk and dairy products: beginning in the early sixties, the number of self-sufficient families continuously fell since the number of cows left in private hands also decreased as a consequence of collectivization. Due to the subsequent drop in private production, keeping Hungary's rural areas supplied with milk and milk products became a virtually unsolvable issue in the 1960s. Nearly half of Hungary's small-sized communities were left without even the presence of a creamery or distribution center for milk.

Although food consumption began to climb as of the early 1960s, the rate of growth proved somewhat lower in rural households as opposed to urban ones. Within the period under examination, the consumption of meats, eggs, milk, and dairy products showed a considerable increase.²²¹ In summary of the trends that were influencing Hungary during this period, two factors played a fundamental role in the changes that occurred in Hungary's food supply: first, small-scale agricultural production that, as it took on mass proportions, functioned as a form of self-sufficiency which (among its other results) eased the extent of food shortages; and second, the consolidation of large-scale agricultural production.

Table 10. Average per capita consumption of food from 1950 to 1996 (kg/person)

Year	Meat, fish	Milk, dairy products	Fats	Vegetable oil and margarine (within fats)	Sugar	Flour and rice	Vegetables and legumes	Fruits
1950	34.9	99.0	18.7	-	18.3	142.1		
1960	49.1	114	23.5	2.8	26.6	136.2	84.1	55.3
1970	60.7	109.6	27.7	6.6	35.5	128.1	83.2	72.5
1980	73.8	166.2	30.5	11.8	37.9	115.1	79.6	74.9
1990	75.8	169.9	38.6	15.2	38.2	110.4	83.3	72.3
1996	62.6	138.0	36.1	-	40.3	85.3	-	-

Source: Iván Balassa, ed., *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997); and *Magyarország népessége és gazdasága: Múlt és jelen* (Budapest: KSH, 1996).

MNL OL, XIX-G-4-zz. 3.d., March 26, 1959.

²²¹ Changes in meat consumption best demonstrate this process: from 1934 to 1938 an average of 33.9 kilograms per person per year was consumed in Hungary. In 1955, this number was 37.6, in 1965 it rose to 53.2, in 1975 it was 71.2; in 1985 meat consumption hit the average of 79.6 kilograms per person.

By the early 1960s, the circumstances surrounding the nation's trade in foodstuffs had also consolidated to a certain extent. As a report made by the largest grocery store in the city of Nyíregyháza stated,

The store's management does everything in its power to guarantee the more developed forms of service that befit socialist commerce. Our company places great emphasis on the tasteful and hygienic packaging of bread, baked goods, meat, and dairy products by using waxed paper, wrapping paper, or other types of printed (bearing our company logo) forms of packaging. Our store has introduced the service of home delivery and maintains to this very day an errand-boy service that speedily and effectively gets our wares from one city to the next. Other than this, a delivery route has been established with the Delicatessen Food Trade Company in Budapest to ensure that their own pastries, sweets, and cold platters are brought from their location in Budapest to our store for purchase by our customers. . . . Furthermore, our level of equipment includes the most up-to-date electric cooler, cases for frozen goods, an espresso machine, a blender, and a food slicer, all of which enable us to provide a civilized level of service and appropriate food storage.²²²

The ministry of internal trade viewed the supply conditions for the winter of 1962/1963 as suitable.²²³ Attempts were made to counteract the effects of an unusually hard winter by importing potatoes and ordering small-scale trade operations to maintain three weeks' worth of stock.

The socialist transformation of agriculture has, other than its truly great results, led to the shortage of certain, only moderately necessary items. Appropriate production methods have not yet been devised for beans, lentils, or millet; therefore, these commonly used materials have been scarce for years. The same is true today. . . . Today even villagers demand a regular supply of citrus fruit. The same situation is true of frozen goods, the supply of which we cannot satisfy for technical reasons (i.e., the lack of freezer cases). For the rest of this year, the undisturbed flow of supply for the nation is (as regards the majority of items) guaranteed by the commodity supplies provided in the plan. We can ensure the continued and acceptable supply of basic foodstuffs, such as bread, flour, lard, sugar, salt, dried pasta, and potatoes. The available quotas for meat will not allow us to meet demand: an additional

²²² "A Csemege Élelmiszerkereskedelmi Vállalat 125. sz. boltjának beszámolója," Nyíregyháza Városi Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottságának iratai, MNL SzSzBML, XXIII. 502., February 5, 1960.

²²³ "Előterjesztés a közellátási helyzetről a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiuma számára," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-yy. 83. d., April 18, 1963.

400–500 wagons of meat (beyond the amount found in the plan) is required to maintain a continued supply. The same can be said of eggs; the planned amount is not enough, and it may become necessary to import dried powdered eggs. . . . As for citrus fruit, a good supply of lemons can be provided throughout the year, while oranges cannot be released into trade until May 3, at the Ministry of Agriculture's directive.²²⁴

While shortages of meat and eggs could be blamed on the low level of agricultural production, in the case of other items (canned goods, for example) the fact that foreign trade was given precedence over local retail needs made it impossible to fulfill national demand. The third explanation for shortages was laid at the doorstep of limitations in the capacity for industrial food production and shipping. In another peculiar twist of logic, the growth of tourism was also targeted for increasing the demand for certain products (salami, smoked sausages from Gyula, paprika) to such an extent that these items had naturally become scarce. As regarded the supply of shortage items, precedence was given to cities, mining and industrial centers, and Budapest; due to the spread of tourism, more attention was turned toward ensuring supplies for known tourist and holiday destinations. After fulfilling quantitative demands, even though the selection of items expanded rather slowly, the 1970s were marked by the gradual emergence of "prestige products" in food and luxury goods. These included brand-name (Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, Marlboro Cigarettes, or Cezar cognac from Yugoslavia) "Western" drinks, tobacco products, chocolates, and soft drinks.

At the end of 1968, a proposal concerning the grocery trade emphasized the need to change the quality of nutrition and solve the issue of providing sufficient quantities of food. Domestic trade's basic task was therefore to ensure

that the population's food supply develop in a balanced manner, without disturbances. We are simultaneously to strengthen all those tendencies that target the emergence of a modern consumer structure. The sale of animal, vegetable, and fruit products rose more this year than that of other food items. . . . In accordance with the increase in quality of life, the sale of luxury items also rose. The only area in which we were not able to increase the sale of food to the desired level was in the restaurant and catering sector, mostly due to the higher price level and the population's resulting reluctance to make use of this sector.²²⁵

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ "Aktívabb kereskedelempolitikával a reform megvalósításáért: Tézisek," MNL OL, XXXVI-G-4. 2. d., January 21, 1969.



Figure 28. The enjoyable objects of consumption: branded “Western” drinks and cigarettes in the gift shop at the Budapest Keleti railway station in 1971 (Fortepan, 109797, Sándor Bauer)

Outside of those possessing the highest incomes, various social groups in Hungary were generally sensitive to prices, a characteristic that was particularly strong in relation to foodstuffs. The relatively high rate of self-sufficiency and the widespread prevalence of small-scale food production can essentially be explained by Hungarians’ unwillingness to pay high prices for food. After all, a surprisingly large variety of vegetables and fruit could be grown in kitchen gardens planted around the house or at the “weekend plot of land,” a habit that emerged as Hungarians invested their savings in land plots

that they then spent their weekends gardening. These options proved less expensive for the very reason that Hungarians never bothered to calculate the cost of their own labor among all the other expenses for seeds, etc. "The slow transformation of the structure of food consumption is influenced by the still noteworthy presence of the consumption of home-produced goods. In 1966, the rate for self-produced food consumption in the families of working-class and low-wage earners is 23 percent while 66 percent of the food consumed by peasant and two-income families comes from their own resources or the farmers' market."²²⁶

The consumer price for foodstuffs did not increase noticeably in the 1960s, given the fact that the prices for these goods were almost without exception fixed; this is precisely why smaller political and social crises appeared later on, when prices began to rise in the late 1970s. A peculiar characteristic of the fixed price system lay in the fact that prices did not even cover the expenses accrued during production, which therefore meant that food could only be supplied with the aid of continuous state support. At the end of the 1960s, the consumer prices for food were 25 percent less than what the actual costs and production expenses would have justified. In the case of basic, everyday necessities (bread, lard) most Hungarian consumers did not notice the fluctuations in price; when the price of meat rose during the 1966/1967 year, Hungarians overcame this obstacle by buying cheaper cuts of meat or bacon instead.

A study published by the Research Institute for Internal Trade in 1968 summarized the situation in food consumption while also examining the issues related to future developments in this area. The authors emphasized that half of personal consumption consisted of food and luxury goods while Hungarians spent 40 percent of their earnings on procuring these items. "The satisfactory and continuous supply of food and a balanced domestic market of foodstuffs are both important economic and high-priority political issues. The effectiveness of economic policy is demonstrated by what circumstances determine supply on the domestic market."²²⁷ The survey concludes that

²²⁶ "Az élelmiszerfogyasztás helyzete és fejlődése: A Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézetben készült elemzés összefoglalója," MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 1. d., February 14, 1967.

²²⁷ "Az élelmiszerfogyasztás helyzete és fejlődése: Összefoglaló az elemzés fontosabb következményeiről," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 1.d., February 14, 1967.

the structure of consumption did not change substantially during the two decades that followed World War II given the fact that fats and cereals continued to dominate Hungarians' diets, while the consumption of nutritionally more valuable foods possessing a higher level of enjoyment or relation to a more modern lifestyle only appeared at a gradual rate. Among the foodstuffs that offer enjoyment rather than just nourishment, the consumption of coffee, cocoa, and spices increased.

Throughout the decade, the differences found in the quality and quantity of food consumed by urban working-class and low-wage earners as opposed to peasant families decreased. Within domestic trade it was expected that (in the long run) villagers and those working in agriculture would purchase more of their foodstuffs. An analysis by the ministry of internal trade emphasized that

Based on the 1966 yearly data, urban working-class and low-wage families purchase 87 percent of their food from stores and only procure an additional 10 percent at farmers' markets. Respectively, this rate is 60 percent and 12 percent among working-class and low-wage families living in small communities. It can be surmised that the latter values would be higher if trade had not been forced to restrict the sales circulation of certain foodstuffs in small-sized communities, such as meat, butter, and milk. It can also be supposed that the rates for food procurement among peasant families will approach these numbers in the following years.²²⁸

According to the study's authors,

it would not be sensible to issue directives with the aim of lessening home-produced foodstuffs or limiting the sale of goods at farmers' markets during the next ten to fifteen years. Processing and selling the products which reach the population via this route would demand serious investment, tools, and manpower. This is why it is more effective to develop economic policies that do not restrict peasants' consumption of home-produced goods, but rather support the production of food in household plots and encourage the direct sale of this produce at markets. Simultaneously, future policies must promote the development of supplementary food production among working-class and low-wage families by devoting special attention to decreasing worktime and increasing leisure time, a move that will also encourage the sale of any surplus.²²⁹

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

Between 1960 and 1975, the amount of home-produced food consumed by Hungarians dropped by half; potatoes, vegetables, and fruits, however, continued to make up 50 percent of the consumption of home-produced goods.

In September 1969, a report created for the Economic Committee regarding the realities of public supply and forecasting expected developments concluded that "other than the tensions that have existed for years in connection with the meat supply, difficulties most commonly arise in the selection of fruit and vegetables. Central stocks of fruits and vegetables mainly ran out in the first quarter, and the same can be said of stores found in private households or set aside by agricultural producers. As a result, the consequences of a poor yield in crops in 1968 compounded with unfavorable spring weather this year have caused severe supply shortages. Meat has been noticeably scarce."²³⁰

According to a domestic trade report written in 1970,

the available selection of food and luxury items was better and more balanced compared to previously. Shortages in dried pasta and products from the sweets industry came to an end while cocoa powder was abundant this year. The tensions surrounding the supply of meat have somewhat lessened. Lacks in the supply of beer, however, continue to remain while frozen goods are also scarce. In the trade of fruit and vegetables, a plentiful supply of potatoes, carrots, parsnips, and various kinds of apples could be stocked from reserves which were also used to supplement the lack of fresh vegetables that occurred due to the late arrival of spring. The grocery trade has taken care to stock less costly items as well, which was mainly accomplished in regard to cheaper meat products and cheeses.²³¹

The central directives laid out in the Fourth Five-Year Plan for the retail of food items

set the goal of paving the way for a balanced market as well as for stable developments in the selection of goods. The biological composition of the proffered selection of foods is to improve and satisfy modern nutritional requirements.

²³⁰ "Jelentés a Gazdasági Bizottság részére a lakosság áruellátásának eddigi tapasztalatairól és várható alakulásáról," MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 4.d., September 11, 1969.

²³¹ "A lakosság áruellátása, a belkereskedelmi áruforgalom és gazdálkodás alakulása 1970. I. félévében: A belkereskedelem 1970. évi várható tervteljesítése; A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Információs és Ellenőrzési Főosztály és a Közgazdasági főosztály előterjesztése a kollégium részére," MNL OL, XIX-G-4-tt. 26. d., August 15, 1970.

The food trade is to promote population growth policies and aid the realization of resolutions made regarding policies for women and Hungary's youth.... Overall, we have been satisfying the capital city's demand for food for years. Shortages in quantity (pork, dried goods, beer) temporarily appear while a lack of selection—particularly during the final year of the Fourth Five-Year Plan—occurred more often. More long-lasting scarcities occurred in connection to certain types of items (better-quality meat products, dried pasta, goods from the sweets industry, raw fruits and vegetables, pre-prepared goods made of organ meat).²³²

The 1974 report regarding public supply emphasized that

public supply for the year of 1974 is generally satisfactory. The significant lacks in quality found in previous years was not experienced. . . . The supply of foodstuffs and luxury goods was more stable in comparison to previous years. Particularly in the second quarter, the selection of fresh meat and meat products was far better compared to previous years. The exception to this was salami and the supply of smoked sausage from Gyula of which shortages were larger than usual since the same amount as last year was put into circulation. Demand could be met regarding poultry, milk and dairy products, spices, and most types of sweets. . . . The selection of frozen and canned goods improved quite a lot, even though certain types (canned organ meat, mixed fruits, canned vegetables, or stewed vegetables) were sometimes not available in stores due to poor crop yields from the previous year.²³³

By the end of the 1970s, the increasingly balanced state of Hungary's food supply and the growing selection it offered caused a boost in shopping tourism from neighboring countries, especially from the border regions. Also known as "pocket export," shopping tourism accounted for 2.1 percent of Hungary's yearly trade in retail in 1978. The most sought products included salami, types of sausages, wine, vegetable oil, sugar, and paprika. At times purchases made by foreigners caused temporary shortages, which was why "in affected grocery stores, especially if found near the border, only sliced meat products can be bought at times and on days when shoppers appear from abroad. The amount of oil and sugar that can be sold to one customer is also restricted. Goods to businesses that are known to be popular

²³² Gyula Szigethi, "A főváros élelmiszerellátásáról," *Kereskedelmi Szemle* 4 (1976): 14–17.

²³³ "Előterjesztés a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiuma számára az 1974. évi áruellátásról és az 1975. évi felkészülésről," 10.158/1974. sz. A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 41. d., October 1974.

sites for foreigners are not redirected from other regions, a step that protects local inhabitants from having to face scarcities."²³⁴ Tourists visiting Hungary arrived bearing chocolate, coffee, cocoa powder, and hard liquor, items that were usually sold at local "Comecon" markets. Hungarians traveling to other parts of the Soviet bloc took a variety of foodstuffs and thereby created a significant, albeit invisible export market for poppy seeds, shelled walnuts, sweets, and fruit.

In 1980, in connection to supply issues concerning the following year and the Five-Year Plan, the decisions made at MSZMP's Twelfth Congress established the basic aim of maintaining and improving "the current level attained in the supply of goods." Furthermore, "The quantity of meat and meat products at our disposal for the 1981 year is essentially the same as that for the previous year and therefore projects the possibility of a stable supply. As regards the order of product circulation, meat continues to fall under central management, including the state industry, agricultural large-scale production, and sales by ÁFÉSZ. Meat quotas must be strictly upheld. . . . It must be guaranteed that 60 percent of the selection of meat products consist of cheaper goods. Care must be taken in procuring non-quota goods and increasing the selection of such."²³⁵ The commodity supplies for poultry, fats, milk and dairy products, bread, and flour were held to be satisfactory and disturbances in supply were not expected. "Supply tensions in reference to quality and quantity" were expected to occur for eggs, fresh fish, vegetable oil, and rice. In the area of tropical fruit, a continuous supply of lemons was expected for 1981. "During the spring season the sale of oranges lasts until the end of May and begins in mid-November in autumn. Out of the planned quantity, a moderate supply is expected to consist of kinds from the Mediterranean region while periodic supplies of oranges are expected to arrive from Cuba. Even though domestic trade has planned to import 26 percent more bananas compared to the quantity for 1980, demand

²³⁴ "Az aktív és passzív idegenforgalmunk hatása a kiskereskedelmi forgalomra, illetve a belföldi árualapokra: Az Országos Idegenforgalmi Hivatal 10.025/15/1979. sz. előterjesztése a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiumához," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 94. d. May 17, 1979.

²³⁵ "Tájékoztató az élelmiszerek és háztartási-vegyi áruk 1981. évi várható áruellátási helyzetéről," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 83. d., January 19, 1981. ÁFÉSZ (Általános Fogyasztási és Értékesítési Szövetkezet, General Consumption and Sales Cooperative) was a network of sales cooperatives running stores especially in the countryside.

will only be partially met. The sales period for bananas is the same as that for oranges. Regional supplies must primarily be ensured for the capital city and prominent industrial sectors."²³⁶ With the exception of potatoes, the supply of vegetables was covered by reserves: due to unfavorable crops in the previous year, potatoes had to be imported.

At the end of 1980, documents related to trade policies evaluated the closing of the planned period, which had been based on four fundamental goals: ensuring the total supply of basic foodstuffs, continuing to spread the tenets of healthy and modern nutrition, easing the burden of household work, and satisfying the population's differentiating demands. "When assessing the work in trade accomplished during the medium-term plan period, it can be concluded that the most important targets were reached or translated into trends consistent with the goals. The supply of food and luxury goods remained in balance and trade has overall satisfied consumer demands."²³⁷

In the second half of the 1970s, the relatively stable price system for foodstuffs underwent significant changes. In July 1976 and 1979 central price hikes largely affected the cost of basic foodstuffs, thereby influencing consumer habits in relation to certain items for a shorter or longer period as the sale of these increasingly more expensive items either decreased or stagnated while consumers turned to using cheaper products. Maintaining the level of goods supply and following consumer demands with greater flexibility were included among the plan targets for the period stretching from 1981 to 1985:

A complete and continuous supply of important basic foodstuffs and household cleaning agents must be ensured throughout the entire country. Steps must be taken to guarantee that milk, dairy products, and bread can be purchased at the stores selling these products throughout their opening hours. . . . More attention must be devoted to keeping small businesses supplied with goods. Implementing and spreading new forms of operation (contractual and rental systems) promotes the maintenance and improvement of the quality of goods and thereby enables the reopening of businesses that were shut down and the growth of manpower.²³⁸

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ "Az élelmiszer és vegyi áru kereskedelem VI. ötéves tervidőszakra szóló kereskedelempolitikai irányelvei," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XXVI-G-4. 83. d., December 18, 1980.

²³⁸ Ibid.

Similarly, the differentiated satisfaction of consumer demands was strongly urged. In the interest of providing low-income individuals with a stable supply, shops were required to stock cheap and moderately priced products while simultaneously offering items that would, "within reason," meet the special demands of those with high incomes. In contrast to previous habits, the question of selling a broader selection of low-calorie diet products also emerged. Issues related to maintaining supply throughout two- or multiple-day holidays were prioritized.

Expectations regarding quality were expressed far more definitely as regular quality-control inspections for certain foodstuffs (meat and meat products, bread, milk) were laid out as requirements. The managers of trade units were called upon to pay attention to expiration dates and sell goods based on this information: grocery stores were forbidden to sell expired foodstuffs anywhere within the shop's sales area. For the sake of preserving food quality, shops were encouraged to improve storage methods and increase the capacity for refrigeration. In fact, tradesmen were even given permission to return goods that were poor in quality, as long as this had no effect on basic supply interests. In a move intended to improve the selection of basic goods, the import of foodstuffs and other goods was made possible; however, as Hungary's economy deteriorated during the 1980s, the ability to do so was limited and Soviet bloc countries were viewed as the primary source for import goods. Importing from capitalist countries could not be counterbalanced by local shortage goods or products that did not possess a significant amount of import value: "Capitalist goods can neither be advertised nor sold at a discount."²³⁹ The permitted quantity of imported pleasure and luxury goods was for the most part fixed at previously established levels.

At this time, the practice of advertising foodstuffs increasingly came to the forefront. The most important aim for these advertisements was to popularize modern and healthy eating habits, promote the usage of household products that would cut down on housework, raise the level of food hygiene, and generally emphasize the value in using certain items. From the point of view of economic and social policy considerations, it was understandably forbidden to advertise

²³⁹ "Az élelmiszer és vegyi áru kereskedelem VI. ötéves tervidőszakra szóló kereskedelempolitikai irányelvei," A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XX-VI-G-4. 83. d., December 18, 1980.

products that could not be provided from current supply quantities. "In the interest of improving shopping circumstances, the hygiene and surroundings of shops must be corrected. The regular cleaning of shops, shop windows, and displays, the personal hygiene of staff, the cleanliness of work smocks and the baskets used in self-service stores, the regular extermination of insects and vermin, the usage of cleaning machines in larger ABC supermarkets, the maintenance of debris-free pavements in front of the shops, and the cessation of alcoholic consumption in front of the store are all tasks that have a close bearing on this aim."²⁴⁰

In its evaluation of trade circulation for the period between January and November 1984, the ministry of internal trade concluded that "similarly to October, demand for foodstuffs and pleasure goods was high as circulation exceeded that of the previous year by 11.1 percent. The selection was both stable and good in quality. The supply of pork and beef, meat products, eggs, fish, poultry (with the exception of gizzards) was undisturbed. Out of fats and oils the quantity of RAMA margarine and sunflower oil proved insufficient at certain locations or times. The selection for milk, dairy products, rice, flour, cereals, and sugar was good while there were some lacks in the selection of chocolates or fancy packaged goods."²⁴¹

Following the downfall of state socialism, growth in the quantity of consumed food came to a halt; in the case of some goods, a decrease in consumption could even be observed.²⁴² As Hungarian society restructured itself, food consumption became more polarized: the number of malnourished or inadequately nourished individuals, for example, started to climb. In the years following this political transition, the per capita amounts for food consumption dropped in virtually every category of foodstuffs. As a further consequence of the economic changes that accompanied Hungary's shift to democracy, food prices continued to rise dramatically in the first half of the 1990s.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ "A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Közgazdasági Főosztály Információs Osztályának áruforgalmi gyorsjelentése az 1984. január-november hónapokról," 30.010/136.1984. sz. A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-xxx. 182. d., December 15, 1984.

²⁴² For a comparative historical analysis of food consumption and nutritional habits in Eastern and Central Europe after the fall of communism, see Melissa L. Caldwell, ed., *Food and Everyday Life in the Postsocialist World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).



Figure 29. Rural grocery store in 1981. By the beginning of the eighties the quality of the supply of goods had become balanced (photo by László Gábor, Fortepan, 31879)

This factor led to decreased levels of consumption, even though most households avoided cutting their budget for food in favor of forgoing other types of expenditures. Not utterly independent of prices, this drop in food consumption played a role in the partial transformation of consumer habits.

According to the KSH's data for 1993, 48.8 percent of Hungarian households did not alter their shopping habits for groceries, meaning that this method was not used to save money; 16.4 percent tried to cut costs by buying less and cheaper cuts of meat while 30.3 percent decreased purchases of meat and other foodstuffs. The majority of those forced to conserve costs included families with multiple children, one-parent families, trained and semi-skilled laborers, the inhabitants of cities located in Hungary's countryside, and simple white-collar professionals. The food consumption of households with either low or irregular incomes dropped dramatically.²⁴³

²⁴³ Béla Falussy et al., "A lakosság táplálkozási szokásai: Kutatási beszámoló; Az 1986–87. és az 1993. évi KSH Életmód-időmérleg-táplálkozási felvételek főbb eredményei," manuscript (Budapest: KSH, 1997), 11–12.

One of the most typical features of this period was the swift increase in a wide selection of foodstuffs, a circumstance that virtually led to the oversupply of goods while simultaneously contributing to the obvious differentiation of food consumption and nutrition levels based on available income. In the early 1990s, the trade system for foodstuffs underwent a total transformation: in place of the state's previous dominance, new privately-owned small- or large-scale trade networks emerged. The quality of nutrition, however, was increasingly determined by the percentage of income that could be spent on foodstuffs; albeit very slowly, habits related to healthy diets were beginning to spread at the same time. Meanwhile, millions more Hungarians found themselves struggling daily to procure a minimal quantity of basic foodstuffs as climbing food prices and the drops in income that occurred between 1987 and 1993 left a broadening circle of Hungarian society teetering on the brink of survival.

Between 1987 and 1993 the structure of consumption changed as fewer "luxury" (as in expensive) food items such as alcohol, high-priced meat products, or meat dishes with a higher content of calories were bought. To a small or moderate extent Hungarians ate more bacon, cracklings, or foods consisting of filling yeast dough while the consumption of stewed vegetables, boiled noodles, potato casseroles, fried bread, bread spread with either butter or lard, and tea skyrocketed. This adjustment in the content of consumption aptly demonstrates the change in financial circumstances as a broader section of society sank deeper into poverty.²⁴⁴ Based on the survey's data, in 1993 the amount of bread (either eaten plain or spread with something) or sandwiches eaten for breakfast and supper along with some type of drink increasingly replaced the main meal. The role played by milk and dairy products in daily nutrition fell while meals made of cheap or moderately priced meats appeared for lunches. The consumption of stewed vegetables or side dishes (rice, potatoes) unaccompanied by any form of meat grew more and more common in daily meals. Visible throughout the 1980s and 1990s, yet another general trend was the continuing disintegration, dissolution, and relative homogenization of traditional Hungarian cuisine and eating habits.

Throughout the latter decades, the nutritional structure found in Hungarian households has transformed as greater prominence is given

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

to fruits and vegetables over the consumption of grains and sugar. Cuts in household food expenditures are reflected in the consumption of food.²⁴⁵ Compared to 2000, significant drops have occurred in the consumption of fruit and milk; in 2009, 4.7 fewer kilograms of milk or dairy products were consumed per person compared to the previous decade. While fruit consumption generally fluctuated in accordance with availability and consumer prices, an overall decrease took place. The gradual adoption of healthy nutritional habits can be seen in the continuous change of which food products are consumed in varying quantities in households; for years, the decrease in the usage of animal-based fats and sugar has been noticeable. Despite this, this same trend is not characteristic of the lower echelons in Hungarian society given the fact that a low or irregular income mainly leads to the consumption of cheap yet high-calorie foodstuffs, if and when they are available.

Compared to 2006, in 2010 the average per capita consumption of meat fell by four kilograms. It can be surmised that the consistently low amount of fish eaten in Hungary (3.7 kg per person per year) is partially due to eating habits and also related to high prices. Out of foodstuffs containing a high percentage of carbohydrates, the consumption of potatoes and flour decreased in 2009. Fewer and fewer eggs have been consumed in the past decade. The amount of fruit and vegetables consumed in Hungary is not judged as high and typically fluctuates. In 2009, the consumption of fruit increased while 3.3 fewer kilograms of vegetables were eaten on average. In 2010, the price of vegetables rose by one-fifth in under one year, while potatoes cost one-third more. Throughout the three years preceding 2009 the amount of nourishment eaten per day fell, yet was still 3,140 calories per day in 2009 and obviously exceeded the daily allowance for calories that was accepted by health professionals. The quantity of consumed fats soared far above accepted values and did not change in comparison to those measured in 2008 yet was still somewhat lower compared to the 2006 levels. Compared to the middle of the past decade, the consumption of carbohydrates has fallen by 6 percent, reaching the nutritionally recommended level.

Due to a significant rise in food prices that took place in 2010, households continued to lower the quantity of consumed food since increased costs naturally affect how much food is eaten. Although

²⁴⁵ For this data, see *Magyarország 2010* (Budapest: KSH, 2011).

nutritionally better food is consumed more often by those with the lowest incomes, these levels still lag far behind the average and deviate even more strikingly in comparison to the eating habits of high-income individuals. This circumstance is particularly noticeable in connection with the low consumption of meat and fruit.

Within total expenditures, the fall in the ratio of food consumption (together with the standard of living) that occurred following the political transition to democracy climbed until 1995, then began to decrease again in the latter half of the 1990s. In 2005, food costs represented 21.4 percent of total household expenditures. From this point on, a slight increase was followed by a state of stagnation; in 2008, this value only reached 22.8 percent. As of the beginning of the 1980s, the percentage of home-produced foodstuffs once again increased to the detriment of purchased foodstuffs. This trend temporarily strengthened directly after the fall of state socialism since family-run agricultural production—other than functioning as a form of supplemental income—increasingly represented a solution to staggering drops in finances as a growing number of Hungarians joined the ranks of the unemployed. At the beginning of the new millennium, however, the importance of home-produced foodstuffs somewhat lessened as the production of homegrown foodstuffs was increasingly taken over by privately operated forms of farming or farming methods that were determined by a lack of adequate land. Mainly due to the termination of the state socialist “institution” of the household farm plot, private farming drastically diminished throughout the 1990s, a trend that continued after 2000. Between 2000 and 2005 the rate of homeowners producing foodstuffs exclusively for their own usage fell, then rose again to reach 61 percent in 2010. The number of households engaging in home food production on amounts of land that are too small to qualify as farms was 1.1 million in 2010. Most of these fell under the definition of kitchen gardens used to supplement household consumption. A parallel trend in food consumption is the weakening attempt to maintain a self-sufficient food supply, a tendency mainly brought about by the fact that it is often more expensive to grow food locally rather than take advantage of the seemingly limitless piles of less expensive food sold in shopping centers.

Chapter Four

This Is How We Lived: Housing Conditions, Usage of Living Space, and Interior Decoration

The general characteristics determining housing and the state of urban housing

In the middle of the twentieth century, the housing situation in Hungary was worse than the European average as the level of comfort and furnishings found in Hungarian homes did not meet the European standards of the time. To best demonstrate this fact, statistics from 1939 reveal that out of nearly 270,000 apartments located in Budapest, only 50,000 had indoor plumbing, while 140,000 apartments lacked gas or electricity. A further ten thousand basement apartments were what more than twenty thousand people called "home." According to data collected by the Hungarian Royal Office of Statistics in 1941, thirty percent of the inhabitants living in Szeged, one of Hungary's larger cities, had to share one room with five or more people, a situation that affected approximately forty-one thousand people. These numbers alone testify to the low level of comfort and high density of people that characterized Hungary's housing conditions throughout the 1930s and 1940s. As one of the most essential factors in determining everyday life, the issue of housing underwent noticeable changes in the second half of the twentieth century, a period during which the general trend demonstrated an increase not only in the number of apartments and houses, but also in the size of these structures. The comfort offered by these dwellings showed an overall improvement, a tendency which continued to grow after the fall of communism between 1989 and 1990; the post-communist era, however, also saw a sharp increase in the differences determining living conditions and the quality of housing available to those occupying a place at the top versus the bottom of society.

Throughout the 1950s, most homes were constructed in industrial centers and cities that had been fashioned after the state socialist

model. Since the populations of these areas grew at a rate that rapidly outstripped the number of available dwellings due to the forced speed with which industry was being developed, the density of people living within one residence continued to grow. While in 1949 there were 365 residents to every 100 apartments, by 1955 this number had risen to 373. Partially due to the housing shortage, the number of one-room homes also increased significantly. Similarly, 195,671 people were living in the 32,225 shared tenancies available in Budapest; in cities located elsewhere in Hungary, 95,358 individuals lived in the 15,009 apartments of this type.¹ In the mid-fifties, out of Budapest's 479,971 apartments, 4.7 percent had an area no larger than 10 square meters, while another 41.3 percent hovered between 11 and 20 square meters. A further 18.3 percent of apartments were between 21 and 30 square meters, meaning that two-thirds of the city's housing consisted of homes that were smaller than 30 square meters in size, while at the same time only 8.6 percent of apartments could boast an area larger than 61 square meters.

In their study summarizing the data collected during a housing census taken on July 1, 1954, for usage by Hungary's political leadership, the Central Office of Statistics' (KSH) researchers emphasized the following:

The growth in available housing is generally far behind the increase in population, thereby leading to a noticeable worsening of housing conditions. The number of "emergency" (a term used to describe businesses, workshops, cellars, or other types of spaces that were turned into living areas)² and shared apartments has risen significantly. During the period that has passed since the previous population census, the large number of dwellings that were either demolished or put to other uses has only exacerbated the situation.

¹ *Adatok és adalékok a népgazdaság fejlődésének a tanulmányozásához 1949–1955* (Budapest: KSH, 1957). The concept of shared tenancies or housing was "invented" during the first half of the 1950s and consisted of tenants who paid rent for the exclusive usage of one or more rooms in an apartment, while other spaces (such as the entryway, kitchen, and bathroom) were used by all the tenants. So as to mitigate the housing shortage that emerged following World War II, multiple families were moved into any larger-sized apartments, the space of which was parceled out among the residents. Shared tenancies were gradually phased out of usage beginning in the 1960s.

² According to the terminology used in Hungary, any building or living space that had originally not been intended for residential purposes and was therefore essentially only suitable for protecting the inhabitants from the elements was labeled as an emergency residence or apartment.

At most, the current pace of the construction of residential structures can only match the natural increase in population: based on the national average, however, this pace remains lower than necessary, thereby leading to a further deterioration in housing conditions.³

Quite understandably, a study analyzing the housing situation that was prepared at the behest of the Patriotic Popular Front Committee for Housing Policies at the beginning of the 1960s only emphasized the positive trends that took place in the decade following 1945; in contradiction to the practice of the time, the examination surprisingly enough contained an evaluation of the difficulties found in various areas and the problems remaining to be solved.⁴ Among other issues, the fact was pointed out that the average number of rooms in a residence had only risen by a slight degree: in 1949, a home consisted of 1.4 rooms on average, a figure that was only 1.5 rooms per residence eleven years later. Other than this, the number and percentage of two- to three-room homes was only increasing at a remarkably slow pace. It must be mentioned that during this period construction could be accomplished either via state support or by raising the money and resources for building a home via private means. Taking advantage of state support usually involved—as I shall soon examine—living in a housing estate unit styled after the Soviet model, a privilege that was only accorded to those deemed to be worthy citizens of the state socialist system and therefore deserving of support based on the system's approach to solving social issues. Private construction, the only other possibility, demanded that potential homeowners pool their financial resources, labor, and building materials in order to construct a house of their own. While, on the surface, state control during this period appeared invincible, in reality the number of privately-constructed homes was always higher than that of state-funded buildings. This peculiarity characterized the era's housing issues until the middle of the 1970s, when the number of state-funded versus privately-constructed structures was roughly equal, meaning that out of the one hundred thousand apartment buildings erected in 1976, half were supported by the state while the other half resulted from private

³ "A KSH jelentése az 1954. július 1-i lakásösszeírás eredményeiről," MNL OL, XXVI-D-8-g. 4. d., November 13, 1954.

⁴ "Lakáspolitikánk időszerű kérdései: A HNF Országos Tanács Titkárságának számára összeállította dr. Szamek Tamás a Lakáspolitikai Bizottság vezetője," MNL OL, XXVI-D-1-c. 1. d., 1962.

efforts. Yet another phenomenon related to this period is the fact that houses with multiple rooms were mostly built during the fifties and by private means. As far as home furnishings and fittings were concerned, other than the relatively quick spread of electricity, very little changed during the fifteen years that followed World War II, a situation that was particularly true in villages.

State-supported construction initially took the form of five-story cement structures designed as standardized neighborhood units or housing estates, the mass appearance of which fundamentally transformed cities and city life in Hungary, a country where the tallest apartment building had rarely exceeded four floors. Notwithstanding a handful of exceptions, these settlements were all located in cities and therefore had a far-reaching effect in altering urban behavior and lifestyles. By the 1960s, this type of housing solution enabled the construction of state-funded housing not only to accelerate, but also to become widespread. To pave the way for the state housing program, in 1962 the Hungarian government purchased the Soviet Union's latest technology in housing construction, the technique of constructing six-, eight-, or even ten-story apartment buildings using mass-produced, prefabricated concrete panels that were used for structural elements as well as facades. This created the need for new factories producing these housing materials, as is clear from a report by the minister of construction:

In the interest of speeding up the construction of housing, eliminating the industry's seasonal nature, increasing the demand for quality, and putting building materials to appropriate use, the third five-year plan intensifies its focus on getting house-building plants into operating order. One of the most significant steps made to this end will be to put the House-building Plant purchased from the Soviet Union into operation. Within the house-building plant's system, tasks will primarily be performed on site and in nearly industrial-grade surroundings. Assembling and completing the buildings will essentially be possible on any day of the year, no matter the weather, and can therefore be accomplished at a regular rate. Currently the products and apartments manufactured by the House-building Plant have met with a number of objections. Worries have been specifically expressed regarding the 2.55-meter height of the walls and the 3.08-meter width of a room that is 18 m² in area. Since the construction of modern housing cannot be separated from the issue of modern furnishings, as the apartments are developed we will strive to replace individual wardrobes—as traditional pieces of furniture—with built-in cabinets. In reference to certain aspects,

the standard designs . . . deviate from the regulations laid out by the National Building Code.⁵

Various documents designated 1966 as the year for launching the construction of large-scale, Soviet-type prefabricated panel houses. In contrast to Hungary's building code at the time, the height for each story was to be 2.7 meters, which meant decreasing the internal height for the rooms to 2.5 meters. Contrary to the standards of the time, the largest room in one-third of these apartments did not reach the minimum size of 18 square meters. As far as the heating and plumbing were concerned, "In accordance with the Soviet model, the central heating and plumbing system does not necessitate the installation of gas meters for the cookstoves in each apartment. All one-room apartments will include built-in furnishings, artificial light, and interior kitchens equipped with their own ventilation system."⁶ The rationale behind these decisions was that modifying the equipment shipped from the Soviet Union for mass-producing housing elements would not only cost more, it would also delay the construction of house-building plants for years to come. Other than supporting the introduction of the Soviet Union's latest technology in Hungary, it was additionally reasoned that

based on both technical and economic indicators as well as on its technique of execution, the prefabricated panel method of construction currently represents one of the most developed means for building known today and can therefore completely satisfy the growing demand for housing that can be built in a way that is both quick and inexpensive. (The allotted time for construction is decreased by 50 to 60 percent while construction costs are lowered by 8 to 10 percent in comparison to traditional methods.) . . . Our country already commands the technical means necessary for introducing the panel type of building method. The studies we have conducted and the panel structures that have already been erected are ample proof of the fact that—given proper technical and economic preparation—a significant proportion of the housing construction program can be attained via the panel construction method. . . . The advantages to the prefabricated panel construction method only appear in full if the necessary preconditions have been put in place for guaranteeing the type of circumstances that truly approach those

⁵ Letter from Minister of Construction Affairs Rezső Trautmann to Vice-President of Council of Ministers Jenő Fock, MNL OL, XIX-D-3. 6. d., September 10, 1962.

⁶ *Ibid.*

entailing mass manufacturing. . . . Among other things, the panel construction method exclusively demands the building of larger, adjoining housing estates.⁷

The apartments built in these housing estates were either small or moderate in size; two-thirds of these dwellings were located in structures made out of prefabricated concrete panels and categorized as either medium-high or high buildings. According to the description provided by a 1970 issue of the magazine *Lakáskultúra* (Interior Decoration), “numerous cities are seeing the hearteningly swift construction of hundreds or even thousands of apartment buildings made to the specifications of the Soviet-style house-building plant that has been in production for over a year now.”⁸ Populated on average by twenty to forty thousand people, these housing estates were initially established on city outskirts, but later crept closer and closer to occupy locations within urban centers. It was not uncommon for a city’s historical district to fall victim to this process of “modernization”; to mention just a few cases, Budapest’s oldest district, Óbuda, as well as the urban centers of Debrecen and Kecskemét completely lost their historical character. To make matters worse, neither those who commissioned the project, nor the contractors responsible for building these structures devoted any sort of attention toward ensuring that these new examples of “socialist” architecture would blend in with the older buildings already present in the surrounding area.

To cite one example, construction of the Derkovits housing estate in Szombathely, a city located in Hungary’s western region, began in 1961 on twenty-six hectares of land found north-west of the city. The majority of the structures established here belonged to the “medium block” category of apartments building and therefore consisted of only four stories equipped with central heating and topped with a flat roof. The plans, however, included designs for the construction of seven eight-story and one twelve-story structure; an eleven-story building (featuring a basement, a ground floor, and nine additional floors) was finally completed between 1964 and 1965, thereby representing the first appearance of a structure belonging to the medium-high category. The housing estate offered a total of 3,241 apartments,

⁷ “Intézkedési keretternv javaslat. Budapest,” Az Építésügyi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-D-3. j. 4.d., June 1961.

⁸ *Lakáskultúra*, no. 6 (1970): 23.

of which more than half were two-room dwellings. Forty percent contained apartments with one-and-a-half rooms, while fifteen one-room and seventy-eight three-room homes could be found in the entire development, which housed a total of 11,740 people.⁹

The development of housing estates in Hungary's cities rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. As happened in the cities of Kazincbarcika, Komló, Tatabánya, Ajka, Dunaújváros, and Ózd, industrial and residential areas were often placed far too close to one another, leading to situations in which inhabitants were exposed to the dangers of industrial pollution, not to mention the fact that constructing these housing estates significantly reduced the amount of land that could be utilized for recreational purposes. In choosing the sites for these developments, the factors determining the quality of lifestyle that would later be led by the estates' occupants were mostly ignored. Since planning and construction also had to accommodate the restraints imposed by the existing city structure and the need to provide transportation, the housing estates built from the 1960s to the 1980s consequently presented a visually bleak image that was further compounded by a dismal lack of functionality.

A form that was generally no more than either a four-story rectangular shape lying horizontally or a ten-story rectangle standing vertically, these structures inevitably entailed very modestly sized apartments



Figure 30. Construction of the housing estate in Óbuda, 1974 (Fortepan, 198870, Zoltán Szalay)

⁹ "Tájékoztató a szombathelyi Derkovits-lakótelep beruházási programtervezetéről," MNL OL, XIX-D-3-j. 6. d., May 30, 1962.

(54 square meters on average) and an atmosphere of visual and aesthetic monotony. Not only could very little furniture be placed in the minimal living space contained in a housing estate apartment, the type of furnishings that did fit in was also so unvaried in style and form that creating a visually diverse, stimulating interior—at least according to traditional taste—was virtually impossible. The spaces in these dwellings can be summarized as serving the purpose of maintaining basic, biological functions and no more: they were completely inadequate for conducting any type of social activity, such as holding family events, parties for friends, etc. Regarding the poor quality of life and living circumstances engendered by these Soviet-type prefabricated panel structures, the housing estates that were constructed during the 1980s with the aim of at least somewhat accommodating their surroundings (such as the Gazdagrét development found in Budapest) or presenting an image that was visually more stimulating, formally more exciting, and only contained a medium number of floors as opposed to towering over the city (the Tóció Valley housing estates in Debrecen) were the exception rather than the rule.¹⁰ “The massive construction projects being launched as a part of the third five-year plan have been conceived in the name of creating new city districts and housing factories. Between 1966 and 1970 thirty thousand apartments were built in Budapest with an average area of 51 square meters. . . . Ten-story structures are characteristic of this period, with each featuring express elevators, garbage chutes leading to incinerators, and ventilation systems. While designing the five-year plan, the idea to serve the population’s needs by including businesses, schools, and kindergartens in the construction of housing estates was also formulated.”¹¹ In 1985, 1.6 million people lived in the 518,000 apartments found in the nation’s 408 housing estates.

¹⁰ In the case of housing estates, the fact that the apartment model they offered (two living rooms with full comfort) became widespread led to a significant improvement in the lives of many, particularly from the point of view that their construction was a relatively swift solution to increasing access to running water and bathrooms. The issue of what lifestyle improvements housing estates may have brought in areas other than basic facilities remains highly debatable. The social prestige held by housing estates changed vastly in the decades following communism and was dependent on factors such as location, construction, or the residents’ social characteristics and status.

¹¹ Kornélia Dolecskó, “A lakótelepek története,” *Népszabadság*, March 29, 1975, 4.



Figure 31. Housing estates built in the 1960s near the industrial areas of Ózd, northern Hungary (private collection of Péter Alabán)

By the end of the 1980s, the state-sponsored mass construction of housing projects had practically come to an end; no more standardized “panel” structures were built during the 1990s, although it cannot be forgotten that the concept of “humanized panel houses” appeared at this time. Compared to the previous style, this type had fewer floors and a peaked instead of a flat roof, turned the attic space into loft apartments, and attempted to create more aesthetic and livable spaces by using a greater variety of forms. Examples of this kind of structure can be found in the housing estates built in the Káposztásmegyer area of Budapest, or the units located on Vezér Street in Debrecen. Further attempts were made to apply panel construction techniques to family homes, an experiment that left its mark on houses found in Debrecen, Szeged, Szolnok, and Budapest. Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, the dreary forms fabricated in home construction factories were exchanged for homes that were built to reflect personal tastes while additionally accommodating either one or multiple families as an increasing number of family homes were being built instead of housing estates. The new millennium then saw the arrival of new kinds of housing developments constructed by private investors or

housing “parks,” a type of development in which a large tract of land is divided into individual plots that are then privately developed according to each homeowner’s taste and budget.



Figure 32. New apartment buildings in the late 1980s in Győr (photo by VÁTI, Fortepan, 33384, donated by Lechner Nonprofit Kft. Dokumentációs Központ)

Other than satisfying Hungary’s massive need for homes, housing estates were also intended to speed up the process of improving social conditions by combining ideology with technology. For a time at least, the construction of housing units did succeed in establishing equal conditions among different social classes; this state, however, only lasted until the 1970s, when a process of differentiation began that gained increasing momentum throughout the 1980s. From this point on, a significant number of the apartments located in housing estates changed hands as all those who could afford to switched their units for better-quality homes. As a rule, the families who moved into the housing estates arrived from conditions that were far worse both financially and socially. It must also be emphasized that living on a floor in a multi-story building entails a markedly different way of life compared to that offered by the greater isolation found in a street of one-level family homes located in a small town or a village that

almost exclusively contains single homes. In every instance there was no close relationship, however, between the size of the town and the choice of construction: residential areas containing mostly family homes existed in great numbers throughout most of Hungary's large and small cities or towns. In 1970, for example, 43 percent of Budapest's population lived in a one-level home.

In the decades following 1945 the size of homes increased significantly as only one out of ten dwellings built before 1960 could boast of a floor plan that was 100 square meters or larger, a percentage that rose to be four times greater in twenty-five years. While one-room homes formed more than two-thirds of Hungary's housing in 1949, by 1990 the highest percentage was for two-room homes. In other words, throughout this period the two-room model had become widespread, meaning that the average number of rooms found in a dwelling also increased. While one-twentieth of Hungary's housing contained three or more rooms in 1949, by 1990 two-fifths of all homes had more than two rooms. The level of comfort, fittings, facilities, equipment, and furnishings found in Hungarian homes also underwent major changes in the decades following World War II.

Table 11. Changes in residential access to utilities and facilities from 1949 to 1995 (by percentage)

Type of Utility/Facility	1949	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995
Indoor plumbing	17.0	22.5	35.6	64.0	83.3	89.0
Gas lines	-	-	16.2	25.5	40.2	59.1
Access to public water/ sewage system	-	-	27.0	37.0	43.8	43.9
Toilet	12.6	16.0	27.0	52.5	74.1	80.6
Bathroom	10.1	17.5	31.6	59.7	81.2	84.1
Central heating	-	-	9.0	19.1	41.2	44.3
Electricity	46.0	73.8	91.7	98.1	99.0	100.0

Source: Statistical yearbooks by KSH from the years 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 1995

As far as heating was concerned, wood-, coal-, or oil-burning stoves were gradually replaced by central heating or heating systems that utilized natural gas. Access to electricity became almost total, just as more than four-fifths of all homes had indoor plumbing, a toilet, and

a bathroom by the middle of the 1990s. In essence, access to public utilities remained the only area during this period to display a relatively lower level of dynamic development. In the first half of the 1950s, for example, out of Hungary's sixty-two cities only fifty had their own water and sewage system. In the city of Pécs, 41 percent of residences were not connected to the city water system, a percentage that rose to 66 percent in the city of Szolnok. Not only were city water mains fairly crude, but by the 1950s the systems that were already in use had become outdated. Notable regional differences emerge regarding the facilities provided by Hungary's homes as the percentage of fully-equipped dwellings was larger in the capital city and other large cities (with a population of one hundred thousand or more) compared to the level of amenities available in regions mostly dotted with small villages.

The level of urban housing that was available during this period was heavily influenced by the fact that a rather significant number of Hungary's rural population had been moving into urban centers for decades, resulting in a constant lack of housing. The state socialist system placed residences within the category of social benefits; once housing fell under central administration and decision-making, the mechanisms used for reallocating homes or apartments created a vast degree of inequality due to the fact that housing policies showed an entirely different picture on paper than in practice. While in theory everyone had an equal chance of gaining access to housing, in practice the state only provided a significant level of support for urban housing, while rural housing remained neglected. Other than the financial support provided to encourage couples to have children (a program known as "social policy"), the opportunities available to rural families attempting to borrow money from banks for the purpose of building their own home in a village were far less favorable, as "nearly half of the nation's population was not affected by the centralized housing policy."¹² In 1981, 87 percent of those who gained access to a residence located in small communities either built, bought, or inherited their home. A directive issued in 1955 casts further light on the peculiar reality that emerged out of the period's ideals regarding social equality: "In the interest of creating an appropriate appearance for cities, in cities the better-quality areas can be designated as

¹² Ágnes Vajda, "Nagyvárosi és falusi lakásformák," *Statisztikai Szemle*, nos. 8–9 (1986): 854.

separate residential areas set aside for homes for those rewarded by the state on the basis of their merit (those decorated by the state, the recipients of the Kossuth Award, artists, scientists, etc.).¹³ It is compulsory to build houses that are architecturally higher in quality in these areas."¹⁴

The issue of inequality was addressed in a proposal put forth by the Ministry of Building Affairs in 1962:

The essence of the issue that remains to be solved lies in the fact that the way in which different social levels of the population participate in the mutual grand social effort that is needed to realize the fifteen-year housing development program is disproportionate to one another. One part of society—mostly those with better means and a higher level of income—was able to gain or is currently gaining access to state-funded, low-cost tenancies without having to make any type of financial sacrifice. The rent for these apartments does not even cover the expenses the state expends for building maintenance; others are simultaneously forced to take on conditions that far exceed their financial capacity in order to have their own home, privately-owned apartment, or cooperative residence. . . . Nearly 90 percent of our urban population is a worker living on his or her own wages. The time when our entire population will be living on his or her own wages alone is not distant. While the principle of distribution according to labor has still not been perfectly achieved in our country, the difference among wage-earners is generally speaking not large enough to justify the need for them to satisfy their demand for housing based on such disparate financial circumstances. . . . According to our observations, the majority of wage earners who build their own home do not set aside the sum needed for the down-payment that precedes construction out of their working wage. Instead, it is usually due to some exceptional circumstance (selling their rural home, relatives sending money from abroad, inheritance, winning the lottery, etc.) that they manage to do so. Nor is the number of those who build homes based on sources of unverifiable and illegal income—marketeering or tips, for example—insignificant.¹⁵

The inequalities that emerged in connection to the housing situation were noticeable throughout Hungary's state socialist period and continued to grow. Once the Iron Curtain fell, this process of differentiation

¹³ The Kossuth Award was established in 1948 to commemorate the centenary of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. The award is the highest state award given to those who have made great achievements in the fields of Hungarian culture and science.

¹⁴ "Irányelvek a második öt éves terv lakás- és járulékos építkezéseinek tervszerű előkészítéséhez," MNL OL, XIX-D-3-b. 25. d., August 3, 1955.

¹⁵ "Kiegészítések a 'Lakáspolitikánk időszerű kérdései' című előterjesztés tervezet-höz," Az Építésügyi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-D-3-j. 6. d.

sped up even more: in 2005 Hungary contained a total of 4,173,000 dwellings, a number that was 2.7 percent higher than what it had been in 2001.¹⁶ Within the same period, the percentage of occupied housing rose from 91.6 percent to 94.4 percent, thereby exceeding the number of 3,937,000 dwellings. The majority of these (32 percent) were located in villages, while 20 percent could be found in county seats; an additional 20 percent were in Budapest. The remaining 28 percent were spread throughout Hungary's remaining cities.

Table 12. Housing and the number of residential homes, occupants, and density of occupants from 1970 to 2011

Year	Total Residences		Occupied Residences		Occupants (in thousands)	For every 100 occupied	
	Number (in thousands)	According to percentage from previous national census	Number (in thousands)	According to percentage from previous national census		Home	Room
						<i>Number of occupants</i>	
1970	3,118	113.1	3,034	111.9	9,925	327	199
1980	3,542	113.6	3,417	112.6	10,349	303	151
1990	3,853	108.8	3,688	107.9	10,119	274	115
2001	4,065	105.5	3,724	101.0	9,933	267	103
2005	4,173	102.7	3,937	105.7	9,886	251	95
2011	4,390	109.5	3,912	99.4	9,717	248	93

Source: *Mikrocensus, 2005* (Budapest: KSH); *Népszámlálás, 2011*, vol. 3, *Országos adatok* (Budapest: KSH, 2013).

¹⁶ Further detailed statistics regarding housing are provided by the 2005 microcensus, a smaller census prepared for the purpose of gathering representative statistical data between national censuses. These factors are primarily why I draw my data from this source. The volume in which the data gathered during the 2011 national census was published contains far less detailed information, *Népszámlálás, 2011*, vol. 3, *Országos adatok* (Budapest: KSH, 2013).

Together with the decrease in Hungary's population, the increase by more than 200,000 residential dwellings led to an improvement in the indicator for the average density of people living in each home, which fell from 2.67 to 2.51. It should not be forgotten that this national average in effect disguises the remarkable differences that emerge when the issue is examined from the point of view of type of settlement, as the situation in Hungary's large cities was far better than the average suggests. In Budapest, for example, there were only 213 inhabitants per every one hundred homes, while county seats had 240 inhabitants per the same number. While other cities and villages displayed much larger averages (262 inhabitants per every one hundred town dwellings versus 272 inhabitants per every one hundred village dwellings), the difference between these values was smaller.

This description of the changes in the amount of living space that has become available to Hungarians can be further refined by comparing the number of occupants found in each residence to the number of rooms. Between 2001 and 2005, the number of occupants for every one hundred rooms found in residential dwellings decreased from 103 to 95. The indicator for county seats (94) is even smaller compared to the national average, while the capital city offers the best conditions for its occupants given its indicator of 88. The average is slightly higher in Hungary's other cities (96) and villages or smaller towns (97). According to this data, appearances suggest that every room has only one occupant. If, however, we examine how many occupants can be found per room, it can be seen that the average of one occupant per room is only true for 2,830,000 dwellings, in other words 72 percent of Hungary's residences. A further 24 percent (955,000 homes) have more than one, but no more than two occupants per room, while the remaining 4 percent (153,000 homes) house more than two people per room, a condition that can be judged as relatively crowded. In Hungary the reality of housing two people per room is viewed as fairly acceptable: based on this premise, three people per a one-room, five per a two-room, or seven per a three-room home is overly crowded. Based on the data collected in the microcensus illustrated in the graph above, four percent (156,000 homes) fall into this latter category. Furthermore, eight percent of Hungary's population (more than 825,000 individuals) reside in dwellings in which the density is above five; in these cases, it can justifiably be stated that these occupants are most likely dissatisfied with their housing conditions.

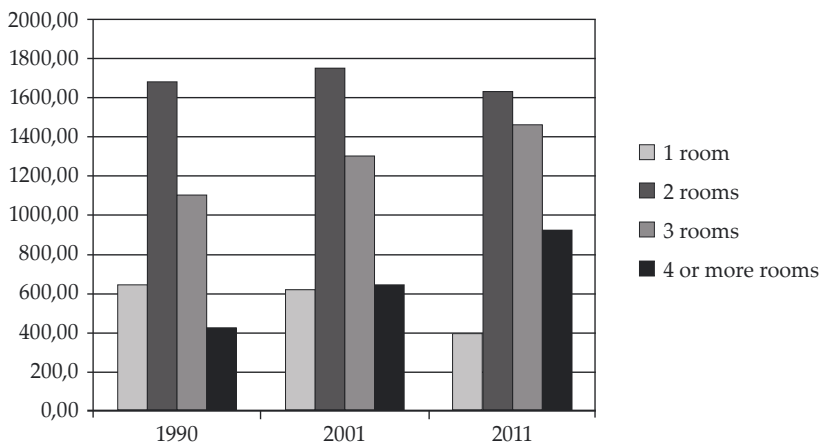


Figure 33. Changes in housing based on the number of rooms, 1990–2009. Source: *Magyarország 1989–2009* (Budapest: KSH, 2010)

When analyzing the size of dwellings based on the number of rooms, it can be stated that no meaningful changes occurred between the 1990s and the 2000s. Although the percentage of two-room homes continues to be the highest (39.5 percent), when grouped together larger homes (containing three or more rooms) absolutely represent the majority at 50.4 percent. When assessed by size of community, the data continues to demonstrate percentages that approach those found on the national level. When working downward in the hierarchy of community size (from Budapest, the capital city, to the smallest villages), the percentage of small homes generally decreases while that for large homes increases. Without going into exhaustive detail, the following values reveal some discrepancies in comparison to the average: in the capital city, one-room homes can be found at 19.2 percent, a number almost double the national value of 10.1 percent. While this phenomenon can naturally be explained by historical factors, it must also be mentioned that the emphasis placed on the supply of housing in Hungary's capital city has always played a definitive role. In county seats, the percentage of two-room homes (39.5 percent) is six percent higher, while in villages or small towns this indicator is five percent lower than the national average. In Budapest, the ratio of three-room (or larger) homes is five to six percent lower than the national average, while both values are far higher (at six and three percent, respectively) in small municipalities. These figures amply

demonstrate the fact that at least 100,000 to 110,000 dwellings are occupied by more than three people per room. Within this number, a little more than 70,000 homes have at least four people per room. In summary, from the point of view of the density of living conditions, a minimum of 500,000 individuals can be estimated as currently residing in the least favorable circumstances.

Table 13. Conditions in occupied residences based on number of rooms and occupants in 2005

Occupied by number of people	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9 and more	Homes without occupants	Total
Number of rooms							
1	308,098	51,653	9,175	1,508	292	25,560	396,268
2	1,050,044	402,321	59,734	5,848	2,223	36,245	155,6415
3	622,887	531,185	120,132	14,774	5,087	21,113	1,315,178
4 and more	189,996	324,668	120,414	17,752	50,256	11,293	669,379
Total	2,171,025	1,309,827	309,455	39,882	12,858	94,211	3,937,258

Source: *Mikrocenzus, 2005* (Budapest: KSH, 2007).

Compared to the number of bedrooms, a home's size presents an even more accurate measure of the realities and circumstances surrounding Hungary's housing situation. Between 2005 and 2011 the mean national area for a residence in Hungary was 78 square meters, a sum that represented an increase of 3 square meters in comparison to 2001. While this does not signal a significant improvement, the fact that homes were increasingly being constructed with the aim of satisfying a certain level of quality must also be taken into consideration. One indication of this shift is the growing trend toward larger floor plans. When categorizing Hungary's occupied residencies according to area, in 2001 the group representing the average (60–79 square meters) proved to be the largest at 23 percent. Based on data gathered in 2005, dwellings with an area larger than 100 square meters had already taken the lead (25 percent) and subsequently made up over 980,000 homes in Hungary, a phenomenon that obviously owed

much to the spike in home construction that occurred at the beginning of the new millennium. Based on the area of residential homes, the percentage for homes that are smaller than 60 square meters was the highest in Budapest and county seats (56 and 50 percent respectively), while dwellings in Hungary's other cities and small towns or communities averaged between 60 and 99 square meters (45 and 50 percent respectively). In contrast to the size of the residence's location, the percentage of homes with floor plans exceeding 100 square meters grows from 11 percent in Budapest to 37 percent in small communities, a phenomenon that indicates the need to take the factor of location into account when assessing the data for housing.

In 2011, 9.1 percent of residential homes had only one room, while 37 percent had two rooms, 33 percent had three rooms, and 21 percent had four or more rooms. The percentage of homes with more rooms is once again higher in cities that are not county seats as well as in small towns and villages. In Budapest one-room homes made up 17 percent, a figure eight percent higher than the national average, while in county seats this number was 9.3 percent, compared to 7.2 percent in other types of cities and 5.7 percent in small communities. The occurrence of two-room homes in Budapest and county seats was also higher compared to the national average. In other cities the number of homes with three or more rooms was well over 50 percent, a figure overshadowed only by the higher than 60 percent rate exhibited by small communities.

The average area for residential homes in 2011 was 78 square meters, a sum that had increased by 3 square meters compared to the average found in the population census of 2001. Similar to the increase in rooms, the change in larger floor plans was influenced by the number of newly constructed, larger dwellings resulting in a decrease in the percentage of smaller-sized homes and an increase of the figure for larger ones. The rate at which homes greater than 100 square meters in size have grown is particularly noteworthy: today every fourth home in Hungary belongs to this category.

In reference to the level of facilities and access to public utilities, the situation improved in the first half of the new millennium, but obviously at a slower pace following the nearly 90 percent rate of development reached between 1990 and 2001 in all areas except for access to municipal wastewater management and natural gas lines. It therefore follows that increased development is mainly observable in the areas of sewage and natural gas systems, which have grown

by 10 percent and 5.5 percent respectively since 2001. Improvements in public sewage systems can also be seen in the increased number of homes fitted with flush toilets, the percentage of which grew by 4 percent in under five years. The majority of occupied dwellings (57.7 percent) contain central heating, which saw a 3 percent rate of increase between 2001 and 2005. The facilities found in tenancies essentially display the same indicators as residential homes; a total rate of one- to two-percent is the extent of divergence between the two, to the benefit of residential homes.

The degree of comfort offered by homes also improved to a moderate extent.¹⁷ Based on the data, the number and percentage of better-quality, more comfortable homes rose. Between 2001 and 2005 the rate of residences possessing a full range of utilities and facilities rose by four percent. Although the category for homes displaying a full-comfort level also expanded, this growth only equaled one percent. Not only did the percentage of homes falling into the category of minimal comfort decrease, but the dwellings providing no comfort also fell by three percent. When evaluating these numbers, it must be mentioned that the homes built during the past few years have almost exclusively belonged to the full comfort category, while most of the dwellings that were liquidated exhibited a low level of comfort. Subsequently, Hungary's growth in housing has primarily consisted of full-comfort homes, a factor that has contributed to raising the average level. This phenomenon also means that the percentage of homes in the lowest category most likely fell without decreasing in reality, as the number of these homes remained the same. Nor should it be forgotten that public utilities are generally available for those living in the very worst conditions, but their home may have been disconnected from the grid, a circumstance that housing statistics are not equipped to assess.

¹⁷ According to the definition used by Hungary's KSH, a dwelling is assigned to the "full comfort" category if it has at least one room exceeding 12 square meters, areas for cooking and bathing, a toilet, is heated by central means (which can either be municipal heating, a central system, or heat distribution system) while additionally ensuring electricity, water, hot water, and access to a sewage system. The heating for medium-comfort homes is different compared to full-comfort ones: instead of central heating, each room is heated separately. In half-comfort homes either a bathroom or a toilet is missing; out of all utilities, only electricity and water is ensured. Among the specifics listed for the other comfort levels in housing, homes with no comfort have at least one room, an area for cooking, and can be heated by some type of means. Temporary housing (issued by local or state governments in emergency situations) or other forms of similar housing cannot be included in any of the categories listed above.

Table 14. Level of comfort in residential homes, 1990–2011 (in percentages)

Year	Total	Full-comfort homes	Medium-comfort homes	Half-comfort	No level of comfort	Temporary housing or other types of dwelling
1990	3,697,996	39.7	30.6	7.6	18.6	3.6
2001	3,723,509	51.6	30.2	5.0	9.5	3.7
2005	3,937,258	55.6	31.1	4.2	6.5	2.5
2011	4,390,302	61.4	31.0	2.7	4.9*	

Source: *Mikrocensus, 2005* (Budapest: KSH, 2007); *Népszámlálás, 2011*, vol. 3, *Országos adatok* (Budapest: KSH, 2013).

* calculated together with temporary housing or other types of dwellings

Between 2001 and 2011 the rate for homes falling into the two highest categories of comfort rose by ten percent; the number of dwellings belonging to the two lowest categories decreased by eight percent. During the period when Hungary was shifting toward a democratic political system, the number of temporary or similar types of dwellings totaled 133,000, a figure that rose by nearly 5,000 dwellings during the 1990s. In the first years of the new millennium, nearly 100,000 dwellings served as temporary housing. This statistic, however, provides more of an indication of the effects of plans regarding resettlement and community rehabilitation (or reurbanization), rather than demonstrating a genuine decrease in the number of individuals enduring the lowest level of poverty.

Together with size, construction, and form, the location where a dwelling is situated within a community also represents the owner's social status. Housing's function in representing social status has played an increasing role in post-communist Hungary. The first indication of this change can be traced to the latter part of the 1980s, when home architecture began to emphasize a metropolitan, bourgeois style imitating the villas that conveyed the image that a strengthening, prosperous middle-class desired to project of itself, even at the cost of occasionally falling into an alarmingly kitschy excess. Still present today, this form of self-representation took on an even greater hold beginning in the mid-nineties as privately-owned housing parks and developments containing new types of family or row houses presented

an alternative option for housing. In rarer instances, residential areas featuring three- or four-floor apartment buildings were also established. Throughout the 1990s, the monotonous architectural forms churned out by house-building plants were gradually exchanged for private homes or apartment buildings that reflected the owners' personal taste. Instead of housing estates, construction increasingly took place in areas that had been intended for family homes.

A state of equilibrium simultaneously accompanied by a vigorous process of polarization can be observed in the changes that took place in connection to the facilities found in Hungary's homes: while balance was achieved thanks to a more or less general increase in comfort levels, the ever-widening gap that grew between the well-off and those existing in deep poverty on society's margins created a difference in conditions that soon appeared insurmountable. In the former case, owning a residence that was several hundred—or even a thousand—square meters in size and boasted every type of luxury facility that could be imagined was quite common; in the latter case, temporary housing, dwellings containing only one room and a kitchen, or a home with at most two rooms and perhaps access to public utilities was just as characteristic.

Table 15. Selected indicators demonstrating changes in Hungary's housing from 1990 to 2009

	January 1, 1990	February 1, 2001	January 1, 2009
Number of homes (in thousands) ^x	3,853	4,065	4,303
One-room (percent)	17	13	12
Two-room (percent)	44	41	40
Three rooms or more (percent)	39	46	48
Occupants per 100 homes	269	251	233
Occupants per 100 rooms	114	98	90
Access to indoor plumbing ^{xx} (percent)	83.3	90.6	91.4
With flush toilet (percent)	74.1	85.0	86.5
With bathing facilities (percent)	78.3	88.7	89.8

Source: *Magyarország 1989–2009* (Budapest: KSH, 2010).

^x Combined data for occupied, unoccupied, and holiday residences

^{xx} Including both homes connected to public water systems and those reliant on private water sources

Based on these statistics, it can be stated that following the millennium residential real estate experienced a slightly more dynamic period of growth. The ratio of number of rooms to every one hundred dwellings furthermore demonstrates a general improvement in the quality of living conditions, a fact supported by the decrease in the density of occupants per room. Another trend worth mentioning is the rise in homes possessing flush toilets and bathrooms, a phenomenon that began to gain momentum in the 1990s. In 2011, 98 percent of Hungary's homes had running water; out of these, 96 percent were connected to municipal water utilities, while 2.2 percent drew from private water sources. Compared to the previous population census, the percentage of homes provided with indoor plumbing had grown by five percent. Similarly, five percent more residences had access to hot water as 95 percent of all homes could use hot water indoors.

Since 98 percent of occupied residences are connected to sewers, it can be said that the issue of wastewater management has been solved. The largest advance in developing the public sewage system occurred in 2001, when 56 percent of occupied residences were connected to public sewer systems. By 2011, this percentage had grown to 77 percent; currently, the percentage of homes that rely on their own septic system has decreased and is only 21 percent. Between 2001 and 2011 eight percent more homes had flush toilets, increasing this number to a total of 94 percent. In spite of these indicators regarding facilities, more than 90,000 homes had no access to either indoor plumbing or to municipal wastewater systems. Flush toilets or hot water was not found in more than 200,000 homes throughout Hungary. These circumstances further demonstrate the fact that a significant proportion of Hungarians belonging to certain social classes were still living in homes possessing a very low level of comfort and facilities during the years following the first decade of the millennium. The largest percentage of residences demonstrating the fewest facilities was found in the counties of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. While assessing Hungary's housing statistics reveals that the number of bedrooms and access to facilities found in homes built during the post-communist period was generally high as more and more owners constructed dwellings with three, four, or even more rooms, this overall improvement tends to put a more positive spin on the facts connected to the actual situation surrounding living conditions in Hungary.

Village houses, village dwellings

From the end of the 1930s to the middle of the 1960s, very little changed regarding the housing conditions found in Hungary's villages as interiors, furnishings, and facilities continued to follow traditions established in previous decades.¹⁸ Known as a "long" house in Hungarian, the traditional village house was usually built of brick, was situated perpendicularly to the street, and the floor plan was divided into either three or four spaces containing a room, a kitchen, perhaps a second room, and a storage room for foodstuffs.

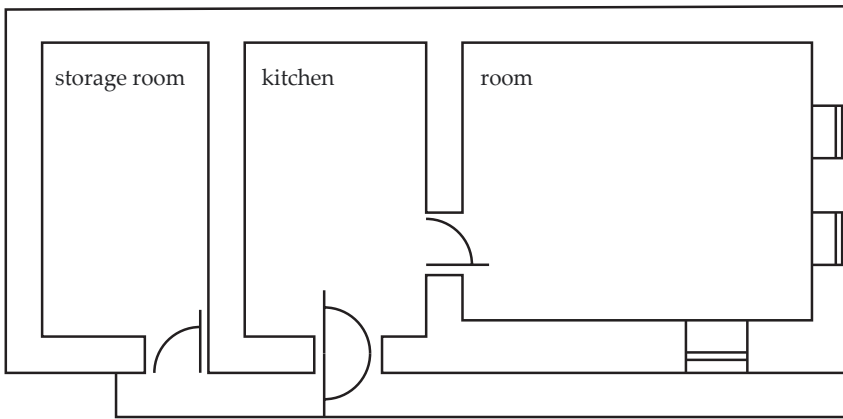


Figure 34. Floor plan for a "long" house divided into three parts to contain a room in front, a kitchen in the middle, and a storage room for foodstuffs at the back of the house. Based on Balassa, *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód*, 382.

Following the changes that took place in the first half of the twentieth century, after 1945 it grew increasingly rarer to build kitchens that had their own chimney, a traditional architectural element that allowed families to use a brick oven for cooking, baking, and heating purposes. Houses were designed to allow for the later addition of another room, storage room, or any structure necessary for agricultural reasons, such as a cellar, shed, pigsty, or henhouse. Practically speaking, the inner structure of residential buildings was remarkably similar in villages throughout Hungary. During the second half of the

¹⁸ For more information on the topic, see Tibor Valuch, "From Long House to Square: Changing Village Living Conditions in Sixties' Hungary," in *Muddling Through in the Long 1960s: Ideas and Everyday Life in High Politics and the Lower Classes of Communist Hungary*, ed. János M. Rainer and György Péter (Trondheim: NTNU, 2005).

twentieth century, traditional modes of architecture not only became rarer, but construction materials also changed dramatically. Traditional tamped mud walls or homes made of sun-dried earthen bricks, were gradually replaced by brick dwellings, just as thatched roofs made of straw or reed were exchanged for tile roofs.

In the mid-fifties new standard designs were created for village dwellers as the Industrial Building Design Company was charged with planning homes that suited agricultural purposes in the form of a one room structures that could be expanded at a later date, or two-room structures.¹⁹ The area for one-room homes was set at 32 square meters while two-room dwellings were 41 square meters. These homes included electricity, were heated by a tile stove, and included a kitchen range for cooking; indoor plumbing and access to a municipal wastewater system, however, were not a part of the design. In one-room homes, the entryway, porch, bathing facilities, storage room, and kitchen with eating area were all contained in one space, while two-room homes separated the living area from the bedrooms. These plans did not prove to be very popular.

After the process of state collectivization drew to a close, the gradual move to unify construction methods was begun. As of the 1960s, these attempts to standardize architecture led to the practical disappearance of regional differences in Hungarian architecture. As the new fashion for square houses—“cube houses” as they are called in Hungarian—took hold, another room was added to the area that faced the street in traditional long houses and a hipped roof was raised above the walls (See Figures 35 and 38). Another characteristic move was to demolish the old house entirely and build a new, square house in its place based on a standard design that employed modern materials and included a hip roof.

When they first began to be built, these structures did not include any agricultural outbuildings; later, as the political system made allowances for small household farms and small-scale agricultural production, it became obvious that further areas would be needed for performing various farm tasks, processing and storing crops, and maintaining livestock. As a result, the square form originally used in the floor plan for this type of house gradually came to take on an L shape. Beginning in the 1970s, in many places a half-floor was

¹⁹ “Az egy- és kétszobás mezőgazdasági lakóházak tervei és költségvetése,” MNL OL, XIX-D-4. 8. d.

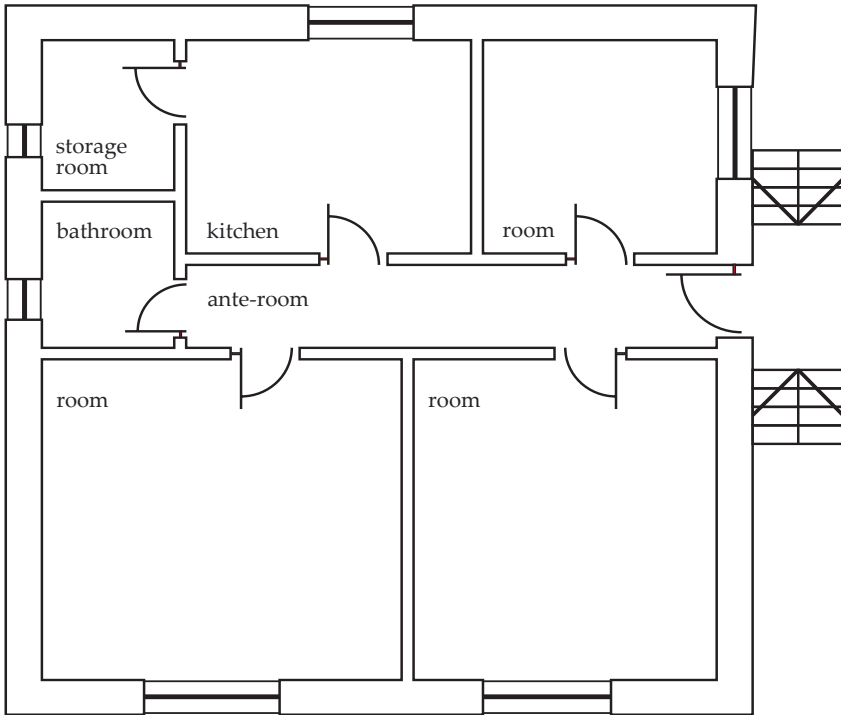


Figure 35. Floor plan for a “square” house. Based on Balassa, *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód*, 384.

added to the building, which meant that ten or twelve steps had to be climbed to reach the bedrooms while the floor below was partially recessed below ground level. By doing so, homeowners gained a few extra rooms on the ground floor, such as pantries or storage rooms that could be used for agricultural purposes. It was also quite common for these buildings to feature a lower and an upper (summer and winter) kitchen, a solution that was in keeping with earlier styles. The total area occupied by these homes could reach anywhere from 150 to 170 square meters; the living area containing two to three rooms was usually 75 to 90 square meters. As another adjustment to the square house design, the construction of genuine two-level homes began to spread through villages at the end of the 1970s, resulting in structures that were no longer cube in shape, but rather rectangular cuboid. This period also marked the time when various construction methods for different kinds of multi-story homes were introduced to Hungarian villages, including the two-story A-frame type of house usually found

in the Alps. In these homes the loft area under the eaves was usually turned into living space, thereby creating three levels and making way for a separate living room. The total usable floor space found in this type of home commonly reached 200 square meters.

Between 1949 and 1960 the housing conditions found in smaller communities or villages only improved slightly in that the percentage of traditional mudbrick homes decreased while the average number of rooms found in a rural home increased. The level of facilities found in homes throughout the fifties, however, barely showed any noteworthy change. A community health survey conducted between 1958 and 1959 in four villages located in Baranya County—Berkesd, Ellend, Pekesd, and Szilágy—revealed that all of the homes were without exception old buildings that followed the traditional design of two windows on the building's street-facing façade, with a long side-porch running the length of the building.²⁰ Nearly nine-tenths of the homes had been built of mudbricks, with homes built of brick or stone occurring at an average that was only slightly more than one-tenth. Residential buildings usually had two rooms, or three rooms in rare instances. A kitchen and a room for food storage was also included, with a summer kitchen frequently found somewhere on the property:

According to the general, village custom, most of the living spaces remain unused. The room facing the street, the so-called clean room,²¹ is only used for special occasions. The family usually spends most of its time in the kitchen, or in the living area that also serves as a kitchen following the installation of a cooking range. . . . The living areas are usually 3.5 meters by 4 meters in size, or 4.5 by 5 meters. The ceilings are around 2.6 meters high, but there are some that are lower. Compared to the size of the rooms, the windows are small, especially in old buildings. . . . Seventy-five percent of the living areas have dirt floors; we only found covered floors in 15 percent of homes. Cement slab floors have recently gained in popularity because they are easier to clean and inexpensive, but we do not recommend this solution for reasons of health.²²

²⁰ Ernő Kienle and Lajos Kun, "Négy Baranya megyei község település-egészségügyi és morbiditási viszonyainak vizsgálata," *Egészségtudomány*, no. 3 (1961): 209–21.

²¹ In more well-to-do traditional peasant homes, the room that looked onto the street was reserved for representational purposes and only used in rare cases, such as when important guests (for example the village priest) visited the home. Known as the *tisztaszoba* (clean room) in Hungarian, the closest equivalent to this custom would be the parlor found in nineteenth- or early twentieth-century farm homes.

²² Kienle and Kun, "Négy Baranya megyei község."

Wastewater disposal and the lack of outhouses also posed serious health problems:

In our communities the hygienic management of rubbish, manure, and human waste remains unsolved. Household waste is usually scattered about the yard. In some instances, the final resting place for garbage is a manure pile placed not very far from the house itself. Management of manure or its placement remains unsolved. Once hauled from stables or sties, the manure is habitually gathered into a pile. Here, it is constantly washed away by precipitation and therefore loses some of its fertilizing value while the wastewater flowing down from hills frequently pollutes the water in wells that were often not constructed properly. The situation is further worsened by the fact that manure piles also contain human waste since the management of human waste also remains unsolved. Roughly ten percent of the homes found in these villages have no outhouse at all, while the ones that do exist are unacceptable from the point of view of hygiene. Due to the factors listed above, manure and human waste are easily accessible to flies and pollution of the groundwater is also possible. With time, the decomposed manure and human waste can become air-borne and pollute the air as well. In our villages the water supply is ensured by wells found in the yards of houses. Most of these hand-dug wells bring water to the surface via side-wheels or a well sweep. Due to faulty walls in the well shaft or defective covers, most of the wells with pumps are not acceptable for health reasons either. The majority of wells were placed at the lowest part of the yard; since the stables and manure pile are located at a higher point, wastewater from these areas flows toward the well. In many places the well is immediately next to the stable or animal pens. Due to the lack of a surrounding wall or the well's bad structure, it is possible for surface water to trickle into the wells.²³

For homes located outside of the main community, the situation was even worse than that found in villages as the lack of plumbing or sewer drains fundamentally influenced the quality of life. True changes in this area only began to take effect during the 1970s. At the end of the 1960s, fairly large differences in access to municipal utilities could still be observed: to mention one example, while 53 percent of the homes found in towns located in Komárom County had plumbing, the same facility was only found in eight percent of homes in Szabolcs-Szatmár County. Only five percent of residences located in Hajdú-Bihar County could say the same.

²³ Ibid.

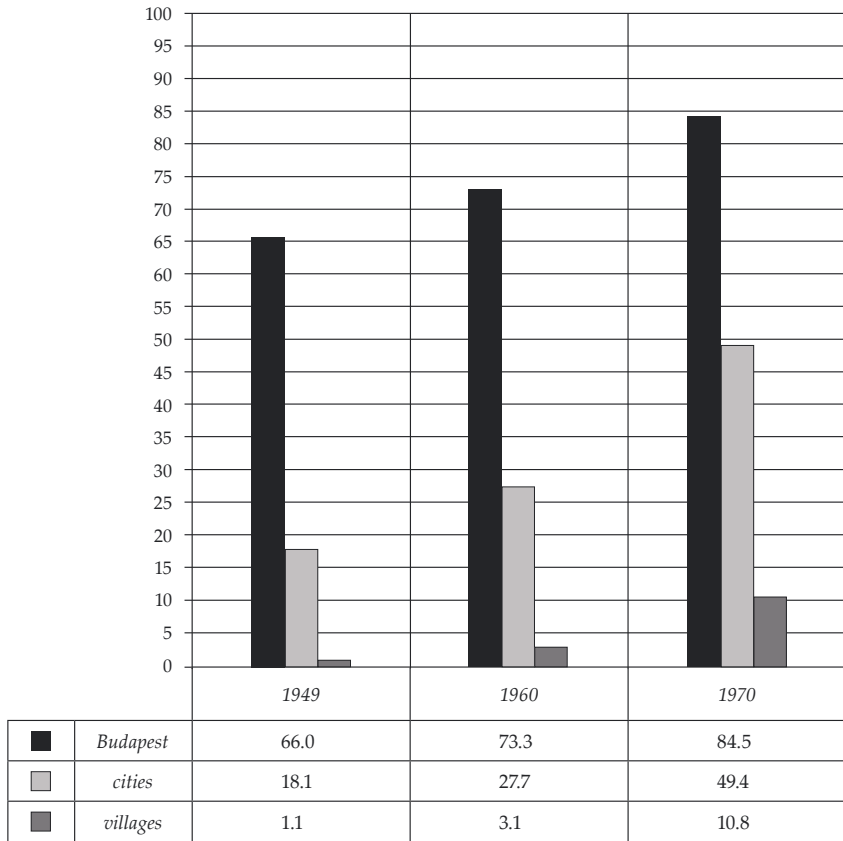


Figure 36. Distribution of homes with access to plumbing based on settlement size between 1949 and 1970 (percent). Source: *Az 1970-es népszámlálás: A lakóépületek és lakott lakások adatai* (Budapest: KSH, 1973).

Although the process of introducing electricity to rural communities was completed in 1966, this does not mean that the electrical lines reached every home in every community. Naturally, gaining access to electricity improved living conditions while also accelerating the changes that were occurring in daily lifestyles. Among other things, electric power made housework easier, thereby altering the order in which daily activities were conducted. Thanks to electricity, devices for modern mass communication gained ground throughout the nation, resulting in changes in how culture was consumed. Electricity also enabled the introduction of other types of utilities: without electricity, installation of essential devices like electric pumps or water

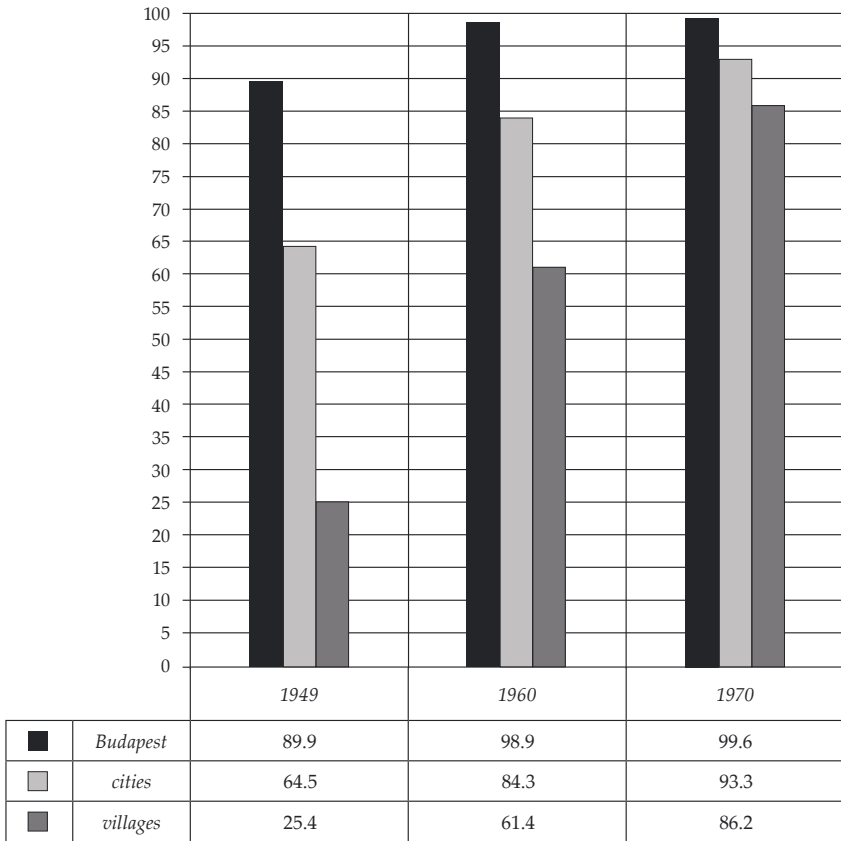


Figure 37. Changes in the percentage of homes with electricity based on settlement size from 1949 to 1970. Source: *Az 1970-es népszámlálás: A lakóépületek és lakott lakások adatai* (Budapest: KSH, 1973).

tanks (that could be used to heat water) would have been impossible. During the 1960s, these changes barely made their influence felt as they only became present in mass proportions in the following decade.

In 1960, Hungary's smaller towns and communities contained 1.57 million residences that were home to 5.8 million individuals with an average of 363 people per every hundred dwellings. Based on data collected in the 1960 census, 57 percent of the nation's residential buildings (60 percent of Hungary's housing) were situated in villages. In under ten years the number of village homes rose to 1.69 million. The low level of living conditions village homes provided compared to the average at the time is amply demonstrated by the fact that there

were only 131 rooms to every 100 homes. This figure reflects the reality that a definite majority of village dwellings only had one room at the beginning of the 1960s, at a time when the process of state collectivization was simultaneously occurring. Due to the lower number of rooms and higher number of family members, the density of people per room was generally higher for rural homes compared to urban ones. In 1970, based on the occupation of the head of the household, the density found in the homes of those who did non-agricultural physical labor was the highest, with 366 people per every one hundred rooms. In the case of agricultural workers, this figure was only 351, yet it cannot be forgotten that their homes also provided the fewest facilities. In 1970, for example, only 2.3 percent of residences in which the head of the household worked in agriculture had a flush toilet, while 5.1 percent had indoor plumbing and 78.9 percent had electricity. Throughout the decade the density of occupants found in rural homes decreased, even if at a rate that was slower compared to the national average. Other than the gradual increase that occurred regarding the size of homes and number of rooms found in newly-built residences, this trend was further influenced by the demographic factors of emigration and the average decrease in the number of children being born. During the 1960 census 600,000 mudbrick or mudwalled dwellings were recorded. The majority of rural homes (93.5 percent) fell into the category of having no comfort, while the percentage of homes with comfort totaled 2.5 percent, and 4 percent of residences belonged to the half-comfort category. Although these indicators of available facilities improved somewhat by 1970, genuine change only occurred during the following decade.

Table 16. Occupied residences distributed by facilities and size of community in 1970 (percent)

Community	Full comfort	Half-comfort	No comfort	Total
Budapest	55.7	10.4	33.9	100.0
Cities	37.0	9.0	54.0	100.0
Small towns/ villages	6.5	9.3	84.2	100.0
Total	24.6	9.5	65.9	100.0

Source: *Az 1970-es népszámlálás adatai: A lakóépületek és lakott lakások adatai* (Budapest: KSH, 1973).

In contrast to the conditions regarding facilities, the floor space found in rural homes increased during the 1960s. According to data from 1970, in under ten years the number of one-room homes decreased by 202,000 while the figure for two-room homes rose by 264,000. A significant amount of growth was also seen in homes with three or more rooms: from 44,000 in 1960, the number for this type of dwelling rose to 140,000. Naturally, this shift does not mean that the construction boom in new residences was responsible for each case since rural housing only increased by 160,000 dwellings throughout the decade. Instead, these numbers indicate the influential role played by home renovation, additions, and remodeling in improving the rural housing situation. At the beginning of the 1970s, however, between 53 percent and 59 percent of the rural homes located within the counties found in Hungary's Great Plain region (Csongrád, Békés, Bács-Kiskun, and Hajdú) were still one-room dwellings. It can therefore be concluded that the growth in the number of rooms per home was due to both the renovation of older structures and the fact that the majority of newly-built residences were designed to contain at least two rooms.

Table 17. Number of rooms in rural residences between 1949 and 1970 (percent)

Year	One room	Two rooms	Three or more rooms	Total
1949	73.1	24.2	2.7	100.0
1960	63.6	33.5	2.9	100.0
1970	44.5	47.4	8.1	100.0

Source: Iván Oros, ed., *A falu és a mezőgazdaság főbb társadalmi és gazdasági jelzőszámai* (Budapest: KSH, 1994), 67.

The average width of a traditional house was between six and seven meters while the length was fourteen to sixteen meters. Other than the basic floor plan that separated the building's space into three areas, a style of home known as the "middle-class peasant" type of structure was also characteristically found during the mid-twentieth century. Although the width for this kind of home did not deviate much from the previous type, four or more rooms were included in the plan along with a porch; the length of the house was usually nine to ten meters longer than a traditional dwelling. In traditional homes, plank flooring was used in rooms while other areas had tamped earthen

or—in rare instances, such as in the homes of wealthier peasants—tile floors. Following the changes that occurred in the first half of the century, during the postwar period it was not common to have a kitchen with its own chimney and brick oven; by the end of the 1940s, this feature was removed from most homes throughout Hungary. After converting the chimney space into a part of the attic, tile stoves and iron-lidded cookstoves replaced the brick ovens that had once played an essential role in providing a means for both cooking and heating. Beginning in the 1970s, gas stoves were used instead. The installation of indoor plumbing was another important issue for the renovation of old homes. By the 1970s, it had become common for newly constructed houses to include plumbing, though due to the uneven quality of the community's available infrastructure it was not unheard of for the bathroom and the toilet to be completed long before access to the town water system could be attained. Rural homeowners also had to accept a far greater role in financing the development of a municipal water, waste, and natural gas network than urban homeowners did.

Other than the appearance of newly constructed homes, traditional-style peasant homes also remained a part of a community's architectural make-up, although to differing degrees depending on the given region. "In the case of newly renovated peasant houses," according to a study on interior design habits, "two solutions are used for modernizing the structure. Either the building's original plan is kept with the addition of a larger kitchen and bathroom, or the addition is placed at a right angle to the original building."²⁴ What fate awaited traditional structures was not only determined by building trends, changing habits, or different social expectations occurring on the micro-level, but also by the structure's condition. If the original building was in good shape, renovation was more common. If, however, the structure could not be used for further construction, it was demolished. In most cases renovation also involved increasing the number of rooms. The storage room was frequently converted into a bathroom and the house's rectangular floor plan was changed into an L-shape. The kitchen and the bathroom often ended up next to one another not only because the storage room was used to add a bathroom to the house, but also because bathing had customarily been done in the kitchen. Larger windows were installed, thereby increasing the amount of light entering these renovated peasant homes.

²⁴ S. Nagy, *Eredmények a lakáskultúra-vizsgálatból 1974–1978*.

Similarly, the addition of electricity, plumbing, and a septic system also increased the dwelling's level of comfort. Increasing the amount of living space generally entailed decreasing the space used for agricultural purposes or altering the original usage of this area; when modernizing older homes possessing a traditional porch running the length of the building, it became popular to wall in the porch area and turn it into a hall or storage area.

Long houses had originally been designed and built so as to allow homeowners to add new rooms, storage areas, or outbuildings to the structure at a later date. While different regions had their own architectural features and characteristics, home interiors were strikingly similar throughout Hungarian villages everywhere. These village homes "made new" looked out on the street through wide, double windows. Previously used to store wheat, corn, smoked meats, or other agricultural products, the attic lost its relevance regarding farming. The courtyards of modern village homes, however, preserved their connection to the material world of peasant farming, even though some major changes occurred in this aspect as well. In many cases the stable was replaced by a garage while the shed was converted into a workshop.

It must not be forgotten that before collectivization, the demands placed by agricultural production and a family's focus on fulfilling these requirements were the primary factors in determining a dwelling's size, how it was separated into different areas, its interior arrangements, the courtyard's functionality, and the placement of any additional outbuildings. Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, the floor plan, location, and lack of agricultural outbuildings reflected how newly built homes were intended to fulfill a different function: as family life centered less and less around agricultural production, the issue of comfort and convenience came to the forefront. Just by their appearance, the swift spread of square houses featuring hip roofs clearly demonstrated the extent to which Hungary's social and economic circumstances had changed, thereby ushering in new forms of lifestyles. This change remained influential until the agricultural role played by the farming of household plots and small-time agricultural production began to gain traction, opening the path for villagers to access new sources of (semi-legal) private income.

In spite of these alterations, most village dwellings continued to feature a courtyard that was intended for agricultural purposes. (It must be mentioned that in Hungarian cellars, stables, sheds, and animal

pens were generally added on as a continuation of the house itself; technically speaking, these are not outbuildings since they are not always a separate structure.) Whatever stables, animal pens, or agricultural equipment that remained in the family's keeping following collectivization and the social changes that occurred as peasant farmers were forced to join the workforce became an inseparable part of the double function these individuals fulfilled. Whether as employees who worked by day at state-run companies and continued to farm small, household plots in their free time and on weekends, or as employees who also established their own small-time businesses "on the side," by the beginning of the 1970s it became obvious that a vast proportion of newly constructed homes had retained some form of agricultural function. While this function differed from the way agricultural production had been conducted before collectivization, it continued within certain restrictions, a phenomenon that is best demonstrated by the way in which agricultural outbuildings were continuously added on to new homes, yet constructed with shorter and shorter interior heights that ultimately made the resultant structure less conspicuous.

In the beginning, most new homes were only one level, even though homes with half-stories or an entire first floor were built in hill regions. Originally rather puritan in form, various decorative elements (pedestals, columns, terraces) gradually created an aesthetically less rigid appearance. In the case of a new home, as of the mid-seventies it became increasingly common to include the work areas, workshops, garages, toolsheds, or storage rooms necessary for the jobs many villagers took on to supplement their main income. This phenomenon eventually fueled the spread of one- or two-story homes. Rather than bringing about the strict uniformization and standardization of rural dwellings, the housing policies and programs introduced during Hungary's state socialist era resulted in an amalgamation of styles, structures, and aims that indelibly altered the appearance of villages while also preserving the effects of certain political and social pressures rural families faced during the postwar period.

Whether a house was renovated or abandoned in favor of constructing a new one also depended heavily on a family's generational make-up and financial circumstances. During the 1960s and 1970s, members of the oldest generation usually had to be satisfied with either renovating their home or only making a few additions since the trifling pension they received for their few years of work on the col-

lective farm did not allow for any kind of more substantial alteration. Older homeowners, for example, were generally more likely to modernize the appearance of their home's façade by changing the front windows; more extensive renovations or the construction of a new house were more characteristic of middle-aged or young homeowners who had access to more stable incomes. Since home construction was a venture that demanded the largest form of investment allowed at the time, a minimum of two incomes, reliable financial circumstances, and—in the case of young homeowners—the strong support of parents as well as an extensive network of relatives was needed.

At times the construction regulations and architectural approach that characterized the era influenced how living spaces could be developed, or even made it far more difficult to achieve the kind of dwelling a homeowner wanted. According to the prevailing concept that dominated the early 1970s, most designers aimed to minimize living space based on the size of the family that would later occupy the home. This habit of calculating a design based on a minimal amount of living space also influenced how the requirements for granting credit were set as any homeowner desiring to build a dwelling that was larger than the area deemed legitimate was either refused credit or only given credit based on far less favorable conditions. Since housing remained one of the most unsolved—and therefore most serious—issues during Hungary's state socialist period, a significant number of families understandably tried to build a new home that would fulfill the needs of their growing or future children. Many homeowners subsequently overstepped the requirements regarding size that had been laid out in the era's laws.

As lifestyles changed, this shift also immediately expressed itself in a departure from traditional forms of home construction. Building a new house provided homeowners with the opportunity to demonstrate their changed social status; whether this included a genuine or only presumed increase in rank within the local context, the intent to distance oneself from the outer trappings of a peasant lifestyle was clear. Access to quality building materials and the abundance or perhaps lack of financial resources were also factors in determining what mode of construction could be adopted. In reality, the desire to gain access to the basic elements of a civilized life—clean water, indoor plumbing, sanitation, electricity—was the driving force behind the wave of home construction that swept through Hungary's rural communities at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

Taking on this type of task required monumental effort: compared to city dwellers, those living in rural communities were practically forced to organize their own labor and finances in order to alter their living conditions and environment.²⁵

Other than financial restrictions, the quick spread of the square house design was fueled not only by changing social conditions and the creation of standard designs, but also by the current trends and fads of the time, which were often reinforced by whatever local mason the homeowner was able to entrust with building the new structure. It must not be forgotten how many individuals truly believed at the time that ridding their environment of all the outer appearances and forms that—to them—spoke of the toil and frequently miserable conditions experienced in the peasant lifestyle of the previous decades would truly “liberate” them of this past. Beyond this compulsion to reject (either completely or only partly) a traditional housing type that reflected the norms of Hungary’s historical peasant class, these new homes also indicated attempts to imitate an urban lifestyle and the desire to rise within the social hierarchy.

From the point of view of architecture, an important change was that—in contrast to the way that traditional peasant homes allowed other views and aspects of the village to remain visible—square houses, according to a contemporary study on village housing, “stifle natural spatial elements as the addition of another floor allows their bulk to rise above them, thereby narrowing and enclosing the image of the entire street. This wall-like enclosure becomes particularly oppressive and confining when new houses have been built directly on the edge of the sidewalk, without any bit of an area left for a flower garden in front of the house, or in places where no space for a yard or garden was left between houses, thereby leading to streets featuring dense groupings of two-floor block houses.”²⁶ Other than fashion

²⁵ As a result of the shortage economy that existed, it was extremely difficult for a private citizen to obtain construction materials which were primarily earmarked for state-funded building projects. This circumstance explains the spread of corruption through brick factories and construction yards where “customers” could only gain access to the necessary bricks, tiles, or other materials by bribing one of the employees. Other than the standardized designs used at the time, the difficulty in obtaining construction materials was another factor in determining the very similar outer appearance of the square houses built in the 1960s. Homeowners tried to relieve the resultant visual monotony by adding some form of decoration, such as a different type of plaster or a custom-made fence.

²⁶ Győzőné Kenéz, *A falusi lakókörnyezet alakulásáról*, Közlemények, no. 135 (Budapest: Szövetkezeti Kutató Intézet, 1978), 9.

and the limited opportunities offered at the time, another component in the dominant appearance of square houses throughout Hungary's countryside lies in the fact that many of the initial standard designs for these square-shaped structures were included in propaganda booklets that provided information on the requirements for receiving a loan from the state bank, OTP. Touted as the cheapest form of structure, these illustrations of very similar buildings were disseminated via the credit application process. In many instances, neighbors simply borrowed plans from one another; following a few changes, these were routinely accepted by the building authority. The technical restrictions imposed by the limited selection of construction materials, fittings, doors, and windows further emphasized the relatively monotonous image projected by these structures. The final result was not primarily due to a lack of consumer demand for quality or taste, but rather lay in the interplay of a variety of combined factors that reinforced one another and consequently led to the emergence of a rather unimaginative conceptualization of a "modern" village.

Both local and national authorities paid close attention to these changes in an attempt to guide the building plans selected by homeowners. In 1972, the Bács-Kiskun County Committee as well as the Ministry for Building Affairs and City Planning announced a national public competition for "the acquisition of design ideas for the construction of the types of home that primarily suit the needs of the nation's farming population." As a requirement of this design competition, submissions were expected to present ideas that would take into consideration the special requirements of those working in agriculture while also allowing for the creation of modern living conditions. When formulating the terms for acceptable designs, the competition committee worked on the assumption that village homes would continue to combine living space with the need to fulfill an agricultural role; even if farming was done at a much reduced level compared to what it had been before collectivization, small-time agricultural production had not come to a complete halt due to the farming of household plots and other supplementary activities. This factor explains why submissions were to contain "designs for out-buildings that architecturally harmonized with the structures used as dwellings."²⁷ The homes were furthermore to be either one level

²⁷ *Mezőgazdasági családi ház '73 tervpályázati kiírás* (Kecskemét: Bács-Kiskun megyei Tanács and Építési- és Városfejlesztési Minisztérium, 1973).

or have only one floor and contain an area no larger than 80 square meters for a four-member family or 100 square meters for a six-member family. Larger homes also had to be suitable for the coexistence of multiple generations. The requirements for each home design contained a combined kitchen and dining area, a bathroom large enough for an electric washtub and spin dryer, and a separate toilet. The projected outbuildings that were attached to each category all included a summer kitchen, pens for raising farm animals, storage areas for implements and firewood, and a garage. The competition organizers emphasized the importance of keeping in mind the fact that "construction must usually be solved on a private basis." The inclusion of electricity and plumbing was listed as a general expectation.

How housing plots were used changed along with the transformation in housing types since the significant changes brought about by collectivization fundamentally influenced the lifestyle alterations that were emerging throughout the 1960s. Numerous elements related to the characteristically close relationship between nature and rural life still remained present:

Just as workers employed in industry have appeared in villages, so has the lifestyle of agricultural workers also changed thanks to the industrialized and centralized management of collective farming. . . . As certain functions disappear, areas of land are becoming superfluous exactly at the moment when new needs are making themselves known (such as storage for vehicles), which can be solved by razing unused outbuildings, building new ones, or keeping the existent structure and adapting it to a new function. . . . While front gardens are still found, they are increasingly put to use for growing flowers, just as the courtyard has taken on combined functions as an area for traffic, keeping animals, or other types of usages. The back garden is furthermore used for growing vegetables or fruit trees.²⁸

In her examination of Békés County in the early 1970s, Ágnes Losonczy attempted to answer the question of what elements comprised the ideal rural home.²⁹ Slightly more than half of those surveyed answered that a family house with a small garden represented their ideal home, while one-fourth would have preferred a family house with a large garden. Every tenth participant chose the type of multi-story apartment building preferred by tenants, while the rest emphasized

²⁸ S. Nagy, *Lakásmód, lakáskultúra Telkibányán 1975–1978*, 64.

²⁹ Losonczy, *Az életmód az időben*, 426–29.



Figure 38. The new village building fashion after collectivization, the square or “cube” house, Veszprém, 1960 (Fortepan, 58424, Gyula Nagy)

the advantages of a villa-like house. The housing estate apartments that were so characteristic of this period were far from being held as the ideal home. In their aim to adopt “citified” habits, Hungary’s rural population primarily chose the urban, lower middle-class lifestyle as their model, which meant a family home and an improved level of comfort in their living conditions. Owning a family home and surrounding garden not only bolstered the continued existence of the mentality regarding private ownership, it also provided enough land for maintaining a kitchen garden that subsequently played a large role in sustaining the family’s access to food and additional income.

In the village of Atkár located in Heves County, the seventy homes built between 1960 and 1980 can be placed into two categories based on their floor plans: the one type was a local interpretation of the usual square house containing two to three rooms, an entryway, kitchen and either space for a future bathroom or an actual bathroom in 80–130 square meters of space. The other was a multi-story structure influenced by urban designs that reached 150 square meters or more in area. Oil heating was most common in both cases: “Homeowners who follow urban norms consciously set their family homes apart

from the city's 'teeny-tiny' apartments and are proud of how spacious their homes are, yet still take the city as their example when it comes to the comforts that they want."³⁰ As of the 1970s, rural families were building homes that displayed many kinds of style elements, reflected their financial position, and served the purpose of bettering their living conditions.

For those without a home: apartments for rent, beds to let, and work dormitories

Combined with the constant housing shortage, the population migration that was occurring within Hungary led to a heightened demand for rental apartments, a bed that was "let out" for a given amount of time, or a place in any of the various forms of accommodation that were available. In the mid-forties, the number of tenants found in cities located outside of Budapest was 90,000, with an additional 45,000 renting beds. In the summer of 1954, 127,000 people were living as tenants in Budapest, while 43,000 were renting beds. Based on data collected by the KSH, at the same time "eleven thousand more businesses, workshops, warehouses, cellars, etc., were being used as dwellings by a total of thirty thousand more individuals compared to the statistics gathered on January 1, 1949."³¹ In Budapest, 55,000 people lived in workers' dormitories, a figure that was 43,000 for the rest of Hungary's cities. Two-thirds of the residences that rented out beds only had one room, a fact that indicates the owner or lease-holder was facing poverty as well and used this method to supplement his or her income. Due to the housing shortage and the mass emigration of people from the countryside to Budapest, any type of lease (whether an apartment or a bed) was rather expensive, particularly in comparison to the average monthly wage. In the capital city it was not uncommon for a room to cost three hundred to four hundred forints a month (or perhaps even more), a sum that was equal to two-thirds of the average monthly wage. To offer a means of comparison, it must be mentioned that the monthly rent for a one-room apartment with

³⁰ Annamária Lammel, "Kontinuitás, átrétegződés, akkulturáció (Atkár 1920–1980)," in *Életmód: modellek és minták*, ed. Mihály Hoppál and Tamás Szecskő (Budapest: Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont, 1984), 310–45.

³¹ "Lakásviszonyok, 1954. július 1," KSH Jelentés, MNL OL, XXVI-D-8-g. 4.d., August 8, 1955.

a kitchen located in a building owned by the local Property Maintenance Company only cost 58.6 forints a month, as opposed to 111.3 forints a month for a two-room apartment.³²

At the beginning of the sixties, over 80,000 tenants (leasing either an apartment or a bed) were living in nearly 50,000 rentals in Budapest, a figure that was roughly the same in the rest of Hungary's cities. Primarily due to the expanded capacity of workers' dormitories, during the following decades the number of those leasing a bed fell steadily; the demand for sub-leases, however, did not diminish as housing shortages and the need to travel farther away for work opportunities continued to influence the housing situation. At the beginning of the 1980s, three to five percent of Hungary's population was living in a sub-let apartment.

Renting an apartment or a bed continued to be expensive compared to wages and tenants had no choice but to accept whatever demands or rules the owner or leaseholder made regarding either the tenant's behavior or usage of the apartment. In many places written "rules of the house" were hung up on a wall and prohibited things like inviting visitors to the apartment, smoking, or in some cases even the use of the kitchen. Usage of the toilet and bathroom was also strictly regulated. Depictions of the relationship between a tenant and his or her shrewish, nagging landlady abounded in humor sketches of the time.

In accordance with the social policies followed by large companies at the time, the employer usually provided temporary lodgings for employees who had to commute from farther away or gave some form of financial support toward their living expenses. In the city of Ózd, some of these commuting workers were able to get a place in the factory barracks while others were given "quarters," which meant paying rent for a bed and modest provisions.³³ A third group

³² Following the communist takeover of Hungary, beginning in 1952 all buildings containing multiple apartments were, according to the law, "apartments that exceed the permitted size and number of rooms for a justifiable housing need" and were therefore placed under state control. Consequently, the number of state-owned apartments rose significantly, particularly in cities. In villages most homes remained privately owned because their size and number of rooms were smaller. State-owned property maintenance companies, called *Ingatlankezelő Vállalt (IKV)*, were responsible for leasing and maintaining these state-owned properties.

³³ From the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century Ózd was one of the centers for iron-smelting and metallurgy in Hungary. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Ózd Ironworks Factory employed 14,000 people. Beginning in World War

had no choice but to walk or bicycle ten to twenty kilometers a day to get to work as the available capacity in workers' dormitories had already proven insufficient in the 1940s. Due to overcrowding and crude sanitation, living conditions at the workers' dormitories in Ózd were truly poor. This situation did not change much between the 1940s and 1950s. Following an inspection held jointly by the police, the factory operation committee and its committee for social affairs, and employees from the Center for Heavy Industry in August 1947, the following results were described in the subsequent report:

we had six women handed over to the vice squad; one was arrested for selling the fifty liters of wine illegally (we confiscated the fifty liters) on the dormitory premises. Ten men were handed over to the police's public order department because they had not been issued a residential permit by the police and could not certify their presence in the dormitory. We reached the conclusion that conditions truly are unbearable in the dormitory. There is no supervision, no organizing committee, and no form of registry is kept of the residents. The level of filth and squalor found in each and every room is unspeakable: the rooms are vermin-infested and a suitable list of regulations had not been posted anywhere. Women and men lay in the same room (in the same bed) and in many cases two or even three men share one bed, or at least a sleeping place that is used as a bed. The kitchen and dining area are in utter squalor. The lavatories are so filthy as to be unusable.... According to the residents' opinions the company is required to provide free living quarters and they are not required to maintain cleanliness or pay rent; indeed, it must be said that they are not asked to contribute toward their living expenses.³⁴

In an attempt to improve the situation in workers' dormitories, the NIK (*Nehézipari Központ*, Center of Heavy Industry) directed the factory operations committee to arrange for order to be established in the dormitories. Monetary aid was granted for completing construction of the new workers' barracks that had been started in 1947 and

II, the population of both the city and the factory grew with incredible swiftness. As the construction of homes could not match the population boom's pace, it became common to maintain workers' dormitories, rent beds or apartments, or commute from the surrounding towns to Ózd. After the political transition between 1989 and 1990, the ironworks factory was shut down, new workplaces were not created, and the city and its suburbs plummeted into a state of long-lasting crisis.

³⁴ "Feljegyzés az Ózdi Munkásszálló 'Laboratórium'-ban fennálló tűrhetetlen állapotok miatt beérkezett rendőrségi jelentés értelmében 1947. VIII. 1-én megtartott 'razzia' eredményéről," MNL OL, XXIX-F-32. 156. d.

designed to contain room for two hundred beds. The largest workers' dormitory, the Hétes Barrack, was renovated and new workers' dormitories were built during the following years. By the end of the 1950s, the factory operated six dormitories—with a total of 764 beds—for its employees. The conditions at each barrack were quite varied and included anything from barracks with sleeping quarters for thirty to forty people at a time to hotel-like buildings with only four beds per room. According to the plans of the Ózd City Council, "The Béke dormitory will have room for four hundred beds, out of which eighty have already been occupied. Construction of the workers' dormitory must be completed by the fourth quarter, in April 1960. Once the dormitory is in operation, we will have provided the iron foundry's workers with the type of civilized, modern living quarters that is worthy of representing the speedy advances being made in our social and cultural life."³⁵ In 1960, the cost of operating the workers' dormitories equaled 2.2 million forints, thirty-five percent of which was covered by the fees paid by the workers themselves.

Throughout the entire nation, the effort to develop a network of workers' dormitories sped up during the 1950s as the system's contrived push to increase industrial development increased the demand for workers, who in turn were forced to work in places that were too far away for them to commute from their permanent residence. Most of the dormitories built at this time were fairly simple and only provided a primitive level of comfort, if any at all. Those who built the new industrial town of Sztálinváros or worked at the ironworks spent years living in barracks; the situation was similar in other industrial cities.³⁶ The deplorable conditions were also reported on in a contemporary weekly:

³⁵ "Jelentés az Ózdi Kohászati Üzemek szociális és munkavédelmi tevékenységéről," Ózd Városi Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottságának iratai, MNL BAZML, XXIII-527/a 4., August 18, 1960.

³⁶ During the period when the communist system rose to power, "socialist cities" were created in which urban spaces that reflected "a collectivist attitude" were established around either an old or a new industrial center. In Hungary a village located on the Danube, Dunapentele, became the center for the nation's largest ironworks, around which a new city was erected in reflection of the era's ideological and political requirements. This city was named Sztálinváros, or Stalin-City. See Sándor Horváth, *Stalinism Reloaded: Everyday Life in Stalin-City, Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017). See also Sándor Horváth, *A kapu és a határ: Mindennapi Sztálinváros* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2004).

"Take a look at the Lepers' Colony, comrade," they say, "and you'll understand right away why we're dissatisfied." "Lepers' Colony" is what we call the women's dormitory. . . . The women's dormitory is at the absolute end of the barracks camp and maybe a whole thirty meters from the hog pens. So now you can understand why the rooms are filled with flies even now in the middle of winter. An area that's three paces long, three paces wide and has a stone floor: that's Valéria Berzseni and Mária Györi's room. Two beds, one wardrobe, a table and one chair are in this tiny room. And what a bleak home it is! Bleak and cold. . . . The opposite room belongs to Erzszi Farkas, Mrs. János Müller, and Piroska Labancz. The floor is stone, and there's no stove here either. . . . "That there is our full comfort," says Vera Bertók with black humor. She points to a little hut with a collapsed door. It's at least thirty paces from the "living" quarters. "If you can call it that, there's our bathroom." Six meters long and six meters wide, two showerheads stand in the middle of this roofless "room." It must be pleasant to "bathe" here, under the clouds — especially in winter.³⁷

Many accepted the worse conditions because a workers' dormitory cost far less than leasing a bed or an apartment. In 1955, 110,000 individuals lived in this type of a dormitory; by 1961, this number had risen to 225,000. At the end of the 1970s, workers' dormitories only had 150,000 occupants and by the middle of the 1980s this figure was between 120,000 and 130,000 people.³⁸ Most of the workers' dormitories were shut down during the decade following the fall of communism.

The level of comfort found in dormitories built in the 1960s showed some improvement. Generally speaking, the rooms had six to eight beds, or only four in rarer instances. Each floor had its own lavatories and kitchens. In some cases, there were also areas for socializing. Overcrowding, however, continued to remain a problem and it was common for eight people to sleep on bunk beds put into rooms that had originally been designed to fit only four occupants. The furnishings found in the rooms and social areas were usually quite plain. According to official expectations, the aim for these institutions was to establish "the framework for socialist communal life," a goal that mostly resulted in total failure since attaining it meant regulating every single aspect of what the residents could or could not do on the

³⁷ Mária Zsigmondy, "Inotán egy panaszos levél nyomában," *Nők Lapja*, November 19, 1953, 3–4.

³⁸ Antal Bóhm and László Pál, *Társadalmunk ingázói – az ingázók társadalma* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1985), 94–95.



Figure 39. The lounge of a workers' dormitory in 1955 (Fortepan, 96711, UVATERV)

premises. Other than the official “house rules,” the unwritten laws developed by the other inhabitants were frequently more important to follow. Alcoholism, fistfights, and smaller or larger instances of theft were part and parcel of daily life in a workers' dormitory.³⁹ Instead of going to the library, attending the theater, or participating in officially organized and sanctioned work, cleanliness, or cultural competitions, workers were usually more inclined to go to bars or play cards. If any seats were left in the “culture room,” then there were times when watching television was preferred. Watching television was in fact the only free time activity mentioned by sources that proved capable of regularly bringing together a significant percentage of dormitory residents. A new form of entertainment in 1960s Hungary, watching television quickly became a favorite form of relaxation in the workers' dormitories: “Not even standing room is left when international soccer matches or the popular show ‘Angel’ is being broadcast. Thirty to

³⁹ Tamás Kohut, “‘Erkölcsei téren ma már a szállókon rend van’: Mindennapi élet a szocialista korszak munkásszállásain,” *Korall*, no. 32 (2008): 60–77.

forty people crowd into the small room. The last time ‘unidentified individuals’ removed the door of the room, so it would be easier to see the screen, but they forgot to put the door back on its hinges.”⁴⁰

For many, the workers’ dormitory represented an intermediate step on the ladder to the better social position that they longed to attain. Getting used to this new environment, however, was not without hardships, as illustrated by an interview from a 1977 sociography:

I left home on April 1, 1975. I waited till I was sixteen. It was all I could do to wait. I’d had enough of home. . . . After the factory, we arranged things at the workers’ dorm next. The woman at the door sent me to the lady in charge of supervising the number two shift. She arranged everything for me. She told me if there was any problem, I was to tell her. She had me read the house rules and told me they were to be kept, too. I ended up in Room 17. I put my stuff into one part of a metal locker in the hall. Out of the two keys to it, I got one and had to give the other one to the supervisor. They said she’d be checking to see if it was being kept tidy. They showed me my bed. Nobody said a word to me, so I lay down on the bed and waited for night to come. . . . In the beginning I liked being at the factory better than at the dorm. My roommates acted strange with me. I couldn’t say a word to anybody for days at a time. And I could tell they were watching me. Maybe I should have started talking about myself, but I didn’t exchange a word with anybody in that room. They couldn’t even be bothered to say hi to me. There’s no way I would have gotten used to this, so it’s lucky that I landed in another room.⁴¹

Many found themselves incapable of enduring the conditions and circumstances found in the workers’ dormitories for a lengthy period of time and either fled to another kind of residence or moved back to their initial point of origin. For others, as they increasingly became estranged from friends, family, and the social expectations that were upheld “back home,” the dormitory became their only permanent residence. During the economic restructuring that occurred in the 1990s following Hungary’s shift from state socialism, not only were many factories shut down, but the dormitories that they had operated were also closed, meaning that this particular social group suddenly

⁴⁰ *Építők Bartók Béla Úti Munkásszálló Híradója*, no. 8 (1966). Quoted in Kohut, “Erkölcsei téren ma már a szállókon rend van,” 68. The show discussed is the UK TV series *The Saint* starring Roger Moore, which was broadcast in Hungary under the title *The adventures of the Angel* and was highly popular.

⁴¹ Aliz Mátyus, “Végtelen óta folynak a percek...’ Lányok a munkásszálláson,” *Valóság*, no. 8. (1977): 77–87.

found itself without either a job or a place to live. In many cases these individuals ended up on the streets, homeless. While homelessness—or at least potential homelessness—existed under state socialism, it was as carefully hidden as poverty was and therefore did not appear to exist. When the political system turned to democracy, the fact that individuals were living on the streets suddenly became painfully visible to Hungarian society as a whole.

Living in dire straits—slums, shantytowns, and ghettos

After World War I the already appalling housing situation that was widespread among Hungary's lower social classes deteriorated even more when waves of refugees—mostly fleeing areas that had once belonged to Hungary, but were made a part of Romania, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Yugoslavia following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920—arrived in the capital city. By October of 1920, nearly five thousand refugees were living in cattle cars, a situation that compelled Budapest's city council to request aid from the state government. Seventeen emergency apartment complexes were built, comprising a total of 6,200 apartments. While the complex on Pongrácz Street was one type of emergency apartment complex that was established for former government employees in need of temporary living accommodations, the two-room apartments found in this complex were far from the norm experienced by most who found themselves living in more makeshift accommodations. The Mária Valéria complex was one such type of emergency dwelling and consisted of a wooden barracks that had previously served as a military hospital. Eight thousand people crowded into the 1,050 rooms that were essentially all this building offered since it included no form of basic comfort, such as indoor plumbing, etc. During the 1930s, the complex was expanded and by 1940 it contained 1,776 apartments. Three well-defined areas could be found in the complex: to the southeast, in the direction of Határ Street, fifty-four wooden barracks were turned into brick buildings that became the "small apartment complex." (These brick structures still existed during the lengthy construction of the Attila József housing estate which took place in two phases, the first from 1957 to 1967 and the second from 1979 to 1981.) A further eighty wooden barracks stood in the complex's central area; this section was where the worst conditions could be found. The third area consisted of sixteen larger

brick structures that were located along Ecseri Street. In 1927, residents received permission to use the area in front of the barracks (no wider than one-and-a-half meters and only as long as the barracks itself) as a garden patch. Once these gardens were fenced in, the rows between each barracks were effectively turned into narrow streets. An illusion of comfort and sanitation was provided by the latrine and showers placed at the end of the barracks.⁴² Yet conditions remained dire, occasionally requiring the intervention of authorities, as illustrated by a 1940 report of the mayor of Pesterzsébet:

In my town the forty-seven families (seventy-six adults and 119 children) living in forty-three rooms found at 50 Határ Street are waiting in the dead of winter, surrounded by unimaginable circumstances, for the authorities to provide some form of help. Since the shantytown's residents were in danger of freezing to death, on February 23 I established a children's home that continues to operate until this day. There, forty-six children between the ages of three and thirteen are cared for by a public nurse and receive provisions throughout the entire day. . . . After they are disinfected, bathed, and have had their hair cut, the children referred to our home leave their clothes at the shantytown and change into clothing purchased for this very purpose by the city, under whose care they now fall. Placing the children of the very poor into this type of facility has somewhat eased the miserable conditions that the shantytown's residents are forced to endure.⁴³

At the end of the 1930s, Budapest contained dozens of shantytowns where conditions were similarly inhumane. Temporary emergency dwellings, "cave homes" dug out of limestone hills, barracks converted into housing, and other types of structures used as homes all belong to the story of daily life in Hungary as it unfolded throughout the past seventy-five years.⁴⁴ While various campaigns were repeatedly

⁴² "Mária Valéria telep," *Egykor.hu*, <http://egykor.hu/budapest-IX--kerulet/maria-valeria-telep/3065>, uploaded June 17, 2012.

⁴³ "Pesterzsébet polgármesterének jelentése," Alispáni iratok, MNL PML, 408.u., April 19, 1940.

⁴⁴ According to its statistical definition, a temporary or emergency dwelling has at least one area that is larger than 6 square meters, a window or glass door, can be heated, and includes a toilet (or outhouse) and water. Dwellings categorized as "other" consist of an area or groups of areas that do not fulfill even the requirements for an emergency dwelling and only have one area that is at least 4 square meters in size, or if they have more than one area and contain a living space used as a room, then the room's size must be minimum of 4 or a maximum of 6 square meters.

organized to eliminate these kinds of housing conditions, other than a few rare instances or certain areas that drew greater attention (such as the Mária Valéria complex), these attempts either ended in failure or occurred over an interminably long amount of time. After communism gained control between 1948 and 1949, shantytowns and temporary forms of housing were both politically and ideologically undesirable: despite this fact, removing them was never accomplished even under state socialism. Among the many reasons for this, the main one was the fact that a level of deep poverty was always present (although to differing degrees) and always reemerged in Hungarian society throughout the second half of the twentieth century; for those who belonged to this social group, no other way existed for them to put a roof over their heads. While the lack of statistics makes it impossible to provide the exact number of individuals, according to the most conservative estimates at least two to three hundred thousand people lived in slums or Roma settlements in the 1950s. In 1949, slightly more than six thousand structures (huts, shanties, shacks, boats, caves, ruins, or other buildings) existed in Budapest alone that should not have functioned as dwellings for the twenty-five thousand individuals who were occupying them. In more fortunate cases, the buildings in these slum settlements had stable walls and were barracks-like structures that were usually quite run-down on the outside and in a state of disrepair within. The living areas were often one room or a room and a kitchen and each one usually housed eight to ten people. The type of hut found in Roma settlements were mainly low structures made of dirt bricks, with dirt floors and one or two rooms for eight to twelve people.⁴⁵

In the spring of 1956, in accordance with a governmental directive, county councils had every town compile a report regarding cave dwellings and their occupants. One such report from the Szentendre District Council informed the county "that individuals are living in caves in two of the communities in our district. Eight families can be found living in caves within the town limits of Budakalász and sixteen families in Visegrád. Out of these, six have a small room built in front of the caves, the rest were exclusively dug into the earth."⁴⁶ Two earthen huts were registered in Szentendre while families were

⁴⁵ The data come from contemporary housing statistics collections.

⁴⁶ "A Szentendrei Járási Tanács jelentése a barlanglakásokról," *A Város és Község-gazdálkodási Minisztérium iratai*, MNL OL, XIX-D-4-1. 8. d., March 22, 1956.

known to be living in ninety-nine cellar homes and twenty-nine cave dwellings in the Buda district. Based on the report summary, no other forms of this type of “home” were found in other parts of Pest County. To offer a further explanation of what these cave dwellings were, it must be mentioned that cave homes were commonly found in mountainous or hill regions where the type of stone (usually sandstone or limestone) was such that individuals in need of shelter could carve a home into the hillside or mountainside (See Figure 40). Budafok and Sirok are examples of villages where cave homes were possible. While various types existed, the most common variation was to dig out a cave with one or two living spaces, or to build an entryway in front of a cave. Earthen huts were slightly different in that these structures were roughly two meters high, out of which one meter was below ground. From the outside, only a wall that was between sixty and eighty centimeters high and the roof could be seen.

On the national level, the most widespread usage of cave dwellings was found in Sirok: 131 individuals were living in the forty-one cave dwellings found in the town. Used as residences, these cave dwellings were between 12 and 28 square meters and the people who lived in them were mainly industrial workers, seasonal agricultural

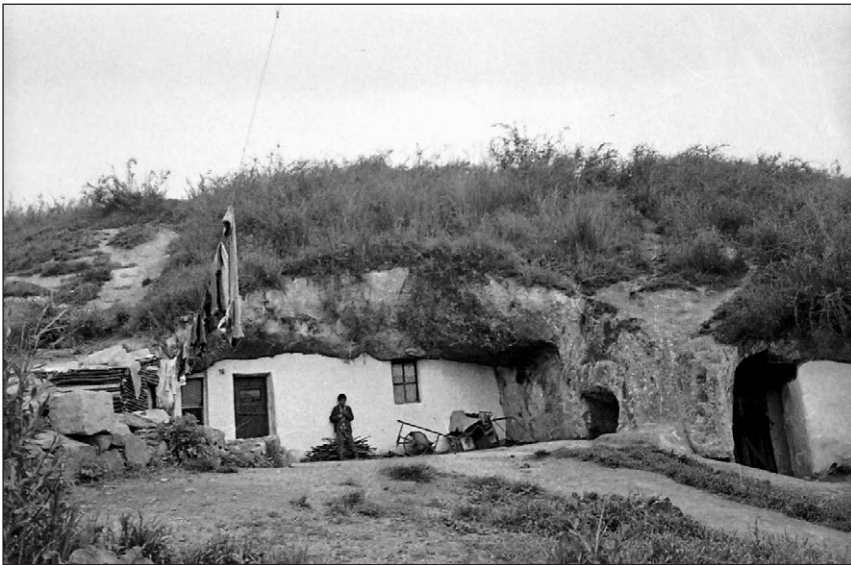


Figure 40. Cave dwelling in the village of Sály, 1972 (photo by János Kende, Fortepan, 185079)

workers, agricultural workers, private farmers with only one to three hectares, or miners. In a report from 1954, other than Sirok, the town of Egerszalók was also reported to contain sixteen cave dwellings with a total of sixty inhabitants whose occupations were not vastly different from those listed in Sirok.⁴⁷ The documents also referred to the fact that the situation could only be solved via state aid since there was no way for the inhabitants to improve their situation on their own as they all lacked financial resources and earned extremely low wages. Attention was also drawn to the fact that

if the caves' inhabitants were relocated to new, modern apartments as part of some type of campaign, it is absolutely imperative that the old, abandoned cave dwellings be razed or rendered in some way uninhabitable because the current residents believe that they can sell their cave dwellings once they have been relocated. The demand for homes like these is quite high as they barely need heating in winter and are cool in summer. The best way to ensure that the continued usage of these structures is stopped is to place them under state or town control and have them put toward a more appropriate use, such as wine cellars or warehouses.⁴⁸

Since the planned measures were carried out only partially and very slowly, cave dwellings continued to remain occupied.

In 1962,⁴⁹ another governmental directive ordered the evaluation of "the number of families living in temporary structures (construction site buildings, barracks, etc.) and their financial situation within the capital city and other large cities. The amount of space in these residences and its distribution are to be included for the purpose of forming recommendations concerning how to liquidate these structures."⁵⁰ In 1964, the Institute for Construction Organization and Management

⁴⁷ "Heves Megye Tanácsa Végrehajtó Bizottságának jelentése a siroki barlanglakásokról," A Város és Községgazdálkodási Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-D-4-. 8. d., July 18, 1954.

⁴⁸ "Az egerszalóki barlanglakások felmérése: Heves Megye Tanácsa Végrehajtó Bizottságának jelentése," A Város és Községgazdálkodási Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-D-4-. 8. d., October 18, 1954.

⁴⁹ For a discussion on social policy and politics in the Kádár era, see Sándor Horváth, *Két emelet boldogság: Mindennapi szociálpolitika Budapesten a Kádár-korszakban* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2012), 266.

⁵⁰ Letter from Vice-Minister of Construction Affairs János Szabó to Minister of Construction Affairs Rezső Trautmann, 758/1962. sz., MNL OL, XIX-D-3-j. 6. d., August 16, 1962.

prepared this national survey. According to the national results, a total of 21,033 buildings stood in 1,190 slums (euphemistically referred to as “socially unacceptable” settlements).⁵¹ All in all, 119,820 people were living in the 27,258 dwellings that were registered. The most slums were found in Borsod County (168, totaling 23,275 occupants), Szabolcs-Szatmár County (151, totaling 12,912 occupants) and Nógrád County (139, totaling 11,161 occupants). In the 3,137 homes located in Budapest’s 45 slums, 10,008 occupants were registered. Two-thirds of these slums were situated within the city limits while one-third existed on the outskirts of Budapest. The highest number of occupants (1,870) lived in the Százados Street housing estates found in Budapest’s eighth district. The Tomori settlement in the thirteenth district (with 1,158 occupants), the Hárosi illegal settlement⁵²



Figure 41. Slums in Budapest: houses of the Százados Road housing estate, 1978 (photo by István Harmath, MNM TF, 78.1809)

⁵¹ “Összesítő a szociális követelményeknek meg nem felelő telepeken élők összetételéről, az építmények jellegéről és a telepek felszámolásának előrelátható idejéről,” MNL OL, XXVI-D-1-C.16. d., January 1965.

⁵² In Hungary any area that was not suitable for residential purposes, yet still contained structures (huts, shanties, shacks, etc.) that had been spontaneously built without municipal permission was classified as an illegal settlement. Starting in the 1960s when authorities enforced stricter regulations for moving into the capital

(1,000 occupants), the Mihalkovics Street settlement in the second district (518 occupants), and the Madarász settlement in the thirteenth district (498 occupants) displayed the highest numbers. Whether in Budapest or the countryside, the buildings found in slums were mostly made of mud bricks; a smaller number had been tacked together out of mixed construction materials. In many places barracks were being used as places to live, and an additional twenty-three settlements consisted entirely of cave dwellings.

In the 1960s, as a consequence of the massive influx of people seeking work in the capital city, new slum settlements emerged in the suburbs around Budapest, where many lived in shanties and shacks that were improvised out of wood and leftover construction materials. In 1980, the number of occupied "homes" made of tin, wood, wood sheeting, and paper was 2,131 in Budapest and 2,356 in the countryside. Based on conservative estimates made at the beginning of the 1980s, between eighty and ninety thousand individuals were living in temporary residences while a further twenty to thirty thousand were estimated to be homeless. Throughout the nation a total of 266 cave dwellings—either dug into the earth or out of a hillside—were still in use and numerous slum settlements had existed for decades.

One such example was a housing estate built in 1937 that became known by the notorious nickname of *Dzsumbuj*, a slang term for chaos or a wild ruckus. For decades, the three buildings it contained had originally provided rental apartments owned by the capital city. During the 1970s and 1980s, the people who lived in these buildings were employed at the local factories as mainly semi-skilled workers or skilled laborers and had taken up residence in the 28 square meter apartments (one room and a kitchen) found here in the hopes of eventually gaining a better livelihood.⁵³ Very few, however, were able to climb their way out of the poverty that only grew deeper and deeper; in spite of numerous attempts to shut it down, the *Dzsumbuj* was always populated by new arrivals, including squatters. The twenty-first century had already reached its first decade when most of its

city, many attempted to solve their need for shelter by building some type of structure on the outskirts of Budapest or on the edges of towns that were suburbs to the capital city. After a lengthy process, a few of these buildings were razed, but the majority were granted a building permit. It was not uncommon for authorities to rezone these illegally established areas as residential districts.

⁵³ See Péter Ambrus, *A Dzsumbuj* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1988).

inhabitants were relocated and two out of the three buildings were razed. The following is a description of everyday life in *Dzsumbuj*, as a first-hand experience of what living in the “wild ruckus” of a working-class housing estate was like:

There are three buildings in the housing estate on Illatos Street. We call them “six houses” as a joke. . . . A stairway connects two houses but they count as one house according to the letters they were marked with, A, B and C. . . . The A and C buildings are smaller, there are only one hundred-thirty apartments in these buildings, with one room and a kitchen each. The B building is larger, there are one hundred-sixty apartments in it and you can add another twenty apartments that were converted out of the laundry rooms. . . . It’s not just because all the doors and windows face the corridor—there’s ten meters at most between apartments there—that we know every little thing about each other. It’s also because all the bedroom windows in the back of the house face the bedroom windows in the front of the next building. . . . Whether I want to or not, I hear it when my neighbor comes home, whether he’s stinking drunk or just started to hit the sauce. Whether he’s lost all of his money betting on the horses or playing at cards, or that another neighbor calls me a fucking whore, because my schedule and my work is different from the schedules and the work held by the others here in the *Dzsumbuj*.⁵⁴

All of the issues that had been “swept under the rug” during the state socialist era emerged tenfold following Hungary’s transition to a democratic system. The fact that certain levels of society swiftly fell into poverty, were marginalized, or sank into deep poverty exerted a lasting effect on the housing situation in post-communist Hungary. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, 260,000 residences lacked any level of comfort while nearly 100,000 emergency municipal residences or temporary dwellings were occupied by society’s most deprived. This figure indicates that hardship and privation define the living conditions for nearly 1.2 million people living in Hungary today, a number representing nine to ten percent of the nation’s total population.

Similarly, as slum settlements and shantytowns were repopulated in the two decades that followed the fall of the Iron Curtain, segregation—on the basis of finances and ethnicity—gradually overcame

⁵⁴ Eszter Anóka, “IX., Illatos út 5,” in *Folyamatos jelen: Fiatal szociográfusok antológiája*, ed. György Berkovits and István Lázár (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1981), 295–96.

Hungarian society. In certain areas of Budapest and the country that count as disadvantaged from the point of view of employment (such as Borsod or Szabolcs-Szatmár Counties), or in areas dotted with tiny villages, communities emerged that displayed a ghettoization brought about by deep poverty and partially by ethnicity as well. At the dawning of the new millennium, roughly 100,000 individuals were living in the 538 slum settlements found throughout the country, surrounded by catastrophic conditions from the point of view of both infrastructure and public health. According to research done by Veronika Domokos, in 2010, 1,633 segregated areas were registered in Hungary's 823 towns and the capital's ten districts, spanning a population of 280,000 to 315,000 individuals.⁵⁵



Figure 42. The former steelworkers' housing estate, now a ghetto, Hétes telep at Ózd, 2012

⁵⁵ Veronika Domokos, "Szegény- és cigánytelepek, városi szegregátumok területi elhelyezkedésének és infrastrukturális állapotának elemzése különböző (közoktatási, egészségügyi, településfejlesztési) adatforrások egybevetésével," (manuscript, 2010); and Veronika Domokos and Béla Herczegh, "Terra Incognita: magyarországi szegény- és cigánytelepek felmérése – első eredmények," *Szociológiai Szemle* 14, no. 3 (2010): 82–99. In Hungary any part of a given town or community that is partially

By the year 2000, the Hétes Roma settlement in the town of Ózd had become known as one of the most notorious sites of ghettoization. This part of the city had been built in the first half of the twentieth century to provide residences for the ironworks factory's skilled labor and mid-level managers; the level of comfort and facilities it offered reflected the period of its construction. Until the 1960s, the Hétes district represented a prestigious address. In the 1970s, the homes in the Hétes district constantly changed hands. Then, when the metalworks factory closed, the buildings that had been rented out by the factory were put into the hands of the municipality after 1990. Today the dilapidated houses here are exclusively inhabited by nearly four hundred Roma individuals, who live here without any type of facilities. According to a 2001 news report,

The level of poverty within the settlement is immeasurable. As we learned, the only certain form of income for the Roma is the family stipend.⁵⁶ The Roma who live in Hétes cannot get jobs in Ózd because there is no longer any need for an untrained workforce. Since the majority are squatters, they cannot apply for social welfare from the city. Constant hunger is the most significant issue that these families face. The residents gather iron from the slag heap that stands opposite of the settlement. Before the fall of communism, the foundry had churned out massive amounts of slag that still had a high iron content; today the Roma "mine" this slag heap for scrap iron. With one day of strenuous labor, the amount of scrap iron that can be collected is worth one thousand forints. Also, a source of good quality coke, the slag heap provides the settlement with fuel for heating. At the moment a two-wheeled handcart filled with tree branches is being put up against the wall of one of the hovels. They say that they're leaving it there because police were seen down below. As we discover, the other important source of income for the Roma here is stolen wood. Used for fuel, they sell the wood to the settlement's residents. One wheelbarrow's worth of wood costs one

(but not entirely) separated from the majority and displays a higher number of residents who possess a low level of education and earn irregular or low wages is classified as a segregated area. These groups include the elderly, pensioners, the poor, and other social groups that have been marginalized.

⁵⁶ In various forms, the family stipend has existed as a government benefit or supplementary form of income since the mid-twentieth century and is issued to support families raising children under eighteen years of age. The amount was generally determined by the number of children in the family and was—at times—only granted if parents were employed. During the period of transition that occurred after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the family stipend was interpreted as a civil right and therefore issued to any parent raising a minor.

thousand forints, but everyone buys a washtub of wood for two hundred. The Roma who dig for iron in the slag heap do not have time to gather firewood. . . . Many people make a living as moneylenders. Anyone with an extra thousand forints lends it at 70 percent interest, until the next family stipend arrives. Despite the inhumane conditions, having a house is highly valued at the settlement. The minute someone moves and word spreads, the vacant hovel is immediately occupied. If a house stands empty for even one day, the neighbors instantly start taking the walls apart since they can earn enough money for a day's worth of food by selling the bricks.⁵⁷

This description provides just one example of the process of ghettoization that has begun in many of the hundreds of slums found throughout Hungary today.⁵⁸ The emergence of ghettoizing slums was one of the many consequences that originated from the economic and social changes Hungary underwent as a result of the transition from state socialism to capitalism. Virtually overnight, massive layoffs occurred throughout numerous communities, leading to a rapidly growing chasm in social equality. Those individuals (and their families) who found themselves permanently squeezed out of the job market were effectively closed off from the majority and consequently came to occupy the social fringes that gradually transformed into increasingly isolated slums.

The general characteristics of changes in home interiors

Defined by social status, hierarchy, tradition, and financial position or circumstances, pre-war habits in interior design changed very little—or not at all—during the 1940s. Barring minor adjustments, three basic types of dwellings continued to exist in Hungary: middle-class, working-class, and peasant homes, each of which brought with them their own customary appearance.⁵⁹ When furnishing and using the

⁵⁷ "Járvány elleni fertőtlenítés az ózdi cigánytelepen," *Népszava*, March 27, 2001, 1 and 6.

⁵⁸ For more information on this issue, see János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi, *A kirekesztettség változó formái* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2004); Katalin Kovács, "Osztályosodás a magyar településhálózatban," *Kultúra és Közösség*, nos. 3–4 (2005): 21–26; Tünde Virág, *Kirekesztve – falusi gettók az ország peremén* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 201), 268.

⁵⁹ After communism rose to power, the style and approach to home interiors that was characteristic of middle-class homes underwent great changes. In particular, maintaining the type of home previously owned by the (upper) middle-class became

interior living spaces of their homes, most homeowners followed the examples set by other members of the same social class who lived a similar lifestyle. The changes that occurred in home interiors during this period reflect shifts in traditions and cultural habits. To mention one example, as television became more widespread during the 1960s, the Tavasz, Kékes, or Duna television sets that were popular at the time were frequently placed in a central part of the home, a choice that was partly made to make watching easier, but also demonstrates how televisions were valued as status symbols by virtually every social class in Hungary.

Attempts to create a private sphere similarly indicate a change in lifestyle that demonstrates the desire to follow Western European consumer society. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, altering the style and kind of furnishings or modernizing home appliances was severely hindered by a relatively restricted selection and financial circumstances. During the first two decades of state socialism, the amount earmarked for household goods or furnishings in family budgets was regularly quite small. In 1956, for example, according to calculations made by the National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT) based on the minimum wage, nine-tenths of all families were not able to buy furniture; at the time, an average set of furniture for one room was between eight and twelve thousand forints. Half of all families could not produce the 1,200 forints that were judged to be the minimum amount required per year for household goods. "Working class families," noted the report, "usually only possess the three to four bedsheets that are necessary; more than one-third of families either have fewer, or none at all. . . . In some families (especially in large families) the bedding is never changed at the same time. Instead, they change the sheets for only one or two beds and sleep on rags, straw, etc."⁶⁰ As of the 1970s, a growing number of Hungarian families were able to afford furnishings and household items, a development that led to an increase in demand and expectations. As shortages gradually

significantly more difficult. As it later turned out, the seeming disappearance of this kind of approach to home interiors was only temporary: in a modernized form, the middle-class and upper-class style of home has come to represent a kind of ideal style of home following the 1989 political transition.

⁶⁰ "Munkás és alkalmazotti családok létminimuma: A SZOT Közgazdasági és Statisztikai Osztályának elemzése," September 1, 1956, MNL OL, MKS. 276. f. 66/36. őe., quoted in Gyula Belényi and Lajos Sz. Varga, *Munkások Magyarországon 1948–1956* (Budapest: Napvilág, 2000), 457.

lessened, the selection of goods slowly began to improve. "Under state socialism," Katalin S. Nagy notes in her work on home decoration in the 1970s, "Hungarians were eager to arrange their private spaces the same way that other members of a twentieth-century consumer society did, meaning that they focused on consumption and were motivated by the need to satisfy their urges and experience joy in their surroundings. They did not follow the puritan, practical, thrifty décor typically found in bourgeois homes, but rather the modern, consumerist tendency to accumulate masses of objects."⁶¹

The large-scale changes in social position and residence that occurred throughout the fifties and sixties in Hungary obviously influenced habits too, given the fact that those who moved from the countryside to the city not only changed their location, but their lifestyle as well. One unique aspect of Hungarian homes was the low number of rooms, which subsequently rendered it impossible for residents to designate different functions to separate rooms. Access to privacy—one of the defining characteristics of modern living spaces—was similarly difficult to obtain.

In the middle of the twentieth century how home interiors were furnished, developed, and decorated provided a fairly exact representation of the owner's social status and financial position. Based on the quality and condition of furnishings and the number of objects in his or her home, placing an individual within a certain social category could be done with relative ease. Primarily due to the general state of poverty and lack of goods that typified the 1950s and 1960s, living spaces lost some of their ability to signify social status, even though the high-prestige objects that had been previously procured did not lose their value entirely. Beginning at the end of the 1960s, living spaces started to regain this symbolic function; during the following decade, décor became a permanent means for expressing social prestige, as it still is today. The habits and financial situation that were characteristic of certain social groups exerted a rather strong influence on interior design and furniture selection; while some customs did cross social boundaries, for a very long time these were the exceptions that only proved the rule. In the decades of the sixties and the seventies, it became increasingly rare to find a home interior that followed the purely peasant, working-class, or middle-class example;

⁶¹ Katalin S. Nagy, "Fogyasztás és lakáskultúra Magyarországon a hetvenes években," *Replika*, no. 26 (1997): 52.

at this time, different traditions, customs, and lifestyles were intermixing and adding layer upon layer to one another, a circumstance that obviously owed much to the fact that Hungary's population was undergoing a massive emigration from village to town to city.

It also cannot be forgotten that changes in the interior arrangement of homes was naturally related to alterations in how living space was used and furnishings were added to the home. In working class or peasant households, the kitchen's primary role slowly decreased as the increase in rooms made it possible for residents to separate their activities. In cities, as the appearance of the new minimal norm, the "two rooms with full comfort," became widespread, this type of space had the greatest effect on how living space was used and furnished.

Based on her research conducted during the 1970s, Katalin S. Nagy was able to establish five rural, five urban, and five rural-urban forms of interior style. Her work provides a detailed analysis of the characteristic features found in the following types of interiors: the feudal peasant home; the middle-class peasant home; the rural lower middle-class home; the rural square house home; the rural modern home; the impoverished rural and urban home; the traditional urban working-class home; the urban lower middle-class home; the urban middle-class housing estate home; the quasi-modern home; and the rural and urban white-collar home.⁶² Based on S. Nagy's categories, I will summarize the characteristic features found in both urban (including working-class and lower middle-class homes) and rural interiors in the following sections. Further attention will be directed to a brief overview of two of the era's most typical living spaces, the housing estate apartment and the weekend or vacation home.

Working-class and middle-class homes

A vast proportion of urban, working-class homes were built at the turn of the twentieth century; in the decades following World War II, primarily between 1945 and 1965, this type of home was mainly found in tenement buildings that had been constructed during the interwar period. In the first half of the twentieth century, better-quality working-class apartments were more commonly found in factory

⁶² S. Nagy, *Lakberendezési szokások*.

“colonies” (as they were called) that were built in the towns of Ózd, Diósgyőr, and Salgótarján. The MÁVAG colony, constructed on the site of the Gasworks Company in Óbuda, is another example worthy of mention.⁶³ Generally one room and a kitchen—or more rarely two rooms and a kitchen—the facilities for these apartments were provided by a water pump and electricity, in some less common instances. Including a bathroom or toilet was not even considered at the time of construction; later, when the buildings were modernized, the lack of room proved a serious obstacle to making this addition.

In the 1950s, a small percentage of the wave of “new workers” who were arriving in Hungary’s cities were able to establish a household in homes that had generally been seized from their previous middle-class owners and were then used to reward those deemed to be loyal members of the new political system and therefore worthy of promotion. Beginning in the mid-sixties, the vast majority of the people who moved to the city ended up living in one of the new housing estates.

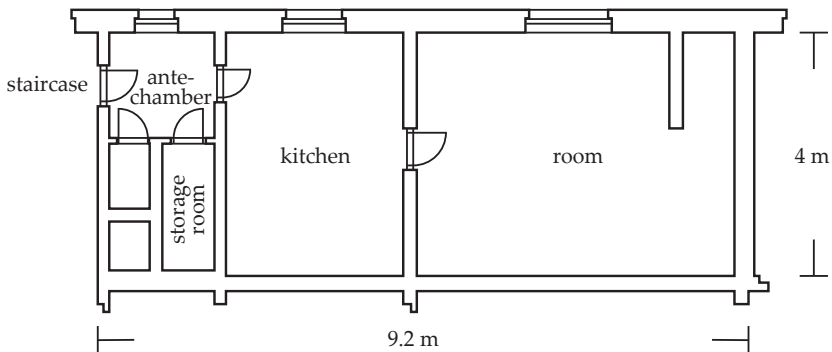


Figure 43. Floor plan of a one-room working-class apartment in the Óbuda Gasworks Colony. Source: Irén Sz. Bányai, *A gázipari kolónia* (Debrecen: KLTE, 1996).

⁶³ For a discussion on this issue, see Györgyi Csontos and Tibor Vass, *Ózdi munkáskolóniák (1861–1970) – Gyári lakótelepek és lakásbelsőik története a századfordulótól az ezredfordulóig* (Pomáz: Kráter Műhely Egyesület, 2001); Csaba Olajos, *A Diósgyőrvasgyári kolónia* (Miskolc: Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltár, 1998); Vera Peterdi Sallayné, “A MÁVAG kolóniái 1865–1989,” in *Tanulmányok a MÁVAG történetéből*, ed. Géza Bencze (Budapest: n.p., 1989); Irén Sz. Bányai, *A gázipari kolónia* (Debrecen: KLTE, 1996); József R. Nagy, *Boldog téglafalak között: Munkáskolóniák kulturális antropológiai vizsgálata Északkelet-Magyarországon* (Miskolc: Miskolci Galéria, 2010).

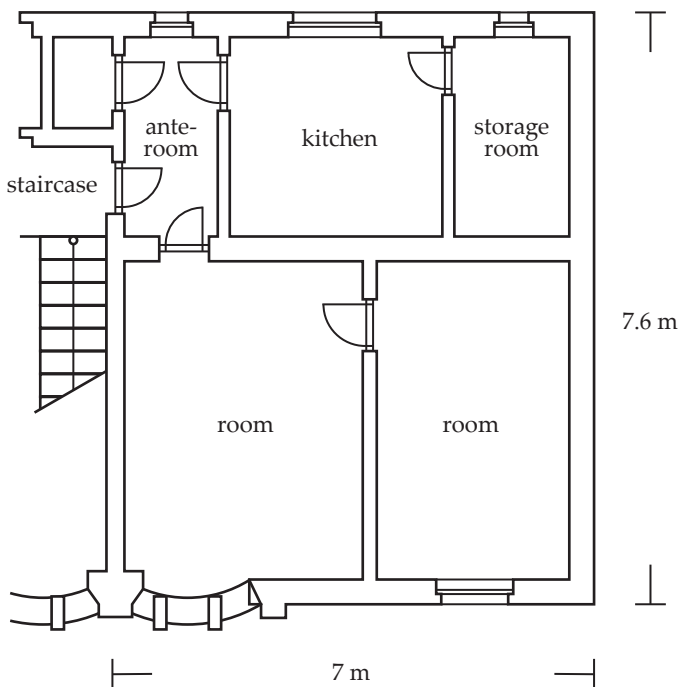


Figure 44. Floor plan of a two-room working-class apartment in the Óbuda Gasworks Colony. Source: Sz. Bányai, *A gázgyári kolónia*.

The working-class apartments constructed in the 1940s and 1950s were mostly located in three- or four-story buildings and averaged 45 to 60 square meters in size. For the most part these dwellings either offered a half-level of comfort or — more rarely — fit into the category of full comfort. After 1945, it was suggested that colonies containing family homes for workers should be established, but this idea was viewed as being “anti-collective” once the communist takeover occurred in 1948.⁶⁴ In the end, it was rejected in favor of industrial-type

⁶⁴ As a type of housing that emerged in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the workers’ colony cannot be directly compared to a housing estate or development. In Hungary at least this type of residential area consisted of much smaller, one-level buildings. The largest colonies housed between eighty and one hundred families and were built by large companies for the purpose of maintaining a hold on the most important members of their workforce. Life at these colonies was strictly regulated; noise or creating any type of a “scene” was forbidden. Factory gardeners provided residents with plants for flowers and made sure the area was properly maintained. Since rent was either extremely low or nonexistent, an apartment in

house construction and standardized designs. As a study analyzing lifestyle changes in postwar Hungary points out, "Apartments built according to the 1948 standardized designs usually contained one living room and a sleeping alcove, along with a kitchen, an entryway, a bathroom, and a toilet. The size of the apartments was set at around 50 square meters. By 1949 the size of the 'sleeping alcove' was first increased by decreasing the size of the entryway, then the bathroom and toilet were combined. The size of the kitchen was cut, and finally the separate pantry was removed altogether. This was how apartments could be made to count as two-room homes."⁶⁵ In the 1950s and 1960s, the interior spaces in small or two-room apartments were frequently divided with a curtain in order to create a "children's room," to make a part of the kitchen into "the bathroom," or to turn a corner of the only room into the "master bedroom" for the parents.⁶⁶ Furnishing and decorating apartments that only had two or three spaces was absolutely dictated by practicality and the need to put each and every square meter to optimal use.

Adding a separate bathroom to working-class (or peasant) dwellings only began to spread in the second half of the 1960s. The ultimate goal for modernizing homes was to gain access to running cold and hot water, a flush toilet, and a bathroom. Until homes possessed a bathroom, bathing and washing was generally done in the kitchen. In working-class apartments that had one room and a kitchen, or even two rooms, living space was put to maximum usage since a way had to be found to solve virtually every aspect of life (sleeping, eating, relaxation, bathing, entertainment) within very narrow confines. At the end of the 1940s, a survey completed with the inhabitants of a newly built apartment building contained the following results: "Anywhere from two to fourteen people were living in the apartments, with an average of four to seven individuals per home. . . . In residences with eight to ten individuals living in a two-room apartment, the men slept in one room while the women occupied the other. . . . Family

a workers' colony was also a form of social benefit that represented an enormous improvement for the family as these homes were much better quality and far more affordable than the average residence of the period. As owner of the property, the factory could give notice at any point and revoke the occupants' lease.

⁶⁵ Sándor Horváth, "A magyar társadalom életmódjának változásai fordulat éveiben 1945–1949," in *Fordulat a világban és Magyarországon, 1947–1949*, ed. István Feitl, Lajos Izsák, and Gábor Székely (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2000), 350–51.

⁶⁶ Mária Pataki, *A dolgozó nő háztartása* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1956).

life still takes place in the kitchen as this is where they cook, eat, and wash. True, one-third of the building's inhabitants spent the day in the room, where the children played and studied while the adults listened to the radio. Some even ate in the room.⁶⁷ In working-class apartments the number of sleeping places was frequently lower than the number of occupants, even in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the midst of the many changes occurring in living circumstances, it was still typical for urban, working-class apartments to display fashions originating from the 1920s or 1930s. The indispensable

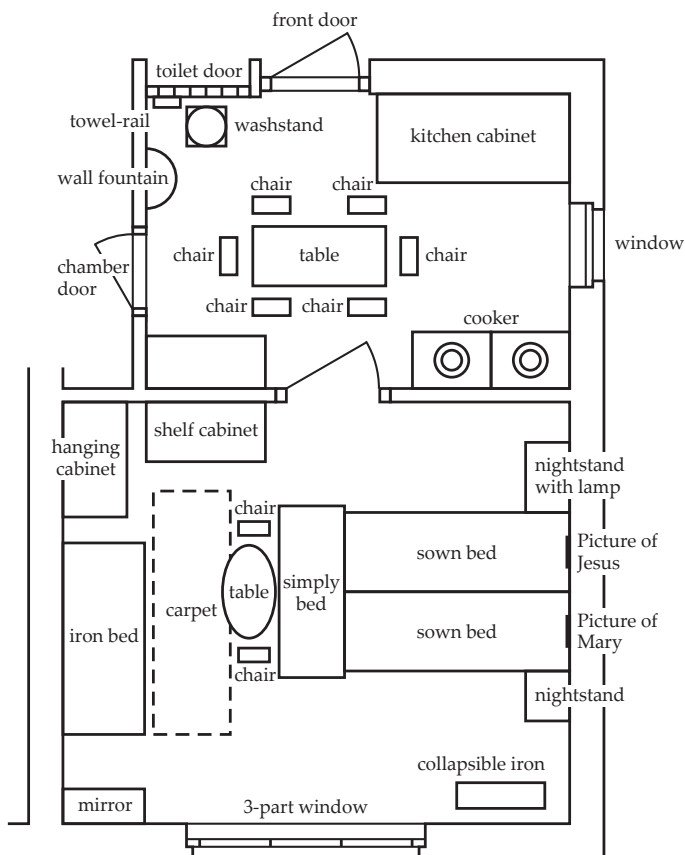


Figure 45. Floor plan of a working-class apartment at the MÁVAG Colony. Source: Vera Peterdi Sallayné, "A MÁVAG kolóniai 1865–1989," in *Tanulmányok a MÁVAG történetéből*, ed. Géza Bencze (Budapest: n.p., 1989).

⁶⁷ Horváth, "A magyar társadalom életmódjának változásai," 351.

furnishings for a one-and-a-half- or two-room apartment, or an apartment consisting of one room and a kitchen, included a twin bed, a dark-colored, usually double-doored wardrobe where clothes could be hung, and/or a combined wardrobe that could be used for storing both practical and decorative items. In some cases, a clothes press or—in rare instances—a vitrine cabinet was used. The furnishings for most working-class apartments contained additional sleeping places in the form of iron-framed beds. For shift managers who lived among skilled workers, but in the better circumstances offered by two-room apartments, having the ability to furnish one room with a set of bedroom furniture and leave the other room free for representative and social purposes was a mark of status.



Figure 46. The furnishing of a room in the apartment of Rezső Hampl Jr., a mechanic in Budapest, district 13, Tahi Street 26 (Photograph by Csaba Gabler, MNM TF, 73.142)

At the end of the 1960s, the two-room apartments found in the colony named the Ózd Metallurgical Works New Settlement had running water, electricity and contained a set of bedroom furniture in the smaller room. Painted yellow, the set included a double bed, a nightstand, a wardrobe, two chairs, and a round table covered with

a small, crocheted tablecloth. By day the fold-out bed found in the other room functioned as a sofa and was accompanied by two large armchairs, a coffee table, a wardrobe with hooks for hanging clothes, and a combined wardrobe. Heat was provided by a tile stove, a factor that influenced the placement of the room's other furniture. As of the beginning of the 1970s, television sets were featured among the appliances found in living spaces. Family photos, paintings, religious symbols, and reproductions of paintings or other artworks also appeared on the walls of the main room. Other than the kitchen furnishings that were painted white and green, a relatively large table (with a drawer under the tabletop), four or five stools, a chest for clothes or laundry, and a cookstove used for cooking and baking could be found in the kitchen. The chest used to store coal was either placed in the kitchen or in the entryway, which was large enough to contain a coat stand, a small-sized table, two chairs, a radio, and a shelf used to display knickknacks. Usually done in redwork, embroidered wall-coverings decorated the entryway and kitchen while simultaneously displaying quotations underscoring the importance of the home.

At the beginning of the 1950s, the four-floor buildings constructed in the Tánicsics settlement in Ózd provided workers with apartments that had either one-and-a-half or two-and-a-half rooms.⁶⁸ Accessed through the entryway, the kitchen in these apartments contained an enclosed kitchen cabinet, a kitchen table, a spigot and sink attached to the wall, a gas cookstove, and a refrigerator at the end of the 1960s. Ceramic plates, wall-coverings, and a calendar decorated the walls. Also accessed from the entryway, the largest room in the apartment had a row of cabinets lining the longer wall. Used to store bedding, the large-sized chest of drawers next to these cabinets also displayed ceramic knickknacks. An ornamental—or at least ornate—hanging lamp with either three or five arms provided light. In the 1970s “bar cabinets” that also provided mood lighting became extremely popular; by the end of the 1970s, various versions of this type of furniture were being used as TV stands. A coffee table and two shell-backed, upholstered armchairs stood in the middle of the room. Since these apartments had a smaller room and a sleeping alcove, the beds were usually placed here, but it was also common for the smaller room to be converted into a bedroom. Due to the size of the room, using the smaller room as a bedroom meant that the two beds could only be

⁶⁸ Csontos and Vass, *Ózdi munkáskolóniák (1861–1970)*.

placed one after another, with the footboard of one bed flush against the headboard of the second bed. A wall hanging was placed above the bed to protect the wall from being soiled. A hanging lamp with either one or two arms was used for light.

Despite the improvements listed above, a good many working-class apartments still only provided the narrow amount of living space contained in one room and a kitchen. Furnishing these two areas largely depended on the room's function and the number of people living there since these homes were rather crowded, especially at night. Another noticeable aspect reflected how "those who moved to the city from a rural environment to work in factories brought with them the middle-class peasant style of interior design while simultaneously copying the style of furnishings used in lower-middle-class urban homes, the social group they strove to resemble the most."⁶⁹ Taken at the beginning of the 1970s, a photo series illustrating the two-room apartment owned by Rezső Hampl Jr., a lathe operator who lived in Budapest's thirteenth district, offers an excellent example of this type of interior (see Figure 46). As housing estates became widespread during the 1970s, the interiors found in these block buildings brought about a more uniform appearance in working-class apartments. In the 1980s and 1990s, the working-class homes that had once been constructed in workers' settlements or colonies inadvertently preserved the habits and décor of their inhabitants, thereby evolving into what could be interpreted as a unique cultural or generational relic or as an increasingly segregated, ghettoized section of the city where they were located. However they may be viewed, the interiors found in these apartments demonstrate living spaces formed by either poverty or the ethnic characteristics of Hungary's Roma inhabitants.

In appearance, the urban (lower) middle-class home interior could be classified neither as peasant nor middle class and consisted of a living space that was only loosely related to the characteristic architectural forms that were typical of the twentieth century, as this kind of style could be found in tenements built at the turn of the twentieth century or during the interwar period, in apartments found in state socialist housing estates, or even in the two-room family homes located in the suburbs of Budapest. This is not to say that the apartment's location did not influence how living spaces were used as the high interiors (four meters) found in older buildings created a far

⁶⁹ S. Nagy, *Lakberendezési szokások*, 119.

more spacious interior compared to the 2.7 meters generally allowed for homes constructed after the war. As the different technology utilized in erecting Soviet-type structures already determined how living spaces could be furnished and used, these homes emphasized the feeling that their inhabitants belonged to a similar social class even though the group that had been known as “the lower middle class” in the pre-war period had already experienced significant changes.⁷⁰ It can, however, be said that in the case of this type of home, living spaces possessed an above-average role in demonstrating and displaying social status.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what type of individual belonged to the social class whose style in furnishing and decorating home interiors followed (with only a few, small alterations) the example set by Hungary’s lower middle class during the interwar period. While as a designation it referred less and less to a social class during the postwar decades, the category of “lower middle class” possessed a content that continued to represent a certain lifestyle and attitude. In the interwar years this class, which was mostly comprised of state functionaries, soldiers, and civil servants, felt a strong desire and pressure to prove their ability to move up the social ladder. Other than the fashion of the time, this added motivation explains why it was the habit to fill a relatively small apartment with massive furnishings. A kind of compulsion to amass accumulations of objects was also characteristic of this type of lifestyle. The apartment or home’s role as a representation of social status was particularly apparent in the room used as a living room which therefore combined the functions of dining room, study, and sitting room, while the second room was used as a bedroom.

In residences that followed lower middle-class habits regarding furnishings, décor, and the usage of living space after 1945, the

⁷⁰ The communist takeover of Hungary in 1948–49 brought with it ideologically and politically supported changes in social mobility, resulting in a kind of mass migration that could be physical (as in relocation), social (becoming a member of a new social group), or both. Those who had once been members of the lower middle-class and earned a living as small-time businessowners during the interwar period were stripped of their property and often became workers in a factory or industrial collective. Some former bureaucrats were dismissed from their position for political reasons and replaced with politically acceptable Party members. Despite sinking to a lower social level, numerous aspects characteristic of the lower middle-class mentality remained present in Hungarian society and could be observed in home interiors.

significance possessed by other areas of the home generally maintained their original function. Used for food preparation and informal dining, the kitchen was also the place where less important daily visitors were received and—in some cases—where the family bathed and saw to their other hygienic needs. Also functioning as a sort of “walk-in closet,” the entryway was where clothes were stored and changed, other than serving the more common function of allowing people to enter or leave the dwelling. As its central space, the living room was reserved for representation and therefore was where the family’s ownership of certain valuable possessions was placed on display. The living room also fulfilled social functions as the place where guests were received, family celebrations were held, and free time was spent. In the smaller apartments found in housing estates, these functions had to be combined; once it became customary to provide children with a separate bedroom, the room used as a living room by day was converted into a bedroom at night. The high number of objects found in a relatively small space therefore played a defining role in how living spaces were developed since the need for each space to perform multiple functions led to a unique clutter of items. These characteristics also served to present an image of the residents’ social status in a way that would be as complete as possible.

It must be stressed that during the Kádár era the interiors of homes occupied by lower-middle-class families reflected both the customs that had been upheld by the historical lower middle class while also demonstrating the taste of a newly-formed social group that had emerged from this past and was still heavily influenced by its predecessors’ norms. The residents of these living spaces regularly persisted in upholding the rules and habits that had formed from generation to generation: maintaining an orderly household, for example, was one such custom, or the habit of putting objects back in their place the minute the room’s function changed. The uniform interiors and purely functional nature of the objects that were intended to reflect and promote a Soviet-type lifestyle placed serious constraints on creating a lower middle-class interior. It was for this reason that many were forced to replace heavy, craftsman-made bedroom furnishings, dining room sets, and sideboards with rows of cabinets that were both easier to assemble and to maintain. In the 1960s and 1970s other characteristic furnishings included a glass display cabinet, a fold-out bed that frequently had an overhead light at the headboard, a coffee

table, and large-sized armchairs upholstered in green or dark red fabric. Sets of furnishings that consisted of two upholstered daybeds that could be used as a seating area by day and converted into beds for two people at night, two upholstered armchairs, a coffee table, and a row of cabinets were also quite typical.

A peculiar form of object worship could also be observed in these home interiors as owners strove to use an accumulation of both practical and ornamental items to indicate their financial position. This aim resulted in an endless number of vases, ornamental plates, porcelain figurines of Hungarian shepherds, galloping horses, cats, dogs, nude women, bounding stags, any other variety of painted or unpainted knickknacks, tea sets, collections of shot glasses, and hand-embroidered or crocheted tablecloths. In the 1970s a new habit swept through Hungary's homes: as a sign of the family's ability to gain access to Western goods, bottles of hard-to-obtain, expensive, brand-name alcoholic drinks were proudly placed on exhibition atop the row of cabinets found in the main room. A triple mirror was another commonly found item in lower middle-class homes; the glass vitrine that it stood on offered another opportunity to display objects that were not for everyday use and possessed a varying degree of value and quality. The television set also had a prominent place in this type of home and was—as was also typical of many rural homes—topped with a lace doily or piece of textile, then covered with more decorative objects. Decorative pillows were also placed on the armchairs, the beds, and the sofas. Since home furnishings, decorations, and household goods were highly prized, protective coverings were often used to preserve the upholstery. Cloths were put on rugs for the same purpose. Great care was taken in keeping the home clean and maintaining a well-tended environment. To a certain extent, it can be said that this specific style of using and furnishing living spaces is an example that continues to this day.

Just as the lower middle-class approach to interior design is still present in homes today, the interior style that can be connected to Hungary's (upper) middle-class homes has reappeared again and again—albeit with some adaptations made due to changes stemming from different social circumstances and fashions—in the decades following the end of communism. In these homes, the large size (anywhere between 200 and 500 square meters), extensive facilities, above-average number of rooms (six to eight), the distribution of functions, the quality of

construction, the selection of furnishings, and the exceptional value of the home itself all contribute toward transforming this kind of dwelling into an effective symbol of social status and wealth. As strange as it may seem, the lower middle-class style of interior decoration provided an example that not only continued to exist under state socialism, it also proved to be widespread as the middle-class norm for white-collar government employees. In contrast, before 1989 the middle-class interior was only found in a rather narrow section of society where it reproduced itself within the confined circumstances of, for example, the homes of well-to-do doctors or lawyers. In the 1980s a new social class of successful entrepreneurs emerged who possessed the wealth and means to represent their new social status via their homes and the objects that decorated their interiors. Once virtually all restrictions on obtaining personal property were lifted between 1989 and 1990, the lifestyle followed by the prosperous quickly reflected this change. Nowadays the lower-middle-class home interior refers to a smaller living space decorated with less expensive items while the reemergence of the middle-class interior expresses its separate identity from other social groups by drawing upon the middle-class mentality from the prewar period in issues regarding values, style, and size.

Rural and peasant interiors

In the decades following the end of World War II, the transformation that the interiors of rural homes underwent regarding furnishing and usage was equally influenced by tradition, fashion trends, residents' social status, and the type of dwelling that was available. It must not be forgotten that different objects and customs prevailed in peasant homes as opposed to rural houses that had been remodeled or modernized to some extent. As of the 1960s, the mass construction of square houses was followed by the quick spread (in the 1970s and 1980s) of steep-roofed, two-story homes that reflected the attempt to adopt a more suburban style of home.

Based on observations made by Katalin S. Nagy, in the 1960s the traditional homes that were divided into three basic living spaces characteristically exhibited the feudal-peasant style of interior decoration. Namely, furnishings were subordinated to function and interior spaces were defined to reflect aspects related to work and prestige.

“The traditions connected to this type of interior continue to thrive even in places where the peasant culture, customs, norms and objects appear to have been abandoned.”⁷¹ If multiple generations were living in a traditional long house, the occupants typically lived together in one room. Only in the case of wealthier families who possessed four or more living spaces and could set aside an area for sleeping was it true that the youngest married couple usually slept in an unheated separate bedroom.

In earlier versions of the square house, the kitchen and one room were accessed from the entryway. The other rooms and the pantry could then be reached through the kitchen. In later designs, an entryway or hallway that was one-and-a-half meters wide ran through the dwelling’s interior with two similarly-sized sections on each side. Two rooms were located in the part of the house that faced the street, while a kitchen and frequently another room, a pantry, and a bathroom lined the courtyard, behind the “square” that housed the two front rooms. The size of the windows increased noticeably, which was not only a sign of the attempt to modernize the structure, but also due to the circumstance that only one window size (1.5 meters by 1.8 to 2.0 meters) was available.

The previous rectangular form found in traditional peasant homes was changed to a square that was either eight meters by eight meters, or ten meters by ten meters in size. Fully occupying these homes was a process that took time:

The back of the house is the first part to be put into use, as this includes the kitchen, the smaller room, the pantry and the connecting hall. The layout for the rooms is highly reminiscent of the older buildings that were divided into three sections, just as the hall resembles the traditional porch that runs the length of one side of the building. The next space to be occupied is the smaller room that falls a bit farther away from the entrance, where either older family members or the children are placed. The room that is closest to the entranceway that is accessed from the street—the future “clean room”—remains incomplete in most instances, just as the bathroom does.⁷²

While running water, electricity, and sewage pipes were added to these houses either during construction or in the years that followed, the outhouse remained a part of the courtyard. According to S. Nagy’s

⁷¹ S. Nagy, *Lakberendezési szokások*, 69.

⁷² S. Nagy, *Lakásmód, lakáskultúra Telkibányán 1975–1978*, 83.

research, in 1975 more than one-third of the homes found in the village of Telkibánya located in Northern Hungary had bathrooms; half of these were in actual use. One-sixth of the village's residences had running water and one-tenth contained a flush toilet. Other than the more typical wood-burning cookstove, stoves that were fueled with gas cylinders were becoming increasingly common.

While occupants of the earlier design of square houses only used the smaller section of the dwelling (the kitchen and one room) on a daily basis, the remaining larger part served representational purposes and was therefore only used for guests or celebrations. In contrast to this habit, the newly-constructed houses that often boasted an additional floor increasingly provided separate rooms for different generations of the family. Parents, for example, had their own bedroom and the custom of placing children in their own room became more widespread. The house's largest room served as the living room (where the television was naturally placed), guest room, and parlor. In two-floor residences the lower level was generally the area for carrying out daily activities while bedrooms were found on the upper level. Adding a bathroom to the upstairs area became fashionable in the 1980s. The basement was used for work purposes (either agricultural or other) and was usually where a summer or additional kitchen was placed. The kitchen on the ground floor generally had two entrances: one from the street, through the entryway, and another from the courtyard which allowed for easy access to the garden, an important indication that the home and agriculture still co-existed in a unity that influenced how living spaces were used and developed.

In villages, the furnishings and household items found inside homes were exchanged for other options just as the outward appearance and floor plan of homes underwent a dynamic transformation that also affected how interiors were used. Rooms increasingly functioned as living spaces, a phenomenon reinforced by the fact that men were more likely to sleep inside the house rather than in the stables, a habit that would have been unheard of in a traditional peasant home. The summer kitchen slowly lost its function as an additional sleeping space. Adopting new customs, however, frequently took a long time: bathrooms were often left untouched, their only purpose to serve as a status symbol that often remained unused because there was no way to heat them in winter. While a new dining room stood next to the kitchenette that still awaited the final touches, daily life

took place in the old kitchen, or perhaps on the veranda, where visitors were hosted, the children did their homework, and the young wife of the family kept her sewing machine. Until the separate bathroom was completed, or the family became accustomed to bathing in new surroundings, personal hygiene was taken care of in the kitchen, obviously yet another factor that influenced how living spaces were used.

Both changes in how homes were utilized and the aim to modernize daily habits were furthered by the fact that it was becoming far rarer for multiple generations to share the same home. The reorganization of rural living spaces was equally determined by the strength of tradition and the extent to which individuals were willing to accept recent innovations. Directly after World War II, most peasant households contained furnishings and household items that had been exclusively prepared by local craftsmen; factory-made furniture only became widespread in the decades following the war. Only wealthy farmers were the exception to this habit, as in their case following the example set by the urban middle-class frequently proved more definitive.

Until the beginning of the 1960s, the most important furniture found in the homes of well-to-do peasant farming families included two wardrobes, two nightstands, a mirror, two beds, chairs, and a table, all of which had most likely been made by a local craftsman. These furnishings were arranged in a symmetrical or central order. In the former case, the beds were placed against the farthest walls, the wardrobes stood at the feet of the beds and the table and chairs were in the center of the room. When centrally arranged the beds were placed alongside one another in the middle of the room. The hardwood, rectangular table and chairs were put at the feet of the beds and the wardrobes stood along the walls. At the beginning of this era a third arrangement—known as “the corner interior”—was also quite common. In this configuration, a stove or brick oven stood in the corner opposite the wall facing the street; the table and chairs or corner bench were placed next to the stove, with a wardrobe or bureau standing behind. The beds were then placed against the opposite wall.

Based on observations conducted in the village of *Átány* during the 1950s and 1960s, the presence of a table is what made a space into a room.⁷³ Tables were viewed as almost ceremonial objects and

⁷³ Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer, *Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1997). For a more complete edition of this work, see Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer, *“Mi, korrekt parasztok...” Hagyományos élet Átányon* (Budapest: Korall Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület, 2010).



Figure 47. Interior of a rich peasant home in the early 1960s (Néprajzi Múzeum Fényképtára, no. 205565)

it was quite common for only clean work to be done at a table. Chairs or a corner bench often accompanied the table. The other prominent piece of furniture found in the room was the bed, a ceremonial piece that was piled high—almost to the ceiling—with pillows and highly decorated embroidered coverings that had almost definitely arrived in the home

as part of the wife's dowry and were therefore only put to actual use in very exceptional cases. Other than these pieces, the room contained beds for sleeping, clothing wardrobes, and chests for storing possessions. A mirror, coat peg rack, and pendulum clock fulfilled a decorative purpose that was also practical in nature. Further ornaments included devotional items expressing the family's religious denomination, souvenirs brought home from the male members' military service, and family photos, with one wall for those still alive and another for those no longer alive. When necessary, children's furniture was added to these objects. In homes that had room for a "clean room," the more valuable, representative pieces of furniture were naturally found here; smaller, shabbier, less valuable furnishings were placed in the "everyday" room: "Until the 1970s, the reigning norm was that a married couple would spend their entire life among the furnishings received on their wedding day or purchased in the first years of their marriage. For those who were married in the fifties, this custom began to change in the 1970s, meaning that a married couple could buy many sets of furniture and change the items in their surroundings many times."⁷⁴

The first significant shift in the interiors found in rural homes occurred in the second half of the 1960s as factory-made furniture appeared in the homes of newlyweds. In this case the furnishings were

⁷⁴ Péter Szuhay, "Az életmód változása a magyarországi falvakban," in *Magyarország agrártörténete*, ed. István Orosz, Lajos Für, and Pál Romány (Budapest: Mezőgazda Kiadó, 1996), 712.

generally a fold-out double daybed, two cabinets, a varnished table, and four upholstered armchairs. In the next period, which began in the mid-seventies, rows of cabinets appeared in rural household interiors which also contained two armchairs, two chairs, a coffee table, a daybed that could be used as a bed, and a row of cabinets that consisted of four to five elements. The following modernizing trend brought the innovation of the double bed, the creation of a separate dining area, and furnishings that paralleled the increased number of rooms.

When decorating the interior, the previously widespread presence of pictures featuring holy saints or family members was eventually replaced by embroidery, needlework, and images made by rug hooking, a hobby that reached great popularity in the mid-seventies. Both peasant, rural, and lower-middle-class homes came to feature rugs displaying the head of a dog, flowers, or different figures that were hooked based on patterns published in the popular women's weekly *Nők Lapja*, then hung up as decoration. For a while wrought-iron objects—lamps, candlestick holders, flower planters—enjoyed great favor as homeowners attempted to break the monotonous sight of the row of cabinets by adding small arrangements of objects. As was already described in the case of lower-middle-class homes, a plethora of ornamental objects was also typical of rural interiors throughout the 1970s and 1980s: "The items placed in the home frequently fulfill a purpose that completely opposes the object's original function or were only purchased for the sake of prestige. This is why the new row of cabinets or new set of chairs often remains untouched, nothing more than a decoration."⁷⁵

At times the role of symbolizing prestige or providing ornamentation also emerged in the case of new pieces of furniture or household items: "Village dwellers are far more likely to preserve and take good care of durable consumer goods than city dwellers. In Atkár's homes the television occupies a central position, is surrounded by pictures or knickknacks, and is covered with an embroidered cloth. Similar emphasis was placed on the refrigerator, with emphasis being placed on what type and size of appliance they had been able to buy."⁷⁶ While petroleum or oil lamps provided light in rural homes during the 1950s, these light sources were replaced by electricity in the following decade-and-a-half.

⁷⁵ Lammel, "Kontinuitás, átrétegződés, akkulturáció," 335.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 338.

In rural regions, a home's appearance and facilities heavily depended on the given community's expectations, the opportunities that were available locally, and the family's internal organization and ability to muster its financial and physical resources. How living spaces were organized and used was determined by tradition as well as the family's financial position and the structure of its activities. Other than these factors, it must not be forgotten that a house naturally possessed value: from 1949 to 1989 homes were the only form of private property that was legally permitted in Hungary.

As circumstances altered, how rural families used, furnished, and decorated their homes also changed with time. According to the contemporary sociological observations of Ágnes Losonczi,

A home not only determines the variety of lifestyle options that are open to its occupants—such as what it provides from the point of view of protection, or biological, family, and social functions—but with its firm walls a home also defines the quality of co-existence within a family, the course, level, content, and atmosphere of daily activities. The more a home's function is reduced to one living space, the more reduced the family's lifestyle is. The more monotonous the interior is, the less likely it is that any kind of differentiation will be made among daily activities, leading to a reduction of space and opportunities for a richer, more complex lifestyle. As regards content, the narrower the scene for conducting the tasks of everyday life is, the greater the chance there will be for conflicts to erupt and develop among co-inhabitants.⁷⁷

In the case of rural residences, the representational role possessed by homes remained important, meaning that families strove to create and use living spaces in a way that suitably reflected their social status. This representational aim was true on both the micro- and the macro-level and was most commonly used to express the family's altered social standing, even if attaining the objects, facilities, etc. that symbolized this required enormous sacrifice. In rural homes, the "clean room" was the traditional space for representing social status, a custom that mainly remained present throughout the 1960s and was only changed when televisions appeared in homes. As a "rare treasure and status symbol," the television was often placed in this room, an addition that transformed it from being a space that was only used on rare, important occasions, to the place where family and friends regularly

⁷⁷ Losonczi, *Az életmód az időben*, 415.

gathered to watch the latest program. With time, this cultural function slowly turned the “clean room” into either a regularly used room, or a room that followed the urban example of living rooms and continued to maintain a representational role via the furnishings and decorative items that were found there.

Changing household items and the entire or partial function of living spaces was a process that occurred over a lengthy amount of time and was largely dependent on the family’s social position and generational identity. Older individuals generally clung to their usual lifestyle and the objects that they had always used in the course of their daily activities. The majority of older people who lived alone only had access to very limited funds (either from land rents or a pension from the collective farm), a factor that made it impossible for them to make any changes. For those with limited financial resources, modernizing their home or building a new one was such a burden that new household items could only be purchased over a period of time.⁷⁸ In rural communities, acquiring household items was an investment that most felt had to be accomplished during the first years when a family was started. Great care was taken to choose the best possible quality and then preserve the item’s condition as much as possible, since new purchases were rare. As the customs and mind-set that accompany consumerism began to gain a foothold in Hungarian society, these habits lost their relevance. By the new millennium, how rural families furnished and used their living spaces was increasingly determined by their financial circumstances and the generation to which they belonged; whatever micro-social expectations their close surroundings may have held mattered far less.

The interior world of Soviet-type housing estates

In cities the spread of homes built out of industrially manufactured elements and the minimum norm of “two rooms with full comfort” that these structures offered exerted the greatest influence on how living spaces could be utilized and furnished. During the 1950s and

⁷⁸ For further details, see S. Nagy, *Lakberendezési szokások*; Fél and Hofer, *Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban*; Iván Balassa, ed., *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997); Szuhay, “Az életmód változása a magyarországi falvakban.”

1960s, the type of furnishings, household items, or décor that would have previously indicated social status was somewhat relegated to the background. In the case of the apartments found in mass-constructed, Soviet-type housing estates, the economic and production prerequisites determined by the construction technology had a major influence on the size of apartment interiors. In apartments that were the same type and had the same size and number of rooms, the fact that windows, radiators, bathrooms, toilets, built-in cabinets, and kitchen cupboards were all installed in the same place meant that few individual choices could be made regarding how the space could be used or furnished. Pre-determining these factors naturally reflected certain political and ideological goals as well since these types of spaces sped up the uniformization of interiors inhabited by people who had once come from different social classes and backgrounds. Similar to the situation in old, pre-war apartment buildings, those living in housing estates had no choice but to be familiar with one another's personal lives, at least as far as the occupants living on the same floor were concerned. Due to technical and design shortcomings, living in this kind of apartment meant knowing what the neighbors (either above, below, or next door) were cooking for dinner, when someone was using the bathroom, what music they listened to on the radio or cassette player, which programs they watched on TV, etc. Containing sixty to eighty apartments, these eight- to ten-floor buildings did not separate people only from a physical point of view: the total lack of social spaces in a stairway that provided homes for two hundred to three hundred people meant that residents barely knew their neighbors, a circumstance that was further aggravated by the high fluctuation in population. The physical separation that the building's structure imposed on its occupants resulted in a lack of personal contact or communication, a factor that further hampered the utilization and development of joint spaces. It must also be mentioned that the condition of these joint spaces (halls, elevators, balconies, and storage units) frequently fell into disrepair much faster than apartment interiors did.

Eight types of apartments could be found in buildings that had five to ten floors; their interiors were

determined by the fact that apartments were made of main unit cells that are 3.6 meters wide along the axis of the wall and 5.4 meters long. Since the walls are fifteen centimeters thick, this means that each room is an area of 3.45 meters

by 5.25 meters. . . . All apartments characteristically contain the following: the entryway includes built-in, floor-to-ceiling cabinets. The bathroom and toilet are built-in cabins that were completely outfitted and assembled in the factory. Built-in furniture (cupboards, sink, table, gas stove) is found in the kitchen along with a cabinet that serves as a pantry. A place has been provided for a refrigerator. In small apartments with one-and-a-half rooms, there are only interior kitchenettes with vent hoods for ventilation. Glued parquet installed on a rubber underlayment covers the floors of the rooms; the other floor surfaces are vinyl resting on a foam underlayment. Wallpaper covers the walls and plastic tiles surface the walls of the kitchen and bathroom. The ceilings are plastered white. Each apartment has central heating that also provides a constant supply of centrally heated hot water.⁷⁹

During the 1970s, the interiors found in housing estate apartments were determined far more by the apartment's size than by the occupants' social position. As a result of panel manufacturing technology, each wall in both rooms of a two-room apartment was completely occupied by a radiator that was located under the window. The longer wall was therefore the only remaining space for the row of cabinets



Figure 48. Apartment interior in a prefabricated large-panel house in the 1980s (Fortepan, 60523, György Gárdos)

⁷⁹ István Takács, "Új lakótelepeink," *Lakáskultúra*, no. 6 (1970): 23.

that was favored at the time. By the second half of the 1970s, furniture manufactured as easily-assembled separate elements appeared in the room: a daybed (used as a sofa during the day) was placed opposite the window while a coffee table, two armchairs, and perhaps a round or square pouf seat (used as an additional “chair”) was also included. Shelves were often placed on empty wall spaces. Within the narrow confines of a housing estate apartment, it was also fashionable to make walls seem larger by hanging a huge poster (usually depicting an enlarged landscape or nature scene) that covered the entire surface. Serving as living room and bedroom, the placement of electric outlets in the larger-sized room found in these apartments determined not only where the television or other electronic devices could be placed, but also added the function of entertainment to a room that was already fulfilling dual roles.

Built-in cabinets were also included in these apartments as storage areas for clothing or other items. The smaller room functioned as a room for the children and contained a daybed or crib (depending on the child’s age), shelves, a desk, and chairs. Bathrooms were one unit built into the apartment, while the kitchen had a built-in cupboard containing a sink. Next to the gas stove there was a second cabinet used for storing foodstuffs above and with a space for the refrigerator left below. The size of this cabinet determined what size refrigerator could be installed in the kitchen. Already very small in size, these kitchens had just enough room for an even smaller-sized table, or a narrow “dining counter” installed under the window. In some variations on this floor plan, a glass wall divided the dining area from the kitchen.

At the beginning of the 1980s, an apartment with one room and two half-rooms⁸⁰ located in the ten-story housing estate found in the Békásmegyer area of Budapest had an entryway where built-in cabinets provided storage, a coat rack, and a cabinet for storing shoes. An L-shaped sofa was placed next to the wall, with the smaller end of the sofa jutting out into the middle of the room. A coffee table that was on wheels, a row of cabinets containing a built-in desk, and a bar cabinet that also served as a TV stand could be found in the larger room. Between 5 and 7 square meters in size, the half-rooms were set

⁸⁰ At the time, a room’s surface area was classified as either a whole or a half room; any room smaller than 10–12 square meters was a half room while any room larger than this was a whole room.

aside for the children and contained a crib or daybed, a small-sized clothing rack and cabinet, a bookshelf, and a desk. In the decades following the end of communism, slight changes were made in how the living spaces in housing estate apartments were utilized and furnished. By removing non-supporting walls and replacing doors with arches, it was frequently possible to remodel the apartment's interior and thereby create spaces that diverged from the usual examples and reflected some degree of individual taste.

Summer and weekend homes

At the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, a large percentage of the vacation resorts or summer homes that had previously been privately owned became state property. In the years that followed, labor unions were responsible for arranging "organized vacations for the workers." Private ownership of vacation homes began to reemerge during the 1960s and gradually became another form of status symbol. In Hungary a plot of land that was one hundred to two hundred square meters in size was classified as a "weekend plot" where a vacation or weekend house could be built. A privilege that had previously only been available to the elite upper classes (naturally in a far different form) became available to the masses during this period. In 1980, nearly 120,000 privately-owned vacation homes had been registered, but this number was most likely far larger given the fact that many were willing to "camp out" in a toolshed or some sort of homemade shack that stood on a few hundred square meters of land.

Vacation homes constructed in favorable areas that boasted a proximity to lakes, rivers, or forests often served as a means of private investment. As of the beginning of the 1970s, renting out a room in a vacation house located on Lake Balaton or Lake Velence became a widespread practice that could engender a significant amount of supplementary income for the owners. Hobby gardens sprung up in zones located on the outskirts of larger cities and became places where amateur gardeners could relax while simultaneously producing fruit and vegetables for their families. Partly a result of fashion, the popularity enjoyed by weekend houses and garden plots also owed much to the quickening accumulation of private income as the legitimacy of the era's political leadership was strengthened by turning a blind eye to the reemergence of private ownership.

From both an architectural and aesthetic point of view, vacation homes constructed between the 1960s and 1980s displayed a wide range of variety and could include structures such as a railway car or truck cab rendered livable, a handmade shack totaling eight to ten square meters in size, a small wooden or brick structure, or a multi-story, elegantly furnished villa. Due to the size of the plot of land, most vacation homes were rather small; only one-third had more than two rooms. These circumstances were naturally further influenced by the fact that—even in the mid-seventies—it was not possible to get a bank loan for building a vacation home, therefore property owners were forced to build the kind of structure that they could afford. In certain areas minimal access to public facilities (electricity at most) resulted in the formation of shantytowns. Beginning in the 1970s, parts of small villages or mountainside communities that were losing their populations were transformed into areas for vacation homes.

The layout and usage of vacation homes was obviously determined by the structure's size. In smaller houses the living area was not strictly separated from the area where gardening tools were stored. Houses primarily built for vacation purposes basically followed the same functional order found in permanent residences. The quality of household items was very different as objects that had been discarded from the "city house" frequently found a home at the weekend house or bungalow, which subsequently became a refuge for furnishings or appliances that had fallen out of fashion, such as combined cabinets, daybeds, rows of cabinets, cookstoves, or refrigerators. In summer homes built purely for the sake of relaxation and vacationing, the well-to-do usually had new and fashionable furniture. As an effect of the financial growth that occurred between the 1970s and 1980s, those belonging to the wealthiest social groups were able to reproduce the same circumstances in their vacation home that they enjoyed at their permanent residence. When the Iron Curtain fell, the further growth and strengthening of the position enjoyed by Hungary's "upper ten thousand" led to the emergence of a unique style of architecture in vacation homes. For the very wealthy, other than a second, third, or even fourth vacation home built in Hungary's most popular resort towns, it was also not uncommon to own a summer home in a European resort. While luxurious surroundings reemerged as the hallmark of the upper crust, the 1990s saw a reduction in vacation homes for middle- and lower-middle-class individuals, in spite

of the fact that this opportunity had been a commonplace and widespread option for these same social groups in the 1980s. As incomes changed and families became more impoverished, maintaining a second property for the sake of intermittent usage became increasingly impossible. Many individuals tried to cut living expenses by moving from their housing estate apartment to live in these seasonal structures instead.

Chapter Five

“Well-dressed and Fashionable”: Changes in Clothing Styles, Habits, and Fashion

Need and puritanism: rural and urban styles of dress in the mid-twentieth century

As the 1930s turned to the 1940s, how people dressed and the style of clothing they wore still tended to be determined by factors connected to tradition, etiquette, behavior, social status, and cultural expectations.¹ While *haute couture* existed and even flourished during World War II, for everyday people apparel was strictly regulated. Shortages led to more streamlined silhouettes as clothing materials became rougher and thicker compared to what had been available in prewar years. The lack of material, the ration card system, and the increasingly severe restrictions placed on supply exerted a strong influence on fashion that in turn determined how clothes were produced. As a result, not only style and fashion, but also the customs, habits, and expectations that surrounded clothing underwent various transformations. Uniforms, for instance, grew in prestige as patriotic motifs became fashionable. Primarily in cities, apparel began to be the means for otherwise very disparate social groups to bridge class divisions, at least as far as appearance was concerned. Partly as the result of joining the workforce, women abandoned corsets and long hair. While women in cities increasingly chose to wear hats, traditional garb continued to be the norm in villages, where women covered their heads with kerchiefs and wore multiple layers of pleated skirts; riding breeches and hats were customary for rural men. Personal hygiene naturally remained important for women, but men became increasingly concerned with

¹ For an overview of the history of dress during the Dual Monarchy and the Horthy era, see Katalin F. Dózsa, *Letűnt idők, eltűnt divatok, 1867–1945* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989); Gábor Gyáni, *Hétköznapi élet Horthy Miklós korában* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 2006); Katalin F. Dózsa, *Megbámulni és megbámultatni: Viselet-történeti tanulmányok* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2015).

maintaining a neat appearance. At this time in Hungarian history, neither a public servant nor even a shop clerk could have appeared at work unshaven or wearing anything less than a full suit, necktie, and vest. Symbolic of middle-class clothing styles, a suit was not only the necessary garb for white-collar professionals but also a garment that a large segment of skilled workers could afford to purchase. Public and political ceremonies demanded that male attendees don evening tails, tuxedos, or even *díszmagyar*, the ceremonial attire worn by Hungarian noblemen for occasions of great pomp.²

Beginning with World War II and continuing throughout the post-war decades, apparel underwent a significant series of transformations in Hungary's urban and rural communities.³ Regarding multiple aspects, these changes occurred in what can best be described as "waves" during a period that spanned roughly fifty years and can be divided into five larger periods or stages. Encompassing the war and the first few years that followed—a time that can be interpreted as an era of reconstruction—the initial period saw a few, insignificant

² For further details, see "Magyarország a XX. században." Accessed December 20, 2018. <http://mek.niif.hu/02100/02185/html/11.html>

³ For more information regarding dress and fashion during this period, see Katalin F. Dózsa, "Magyar divattörténet, 1945–1959," *História*, nos. 4–5 (1991): 13–19; F. Dózsa, "Budapest, Divatváros: A magyar divattervezés rövid története," in *Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából*, ed. Gabriella Szvoboda Dománszky, vol. 26 (Budapest: Budapest Történeti Múzeum, 1997), 89–111; Péter Zsolt, "A divat és jelentősége az elmúlt ötven év magyar társadalmában," *Elméleti Szociológia*, no. 1 (1995): 40–44; Tibor Valuch, "Kész ruhát vesz már a nép, olcsó, tartós, mindig szép! A divat és a városi öltözködés változásai Magyarországon az 1940-es évektől az 1960-as évek végéig," in *Hagyomány, közösség, művelődés: Tanulmányok a hatvanéves Kósa László tiszteletére*, ed. Balázs Ablonczy, Iván Bertényi, Pál Hatos, and Réka Kiss (Budapest: Books in Print Kiadó, 2002), 430–40; Valuch, "A lódentől a miniszoknyáig: Az öltözködés és a divat Magyarországon az 1950-es és az 1960-as években," in *Magyarország a jelenkorban: Évkönyv IX.*, ed. János M. Rainer and Éva Standeisky (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2002), 52–75; Valuch, "Divatosan és jól öltözöttek: A városi öltözködés és a divat néhány jellegzetessége Magyarországon az 1970-es és 1980-as években," *Korall*, no. 10 (2002): 72–95; Ildikó Simonovics and Tibor Valuch, eds., *Öltöztessük fel az országot! Divat és öltözködés a szocializmusban* (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 1956-os Intézet, Budapest Történeti Múzeum, 2009); Fruzsina Müller, *Jeansszocializmus: Konsum und Mode im staatssozialistischen Ungarn* (Göttingen: Wallerstein Verlag, 2017). For a comparative analysis of the history of dress and fashion in twentieth-century Eastern and Central Europe, see Bartlett Djurdja, ed., *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, vol. 9, *East Europe, Russia, and Caucasus* (New York: Berg, 2010); Ildikó Simonovics, "Divat és szocializmus: Magyarország divattörténete 1945–1968" (PhD diss., University of Pécs, 2015).

modifications in attire, but primarily continued to follow the dress norms and associated habits that had typified the interwar period. For the most part, attire continued to signify social standing as great differences in dress could still be observed among certain urban social groups or between urban and rural populations, a factor indicating the extent to which Hungarians still clung to tradition and adhered to social expectations on both the macro- and micro-level. At this time the flow of information surrounding the latest fashions continued unabated; Hungarians could likewise keep up with the latest European trends on a virtually daily basis. During this period shortages in clothing material caused the most difficulties, particularly from 1945 to 1946.

Comprising the first half of the 1950s, the second stage presented a stark contrast to the initial period. Mainly visible in cities, the dress norms demanded by “enforced puritanism,” the process of mandatory social uniformization that was reached by means of continuous political pressure exerted from above, enacted great changes in what Hungarians deemed as both suitable and safe to wear outside of the home as the nation was transformed into a communist society. The demands placed on society to follow the collective and adhere to rather prudish moral expectations were further exacerbated by the nation’s growing isolation from international influences. As the experiment to gain partial seclusion from the rest of the world went into effect, the reorientation of Hungary’s economy and the subsequent scramble to fulfill at least basic needs rendered it practically impossible to address continued shortages in clothing materials.

Beginning at the end of 1956 and the start of 1957, the third period saw a slow return—at least in the area of fashion and apparel—to previous attitudes as the habit of following fashion once more became widespread and commonplace, developing into a process of normalization that was aided by gradual improvements in supply. In 1967, János Kádár took the following stance on the issue: “A few western fashions have, to a certain extent, made their influence felt here in Hungary as well . . . one of these is a sense of cynicism and indifference toward public affairs. In the West this fashion pairs up with wearing Wild West trousers and growing long hair and neglecting to shave. . . . I have no intention of spending time on Wild West trousers and beards and hair . . . what is important here is that the Party and the Youth League are neither fashion design corporations nor hairdressing cooperatives and do not need to deal with issues

of this sort.”⁴ During the lengthy decade that lasted until the end of the 1960s, the institutional systems connected to fashion, attire, and clothing expanded, although (to lesser or greater degrees) shortages remained present due to the nature of the system itself. Within Hungarian society the number and percentage of those unable to satisfy basic clothing needs decreased. Due to social, economic, and lifestyle changes, this period also marked the widespread abandonment of traditional clothing as Hungary’s villages adopted urban dress styles. Once rural men and women began turning to more modern styles, traditional wardrobes became obsolete in a process that became practically irreversible, leading to what is known in Hungarian as *kivetkőzés*, or the “undressing” of traditional garb. Other than being propelled by the desire to achieve a change in social position, the role played by mass communication (television) and the quickened pace dictated by the spread of motorization had a strong influence on the alterations that fashion and apparel underwent in Hungary’s urban and rural communities.

From the end of the 1960s to the middle of the 1980s, the fourth stage, clothing and the customs attached to it became simple. Apparel’s symbolic function as a signifier of social status became transformed while the news regarding international fashion trends could once more be followed on a virtually daily basis. These shifts largely occurred due to the reemergence of a strong private sector during the mid-1970s. Shortages that had commonly kept buyers from attaining basic goods or current items (such as blue jeans at the beginning of the 1970s) became either temporary or more prolonged. At times shortages did not influence the availability of the type of apparel itself, but only affected access to certain sizes, styles, or colors, or resulted in a narrow selection of goods. The quality of clothing that could be purchased once more functioned as a visible indication of income: in daily life, possessing a piece of clothing that was valued as a status symbol served as the most powerful means for demonstrating social differences.

As fashionable clothes frequently became items of prestige consumerism, value systems and public opinion accordingly reflected this change. For the fifteen-year period following 1968, clothing styles

⁴ János Kádár, “Kádár János felszólalása a KISZ VII. Kongresszusán,” in *Hazafiság és internacionalizmus* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1968), 112–14.

once more became either a symbolic or actual reflection of the wearer's personal circumstances. Based on its visibility, attire provided the perfect means for an individual to display to either his or her close surroundings or more distant environment that he or she was keeping pace with trends and thereby fulfilling a role as a consumer. The fact that being well-dressed became a sort of general social expectation and value was underscored by the National Market Research Institute's survey conducted in 1976. According to the survey's collected data, "even though approximately one-third of the adult population consciously conforms to fashion, apparel's role has decreased somewhat . . . the environment has a remarkably strong influence on style of dress. Despite this, today only six to seven percent of adults stress the importance of dressing better than others, while nearly half believe that clothing should not stand out from (in either a positive or a negative way) the surrounding environment."⁵ No matter the individual's financial or social position, this type of viewpoint was widespread in Hungary during the mid-1970s. Since the previous period of a mass transformation in how social status was viewed drew to a close by the mid-1970s, a new period of consolidation emerged that was marked by the process of socialization and adapting to those social norms that belonged to the individual's new circumstances. No longer simply determined by the desire to meet the demands raised by a new environment, a sense of identity was strongly influenced by elements related to consumerism, among other factors.

From the middle of the 1980s until the twenty-first century—or even up to today—the fifth period is typified by the avid interest in and the rapid combination of fashion styles. This period is therefore related to the spread of mass consumerism, a phenomenon that subsequently gained in value. As far as attire was concerned, differences in financial circumstances became even more obvious: at one extreme of the spectrum, a growing number of buyers could afford luxury items. Those, however, who fell into financial difficulties during the economic transformations that followed the end of communism found it increasingly impossible to procure even the most basic garments. This era is therefore also characterized by a rapid rise in the number of individuals lacking sufficient clothing for their needs. The rules and customs governing dress also underwent certain modifications

⁵ László Szabó, "A ruházati forgalom szenzibilitása," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 1 (1978): 7–10.

as, for example, the differences between formal and everyday attire became even less noticeable. Particularly in the first five or ten years following the fall of the Iron Curtain, perhaps the most obvious changes could be seen in the prerequisites and expectations determining the appropriate garb for certain professions.

How changes in dress and fashion reflected the sense of identity, mentality, and behavior exhibited by various social groups is a question worthy of consideration. During the 1940s apparel was still viewed as an important indicator for expressing the social class or profession to which an individual belonged. In the years following the end of World War II, public opinion underwent a series of vast and significant changes as the value system or mentality upheld by certain social strata or groups temporarily found it less important to use outer appearance to emphasize social belonging. Throughout this transformation in values and public opinion, attire had a dual role. Other than the factors of political pressure and economic necessity, it can be argued that the individual attempt to adapt to the expectations of "enforced puritanism" that characterized the early 1950s may have also been influenced by the need to hide. In other words, adopting a gray, uniform exterior might have been a survival strategy as it became obvious that safety lay in the ability to blend into the gray masses.⁶ Similarly, the termination of dress norms that had once been associated with certain social groups also signified a weakening in ties to this group, or a decreased sense of self-identification. As Hungary spiraled into poverty, how people dressed also indicated the presence of a sort of social leveling that was directed toward society's lower rungs. During the period of consolidation that occurred under Kádár, the exact opposite process occurred: the era of total shortages was first replaced with a period when supply was merely uncertain, then slowly followed by increasingly more secure access to necessities. In the 1970s, clothing reflected the appearance of the quasi-consumerist attitude as the members of certain social groups were willing to reach far beyond their actual means for the sake of satisfying the projected or genuine demands placed on them by their social level. Mainly in the underground movements led by youth subcultures, attire also acted as an expression of a rebellion against formality. Not insignificantly, consumerism's growing spread reflected the weakening hold socialist ideology exerted on public opinion.

⁶ Zsolt, "A divat és jelentősége," 41.

Until 1948 urban dressing styles attempted to keep abreast of the relatively rapid regeneration that European fashions were undergoing.⁷ With the restrictions placed on specific social groups, such as members of the aristocracy, certain styles of clothing or habits of dress (like *díszmagyar* apparel) disappeared from everyday life. Other than this, the customs, social expectations, and norms disseminated by various magazines and publications that dealt with fashion and etiquette did not change in any great way. Nor did the image of the ideal woman undergo any significant modification compared to the interwar era. At most, the only detectable change occurred in the gradual spread and acceptance of women working outside of the home. The fact that women had employment influenced both female roles and public opinions regarding the division of labor within the family. In villages, however, the role assigned to women who belonged to the historical peasant class essentially remained unchanged.

The first volume of the magazine *Asszonyok* (Women), published by The Democratic League of Hungarian Women (MNDSZ) in 1945, mainly addressed the difficulties in rebuilding daily life after the war.⁸ Tips were provided on how to substitute unavailable items (foodstuffs, clothing, glass panes) and otherwise solve the problems that arose in the course of everyday postwar circumstances. While issues regarding fashion or dress rarely appeared, by the autumn of 1945 readers were treated to brief descriptions of Paris trends. Not surprisingly, after wearing clothing that was dictated by wartime privation and bare necessity, the demand for new forms, colors, and materials was enormous. It is therefore understandable that no serious obstacles blocked the arrival of Dior's New Look to Hungary, even though an article in the August 1947 issue of *Asszonyok* criticized the innovation by referring to the threat of class warfare:

⁷ For further information on the history of dress and fashion in Hungary, see Katalin F. Dózsa, *Letűnt idők, eltűnt divatok, 1867–1945*; F. Dózsa, "Budapest, Divatváros," 94. The most complete ethnographical and historical summary of village dress norms and regional types of traditional clothing can be found in Iván Balassa, ed., *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997). For a more recent discussion, see Mária Flórián, *Magyar parasztviséletek* (Budapest: Planétás Kiadó, 2001).

⁸ Established in 1945 with the support of the Communist Party, the Democratic League of Hungarian Women (Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége) essentially acted as a political wing for the Party's female members until it was terminated in 1956.

Paris has decided to turn us inside out of our own skins. They will remold us, reshape us into slender figures, plump figures, tender figures, all in the desperate attempt to make us resemble our great-grandmothers. . . . Long, rustling silk skirts, all beribboned and frothing with ruffles, our heads all covered in curls just like a portrait by Turner. . . . Let's just cast all our clothes aside—after all, according to the new lines, nothing can remain of the past, from slips to jackets, let's all buy new clothes!... These new clothes were designed for idle women. That's the crux of it! This new fashion wants women to be slender stems of flowers. . . . This is the fashion of class warfare. Her Highness and friends are fighting for their class: for those who have no other worry beyond looking charming and bewitching their entire, livelong day. This is the most reactionary fashion ever to be invented.⁹

The defining personalities of Budapest's fashion scene (Júlia Apponyi, Klára Rotschild, and József Szita) fortunately thought far more favorably of this new wave in fashion. Compared to the previous, square-like form that had determined the upper part of dresses, this new approach was characterized by the way in which the line of the garment followed the natural line of the upper body. The waist's slimmness was once more emphasized as the soft pleats and drape of the skirt belled into a wider shape that almost grazed the ankles. Fashionably wide collars and coats with hems that swung into an A-shape added to the other alterations made in dressing the upper body. One year later, in 1948, Hungary's contemporary fashion press was already enthusiastically welcoming the way in which this new line "freed" fashion from excess.

At the end of the 1940s, in a move that reflected an adaptation to the nation's changing political situation, a variety of interviews and articles discussed the total equality experienced by Soviet women, whose refined taste followed the latest trends in Moscow fashion, which was naturally equal to anything Paris could produce. While it is impossible to establish what influence Moscow fashion may have had on urban clothing styles in Hungary, it cannot be denied that the books, brochures, and magazines published between 1945 and 1949 essentially popularized the same customs that had existed before the war, with the exception of perhaps a few small alterations. When providing advice to younger or older women and men, housewives, or working women on how best to follow these customs, it was primarily some form of an aesthetic ideal that was emphasized: "Fashion's

⁹ *Asszonyok*, August 1947, 8.

aim is to accentuate female beauty and enhance the effect wrought by her appearance."¹⁰ According to the customs of the time, an elegant lady always dressed for the given time of day and occasion in an appropriate manner and therefore had a wardrobe containing morning or afternoon dresses in addition to evening gowns that were only to be donned after five o'clock. Since the color black was no longer used simply for mourning, it was also deemed necessary for men to own a black suit jacket and women to lay claim to their own "little black dress." A dark blue dress or two-piece ensemble was also judged to be sufficiently elegant, depending on the occasion:

The secret to being well dressed is to choose attire according to the time and occasion. The most modest type of dress can be perfectly acceptable in either the afternoon or the evening while wearing an evening gown in the morning or before five o'clock in the afternoon is inappropriate. . . . During the warm days of summer, spring, or autumn the kind of linen dress or ensemble favored by the British is the most suitable attire for every occasion, from morning till the afternoon. . . . For those who have one, donning a mackintosh over a British-style dress or a skirt and colorful jumper will lend any wearer a well-kept appearance. In winter an English-cut winter coat with just a touch of fur or a dyed fur coat is best worn before noon. In summer, a silk ensemble or a colorful or printed silk dress with a little jacket is the right choice for late afternoons. In spring and summer, a black ensemble with either a lace or silk blouse serves the same purpose.... For the time being, evening dresses remain the least necessary item. As true as this may be, a cocktail dress—a short silk dress tailored according to the French style and embroidered with beads—is just the thing for a lady of society to wear to premiers, dinners, or for an evening out among company.¹¹

It was also considered important for female wardrobes to contain a gray, English-style dress suit; when paired with the right blouse, a classical piece such as this would remain fashionable for years, thereby making it a practical choice as well. Between 1945 and 1947 other publications and newspapers based their advice on the reality of the current situation and provided tips on how to make do with the one or two outfits that women actually possessed.

According to fashion experts, appropriately attired ladies did not pay attention to their outerwear alone, but also devoted sufficient

¹⁰ Blanka Simon, *Házi mindentudó* (Budapest: Atheneum, 1946), 69.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 70.



Figure 49. Fashionable, elegant middle class lady in winter coat and hat, 1940s (MNM TF, 773.1963fk MFI)

undress" even in front of family members. Plunging décolletage or an overly short skirt was also seen as opposing society's generally held views regarding the exposure of too much "skin." The only exception to this rule was allowed in the case of bathing at public pools or baths, although it cannot be denied that bathing suits still contained quite a lot of material in the mid-1940s. Anyone who did not uphold the norms for dressing was judged an "easy" woman. Breaking either the written or unwritten laws regarding behavior and etiquette therefore drew the swift censure of both the close and broader social environment.

Throughout every walk of life, the social and behavioral expectations connected to dress norms were quite rigid and exacting during the 1940s. In secondary schools, uniforms or uniform caps had to be worn by all students.¹² When analyzing the socialization mechanisms

care to their underclothing. By this time the classic corset had already disappeared and been replaced by a brassiere and full slip, or—in more rare instances—a brassiere and girdle with garter snaps or an elastic panty girdle. Colorful undergarments made in materials such as silk, rayon, nylon, pure silk, or muslin became common. Immediately after the war cotton underwear was sewn at home (even in urban families) and worn. Due to their intimate nature, it goes without saying that underclothes were meant to be invisible as the norms and proprieties surrounding this type of apparel were quite strict. It was, for example, considered inappropriate behavior for anyone to appear "in a state of

¹² For further examples, see Ferenc Horváth, "Egy gimnázium hétköznapijai 1948–1956" *História*, nos. 4–5 (1989): 24.

attached to attire, clothing played an important role in emphasizing and reinforcing the separate education and rearing of boys and girls, just as the type of clothing that was deemed acceptable also served to regulate relations between the sexes.

As was previously mentioned, white-collar workers, officials, and bureaucrats had no choice but to wear a suit and tie at work every day, a rule that only began to lose validity toward the end of the 1940s. Once this occurred, a certain section of the era's politicians and public personalities took to appearing in open-necked shirts that drew even more attention to the lack of a tie. It can be supposed that the point to this trend was to suggest a sense of spontaneous informality that simultaneously reaffirmed a sense of identification with the "working masses."

Written by the author of a guide to "household tips and management" whose opinions obviously reflected middle-class norms from the 1930s, the following passage demonstrates the attempt to interpret Hungary's changing social circumstances within the context of the growing number of women choosing employment outside of the home. While the author did not oppose careers for women, she still emphasized the opinion that even professional women must take care to combine a neat appearance with practicality: "A working woman is to dress simply but well. It is important that her garment be made of good material because clothing made from durable and good-quality material can be altered several times. . . . Her dress's fit must be beyond reproach. . . . She must never wear so-called 'company attire' at work, not even if she is going to a social event directly from work. It is far preferable for her to take her tea-gown with her to work in a valise. . . . Working women are not to dress in a dull manner. She must look after her appearance and be vain, as is the obligation of every woman."¹³

The number of women employed at workplaces was relatively small in the second half of the 1940s. Generally speaking, mainly unmarried women or married women who still did not have children were the only ones to work outside of the home. In contrast to this, maintaining a household and raising a family was naturally seen as one of the most important roles a woman could fulfill. It therefore comes as no surprise that publications from the time described in great detail how a woman was to dress while at home. According

¹³ Ibid., 25.

to these sources, it was appropriate for a woman to cover her nightgown with a dressing gown (made of cotton shirting, silk, or flannel depending on the season) in the morning, then change this outfit for one in which housework could be suitably done. The era's housewives were repeatedly warned not to wear clothes that still smelled of the kitchen when sitting down to eat a meal; to avoid this fate, it was instead recommended that the afternoon dress be donned for lunch.

As a sign of the changing times, the clothing worn for free-time activities changed from time to time: "A well-fitting swimsuit is necessary for swimming and should be made of colorful or flower-patterned seersucker or cotton. Other than these colorful tops, knit tops remain quite popular. Two-piece swimsuits are only recommended for women with slim figures. Women with fuller figures should wear one-piece bathing costumes."¹⁴ Behavior and dress were connected in this respect as well: while bathing costumes were somewhat more daring compared to those worn in the interwar period, the main goal (other than providing ease of movement) was still maintaining propriety by covering the body adequately. Making its first appearance in world fashion in 1946, the "two-piece bikini that even exposes the navel . . . is spreading like wildfire among girls with good figures"¹⁵ and was quickly adopted in other parts of Europe. In Hungary, however, it took longer for the same process to occur. In fact, it was not until the end of the 1950s that this daring piece of swimwear became more commonplace. Among men, one-piece bathing suits fell out of fashion by the end of the 1940s, to be replaced by bathing trunks sporting much shorter legs.

For its first issue of 1949, *Asszonyok* made sure to provide readers with advice regarding how to choose clothing for winter sports that would be both fashionable and appropriate: "No longer can it be said that winter sports are a luxury. The right attire can be bought for very little money. The most comfortable garments for ice-skating are a skirt and sweater. The sweater should be made of thick yarn. The skirt should be comfortable and loose, rather than tightly fitting."¹⁶ For skiing a simply tailored pair of ski pants and a "ski jacket" that could be made from an altered coat containing a warm lining were

¹⁴ Simon, *Házi mindentudó*, 62.

¹⁵ Katalin F. Dózsa, "A fürdőöltönytől a tangáig: Női-férfi divat a vízparton," *História*, nos. 5–6 (1999): 38–39.

¹⁶ *Asszonyok* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 1949), 4.

also recommended. A heavy, colorful scarf and warm wool stockings additionally appeared as accessories to a practical and fashionable winter sporting outfit.

It must be emphasized that the household tips and fashion advice found in the era's publications obviously only provided an example that could be followed by certain social groups, such as the lower-middle class or middle class. Similarly, it can be safely said that the behaviors and norms held by these groups represented a kind of ideal that could be copied by other social classes. For many, being well-dressed was merely a sort of ideal or distant goal, rather than a widespread social expectation. Those who genuinely followed and created fashion trends mainly belonged to the urban middle class.

The genre of household management or advice publications primarily addressed issues related to women's fashion; far less attention was devoted to menswear. Estate inventories are one source for gleaning an approximate idea of the contents found in the wardrobes of men living in various social circumstances. According to an inventory made in 1950 regarding the estate of the respectably middle-class, retired head councilman for the city of Debrecen's auditing office, A.L., his personal wardrobe contained 217 items, totaling an estimated value of 6,180 forints. Virtually every type of garment deemed necessary for any kind of everyday purpose, formal event, and sporting or leisure activity can be found in this inventory. Among other garments, A.L.'s extensive wardrobe contained five hats, two cloth caps, one summer coat, two smoking jackets, one tan leather coat, one dark gray fur coat, one grayish-black winter coat, one coat each for spring and autumn, six winter suits, one summer suit with a waistcoat, one pair of breeches, two bathing suits, eleven collarless shirts, one tuxedo, two dress shirts for formal evening wear, four sweaters, twelve pairs of underwear, twenty-four neckties, and four pairs of shoes.¹⁷ For the sake of comparison, the wardrobe (inventoried in 1945) of the former estate manager of the Catholic Church in Eger, Ferenc W., demonstrates a similar level of completeness. Ferenc W.'s wardrobe contained one pair of jodhpurs with a sports jacket, one black suit with no waistcoat, one summer suit with no waistcoat, one gray suit with a waistcoat, one linen suit, four shirts, one package of collars, one nightshirt, six pairs of socks, six pairs of underwear, two pairs

¹⁷ For details, see "A. Lajos hagyatéka," Debrecen város leltár-biztosi hivatalának iratai, Összeírási jegyzék 929/1950, MNL HBML, XXI. 511. 10. d., 1950.

of shin guards, fifteen neckties, one "winter coat lined with one layer of dark-colored, high-quality nutria fur," one lined work jacket, one overcoat, one urban-style fur coat, three pairs of shoes, one pair of winter boots, four pairs of boot gaiters, one straw hat, one bowler hat, two fedoras, and one bathrobe.¹⁸ In both cases it is quite obvious that the clothing had not only been acquired over a lengthy period of time, but also that the clothing accurately reflected the social position of the men whose estates were inventoried, even given any inadvertent errors that may have occurred when the items were recorded.

Relatively little is known, however, about what the different urban groups of Hungary's working class wore on a daily basis. As financial constraints played a considerable role in determining the apparel choices for working women, it was unlikely that they bought fashion magazines or followed the latest trends. If possible, working class women strove to present a simple yet clean and neat appearance within the restrictions placed on them by a limited wardrobe containing one or two changes of either a simple skirt and blouse or a factory-made dress, a coat, shoes, and a few pairs of undergarments. A few individuals belonging to this social group naturally amassed wardrobes that were far more expansive compared to the average. The wife of a skilled laborer working in upholstery in Debrecen who died in the spring of 1945 at the age of thirty-five could select from one gray winter coat with a black fur collar, fifteen cotton or woolen dresses, six "special" dresses, two skirt suits, eight blouses, two pairs of trousers, one sweater, five nightgowns, three pairs of pajamas, three white and four colored camisoles, six pairs of women's underpants, two bathing suits, three pairs each of shoes and dress shoes, and one pair of boots.¹⁹

It comes as no surprise that workers in positions of higher prestige (foremen, skilled laborers, the heads of workshops) had access to apparel that was far superior to that worn by the average members of their profession. In the case of men, this meant owning at least two to three sets of suits for everyday use, one suit for special occasions, between six and seven shirts, eight to ten pairs of undergarments, one cap and one hat, a spring jacket, and a winter coat.

During the interwar period, most large companies had already begun supplying their workers with work clothing, a habit that continued

¹⁸ "W. Ferenc hagyatéka," 100025/1950. sz. MNL HML, XXIV-102/B/24, 1950.

¹⁹ "F. Lajosné hagyatéka," Debrecen város leltár-biztosi hivatalának iratai, XXI. 511. 1. d., 1945.

after the war. For the most part, uniforms also retained a sense of prestige due to the fact that they represented secure employment and a steady lifestyle. It was precisely for this reason that certain professions—such as that of the postal or railway worker—remained relatively popular, not to mention the added benefit of being able to reduce clothing costs thanks to the uniform that was provided or the clothing stipend that was issued.

In contrast to the gradual shifts occurring in adult wardrobes, children's wear and styles of dress did not change substantially. As a fashion history summary notes about the 1940s, "dresses for little girls were cinched at the waist and the skirt was gathered or pleated with a ruffled apron to cover it. Hair was brushed into a crest above the forehead and decorated with a large hairbow. Boys wore shorts with suspenders in summer and trousers in winter, with plaid shirts on weekdays and white shirts for formal events. The style for their coats and blazers was the same as that used for adult clothing. Although children were still required to be careful of their clothing, garments were more comfortable and allowed for greater freedom of movement. . . ." ²⁰ For little girls, formal clothing continued to be a sailor's dress or dark skirt and sailor's blouse while boys had to wear a suit jacket and tie.

Throughout World War II, while it was not unheard of for members of the middle-aged generation of Hungary's peasant class to exchange their traditional clothing for store-bought apparel, this practice was still not widespread. ²¹ It is undoubtedly true that (particularly in the case of women) the inhabitants of Hungary's villages mostly clung to their traditional attire, garments, and customs, as well as the values that surrounded how these garments were worn

²⁰ F. Dózsa, *Letűnt idők, eltűnt divatok*, 262.

²¹ In the middle of the twentieth century, the peasantry was still a definitive social group in Hungarian society. In 1949, 53.8 percent of all active workers (totaling 2.2 million people) were employed in agriculture. The amount of land or size of farm owned by a family or individual determined the separate levels of Hungary's peasant class and were used to describe these social groups. In 1949, 15 percent of all registered agricultural workers did not possess any land while 55 percent had anywhere from 0.6 to 5.8 hectares; this group also performed day labor and they were known as a smallholder/small landowner peasant farmers. Twenty-four percent farmed and owned 5.8 to 14.4 hectares and were known as mid-level peasant farmers; a large majority of this group also employed farm laborers. Six percent owned more than 14.4 hectares of farmland and therefore composed the group referred to as the high-income, wealthy peasant or peasant elite.

in a way that transcended any regional factors that may have otherwise influenced dress norms. In the village of Atkár, located in Heves County, almost every member of the community's middle-aged generation still wore traditional dress throughout the 1940s; the number of women, however, between the ages of eighteen and thirty who had turned to modern apparel had risen somewhat, even if their clothing choices were actually a unique amalgamation of traditional and urban styles that clearly marked them as rural in the eyes of outsiders.²² One such continued custom was the habit of wearing certain colors that were used in traditional wardrobes to indicate age (such as red for young or newly married women and dark colors for older women) or the habit of covering their heads with a kerchief. In other words, their appearance combined what they conceived as urban with pieces or aspects of traditional peasant clothing. In the northern Hungarian community of Varsány, "before 1948, the village's entire female population wore traditional peasant clothing; the only exception to this were the family members of craftsmen or servants who had come from elsewhere and naturally dressed differently."²³ Compared to women, it was more common for younger members of Hungary's rural male population—particularly among those who lived in more industrialized areas or near larger cities—to abandon traditional garb.

At this time, clothing still provided a fairly accurate expression of a villager's local ties, specific age group, marital status, and actual or only coveted financial situation. In many cases garments even indicated the wearer's religious affiliation and the given occasion or event for which a certain choice of apparel had been donned. Until the end of the 1950s, clothing still had a major function as a "sign designating the wearer's role in the local community."²⁴ It therefore follows that different kinds of apparel were donned for holidays or work as opposed to everyday functions. In many cases, garments also acted as

²² Annamária Lammel, "Kontinuitás, átrétegződés, akkulturáció (Atkár 1920–1980)," in *Életmód-modellek és minták*, ed. Mihály Hoppál and Tamás Szecskő (Budapest: Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóintézet, 1984), 310–45.

²³ Katalin Gergely, "Változások Varsány népviseletében," in *Varsány: Tanulmányok egy észak-magyarországi falu társadalomnéprajzához*, ed. Tibor Bodrogi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978), 201–76.

²⁴ Péter Szuhay, "Az életmód változása a magyarországi falvakban," in *Magyarország agrártörténete*, ed. István Orosz, Lajos Für, and Pál Romány (Budapest: Mezőgazda, 1996), 705–20.

a means of preserving value since procuring the right materials and then making a richly decorated set of clothing deemed fit for the most significant occasions demanded an enormous amount of time, effort, and money. As a result, valuable pieces such as these were naturally treated with great care.

The women who still maintained tradition wore an undershirt or chemise, petticoat(s), a blouse with either ruffled or plain sleeves, a bodice, an overskirt, a vest, an apron, a headkerchief, and a shawl. Instead of boots, in most regions women wore a type of buckled shoe. A headkerchief and apron were essential elements in most regional apparel for women; many thought that a woman would be “naked” without them. The other variation of traditional dress that was generally prevalent at the time, though perhaps less strict regarding custom, merely signified the wearer’s regional origin and did not possess any significance as a representation of value.²⁵ In these communities, individuals exhibited a lower degree of attachment to tradition compared to the average and were more open to innovation; their dress subsequently showed fewer indications of social position or function: at most, a difference between daily apparel and formal wear was made.

For those who belonged to the lower echelon of the peasant class, the clothing listed in estate inventories was generally valued at anywhere from twenty to thirty forints and—in the event that actual garments were listed—it can be seen that owning more than ten to fifteen pieces of clothing was rare. Estate inventories, however, show that members of the wealthier peasant class had far larger and more valuable wardrobes, as was the case for the mid-level peasant housewife, Mrs. István B., who died at the age of twenty-two in December 1944 in the village of Érsekvadkert in Nógrád County.²⁶ Her wardrobe contained 146 garments estimated to be worth over 40,000 pengős on July 9, 1945, the day when the estate was valued. Even when taking the rising rate of inflation that Hungary’s economy was experiencing at the time into consideration, this wardrobe represented quite a respectable sum. Among the many pieces it contained, Mrs. István B.’s wardrobe had no less than seventeen skirts, twelve blouses and

²⁵ See Szuhay, “Az életmód változása a magyarországi falvakban”; Flórián, *Magyar parasztoiseletek*, 112.

²⁶ “Kimutatás B. Istvánné hagyatékáról,” Nógrád-Hont Megye Árvaszékének iratai, MNL NML, XXI. 6. 2. d. 3848/946. sz., 1946.

an equal number of chemises, seven long-sleeved, lace-edged, fitted jackets, three embroidered vests, twenty-five headkerchiefs, two large shawls, two handwoven, decorated aprons, five cloth aprons, one pair of high-laced shoes, and one pair of dress shoes. The color combinations used in the clothing found in this particular wardrobe reflected the wearer's age and therefore contained many relatively brightly colored and patterned garments. The skirts for example were mainly black, maroon, green, and brown, while the headkerchiefs were red, blue, orange, purple, and black. Materials such as chambray, silk, broadcloth, and cambric predominated throughout the selection of garments.

The traditional garments worn by rural men were typically far simpler compared to those worn by women. By the middle of the twentieth century, the more traditional type of linen trousers made of (usually handwoven) white linen was replaced by jodhpur-like trousers that were baggy around the seat and hips and narrowed into tight-fitting legs that enabled the wearer to fit a pair of boots over the trouser legs. Everyday or more formal shirts sewn of heavy white canvas or linen that was carefully pleated around the neck and decorated with tucks down the front and perhaps embroidery were made by the women of the family. A black vest was usually worn over the shirt; in some regions, a long apron, a fitted jacket, or—for colder weather—a heavier jacket completed the outfit for men. Pantaloon pants also appeared by the middle of the twentieth century among the clothing items worn by wealthier peasant farmers. For the most part, men wore black boots; rural men only began wearing dress shoes in the 1940s. Another essential element of a rural man's wardrobe was his hat, an item that virtually came to symbolize manliness and masculinity within Hungarian culture. A black broadcloth suit was the most important garment worn by men on formal occasions.

As rural men increasingly sought employment in Hungary's cities, by the latter half of the 1940s trousers made of store-bought, finely woven material became far more prevalent, just as boots were exchanged for dress shoes or work boots. In villages, apparel's powerful ability to represent social position still held firm, similarly to the micro-level norms that placed certain types of garments within categories judged as appropriate for designated age-groups, sexes, or occasions. The only exception was made in the case of young women who were either preparing to be wed or had recently done so: at this

time of life, more well-to-do peasant families spent less on dressing their eligible daughter while poorer families went to great lengths to supply their daughters with a suitable number of garments. A traditional rural wedding dress included—to list just a few of the clothing items—four to five pleated skirts worn over four to five starched petticoats, a lace-edged blouse, an undervest made of silk, an overskirt of white silk that was edged with lace, white stockings, black shoes, a neckerchief, a shawl made of white lace, and the bridal wreath that was the prerequisite headpiece for all brides. Once the bride had danced the “bridal dance,” a tradition that marked her final dance as a girl before she was formally dressed in the attire and hairstyle of a married woman, she donned a new set of clothing that was usually bright red in color and highly decorated, which served the function of displaying her status as a newly-married woman. It should also be mentioned that great importance was placed on how many sets of clothing a person owned, or how many of one type of more expensive garments (such as overskirts) could be found in an individual’s wardrobe. In Varsány, for example, it was not unheard of for a peasant wife to own a total of eighty skirts, including both everyday skirts and ones for more formal occasions.

Village dwellers emphasized the importance of looking neat, trim, and clean while wearing clothing that lent a tasteful appearance. The culture surrounding traditional peasant styles naturally changed too as new innovations made an either short-lived or more lasting appearance in hairstyles, certain pieces of outer clothing, or in the kind of materials used to make these garments. Once an innovation became widely accepted, it speedily became a part of village tradition and thereby remained a constant element among the clothing that was worn. Compared to Hungary’s other social groups, however, it must be said that traditional styles of dress were far more consistent and less given to change.

As far as nightclothes were concerned, in most villages women slept in a blouse and petticoat that were considered too shabby for daytime wear; nightgowns only became more common in the post-war years. Men simply removed their outer layers and went to bed in the shirt and undergarments they had worn all day. In the village of Átány in Heves County, “the women do not have a separate set of nightclothes; they sleep in the same clothes they worked in throughout the day. Older women hardly remove any of their clothes at

night: some only take off their shoes and apron while others also remove their outer, long-sleeved jacket. Younger women in their forties generally remove their outer clothes and sleep in a blouse, petticoat, or long chemise."²⁷ In the 1940s panties still counted as a novelty for rural women and were therefore far from common.²⁸ This period also marked a reduction in the number of people going barefoot; it comes as no surprise that this was also when women started wearing shoes with cotton stockings instead of boots.

Nice clothing naturally formed an important part of presenting a good appearance and therefore meant wearing garments that were well-maintained and clean even on weekdays. The unique way in which village women walked—tiny quick steps were taken as the upper body was held in a straight, upright position while the head remained erect, the hips swung rhythmically, and the arms were allowed to hang or swing at the sides—was not only the result of the clothing they were wearing, but also added to the overall effect of maintaining a good appearance. In most communities, general opinion held that "dressing nicely, stepping neatly best befits bachelor men and eligible girls."²⁹

While the time that newborn infants were kept in swaddling varied from region to region and extended anywhere from six to nine months, once they passed this stage all children were dressed in a baby shirt and skirt or a long shirt and jacket, a long-sleeved pleated dress that closed in the back. From the time they were three or four years old, little girls wore blouses and skirts until they reached school age, from which time they basically wore the same types of clothes that older girls did. Once they began going to school, boys wore white shirts and narrow-legged trousers that were essentially the same kinds of garments worn by young bachelors. Small children went barefoot until they began attending school. Both boys and girls usually received their first, truly special set of clothing when they took their first communion or had their confirmation.

As was previously mentioned, colors played a significant role in the clothing worn by rural women as they expressed the woman's age

²⁷ Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer, *Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1997), 326.

²⁸ See Gergely, "Változások Varsány népviseletében"; Katalin Gergely, "Öltözködés, viselet," in *Kecel története és néprajza*, ed. János Barth (Kecel: n.p., 1984), 793–818.

²⁹ Fél and Hofer, *Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban*, 317.

and marital status, and the nature of the occasion. Red, other kinds of bright colors, and patterned cloth dominated the wardrobe worn by newlywed women and was deemed acceptable until the birth of her first child. From this time on, the color of a woman's clothing became progressively darker. Black and brown, for example, dominated the garments worn by older women. Religious customs and traditions also influenced what colors were worn for certain holidays; in Catholic villages, women dressed in black when they went to church during Lent and on the days leading up to Easter. On the first Sunday after Easter, women attended mass dressed in white from head to toe.³⁰

Little money was spent on replacing garments that had become worn from use. On the one hand, this was because individuals took great care in preserving what clothing they had. On the other hand, the majority of peasant families only spent money on items they absolutely had to have for necessity's sake. The custom of providing girls with a trousseau that also functioned as part of her dowry was still common in the 1940s. In Varsány

a girl's dowry usually contained the following garments: one wardrobe's worth of skirts totaling forty to fifty, or in some cases sixty, pieces; another wardrobe of blouses, thirty to thirty-five pieces . . . ; underskirts: four starched and seven pleated; twenty-five petticoats; nine aprons; eight headpieces, seven richly decorated for holidays, one for mourning; between fifty and sixty kerchiefs, twenty-five with tassels and twelve without; twelve undervests, two of silk and ten knitted; two large tasseled shawls for wearing around the neck; one outer vest (half coat); one pair of boots, a pair of buckled shoes, a pair of high-laced shoes, and a pair of sandals.³¹

It is therefore apparent that (within the limitations imposed by their financial circumstances) families supplied their daughters with all the basic clothing they would need for the rest of their lives as they prepared to enter marriage.

³⁰ See Gergely, "Változások Varsány népviseletében"; Ágnes Fülemile and Judit Stefany, *A kazári női viselet változása a XIX–XX. században* (Budapest: ELTE, 1989); Flórián, *Magyar parasztoiseletek*, 118.

³¹ Gergely, "Változások Varsány népviseletében," 245. The trousseau collected for girls preparing for marriage was similarly opulent in Átány. See Fél and Hofer, *Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban*, 331–32.

Fashion and dressing habits during the state socialist period: changes in norms for everyday and formal occasions

The transformation that occurred in the norms and habits surrounding dress became increasingly apparent toward the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. The brochure for a fashion show held by the Union for Hungarian Fashion Designer Artists at the end of 1947 already displayed a shift in attitude toward the role played by clothing:

A working woman naturally needs different types of garments for her daily lifestyle compared to a “decorative woman.” It is not the task of modern designing artists to come up with phantasmagoric clothes—the likes of which have yet to be seen—for the sake of a few fashion divas: it is their job to design pretty and practical clothes for the sake of millions and millions of women, the likes of which can be put to good use and satisfy the needs of millions and millions of working women living in real life situations, whether at home, at work, pursuing sports, or celebrating special events.³²

In the name of gender equality, the February 1948 issue of *Asszonyok* urged the development and production of ready-made clothing for women: “If male workers can get ready-made suits and shirts, then the working woman also needs a ready-made woman’s suit and ready-made dress.”³³ One-and-a-half years later this shift in attitude had reached its apex; in the same women’s magazine an entire page bearing the title of “How the Soviet Person Dresses: Bolder, More Vividly, More Intriguingly” was already making it very plain to its readers that the Soviet-style clothing included in its compilation was the correct example for them to follow. After *Asszonyok* was taken over by its successor *Nők Lapja* in 1949, the first issues of the new magazine already included practical tips on how to alter “obsolete,” middle-class garments while simultaneously emphasizing that “for today’s woman apparel is practical, healthy, and pretty. Nowadays the large department stores serve the interests of working women rather than the senseless whims of fashion queens.”³⁴

When it came to satisfying the needs of “the working woman,” after 1949 neither fashion salons, individuality, nor beauty played any part in the process. Following trends was no longer the most im-

³² F. Dózsa, “Magyar divattörténet, 1945–1959,” 13–19.

³³ *Asszonyok*, no. 4 (February 1948), 6.

³⁴ *Nők Lapja* 1, no. 2 (1949), 6.



Figure 50. The fashion for simple elegance—a dress show at the ministry of transport, 1948 (photo by *Magyar Nap*, MNM TF, 1185.1 MN)

portant issue at hand; focus was instead turned to acquiring the bare minimum of garments necessary for fulfilling basic needs. As far as dress was concerned, the era of (more-or-less) standardized clothing was ushered in for the purpose of exalting the puritan nature of the worker's ethic by banishing any aspect of apparel that was deemed unnecessary or antithetic to simplicity, practicality, and the serviceability needed to meet workplace demands. Fashion magazines of the time no longer promoted individual taste, but rather praised the products being churned out by state-owned clothing manufactories

in quantities that ran to tens of thousands of the same type of clothing. As *Asszonyok* reported on a fashion show held in the spring of 1949: "The clothes are excellent; in style, cut, and taste it must be said that they are in no way subordinate to the products sold by the big French tailoring industry—unless, of course, their value is somehow reduced by the fact that the working women of the state's clothing manufactory are making them by the thousands or tens of thousands to be worn by many thousands or hundreds of thousands of our nation's working women."³⁵ The customers, however, were not overly enthusiastic for standardized garments "because these models were made of low-grade materials and were tailored incorrectly due to the low technical quality exhibited by the clothing manufactory, not to mention how extremely boring and conservative they were since copying the 'capitalist fashion' of the West was considered an ideological error."³⁶ The way in which clothing and dress "turned gray" is obvious in the cinema news reports or films made at the time.

The direction which clothing trends took unequivocally demonstrated the emergence of a contrived propaganda campaign declaring a state of emancipation. Underlying this campaign was the aim of achieving certain economic and political goals via the rapid inclusion of women in the workplace.³⁷ This goal was stressed by a 1954 report by the Democratic Union of Hungarian Women:

The most telling proof of female equality is the fact that female factory workers stand shoulder to shoulder with men in the battle to attain the [state economic] plans. As if it were our own personal victory, we are all pleased that one-fourth of our Stakhanovites are women. We are proud of the two-time Stakhanovite, Mrs. Sándor Tóth, the shoe stitcher at the Fashion Shoe Factory who was awarded the Work Order of Honor for continuously fulfilling her goal by 180 to 200 percent. The same is true of Mrs. Gyula Spelleg, the Canned Foods Manufactory's Stakhanovite worker whose average achievement is 160 percent.³⁸

³⁵ *Asszonyok*, March 1949, 4.

³⁶ Katalin F. Dózsa, "Jó reggelt Búbánat! (Françoise Sagan) – Állami Áruház (Barabás Tibor, Darvas Szilárd, Gádor Béla, Kerekes János)," in *Párizs és Budapest a divat tükrében 1750–2003*, ed. Katalin F. Dózsa (Budapest: Budapest Történelmi Múzeum, 2003), 110.

³⁷ For further background history regarding this question, see Mária Schadt, "*Feltörekvő dolgozó nő*": *Nők az ötvenes években* (Pécs: Pro Pannónia, 2003); Gyöngyi Gyarmati, "Nők, játékfilmek hatalom," in *Az 1950-es évek Magyarországa játékfilmekben*, ed. József Vonyó et al. (Pécs: Asoka Bt., 2004), 41–68.

³⁸ *Az MNDSZ elnökének beszámolója* (Budapest: MNDSZ, 1954), 15. The Soviet term

Within this political context, “only” those women who were employed (preferably in factories, mines, or manufactories, or as workers or tractor drivers on collective farms) counted as productive members of society. This image was quite the opposite of the still widely accepted, family-centered role women had traditionally maintained, along with the household tasks and accompanying values this implied. As a household advice booklet published after the war expressed it, “Can there be any more exalted duty for a woman than to ensure her husband’s well-being, peace, and ordered lifestyle and to raise children?”³⁹ At the time, only one answer was conceivable to this question, particularly among the middle-class. Among urban working-class families, however, the model of a family supported by a double paycheck was generally accepted more quickly due to the necessities brought about by survival; the same process occurred much more gradually and with far greater difficulty in white-collar families. In villages agricultural labor’s cyclical nature had already laid out an established order in which “masculine-dominated custom” obstructed this type of change. It must also be mentioned that peasant families had already evolved a system regarding the division of labor that rather finely coordinated tasks in a way that was not only compulsory but was also firmly based on the physical abilities of each gender.⁴⁰

The enforced emancipation of women spread to virtually every aspect of life in Hungary. The press devoted a remarkable amount of attention and space to the topic itself: “The female ideal has fortunately changed. It is no longer mandatory to float about the world as slender as a reed, as ephemeral as a will-o’-the-wisp. Modernism’s concave chest and serpentine posture is not liked by anyone these days. We are pleased to see buxom young wives leaning over baby carriages and well-built, ‘sturdy’ women operating building cranes: it is no longer a problem for the SZIT girl to be bursting with health.”⁴¹ Even as fashion shows became an increasingly rare event at the end

Stakhanovite referred to shock-workers who tried to follow the example of the Soviet miner Alexei Grigoryevich Stakhanov by overachieving their work norms and thus creating a movement of socialist work competition.

³⁹ Simon, *Házi mindentudó*, 74.

⁴⁰ For further details, see Fél and Hofer, *Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban*, 146–49.

⁴¹ *Nők Lapja*, no. 17 (1950), 9. The acronym SZIT refers to the Szakszervezeti Ifjómunkás és Tanoncmozgalom (The Union Movement of Young Workers and Apprentices).

of the 1940s and the 1950s, female workers were pointedly placed on the catwalk in place of professional models: "Instead of whittled down and dried up mannequin misses bred for this sole purpose, the dresses were worn by young girls, women, and working women with a healthy amount of flesh on their bones."⁴²

While fashion became progressively removed from public view, the news regarding international or national fashion events first became shorter, then much harder to find in the press. Despite this trend, most issues of *Nők Lapja* published during the 1950s dedicated the magazine's back cover to the latest fashion while additionally providing tips on what to wear or how to make clothes. Throughout the month of March 1950, this publication even offered ideas on dressing fashionably during the approaching spring season: "On the street a sprightly, light wool dress provides a wonderfully refreshing splash of color in the bright, spring sunshine. It is especially appropriate for a young woman to wear a dress in light red, blue, pink, or green in a hue that isn't overly bright or conspicuous, but more muted, like the kind of shade called 'pastel' . . . Gingham is highly fashionable, from tiny checks all the way to big, bold patterns."⁴³ References to the custom of dressing according to the time of day (morning/afternoon/evening dresses) sometimes appeared among the tips and advice provided for readers, but it was far more common for this section to contain dress patterns for making clothes at home or suggestions on how to alter garments.

An enthusiastic recommendation published in January 1950 informed readers of the fact that flannel was the latest fashion: "[T]he shop windows are just jammed pack with it. How very tasteful, how very refined all the plaid flannel blouses are! A soft, warm, youthful material that veritably embodies our growing standard of living—not to mention that one meter is only 15.70 forints."⁴⁴ Compared to the average wage earned by physical laborers (500 to 600 forints) this price was far from cheap, particularly given the fact that buying enough fabric for one blouse cost 40 forints. In the double 1950/1951 issue of the new fashion magazine *Ez a divat*, the editor of the column "Fashion News" felt that simplicity represented the most current trend in fashion and should therefore define which material was selected, the

⁴² F. Dózsa, "Magyar divattörténet, 1945–1959," 22.

⁴³ *Nők Lapja*, no. 10 (1950), 8.

⁴⁴ *Nők Lapja*, no. 1 (1950), 9.

cut and colors used in the garment, and whatever embellishments were to be added. This fact was also demonstrated by the biggest fashion hit of that winter, the jumper dress. A style that allowed for some variability, the jumper dress could be adapted to older pieces, yet always looked brand-new when paired with a blouse or pull-over.⁴⁵ In 1951, articles discussing fashion or apparel were quite rare in *Nők Lapja* while photos exclusively pictured women (or men in a few rare instances) clothed in work clothes and heroically fighting on the “work front” as Stakhanovites.

During the 1950s in Hungary, the enforced way in which dress was uniformized represented a demonstration of how much society had changed. It became a political and ideological requirement for the outer appearance of individuals to express a break with the old, bourgeois world. It was believed that—once significant social groups had adopted the exemplified, puritan dress of the “worker”—social equality would naturally follow since “everyone” was wearing overalls, work clothes, loden coats, or simple garments made of cotton. As masses of people dressed nearly the same way, it became virtually impossible to categorize anyone based simply on his or her appearance; clothing, it seemed, no longer acted as a signifier of social position. This change represented an enormous split from the interwar period and its customs. Oddly enough, the drive toward uniformization also opposed the dress norms held by various groups among the working class: according to Katalin F. Dózsa’s detailed analysis, during the 1940s many of the garments worn by better-paid, skilled workers were used to emphasize the wearer’s elite position within his or her own social class.⁴⁶ Many, for example, felt that exchanging their favorite fedora and simple suit for a cloth cap and work coveralls was a loss in prestige, especially when individuals were urged to wear the latter in public as well as at the workplace. Those who strove to remain well-dressed during the 1950s primarily relied on clothing reserves accumulated before the war; more importantly, by doing so their behavior did not conform to the political system’s expectations.

⁴⁵ *Ez a Divat*, Winter 1950/51, 2.

⁴⁶ F. Dózsa, *Letűnt idők, eltűnt divatok, 1867–1945*, 321. In the case of elite, highly skilled workers, “their outdoor clothing was a black suit with a white shirt, a starched collar, tie, watch chain, and either a bowler hat or a black fedora. Footwear was a pair of high, laced shoes.” Outerwear for semi-skilled workers was “a black suit that resembled the kind worn by peasant men, a white shirt with a soft collar, no tie, and a fedora.”

As egalitarianism was increasingly taken to the extreme, by 1950 the system was no longer satisfied with merely judging “self-serving fads,” but also condemned patent leather shoes, hats, and ties as “unacceptable exhibitions of bourgeois habits.” Regarding women’s apparel, ruffles, a slightly plunging neckline, genuine or costume jewelry, lipstick, makeup, and nail polish were also rejected. In other words, all outer elements that opposed the norms upheld by the period’s enforced sense of egalitarianism or emphasized individuality as opposed to a sense of communality were looked at with deep suspicion. This view therefore explains why the majority of women in leadership roles usually wore a white blouse under a simple, brown, skirt suit that was tailored in the English style. Men usually attended to their “highly responsible” leadership tasks in dark gray or black suits that were made of rather low-quality material. For this class of society, the need to expand their wardrobes to accommodate sudden rises in the political echelon frequently led to difficulties

Throughout this period, the apparel worn by working women and men represented the ideal. When choosing garments, price and availability became the most important aspects. Clothing choices were much narrower at the beginning of the 1950s: for urban men, a gray or dark green loden coat and a cloth cap or beret became typical. Most women wore shirtwaist dresses, skirts, and plaid flannel blouses. The appearance of the *jampec* style, consisting of a colored shirt, patterned necktie, drainpipe trousers, thick-soled shoes, and narrow skirts, aimed to break the overwhelming monotony imposed by the “enforced puritanism” of coveralls and loden coats but was not entirely successful in reaching this goal.⁴⁷ Particularly during the first half of the 1950s, the *jampec* subculture was an instinctive rejection of the era’s politics. Sándor Horváth summarized the characteristics of this subculture in his historical analysis of everyday life in Sztálinváros:

Based on numerous descriptions it can be said that the “*jampec*” were primarily characterized by their appearance. *Jampec* wore black or colored shirts, patterned ties or red, polka-dotted neck kerchiefs, baggy suit jackets with shoulders that sloped, drainpipe trousers, striped socks, rubber-soled colored shoes, and cowboy hats. *Jampec* girls wore narrow skirts and blocky, square-

⁴⁷ *Jampec* were youngsters who tried to follow the newest (Western) fashion—similarly to the *stilyagi* in the Soviet Union or the Teddy Boys subculture in the United Kingdom—by dressing in a way that would distinguish them from the rest of society.

shaped coats with their hair either in a ponytail or in a “permanent.” Later they were the first to wear the garment that erased all differences between gender and class: jeans. Donning just one of these pieces of clothing could automatically turn someone into a follower of the *jampec* rage: wearing the full range of possible items in the complete outfit was not necessary. . . . For those young people who managed to obtain this type of apparel on the black market, *jampec* clothes represented urbanity, the experience of belonging to a certain group, and the feeling that they were following western values. . . . By changing their hair and dress, anyone who saw them walking down the street knew that this particular group of young people was on its way to have fun, meaning that they had removed themselves from the workplace and were therefore not under Party supervision.⁴⁸

The rules regarding etiquette and morality were reinforced via fashion and clothing during this period. These were also frequently covered in the contemporary press: “In a heatwave, we can still remain well-dressed even if only wearing one layer, provided that our light summer dress remains within the boundaries of good taste and we don’t use the hot weather as an excuse to permit ourselves to wear necklines that drop to the waist and offend the eye.”⁴⁹ As to the question of whether “a working woman should paint her face and smoke,” the answer was that matters such as these are private until they overstep the boundaries dictated by common taste.⁵⁰ Skirt length, women sporting trousers, and the *jampec* style were issues that frequently sparked sharp debates: “When working in winter trousers are acceptable. Whether they should be worn in summer is a matter of taste and fashion. One thing is for certain: appearing in trousers at the theatre or places of entertainment is ridiculous and tawdry.”⁵¹ A review of what clothing styles were deemed acceptable at the time therefore demonstrates that the essentially conservative views promoted by journalists attempting to influence public opinion was not far from the rather prudish behavior norms that the contemporary state socialist system was trying to enforce throughout Hungarian society.

⁴⁸ Sándor Horváth, “A városi lakosság életformája az ötvenes években: A mindennapok története Sztálinvárosban” (PhD diss., Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, 2002), 144. For a more recent version, see Sándor Horváth, *Stalinism Reloaded: Everyday Life in Stalin-City, Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 94.

⁴⁹ *Nők Lapja*, no. 26 (1950), 7.

⁵⁰ *Nők Lapja*, no. 1 (1952), 9.

⁵¹ *Nők Lapja*, no. 5 (1955), 8.

Despite the dramatic way in which clothing was simplified, fashion shows continued to be held throughout the 1950s; after all, the fashion industry's products still had to be sold.

The Company of Garment Manufactory Design is showing working women its fashion collections at industrial works and centers. Other than Budapest's factories, fashion shows were recently organized in the cities of Dorog, Sztálinváros, Miskolc, Ózd, Diósgyőr, Pápa, Győr, and Pécs.... The Company of Garment Manufactory Design is holding a survey of public opinion after the fashion shows for the purpose of attaining indispensable criticism. Based on this, its mistakes can be corrected and work can continue unabated as the Company maintains its close connection to the masses of working women whom it not only dresses, but also instructs in purposeful, tasteful clothing habits.⁵²

As amusing as it may seem, portraits of Rákosi, Lenin, and Stalin frequently hung above the catwalk. For those who decided to purchase the items featured in the fashion show, the lack of selection and poor quality was far more disturbing. Given the difficulty in procuring apparel items, the fact that there was simply not anything to buy was a more serious issue. In reality, the relative uniformization of clothing that Hungarian society experienced during the 1950s was only partially due to political will and ideological expectations: the lack of goods, low incomes, and the resulting drastic decrease in consumption played just as much of a role.⁵³

In contrast to urban dressing habits, most Hungarian villages saw fewer changes in the first half of the 1950s. Clothing and behavioral norms had not yet begun to undergo any kind of noticeable change in the nation's rural regions, even if certain garments were exchanged for others, such as knitted vests or cardigans. Just as knitted apparel appeared with greater frequency in traditional Hungarian dress, gray trench coats—available in sizes for children as well as adults—were a recent addition to rural wardrobes.⁵⁴ More and more people also

⁵² *Ez a Divat*, Winter 1952, 8.

⁵³ Barely amounting to two-thirds of the real income earned per person in 1949, the income earned by peasant farmers underwent in 1952 a drastic deterioration: "The real income for workers and employees gradually fell in 1952 and was 82 percent of that earned in 1949." See Zsuzsa Ferge, *Fejezetek a magyar szegénypolitika történetéből* (Budapest: Magvető, 1986), 48–49.

⁵⁴ Outside of Transylvania, knitting was not commonly done in Hungarian peasant communities and knitted garments therefore did not appear in traditional Hungarian

worked in gumboots instead of traditional leather boots. In contrast to urban women, the issue of women wearing trousers hardly surfaced in the more isolated surroundings of a rural community, where breaking customs or village norms generated automatic gossip and opprobrium.

As roughly one-quarter of a million active laborers abandoned agriculture and the countryside for employment in the cities, the compulsory mobilization of Hungary's peasant class that occurred between 1948 and 1955 understandably added further impetus to the modernization of rural dress. Those who took up steady labor at an urban or industrial workplace or belonged to the younger generation consequently exchanged their traditional garments for the type of apparel worn by everyone else. Despite this, individuals continued to cling to cultural traditions and respect local customs, a circumstance that explains why rural communities were never standardized to the extent that cities were, even though village dwellers possessed a heightened interest toward urban dress. The highly ineffective methods used to disseminate propaganda are partly responsible for the fact that socialist campaigns lambasting the peasant class for its backwardness hardly reached Hungary's villages. The political enmity directed toward village life and peasant farmers, however, did much to embitter daily life in rural communities.

The lack of goods also made it much harder to maintain or replace items of traditional clothing. In October 1953, a report regarding the extent to which rural populations had access to provisions concluded that the greatest shortages were found in the supply of clothing. The situation was further worsened by the fact that rural consumers displayed a growing demand for virtually every type of garment. In village agricultural-collective shops, ready-made clothes for both men and women, shoes, undergarments, cotton, and wool dress goods were scarce.⁵⁵ Even in the mid-fifties, peasant communities continued to strive toward self-sufficiency and were characteristically reluctant to make new purchases of any sort. To be more specific, rural consumers either only bought the products that they could not make themselves or restricted purchases to the most essential items because farming

dress until roughly the 1940s. When knitted vests, socks, etc., were included, they were made to match the style, color, and shape of the garment they had replaced.

⁵⁵ "Jelentés a földműves-szövetkezetek működési területén a falusi lakosság ellátási helyzetéről," Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-14. 1. d., October 12–19, 1953.

expenditures took precedence over every other type of cost. The shortages and lack of supply that typified this era in Hungarian history only deepened this traditional attitude and survival mechanism.

As 1956 turned to 1957, the ideological constraints binding fashion loosened somewhat as puritanism gradually lost its position among the compulsory ideals determining apparel at the time.⁵⁶ The issues of femininity and expressions of individuality subsequently began to fade from political discourse. The following sentiments were stressed in the introduction to a new column entitled "Lessons in What to Wear" that regularly appeared in *Nők Lapja* as of January 1957: "[W]e don't dress for our female colleagues or girlfriends, but most definitely for ourselves and especially for men. We dress for our own selves so we can catch a joyful glimpse of ourselves in the mirror before heading off each morning to tend to our daily tasks. We dress for men so it will be far easier to find and keep that one, Mr. Wonderful. . . . We don't chase after the latest, odd fads or extravagances at any price, nor do we abandon femininity for the sake of fashion. Let's all dress like women!"⁵⁷ Compared to the beginning of the decade, women's magazines showed that the attitude toward following fashion had undergone a complete change as advice regarding even the following issue was aired in print:

To what extent should we remain undressed when dressed, you ask? Those who are not so very young will recall a certain trend that took over Europe a few years ago. Women wore two-piece summer dresses with a top that barely reached to below the breasts, revealing a handbreadth of bare skin above the skirt. We can ease the palpitating hearts of those in shock: this trend hardly found any followers here in Budapest. We can remain confident that Budapest's taste and sense of restraint shall hold as firm as any other ancient virtue. After all, here in Hungary it truly is rare for a very young girl or older woman to appear in public in a low-cut dress. And if they should: doing so is utterly tasteless in the case of adolescents while the sight of décolletage in older women can cause exactly the opposite reaction from what they intended.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Following the defeat of the 1956 Revolution, the government headed by János Kádár consolidated its power by resorting to dictatorial methods and widespread reprisals. Despite this, a few small compromises were made in areas related to daily life. Wages were raised and issues that were less important from an ideological standpoint—such as dress and fashion—were not handled the same way as they had been before the revolution.

⁵⁷ *Nők Lapja*, no. 1 (1957), 7.

⁵⁸ *Nők Lapja*, no. 15 (1957), 9.

As a sign of how much the attitudes connected to dress had changed, in 1957 women's magazines and fashion publications raced to report on the latest trends in spring fashions. According to these sources, Hungary's fashion "industrial units" were "humming with activity" and would therefore be sure to satisfy the choicest demands regarding spring styles. The number of copies of the magazine *Ez a Divat* was raised to twice what its previous print run had been; as of February 1957, 100,000 copies were being published. At the beginning of 1957 the weekly paper published by the newly organized Communist Youth Union of Hungary, *Magyar Ifjúság* (Hungarian Youth), also devoted a column to fashion. Other than providing useful tips on—to mention just one example—how to turn a loden coat into a fashionable garment,⁵⁹ readers could regularly follow events in the fashion world on both the national and international level.

Beginning in the summer of 1956, detailed coverage was once again made of London and Paris fashion shows, including descriptions of Christian Dior's latest collection and its public reception.⁶⁰ In August 1958, Klára Rotschild reported on her two-week field tour of Paris in *Ez a Divat*. Based on her observations, Hungarian women had nothing to be embarrassed about since "they can hold their own in any international contest of beauty or elegance."⁶¹

The fact that the National Counsel of Hungarian Women organized a discussion about fashion, modern and tasteful apparel, "the models from large Parisian fashion houses," and the burning question of whether Paris had prettier women than Budapest in September 1957 is a further indication that the winds of change were blowing. The participants eventually solved the final, knotty issue by concluding that Parisian women are not only more careful of their figures, they are also much stricter in matters of taste: "Of course women here

⁵⁹ "Even a loden coat worn for years, an old-fashioned skirt suit, or ready-made clothes that you've grown bored of are worth altering. The old loden coat can be shortened while the material that was cut off can be turned into pockets and cuffs to replace those that were worn through." *Magyar Ifjúság*, no. 11 (1957), 6.

⁶⁰ See among others: Stefi Sándor, "Párizsi divatbeszámoló," *Ez a Divat*, Summer 1956, 12–13; Péterné Nagy, "Londoni divatlevél," *Ez a Divat*, no. 4 (1956), 13. It must be mentioned that in the spring of 1957 both *Nők Lapja* and *Ez a Divat* underwent significant changes regarding form and content. Not only did fashion photos replace the drawings and sketches that had previously characterized these publications, but socialist production reports and emancipation propaganda were gradually phased out in favor of articles focused on socializing.

⁶¹ Klára Rotschild, "Ez Párizs," *Ez a Divat*, August 1957, 4–5.

would have a much easier time of it if ready-made models weren't lagging two to three years behind fashion and if those responsible for industry and trade would be far more daring in choosing from designers' modern and good ideas."⁶² Those who managed to gain access to aid shipments sent to Hungary during the 1956 Revolution or had relatives living abroad managed to follow the latest trends more easily.

In contrast to the practice of earlier years, the custom of holding fashion shows in factories became rarer toward the second half of the 1950s; instead, these events were staged in the town's most representative building. In 1958, for example, when the latest designs in fashion were shown in Sztálinváros, the runway was placed in the Arany Csillag (The Golden Star), the most elegant hotel in town, rather than at the Ironworks. According to the local report, "each and every garment was the absolute standard of classic elegance. The models emerged to soft, sweet strains of melody played by the Arany Csillag's orchestra before taking their places at the podium, all while the audience gazed upon them with great interest. The most modern of cocktail dresses clicked past in stiletto heels, followed by elegant skirt suits in wool and export-quality, dark gray double-breasted suits. The audience burst into rhythmic, enthusiastic clapping when it saw that tuxedos made of pure wool—perfect for balls, the theater, or weddings—had come back in fashion."⁶³ Since events of this type were no longer held at workplaces, instead of the "working women" who attended fashion shows in the early 1950s, this time members of the local elite sat in the audience and enjoyed the spectacle of the latest trends.

Although the political and ideological views attached to attire gradually faded into the background, they still cropped up from time to time in connection to weekday and formal apparel during the 1960s. Similarly, advertisements and promotions appeared with increasing regularity.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, various publications followed the international fashion trends set by famous designers (Givenchy, Nina

⁶² *Nők Lapja*, no. 35 (1957), 5.

⁶³ *Sztálinvárosi Hírlap*, March 4, 1958, 3. Quoted in Sándor Horváth, *A kapu és a határ: Mindennapi Sztálinváros* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 2004).

⁶⁴ Other than apparel and cosmetics, the 1962 issue of *Pesti Divat* (Budapest Fashion) contained advertisements popularizing durable consumer goods, such as Lehel-brand refrigerators and floor-polishing machines.

Ricci) in reports that described the latest models while usually including photo illustrations.

Beginning in the 1960s, opponents of fashion trends did not primarily originate from political circles, but rather spoke out from society's more conservatively-minded groups. It must be mentioned, however, that their opinions were sometimes colored by political and ideological overtones as they stepped forward in defense of socialist values in the face of the young generation's "scandalous" clothes and hairstyles: "We must convince . . . young people to dress and choose their garments in an appropriate manner and to keep the size of their clothes in proportion so they can avoid reminding us of a bunch of hooligans. This time and age accepts what young people are wearing today—just think of their dances and hairstyles. If they continue to go down this path, what will we do when we can no longer tell boys from girls?"⁶⁵

Opinions regarding the undesirable behavior and appearance of Hungary's youth were naturally aired in the daily and weekly press of the time as well as in publications intended for young readers. Critics emphasized that opposing tradition, social custom, and "the norms of the socialist community" was also a sign of moral decay: "There are *jampec* whose dress and behavior is very conspicuous as they stroll around in trousers that are far too tight and skirts that are far too close-fitting. They want to draw attention to themselves at all costs."⁶⁶ There were some, however, who were more patient regarding how Hungary's youth were using their outer appearance to stand out from everyone else: "Young people who dress in the *jampec*, hooligan style haven't committed the type of crime that warrants the police's attention. The fact that we leave the police to deal with them is not right; they haven't stolen anything and do not break any important laws. Since they say they want to work, let's give them the chance to work. A better option would be for the KISZ Committee to invite these young people to a pinpong [sic] or any other type of match or hold a dance and devote some attention to them."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ "Homokmégy községi tanács végrehajtó bizottsági ülésének jegyzőkönyve," Homokmégy községi iratár, November 13, 1963. Published in Tibor Valuch, *Rekviem a parasztságért* (Debrecen: KLTE, 1988), 126.

⁶⁶ Margit Csákváry, "Milyen a mai lány?" in *Lányok évkönyve, 1964* (Budapest: Móra Kiadó, 1963).

⁶⁷ "Nyíregyháza Városi Tanács Végrehajtó Bizottságának ülése: Jelentés a nők és az ifjúság helyzetéről," MNL SzSzBML, XXIII. 502, August 2, 1960. The acronym KISZ refers to the Kommunista Ifjúsági Szervezet (Young Communist League).

In reality, however, these issues were usually resolved according to far more brutal methods. In contrast to the approach suggested by the article quoted above, it was not uncommon for police officers to “supervise” haircuts for young men whose hair was long. Beginning in the mid-sixties, the new fashions and dressing habits that went hand-in-hand with the Beat movement and rock n’ roll (long hair for men, jeans, and the hippie look) first caused political consternation and then led to bitter intergenerational conflicts.

In the middle of the 1960s, Hungary’s clothing industry and fashion institutions were already registering the consummation of fashion’s influence on society and the increased expansion of the means used to relay and follow the latest trends. This change in attitude was summarized in a professional document issued in 1965 as a description of the social background that underpins the role played by attire: “In issues of dress, conforming to fashion has become the standard; changes in the circumstances surrounding property, class, and income have steadily eroded the class distinctions represented by dress in previous times. The opportunity to purchase as many kinds of apparel as possible has also created a demand for more fashionable styles. . . . The difference between what members of the professional class vs. the working class wear has become increasingly blurred as differences in income have also faded.”⁶⁸

This period also entailed the emergence of a new type of behavior as the selection found in stores not only expanded, but also strove to meet the growing expectations raised by their consumers. In direct contrast to the 1950s, being able to dress well was a fundamental element of this new attitude. Naturally, the fact that the means used to relay fashion trends were more developed also contributed to this changed perspective. In addition to the definitive centers of fashion such as Paris or London, various publications regularly featured fashion trends from Eastern European countries. In January 1969, for example, the ministry of internal trade’s magazine *Kirakat* (Showcase) reported on the fact that

a monumental fashion show organized jointly by the GUM department store in Moscow, the “May 1,” and the Debrecen Garment Manufactory was held in Budapest. Soviet designs have taken their rightful place in world fashion.

⁶⁸ Jenő Markovits, *A divat és meghatározó tényezői* (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet, 1965).

The fashion show organized in Budapest provided a faithful reflection of Soviet designers' ingenuity, artistic creativity, and the high level of craftsmanship used to make their garments. Soviet models—each one lovelier than the next—walked one resplendent design after the other down the runway. Not only the garments' form and cut, but also their material created quite a splash, thereby reaping a roaring success in Hungary's capital.⁶⁹

Given what we know about the circumstances of the time, it can be safely judged that the members of Hungary's fashion-oriented public were far more interested in trends from Paris or Vienna and did not direct much attention to Moscow, in spite of what the article quoted above states.

Together with a growing sense of freedom in the area of fashion and dress, the image of the ideal woman also underwent a few slight changes in the state propaganda disseminated throughout the 1960s.⁷⁰ Women were urged to participate actively at workplaces and jobs—an element that naturally indicated their ability to realize their potential—in a somewhat overly insistent political and ideological campaign that stressed women's equal rights. Contrary to earlier views, slightly more attention was devoted to presenting women's roles in the family and the household. Lofty writings exemplifying "the double shift" women do as they fulfill roles both at work and at home consequently appeared in the press and other contemporary publications, a change from previous opinions that merely pictured women at the workplace. According to this view, the ideal woman could hold her place at work while applying the methodical system learned there to running a household, raising children, taking care of her husband, protecting her family, preserving the calm of her home, and refraining from the kind of "frivolous pursuits" that opposed socialist morals. Women could thus render themselves useful members of a Hungarian society intent on "building socialism."

Under influences such as these, it comes as no surprise that women began to view themselves quite differently. As far as outer appearance was concerned, in the second half of the 1960s age became indistinct: "More and more women want to stay young as long as possible regarding

⁶⁹ *Kirakat*, no. 1 (1969), 4–5.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of the image of women and how the lives of working-class women were interpreted at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s in Hungary, see Eszter Zsófia Tóth, *Kádár leányai: Nők a szocialista időszakban* (Budapest: Nyitott Könyvműhely, 2010).

their apparel. . . . These days nobody is surprised that a fifty-year-old woman takes care of her skin or dyes her hair."⁷¹ Changes such as these naturally did not happen from one day to the next: at the time it was still not widely accepted for a woman over the age of forty to wear bright colors. In a decade marked by the appearance of various fashion phenomena (such as the mini, the midi, the maxi, or jeans) the attitudes, norms, and customs connected to attire underwent significant change. Eventually, the garments that had once shocked society by waving the battle flag of rebellion and anti-tradition became so widespread that they lost their original content.

Hemlines rose far higher in the second half of the 1960s; barely grazing mid-thigh, mini-skirts became all the rage during this period and earned as many followers as they did detractors. According to a contemporary book on modern fashion, "This mini fad has even changed how women move. There is nothing feminine about it at all: fashion photos showed a masculine pose with thighs spread daringly wide. Some women thought a mini would change them back into teenagers just like that. . . . The mini-skirt has proven to be yet another exaggeration, from the point of view of both fashion and health."⁷²

Bell bottoms appeared at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. In contrast to earlier fashions, this type of trouser increasingly widened from the hip down and was paired with heavy-soled shoes by members of both sexes. In Hungary, this period additionally marks the time when jeans became the rage.⁷³ Not surprisingly given



Figure 51. Girls in miniskirts on Rákóczi Street in Budapest, 1971 (Fortepan, 552)

⁷¹ Katalin Osvát, "Mi a baj a divattal?" *Nők Lapja*, no. 5 (1962), 18.

⁷² Zsuzsa Uresch, *Korszerű divat* (Budapest: MNOT-Kossuth, 1978), 17.

⁷³ Ferenc Hammer, "...nem kellett élt vasalni a farmerbe": *Mindennapi élet a szocializmusban; Tanulmányok* (Budapest: Néprajzi Múzeum, 2013).

the extreme difficulty required in obtaining a pair of jeans—in the beginning they could only be found on the black market or abroad—this particular garment remained a sign of prestige for a long time, even though it was picked up by young rural people later and somewhat more slowly than was typical of young urban generations. Tailored to be more form-fitting, shirts, blouses, and jackets were made of increasingly colorful materials. Femininity, a sense of chicness, or—in the case of men—an elegant appearance at formal occasions, the general desire to be well-dressed even on weekdays, and the expression of enjoying leisure time or athletics spread with relative speed. After all, as a contemporary study on lifestyle noted,

attire is the most visible, outer sign of keeping up with the latest trend, the standard of living, and modernity. Adjusting to this norm plays an enormous role everywhere where this level is expected or needs to be proven. . . . Today it essentially represents a norm of urbanization; cities set the pace and style while village dwellers can then use this to show that they aren't so different from urbanites since a city's fashion styles are still easier to attain than its streets, water system, or public transportation. . . . As regards those living in small towns or villages, fashion is the one area in which they are the least backward compared to Budapest.⁷⁴

Together with the radical transformation of women's clothing, the unusual emphasis placed on femininity eventually won acceptance.

For young people of marriageable age, the custom of collecting a trousseau was no longer a general expectation among every social group. Despite this, parents generally encouraged young people (especially girls) to spend part of their earnings on developing their wardrobes. The following items were viewed as the most essential part of a woman's trousseau: three sets of bedsheets, one or two tablecloths, half a dozen dishcloths and towels, two or three nightgowns and pajamas, three to four camisoles, six to eight pairs of women's trousers, four to five pairs of stockings and socks, two to three shirt-waist or cotton dresses, five to six blouses, three to four skirts, one winter and one spring coat, and two to three pairs of shoes. In the case of young men, three to four changes of outerwear (including a shirt, trousers, and a jacket or sweater), a winter and a spring coat, one to two pairs of shoes, and a week's worth of undergarments (underwear, undershirt, socks) was considered as the minimum requirement for setting up life as a married man.

⁷⁴ Losonczi, *Az életmód az időben*, 486.

At the end of the 1950s, skirt suits and the less formal blazer became definitive additions to women's wardrobes while hemlines that only reached to the knees—or maybe even slightly above—were no longer greeted with raised eyebrows. Already characteristic of menswear, suits became even more popular, together with more colorful neckties, short-brimmed hats, and checked overcoats. According to one of the era's most popular publications at the end of the 1950s, "knowing how to dress is an art . . . wearing just the right kind of garment is no easy task since so very few women possess a sense of self-criticism. Dress requires a sense of flair, but this is something that can be learned. The ones who make the biggest wardrobe mistakes are the women who ignore the fact that they are too heavy or too bony and want to look younger at any cost, or follow whatever fad, craze, or rage fashion has come up with, no matter that it doesn't suit them in the least."⁷⁵

A household advice book published in 1961 clearly breaks away from the norms related to the movement in "uniformization" and "enforced puritanism" that was so typical of the previous decade by emphasizing that choosing the right attire for either inside or outside of the home is equally important for both men and women. The most essential detail to remember was that the garments be comfortable, neat, fashionable, tasteful, and appropriate for the given occasion. "In the past only a few hundred thousand women and girls had to worry about what to wear for certain occasions: today this is a question occupying millions of women. If we have the money and the opportunity to go out and have fun, then it is only right that we choose our outfit based on the occasion and form of entertainment."⁷⁶ In a return to the norms that had once typified the thirties and forties, a definite difference was made between morning, afternoon, and evening apparel.

At work and at home the tried and true solution is a skirt and blouse or a skirt and sweater. . . . On the way to work in spring or autumn, the two seasons that make up most of the year, a skirt suit or other two-piece outfit is the most appropriate choice. . . . For those who frequently go out for entertainment in the evenings, purchasing an evening gown or having one made is recommended. Dark blue or black is always elegant, no matter what age or

⁷⁵ Ilona Faragó, *A főzőkanáltól az estélyi ruháig* (Budapest: Móra Kiadó, 1958), 41.

⁷⁶ Mária Pataki, Zsuzsa Kelemen, and Anna Molnár, *Korszerű háztartás, kellemes otthon* (Budapest: Minerva, 1961), 68–69.

size the wearer may be; nor does it turn so quickly into “last year’s look” the way other dresses do, even if otherwise very lovely. For years now, a skirt suit or two-piece ensemble consisting of a skirt and a blazer has not been beaten when it comes to style.⁷⁷

The same household advice book also insisted that any type of simple and comfortable garment may be worn at home—such as a short or long housecoat, with an apron added to it for daytime wear—as long as any impression of slovenliness was avoided. A neat and smart outfit was expected at home, too, and not just on the part of the housewife: every member of the family was urged to tend to his or her appearance. “Regarding the issue of what to wear at home, a few words must be said about sweat suits. While it’s true that sweat suits are not attractive, they are comfortable. Let’s not forget that they are easy to wash and keep clean, especially if we wear an apron over it, an option that not only makes it look better, but also makes a woman look slimmer. While a sweat suit is advisable when doing housework, cleaning, sweeping the yard, or performing any other type of outdoor work, it must still be removed the minute we are done!”⁷⁸ After the housework was done, women were advised to don a coat-like dressing gown that reached to the middle of the calves, a fashionable and comfortable garment that could be made of corduroy or some kind of fleecy material in winter and lighter cotton in summer. The important thing was for the garment to be in harmony with the place, occasion, and activity: “It is always much easier to dress up a simple outfit rather than tone down an overly fancy one.”⁷⁹

Other than maintaining all the written or unwritten rules regarding dress and behavior, various publications also emphasized the need to introduce members of the younger generation to the basics of how to dress tastefully while keeping an eye on both fashion and economics: “The young girl who learns to dress by supplementing the basic items of her wardrobe . . . will always stay within the boundaries of good taste. . . . Let’s begin by stating that girls should go to school in skirts, not in trousers. Trousers are only to be worn while on class trips or doing sports. Girls must only wear flat-soled boaters or loafers. . . . We want to raise our children to be tastefully dressed

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

women and not fashion dolls; other than the girls, it is also important to teach boys every aspect connected to developing a sense of good taste."⁸⁰ The general consensus was that younger generations undoubtedly had different taste, but this change tended to overstep the general social boundaries and expectations of the time.

During the first half of the 1960s, the issue of how to dress and what to wear was simpler for men as following fashion or the latest trends was less of an issue. In 1961, dark brown, dark gray, or various shades of these two colors were the most common for men's daytime wear. According to fashion experts, a well-tailored garment was slightly loose and single-breasted suit jackets were the most popular style. Donning a tie continued to be a sign of everyday elegance. Both the "drainpipe" style of trouser popularized by the *jampec* style and bell-bottoms were replaced by straight-legged trousers that had no cuff at the bottom. Overcoats decorated with fur became extremely popular for winter.⁸¹ "All over the world menswear is characterized by the athletic look. . . . Wide-shouldered coats emphasized even more by a pair of tight trousers, a sweater—a garment originally intended for sportswear—a tanned face and the lack of a hat all serve to present the image of being an athletic and strong man. . . . In this case, Hungarian fashion complies with the general European trends."⁸² It is impossible, however, to judge how common it was for men to follow fashion trends in Hungary.

An individual's closer or more distant social surrounding, the time of day, the "occasion," and fashion all influenced what was worn. According to a contemporary household advice book, which also gave tips on fashion,

Dressing for the occasion is a prerequisite to being well-dressed and displaying good taste. No matter how modest the financial means were when a garment was made, its wearer automatically appears well-dressed if his or her apparel suits the occasion. Anyone who puts on an afternoon dress to go to a place where simple street clothes are required or dons a morning dress for the theater has violated the rules governing good taste and dress. . . . We should only wear sportswear at sporting events: shorts are only for the pool or beach while trousers are for trips. Wearing trousers has become quite

⁸⁰ *Pesti Divat*, no. 1 (1962), 27–28.

⁸¹ *Divatújdonság*, 1963/1964 (Budapest: EKISZ Ruhaipari Szövetkezet, 1964).

⁸² Jenő Markovits, *A divat és meghatározó tényezői* (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet, 1963), 34.

widespread during the past few years. It is far more tasteful not to wear them all the time. The one exception is when it is -10°C outside: even the strictest of etiquette teachers cannot object to trousers in this case.⁸³

Weekday apparel for women continued to consist of shirtwaist or cotton dresses while men were advised to wear cotton suits with sweaters. Other than the workplace, this was deemed acceptable for going to the movies or "club afternoons at the collective farm or KISZ." Silk or velvet dresses were recommended for women when attending the theater or going to a dance; in winter, this could be accessorized with a stole that would additionally provide some protection against catching a cold. A dark suit was naturally the proper choice for men to wear at formal events. During the 1960s, boys between the ages of fourteen and eighteen also wore suits and ties to formal occasions as the habit of dressing boys in a suit jacket with short pants had basically gone out of style by then. Depending on the event, girls wore a white blouse with a black skirt, or a fancier dress made of nicer material. School uniforms were still quite commonly required, even if wearing them was increasingly only made compulsory at official school events or celebrations. For girls this uniform usually consisted of a sailor blouse and dark blue or black skirt that reached mid-calf while boys wore the same type of suits all in the same color.

The level and quality of clothing an individual had access to largely depended on the financial circumstances of the family. In households possessing an average income, a man's entire wardrobe consisted of forty to forty-five garments while women owned fifty to sixty pieces of clothing. In the estate inventory made in 1964 of a forty-two-year-old woman from Debrecen who made her living as a laboratory assistant, her personal clothing totaled sixty-six items valued at 3,095 forints.⁸⁴ The most important garments found in the wardrobe of this divorced (formerly married to a doctor) lady living in a one-room, full-comfort apartment included one winter coat, one mackintosh, three purses, two skirt suits, four blouses, two skirts, two summer dresses, two shirtwaist dresses, two nylon nightgowns, four pairs of women's trousers, five camisoles, four brassieres, four pairs of nylon stockings, two slippers, one bathing suit, one dressing gown, two pairs of flat-soled sandals, two pairs of shoes, one pair of slippers,

⁸³ György Almár, et al., *A dolgozó nő otthon* (Budapest: Táncsics Kiadó, 1963), 169–70.

⁸⁴ "Dr. D. Józsefné hagyatéka," MNL HBML, XXIII. 169., 141. doboz 10.003/1-D/1964.

one hat, one cap, and one wristwatch. This selection did not differ much from what any average, professional woman would have worn at this time in Debrecen. During the same period, the wardrobe of a retired man in his sixties (previously employed as a purchasing agent) contained 110 pieces of garments and was valued at 9,370 forints.⁸⁵ Among other items, his wardrobe consisted of five suits, twenty cotton and three nylon shirts, two knitted wool sweaters, a set of undergarments containing fourteen items, twelve pairs of socks, two winter and one spring coat, a mackintosh, an expensive sheepskin coat estimated to be worth 2,500 forints, one pair of deerskin gloves, two pairs of black wingtip shoes, one pair of sandals, and one pair of rubber-soled shoes. Compared to this estate, the wardrobe of a head accountant in his fifties who lived in Nyíregyháza was rather modest.⁸⁶ Based on personal estates and surveys made regarding clothing and household statistics, it appears the deficiencies that had characterized individuals' access to clothing throughout the previous decade had significantly lessened by the mid-sixties.

Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, the expectations and habits surrounding undergarments changed dramatically. In this case as well, the heightened demand for a higher level of fastidiousness or refinement predominated: "Due to the dynamic development seen in products such as brassieres, corsets, and garter belts during this period . . . the sale of goods that only satisfy a lower level of quality (garments made in satin or chiffon) has entirely stopped. Customers are seeking products that are trimmed in lace and made of stretchy material cut in a more refined manner that accentuates the natural line of the body. This increased demand for quality also manifests itself in the way in which consumers cling to certain familiar, tried-and-true brands, such as Triumph."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ "Sz. László hagyatéka," Nyíregyházi Városi Bíróság Közjegyzői Irattára, Kjó. 616/1970. sz.

⁸⁶ Assessed in 1970, this wardrobe was valued at 3,110 forints and consisted of six pairs of underwear, seven undershirts, four nightshirts, one pair of pajamas, three suits, one mackintosh, one spring coat, one winter coat, and five pairs of shoes. This amount either indicates a below-average amount of clothing or an imprecise inventory. "T. Ferenc hagyatéka," Kjó. I. 293/1970. sz. Nyíregyházi Városi Bíróság Közjegyzői irattára.

⁸⁷ "A ruházati kereskedelmi áruforgalom a III. ötéves terv időszakában," compiled by Lenke Tóth and Júlia Vajnai, Budapest, Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Főosztály iratai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-ttt. 45. d., June 1971.

Spending time poolside or at a beach steadily filled a larger role in free-time activities. For women, two-piece bikinis were sweeping one-piece swimsuits off the fashion scene. This era was also the beginning of the age of bathing suits made of synthetic material that dried quickly and kept its shape. For young men the triangular, lightweight cotton speedo (with a vertical strip down its middle) was popular.

The first decade of the Kádár era brought basic changes to the dressing habits of those living in Hungary's villages. This trend was particularly true in the years after collectivization came to an end, when traditional clothing was abandoned on a mass scale. The speed with which this process occurred was most likely largely due to the political campaigns waged against peasant farmers during the 1950s. Removing all outward indications of identifying with the traditional peasantry was one way for individuals from this class to defend themselves against this type of atmosphere. Similarly, the materials required for making traditional clothes had vanished from the market at a time when textiles were woven less and less often at home. The next wave of exchanging traditional attire for ready-made clothes emerged at the end of the 1950s and then sped up after collectivization wound to a close. Virtually without exception, members of generations twenty-five years and younger wore ready-made clothes while girls—in a break with the custom of never cutting their hair—had their hair styled according to the newest fads. The majority of middle-aged women and a smaller percentage of older women soon followed their example. The task of preserving either all or at least some of the garments that belonged to traditional Hungarian folk dress fell to older generations, particularly women who had been born during World War I. In the village of Patak in Nógrád County, men had switched to wearing ready-made clothes by the end of the 1950s, after spending a lengthy amount of time working in Budapest.

This same process came to an end among Patak's women at the end of the 1960s and in accordance with the generational differences discussed above.⁸⁸ It must be mentioned that this process took place quite differently in Hungary's various regions. Inhabitants of the village of Kecel in Bács-Kiskun County began abandoning traditional garb in larger numbers toward the end of the 1950s: "At first they

⁸⁸ Márta Kapros, "'Jönni-menni' viselet a Nógrád megyei Patak községben 1985-ben," part I, in *Nógrád Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve*, vol. 17 (Salgótarján: Nógrád Megyei Múzeumok Igazgatósága, 1991), 207–43.

only wore city clothes on weekdays and around the house; they still went to Sunday mass in traditional clothes. When they even went to church in tight clothes, that meant they had given up wearing traditional attire. . . . Women who have made this switch only dress their daughters in tight, city clothes; in some cases, they do not even bother to have a traditional set of clothes made for them."⁸⁹

Urban fashion trends generally appeared in rural women's wardrobes somewhat later. In the countryside, for example, women only began wearing trousers at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies. The number of women covering their heads with kerchiefs also decreased given that "the tendency clearly indicated that rural populations began integrating into urban populations to larger or lesser degrees beginning at the end of the 1950s. The first phase of this process occurred within the village itself, as members still wearing traditional garb began integrating among those who had already adopted urban attire. During the second phase the village began to integrate itself into [the rest of] Hungarian society."⁹⁰

Throughout its stages, this process of adaptation and unification was influenced by various phases occurring in actual fashion trends. Great divergences can be found in how different sexes or generations replaced their traditional clothing with more modern attire; each case reveals differences in the amount of time the process lasted, who initiated it, in what order the garments that the outer world had labeled as "peasant" were abandoned, and how urban styles were adopted in the dress culture of rural communities. Primarily speaking, the highly differentiated system of symbols that rural communities had used to signal age, sex, social status, and religious affiliation lost its previous significance. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to state that the relatively quick spread of urban apparel and dress norms was the outer embodiment of the (fictional) social mobility that the era propounded. Many must have felt that dressing like a city dweller would allow them to avoid or decrease the disadvantages of originating from the peasant class. After all, if a poor peasant farmer could dress his children the same way the wealthy peasant farmer did, the gap between the two social levels must have seemed smaller.

Traditional garb had disappeared almost completely from Hungary's villages by the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

⁸⁹ Gergely, "Változások Varsány népviseletében," 793–814.

⁹⁰ Szuhay, "Az életmód változása a magyarországi falvakban," 714.

At this time the main reasons for this phenomenon were seen to lie in changing lifestyles and the large-scale employment of women: "The disintegration of peasant culture was unstoppable by then. During the 1960s, not only did rural communities long to rid themselves of the outer trappings of their peasant identity, but masses of people were also choosing a life outside of peasant farming in droves, together with all the consequences social mobilization brought with it."⁹¹ Quite frequently, the ones who initiated the change from traditional to modern attire numbered among the poorest in the village, those who were forced to look for work outside of the village. In their new surroundings not only did they discover different habits, they also proved susceptible to the experience.

Adopting modern clothing often meant adopting a new posture, way of walking, and style of movement.⁹² In the village of Varsány, for example, it was already rare to see an eighth-grade girl wearing traditional clothing at the beginning of the 1950s. "During the 1960s the wave of switching to urban clothing grew in strength until anyone wearing traditional garb was seen as old-fashioned and uncultured. City clothes had become the fashion; many young women and girls did not choose to stop wearing traditional clothes out of their own sense of taste or style, but rather because they were afraid of being left behind by the rest. In other words, they wanted to conform to the newly emerging norms of their community."⁹³ Although the generational differences that had previously manifested themselves in certain garments or elements of apparel disappeared, these indications remained to a certain extent, even if only partially. Among younger people, adopting urban clothes happened at a faster pace due to issues related to comfort: to them, modern clothes seemed easier to put on and more practical to wear. As a part of their socialization, they frequently did not learn how to wear traditional clothes or the significance behind some of its aspects; even if they did learn this information, their decision was final once they adopted modern dress. As their wardrobes changed accordingly, off-the-rack products pushed traditional garments into obscurity. While middle-aged women were

⁹¹ Ágnes Fülemile, "Megfigyelések a paraszti női viselet változásához Magyarországon az I. világháborútól napjainkig," *Ethnographia*, nos. 1–2 (1991): 50–75.

⁹² See among others Fél and Hofer, *Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban*, 114; Edit Fél, "Újabb szempontok a viselet kutatásához," in *Régi falusi társadalmak*, ed. Tamás Hofer (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2001), 316–22.

⁹³ Gergely, "Változások Varsány népviseletében," 207.

still likely to don traditional clothing for holidays or special occasions, urban attire was their natural choice for weekdays. The majority of older women, however, only felt comfortable in traditional clothing. As far as they were concerned, what the outside world thought about them was essentially meaningless, together with the pejorative redefinition of the term "peasant" as an adjective designating backwardness.

When teamed with the aggressive reorganization of Hungary's agricultural system into the form of collective farming, the exaggerated emphasis placed on industrialization rendered it impossible for the more traditionally minded, mid-level peasant farmer class to survive. Once this social group lost its role as the "watchdog" of community traditions, rural communities lost their sense of cohesion. Splintered apart, communities found it impossible to judge which elements of the new products they were being flooded with should be built into their culture or simply rejected.⁹⁴ While abandoning traditional garb sped up the massive flux of people leaving the countryside, those who continued living in villages also felt that their isolation had been broken: after enduring many bitter attempts to restart their lives during the 1950s, many reached the conclusion that it would be better to raise their children for another kind of life not connected to farming. Education provided the most expedient means for accomplishing this aim. Rural teenagers who attended urban schools during the 1960s in turn returned home bearing new norms, types of behavior, and styles.

Out of those publications printed at the beginning of the 1960s, most of the authors who analyzed the issue of rural dress were of the opinion that museums were the proper place for traditional garments. Given the changes that lifestyles and working conditions had undergone, "all those skirts and additional accessories are not only far too heavy and uncomfortable, but also expensive." The task, in this case, was "to familiarize the rural girls and women who have abandoned traditional clothing with the benefits of wearing tasteful, modern apparel."⁹⁵ Some elements of the value system held by Hungary's historical peasant class changed far more slowly; in many places, for instance, parents remained in charge of deciding what their children would wear and which pieces of new clothing would be purchased in urban shops and stores even though modern habits were otherwise being followed on the surface.

⁹⁴ Judit Stefany, "Paraszti öltözködés," *História*, nos. 5–6 (1986): 32–34.

⁹⁵ Blanka Simon and Piroska Szemes, *Házi mindentudó* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1962), 34.

Instruments of mass communication also spurred changes in lifestyle. As advertisements became increasingly common beginning at the end of the 1960s, viewers were exposed to completely untraditional examples. While the latest fads could primarily be seen in the windows of shops located in nearby cities, newspapers and television also played a role in forming and developing the taste of rural women and girls. According to an ethnographic study analyzing the issue, "Starting in the 1970s and at a rate that naturally differed by region, intensified contact with the outside world and the new, urban standards transmitted via television progressively led to the adoption of modern consumer habits, a process in which the desire to leave the traditional, peasant lifestyle behind also gained expression."⁹⁶

In villages, young women who opted to switch to modern attire often only began following fashion a few years afterward. Nylon knit jerseys, for example, a fabric which inundated urban wardrobes during the 1960s, only became a favorite material for rural consumers two or three years later. Those, however, who increasingly distanced themselves from peasant traditions as they worked in urban centers were careful to follow the latest trend. As their ties to local customs steadily loosened, this social group grew more open to new fads and were frequently the first "trendsetters" who risked appearing in a more daring outfit, such as a mini or maxi dress, or in a garment with an unusual color scheme. These innovators often provoked their family and neighbors' scorn: ever ready to wag, "the village tongue" disparaged those who were the first to wear a miniskirt or bell bottoms, a piece described as "neither skirt nor trousers, here in the village clothes like that are just for mopping up the mud."⁹⁷

In some places the overly quick pace of change brought about a peculiar sort of "fashion overload" that resulted in the disharmonious combination of odd elements and strange colors. Many additionally found it difficult to get used to the different way of walking and moving that urban clothes demanded. Used to the straight posture and swaying walk necessary for wearing traditional clothing, middle-aged or older generations could not teach younger generations how

⁹⁶ Kata Jávör, "Mai falusi folyamatok: A paraszti kultúra felbomlásának dinamikája," in *Démonikus és szakrális világok határán: Mentalitástörténeti tanulmányok Pócs Éva 60. születésnapjára*, ed. Katalin Benedek and Eszter Csonka-Takács (Budapest: MTA Néprajzi Kutató Intézet, 1999), 589.

⁹⁷ Stefany, "Paraszti öltözködés," 34.



Figure 52. In the pull of tradition—women in headscarves at the Palóc Days in Hollókő, 1970 (photo by Irén Ács, MNM TF, 93.226)

to stand, sit, walk, or appear in their new clothing. Young people consequently gave the impression of being clumsy and ungainly even when they were wearing elegant and well-tailored garments.

Once traditional garb had been cast aside, the typical garments worn by village women consisted of sweatpants, a knit blouse, a sleeveless housecoat known as the *otthonka* (See Figure 53), and a pair of comfortable shoes. As far as underclothes were concerned, petticoats were exchanged for slips and undervests. In Patak the custom of wearing nylon or charmeuse slips and cotton undervests began to spread during the 1960s.⁹⁸ The cut and decoration were not important;

pale colors were preferred, such as white, pink, or light blue. The undervest was a sleeveless undershirt made of heavier material. “Nowadays [1972–1974] wearing underpants has become more common among younger women. Adult women usually choose heavier materials; charmeuse is preferred as they do not like the fact that nylon is ‘see-through.’ Girls and younger women have no aversion to different kinds of synthetic materials, nor to wearing nylon underpants under a circle skirt.”⁹⁹ The habit of sleeping in a nightgown also spread during this time. At the beginning of the 1970s, the trousseau for girls from Varsány generally contained five to seven nightgowns sewn according to the latest fashion. Fancier nightgowns, silk dressing

⁹⁸ Márta Kapros, “‘Jönni, menni’ viselet a Nógrád megyei Patak községben 1985-ben,” 212–13. See also part II in *Nógrád megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve*, vol. 19 (Salgótarján: NMMI, 1994), 113–27; and part III in *Nógrád megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve*, vol. 20 (Salgótarján: NMMI, 1995), 117–29.

⁹⁹ Gergely, “Változások Varsány népviseletében,” 216.

gowns or quilted bathrobes also made an appearance in the wardrobes of older women; these garments, however, were usually only donned when they had to stay in a hospital or were staying elsewhere overnight.

In many villages, women continued the habit of covering their heads, a custom that had nothing to do with the weather or whether their hair was in a traditional bun or had been styled by a hairdresser. Another garment that “crossed over” was the apron, in all of its various forms. Women’s pantyhose, however, was a new addition. Originally made of cotton and only replaced by light-colored nylon stockings in the second half of the 1960s, this innovation was added along with short- or long-sleeved knitted sweaters or cardigans. Shoes only began to replace boots at the start of the 1950s; by the end of the sixties, a canvas gym shoe known as the *dorcó* in some parts of Hungary became a popular element in everyday wear.¹⁰⁰ Even after exchanging their traditional garb for modern clothing, older women continued to prefer dark-toned attire.

Shabby, blue work clothes—too worn for the workplace—became a favored element of the weekday and at home clothing worn by men. Underneath the jacket men donned inexpensive shirts made of some type of soft material while older men often added a traditional element, the work apron, as well. Khaki-colored military fatigues also enjoyed a growing popularity. For holiday occasions younger men wore light-colored or patterned suits while older men chose one-colored suits; these garments were usually ready-made. Outer clothing consisted of a coat filled with cotton batting or (in rarer instances) a leather or fake leather coat. Pointy-toed shoes with slightly higher heels also came into fashion. By the end of the 1960s, baggy-legged trousers, patterned shirts, and colorful sweaters made of synthetic yarn became the characteristic outfit for members of the youngest generation. For a long time, polyester stretch tops or turtlenecks were a favorite option compared to dress shirts when it came to attending Sunday religious ceremonies or other significant events. The appearance of the leather coat, the mackintosh, clothes made of fake fur, the sleeveless polyester *otthonka* worn by women, and the leisurewear item known as the *mackó* (sweatsuit) in Hungarian are all garments that can be used to mark the “periodization” of different waves in rural fashion as it tried to keep up with urban styles.

¹⁰⁰ In its classic form, this was a factory-made, laced shoe made of a black, felt upper part and leather soles. In many places the same name—*dorkó*—was used to refer to laced, canvas gym shoes.



Figure 53. Women wearing *otthonka* harvesting wine grapes in 1985 (Fortepan, 76076, Katalin Erdei)

Different kinds of work—whether carried out in a factory, office, or out in the fields—naturally demanded different types of clothing. According to an advice booklet published at the beginning of the 1960s, for rural women

a light cotton dress is the most ideal option for hoeing or harvesting. We should only wear a skirt and a blouse when doing work that does not require bending over.... These days young women are working in a pair of short cotton or polyester trousers and a blouse that is knotted above the waist, with a straw hat to protect their heads from the strong sun. I've even seen girls hoeing in swimsuits, a thing I hold as entirely inappropriate—not because it is improper, but because it is bad for the health. It's not good if a large amount of our skin is exposed to the sun for lengthy amounts of time as we work. The reason why men wear white shirts at harvesttime is because white deflects the sun. Nowadays it isn't rare at all to see a woman or girl working in long trousers or a tracksuit. I have even seen older ladies in sweat suits. In cold weather a sweat suit is much better than a skirt—after all, stockings alone aren't enough to keep out the sharp, cold wind.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Simon and Szemes, *Házi mindentudó*, 151.

For home wear or while doing housework, the booklet recommends that rural women wear a brightly patterned cotton dress that buttoned all the way down the front; it also suggests that an apron made of heavy cotton or some sort of synthetic material be included in order to protect the dress from dirt.

Village dwellers had many means and methods for procuring and making clothing. Since fewer and fewer people were producing their own textiles for making traditional garments, most were making do with factory-made products. Footwear, for example, was one item that was generally bought. Preparing clothes and dresses was primarily a wintertime activity since this was the time of the year when the cycle of agricultural work allowed time for sewing. Other than making garments themselves, most villagers could turn to "village seamstresses" who helped with more technically difficult tasks or made special pieces of clothing. These seamstresses also helped spread the technique of machine sewing in rural areas.

The best means of demonstrating the changes in dress that occurred in Hungary's rural communities is to compare clothing lists that were prepared of a traditional vs. a modern wardrobe. At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the wardrobe of a young woman who continued to wear traditional garb in the village of Varsány contained seven headdresses, twenty-four silk and eleven cashmere shawls, twelve petticoats, four camisoles, four heavy undershirts, six underskirts, eighteen embroidered blouses, ten black and thirty patterned overskirts, seven colored vests, eight woven aprons, sixteen bib aprons, six knitted sweaters, two blouses, seven pairs of stockings, two outer coats, two pairs of laced shoes, one pair of shoes, one pair of boots, one pair of sandals, one pair of slippers, and one pair of track shoes. A young woman who wore city clothing, however, had three polyester skirt suits, ten polyester skirts, two pairs of trousers made of jersey and/or suiting fabric, six single-piece dresses, four summer dresses, two cardigans, five short-sleeved tops, three blouses made of fine lightweight material, three warm-up or track-suits, city-style undergarments, nylon stockings, silk, nylon, and cashmere shawls for going out or staying home, a mackintosh jacket, a fake fur coat, a cloth coat, one pair of boots, three pairs of shoes, one pair of sandals, one pair of track shoes, and one pair of slippers.¹⁰²

¹⁰² For greater detail, see Gergely, "Változások Varsány népviseletében," 267–69.

Urban-style clothing was usually sewn by order. According to a contemporary ethnographic study, in many places it was customary “for women and girls who had switched to modern clothing to have every type of clothing—other than the overcoat that was purchased off-the-rack in stores—made by a seamstress. . . . These women and girls rarely had any idea of their own, they simply took the purchased material to the seamstress—whom someone . . . had generally recommended to them—and trusted her with choosing the right style. The result was a very uniform type and style of dress that took nothing into account regarding the customer’s personal, physical characteristics or what color would look best.”¹⁰³ The way in which villages adopted a relatively uniform style of urban attire was definitely influenced by the desire to imitate others and match what was considered modern on the local level.

According to those who make ethnographical or sociological observations, once families had adopted modern clothing no significant difference was noticeable among family members; urban styles brought a homogenized type of style with them. In the case of women, the main differences could be found in whether they had maintained or rejected traditional garb, or to what extent they followed urban fashion trends. What profession they pursued was the primary factor in differentiating how men dressed. Yet it was also typical for no major differences to be detectable (based on dress) within certain social levels.

While the rejection of traditional clothing and the subsequent transformation of dress norms was a general phenomenon, in villages located along the Galga River (Galgamácsa, Galgahévíz, Kartal, Püspökhatvan) near Budapest, it was also possible to find women wearing the type of “new folk dress” that flourished in the decades following World War II. As Mária Flórián notes in her work on the history of peasant costumes,

Like all other villages enjoying similar circumstances, the people of Bag spent a relatively large amount of money on clothing. . . . Even though they eventually started using the synthetic materials that were available at the time, the clothes they sewed still conformed to traditional dress in Bag, particularly from the point of view of what colors were selected. Thanks to this, the traditional order and symbolism of colors was still intact at the beginning

¹⁰³ Gergely, “Változások Varsány népviseletében,” 259–60.

of the 1960s—although primarily in the clothing worn by young women preparing for marriage or young newlywed wives. . . . Most individuals still followed the “peasant” style of choosing colors, meaning that they preferred the vibrancy of contrasting colors; to them, colors that “pop” were still the most pleasing. . . . While Bag’s traditional peasant taste still predominated during the 1960s, the view that separate garments should be made of materials in the same color was also gaining ground.¹⁰⁴

In this case the following of urban trends was definitive, but not exclusive: most Hungarian villagers dressed according to the new fashion, yet still accommodated local norms and customs, at least during this period.

Within the history of clothing and dress norms in Hungary, the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies can also be viewed as the closure of an era from many points of view. The rapid spread of television, the mass emergence of tourism,¹⁰⁵ the steady erosion of Hungary’s secluded condition and the increased selection of goods available for purchase were all factors in bringing gradual changes to the public opinions and social expectations surrounding dress and clothing. The issue of what to wear essentially became a matter of private opinion: any debates connected to clothing were usually due to generational differences connected to how customs and traditions should be interpreted. As far as this sphere of life was concerned, certain individuals increasingly felt that they had the right to decide what apparel was appropriate for them to wear; at most, they took the social expectations of their surrounding environment into consideration. More importantly, this perspective met with fewer obstacles.

Compared to previous eras, the 1970s marked the period when fashion evolved into an independent branch of industry in Hungary. Predicting trends, assessing what products would be in demand, and defining fashion continued to remain within the scope of the Hungarian

¹⁰⁴ Flórián, *Magyar parasztoiseletek*, 311–13.

¹⁰⁵ In 1957 217,000 Hungarians traveled abroad. In 1960 this number was 299,000 and rose to 893,000 in 1965. The one million mark was reached in 1970; in 1980 5.2 million Hungarians traveled outside of Hungary. In 1957 the number of foreigners visiting Hungary was 213,000 and did not even climb to 250,000 by 1960. In 1970, however, more than 3.5 million tourists entered Hungary; this number reached nearly 9.5 million by 1980. *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv, 1970* (Budapest: KSH, 1971), 375; *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv, 1980* (Budapest: KSH, 1981), 343. These numbers are remarkably high even given the fact that they include multiple entry into or out of the country.

Fashion Institute.¹⁰⁶ The connection between the market's orientation and the region's industry and trade network grew progressively stronger as producers and traders together strove to establish and circulate "brands" that would allow Hungarian products to compete with goods from Western Europe. The success that these aims enjoyed is indirectly demonstrated by the fact that numerous Hungarian products gained serious value as barter items in the "pocket import" market that emerged as a result of the burgeoning phenomenon of consumer tourism that evolved as citizens of Soviet bloc countries began to travel in greater numbers throughout Eastern and Central Europe.¹⁰⁷ Another sign of the industry's increased attempt to satisfy consumer demand was the establishment of Trapper Jeans, a brand that ushered in the manufacturing of jeans in Hungary during the second half of the 1970s. A ministerial report stressed that "As a result of much effort, the supply of jeans and denim apparel has particularly improved. In 1976, roughly one million pieces (200,000 of which were import goods) were sold. In 1977, this number climbed to 2.5 million garments (1.3 million of which were imported). Despite this, the demand for the most popular brands in jeans has not been completely satisfied."¹⁰⁸ At this time, the price for a popular brand hovered between 900 and 1,100 forints. In 1978, 3.5 million denim

¹⁰⁶ The Hungarian Fashion Institute was the most important organization of fashion design and fashion life in the state socialist era.

¹⁰⁷ Although the right to travel remained restricted after the 1956 Revolution, as of the beginning of the 1960s individuals could travel to other state socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe without having to apply for an official permit. The Soviet Union could only be visited as part of an organized tourist group or by letter of invitation. Visiting Yugoslavia required a special travel permit placed within the red passport that allowed its owner to enter state socialist countries. While Yugoslavia was a socialist nation, it had not followed the Soviet example in all areas; due to the separate path it took, the supply and selection of products available in Yugoslavia increased earlier and at a faster rate compared to Hungary. By the end of the sixties, Hungarians who were eager to visit other countries for the purpose of buying certain items quickly chose Yugoslavia as their destination. With a blue passport that had to be specially applied for, Hungarians could visit Western Europe once every three years on private trips, or once a year as part of a tourist group. This opportunity could be repeated several times a year beginning in the 1970s. Political police supervised the issuing of blue passports and could either revoke or refuse to issue one without providing any reason. By the second half of the 1980s the restrictions limiting travel were completely removed.

¹⁰⁸ *A ruházati áruforgalom alakulása 1976–1977 években* (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet, 1978), 6.

garments—mostly jeans—could be found on the market, although somewhat more than half of this number was imported. The greater level of supply and procurement, however, still could not meet the demand for leading brands such as Levi's, Lee Cooper, Wrangler, and Super Rifle.¹⁰⁹ Instead, sale campaigns were launched to popularize national brands. A significant player in initiating new methods and forms for spreading trade, the collective department store chain Skála-Coop held "Trapper Weeks" between March 14–28, 1980. According to an article in a fashion magazine that publicized the event, "after Levi's, Wrangler, and Lee no introduction is needed for the Trapper brand. Even though hardly a year has passed since its debut, Trapper has already accomplished quite a career. . . . Trapper jeans

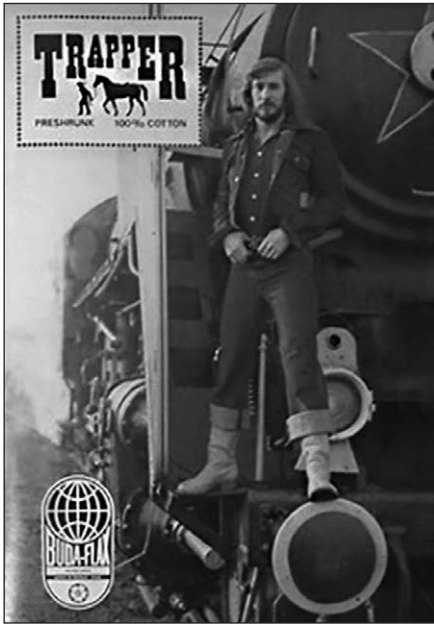


Figure 54. Advertisement for the Hungarian blue jeans "Trapper" in the seventies and eighties (Fortepan)

they are stronger and less costly—and at what savings! Not a bad word can be said about its leather emblem, which is tasteful, modern, and great fun, just as befits this type of garment. The 'blueness' of the material is excellent, meaning that it fades wonderfully."¹¹⁰ Throughout that year more than quarter of a million pairs of Trapper denim products—including jeans, skirts, and dresses—were sold.

During the 1960s and 1970s the percentage of customers who relied on custom-made clothing produced by seamstresses or tailors remained relatively high (particularly among women), even as ready-made garments slowly crept to

¹⁰⁹ "A ruházati áruforgalom alakulása 1978. évben." compiled by György Peremiczky, Budapest, MNL OL, Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet iratai, XXVI-G-4. 83. d., August 1979.

¹¹⁰ Czeglédy Katalin, "Magyar farmer," *Ez a Divat*, no. 3 (1980), 11.

the forefront. Many had a reliable seamstress who could be counted on to sew fashionable garments based on the patterns printed in various fashion magazines; for others, it was still quite common to sew clothing at home. In 1975, the percentage of certain garments that were custom-sewn surpassed the amount of ready-made clothing bought in stores. In women's apparel, 52–53 percent of dresses, 17–18 percent of coats, 17 percent of tops, and 22–24 percent of cardigans and vests were prepared by hand. On average, 26 percent of suits, 21 percent of trousers, and 12 percent of suit jackets were made to order for men. Analyses of this trend primarily point to the public's growing interest in more varied forms of attire as an explanation of this phenomenon. It cannot be forgotten that one-fifth to one-sixth of the population's clothing supply was sewn at home between 1975 and 1976, a circumstance that was likely due to reasons of frugality.¹¹¹ Yet another characteristic feature of the era is the definitive role played by "the amateurs" who prepared clothing to order without applying for an official business license: "77 percent of women's knitted outerwear that was made to order, 70 percent of men's suits, 75 percent of men's trousers, and 65 percent of men's suit jackets were made 'privately.'"¹¹² In other words, Hungary's "gray" economy had a significant role in influencing clothing and dress during this period, a circumstance that was largely due to the lack of selection and poor quality found in state-run shops.

The increasingly important role played by consumption exerted an equally strong influence on dress culture, fashion, and the transformation of the norms, habits, and expectations related to clothing; not only did this factor alter how younger generations dressed, it also affected wider swathes of various social groups and classes and thereby brought about a higher level of acceptance toward new trends and innovations. "Clothing habits have irrevocably changed: instead of traditional, matching sets of clothes, outfits containing pieces that can be either easily combined or worn separately in accordance with today's lifestyle and taste are preferred. Buyers naturally seek out the more valuable items among these goods."¹¹³ This period was also marked

¹¹¹ László Szabó, "A ruházati forgalom szenzibilitása," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 1 (1978): 7–10.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹³ Györgyné Andor, "A ruházati forgalom alakulásáról," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 11 (1979): 41–43.

by the reappearance of one of apparel's functions, in that social status and differences were once more displayed via the quality, cut, style, color, and fashionableness of an individual's attire.

In both cities and villages, the custom of assembling baby clothes during the weeks and months preceding a child's birth remained widespread. Unlike western cultures, the habit of holding a baby shower was never common in Hungary; instead, the new mother prepared or gathered essential clothing items before giving birth, while friends and family members generally brought gifts of clothing or diapers when visiting the newborn for the first time. In families with average or low incomes it was still quite common to pass down items from older to younger children. Exchanging children's clothes among close or more distant friends and acquaintances was also a common method for reducing the costs for clothing.

To summarize what changes occurred in clothing and dress habits after the sixties were overtaken by the seventies, the first iconic garments that deserve mention are miniskirts and jeans. While both garnered a vehement response from public opinion at the time, their general acceptance happened relatively quickly. As it made waves throughout the second half of the 1960s, the miniskirt was first donned by members of the youngest generation, then spread in ever-widening circles, encompassing women who were anywhere from middle-aged to even older. As an accessory, it should not be forgotten that pantyhose also established itself as a wardrobe necessity at this time. For young women who wanted to appear at the height of fashion, it was a must to complete their miniskirt look with a beehive hairdo. At the beginning of the 1970s, the miniskirt fad was followed by the briefly scandalous emergence of hot pants, or short shorts, a pair of very short knit shorts. Both garments overturned the traditions and norms governing what aspects of a female body could be revealed in public. Within a few years, an opposite trend took place as maxi or midi fashions were added to the miniskirt craze.

During the 1970s in Hungary fashion and apparel were characterized by a simultaneous medley of varied trends and colorful looks: women's wardrobes were just as likely to contain a two-piece skirt suit by Chanel as they were miniskirts, midi dresses, or jeans. While garments that displayed elements of traditional folk dress were growing in popularity, it also became increasingly important to be able to wear an item from a well-known brand.

As regards menswear, the cut and length of suit jackets practically changed year-by-year: "This period marks for example the complete disappearance of the 'traditional' trench coat as the mackintosh first took the spotlight and then became a 'must have' item before slowly, irrevocably fading into extinction only to make way for the reappearance of the trench coat, albeit of vastly different material and style compared to the original version."¹¹⁴ To indicate the extent to which dress and fashion had grown more important, the Youth Fashion Committee was formed in June 1970 with the goal of promoting "modern, practical, and cultured dress for young people." An analysis prepared by the Fashion Design Company in the summer of 1971 underscored the fact that "creating practical and tasteful forms of dress that express the socialist perspective and lifestyle is a new, intellectual, and creative field that bears great responsibility since product designers can only accomplish these aims if in full possession of a uniform basic concept. The process demands a high degree of circumspection, not to mention the complete participation of the entire clothing industry."¹¹⁵

In practice, these measures only produced moderate results throughout the 1970s as the refined, well-made garments that earned great success in national and international fashion shows and industrial arts exhibits were either entirely missing from Hungarian shops or only rarely available. The actual selection continued to feature mass-made, less stylish, off-the-rack clothing. At this time fashion shows were regularly held in the capital city's most elegant hotels, starting with the internationally renowned Gellért Hotel, then followed by the Nagyszálló on Margit Island, the Duna Intercontinental, the Hilton or—beginning in the 1980s—the Forum or Atrium Hyatt. "These shows represented social events. A separate viewing was held for those whose names were on the protocol list, such as members of the Party and government, leaders of foreign trade enterprises and textile manufactories, the MTI, representatives of television and the press, and their accompanying female relatives. It was at this time that they chose which garments they liked the most and had them quickly

¹¹⁴ "A ruházati áruforgalom alakulása a III. ötéves terv időszakában," Budapest, Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Ruházati Főosztálya, compiled by Lenke Tóth and Júlia Vajnai, MNL OL, XIX-G-4-ttt-45. d., 1971, 22.

¹¹⁵ "Az új divatvonalak terjedési ideje, a divatváltozások közgazdasági hatása: A Divattervező Vállalat tanulmánya," MNL OL, Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet iratai, XXVI-G-4. 22. d., August 1971.

prepared in their size.”¹¹⁶ Fashion shows were then shown to the general public in rural hotels, community centers, or department stores.

At the beginning of the seventies the attire for young people who were not connected to some type of subculture group also changed, if only to a certain extent. According to the magazine *Ez a Divat*, “it is interesting that the mini has disappeared from dress hangers. Even though they wear maxi or midi dresses, teens won’t say no to minis, especially in summer. Most teens are not unwilling to wear ruffles, lace, or ribbons.”¹¹⁷ In a peculiar twist, the public’s longing for a pair of jeans did not noticeably make its way into fashion or youth publications, even though this was the era’s second iconic garment to transform dress norms, albeit after something of a delay compared to Western Europe.¹¹⁸ In Hungary the “jeans phenomenon” unfolded at the end of the 1960s and the start of the 1970s as a rejection of “freely chosen” uniformity and the “suit-and-tie” tradition while additionally indicating the emergence of a striking difference in how older and younger generations viewed the world as it progressively turned toward a consumption-driven orientation.¹¹⁹ In the beginning it was exceedingly difficult to satisfy the needs of those who wanted to buy jeans, a factor that not only added to the value of certain pieces, but also increased the wearer’s prestige in the eyes of his or her social environment. By the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, denim clothing had started to lose its uniqueness and appeared as a general fashion element in the wardrobes of virtually all generations, not just younger people.

¹¹⁶ Valéria Kovács, “Azok a régi szép idők! Clara Salon: a szocialista haute couture,” in *Párizs és Budapest a divat tükrében 1750–2003*, ed. Katalin F. Dózsa (Budapest: Budapest Történeti Múzeum, 2003), 119–21. The acronym MTI refers to the Magyar Távirati Iroda (Hungarian News Agency), the national state-directed news agency of Hungary

¹¹⁷ *Ez a Divat*, no. 4 (1971), 14.

¹¹⁸ Published since the mid-sixties, the *Iffúsági Magazin* addressed fashion issues with a fair amount of regularity and included fashion tips illustrated with drawings in an attempt to influence the orientation of young people’s dress habits. These tips differed from those offered to adults in that the clothes were more athletic, displayed brighter colors, and—in the case of clothing for young men—a sweater or jacket replaced the more conservative suit jacket. Among the iconic garments of the time, only miniskirts and minidresses appeared among the fashion tips published at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

¹¹⁹ For a detailed look at the history of jeans in Hungary, see Hammer, “...nem kellett élt vasalni a farmerbe,” 28.



Figure 55. Dancers at the Buda Youth Park in 1963 (Fortepan, 137216, Zoltán Szalay)

When it came to following fashion and choosing apparel, the difference between generations became markedly noticeable during the seventies, a phenomenon to which the press and various advice booklets dedicated more and more space and energy. Members of younger generations often found themselves in conflict with their parents, school, or older people in general as their clothing and behavior came under fire for their quick adoption of whatever trend happened to be the latest, blatant disregard for tradition and distinct expression of individualism. "Parents who dress conservatively are not overly happy at the sight of their 'shabby' son or daughter."¹²⁰ These generational differences only grew sharper as the decade progressed; while it would have been forbidden to enter the youth center Budai Ifjúsági

¹²⁰ Ilona Faragó, *Az öltözködés ábécéje* (Budapest: Minerva, 1977), 9.

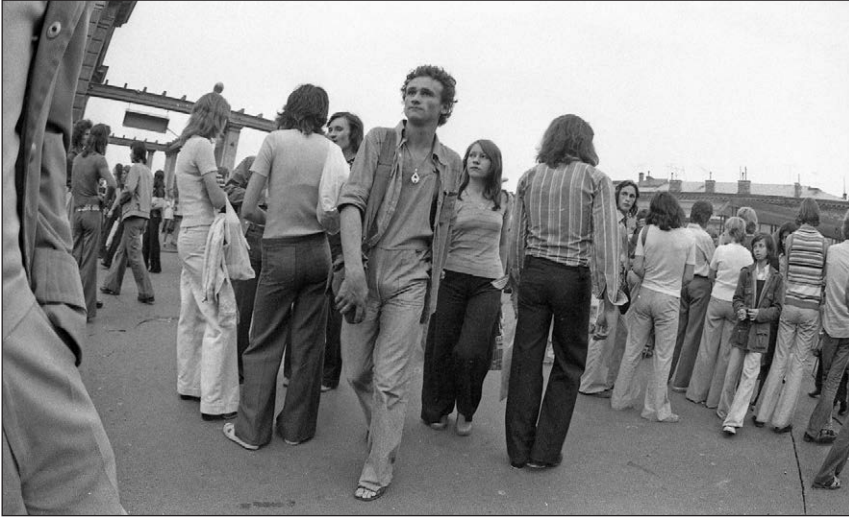


Figure 56. Young people at Buda Youth Park in 1976 (photo by Tamás Urbán, Fortepan, 125536)

Park (Buda Youth Park) in sporting jeans and long hair in 1971, five or ten years later anyone who dared to attend a rock concert in a suit and tie instead of jeans and a T-shirt would have been a source of great amusement.¹²¹

Attaining public acceptance for the fashion statements that went hand-in-hand with the spread of beat and rock music—such as jeans or long hair—took a longer amount of time. It must, however, be said that the political and social atmosphere became more tolerant of expressing individual difference (either by the means mentioned above or any other) throughout the 1970s. This circumstance was just as much due to communist ideology's slackening grip over society as it was to the transformation of values and opinion that was taking

¹²¹ Opened on April 20, 1961, the Buda Youth Park soon became a popular concert venue. However, the clothing and type of behavior allowed in the Park were regulated with a fair amount of strictness for quite a long time. "The two stone lion statues stationed at the bottom of the ramp are very gentle beasts and do not even growl or flick a tail at the sight of a more striking or individual outfit. Just a few meters higher up watchful eyes examine those wanting to gain entrance from head to toe. No quarter is given: trainers, Bermuda shorts, jeans or long hair is treated with the same mercilessness as anyone wearing clothes that 'don't belong here' is forced to stay outside." Klára Brassnyai, "Zene száll a függőkertből," *Ifjúsági Magazin*, no. 8 (1970), 4.

place as part of the emerging influence formed by the consumerist mentality and the expression of consumer demands. While utter scandal broke out over the hippie trend at the end of the 1960s, one decade later Budapest's streets had been overtaken by the highly groomed *digó* ("gigolos") who went to extremes in presenting a polished appearance, the "bums" (*csövesek*) in their narrow-legged, ragged jeans, and the underdressed "punks" sporting their characteristic mohawk hairstyle.

Many of the experts who dealt in fashion and style at the turn of the 1960s to the 1970s thought that "these days inspirational style elements are not arriving from fashion salons, but rather from the more peripheral reaches of dress and subcultural youth movements. Today fashion draws from pop festivals, sports clubs, and musicals while also featuring garments from exotic regions, military uniforms stripped of their rank insignias, and the most varied types of work clothes."¹²² Particular clothing elements became the iconic emblems of a certain period, such as the extremely tight-legged jeans worn at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the red-and-white, polka-dotted kerchief (*baboskendő*), or the "sniff bag" (*szimatszatyor*) the khaki backpack issued by the Hungarian People's Army for storing gas masks which became an accessory much coveted by Hungarian teens. The way some young people dressed signaled their allegiance to certain groups, or quite often symbolized the generational perspective epitomized by a rock band, such as the ragged jeans and red-and-white, polka-dotted neck kerchief worn by fans of the band, Beatrice. It was partly thanks to rock music that folk fashion and military-issue garments—or their characteristic, khaki color—influenced dress styles.

Meanwhile the question of what to wear or the more traditional concept of fashion continued to belong to the realm of "women's issues" in everyday life; the era's fashion publications devoted far less attention to menswear. According to a study made on the topic, "fashion is a kind of coherency, it is not a garment, a pair of shoes, or a hat, but all of these elements coming together to form an individual's appearance. A fashionable appearance includes everything from shoes to hair; every element must harmonize in reflection of fashion's current spirit."¹²³ Magazines and various publications attempted to

¹²² Margit Szilvitzky, *A farmertől az ünneplőig* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1979), 15.

¹²³ "Az új divatvonalak terjedési ideje, a divatváltozások közgazdasági hatása: A Divattervező Vállalat által készített tanulmány," Budapest, MNL OL, Belkereskedelmi

provide readers with either general or detailed assistance in orienting themselves among the latest trends that changed with bewildering speed. More tellingly, these suggestions no longer targeted "working women" alone (even though this category did continue to pop up), but also addressed women who were older, younger, middle-aged, tall, short, thin, or plump. For young people, practically every type of garment or style was allowed, "within the limits of good taste," of course. Middle-aged women were primarily encouraged to wear simpler, more conservative apparel that was still fashionable. Virtually every publication that discussed dress and fashion emphasized the need to strike a harmonious balance between fashionable and "wholesome" clothing.

How women were viewed by society also changed; in contrast to the politically and ideologically enforced "equal rights" that had typified previous decades, a certain kind of organic process of emancipation was unfolding while some features of traditional gender roles still remained current. From the point of view of politics, the predefined, "mandatory" female ideal appeared more rarely even though the issue of how to influence women's taste remained within the realm of the era's centrally directed treatment of "women's politics." Lectures designed to influence taste were regularly held at workplaces where women were employed and were also featured among the programs organized for socialist brigades.¹²⁴ The ideological and mythologized image of the working woman gradually faded away as it gradually became more natural for the female role to be more and more closely attached to that of a wage earner. From time to time, the need to keep the state socialist economic system supplied with a workforce pushed the efforts to exalt the principles of equality into the background. According to the official position touted at the time, dress was an issue in which the role of trade was defined as one that helped women gain access to practical and fashionable apparel in as widespread and convenient a manner as possible.

Kutató Intézet iratai, XXVI-G-4. 22. d., August 1971.

¹²⁴ During the state socialist system, work competitions or other noneconomic methods were used to spur workers on to greater efficiency. Before 1956, the Stakhanovite movement was one form of this effort, which essentially pitted individuals' production results against one another in a kind of competition. After 1956, the socialist brigade emerged as another method that required 30–40 people all working in the same department at the same manufactory to establish socialist brigades. In some instances, these brigades were the basis for genuine workplace communities.

The principles of practicality paired with “simple elegance” also influenced the thinking of fashion designers, some of whom believed at the time that their work was subordinate to serving the demands of practicality. The importance of attaining an appearance that was rendered harmonious by donning whatever garments were deemed appropriate for a certain age group or body type was emphasized: “It is far from being certain that the piece we see on a mannequin suits us or shows us in an advantageous way. . . . The sight of a conservatively dressed man with a frivolously gaudy woman on his arm is not exactly laudable. The opposite is just as true and refers to young people as well.”¹²⁵ Another equally significant viewpoint reflected the idea that each garment selected for wear must conform—in its cut and color—to the wearer’s personality:

With our dress we sometimes tend to neglect our personality when we automatically and unthinkingly adopt some new fad. To give one example: for an American girl there is nothing more natural than sewing the symbol of her nation on her pullover. . . . For a Hungarian girl to sew the very same American flag to her blouse as a decoration is more than repulsive. We know very well that she is not rejecting her allegiance to our socialist nation: she is simply copying what others do in a game of “monkey-see-monkey-do.” Luckily for us, this type of slavish imitation of foreign fads is not typical of our general taste. For the most part, our designers provide us with lovely designs that help beautify our outer appearance.¹²⁶

Most fashion experts felt that possessing a realistic sense of self-estimation and a sufficient amount of sensibility would go a long way toward protecting certain individuals from fashion excesses since “no matter what the fashion is, excess is always bad. Let’s think back—with all objectivity—to the miniskirt. There were definitely some who followed that crazy trend even when neither her age nor her weight could be considered ‘mini.’ For years caricaturists had a laugh and made others laugh with cartoons lampooning the mini craze. Let us therefore guard ourselves from excess.”¹²⁷

During the second half of the 1970s the skirt suit continued to maintain its position as the most important and practical piece in a woman’s wardrobe. As such, it was considered to be the kind

¹²⁵ Faragó, *Az öltözködés ábécéje*, 8.

¹²⁶ Irén Némethi, “Változó életünk és a divat,” *Ez a Divat*, no. 1 (1975), 2–3.

¹²⁷ Faragó, *Az öltözködés ábécéje*, 9.



Figure 57. People walking along the Danube in Budapest, 1986 (Fortepan, 213028, Zoltán Szalay)

of garment that could be put to adequate use, was always elegant, tolerated changes in fashion trends well, and depended less on the wearer's age and physical attributes. The materials used for skirt suits could include anything from tweed or jersey knit to silk, velvet, shantung, or cotton. Another indication of the changing times lay in the addition of slacks to this outfit, rather than the traditional pairing of a skirt and blazer. Button-down shirt dresses quickly became a widespread trend in the mid-seventies mainly due to the fact that—with the right tailoring—it was a style that could be made fashionable for teenage girls or older women alike.

Most Hungarian women are well dressed. They apply quite a lot of inventiveness to tailoring the material and their clothes are colorful, cheerful, and—for the most part—modest yet still elegantly refined. We ask the leaders of fashion to pay greater attention to the fact that seventy percent of women of employment age are working. . . . Fashion designers must think of the daily conditions experienced by women pursuing various professions and what clothes they can wear at work, at home, or at different events and places of entertainment. To avoid any type of misunderstanding: God forbid that

they design a different kind of dress for the poultry keeper compared to the shift operator when either attends the theater! We are justly proud of the fact that no outward difference can be detected among concertgoers, whether one is a teacher or the other is a shop clerk. We would like to increase this phenomenon.¹²⁸

Except for a few professions that traditionally included the wearing of a uniform, the differences between various professional branches or groups genuinely decreased during this period. Similarly, the prestige represented by a uniform also lessened significantly. The style of dress and quality of clothing, however, continued to signal the wearer's social and financial position.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the spread of sportswear was evident in the wardrobes of both men and women: "In its many variations . . . the appearance of the overall reflects the comfort and protective qualities it provides even in its name, 'over all.' These types of garments that have sprung out of work clothes and different kinds of denim apparel aptly express the functional freedom that results from the relationship between today's lifestyle and clothing and subsequently allow wearers to dress without feeling any sense of tense artificialness. The fad in wearing used clothing can also be placed in this category since it has already made a place for itself in the fashion world."¹²⁹ Relatively few changes occurred in men's fashions during the 1970s. For the younger generations weekday wear consisted of jeans, a shirt and a vest, or jeans and a sweater. Older men were still advised to wear different types of suits, including one of the era's fashionable pieces: the classic suit with a waistcoat. In this period the silk turtleneck or knit pullover made its debut and was quickly paired with an unbuttoned corduroy shirt. High-necked sweaters were also trendy while men's shirts increasingly included plaid or striped patterns other than the more traditional shirts in solid colors. In contrast, the custom of wearing a hat was consistently decreasing in popularity and remained an essential accessory worn mainly by middle-aged and older men.

At the beginning of the 1980s women's clothing tended to pair deep shades of color with contrasting colors, especially white and black. Comfort and informality was emphasized in cut and style with

¹²⁸ Németi, "Változó életünk és a divat," 2–3.

¹²⁹ Szilvitzky, *A farmertől az ünneplőig*, 15.

more emphasis placed on the shoulders, followed by a straight line that flowed downward in a loose, easy synchrony with the body's shape. Skirt lengths grew longer: "The palette used in women's clothing is so colorful that the sheer variety seen now has perhaps never been available before. Four or five or often even more styles exist at the same time and the number of variations is countless."¹³⁰ For fashion-minded men, classical, solidly elegant forms and garments became the rage. Instead of the previously fashionable "coats filled with cotton batting or sportswear, a well-dressed, well-groomed appearance is key. . . . Striped blazers or sports coats made of heavy tweed or twill are truly trendy. . . . Fashion designers suggest men's sportswear—jackets, vests, and the full range of sweaters—be set aside for sports and other leisure activities."¹³¹

According to a fashion magazine, young people's fashion habits underwent another transformation at the beginning of the 1980s:

There is something in the air that leads one to draw the conclusion that a well-groomed, tasteful appearance will once more be more and more fashionable. . . . Wrinkled, patched odds and ends or raggedy bits of garments and an unkempt appearance are beginning to go out of style . . . A few years back . . . there were times when it was necessary to apply tactful yet tenacious pressure in convincing a confirmed hippie follower to wash his or her hair and make more liberal use of soap—who meanwhile swore up and down that this outfit was only "perfect" when the dirt-stiffened jeans stood on their own legs next to the bed, ready for the wearer to dive right into them with both feet when morning came! This was true whether the wearer was a girl or a boy. After all, irritating their elders also meant making it impossible to differentiate between the two, at least from behind, that is. Different winds are blowing today. The girls . . . have noticed that flowery skirts and light blouses can be far more advantageous compared to heavy sweaters that stretch to the knee. The boys' tastes are also changing. More and more young men understand that knotting a tie around their necks is not absolutely necessary when loose, sporty garments can be worn that—gracious me!—have even been cleaned and ironed.¹³²

As far as daily life was concerned, these much-anticipated changes only occurred gradually.

¹³⁰ *Ez a Divat*, no. 2 (1985), 2.

¹³¹ *Ez a Divat*, no. 9 (1985), 15.

¹³² *Ez a Divat*, no. 2 (1980), 2.

As the eighties were ushered in, men's fashions regarding suits abandoned the slim-look styles that had ruled previous decades in favor of emphasizing a more masculine build. "Fashion . . . means wide shoulders and all those who do not possess significant muscles and deltoids of their own can only realize the form of a prize-winning wrestler by relying on shoulder pads or other kinds of padding to create the optical illusion of wide shoulders. . . . Even so, accessories adapt to the garment's style. Fashionable shirts are narrow-necked while fashionable ties are also narrow."¹³³ Among the materials used for trousers and shirts at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, corduroy became common. Young people were happy to pair colorful corduroy shirts as a kind of "substitute jacket" with their jeans and a cotton T-shirt.

Among women the narrow silhouette that signaled physical slenderness became the dominant characteristic of beauty. Essentially typified by a feeling of nostalgia, this type of fashion mainly drew upon styles from the forties and fifties. The characteristic features of a trend that closely followed the line of the body included, according to the yearbook of *Ez a Divat*, the following:

from the little hat perched on the top of the head to the straight shoulders made wider with padding, a loose, slightly wider top flows to a waist accentuated by a narrow or wide belt. Skirts are straight with refined detailing and either graze the knee or extend a few centimeters beyond. Trousers are narrow, with a bit more room around the hips. Shoes are exceedingly high with narrow heels, or elegant flats for more sporty outfits. . . . Among the materials being used for spring fashions, fine suiting triumphs, while cotton, linen, batiste, muslin, poplin, satin, and cotton crepe dominate summer fashions. . . . More avantgarde looks contain more extreme versions of this new fashion together with all of its excesses, such as over-emphasized shoulders, contrasting color additions, and daring skirt slits.¹³⁴

Adaptability to multiple wardrobe variations continued to be one of the most important requirements for clothing worn at the beginning of the 1980s. This demand led to the spread of garments that could be "mixed and matched," or worn for more than one purpose, a factor that made it much easier to replace or add new items to a wardrobe. Another characteristic feature of this period was the spread of fitness

¹³³ *Ez a Divat*, no. 3 (1980), 48.

¹³⁴ *Ez a Divat évkönyv '80* (Budapest: Lapkiadó Vállalat, 1980), 168–69.

wear. Following the “sweat suit period” that occurred during the sixties and seventies, better quality sports clothing increasingly entered the market. Among the manufactories that specialized in this branch of apparel, the Senior brand of sports outfits produced by the Váci Stretch Knits Factory tried to compete against world-renowned sports and leisurewear companies.

When it came to dressing children, practicality continued to determine children’s wear throughout the seventies and eighties, meaning that comfort, style, durability, and ease in washing were held as the most important factors in choosing clothes for children. A fashionable appearance was primarily important among teenagers, even though what this exactly meant changed according to the given age group. In the mid-seventies it was recommended for teenage boys to wear trousers or jeans with a shirt and sweater, while fashion designers suggested a combination of culottes and a blouse or a jumper and a blouse for girls. Most teens, however, found it far preferable to wear jeans, flannel or corduroy shirts, and jean jackets, while girls opted for jeans or denim skirts with cotton tops for everyday wear. Other than the growing influence of the latest styles in sportswear, ties to a subculture youth group or the aim of differentiating themselves from other generations played a larger role in how young people dressed.

According to the Hungarian Fashion Institute’s research regarding children’s clothing, the average supply of garments that was available at the time fulfilled the basic needs of children.¹³⁵ To differing proportions, anywhere from fifty to eighty percent of children owned a coat; most children had two jackets. Hand-me-downs had a significant role in maintaining supply levels as one-third of these coats and jackets had been passed down from another source. Among boys under the age of fourteen, wearing a suit was rare, while one suit was generally found in the wardrobes of boys over fifteen years old. (It cannot be forgotten that—even today—secondary school graduation traditions in Hungary demand that boys wear suits not only at their graduation, but also for most of the events and exams preceding this occasion. This custom likely influenced the appearance of suits in the wardrobes of older teenage boys.) Until the age of fourteen, dresses determined the wardrobes of girls, who owned three to four dresses on average. Older girls usually exchanged dresses for skirts or slacks

¹³⁵ *A Magyar Divat Intézet Piackutatási Stúdiójának 1988-as felmérése a gyermekruházati ellátottságról és a gyermekruha-vásárlási szokásokról.* A Magyar Divat Intézet Irattára, 143.



Figure 58. Children's fashion, 1980 (Fortepan, 27158, József Drimbe)

and blouses. For both girls and boys, trousers were the garment of choice; regardless of gender, the average wardrobe contained three to five trousers and regularly included one pair of jeans that most teens—whether in Budapest or the countryside—bought yearly. In the case of girls, four to five skirts represented essential elements of their wardrobe. On average boys owned four to five shirts while girls had anywhere from four to six blouses. Sweaters or pullovers were also favored items; both boys and girls owned an average of five to six of these garments. As sportswear spread, tracksuits became more popular and many were happy to add the top of these leisurewear items to a pair of jeans. Tracksuits were slightly more popular among children in Budapest compared to rural children since the average supply (two tracksuits per child) was nearly twice that found outside of the capital city. In the 1980s T-shirts played a defining role in the clothing worn by children and teens; boys and girls owned seven to eight T-shirts a piece. Despite improvements in supply and selection, being able to wear a brand-name item of clothing still heralded a significant increase in status and prestige.

The custom of wearing a smock to school was quite common at the time; more than half of all boys and four-fifths of all girls had two smocks in their wardrobes. As children grew older, differences in the underwear worn by the two sexes became more pronounced as girls tended to accrue larger supplies. Boys averaged six pairs of underwear, six undershirts, three sets of pajamas and ten pairs of socks. Girls usually had ten pairs of panties, five undervests, three to four pairs of pajamas or nightgowns, ten pairs of socks, and five pairs of stockings or pantyhose. These numbers meant that both boys and girls had access to a clean set of underclothing every day. At the end of the 1980s, the average children's wardrobe also included a bathrobe, one to two swimsuits, two to three caps, two pairs of dress shoes, one pair of trainers, one pair of boots, and one pair of sandals. These survey results demonstrate that a relative balance existed between urban and rural children as far as their clothing was concerned while additionally reinforcing the fact that attention to fashion and dress grew significantly among teens who were over fifteen years of age, a fact that remained true regardless of residence. For teenagers growing up in quasi-consumerist circumstances, appearing in fashionable and sporty apparel was just as important as gaining recognition—based on their available opportunities—for owning “brand-name stuff.”

In cities, how people dressed for holidays or special occasions underwent relatively little change. It could not be denied, however, that members of younger generations felt that the norms and rules governing traditional dress codes bore less relevance to them compared to those who were middle aged or older. As a result, social expectations also changed. Two elements were and remain an aspect of formal dress habits: the first is to signal the individual and community's connection to a celebratory occasion and the second is to ensure that the related content be recognized as socially acceptable. What apparel is worn for special occasions arises out of customs and the social "compromises" that stem from an event's unique character. During the 1970s and 1980s in Hungary, the rules that represented a respect for tradition changed in that their previous, mandatory nature gentled to recommended behavior or relaxed expectations.

As to what events demanded expression via outward appearance, occasions such as Sunday family dinners held with a broader array of relatives, holidays (Christmas, Easter, birthdays), family or friendly gatherings, visits to the theater or opera, weddings, graduations, workplace events, receptions, and balls all counted as times when donning more formal clothing was necessary. According to the general expectation, wearing appropriate apparel was the way to mark the significance behind each occasion. In the case of formal attire, a significant requirement was that the material, style, and color be appropriate for the given event:

A little black dress is suitable for many occasions; thanks to the air of festivity it brings to virtually any event, it can be worn anywhere. Its somber tone can be brightened with the help of accessories. . . . When awaiting guests at home, clothing should not be overly elegant because it is impolite to "out-dress" our guests. Nor is it acceptable to greet guests in a sloppy outfit we've just thrown on, or a tracksuit since this is a sign of disrespect. . . . Evening dresses are the right choice for occasions or events taking place late in the evening or for New Year's Eve, a visit to the opera, or other forms of evening entertainment. A daring slit or a bare back, however, is not for everyone, no matter how fashionable it is right now. Older ladies or—based on their type—middle-aged women must be wary of baring their upper arms. An exceedingly low décolletage is not advantageous at this age either as it draws attention to skin that is no longer at its tautest.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Uresch, *Korszerű divat*, 118–19.

For men dark-colored suits remained the recommended garb for formal events, although sports blazers in lighter colors were acceptable for family occasions.

The habits and customs attached to life's pivotal points changed relatively little since participants strove to emphasize the importance of these events via their outer appearance:

The wedding ceremony demands the wearing of distinctive garments. . . . Numerous symbolic objects and signs contribute to the marital rites, such as the bridal wreath, the engagement kerchief,¹³⁷ engagement gifts, rings, or the decorations which embellish the bride or the groom's wedding clothes and appearance. To this very day [1982] wedding garments have preserved their emblematic character, which in turn distinguishes them from all other types of clothes. Donning them signals the approach of a significant event; when the groom in his dark suit stands beside the bride in her white dress, this ceremonial symbol of their unification represents the fact that they belong to one another.¹³⁸

In the case of young couples entering marriage, it can be said that the "prerequisites" demanded by tradition were slightly more forgiving as previous customs changed and thereby made room for fashion trends to have more of an influence. Men, for example, found it increasingly more acceptable to attend "important events" in suits that were not just the usual dark colors of black, dark blue, or dark gray. Although lighter shades progressively enjoyed greater acceptance and suit jackets were tailored in sportier styles, dressing in a manner that was suitably elegant for the given occasion remained important. In practice the bride in her white gown that swept the floor generally walked to her groom wearing a dark suit or—in much rarer instances—a tuxedo. Most young brides also clung to tradition and continued to wear a bridal veil with a full-length white dress: "The first rule of a bridal dress is that it be 'proper.' This means it must have sleeves, not expose the upper body and—no matter what the fashion is—it should

¹³⁷ Among the customs that preceded weddings, other than exchanging engagement rings (the main rite of an engagement) it was traditional to exchange additional small symbolic objects. The engagement kerchief was one of these objects and consisted of a small square-shaped piece of textile that was frequently highly decorated or embroidered. It was the bride's role to give an engagement kerchief to the groom.

¹³⁸ Szilvitzky, *A farmertől az ünneplőig*, 21.

never be too short, either. As fashions change, so does the wedding dress's color. Other than the traditional white, sky blue, light green, and powder pink are also common."¹³⁹ In contrast to previous customs, pant suits also became an accepted outfit for brides. Fashion advisers recommended older brides or women marrying for a second or third time select an elegant skirt suit instead of the usual white gown.

Wearing garments that were considered appropriate for the given occasion naturally remained an unwritten rule for all those present. The representational role possessed by weddings grew even more important during the 1970s and 1980s. Other than celebrating the nuptials of a bride and groom, for family, relatives, friends, and acquaintances a wedding presented a rather unique opportunity for demonstrating social and financial status. This factor was made obvious via clothing as virtually every guest made sure to appear at the wedding ceremony in apparel that had been specially purchased for the event.

The dress habits connected to mourning underwent only slight alterations. It was generally expected that participants in the funeral rites appear in black or dark-colored attire. Small discrepancies occurred in the length of the mourning period that was held afterward, based on whether the involved individuals lived in the city or countryside. Wearing black as a sign of mourning for a longer period of time—one year when a close relative died—was typical among village dwellers while this same custom became shorter and shorter in cities. The custom of marking one's everyday clothes with a mourning band also became rare.

Questions related to formal events and occasions appeared in newspaper columns from time to time, particularly within the context of behavioral issues. In the beginning of 1975, a journalist at the fashion magazine *Ez a Divat* indignantly recollected the memory of attending a theater premiere at which two young men had appeared in their everyday clothing, to the shock of the entire audience: "Their hair and beards were crying out for soap, similar to their ragged trousers . . . everyone can wear what he wants at home, where dress is a private matter. A theater, however, is called a public building because it belongs to the public and is where people go to gain a feeling of culture. Nobody has the right to ruin another person's experience by appearing with an unkempt appearance, thereby forcing the others to observe his unwashed body odor rather than the beauty

¹³⁹ Faragó, *Az öltözködés ábécéje*, 19.

of Shakespeare's language."¹⁴⁰ A household management guide published at the end of the 1970s issued the opinion that "all types and styles of dresses can be worn to the theater, but we should not go in jeans and a sweater. A decent afternoon dress is appropriate for any theatrical production, as long as its length is not passé."¹⁴¹ The fact cannot be denied that young people were far more likely to view the dress code for visiting the theater as more of an optional decision rather than a mandatory requirement, which is how other generations viewed this question. This fact regularly sparked debate and conflicts of opinion:

A fashion movement that opposes good dress sense has reared its ugly head in our society as well. In their jeans and shirtsleeves, or preferably a plaid shirt or blouse, its representatives take their seats in the theater. It's a trumped-up fashion movement. We are no longer living in those days when not everyone could afford clothes that are at least somewhat formal. Nor are we at the point that it's time to battle the ho-hum, boring existence of affluence by deliberately appearing ragged in public. It's not as if a lovely evening at the theater, a concert, or a dance is an everyday event in our lives; let's therefore not be ashamed to use our formal clothes to express that fact that the event is indeed formal! Let's dress so that our clothing actually expresses some aspect of our mood.¹⁴²

Many of the members of older generations felt that no separation could be made between the occasion and the clothes that were worn while attending the event. In fact, contemporary opinion generally accepted the idea that

there are certain times of the year that can be made even more unforgettable by donning formal wear. All kinds of balls have become something of a tradition; it's at events like these that a person is right in "going all out" by choosing an evening dress, which is appropriate. We admit in advance that there's no law stating that evening formal wear has to cost a bundle! Anyone good at sewing can even make one for herself. . . . It is, however, useful to have a pretty dress or two made of fine material or angora jersey (like the cowl-necked ones that are so popular now) in our basic wardrobe. A well-tailored little skirt suit with padded shoulders, or today's version of that eternal darling, the shirtwaist dress, can also solve our problem at the blink of an eye. Any of

¹⁴⁰ Némethi, "Változó életünk és a divat," 2–3.

¹⁴¹ Uresch, *Korszerű divat*, 118–19.

¹⁴² Mária Pataki, *A család ruhatára* (Budapest, 1976, Minerva, 1976), 14–15.

these outfits are perfectly suitable for the theater, different celebrations, and events, as well as for hosting guests or paying visits as guests.¹⁴³

Out of all the various celebratory occasions, the significance of secondary school graduations rose to represent—it can be said with only a little exaggeration—a festive induction into adulthood. This content was naturally expressed outwardly via the quality of clothing worn or the number of guests invited to the event. As was referred to previously, suits of the same cut and color were prepared out of good-quality material for the boys while new clothes (the type of which was chosen based on school traditions) were also sewn for the girls. For young ladies, formal clothes for graduation usually meant a dark-colored long skirt, a white blouse emblazoned with the school's crest, a sailor's blouse, or an elegantly tailored skirt suit. This illustrious event frequently evolved into a competition to see who could find better material and thereby ensure a more elegant appearance for the graduating class. The author of a fashion magazine from the spring of 1980 warned readers against falling into excess: "It is hard to decide when and where the desire to display a unified splendor at the graduation ceremony or reception that is so fashionable these days actually began. It cannot be denied that certain schools in the capital city are genuinely vying against one another. . . . This alone is not enough to make it necessary for the clothes to be made of the most expensive, western materials and sewn up by the most exclusive tailor in downtown Budapest."¹⁴⁴ The custom of having new clothes prepared and then worn became an inseparable part of the graduation ceremony. In essence this was the occasion when the aim of presenting a traditional and elegant—according to the generally accepted meaning of the word—appearance did not cause the young people involved to raise objections or resist. By the second half of the seventies wearing the mandatory skirt and school blouse or suit was not at all the obvious choice for every graduation.

Among young people weekend entertainment essentially did not require any customary style of dress; everyone put on the clothes that he or she thought were more fashionable, elegant, or simply different from weekday outfits. "How interesting that younger generations

¹⁴³ *Ez a Divat*, no. 12 (1980), 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Ez a Divat*, no. 4 (1980), 2.

can find the right clothes to wear to their favorite entertainment without having to ask for advice. One glance at the crowd at a disco is enough to see that shiny overalls, fake leather pants, strapless tops or tops with only spaghetti straps, and tight skirts with slits are virtually a uniform of sorts for them, just like the stretched out sweaters and jeans at beat music concerts. Let's not even mention the red-and-white polka-dotted kerchief."¹⁴⁵

At the end of the seventies, fewer and fewer rules or expectations were held regarding what should be worn at home. Noticeable change, naturally, did not occur in differentiating between the garments worn in public or at work and those put on at home. Regardless of their generation or profession, for men tracksuits completely swept aside the dressing gown or smoking jacket, garments that had been common just a few decades earlier. In the case of women, aprons were still recommended for various household tasks, along with a pretty dress or *otthonka*. What was worn at home depended on the individual's place of residence and the nature of the work being done at home:

These days the attitude that any kind of worn out cast-off is perfectly fine for home—where only a few people will see it—is no longer modern. The one to see it is “only” a family member and at most we will just quickly change into something else if we need to run to the store for anything. . . . The important thing is for family members not to look slovenly or unkempt in front of one another. If a guest unexpectedly appears, we shouldn't have to rush to throw on a better skirt or pair of trousers. Even if the person ringing the bell is only the usual postman or bill collector, the last thing we should do is to open the door with tousled hair or wearing disheveled, rumpled clothing! Nor is it right to spend the entire day lounging around home in a dressing gown; by no means at all should the same be attempted in a bathrobe!¹⁴⁶

The main thing was for the clothing worn at home to be simple and comfortable. Aprons, sleeveless smocks that buttoned down the front, and a kerchief were recommended for women. The era's fashionable piece, the *otthonka*, which was available in many colors and styles and generally made of polyester fabric, was also among the suggested garments:

¹⁴⁵ *Ez a Divat*, no. 12 (1980), 2.

¹⁴⁶ Uresch, *Korszerű divat*, 76–77.

While there are all kinds of apparel for home, the attire we wear should always be suitable for either work or rest within the home. It can be a dressing gown, housecoat, apron, jumper, or an overall, it can be the combination of shorts and a top or pants and a top, or even a tracksuit. The important thing to remember is that it be neither worn nor dirty!... To tell the truth, our appearance at home contains a deep, inner message: is it important to us, or not, that family members find each other good-looking and show that they still want the other to find them attractive throughout the long years?¹⁴⁷

Most household management and fashion guides from the mid-seventies suggested that the clothing worn at home be changed according to the actual activity being conducted. By the seventies house shoes or felt slippers had been clearly exchanged for different styles of mules or slippers.

As far as undergarments were concerned, the kind of underwear that had been fashionable in the 1960s—mainly made of nylon or other synthetic materials and therefore not suitable for either ventilation or absorption—was gradually replaced by garments made of cotton stretch knit that only contained a small percentage of polyester. This change fulfilled the population's growing demands regarding hygiene and health needs to a far better extent. According to a technical volume published at the end of the 1970s that provided an overview of all the issues related to modern dress, the primary concern was for undergarments to be both comfortable and discrete since having an undergarment show through a woman's outer apparel would be less than aesthetic. Other than (or together with) the camisole, wearing a cotton undervest became more common. For health purposes, slips were also considered practical, particularly if the type of outer garment being worn required one. The four-fifths of women who regularly wore brassieres primarily emphasized the garment's aid in shaping the figure and providing an aesthetic shape. Garters and girdles were referred to as old-fashioned garments that were rarely used. By the end of the seventies, the cotton undervest had completely replaced camisoles in the wardrobes of younger women, pantyhose was preferred over stockings, and slips were usually only worn under formal wear.

According to a market survey prepared at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, women held much higher expecta-

¹⁴⁷ Pataki, *A család ruhatára*, 8–9.

tions regarding the quality of underwear: "The easier—and lighter—pieces of women's undergarments are panties, camisoles, and slips. These days most of these are made of stretch knit. . . . We have long moved past the tyrannical dominance of white, pink, and light blue. Today an undergarment in black or red is not even conspicuous. A wide variety of colorful undergarments, in all kinds of patterns, is available. The selection of sizes for panties is not only geared toward the hip measurement. Size variations also designate variations in style: from the long-legged garments essential for those susceptible to catching a chill to bikini styles, everything can be found."¹⁴⁸ As the 1970s turned to the 1980s, the latter style became widespread among young women.

When choosing a nightgown or a pair of pajamas, comfort and health-related issues predominated. As a result, in summer a full- or half-length nightgown was recommended, to be replaced by cotton pajamas for women during the winter. In reference to the era's popular nightie, the baby doll, the comment was made that—no matter how aesthetic it may be—a baby doll was only worth wearing in a well-heated home. "Among dressing gowns and robes, the most practical ones are those that can be worn in front of strangers for a brief amount of time at least. We mustn't wear them outside of the home and strongly urge women not to pop over to the store in them, not even if the store happens to be next door and we are only going to pick up just one little thing."¹⁴⁹ They also emphasized the fact that modern and fashionable dress meant a cultured appearance that fit both the place and the situation as regarded both outer and under wear.

Among the fashionable bathing styles worn by women during the 1970s and 1980s, it was increasingly more acceptable for women to expose more of their bodies. "The latest innovations of the 1980s were the thong [*tanga*], a triangle of material in front and a strap or two in back, or the one-piece bathing suit made of extremely thin material that young girls rolled down as far as possible so the sun would tan as much of their skin as possible."¹⁵⁰ Among female bathers frequenting Hungarian beaches or bathing spots, the topless monokini was relatively rare due to public scorn. The establishment of the first nud-

¹⁴⁸ Pataki, *A család ruhatára*, 57.

¹⁴⁹ Uresch, *Korszerű divat*, 26.

¹⁵⁰ F. Dózsa, "A fürdőöltönytől a tangáig: Női-férfi divat a vízparton," 38–39.

ist bathing camps understandably caused quite a large stir in the first half of the 1980s. While the material and style found in men's bathing fashions changed, this issue was not nearly important enough to warrant much attention. As of the 1980s, the old style of bathing trunks that resembled men's boxers became increasingly popular.

Men's undergarments changed relatively little; as opposed to the more commonly used linen or cotton black gym shorts, cotton undergarments with high-cut legs were produced. The colors of black, white, or dark blue lost their previous dominance as men's underwear became more colorful and even patterned prints became acceptable. Compared to women's, men's sleepwear was far less dependent on fashion as men usually wore pajamas made of cotton or linen that was either patterned or a solid color. Nightshirts were characteristically worn by members of older generations or only made an appearance in the form of an aged, "institutional issue" nightshirt unearthed from the back of the wardrobe when hospital care was unavoidable.

By this time working women were not under pressure to present a puritan appearance, but rather encouraged to adopt clothing that would be both practical and fashionable: "At her workplace everyone should look as smart as her abilities allow—but not with green or silver eyeshadow smeared on her eyelids. Be fashionable without looking like a mannequin in a shop window. A neat and well-dressed appearance lends a feeling of good health. But . . . and this is the most important of all: there is no need to wear a different outfit every day. Our surroundings are also important, so let's devote some attention to what others are wearing. After all, a workplace is not a fashion show."¹⁵¹ In connection to dressing for work, practicality triumphed over fashion, which was therefore more restricted in comparison: "Trousers with overly baggy legs, a loose skirt or sleeves can cause an accident, which is why sleeves should be rolled up or buttoned at the wrists. Trouser legs should be cinched. . . . Generally speaking, the most ideal solution is for us to change clothes from head to toe—including our undergarments—so as to preserve our health and well-being."¹⁵² As a means of preventing accidents, close-fitting clothing was recommended for those working next to or with machinery.

For agricultural workers the solution to toiling outside under the sun was to dress in layers. At least two full changes of the suggested

¹⁵¹ Faragó, *Az öltözködés ábécéje*, 42.

¹⁵² Uresch, *Korszerű divat*, 82–85.

amount of work clothes (containing the prerequisite garments) were seen as being sufficient. Larger companies usually provided work clothes for their workers, even if the quality of these garments generally left much to be desired. Since smaller manufactories or cooperative workshops were usually unable to provide this additional benefit, their workers frequently wore shabbier clothes brought from home. For office workers or those pursuing white-collar professions, there was usually no difference between what they wore at work as opposed to in public. Depending on the workplace and type of job being done, some professions (ranging from medical staff to teachers, engineers, or even warehouse workers) expected their workers to don smocks or white lab coats. As an additional work benefit, the employees in a fairly wide array of professions could count on differing sums of money issued as a clothing stipend. By the end of the 1980s, workplaces rarely had any type of mandatory dress code as the unwritten rules of custom generally regulated what people wore far more effectively. It was appropriate for male government employees to wear a suit and tie to work while women were expected to be in some combination of a skirt and blouse or a conservatively elegant dress.

At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, most students in both primary and secondary schools were required to wear smocks that were usually blue in color. "The fact that boys must also wear a school smock in many places is something that can only be encouraged as doing so decreases competition among students. It is far better for the need to follow fashion to be satisfied in private, on the street, or among company."¹⁵³ The compulsory school smock completely lost all function at the end of the 1980s. The same was true of the uniforms issued by the KISZ (Young Communist League) or the Magyar Úttörő Szövetség (Hungarian Pioneers' Association) for different levels of involvement, such as the drummer, the pioneer, or the young guardsman.¹⁵⁴ For children and young people, it was mandatory to wear these "uniforms" at celebrations until the end of the 1980s, when they went out of fashion.

By the beginning of the 1970s, the process of exchanging traditional folk dress for modern apparel had essentially been concluded in

¹⁵³ Pataki, *A család ruhatára*, 12–13.

¹⁵⁴ A wing of the KISZ, the Ifjú Gárda (Young Guard) was an association charged with the task of providing organizers for KISZ events while simultaneously reinforcing the education of its members in national defense. The Young Guardsmen operated under the complete political control of KISZ.

Hungary's villages. Those who remained in traditional clothes after this decade usually continued to wear the basic garments belonging to their regional tradition until the end of their lives. In the village of Patak located in Nógrád County, in 1985 virtually all women above the age of sixty-five were still wearing traditional clothes. While a significant proportion of women over the age of fifty also followed their example, it was far rarer for younger women to be in traditional garb. Women under the age of forty-three, for example, only wore urban-style clothing.¹⁵⁵ In the mid-eighties the wardrobe for a middle-aged woman of average means who still followed tradition contained the following items: five camisoles, two cotton undershirts, nine knit jackets used as sleepwear, ten pairs of underwear, four pairs of winter trousers, eight pairs of stockings, one pair of garters, eighteen underskirts and overskirts each, three aprons, one long-sleeved and four short-sleeved outer blouses, fourteen short- and long-sleeved sweaters, thirteen cardigans, seven vests, one large shawl, forty-nine head kerchiefs, four pairs of sandals, one pair of leather slippers, one pair of leather shoes, two pairs of boots, two pairs of gloves, and one scarf. Altogether, this wardrobe comprised 187 items that belonged to traditional dress customs. The accessories added to her outfits included one umbrella and one handbag; a wedding ring, a pair of earrings, and a wristwatch served as her jewelry. The primary colors of her wardrobe were black, dark or medium blue, brown, dark green and maroon.¹⁵⁶ Two-thirds of the garments were ready-made items purchased from a store while only one-third was either homemade or had been prepared by a seamstress.

When it came to traditional apparel, different materials were used to make these garments. According to Anikó Péterbencze's research, conducted in the village of Zsámbok in Pest County, jersey fabric was mainly used for making skirts, while nylon also became a popular choice and appeared in the form of weekday skirts, shirts, and blouses.¹⁵⁷ Rarely worn garments made of high-quality materials continued to appear at special occasions and events. The traditional style and cut of skirts, aprons, and shirts worn by Zsámbok's women, however, did not display much change; the traditional headdress, for example,

¹⁵⁵ Kapros, "Jönni, menni' viselet a Nógrád megyei Patak községben 1985-ben," 207.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 208–12.

¹⁵⁷ Anikó Péterbencze, "Kecele, kacó, zsámboki matyó": *A női viselet változása Zsámbokon (1900–1990)*. (Budapest: MTA Néprajzi Kutatócsoport, 1990), 74.

remained an essential part of these women's clothing. Other than the wool shawl that was traditionally worn as outerwear, hand-knitted cardigans and vests also grew common. The more noticeable change to occur in traditional clothing was the addition of colors that were brighter compared to that previously found in certain regions. According to the demands placed on individuals by prestige consumerism, special celebrations (such as weddings or village festivals) required new clothing and shoes be purchased or made. For the most part, providing additional or better clothing for girls of marriageable age remained a relatively common custom, regardless of the family's financial situation. Most parents felt it their duty to make sure their daughter had a "dowry worthy of the family name" when they married. As such, the family did not primarily purchase clothing items that were necessary for everyday needs, but instead bought the more expensive garments that represented either their genuine or desired financial status, such as a fur coat or boots. Garments continued to play an essential role in the dowries or wedding gifts bestowed upon young people—particularly women—who were getting married.

Satisfying the need for prestige based on the given society's genuine or only projected requirements was expressed not only via the clothing worn to special occasions, but also in everyday situations, and primarily played a role in how children were clothed. According to Kata Jávör's observations regarding Varsány and Zsombó, village women were overwhelmingly proud of the fact that they "dressed their children well." During the 1970s and 1980s a unique form of competitive consumerism emerged in these and other villages, the underlying goal of which was to demonstrate the level of financial status the family had reached. For many, how their children were dressed presented the perfect opportunity for keeping up with their neighbors in a level of "well-dressedness" that could not fall behind that achieved by other families. "Families in Zsombó go out of their way to dress their children in the very best. There are even parents who refrain from taking their children to preschool because they cannot provide them with clothes that are as nice as the others.' It must be said that the majority of Zsombó's inhabitants judge those who fall below a certain level rather than acknowledge the excesses."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Kata Jávör, "A gyermek és a fiatal, mint a szülői aspirációk tárgya," *Ethnographia*, no. 1 (1981): 89–93.

Other than providing a means for prestige consumerism, how children were dressed was heavily influenced by the models found in the socialization of gender roles. In general, parents took great care in differentiating, developing, and consciously reaffirming the outward differences between girls and boys. As a result, newborn boys were already dressed in light blue while newborn girls naturally appeared in pink. Once children became old enough for preschool or school, clothing once again became important since they had to appear in public, where the tracksuits, etc. worn at home were generally judged as insufficient. At celebrations girls were customarily dressed in a combination of a skirt and blouse. For children of primary school age, what girls or boys wore was mainly determined by the goal of being well-dressed; as gender roles increasingly came to the forefront during the teenage years, differentiating between the sexes became even more emphatic. "During the 1970s in Varsány," notes Kata Jávör in her study on gender roles and clothing,

girls' clothing reflected the polar opposites of weekday versus holiday apparel. Holidays included wedding receptions and attending mass, with Christmas and Easter mass representing the most significant occasions. Other than these events, girls put on slightly better clothes (compared to what they wore at home) when they stepped out to buy something at the store or appear in public. . . . At the time, an older girl owned an average of ten to twelve circle skirts and thirty blouses. These were worn in order, then she began wearing them from the beginning again. This indicates the fact that in many places dressing an older girl "correctly" was mainly a question of quantity. Formal wear exclusively meant donning traditional garb.¹⁵⁹

Later on, a dark-colored skirt suit was also deemed acceptable apparel for every type of celebratory event.

Throughout the eighties and the nineties, girls' wardrobes in Varsány showed a greater level of differentiation based on the kind of events they attended. The less formal, shabbier leisure wear they had previously only worn at home was exchanged for a pair of jeans when appearing in public. "For dates—even when conducted within village boundaries—a special 'seductive,' 'not proper for church'

¹⁵⁹ Kata Jávör, "A nemi sztereotípiák továbbélése és a szocializációs modell alakulása a nemi szerepre nevelésben: (A varsányi példa)," in *Népi kultúra-népi társadalom*, vol. 19, ed. Miklós Szilágyi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999), 167.

outfit is worn, such as dresses with straps, lower necklines, or short hemlines, depending on the season. The most formal pieces of clothing in a girl's wardrobe are the ones she wears to church." Another significant change regarding quality could be observed in the way the clothes worn at wedding receptions came to serve the purpose of drawing attention while also presenting a fashionable appearance. Today "rather than the outfit she wears to church, the most valuable item in an older girl's wardrobe has become the formal dress she wore to a wedding reception."¹⁶⁰

According to ethnographers, clothing for village boys and young men remained a less important issue. The fashion for tracksuits and leisurewear that developed throughout the 1970s was replaced by jeans in the 1980s. Formal wear for younger men consisted of a suit that included a dark (usually black) pair of trousers and a suit jacket that was maroon or green in color. For adults, work clothes predominated as far as weekday clothes worn at home were concerned, while a dark or perhaps lighter-colored suit was reserved for formal events. In contrast to the previous widespread custom, by the 1980s young people had far more freedom in choosing their clothing as parental supervision gradually became restricted to demanding the maintenance of a few basic norms.

Based on observations made in Varsány between 1972 and 1974, even though individuals were progressively exchanging traditional garb for urban styles and most women above thirty years of age still clung to custom, those who were in their twenties or thirties not only wore a somewhat motley combination of peasant and urban clothing but also switched between the two at times. While girls below twenty did not wear any kind of traditional garb on weekdays, for them as well as for younger children formal events meant donning traditional clothes. Parallel to the general, widespread abandonment of Hungary's traditional peasant garb, some cases also pointed to a reversion to custom, meaning that some items characteristic to peasant dress re-emerged in everyday clothing styles. In other instances, the entire traditional outfit was donned for certain important occasions. At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, many of the clothing items that signaled this trend in reverting back to custom were prepared by grandparents for their grandchildren to wear. Young people,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 169.

however, usually only wore these pieces or outfits on weekends or holidays; during the week, they dressed according to urban styles. In regions where local traditional clothing had already been heavily influenced by urban middle-class styles before the process of switching from traditional to modern dress occurred, the change in styles was naturally far less noticeable than it was in regions where tradition had been more closely preserved. As far as the apparel for rural individuals imitating urban styles was concerned, the slight delay in following the latest fashion that usually occurred between urban and rural locations gradually decreased during the 1970s and 1980s, yet still remained a factor. It can generally be said that the regional differences in the clothing supply also decreased at this time.

As of the 1970s, the skirts worn by rural women grew progressively shorter, a trend that occurred regardless of whether traditional or urban customs were being followed. A decade earlier, during the final wave of adopting modern dress, any rural girl or woman whose hemline had not covered her knees would have been considered immoral; in the 1970s a shorter hem was hardly a cause for consternation. While it is undoubtedly true that the morals attached to behavioral norms and the system of expectations exacted on the micro-level of the local community changed at a much slower rate than in Hungary's cities, most village dwellers attempted to fulfill community demands regarding what was viewed as proper and appropriate dress, even as these concerns were raised by a dwindling number of people.

As of the beginning of the seventies, the traditional bridal garb found in peasant traditions was supplanted by the tighter, urban wedding dress which most brides had sewn for them. While only one-fifth of brides in Varsány in 1970 did not wear the traditional bridal outfit, by 1973 nobody said her wedding vows in traditional clothing. A difference, however, continued to be accentuated between weekday and formal dress, regardless of whether individuals were wearing traditional or modern attire. In an attempt to keep up with the latest trends, many turned to buying local fashion magazines; in the 1980s, international fashion publications had also become more common. Girls and women who regularly commuted to work were able to follow fashion more frequently and with greater speed.

Following the switch from traditional to modern garb, most rural women preferred clothes that were either made at home or sewn by a seamstress compared to ready-made models. This also meant that the

local seamstress's level of knowledge, taste, and skill defined what fashions could be followed. It was consequently somewhat rare for individual taste or ideas to gain expression as most villages came to display a kind of newly-emerging homogeneity for a shorter or longer period. This factor was further reinforced by the desire to copy, for example, a certain piece that spread like wildfire throughout the community upon its debut or maintain local dress norms. Furthermore, the one- or two-years' delay that could be expected in gaining access to actual fashion trends remained typical; to mention one such garment, it not only took longer for rural teens to start wearing jeans, this trend also spread at a slower rate compared to the city. Other than this, local dress norms and taste played an additional role in influencing rural fashions. Generational differences also emerged when it came to what innovations were either accepted or rejected; middle-aged or older women who typically remained faithful to custom were far more likely to object to any new fashion that opposed local traditions or habits.

Middle-aged or younger members who had already exchanged peasant garb for modern attire were, however, more willing to follow their own example and support the latest fashion trends being popularized by the village youth. According to research by Katalin Gergely, at the beginning of the 1970s in Varsány a young, twenty-five-year-old woman who wore urban clothing had a wardrobe containing the following items:

outer clothing including three skirt suits made of polyester suiting, ten polyester skirts, two pairs of trousers, one made of jersey and the other of suiting with baggy legs; six dresses made of suiting or jersey, four summer dresses, five sweater sets, two cardigans, five short-sleeve pullovers, three blouses made of lightweight, fine fabric; coats including a wool coat, a padded coat, a fake fur coat, a raincoat; three sweat suits or tracksuits; footwear including one pair of boots, three pairs of shoes, one pair of sandals, slippers, trainers; undergarments including camisoles, brassieres, panties, nightgowns (of nylon or other synthetic material), garters, nylon pantyhose; accessories including silk, nylon, or cashmere kerchiefs for going out (she always covered her head when outdoors); traditional peasant garb including seven pleated skirts, four petticoats, three blouses, two knitted outer jackets, two woven, decorated aprons, five tasseled, silk shawls, two headdresses.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Gergely, "Változások Varsány népviseletében," 269.



Figure 59. Fashionable girl: shawl jacket, zigzag leather miniskirt, ribbed short-sleeved top, colorful tights, high boots: these were the staples of a fashion-conscious young woman's wardrobe in the 1970s (Fortepan, 6742, Dávid Sándor)

The wardrobe of a seventeen-year-old girl who also lived in Varsány only differed in that all of her clothing was modern and contained nary a piece of traditional apparel.

Young and middle-aged rural men continued to prefer blue work clothes—including a shirt made of soft material or heavyweight cotton—as their weekday attire for home or within the village. At special events they usually wore dark ready-made suits with pullovers made of some type of synthetic material. It was much rarer for them to appear in a shirt and necktie. In autumn and winter men wore lined or unlined padded coats while shoes with higher heels and pointed toes remained fashionable. Young unmarried men generally went to school or work in baggy pants and colorful synthetic pullovers and/or patterned

shirts; it was rare for them to wear suits, but this period also marked the growing popularity of fake leather jackets, in addition to the usual padded jacket. The colors of these new, “citized” clothing items (pullovers, cardigans, and turtlenecks) were usually light-colored and included shades such as pink, light blue, and light green.

At the turn of the seventies to the eighties, traditional garb came to be viewed quite differently as public opinion gradually began to change. As preserving tradition became a growing concern, items of peasant attire were increasingly treasured as valuable heirlooms from the past. Local communities gained renewed appreciation for traditional customs and went to greater effort in passing them down to younger generations.

Up-to-date fashion and the re-differentiation of apparel at the end of the century

As of the end of the 1970s, both men and women's clothing was comparable to international trends in that styles displayed the emergence of various groups following different examples, a circumstance that resulted from increased selection and expanded ease in tracking global fashions. Once merely following general fashion trends no longer proved enough for gaining entrance into a given "elite" group, copying the style of a popstar or celebrity, or the type of clothing related to a given free-time or leisure activity became the method for forming a new group, a habit that was particularly common among younger people.



Figure 60. Fashion designer in the mid-1980s (Fortepan, 67117, Magyar Rendőr)

Beginning in the second half of the 1980s, women's clothing displayed the presence of three style movements that were common at the time. The "classic look" adhered to clean lines, elegantly matched colors, and fine materials. The athletic or folk look emphasized comfort via baggy skirts, warm sweaters, and a wide variety of combinations that drew upon athletic and leisure wear. The third trend was the avant-garde look, which relied on shockingly daring innovations in form

and the usage of bright colors; this latter trend quickly became the favorite style of young people.

Based on research done in 1988, the fashion attitudes of Hungarian women could be grouped according to the following categories: fashion influencers, who followed either an avantgarde style, or dressed in a more sporty manner; early fashion followers (with sub-categories of sporty, elegant, or feminine styles); later fashion followers (who dressed in an elegantly feminine fashion, but with an eye toward cost); and those who dressed independently of fashion trends, i.e., conservative women or women who were neutral regarding fashion. This difference is clearly shown by the fact that five to eight percent of Hungary's female population remained impassive to fashion compared to the three or four percent of women who dressed in the avantgarde style. Those who dressed according to the avantgarde look took great care in creating an appearance that reflected a continuously innovative influence. The members of this group were mainly young urban women (especially from Budapest) under the age of thirty who earned above-average salaries at full-time positions or as employees in the service sector. "The avantgarde woman . . . is bold, modern, and not concerned in the least to be considered eccentric or conspicuous. When necessary, she is refined and never has a bad day; even though she is familiar with every style of clothing, she still wears them all in a unique way."¹⁶² Thanks to the above-average financial position these women enjoyed, they were not concerned with price and could afford to shop in specialized boutiques, downtown businesses, and salons. As could be expected, their clothing supply was also better than average; the survey results revealed that members of this particular social group had eighty-nine pieces of outerwear in their wardrobes. Among other items, this included twelve skirts, six trousers, six dresses, eleven blouses, fourteen pullovers, eleven polo shirts, two each of a set of leisurewear and an *otthonka*, six pairs of shoes, four pairs of sandals, and three pairs of boots. Obviously, the undergarments that completed this type of wardrobe numbered a minimum of between fifty to sixty items, bringing the entire supply to total roughly 140 to 150 pieces of apparel.

In contrast to the above, the women who remained indifferent to dressing in a fashionable way reduced the quality of their attire

¹⁶² Stefánia Lakatosné Liput and Csilla Váradiné Szadai, *Piac-szegmentációs kutatások felújítása (Női felsőruházat)* (Budapest: Magyar Divat Intézet Piackutatási Stúdió, Magyar Divat Intézet Irattára, 1988).

to the level of merely fulfilling their minimal needs. For this group, cleanliness, neatness, and protection from the elements were the most important aspects dress was meant to reflect. The women in this group were over forty-five years in age, generally lived in small rural communities, performed physical labor in industry or agriculture and were either unemployed or earned incomes that were lower than average. As dress was not important to them, their wardrobes were renewed erratically and based on necessity. Whatever items had become worn out, for example, were usually replaced with items that were similar in both style and color. Due to their poor financial situation, members of this group only purchased new clothing if it was absolutely essential; when shopping, they continued to frequent tried-and-true sources of mainly inexpensive items. Their clothing supply was subsequently below-average and made up of roughly fifty-two pieces of outwear including five skirts, four trousers, six blouses, dresses, and pullovers, three *otthonka*, one each of a coat and a blazer, four pairs of shoes, and two pairs of boots.¹⁶³ Their supply of undergarments was naturally more modest as well and contained anywhere between 20 and 30 items, bringing their wardrobes to a total of 70 to 80 items.

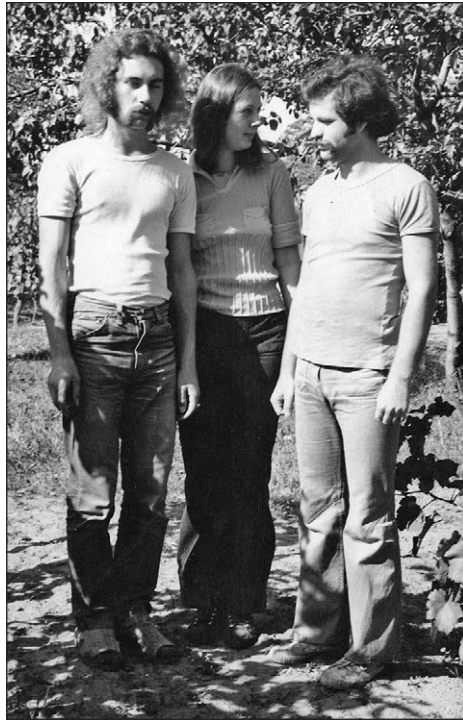


Figure 61. Since the late sixties, jeans have become an iconic item of youth clothing in Hungary too. Those who do not have them covet them, those who do, wear them proudly! Jeans have blurred the distinction between the two sexes and, to a certain extent, uniformized the wearer (private collection of Ildikó Simonovics, 600.5)

¹⁶³ Ibid., 12.

The question can naturally be raised whether this survey data accurately reflects the trends in dress found during this period. It can similarly be supposed that the group following the avantgarde style comprised a fairly narrow section of society since relatively few could afford to indulge in this type of "trendsetting." At the end of the 1980s, most well-to-do, fashionable women strove to own at least one clothing item per season that had been prepared according to the latest style. It must not be forgotten that the women who did not follow fashion on a daily basis also found it important to present an attractive and elegant appearance via the clothing that they had made for this purpose. Although they rejected overly fashionable apparel, they still sought out good quality, reliable items that would also be appropriate for more formal events.

Fashion trends played a less significant role in determining men's wear. In 1985, five major groups among men can be categorized according to their style of dress and fashion habits. The first group can best be described as those conservative dressers who clung to wearing suits and were therefore only comfortable in well-tailored suit jackets, ties, and polished shoes. The second group dressed in a sporty way, meaning that they characteristically preferred jeans worn with a plaid shirt, pullover, jacket, anorak, or brand-name sportswear. The third group was the "silk scarf, slightly feminine type, who loves and willingly wears a gold chain, bracelet, and signet ring. He adores tight-fitting suits and wears his shirts unbuttoned to the waist."¹⁶⁴ The fourth group was reserved for fashion "deviants" who "belonged to an endless variety of groups (hobo, punk, rocker, gigolo, rockabilly) whose shocking, unusual clothing style was designed to ignite confrontations with older generations and infuriate society's more conservative members. No matter the style, they all share the characteristic of willingly calling attention to their appearance for the purpose of causing a scandal. Before it used to be shoulder-length hair, today a shaved neck or an entirely bald head, one pierced ear, and the most excessive display of the latest fad is what they follow."¹⁶⁵ According to

¹⁶⁴ Csaba Gáborné, "Piac-szegmentáció a férfiruházatban" (Manuscript, Magyar Divat Intézet Irattára, Budapest: Magyar Divat Intézet, 1981), 21.

¹⁶⁵ Éva Bedecs, "Férfi, egyéniség, divat," *Ez a Divat*, no. 8 (1985), 28–31. Essentially the same opinions can be read in the research overviews compiled by the Magyar Divat Intézet (Hungarian Fashion Institute) that presented the situation in various segments of the market at this time. See Gáborné, "Piac-szegmentáció a férfiruházatban," 21.

the survey, the fifth group contained men who were not well dressed, remained indifferent to fashion, thought that clothing was only "for women" and therefore put on whatever clothing was within hand's-reach in the mornings, and consequently preferred clothes that were inexpensive and long-lasting as opposed to fashionable.

Together with the social and economic changes that Hungary was undergoing, at the end of the 1980s apparel's social significance changed dramatically. As inequalities grew, clothing made these differences obvious, even though this was most visible in the appearance of a wealthy individual as opposed to an impoverished one. Similarly, the social importance placed on dress and style decreased as it became increasingly impossible to speak of general social expectations or dress norms that public opinion judged as important at the beginning of the nineties. Together with the social transformation that was occurring, the quick pace with which fashions changed also influenced these changes. Perhaps the only exception was found in workplace attire; as Hungary's economic system was altering its form, a growing number of workplaces introduced dress codes. While many places made uniforms mandatory, those that did not had to remain satisfied with offering suggestions and passing dress codes determining the expected attire for employees.

Following communism's fall, new behavioral norms also emerged. As a consequence of the yawning gap in financial circumstances that grew increasingly wide at this time, one layer of society experienced little trouble in purchasing exclusive apparel items, which were in turn used to express their social status. Members of this particular group therefore placed great emphasis on dressing according to the latest fashion and assembling a wardrobe containing the most expensive items possible. This "nouveau riche" style took on some rather strange forms of expression, particularly during the transformational period Hungary underwent as it shifted from communism to democracy. One symbol that came to represent this social stratum was the "business entrepreneur" who appeared in a jogging suit (made of material that made a swishing sound with every movement) and loafers at any time of the day as well as during working hours. For some members of this emerging class of business contractors, their (generally unexpected and usually far too speedy) change in social standing engendered a kind of confusion in values and orientation. Many strove to make their wealth visible by constantly wearing items

that had previously been unavailable in Hungary or acted as important social indicators within the context of prestige consumerism. A growth in wealth, however, did not automatically mean an increase in cultural awareness or the adaptation of the norms and behaviors attached to a cultured appearance. It took time before people understood that in the circumstances created by a private economy, one should adopt the custom of donning a suit and tie instead of jeans or leisurewear when conducting a business negotiation and that presenting the right appearance also acts as a demonstration of dependable, stable conditions.

Following Hungary's shift to a democratic system, it can therefore be said that the emergence of social inequality was not only apparent in an individual's attire, but also became strikingly noticeable in the difference between how a well-to-do individual dressed compared to someone who was falling into deeper poverty as a result of (to mention just one example) the sudden privatization of previously state-run manufactories. At the same time, it became obvious that the social role played by dress and fashion fell in significance as the public had less and less to say regarding dress norms or expectations during the 1990s and 2000s.

As the new millennium emerged, any social expectations raised regarding dress continued to weaken. Special occasion and formal wear continued to change. Various clothing brand names rose in value, based on their temporary attachment to some sort of status-symbolizing role. Owning and wearing brand-name items came to express the individual's ability to keep up with social expectations or demonstrate his or her actual (or only desired) social position. The significance possessed by these garments can be clearly followed among members of the upper or middle classes during the decades that followed the fall of communism: "As we stroll through downtown Budapest, it is not hard to notice that young people dress just as well as those in Paris or London do. Other than their clothes, make-up is trendy and various kinds of jewelry can be seen everywhere. Body piercings are quite popular among young people. Perhaps only patterns and symbols tattooed to different parts of the body are even more popular . . . the dress habits indicating a variety of subcultures . . . have expanded. Jeans, a colorful T-shirt declaring some type of a saying, and a pair of trainers are extremely popular streetwear here in the city."¹⁶⁶ As the

¹⁶⁶ Antal Csipes, *A divatról komolyan* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2011), 128.

clothing selection expanded, following the generally accepted norms related to presenting a well-dressed appearance was not much of a challenge for those whose financial situation allowed for this type of luxury. For those living in deep poverty, however, the need to fulfill their own basic requirements defines their dressing habits. Living in highly impoverished circumstances frequently means that even the most basic elements of clothing cannot be attained. The inhabitants of Hungary's slums, ghettos, and poor quarters face the daily challenge of not possessing the clothing that is adequate for their needs.

Chapter Six

“We Ate, We Drank, We Filled Our Stomachs”: Nutrition, Eating, and Dietary Habits

The general characteristics of eating habits

While eating and dietary habits are primarily formed by economic circumstances and social status, the demands or possibilities related to various professions obviously play their own role in defining nutrition. Other than these factors, the influences related to how food was prepared and consumed in previous eras, regional traditions, the cultural background of certain groups or individuals, and the expectations raised in connection with these categories are all aspects that deserve mention. The influence of religious requirements in connection with eating and dietary habits may either be palpable or have faded into the background, as occurred in the era currently under examination. As the social differences exhibited by how and what kind of nourishment is attained can also demonstrate inequalities in financial position among various individuals or groups, the study of food consumption and dietary habits provides the most tangible means of analyzing this topic.

Beginning at the turn of the 1930s to the 1940s and extending all the way to the first decade of the twenty-first century, Hungary’s alimentary history can be broken up into roughly four periods. During the first decade of the wartime years, deprivation was the rule as the destruction of food sources resulted in widespread shortages. As shortages became less common in the second half of the 1940s, eating habits generally signaled a return to tradition. Defined by the “abundant poverty” that came about as a consequence of the Rákosi era’s adherence to a planned economy, the second period began at the start of the 1950s and ended in the late 1960s while additionally introducing smaller adjustments in eating habits. This period also ushered in the first innovations in food preparation techniques. From the end of the 1960s to the middle of the 1980s, the third period brought the

experience of being able to eat one's fill along with the significant modernization of kitchen equipment and the transformation of eating habits. The fourth period emerged in the second half of the 1980s and extended throughout the era marked by the fall of communism and influences habits even today. It is defined by overeating, increased differentiation, and the overall decrease in attaching a sense of prestige and importance to the social significance of eating.

From starvation to "goulash communism"

Wartime unavoidably entails privation, impoverishment, and meaningless sacrifice. The effect World War II had on daily living conditions was increasingly felt as the thirties turned toward the forties. Extending from 1945 to 1950, the initial postwar period saw food shortages followed by the reorganization and stabilization of the food supply and the subsequent gradual improvement in the quality of foodstuffs. Within the given circumstances, fulfilling the slow recovery of the level necessary for meeting minimal eating requirements was all that was possible at the time. The private sector continued to fill a defining role in maintaining the food supply while eating habits and disparities in eating habits did not change notably in comparison to those found before the war. As the number and proportion of individuals lacking provisions or exhibiting malnutrition remained high, it can be stated that differences in income continued to play a defining role in food consumption.

Food shortages were practically a fact of everyday life in postwar Hungary as the conflict had wreaked havoc on the nation's infrastructure, agriculture, food production, and trade. The extent of how alarming conditions were is best demonstrated by the fact that from 1945 to 1946 public supply struggled with shortages of 45 percent compared to the amount consumed in 1938. Prices quickly soared as a result of the economic shambles in which the country found itself. By the middle of 1945, a loaf of bread cost twenty-five pengő, compared to 0.4 pengő in 1938. White flour was thirty pengő (previously 0.4), the cost of one egg fluctuated between ten and fifteen pengő (0.1 before the war), while the price of a kilogram of lard and bacon was between six hundred and eight hundred pengő, compared to the pre-war cost of 1.6 pengő.¹ In July 1945, the rate of inflation was at

¹ In 1941, 1 USD was the equivalent of 5.06 pengő; by June 1944, the exchange rate for

one percent per month, a number that rose to 18 percent in October, increased to 60 percent by April 1946, and hit 1000 percent by May of that year.²

Throughout the 1945–1946 period of inflation, food prices rocketed. When the pengő depreciated, a period of barter economy ensued in which clothing or food articles counted as the most valuable form of currency. The widespread shortages in food created a secondary market, while the central distribution system created a fairly broad gap that inadvertently contributed to the emergence of “black trade.” It must be mentioned that black market trade did not cause supply shortages, but was rather their consequence, and as such subsequently filled an extremely important role in providing the population with foodstuffs. In October 1946, individuals spent 28.4 percent of their food budget on the black market, a figure that rose to 37.8 percent in December of the same year. In June 1947, this rate was 45.3 percent and fell to 20 percent by August 1947.³ During this same period an average of one-fourth of individuals’ daily calorie intake originated from foodstuffs procured on the black market. International aid formed a similarly significant factor in slowly stabilizing the supply chain. Between January 1946 and August 1947, JOINT (American Joint Distribution Committee) shipped 657 freight cars’ worth of food aid to Hungary. UNRRA, an aid organization for UNESCO, provided a total of 81 million dollars in aid for food supplies, clothing, and medicine.

Rationing became the most important method applied by the central food distribution system and ration cards were issued as a right of citizenship. Maintaining food supplies was attempted by means of legally requiring farmers to turn over a portion of their crops to the state. In December 1945, the previously calculated per capita ration of bread was halved due to food shortages. State-run soup kitchens were opened in an attempt to alleviate the lack of available food. Once the siege of Budapest had ended, twenty state-run soup kitchens operated throughout Budapest; by the summer of 1945, the number of

1 USD had risen to 33.1 pengős. For more on currency values, see Appendix.

² For an economic examination of this issue, see Sándor Pető-Szakács, *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének a története 1945–1985*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1985); Zoltán Kaposi, *Magyarország gazdaságtörténete 1700–2000* (Budapest: Dialóg-Campus, 2002); János Honvári, *Magyarország gazdaságtörténete Trianontól a rendszerváltásig* (Budapest: Aula, 2005).

³ Ibid. See also Ádám Martonyi, “Infláció, fogyasztói árak Magyarországon a második világháború után (1945–1968),” *Statistikai Szemle* 90, no. 5 (2012): 373–93.

places dispensing food included 124 official and 278 factory kitchens, a system that made it possible for 150,000 people to receive one meal per day.⁴ In the small or larger towns located in the countryside, similar methods were applied as a means of helping those in need.

In the interest of improving public supply, beginning in February 1946 a government decree made it mandatory for employers to pay their employees and their family members “in kind,” via food allowances that were calculated based on the number of calories judged necessary for survival. As this attempt did not prove successful, employers were first permitted to exchange this allowance for money, then the officially-calculated calorie values were also drastically reduced. Parallel to the introduction of the forint—the currency that replaced the pengő in an attempt to solve the drastic rate of inflation that arose following World War II—a unified national ration card system was also launched. Its efficacy was significantly diminished by the fact that severe drought conditions led to poor crop yields in 1946, resulting in the inability to ensure a sufficient amount of surplus in food supplies upon which ration cards could be based. Inadequate, deficient nutrition became the norm as the daily values for calorie intake did not reach even half of what they had been before the war.⁵ The situation improved with painful slowness: initially raised to 250 grams per person in July 1947, the daily bread ration was later lowered to 200 grams per person in September of that year. Supplementary portions were provided for expectant mothers and those performing hard physical labor or supporting multiple children. Due to yet another disappointing harvest in 1947, two days per week were designated as “corn days,” meaning that ration cards could only be used to obtain corn flour on these days. Compared to its neighboring countries, Romania was the only other nation where the average food allowances for 1947 were as low as the quotas found in Hungary.

Throughout the period of reconstruction that occurred during the early postwar years, a decisive proportion of Hungary’s population did not receive adequate nourishment, a situation that was particularly true in the cities and Budapest. In 1945, the average level of food consumption hovered somewhere below half of what it had

⁴ See József Kővágó, ed., *Budapest közállapotai az 1945/46. tél küszöbén* (Budapest: Budapest Művészeti és Tudományos Intézet, 1946); and Károly Ignác, “A katasztrófa és az újrakezdés időszaka—Budapest 1945-ben,” *Levéltári Közlemények* 86, nos. 1–2 (2015): 33–52.

⁵ Between 1934 and 1938, the average calorie intake per person was 2,805 kcal.

been before the war. In contrast to prewar years, bread came to play a far more crucial role in daily nutrition: rather than functioning as a supplement to meals, one consequence of widespread shortages was that bread came to represent the main source of daily nourishment. The daily intake of dry legumes meanwhile doubled in comparison to what it had previously been, while the consumption of potatoes and fresh fruit also grew. For the sake of objectivity, it must be stated that these figures from 1947 already indicated that the situation was steadily solidifying in comparison to the conditions experienced between 1945 and 1946.

During the first few months after World War II, access to twenty-five grams of bread and one gram of lard per day actually represented decent provisions. According to the statistics gathered by a survey conducted among five hundred students in Budapest in December 1945, nine-tenths of the survey's participants ate three times a day. Breakfast was a bowl of soup made of browned breadcrumbs and a single cup of coffee or tea. Lunch consisted either of stewed vegetables with no meat, some type of noodles, or potatoes. Very few students had regular access to meat, eggs, or milk.⁶ As a consequence of food shortages, attempts to "stretch" or supplement the ingredients that were available became an increasingly prevalent aspect of daily nutrition that grew widespread virtually independent of social status. Various newspapers and books offered housewives advice on how to provide a varied diet while simultaneously managing to substitute or supplement missing ingredients: "For children sandwiches can also be prepared by chopping a few handfuls of spinach leaves to the fineness of parsley and sprinkling this onto a slice of bread spread with either lard or butter."⁷ On May 13, 1945, the newspaper *Kis Újság* drew readers' attention to the following recipe for stewed nettles: "Place leaves removed from the stem into boiling water and cook for five minutes. Be careful not to cook for any longer as this will lessen the number of vitamins. Drain thoroughly and put the nettles through a meat grinder while using a fine plate disc, or push them through a fine sieve. After preparing a light roux . . . stir in the nettles, add sufficient salt or perhaps flavor with ground pepper. Bring to boil and cook thoroughly. The entire family will think they are eating

⁶ Gyula Marczell, "Budapest lakosságának élet-halálharca ötszáz tanuló éttrendjében," *Városi Szemle*, 2 (1946): 145–50.

⁷ *Asszonyok*, no. 3 (1946), 5.

spinach. If available, milk or broth can be added to the roux instead of water, this will only add to the dish. Instead of a roux, sour cream thickened with flour can be used to save lard without compromising on flavor." It therefore comes as no surprise that food recipes from 1945–1946 predominantly feature meatless dishes, such as a detailed description of how to prepare spinach dumplings, a stew made of boiled eggs, vegetable goulash, or stewed sorrel with mushrooms. Browned breadcrumb soup became one of the era's most common dishes. Suggested diets featuring meat only became more widespread after 1947.

Food was distributed via the state-maintained ration card system for years, thereby guaranteeing access to the bare minimum of food necessary for survival. By the end of the 1940s the situation stabilized, although, as quickly became apparent, only temporarily. The ration card system came to an end and agricultural production for 1948 approached prewar levels; production of some basic items even surpassed those reached before World War II while the selection of goods found on the free market continued to expand. Overall, the extent of nutrition increased as consumption of sugar, vegetables, fruit, lard, and dairy products rose. Following the stabilization of the economy in 1946, circumstances showed gradual recovery, yet still had not reached the level deemed necessary from a medical viewpoint. According to household statistics, in December 1947 one member of a working-class family living in Budapest received 2,213 calories daily, while the family members of civil servants averaged 1,757 calories per day.⁸ An office clerk's family had access to 2,438 calories a day per person and pensioners received 2,301. At the time, the average daily calorie intake recommended for adult men was 2,400. This figure was raised to 3,000 for those performing physical labor necessitating a moderate level of exertion. A survey made in 1948 regarding the nutrition of 35,000 workers employed in thirty-five Hungarian industrial plants concluded that the calorie content of the lunches served in factory cafeterias was not meeting desired standards as neither the food's nutritional worth nor the amount of protein it contained was able to surpass the average level of that found during the interwar period.⁹

⁸ Marczell, "Háztartás-statisztikai felvétel budapesti családokról."

⁹ Dénes Kovács, "A néptáplálkozás egyes kérdései," *Népegészségügy*, no. 10 (1958): 262–67.

In the middle of the 1940s, the most important site for daily nutrition was naturally the kitchen. For both working-class city dwellers and peasant-class households, the kitchen was used for food preparation as well as for numerous other daily activities. In lower middle-class households, kitchens were primarily used for cooking and serving meals, while middle-class or upper middle-class households generally used the kitchen for meal preparation alone. As the 1940s crept toward the 1950s, the nationalization of dwellings led to reductions in living space, thereby making it more uncommon to continue the differentiated usage of various living areas. As a result, in many homes the kitchen once again operated as a multifunctional space.

In an average working-class flat (consisting of one room and a kitchen), the following furnishings and equipment were the most important objects found in the kitchen: one table, four to six kitchen chairs, a small, three-legged stool, a taller, four-legged stool used as an additional work surface, a kitchen hutch, a shelf, a mop bucket, and a dustbin. Kitchen ranges or iron cook stoves were more commonly used for cooking, while petroleum or gas stoves were far rarer. Kitchen walls were usually painted from top to bottom as tile was less common. In the smaller part of the flat, a spigot fixed above a wall sink provided water, while water was hauled in buckets from a well located in the building's courtyard or on the street outside to the larger part of the dwelling. A textile wall-hanging frequently decorated the area around the table. The most essential kitchen equipment found in a two- to four-person household included one 10- or 20-liter pot used for both heating water and washing clothes, one large wash-basin, two to three cooking pots either 2- or 3-liters in size, one half-liter small pot, one four-liter pot, one pot for scalding milk, one pot for boiling water, a frying pan, a few pot lids, six plates and six bowls, cutlery, one pitcher for water and one for milk, a few mugs, some covers for dishes, and cooking spoons.

In 1948, the estate inventory made for a middle-class family home located in the city of Debrecen listed more than four hundred items of kitchen equipment. In this two-person household, essentially every type of object needed for running a household as well as for serving guests could be found. As befitted their social status, the more elaborately decorated household implements were stored in a separate, marble-topped sideboard. The tea set for twelve people, the porcelain coffee service for six, the eight stemmed glasses, the spoons for

milk or coffee, the fruit-stand, the porcelain breadbasket, and the set of compote dishes all served the purpose of providing the appropriate backdrop for both daily meals and more festive occasions. Not to be forgotten are the twelve bowls, thirteen plates, thirteen sandwich plates, two pasta bowls, and one compote bowl also contained in the inventory.

Meal preparation was a time-consuming occupation demanding constant preparatory measures such as hauling water from the well, lighting the cookstove fire, and heating water. Most households paid meticulous attention to the kitchen's level of cleanliness. The kitchen table, for example, was commonly covered with an easily maintained oilcloth. As advice for setting the table and serving meals recommended in 1950: "May your table remain clean and attractive even if you dine at the kitchen table. While a white tablecloth is superfluous for weekdays, there is never a time when a freshly cleaned tabletop is uncalled for: either oilcloth or an inexpensive, colorful tablecloth can be used to cover the table. At the sight of a handsomely set table, your family will take their meals in good spirits."¹⁰

The second phase in the history of nutrition during this period began at the beginning of the 1950s and essentially ended at the end of the 1960s. Its beginning was marked by the completion of the nationalization of Hungary's production and trade in foodstuffs and the subsequent transformation of the supply system. As a consequence of the politics of the time—which forced the push toward industrialization—this sector of light industry was also neglected in favor of developing the nation's presence in heavy industry. Following the elimination of market mechanisms, developing the infrastructure for food production and trade was disregarded; between 1950 to 1953, Hungary's food supply turned chaotic, shortages became not only widespread but also sunk to critical depths, and the quality of nutrition subsequently went into decline. In short, the public supply system was teetering on the edge of disaster. People rushed to obtain a significant surplus of whatever product happened to be available. Unless an individual belonged to the caste of political leaders who had access to the central supply or could "shop" in separate stores, procuring the most necessary foodstuffs for maintaining minimal survival became the most essential aspect of everyday life throughout every social class. Hours were spent standing in front of stores in

¹⁰ Mária Keresztesné Pataki, *A dolgozó nő háztartása* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1950).

the hope that some basic provisions could be obtained. The number of malnourished individuals rose as food shortages brought about a macabre, peculiarly relative form of social equality regarding nutrition. While the situation temporarily improved (to a certain extent) following a change in politics in June 1953, malnutrition remained a specter of everyday life along with the either chronic or seasonal food shortages Hungarian society underwent during this period

Unsurprisingly, in the first half of the 1950s nutritional and eating habits were primarily defined by the lack of foodstuffs. Rather than easing tensions, the system of compulsory delivery increased them: in 1952, the commandeering of agricultural produce (known informally as the *padlássöprés*, “attic sweeping”) left more than 800,000 peasant families with less grain than what was necessary to meet their daily bread ration per head. Nor could the diet of working-class families be called varied: each family member consumed on average a little over 250 grams of bread per day. Meat was eaten at most once or twice a week while dishes made of potatoes or noodles filled the menu during the rest of the week. Other than bread with lard, bacon and inexpensive butcher products—such as sausage made of horsemeat—were eaten for breakfast and dinner. For a change of pace, bread with jam or bread with a hard piece of factory-produced solidified “mixed fruit gel” could be chosen instead. According to various statistics and figures regarding household nutrition, the food consumed by an average working-class Hungarian family was still far below what a family from the same social class had had access to in the final decades of the 1930s, whether viewed from the point of view of value in calories, variety, or the ingredients used.

In 1951, the most popular magazine geared toward female readers, *Nők Lapja*, offered strikingly few recipes for meat dishes in its weekly column suggesting dietary advice; extensive usage of vegetables was urged instead. As far as the main course was concerned, dishes including meat only appeared in Sunday dinner menus. At the beginning of the 1950s, cuts of fresh meat were frequently replaced with “fillers,” such as fried bologna, which either accompanied stewed vegetables or was stuffed with vegetables and served alongside rice or potatoes. Recipes demanding inexpensive meat or meat substitutes were in wide demand among housewives at the time: out of necessity, dishes like vegetable “meatloaf,” a kind of bologna-like manufactured “wurst” dipped in batter and fried, or bologna fried with onions in a paprika sauce became commonplace.

The extent to which the era's popular provider of household tips—titled the *Household of a Working Woman*—ignored the realities of the time is best demonstrated by the following description:

Monotony is not the same as frugality. Anyone who takes just a little bit of time to think over the question of what to cook will never prepare the same dish—not even every two weeks! Why, even a popular, seasonal dish like *lecsó* [a traditional pepper and tomato stew] can be served a variety of ways: on one occasion barley can be added to it, another time it can accompany a pasta such as egg barley, or it can be made with sausage once, then with smoked meat at a later time. Nor does meat broth, a dish on the menu year-round, have to be served with just thin-cut noodles. Semolina noodles or breadcrumb dumplings are also welcome possibilities, not to mention thick-cut egg noodles! Additions to stewed vegetables could be fried potatoes, semolina croquettes, fried bread, fried bologna, boiled sausage, or potato croquettes.¹¹

The handbook's author also expressed the opinion that it was no longer necessary for households to accumulate supplies because "shops await customers from the early morning hours to late evening."¹² No specific mention, of course, was made of what products readers could actually find—or not—on shop shelves; similarly ignored was the fact that the buying power of an average paycheck was steadily decreasing during the first half of the 1950s while food prices rose significantly between 1950 and 1954.

As a reflection of the new spirit of the times, this type of publication also emphasized the importance of family and community as advice was provided regarding how to use meals to turn political anniversaries into a family celebration:

Most families meet at least once a day at the table, the place where family members can express their love for one another and experience the daily joy of spending time together. Let's center the family gathering around the one we are celebrating, the one having an anniversary that day. Let's prepare his or her favorite food for dinner, not neglecting to include some sort of sweet or noodles. . . . First and foremost, let's celebrate our biggest national holiday, the day of our liberation, April 4, and let's celebrate the world's workers on May 1! We must turn our national holidays and notable anniversaries into intimate, family celebrations. A dinner prepared with greater care than

¹¹ Mária Pataki, *A dolgozó nő háztartása* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1956), 48.

¹² *Ibid.*

usual, a supper held before the celebratory day, the donning of festive apparel by the entire family, and the attention paid to the table's appearance are all factors in bringing our people's great holidays closer to each and every member of the family.¹³

However, in spite of the official directives regarding holidays and the "household tips" disseminated in popular magazines at the time, in reality very few families made the customs listed above into actual habits.

Household advice columns also made a point of following the latest political changes:

Today the nation is the workers'. Our standard of living is rising steadily. We are obviously living better and easier than before. Our improved lifestyle is best seen in our improved nutrition. While these improvements in nourishment will continue to indicate the increased standard of living for a time, as Minister of State Ernő Gerő has stated, it is true that later on a certain saturation point will be reached and the growing standard of living will become more and more evident in the area of clothing and culture instead. The Five-Year Plan will open our future to vast vistas, the like of which were never seen before.¹⁴

In his or her everyday life, the average Hungarian either did not experience this, or was in fact enduring the exact opposite. The publication's author additionally urged applying the planned economy system's approach to household tasks and naturally provided tips on how to use the "Stakhanov work method" for the purpose of reducing time spent on meal preparation. According to this author, the ideal housewife, "Mrs. Szabó," first carefully lists each and every ingredient that needs to be purchased on a piece of drawing paper tacked to the kitchen cabinet and then tracks what foodstuff has been consumed in order to avoid any surprises as she creates the weekly meal plan.¹⁵

In the beginning of the 1950s, the projected estimates regarding per capita food consumption fluctuated considerably and, in fact, showed an overall reduction. Beginning in 1954, food consumption

¹³ Mária Pataki Keresztesné, *A dolgozó nő háztartása* (Budapest: Athenaeum Kiadó, 1950), 44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Pataki, *A dolgozó nő háztartása*, 39.

slowly began to rise. The population's widespread experience of starvation or near-starvation led to continued interest in procuring the kinds of high-calorie goods that subsequently not only maintained an important role in daily nutrition at the time, but also remained a part of diets during the next decade as well. Until the middle of the twentieth century, a significant proportion of those belonging to the peasant class consumed poor-quality foodstuffs and lived on diets that were lacking from a variety of perspectives, as their weekly diets overwhelmingly consisted of bread, flour, potatoes, and legumes. In these reduced circumstances, self-sufficiency presented the main opportunity for survival while tradition also continued to define dietary habits. The primary objective for certain households or smallholdings was to produce a year's worth of food that would be sufficient for the entire family. The most important foodstuffs consisted of wheat, lard, cured bacon, meat, other grains used to prepare mushes, and vegetables. Throughout the 1950s, the most essential item made of grain was overwhelmingly bread, which was prepared and baked at home. In general, four loaves of bread—weighing five kilograms each—were baked once a week. Within the circumstances created by a shortage economy and the requirement of delivering a fixed quota of agricultural produce to the state, keeping the family fed demanded supreme effort. It is no wonder that the drastic reductions brought about by the quota system rendered it extremely difficult for most peasant families to maintain any level of self-sufficiency.¹⁶

The income conditions and reduced opportunities for gaining access to foodstuffs further impelled village dwellers to produce the goods necessary for meeting their own nutritional needs, a situation which held true throughout the two decades following the end of World War II. During the first decade after the war and until the middle of the 1960s, the



Figure 62. Little girl eating bread and jam in 1958 (photo by Irén Ács, MNM TF, 93.201)

¹⁶ Iván Balassa, ed., *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997), 417–571.

eating habits of peasant families followed the patterns and customs dictated by tradition. Still present in the 1950s, Hungary's historical peasant class led a lifestyle organized around the changing demands of various farm tasks; nutritional habits therefore conformed to farming's seasonal rhythm. While peasant families generally ate only twice a day in winter, during the summer season it was common to eat four or even five times a day. In the weeks preceding spring planting, not only did the number of daily meals rise to three, the amount of food also became more plentiful in order to prepare families for the work ahead. It therefore follows that foods rich in calories and nutrients were added to their diet during seasons when the most physical labor was demanded, such as when crops were being harvested. In autumn the number of meals once again fell to three per day and the amount of food was also reduced, unless, of course, the grape harvest was underway.

It must not be forgotten that "food and drink serve not only the purpose of sustaining life and imparting strength for the performance of labor but are also a source of enjoyment. It is for this reason that among all the better or worse dishes available a differentiation is made between those which provide a greater or lesser sense of pleasure."¹⁷ In peasant households the custom of family members eating from one bowl came to an end in the 1950s as eating from separate plates became widespread and customary at the same time as using forks did. In spite of this change, dietary and eating habits fundamentally remained the same, just as cereals, potatoes, and corn continued to be the most important staples.¹⁸ More significant changes only began to occur after the process of collectivization came to an end, as the custom of eating meals three times a day gradually spread throughout peasant households. Alterations in traditional diets were essentially brought about by changes in social structure and lifestyle.

Hygiene obviously plays a role in determining the level of quality exhibited by nutrition: "In 1953, the Harcos [Warrior] collective farm located in Túrkeve stored food staples on the premises of a school and cooked outdoors. Within these circumstances the bare minimum for health requirements could obviously not be fulfilled: the spectacle of

¹⁷ Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer, *Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1997), 198.

¹⁸ Eszter Kisbán, "Táplálkozáskultúra," in *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód*, ed. Iván Balassa (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997), 417–583.

homemade noodles being left to dry on the ground while household animals ate from food placed on the ground could be seen daily.”¹⁹ Day laborers were still eating outside, seated on the ground in the middle of the 1950s. Meanwhile, food shortages made it increasingly difficult for employers to ensure the kind of provisions that would be sufficiently nutritious and calorie rich to sustain an intense degree of physical labor: “From the point of view of both quantity and quality, the insufficiencies in food supply are having a negative effect on the workers’ work morale and production, as we had numerous opportunities to observe and gather evidence of while inspecting the provisions at, for example, the machine depots in Kám and Tarján, or the state farms in Berettyóújfalu, Sorokmajor, and Biharkereszt.”²⁰

In 1956, the household statistics for five thousand families were gathered; among the participating families, the monthly average income per family member was 636 forints. While the lowest income proved to be 339 forints, the income for those in the highest bracket was 1,178 forints a month. In the more impoverished families, the amount spent per month on food was 215 forints per person; wealthier families were able to spend 457 forints. On average, the families observed for the purpose of this survey dedicated the monthly sum of 316 forints per person to food.²¹ These differences could naturally be observed in the daily per capita calorie intake as those earning better incomes spent one-and-a-half times more on provisions. Other than the quantity, the contrast in quality is best demonstrated by the fact that mutton and horsemeat, food lower in both price and quality, were consumed at the highest rates in families whose income was lower or below average. Due to dietary habits and the lack of selection, beef was consumed relatively rarely and only in small quantities: poultry and pork were the main staples for meat consumption. It is a sign of the customs as well as the circumstances of the time that—out of the 1,700 working-class and employed families living in Budapest or larger towns in the countryside to participate in the survey—nearly every second family was raising a hog for butchering in 1956, while more than nine-tenths of the peasant families surveyed

¹⁹ György Hatos et al., “Mezőgazdasági idénymunkások ételmezésének helyzete és a megjavítás lehetőségei,” *Népegészségügy*, no. 6 (1955): 162–66.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ötezer család 1956. évi háztartási feljegyzései*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 5 (Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1957).

were doing the same. Among those living in villages in 1956, the type of income-based, nutritional inequality found there was less drastic compared to the disparities city dwellers experienced: in low-income peasant families the sum of 311 forints per month was spent on food, while the wealthiest farming families allocated 371 forints per person for their monthly food budget.

After the 1956 Revolution, a bit more attention was paid to ensuring basic food supplies, but this effort could by no means be declared an absolute success. Other than the anarchical operating approach that typified a planned economy, collectivizing Hungary's agricultural system contributed to the continuation of shortages due to the significant decline in agricultural production. Regarding the food supply, the situation began to change noticeably in the second half of the 1950s as the overall scarcity of goods was gradually replaced by the temporary or constant lack of certain items that were in demand. Accumulating a household stockpile of staples remained a common household strategy.

Throughout the 1950s, the furnishings and equipment found in the kitchens of urban apartments did not change substantially. In more modern homes the wall surrounding the range, sink, or wall sink was covered in tile while in older buildings these surfaces—including the base of the wall—were protected with a coat of oil paint, thereby creating a surface that was relatively easy to clean and long-lasting. When the means for these types of surface protection were not available, paper, oilcloth, or a canvas wall-hanging was used instead. The kitchen cabinet or its substitute (shelves covered with a curtain), kitchen chairs, a dustbin made of either wood or metal, a woodbin for kindling, a wall shelf, a table, and containers for holding spices numbered among the kitchen's most important furnishings in the mid-fifties. In most homes a wood-burning or coal-burning range or cookstove was usual; electric, petroleum, or gas-burning cooktops or stoves were rarer. Utilizing ranges naturally required familiarity with the techniques for starting, laying, and banking a fire. Regarding the tools found in a typically equipped household from the mid-1950s, at least one ten-liter pot, a laundry pot, a tub for washing dishes, two- or three-liter pots, one smaller one- to two-liter pot and a larger four- to five-liter pot, a half-liter pot, a saucepan or pot for heating milk, utensils for making tea or coffee, a frying pan, a baking pan, a meat-grinder, potlids, wooden cooking spoons, knives for cutting bread or meat,

cutting boards, at least one set of dishes sufficient for the entire family, teacups, glasses, and measuring utensils were deemed necessary.²²

Eating habits had not changed appreciably by the end of the 1950s either, at least not if the data gathered by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office in connection to nourishment is any clear indication of the actual situation. In July and September of 1958 as well as in January and April of 1959, a representative evaluation summarized the habits regarding eating and food consumption displayed by various social strata. Essentially, this assessment surveyed and compared the eating habits of urban households to village households since the families participating in the evaluation were grouped according to whether the head of the household was a worker/employee or performed agricultural work. A disproportionately high number of those living in working-class or white-collar households reported consuming only some form of liquid for breakfast, while in every fifth peasant household the same meal did not contain any type of liquid at all. In both groups, the rate of households where breakfasts combining both liquid and solid food were consumed hovered slightly above 50 percent. Among workers and employees, 41 percent drank milk with coffee for breakfast, a rate that rose to 53 percent in peasant households. While tea constituted the second most common drink in urban households, milk was the second choice for peasant households, even though the habit of drinking tea was gradually spreading throughout rural communities. At the end of the 1950s, calorie-rich foods, such as cured bacon, rendered animal fat, and potatoes, still defined the breakfast habits of farming families. In working-class or employed families, butter, cheese, or other dairy products were equally significant compared to traditional breakfast staples.²³

As far as both groups were concerned, the importance of the mid-day meal was emphasized, mainly due to the fact that it was usually a freshly prepared, hot meal which generally consisted of two courses, either soup and then a meat dish, or stewed vegetables followed by noodles. In urban households, meat or dishes containing meat were served every two days, compared to village households where meat

²² Balassa, *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód*; Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer, "Mi, korrekt parasz-tok...": *Hagyományos élet Átányon*, Korall Társadalomtörténeti monográfiák 1 (Budapest: Korall Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület, 2010).

²³ *Étrendi szokások a munkás-, alkalmazotti és paraszti háztartásokban*, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények, no. 34 (Budapest: KSH, 1960).

customarily found its way onto the menu every three days. For main meals, the most common mode of preparation for meat dishes was either *pörkölt*, meat stewed in a paprika sauce, or *vagdalt*, a form of minced meat similar to meatloaf. These dishes were frequently accompanied by potatoes or spaetzle dumplings and as such were only consumed on Sundays by rural families, while urban families were more likely to eat these kinds of foods during the week as well. The consumption of vegetable-based dishes was somewhat more customary in working-class and employed families compared to rural households; on average, stewed vegetables were served as the second course every third day of the week. Significant differences were not found in the consumption of noodle dishes as both urban and rural households were likely to eat noodles every fourth day of the week.

The role, importance, and composition of the evening supper revealed a sharp contrast between the two groups. While more than half of working-class or employed families consumed cold food for supper, only one-third ate leftovers from their midday meal and a paltry one-tenth prepared a fresh, hot meal for the evening. In contrast, nearly one-fifth of the observed peasant households cooked a fresh evening meal as almost one-third ate leftovers from the midday meal instead.²⁴ Even as the end of the 1950s approached, how and what farming families ate noticeably followed the rhythm of agricultural seasons; at the height of the season, a cold midday meal followed by a hot supper was more frequent.

In the cases of both groups, the diets and eating habits for those possessing a higher income demonstrated more variety and quantity in comparison to those earning lower incomes. This meant that better situated individuals ate meat or other products available at the butcher's, butter, and cheese more often, while a high percentage of those living in worse conditions relied instead on less expensive categories of animal fats. During this period as well as later on, poorer families fulfilled their calorie needs with foods like a slice of bread spread with lard and sprinkled with sugar, or *aprítós*, the name given to a dish that consisted of crumbling bread into tea, milk, milk with coffee, or cocoa. Weekday as well as holiday or Sunday meals revealed significant differences regarding the number of courses and their content. The majority of both urban and rural families prepared midday meals containing three (or at times four) courses of fresh, hot food served in

²⁴ Ibid.

bountiful amounts. The first course for Sunday meals was broth soup followed by either one or a variety of meat dishes and sweets.²⁵

In the beginning of 1961, 525 elementary school students in Budapest were surveyed in connection to their breakfast habits. Out of those asked, 5.5 percent had a cup of plain tea as their only breakfast. A cup of milk was the breakfast for 14.3 percent of the children, while 25 percent had tea and some sort of baked good or a slice of bread with some type of a spread. For 29.3 percent breakfast was milk or a drink containing milk and a baked good or bread with some kind of spread. 21.4 percent of the children had nothing at all for breakfast; 4.5 percent, however, ate some other type of food or leftovers from another meal.²⁶ When combined, those who ate nothing or only drank a cup of liquid for breakfast represent more than 40 percent of those surveyed, a fairly high proportion which not only indicates the possibility of malnutrition, but also suggests the continuation of eating habits from earlier periods.

In 1961, the Research Institute for Domestic Trade prepared an evaluation of the food consumption and nutritional habits of those earning wages or salaries.²⁷ According to the results, only 68 percent of the participating families prepared a cooked meal daily; 8 percent cooked more rarely, while 24 percent only cooked the Sunday mid-day meal. In Budapest 54 percent of the families cooked daily; in villages two-thirds of the families prepared a meal daily. In small towns four-fifths of the survey participants made a fresh, hot meal daily. Even though a move was made to extend cafeteria food services to the evening meal as well, this attempt did not prove popular. The data collected by the survey reveals that a total of 0.2 percent of the evaluated families regularly had their suppers outside of the home, at either a cafeteria or a restaurant-like place. In Budapest two-thirds of the families cooked a hot meal for supper on a daily basis; in cities located in the countryside one-third of participating families did the same, while half of those living in townships or villages ate a hot meal for supper. On the national level, an average of 52 percent of households generally ate a hot meal for supper and 48 percent had

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For a detailed look at the survey's data, see Ervin Telegdi and Nóra Vezekényi, "Budapesti iskolás gyermekek délelőtti étkezése," *Népegészségügy*, no. 2 (1963): 51–56.

²⁷ István Makai, *A bérből és fizetésből élő családok néhány élelmiszerfogyasztási szokása*, Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet Közleményei, no. 53 (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet, 1962).

cold suppers. In contrast to its failure regarding the evening meal, workplace cafeterias proved popular places for the midday meal and were increasingly frequented. Compared to the average, this habit occurred with greater intensity among those living in the capital city. From the point of view of employment, the families of employees had the highest rate of using cafeterias. The growth of this service was a general phenomenon in spite of the fact that the food served at these factory cafeterias left much to be desired regarding quality and quantity.

Eating habits were also influenced by the fact that access to gas or electricity was far more common in the capital city or other cities compared to the situation in townships or villages; in cities, preparing a hot meal at the end of the day was therefore an easier process. It must also be mentioned that a wider variety of pre-prepared or



Figure 63. Workers having lunch in the company canteen of the thermal power plant in Ajka, 1961 (Fortepan, 126462, Sándor Bauer)

frozen foods were available in cities, a powerful factor that contributed to transforming eating habits. In the beginning of the 1960s, the cooking habits of families living in townships or villages was characterized by an adherence to tradition as these areas were also where the highest proportion of people ate hot food for both main meals.

Bread continued to be one of the most important staples in the daily diet; during this period, one-tenth of the surveyed families were still preparing their own bread at home. In Budapest 7 percent of working-class families consumed homemade bread. Only 4 percent of employee families followed the same custom, compared to one-fourth of those living in townships: "The continued existence of this custom confirms the fact that even today, within smaller communities, the continuous supply of bread is not guaranteed everywhere and remains a question to be solved."²⁸ During the winter of 1960/61, on the national level 53 percent of Hungary's families butchered a hog at least once during this season. In townships, this number was 69 percent, while 43 percent of urban dwellers chose this means of procuring a sufficient meat supply: "Particularly in 1960, the market price for a live hog reached such a level that butchering at home was actually profitable compared to the price of meat and meat products bought in shops. Similarly, the frequently long-lasting shortages in meat also affected the rise in hog-butchering."²⁹ One-fourth of the families living in the countryside complained of scarcities in meat, in contrast to one-tenth of families living in Budapest. According to the survey's conclusions, the preservation of fruits and vegetables at home—canning, in other words—was another habit that continued. Eighty-two percent of the families living in Budapest canned food for winter, while 90 percent of rural families did the same. The paltry selection and low quality of the canned goods produced commercially further encouraged this habit's continuation. Rural families primarily preserved their own produce or what was left of it, while urban dwellers procured the necessary raw ingredients at farmers' markets.

Publications offering household tips and advice also reflected the transformations occurring in Hungarian society's dietary habits. Not surprisingly, these changes were not infrequently presented in a rather idealized manner:

²⁸ Ibid., 12.

²⁹ Ibid. 13.

Repeated daily and manageable in practically every household, the program for evenings at home is the family supper. All members of the family, whether small or large, take their seats round the table and—no matter how simple the food may be—the entire family eats together. Something so intimate, something so very amiable occurs when family members who have spent the day rushing and hurrying about from morning to late afternoon are calmly sitting together at the table and sharing the events of their day while partaking of a peaceful meal. Not only does it create a good atmosphere, but the family supper eaten together also impacts our health as the digestive system is better able to absorb and utilize food that was consumed in tranquil conditions.³⁰

The customs regarding mealtimes underwent major changes beginning in the middle of the 1960s. As a consequence of collectivization, the nutritional habits of rural families gradually began to transform. New household devices, such as refrigerators and gas or electric stoves, first appeared in urban households and—with some delay—eventually played a role in altering the dietary habits of rural families as well. Collectivizing agriculture had a manifold effect both on the habits determining food consumption and the state of public supply in the nation; on the one hand, collectivizing farms meant a decrease in the number of individuals who had the ability to produce enough foodstuffs to meet their own dietary requirements. On the other hand, converting the entire system of production led to the lasting scarcity of certain staples. The year 1963, for example, saw the greatest shortages in meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products. In the words of the official explanation offered at the time, “The low level of agricultural production has not made it possible to satisfy current national demands for certain products of animal origin.”³¹

The example of the village of Varsány in Nógrád County offers insight into how rural eating habits changed during the 1960s. Only one grocery existed in the community until 1961, when a second, much larger grocery store was opened. Bread was delivered daily to these shops while milk was sold mornings and evenings at the local dairy collection station. In 1971, a confectionery was opened next to the village pub; in 1972 a private entrepreneur was given a permit to sell vegetables in the village. Throughout the decade, the village grocery

³⁰ Mária Pataki, Zsuzsa Kelemen, and Anna Molnár, *Korszerű háztartás, kellemes otthon* (Budapest: Minerva, 1961), 12.

³¹ “Jelentés a közellátási helyzetről a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiuma részére,” MNL OL, 24XIX-G-4-yy.83.d., Budapest, March 24, 1964.

stores saw a steady increase in traffic, though various types of alcohol composed one-fourth of the purchased products. The food bought at the groceries consisted primarily of those kinds of staples that could only be procured from shops following the cessation of private farming, such as flour. The purchase of dried noodles, jams, and pickled vegetables only rose after household supplies had typically run out. According to Emese Kovács's observations regarding nutritional customs, advertisements also influenced these changes as many made a point of trying out the products they had seen on their television screens.³² If they gained the consumers' approval, these products became a part of the everyday diet.

Between seven hundred and eight hundred three-kilogram loaves of bread were delivered to Varsány daily; during holidays this amount could exceed one thousand loaves. Other than delivered bread, 460 households in 1960 still baked their own bread regularly and continued to do so until the end of the 1960s. The supply and consumption of milk was largely influenced by the fact that one-fourth of Varsány's households kept at least one cow and could subsequently meet their own milk needs while also selling the surplus. More milk was drunk in winter rather than in summer as a means of supplementing the nutritional gap created by the scarcity of fresh fruit and vegetables. It must be mentioned that milk was among the staples consumed daily in only one-third of the households, and these typically contained families with small children.

Saturday and Sunday meals continued to maintain their prominent place within the weekly diet, particularly due to the fact that those who worked far away from Varsány during the week returned home on Saturdays, resulting in an increased emphasis being placed on weekend meals.³³ The food prepared for the Sunday meal defined Monday's diet as well since Sunday leftovers were habitually eaten the following day. Weekends and holidays also saw a significant growth

³² Emese Kovács, "A családi háztartásszervezés átalakulása," in *Varsány: Tanulmányok egy észak-magyarországi falu társadalomnéprajzához*, ed. Tibor Bodrogi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978), 173–200.

³³ Primarily as a consequence of the state's aggressive collectivization of privately-owned land, the number of rural men who were forced to seek employment in either nearby or distant cities suddenly expanded at the beginning of the 1960s. These individuals then spent a good portion of their lives far from their families, living in *munkásszállások* (workers' dormitories) that were owned by the company where they worked.

in traffic at the village confectionery as more and more households took advantage of the opportunity to order cakes for special events: "During a holiday event, the village's inhabitants ordered 250 cakes and 1,300 pieces of pastry in advance."³⁴ Alcohol consumption was mostly satisfied by homemade wine or *pálinka*, a potent type of fruit brandy. On weekends, however, the village pub also saw an increased number of customers: "On Saturday and Sunday an average of 2,400 bottles of beer, 40 liters of *pálinka*, and 200 liters of wine is consumed. Based on information provided by wives, men spend 200–300 forints at the pub or bar and pay this amount out of the income they bring home."³⁵

Throughout the 1960s, the organized provision of food for children was also established in Varsány: during the local school's afternoon session, forty children and ten adults took advantage of the school kitchen's fifty-meal capacity, the menu of which followed the usual alteration of meatless days followed by days when meat was served.³⁶ Based on observations of their eating habits, it could be seen that Varsány's children ate only a modest breakfast—or none at all—before leaving for school each morning. For children enrolled in the afternoon session, a breakfast consisting mainly of tea, coffee, cocoa, and a pastry or bread spread with either lard, jam, or butter was also provided. Compared to the others, not receiving breakfast at home therefore meant less of a problem for the afternoon session students. Most of those who did not have a breakfast at home purchased a pastry or sweet at the grocery store.

As far as lunches were concerned, data collected over a six-week period showed that "potatoes were served eight times, prepared in various ways. Boiled noodles flavored with different ingredients appeared on the menu six times while baked noodles were provided five times. Stewed vegetables were served a total of four times. Meat broth was prepared ten times, while stewed vegetables were combined with meat three times. Goulash soup followed by a cream of

³⁴ Kovács, "A családi háztartásszervezés átalakulása," 179.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁶ Beginning in the 1960s, the Hungarian education system introduced and expanded a system for ensuring afternoon supervision for primary school-aged children. Since lessons usually finished around noon, parents could request that their children be kept in school for the *napközi* (afternoon session). Teachers would first make sure the students ate lunch at school, then the afternoon was spent playing outside and completing homework assignments for the following day.

wheat porridge was on the menu three times. The meat was always pork. Potato- or flour-based dishes represented two-thirds of the diet; attempts to introduce children to new types of food were only made one-third of the time.³⁷ For afternoon snacks children primarily received bread with jam, cold cuts, lard, butter and honey, or liverwurst.

According to observations, the transformation of eating habits among Varsány's households also depended upon whether women remained housewives, found employment within the village, or worked outside of the village. Women who stayed within the home were the most likely to cook on a daily basis. On weekdays, the entire family ate breakfast and supper together; the midday meal depended on how many and which family members were home at noon and consisted of either freshly prepared food or leftovers from the previous day. In Varsány a significant difference between housewives and those women who worked at the collective farm was that the children of the latter group ate at the school cafeteria.

Interestingly enough, the women employed at the collective farm took pains to modernize their households, yet either never or only rarely used the appliances they went to great pains to procure, such as the gas stove. Their families had meals together in the mornings and evenings and usually ate cold dishes. Women who were not doing agricultural work, but were instead employed in the village proved the most open to innovations in their households and eating habits. For the most part, this group of women spent four to six hours per day earning money, which left them with a fair amount of time for running their households. When it came to meal preparation, they frequently turned to pre-prepared foods or canned goods for ingredients. Their families ate cold food for breakfast and dinner and mostly had hot meals for lunch.

The final group of village women consisted of those who were employed outside of the village; the fact that they were paid hourly wages and had to work multiple shifts completely transformed their household and food preparation habits. In these families, cold store-bought foodstuffs were eaten during the week while freshly cooked food was only prepared on weekends or holidays. In the case of workers who commuted to work, it was relatively common for grandparents to take on the task of making sure the family had cooked food

³⁷ Kovács, "A családi háztartásszervezés átalakulása," 181.

every day.

From the middle of the 1960s, collectivization and its accompanying lifestyle changes—such as the renovation of houses—led to alterations in bread consumption as well. This was mainly true among village dwellers, who gradually stopped baking their own bread in favor of buying it from the local store.³⁸ It must be mentioned that labeling a product as “homemade” versus “store-bought” generally indicated a difference in quality, to the benefit of homemade goods. This designation remained current for quite some time as products such as homemade bread, baked goods, or sour cream were synonymous with better quality according to popular thought.

Among those living in villages, collectivization brought about a whole range of transformations that consequently sped up and altered the customs connected to food consumption and nutritional habits. When farms had still been privately owned, those belonging to the peasant class had—virtually without exception—spent money only on goods that depended on some form of industrial processing and therefore could not be produced at home. In the 1960s, the increased spread of large-scale agricultural cooperatives eased the demand for human labor as machines were used instead; the need to increase the intake of calorie-rich foods during certain work-intensive seasons subsequently became less widespread. As the regulations regarding ownership changed, greater value was naturally placed on the role household gardening plots played in providing families with a regular food supply. In peasant households the most significant transformations began to unfold in the second half of the 1960s. At this point, eating three meals a day gradually became a common phenomenon. Cereals, potatoes, and corn remained staple ingredients for food preparation.³⁹ The calorie content of the dishes prepared for consumption began to rise toward the end of the 1960s as food became richer and greasier. Better financial circumstances enabled families to eat more amply and more often. These changes were most apparent in the menus and dishes prepared for wedding parties as more traditional peasant foods were slowly exchanged for the type of food more commonly eaten by middle-class families.

³⁸ “A kenyér és péksütemény továbbá a tej és tejtermék ellátás alakulása a mezőgazdaság szocialista átszervezése után: Előterjesztés a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium kollégiuma részére,” MNL OL, XIX-G-4-yy.83.d., September 11, 1963.

³⁹ Kisbán, “Táplálkozásokultúra,” 417–583.

The influence religious stipulations continued to have on eating habits during the 1960s is best demonstrated by a micro-analysis conducted in 1967. A survey made among workers at a farm cooperative located in Vajszló, a village found in the Ormánság region, revealed that most families ate some form of meat four times a week. Noodles were consumed twice a week and stewed vegetables once. Three-fourths of the families surveyed ate noodles or stewed vegetables on Fridays and abstained from eating meat. Some form of meat most commonly appeared on family tables on Saturdays and Sundays.⁴⁰

The results of a research project that examined the eating habits of 230 urban and 246 rural families in Baranya County in 1968, showed an overall improvement in nutrition, an increase in calorie intake, and a higher consumption of sugar, meat, and lard. Other than their financial circumstances, personal preferences and improvisation also had an influence on what certain families ate during the week. Regarding alimentary habits, urban and particularly rural families held fast to maintaining traditions. Out of those surveyed, only slightly more than one-third reported regularly drinking milk or dairy-based beverages; within this category, four-fifths were employed in industry or white-collar work, while only four-tenths of those working in agriculture habitually drank milk.

In both urban and rural households, meat was more frequently finding its way into midday or evening meals as roughly four-tenths of the reported meals contained some type of meat dish. Animal-based, rendered fats (such as pork lard) played a defining role in nutrition; whether in cities or villages, bacon, cracklings, and grease-laden meat stews were often found in diets. In villages, pork lard was used without exception for cooking, a logical choice given that virtually every family butchered its own hog. One-third of urban households, however, were already cooking with vegetable oil, or using a mixture of vegetable oil and lard to prepare meals.

Bread unswervingly remained the predominant "staff of life": three-fourths of the households in Hungary's cities reported eating three-quarters of a kilogram of bread per day, while one-fourth consumed between a quarter- and a half-kilogram of bread daily. In villages nearly two-thirds of the families surveyed fell into the latter

⁴⁰ For more details regarding the survey's data, see Aladár Soós, József Walthier, and Ferenc Simonné, "Ormánsági termelőszövetkezetekben dolgozók táplálkozásának tanulmányozása," *Egészségtudomány* 14 (1970): 74–88.

category; only one-tenth reported eating at least half of a kilogram of bread per day, while one-fourth consumed less than a quarter of a kilogram daily. It must also be mentioned that the consumption of boiled or baked noodle dishes was more common in rural households.

In reference to the frequency of meals, for the most part the differences that could still be observed at the beginning of the 1960s disappeared by the end of the decade as both urban and rural households generally maintained the habit of eating three meals a day. The part of the day in which families ate their main meal, however, displayed a difference in custom as rural families were more likely to eat their main meal in the evening. Half of village populations prepared a fresh, hot meal for supper, while noontime was when city dwellers cooked and ate fresh food.⁴¹ Furthermore, researchers were also able to reach the following conclusions:

We found significant differences between urban and rural households concerning the usage of modern kitchen techniques. In villages, the majority of cooks still use old methods for food preparation, while in cities modern cooking techniques (preparation of casseroles or steamed dishes, cooking and baking with oil, usage of store-bought, frozen, or canned ingredients) are increasingly common . . . as regards what dishes are eaten most willingly, very little difference can be observed in the tastes of urban and rural households. In both respects, meat dishes were chosen as the most favorite foods, while noodle dishes came in second and stewed vegetables fell into the last category based on frequency. Among meat dishes, fried pork cutlet is the most popular, followed by stuffed cabbage, *pörkölt* [meat stewed in a paprika sauce] and roasted meat. In villages *pörkölt* is more highly favored while various kinds of poultry dishes remain overwhelmingly popular in cities. Among soups, the favorites were meat broth, bean soup, and potato soup. Most of those surveyed chose boiled or baked noodle dishes flavored with [sweetened] ground poppy seeds, noodles served with farmer's cheese, or various kinds of *palacsinta* [the Hungarian version of crepes].⁴²

Alcohol consumption was more common in rural families: nearly two-thirds of participants reported that they regularly drank alcohol. During this period, wine was favored most by village dwellers as an overwhelming number of rural families tended their own grapevines.

⁴¹ For the details, see Ernő Kienle and Imre Rodler, "A városi és falusi lakosság összehasonlító néptáplálkozási vizsgálata Baranya megyében," *Egészségtudomány* 15 (1970): 262–70.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 267.

Among urban participants, alcohol was primarily consumed in connection with celebrations. At the same time, according to the data collected in this survey, coffee was drunk in two-thirds of urban households while only one-sixth of rural families served coffee regularly.

These changes are — at least partially — observable via the data gathered in a lifestyle research project conducted in Békés County and led by Ágnes Losonczi in 1969.⁴³ The project examined how frequently twenty-six foodstuffs were consumed, the relationship between consumption and production, and the circumstances surrounding trade infrastructure. By selecting these parameters, the researchers attempted to produce an image of Hungary's alimentary culture and eating habits. The conclusion was drawn that bacon remained one of the most essential staples due to its high caloric value and the relative ease and inexpensiveness with which it could be independently produced. In the southern areas of Hungary's Great Plain Region, bacon was eaten daily; even one-third of well-to-do families displayed this habit. Two-thirds of rural families earning an average income did the same, while more than half of low-income families depended on bacon as an essential staple that quickly guaranteed a feeling of fullness, whether eaten for breakfast, lunch, or as the main dish for dinner. In comparison to bacon, cheese, another important food from the perspective of healthy nutritional requirements, only appeared on a daily basis in meals eaten by one-fifth of those families possessing the highest incomes and pursuing white-color professions; in households with the lowest incomes, or in which employment consisted of physical labor, cheese was only rarely available.

Based on her research results, Ágnes Losonczi was able to establish four characteristic nutritional categories. In the first category, labeled "poor and monotonous," Losonczi grouped one-third of the survey's participants whose diets were not only fairly monotonous, but also contained poor-quality foodstuffs possessing low values in protein and vitamins. Nearly one-third of participants were grouped into the "poor but varied" category since the striking variety found in their diets also allowed for more abundant fare. Less than one-sixth of participants belonged to the third category, labeled as "adequate and varied," a group whose nutritional needs were basically satisfactory from the point of view of both quantity and quality. The remaining one-seventh fell into the "abundant, monotonous" category; in this

⁴³ Losonczi, *Az életmód az időben*, 474.

case, participants experienced no lack of food, but faced issues caused by a diet lacking in variety. One of the most important conclusions reached by this research project was the determination that two-thirds of those surveyed did not have access to adequate nourishment.⁴⁴ In the case of inadequate nutrition, economic opportunities obviously played a definitive role, while the situation for those who had access to abundant food sources was still determined by the rules and habits found in the alimentary culture and eating customs of the time.

Losonczy's research project also examined the composition of main meals in a comparison that looked at weekdays as opposed to the Sunday meal. On weekdays more than two-fifths of surveyed families ate meatless main meals, a circumstance that was only true of every sixteenth family regarding the Sunday meal. One-fourth of families ate one-dish meals on weekdays; a two-course main meal was common among two-fifths of households, while a striking one-third had three or more courses. According to financial status, on weekdays one-fourth of prosperous households consumed main meals consisting of one or two meatless courses, a habit this particular group would have hardly continued on Sundays. Similarly, one-fourth of those enjoying the best financial position were able to consume one or two courses containing meat even on weekdays; this proportion was one-fifth on Sundays. Two-fifths of well-to-do urban households could afford to eat three or four courses containing meat on weekdays, a habit that was common among two-thirds of participants on Sundays. The dietary habits of well-to do, rural families only revealed slight differences in comparison. Low-income families very frequently ate one-dish, meatless meals on weekdays, while only one-fourth of this category could afford two meat courses on Sundays. Approximately half of the participating low-income households served three or four courses containing meat for their Sunday meal.⁴⁵ This data demonstrates that the equalization of nutritional differences among various social classes was only just beginning to take effect at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

At the end of the 1960s, a relatively wide deviation in the ratio between meatless and meat dishes emerged on the basis of employment: "The level of nutrition is at its lowest level in households where the main breadwinner is retired. After this follows the group labeled

⁴⁴ Ibid, 364–65.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 367–69.

as 'other types of physical laborers.' On weekdays 46 percent of this latter group eats one or two types of some sort of a meatless dish for the noon meal, while 49 percent of pensioners do the same. The reverse situation also appears; in cases where various types of meat are customarily served at main meals, these two categories still display the lowest ratio percentage."⁴⁶ In connection to the Sunday meal, the differences deriving from professional or financial circumstances lessened significantly. The widespread, characteristic behavior pattern underlying this phenomenon was that those who ate poorer quality meals during the week were setting aside sufficient money for serving an abundant meal containing multiple courses of meat dishes on Sunday. Only the very destitute and most unfortunate—those whose marginalized position only rarely ensured a more plentiful meal on Sundays—proved the exception to this custom.

With its abundance and richness of dishes, the Sunday noon meal frequently compensated diners for the less satisfactory quality of weekday meals. At such times fried chicken, *pörkölt*, fried pork cutlet, roasted or stuffed chicken, roasted pork, beef *pörkölt*, fried meatballs, and stuffed cabbage were the most commonly served meat dishes, a fact which amply demonstrates that pork and chicken were consumed the most often. Potatoes or some type of boiled noodles had a defining role in accompanying meat while stewed vegetables appeared relatively rarely on the menu:

The limited nutritional circumstances combined with the amount of hard labor demanded of individuals led to a system of customs that tended to maximize all available opportunities. The main essence of a Hungarian worker or peasant's eating habits is to use as few raw materials or tools as possible in a way that requires as little time as possible. Within (or perhaps in spite of) these criteria, the food also had to trick the appetite into feeling satisfied, be filling and—if at all possible—also be plentiful and rich in calories. Soup, bread, noodles, potatoes, or bacon fit this bill. The kind of cooking and nutritional methods which represent tradition today were the means of providing a feeling of having eaten well within the previously mentioned limitations: meals began with soup so as to fill the stomach while dishes contained strong flavors and bold spices to give the impression that the flavor of even a small amount of food could be easily tasted. The cravings that arose as a result of these limits were fulfilled simply by accomplishing these criteria, thereby investing diners with a sense of plenty.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid, 369.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 376.

It therefore follows that this behavior pattern bears close relationship to how public opinion connected hearty, abundant meals to holidays and celebrations. During this period the way celebratory meals were arranged followed previously established traditions: "Celebrations offer the opportunity for hosts to demonstrate—either directly or indirectly—before the entire community the extent of their hospitality, progressiveness ('modernity'), and affluence, or at the very least the appearance of a certain financial standing."⁴⁸ Hosting a wedding reception naturally counted as one of the most affluent celebratory meals that could be held; as such, hosts strove to fulfill their guests' expectations even in the most difficult of times. According to the observations made by Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer in the village of Átány in Heves County, roughly thirty households (totaling 120 people) were included in one wedding reception. Providing sufficient food for this number of guests took either three sheep or one 100-kilogram veal calf, thirty chickens, four hectoliters of wine and eight loaves of bread weighing five to six kilograms each. The reception's main meal consisted of chicken broth for the soup, mutton *pörkölt*, a grain dish made with either milk or meat, and a wide selection of cakes and pastries.

The concepts surrounding lifestyle reform which emerged at the end of the 1960s were based on the supposition that kitchens would soon lose their previously dominant role; as women increasingly joined the workplace, far less time would remain for household activities. The construction of new Soviet-type block houses was therefore envisioned in which all provisions and meals—from breakfast to supper—would be centrally ensured. The flats constructed to reflect these lifestyle reforms totaled 30–40 square meters in size and contained only a "kitchenette," the size and layout of which came close to resembling a ship's kitchen. It must be mentioned that, according to the original idea, the kitchenette was not intended for larger households, but rather as a sufficient means for mainly young, childless couples, older couples, or single individuals to prepare meals. A kitchenette's 3–5 square meter area typically contained a double burner gas or electric stove, a sink, built-in cabinets, a storage shelf, and a worktable. Families compensated for their decreased living space by installing built-in kitchen furniture as well. In cities, some block house flats even neglected to include the minimal space required for the usual

⁴⁸ Judit Morvay, "Ünnepi táplálkozás a Boldva völgyében," *Ethnographia*, no. 3 (1950): 14–19.



Figure 64. Kitchen in the 1970s (Fortepan, 184686, Péter Horváth)

“kitchenette”: a cooking “cabinet” was provided instead for both cooking and reheating food. A cooking plate, sink, and storage shelf was installed inside, thereby making full use of the cabinet’s available space.

In reality, however, most families would not have dreamed of removing daily food preparation from their regular household routines, and kitchens continued to remain one of the most important rooms in the home. Compared to earlier periods, one basic difference was that kitchen activities became heavily mechanized, particularly in urban households. The social changes Hungary was undergoing at the time sped up the transformation of the lifestyle led by certain groups or social classes: new habits and forms of consumption emerged as more services came into demand, especially in the case of appliances and furnishings that simplified household tasks. By the middle of the

1960s, access to electricity was widespread, another factor that enabled the quick adoption of different innovations. At the same time, it must be mentioned that—from the point of view of food preparation techniques and technology—a kind of “delayed reaction” could be observed in the case of urban vs. rural kitchens between the 1960s and 1970s. Peasant households, for example, were still relying on cast-iron cooking ranges at a time when gas-burning or electric stoves had already begun to spread through cities. As traditional village homes were rebuilt, brick ovens first became an increasingly rare sight, then disappeared entirely from kitchens by the 1970s. By the 1960s most urban households kept food cold in an ice-box, while rural families used cellars, wells, or cold water to accomplish this goal. In larger communities, companies dealing in ice production and ice delivery satisfied the demand for ice.

In Hungary, electric refrigerators became more common in greater numbers at the end of the 1950s; this process sped up in the second half of the 1960s and only continued throughout the next part of the decade.⁴⁹ In 1960, one refrigerator per one hundred households was the norm; in 1965, this number rose to eight per every hundred. By 1970 thirty-two refrigerators were found in every hundred homes; five years later, there were sixty-eight refrigerators per every hundred homes. Responsible for a remarkable transformation in food storage and consumption, by the middle of the 1970s the refrigerator came to be regarded as an essential household appliance. As it reduced the need to shop as frequently, this quickly popular device altered how families procured foodstuffs: instead of purchasing food daily, shopping was instead done two or three times a week in many communities. Now that they could be kept cool, ingredients that spoiled easily could be stored for longer periods of time. While the connection itself may seem strange, the spread of refrigeration actually aided the mass construction of Soviet-type block houses: since most of the flats in this type of building contained no pantry, food storage was almost always solved by virtue of a refrigerator. Similarly, from autumn to spring the central district systems that supplied block houses with heat led to high average temperatures, another factor in making refrigeration a necessity.

⁴⁹ “A hűtőgép és mosógép ellátottság alakulásának, valamint a műszaki fejlesztésnek előzetes koncepciója és prognózisa Magyarországon 1990-ig,” A Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XXVI-G-4.120.d., February 24, 1977.

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the volume of refrigerators averaged 80–120 liters, a capacity that was 150–220 liters one decade later. These shifts in lifestyle additionally led to the increased demand for refrigerators that also contained freezers, an option that allowed families to store food that had either been purchased or prepared at home on a long-term basis. Since the habit of freezing food was still not widespread, home-canning and food preservation remained popular in spite of the days of labor frequently involved. After procuring the raw ingredients, this task continued with washing, peeling, and cutting the fruit or vegetables, thoroughly cleaning the glass jars, then conserving the prepared jams, fruit compotes, or pickles in a steam bath.

A similar transformation occurred in the case of other forms of kitchen equipment as well. While heavy enamelware or cast-iron pots were the most popular kind of kitchenware used in the mid-1950s, heat-resistant glassware, aluminum, and ceramic crockery gained in popularity by the beginning of the 1960s. In most households, various types of grinders (for walnuts, poppy seeds, coffee, or meat) had already replaced the mortar and pestle; these mechanical grinders were eventually replaced with electric appliances once the first multifunctional kitchen tools appeared at the end of the 1960s. The essential equipment for making homemade noodles consisted of a wooden pastry board and rolling pin.⁵⁰ Gradually, fireproof crockery was supplanted first by enameled, then Teflon-coated metal kitchenware. Glass coffee percolators used over spirit lamps were similarly replaced by percolators that could be used on a gas or electric stove. Electric coffee-makers were later used instead of stovetop percolators. Other than exerting a significant influence on how different kinds of food were prepared, these tools generally reduced the amount of time spent on food preparation as well. The increased availability and variety of frozen or preserved foods also made cooking much easier for families.

In the beginning of the 1960s, the kitchen served as the site of food preparation and consumption in most homes. To accommodate larger family events, another room in the flat was turned into a dining room, a step that was necessary either due to the kitchen's small

⁵⁰ As far as the customs regarding food preparation were concerned, in Hungary the habit of making certain foods at home—such as noodles or dried pasta—remained prevalent until the 1980s.

size or the large number of guests. Like in other periods, it was also common at this time for most households to arrange the kitchen in as practical a manner as possible. In many kitchens the kitchen table was therefore placed between the stove and the faucet or sink while the kitchen cabinet was installed on the opposite wall. The most frequently used items and spices were usually stored on shelves located above the table and stove. Separate storage cabinets for dishes, pots, and pans were often used. The pantry's size and furnishings naturally depended on whether the household was an urban or a rural one. Shelving, poles from which smoked meats were hung, baskets and chests for storing fruits and vegetables, or perhaps a small table comprised the basic equipment found in pantries. Once kitchen cabinets became fashionable, the heavy sideboard—boasting beautiful carving and decorated panes of glass—was switched in favor of furniture that was simpler in form and easier to keep clean and use for storing dishes. After this followed the age of prefabricated, built-in kitchen cabinets.

The years of “feeling full”

During the period that stretched from the end of the 1960s to the middle of the 1980s certain products were regularly unavailable for consumption; while the number of inaccessible goods gradually decreased, items such as tropical fruits remained scarce. By this time the shortages were not related to quantity, but rather to quality. As it enabled rural families to furnish their own needs while also creating produce that could be sold at local markets, household farming played a significant role in stabilizing the nation's food supply chain by filling the gaps created by the increase in demand. For a time, the growth in demand slowed down the recurring phenomenon of rising prices, although it must be mentioned that Hungarian society was not characteristically sensitive to price as far as essential food-stuffs were concerned.

Primarily in cities, the trade network for food products continued to expand dynamically, at least relatively speaking. As of the start of the 1980s, the private sector's presence in this area strengthened considerably, as demonstrated for example by the remarkable speed with which the number of privately owned, small shops increased.

Being able to find and purchase certain products—such as brand-name alcoholic beverages, chocolates, or tobacco—became a symbol of social status, a habit that can, in the case of some items, still be found in Hungarian society today. While nutritional aims continued to target an increase in amounts, the issue of quality slowly stepped to the forefront. For the most part, the continuous expansion of the kinds and availability of goods became a widespread public expectation that was essentially met by the beginning of the 1980s.

Differences in the eating habits exhibited by urban versus rural populations obviously decreased: throughout the fifty years that followed World War II, this period in Hungary's recent history saw the lowest number of individuals suffering from malnutrition.⁵¹ From the point of view of quantity, the level of nourishment attained by Hungarian society can therefore be said to have improved. The fact, however, that gaining access to quality foodstuffs remained an only partially resolved issue is best demonstrated by the results of a nutritional assessment conducted in the village of Valkó in Pest County in 1965 and then again in 1974:

In 1974, meat or meat products were regularly consumed, in contrast to 1965, when 55.2 percent of the evaluated families ate meat once a week, 4.9 percent had meat twice a week, and 7.3 percent purchased fresh meat with even more infrequency. According to our family evaluation, 28.5 percent did not drink milk regularly, while only 26.3 percent of the children in the fifth and sixth grades received milk or dairy beverages. In the earlier assessment [in 1965] nobody—not even the children—in 34.6 percent of the surveyed families consumed milk. The shifts in consumption of fruits and vegetables is reflected by the following data collected among second-grade primary students: according to our survey, nobody ate fruit or vegetables daily, while 20 percent of the evaluated children had fruit and vegetables every other day. In 1965, this number was only 5 percent. In 1974, one-third of the children ate fresh fruit or vegetables every other day while one-third did not eat any type of fruit or vegetable at all. . . . In comparison to the high number (32 percent) of those eating cold food for their noonday meal in 1965, only 8 percent

⁵¹ Exact numbers regarding malnutrition cannot be provided given the fact that the statistics prepared at the time had to meet state requirements, which meant that this kind of data was not published. Since malnutrition generally goes hand-in-hand with poverty, the numbers and percentages regarding poverty can be taken as a rough indication of the former. In the beginning of the 1980s, even the most optimistic estimations listed five to six percent of Hungary's population as living in deep poverty.

were found to be doing the same in 1974. In contrast to the 40 percent rate found nine years previously, 75 percent of noon meals were complete and contained food that was satisfactory in quality. In nine years' time, however, the lack of certain meals has hardly improved: 6 percent of the evaluated children went to school without breakfast, 5 percent did not eat lunch, and 4 percent did not have supper. Out of the surveyed children, one-third were missing one meal once a week, seven missed meals on several days of the week, and four missed two meals on the same day.⁵²

The appearance and relatively dynamic spread of canned or frozen foods contributed greatly to the speed with which nutritional and eating habits changed in Hungary. During the interwar period, neither the demand nor the selection of pre-prepared or preserved foods was widespread. In the 1950s, the volume of production of these goods was three or four times higher than the 16–18 thousand tons consumed before World War II. By the beginning of the 1960s, this number had risen to 140 thousand tons per year. The growing selection and (slow) improvement in quality gradually provided new options compared to home canning, even though “grandma’s homemade compote” naturally continued to maintain a prestigious ranking in eating preferences. Demand for factory-produced foodstuffs also grew as a result of the transformation of the circumstances surrounding employment. Between 1960 and 1975 Hungary’s consumption of canned goods grew three-and-a-half times, from 6.3 kilograms per person to 23.5 kilograms per person. This increase was primarily due to the growth in demand for pre-prepared canned food as public taste continued to prefer fruit that had been preserved at home rather than in a factory.

In Hungary, quick-freezing foods on the industrial level began in 1943; as of 1947 frozen foods were marketed under the brand name of Mirelite. In the early years, mainly fruits and vegetables were preserved using this method, but the selection of frozen foods noticeably broadened by the end of the 1950s. During the first decades following World War II, both the production and the consumption of pre-prepared foods grew dynamically, from 0.2 kilograms of frozen foodstuffs consumed per person per year in 1955 to 3.2 kilograms per person per year in 1975. Other than family households, restaurants, workplace

⁵² Júlia Túróczki and Erzsébet Kelemen, “Mezőgazdasági lakosság körében végzett táplálkozási vizsgálat tapasztalatai,” in *Irányítás és ellenőrzés az élelmezésügyi szakágazatban. III. gyakorlati tudományos ülés előadásai* (Budapest: Országos Élelmezési és Táplálkozástudományi Intézet, 1979), 171–95.



Figure 65. Canned food in a grocery store in 1968. By the late 1970s, 96 percent of Hungarian families consumed canned food regularly (Fortepan, 65764, Magyar Rendőr)

cafeterias, and other eateries willingly made use of quick-frozen ingredients.⁵³ To add another aspect to this analysis, 1956 also marked the year when canned baby food was first manufactured in Hungary. By the end of the 1970s, 96 percent of Hungarian families were using some form of canned goods, even if the familiar paradigm remained valid in that urban families consumed more canned goods compared to rural families. Similarly, out of the various professions, peasant families relied the least upon factory-canned food.

As incomes climbed, the demand and consumption of canned food also rose, just as the greatest demand for this kind of foodstuff was typical of households where the women were working for hourly wages. The usage of canned goods fluctuated according to the seasons: far more cans of products containing fruits and vegetables were

⁵³ András Balatoniné and Jenő Farkasné, "A konzervkészítmények és a gyorsfagyasztott élelmiszerek fogyasztása," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 12 (1976): 20–24.

purchased in winter than in summer. For quite some time it was also true that various social classes in Hungary displayed an aversion to goods prepared in industrial canneries due to their poor quality: the preference for homemade preserved foods and the prestige attached to this form of food preparation remained uncontestably high.

Based on the data collected by various surveys, by the end of the 1970s anywhere between two-thirds and three-fourths of Hungarian consumers were using some form of frozen food, though this habit was generally more intensively present among the families of educated professionals or wealthier households located in Budapest. It can therefore be said that the increased demand for preserved foods played a role in the social transformations Hungary underwent during this period; with the relatively quick spread of time-saving household appliances and cooking techniques, individuals found themselves with more free time on their hands and customs and lifestyles subsequently changed. As the 1970s turned to the 1980s, chest freezers became extremely popular in rural households, thereby greatly simplifying the process of preparing, preserving, and storing foodstuffs, particularly in connection to meat and meat products, fruits, and vegetables. Thanks to this technical advance, the role played by smoked meats and home canning became noticeably reduced and could primarily be found in villages and among small-scale farmers. According to nutrition evaluations made during the 1970s:

Food consumption and the cooking techniques attached to this process remain comparatively unbending as only slight alterations can be seen. In spite of this, we can still witness the surrendering of certain "conservative" habits. . . . Most housewives regularly cook for two, three, or four people. . . . As regards the frequency of meal preparation, 52 percent of housewives prepare the noonday meal every day, 29 percent do so only on weekends, and 12 percent only cook a few times during the week. While the custom of cooking the midday meal remains strong, a notable number have switched to cooking on the weekend. The employment status and age of housewives also exerts a high degree of influence: primarily stay-at-home wives (78 percent) cook a hot midday meal, while working women (40 percent) are more likely to leave cooking to the weekends. . . . younger generations of housewives do not cook nearly as often as those who are over forty years of age or even older, in which this habit is particularly prevalent. Even so, the proportion of younger women who still cook the main meal is significant, most likely because they also fall within the category of families with young children and thereby usually have fewer means and are therefore more pressed to cook the main

meal daily. The frequency with which supper is cooked displays different habits: 31 percent of housewives prepare a hot evening meal every day of the week, while 28 percent do so only a few days out of the week. 26 percent do not cook supper at all. This distribution is therefore fairly even: cold suppers are slowly gaining in acceptance. Similar to the situation with cooked noonday meals, this tendency is also influenced by employment status and age, even if less so than in the previous case. As can be expected, primarily working women are likely to cook a hot supper a few times per week while those who do not cook at all in the evening are mostly stay-at-home wives. The regularity with which supper was cooked decreased inversely to age: the older the housewife, the rarer it was for supper to be cooked.⁵⁴

In summary, women's social status was a defining factor in cooking habits, which also underwent changes.

Beginning at the end of the 1960s, the significant increase in the amount of food that was prepared and consumed represented a noticeably widespread change in the area of food consumption. As the active practice of religious beliefs was repressed, resulting in a process of secularization, the dietary stipulations required by various denominations began to lose their significance. The influence Lent, for example, had on eating habits became far less visible on the whole, even if peasant/village households indisputably clung to religious traditions longer than city dwellers did. A meaningful change in village eating habits could be found in the way that the lines between pre-war social classes were increasingly blurred in reference to eating habits. Generational differences could also be observed as older individuals continued to insist on their traditional diets.

In reference to meals, events that were connected to family celebrations continued to possess a higher significance, a phenomenon that was true virtually independently of the family's social position. The character and makeup of celebratory meals were not only expected to diverge from that found in weekday habits but also to maintain the function of demonstrating prestige, no matter how precarious the family's financial situation might have actually been. Hosting a wedding reception continued to mean holding one of the richest forms of meals. As of the 1970s,

⁵⁴ *Az Országos Piackutató Intézet kutatási jelentése* (1976). Quoted in László Molnárné, "Konzervkereslet és fogyasztási szokások a hetvenes években," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 3 (1981): 21–25.

A unifying process could be observed in the process of meat preparation. The grease-laden, heavily spiced manner of serving meat in a form of *pörkölt*, goulash, or baked meat—a style of cooking mainly characteristic of the Great Plains Region in earlier times—came to represent a unified taste. Simultaneously, dishes such as meat fried in batter and fried pork cutlet became more widespread while veal wiener schnitzel remained rare. Meat consumption continued to reach its apex during celebrations and holidays. Depending on the event's significance, size, and number of guests, anywhere from three to six courses are served for the noon or evening meal, all of which contain meat.⁵⁵

At the end of the 1970s, Hungary's population dedicated an average of 30 percent of its living expenses to the purchase of food. While the amount of consumed food maintained its ascent, the ratio of money spent on food decreased according to total consumption. As high-calorie foods played a characteristically predominant role in diets until the middle of the 1950s, the nutritional and consumer habits typically found in more developed countries appeared later in Hungary, during the 1960s. As a result of these changes, by the late 1970s the number of consumed calories was no longer the only important nutritional consideration: quality, flavor, and value were increasingly sought. According to various data, by the mid-1970s the average level of food consumption in Hungary had just about reached its saturation point; meat consumption, for instance, hit the number of seventy-five kilograms per person per year, a figure judged as optimal by international standards. When broken down, it can be seen that pork remained dominant (56 percent), followed by poultry (24 percent) and beef (12 percent). The consumption of fish (3 percent) continued to remain negligible, while a total of 5 percent represented other meats, such as mutton, horse, or rabbit.⁵⁶

In Hungary the tasks related to food preparation and nutrition represented the housework's most time-consuming aspects since they were jobs that had to be repeated three to five times a day. According to time balance evaluations, after completing the day at a full-time job, a significant number of women then did the daily shopping and cooking, spending a daily average of thirty minutes on the former

⁵⁵ Péter Szuhay, "Az életmód változása a magyarországi falvakban," in *Magyarország agrártörténete*, ed. István Orosz et al. (Budapest: Mezőgazda Kiadó, 1996), 705–20.

⁵⁶ *Életszínvonal 1960–1980, Statisztikai Időszaki Közlemények*, no. 488 (Budapest: KSH, 1981), 108.



Figure 66. A store interior in the 1970s. At that time, the food supply was stabilizing, while eating habits were gradually changing. (Fortepan, 170786, István Péterffy)

and two hours on the latter. As women increasingly turned to earning hourly wages—a process that took place relatively quickly—the end of the 1960s marked a major transformation in how most families ate. In the majority of families, for instance, the noontime meal increasingly took place outside of the home. In 1975, 55 percent of children and 37 percent of adults regularly had their main meals at school or workplace cafeterias.

The large-scale development of institutionalized food services brought about considerable changes in eating habits. By the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, three million people were taking advantage of the eating opportunities offered by workplaces, schools, or children's daycare centers. The era's politics regarding trade viewed institutionalized meals as an issue related to social policies and therefore attempted to use it as a means for balancing out disparities in lifestyle or access to food. This solution was mainly possible due to the fact that the cafeterias maintained by companies and

institutions were generously supported by the state so meal prices remained modest. Since the industrial plants that supplied the hospitality sector were also state funded, the loss in profits they faced for having to sell their products at reduced prices was recuperated. In 1978, an average of 40 percent of those not employed in agriculture ate at workplace cafeterias, compared to the much lower number of 19 percent for agricultural workers. Sixty-one percent (1.2 million individuals) of preschool and school-aged children relied on cafeteria meals.⁵⁷ While the quality of these mass-produced meals was obviously worse compared to home-cooked food, the relatively low price compensated for what cafeteria food lacked in taste. As a newspaper article from 1985 noted,

No matter what—unless, of course, if it's because of how bad they are—workplace meals will never be as memorable as a good Sunday family feast at home. Nor is it even possible for them to reach this level as they lack the familiar, personal flavors we grew up eating, not to mention that the quality and the portions are nowhere near what we are used to seeing on the kitchen table. Yet it is still important that these meals exist. Work can't be done well on an empty stomach. For many, cafeteria meals represent the one hot meal they get per day. . . . At the Ganz-MÁVAG factory the basic menu only costs 12 forints and 10 fillérs. In the company's five dining halls, two-and-a-half to three thousand people eat lunch daily. While naturally not everyone is satisfied, the workers know that better food can't be had at this price. "I'm fine with the way it is," was what the mason István Mizsei told me when I asked about the lunch. "In fact," he continued, "I take the soup home with me for supper." "A lot of the time it's too greasy," commented his young colleague Géza Fodor, as he shook his head and added, "And not just the lunch, but the tray, too!"⁵⁸

According to data collected in 1977 by the National Institute of Market Research, dietary habits were influenced by profession, age, income, place of residence, the frequency with which meals were cooked at home, and whether a cafeteria was available and used. At the end of the 1970s, it was most common for individuals with low incomes, agricultural laborers, and those living in small communities to cook at home. White-collar, high-income individuals who lived in Budapest were least likely to prepare meals at home. In most households,

⁵⁷ For more details, see Endre Hajdú, ed., "A tömegétkeztetés helyzete a hetvenes évek végén és a nyolcvanas évek elején: A Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet kutatási jelentése," (Budapest: Belkereskedelmi Kutató Intézet, 1980), 55.

⁵⁸ András István Takács, "Menü a gyárban," *Népszabadság*, April 6, 1985, 9.

breakfast and other meals were prepared using purchased foodstuffs that supplemented the food services provided by schools and workplaces. Eating purchased ingredients for breakfast was more common among white-collar families, while a significant number of agricultural laborers and urban workers ate food brought from home for breakfast or their ten o'clock break. Among children and adults, the proportion of those who ate breakfast at home hovered around 76 and 77 percent. Children were the most accustomed to eating breakfast regularly, while a higher proportion of adults were likely to begin the day without eating. Out of those under the age of eighteen, ninety percent breakfasted in the morning, while only 82 percent of those over eighteen did the same.

When examined according to profession, those working in agriculture displayed the highest tendency to eat breakfast (93 percent) while only 80 percent of those pursuing white-collar jobs began the day by eating: "Based on income per person, individuals under 18 years of age living in a high-income household eat breakfast the most often; children from low-income families eat breakfast the most rarely."⁵⁹ Children preferred a pastry and milk or hot chocolate in the morning while bread was the most popular breakfast staple for adults. Among men living in the countryside, bacon and eggs constituted the most common type of breakfast food. Eating cottage cheese, cheese, kefir, or yogurt for breakfast was most popular among adult women and older men: "Income growth has brought about more selective nutritional habits. A larger percentage of adults with higher incomes are consuming pastries, *kalács* [a braided sweet bread typically eaten for breakfast], and cold cuts as the children living in better-situated families eat more jam, fruit conserves, and honey compared to those in low-income families."⁶⁰ At the end of the 1970s, on average one-third of all adults indulged in the custom of a morning cup of coffee, a habit that was most prevalent in white-collar households. Agricultural workers were likely to drink tea for breakfast while individuals in urban working-class families were especially partial to starting the day with a glass of milk.

In connection to the midday meal, researchers concluded that children most frequently ate at home or in school. Other than this

⁵⁹ "Áttekintés a magyar tej- és tejtermékpiaconról," Az Országos Piackutató Intézet iratai, MNL OL, XXVI-G-9.17.d., 1980.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

demographic, pensioners and housewives characteristically demonstrated the highest numbers for eating the noon meal at home, a statistic that was particularly true of those living and working in small communities. The majority of employees frequented workplace cafeterias; high-income, white-collar individuals regularly ate at restaurants or other eateries. Ninety-two percent of children ate at noon daily compared to 87 percent of adults. Fifty-five percent of men and 67 percent of women consumed hot, freshly prepared midday meals. One-third of men ate at workplace cafeterias while only one-fourth of women did the same. Five to six percent of men lunched at restaurants or various eateries compared to only three percent of women who followed suit. Among both men and women those with low incomes were most likely to eat their noon meal at home, at 64 and 83 percent respectively.

A bowl of soup and some type of meat dish was most typically found on noonday menus: noodles or stewed vegetables were habitually consumed by children or those living on low incomes. Cold lunches were most likely among men, especially for those performing physical labor: one-fifth of this demographic ate cold food for lunch multiple times a week. According to Hungarian eating traditions, soup was the necessary first course for the noon meal; four-fifths of both adults and children consumed some type of soup several times a week. For the second course meat dishes were present two-thirds of the time in every age group. This was followed by stewed vegetables, a dish eaten several times a week by slightly more than one-third of children and adults. The fourth most common type of food consisted of noodles which were eaten by one-eighth of adults and one-fifth of children multiple times in a week. The prominent, representative role held by the Sunday noon meal was noticeably widespread throughout Hungarian society—independent of social status—even at the end of the 1970s. Ninety-seven percent of adults and 98 percent of children always ate a Sunday meal; for those who worked during the week, the Sunday noon meal was more substantial compared to the weekday version. “On Sunday a larger percentage of people are generally more likely to eat lunch and skip supper in comparison to weekday eating habits. Consuming a more abundant meal is mainly characteristic of those who perform physical labor or do not have the time or the means to eat a proper noon meal during the week.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Ibid.

The majority of adults and children ate supper at home; since this meal increasingly came to represent the only time during the week when families ate together, a relatively high percentage of families prepared hot food for their evening meal. This habit was particularly preferred by men. Among adults more than four-fifths of the men and nearly seven-tenths of the women who were surveyed ate supper on a daily basis at the end of the 1970s, while nine-tenths of children had an evening meal every day. While cold suppers were common among white-collar, high-income participants, the same was quite rare among those performing physical labor. Two-thirds of men and more than half of women and children consumed hot food prepared at home for their evening meal; cold suppers were less prevalent throughout all participating demographic categories:

Since home-cooked food is inexpensive, lower-income families cook more often than others. Seventy percent of adults with low incomes and 71 percent of the children living in low-income families regularly eat hot suppers. The same can be said of only 62 percent of adults earning medium wages while a mere 58 percent of high-income adults cooked supper at home and 49 percent of the children living in medium- to high-wage families ate home-cooked evening meals. . . . Adults consumed meat dishes for supper while children tended to choose lighter foods (milk, dairy products) with the greatest regularity. This was particularly true of families with higher incomes. Among adults, the effect of income was mostly evident in the frequency with which cold suppers were eaten as only 22 percent of individuals earning low incomes ate cold food for supper several times a week compared to 28 percent among those with medium incomes and 33 percent of high-income individuals. In comparison, only 28 percent of non-agricultural, physical laborers and 15 percent of agricultural workers displayed the same tendency.⁶²

Out of all the meals consumed daily, children consumed the largest quantities at noon and the least during suppertime. In the case of adults, breakfast was rarely abundant and—on weekdays—the most food was consumed during the midday meal. For physical laborers, nearly the same amount of food was eaten for lunch and supper during the week.

At the end of the 1970s, eating and preparing meals at home still played a definitive role in Hungarian households; 64 percent of families cooked fresh food daily while 11 percent prepared meals five or

⁶² Ibid.

six times during a given week. When examined by region, two-thirds of urban and more than four-fifths of rural families cooked on a daily basis. Based on employment, preparing food every day was typical of 78 percent of working-class, 90 percent of peasant, and 53 percent of white-collar families. In areas where the production of some food-stuffs was possible, the ratio regarding the regular preparation of meals at home was larger.

Young adults frequented restaurants and other eateries the most while pensioners were the least likely to take advantage of this type of service. When distributed according to employment, the data reveals that white-collar professionals went to restaurants the most while those working within the household or in agriculture ate at restaurants very rarely; if they went to a restaurant at all, it was usually only due to a significant occasion or family event. For the poor, eating at a restaurant was not only impossible, it was the least of their worries compared to the difficulties they experienced in merely acquiring a sufficient amount of food per day. Several sociographies written during this period can allow us to gain a picture of what malnutrition "looked like" during everyday life in the 1970s in Hungary. In her analysis of the lifestyle of Budapest's working-class families that was published in 1975, Otilia Solt emphasized the fact that,

very often the children are hungry. It is most frequently the children between the ages of ten and fourteen who are the hungriest as they are bigger and still growing but cannot earn any money of their own. When we were recording their diet, we also asked what they would spend ten forints on if they had it. One-third of those under the age of ten and two-thirds of those over ten replied that they would immediately eat as much as they could of foods like bologna, sausage, salami, or chocolate milk. . . . We recorded and analyzed the dietary data for a total of forty-six low-income children. Out of the forty-six, sixteen did not eat anything throughout the day other than at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. A further three did not receive one of these three main meals. Seven children ate just a plain slice of bread, or bread with lard and a cup of tea for breakfast. During the day a slice of plain bread was all they ate. Sixteen children had a bowl of soup—with no noodles or vegetables in it—a bowl of stewed vegetables with no meat, or a slice of bread with lard for the noon meal. Fifteen children ate a slice of bread, a bowl of stewed vegetables (with no meat), bread with lard, or nothing at all for supper.⁶³

⁶³ Otilia Solt, "Kész a leltár': Egy budapesti kerület alacsony jövedelmű munkáscsaládjai," *Budapesti Nevelő*, no. 3 (1975): 12.

Consuming high-calorie foods was the customary solution for appeasing hunger pangs: "Characteristically, the only dietary element present in the diets of all classes of low-income individuals that did not fall below normal levels was that of fats. Regarding all other categories of the important food groups, the dietary amounts consumed by low-income earners were not just below the norm, but actually far below what was found in other economic groups. . . . Living in an unfavorable financial situation [in 1979 the maximum monthly income averaged 1,600 forints per person] primarily manifested itself in the low consumption of foodstuffs containing animal protein, vitamins, and minerals."⁶⁴

For an examination of the changes that occurred in the circumstances determining rural dietary habits, Annamária Lammel's research regarding the village of Atkár provides an essential overview.⁶⁵ The poorest families (whose backgrounds were mainly agrarian proletariat) usually ate meat, dishes containing meat, or meat-based products once a week. The most common dishes in this category were dumpling soup, weather loach (a kind of bottom-feeding fish found in meadow ponds) served in oil, bean soup, boiled corn with milk, bread with lard, bread and jam, and bread with sugar. On Sundays they ate soup made of dried meat and *pörkölt*. In peasant families with minimal (less than roughly three hectares) or small holdings, meat was consumed once or twice a week, while Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays were generally kept meatless. Meat dishes most often contained pork or chicken, while milk and eggs also appeared more regularly at mealtimes in comparison to the most impoverished families. On meatless days potato soup, noodles with cheese curd or cabbage, bean soup, stewed beans, or dishes made of clabbered milk were eaten for lunch or supper; bacon, onions, and bread were the most common breakfast foods. Both peasant families possessing average circumstances (previously known as the middle peasantry) and wealthier farming families maintained the custom of three meatless days per week, but their daily meals were more varied as their meat supply was ensured by the butchering of more and larger hogs. These

⁶⁴ Radmilla Versztovsek, "A társadalmi és jövedelmi rétegek ételmisszer-fogyasztása a modell tükrében," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 5 (1982): 21–25.

⁶⁵ Annamária Lammel, "Kontinuitás, átrétegződés, akkulturáció (Atkár 1920–1980)," in *Életmód: modellek és minták*, ed. Mihály Hoppál and Tamás Szecskő (Budapest: Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont, 1984), 310–45.

families regularly drank milk, had access to coffee, and ate eggs. Other than holiday or Sunday meals, eating did not hold any particular prestige, which explains why there was not much of a difference between the dishes and foods consumed by the various social classes of village families.

On holidays, however, eating became an organic part of the other customs and rituals that were otherwise entailed. Compared to weekday meals, different foods were subsequently prepared: "Within the context of customs, nutrition performs a symbolic function. During the holidays, if anyone cannot provide his or her family with the food that bears this type of 'symbolic' value, then the village's inhabitants—or even members of the person's own circle—will not feel that person is 'one of them.' This is why the poorest families will still find ways to procure the mandatory food, even if only in the smallest of quantities."⁶⁶ In the middle of the century, foods bearing this symbolic value included the Easter ham or *kalács*, a traditional braided yeast bread. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the foods served at weddings still reflected tradition. At a wedding in Atkár, the "menu" consisted of a broth soup served with homemade noodles, blood sausage, boiled beef with pickled vegetables, bread, chicken stewed in paprika sauce, stuffed cabbage, roasted chicken, and a variety of cakes and pastries. The abundance of food being served and the quantity of pastries that had been brought to the wedding reflected the family's social status.

After land was collectivized, changes in the social strata naturally led to alterations in nutritional and cooking habits. The prevalence of store-bought ingredients, for instance, steadily rose in proportion to home-produced foodstuffs. Regarding quality and basic ingredients, Atkár's inhabitants increasingly followed urban dietary trends, even though numerous aspects related to composition, preparation, and consumption obviously continued to bear the stamp of local customs. By the end of the 1970s, it was not social status as much as it was age and generational influences that defined eating habits in Atkár. Elderly people, for example, clung to tradition and therefore maintained the custom of meatless days and consuming either no or only very minimal amounts of store-bought ingredients, cold cuts, cheese, or dairy products. They continued to raise their own animals as a source of meat; young people, however, mainly followed family customs rather than looking to village traditions as their model and

⁶⁶ Lammel, "Kontinuitás, átrétegződés," 321.

therefore grew more open to innovation. Out of the customary three meatless days, younger generations regularly abstained from eating meat on Fridays alone. They prepared hot food for supper and also ate great quantities of soup. On weekdays, meals were hurried and family members ate separately, not together. Among children, a bowl of milk with bread crumbled into it was a popular dish for breakfast or supper. Virtually without exception, the Sunday meal consisted of several courses containing meat followed by cakes or pastries.

In villages new types of foodstuffs either did not or only rarely appeared. Until the 1980s, it was more typical for those foods to disappear that had once been widely popular but symbolized—from a certain perspective—times when food had been scarce. These included barley, millet, cornmeal mush, and corn flour. In both cities and villages some “customs,” however, continued to be a part of everyday life in spite of the changing circumstances Hungarian society was undergoing. An example of this would be the “traditional hog butchering,” a custom that remained widespread to the end of the 1980s. In the 1970s and 1980s even the comparatively small kitchens found in urban homes were transformed into workspaces for processing a butchered hog. If this was not possible, village relatives who regularly butchered their own pigs provided the space and means. With the quick spread of refrigeration and freezing, how the meat was processed began to change; far less meat was set aside for the smokehouse as freezers began to replace this technique in meat preservation.

As the quantity of food consumed per person increased, society welcomed the general feeling of being able to eat enough that a state of “fullness” could be reached. Eating more led to certain negative physical effects as well, such as the growing number and percentage of overweight individuals. By the end of the 1970s, three hundred-thousand diabetics had been diagnosed; according to the medical literature, an estimated three million individuals were judged as obese. As another result of this emerging epidemic, the demand for low-fat, low-calorie diet foods gradually began to ripple throughout ever-widening circles of society. The potential demand for this type of product, however, could only be partially satisfied by the food and catering industry of the time.

Between 1960 and 1977 the average number of calories consumed in Hungary rose from 2,938 kcal to 3,189 kcal per person; by the mid-

dle of the 1970s, this previously dynamic spurt in food consumption had slowed. In spite of this decrease, over-eating became a basic issue related to nutrition and health. A study done by the Research Institute of Internal Trade in 1975 concluded that the individuals earning the lowest incomes were consuming on average 10 to 15 percent less than the recommended daily intake of 2,650 calories per person while those earning the highest incomes were eating at least 27 to 32 percent more than the prescribed calorie intake.⁶⁷

Nutritional studies conducted at the time also drew attention to the fact that not only adults were struggling with how to adapt to the relative abundance of foodstuffs:

What children are fed also raises a lot of issues. . . . In spite of all the system's improvements, institutionally organized meals for children still contain more fat and carbohydrates than is optimal, most likely due to the fairly narrow budget. School cafeterias or the eateries paid to cater meals for children are providing less protein and fewer vitamins than necessary. At the same time, a large proportion of children do not like stewed vegetables and therefore leave them on the plate. In many families, morning and evening meals follow tradition and the children consequently do not receive a sufficient amount of nutrients. (For instance, tea and bread and butter is served for breakfast rather than yogurt, cheese, or cold cuts.) To complicate matters further, the many sweets and sugary drinks children are given just fill their bodies with empty calories.⁶⁸

It must not be forgotten that food consumption entails far more than the need to maintain physical survival: expectations related to culture and enjoyment are also tacitly expressed by whatever form eating habits may take. Mealtimes are further influenced by what choice of ingredients may be available or the family's customs and habits. A variety of analyses point to the fact that "in nature nutritional habits remained rather conservative in Hungary. Even today, meat is almost exclusively conceived as being pork; some families never eat fish, for example. Other customs that stubbornly remain is the thickening of vegetable stews with flour, the consumption of too much bread, and the over-usage of lard. The excessive usage of sugar can also be linked

⁶⁷ Sándor Holéné, "Táplálkozásunk színvonala, fejlődési sajátosságai," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 11 (1979): 13–16.

⁶⁸ Gyula Szigethi and László Horváthné, "Gondolatok az egészséges, korszerű táplálkozásról," *Kereskedelmi Szemle*, no. 6 (1979): 1–5.

to traditional tastes, as evinced, for example, in the habit of adding a heavy layer of powdered sugar to pastries before serving."⁶⁹ By the end of the 1970s, the average amount of daily calories consumed per person was enough to supply sufficient energy for a person performing moderately difficult physical labor.

Abundance and shortages after the fall of the Iron Curtain

By the beginning of the 1980s, the social habits associated with eating had mostly lost any sense of being mandatory.⁷⁰ The appearance and widespread popularity of foreign-based fast food chains further influenced nutritional habits in Hungary. Once again, the quality of foodstuffs was primarily determined by the amount of income available for purchasing food. Parallel to this trend, the views related to healthy eating habits slowly began to gain more acceptance. Consuming meals at home continued to maintain an overwhelming role in food consumption, as indicated by the fact that four-fifths of the individuals surveyed in 1993 mostly had their meals at home. This large proportion obviously owed much to the decrease in workplace dining halls brought about by the closing of state-run factories. The number of those who ate three or more times a day also fell: in 1993, 54 percent of all survey participants ate only three times a day compared to the 26.4 percent who ate anywhere between three to five times daily. A further 19.4 percent admitted to eating once or maybe twice a day. As far as caloric value is concerned, this data indicates that one-fifth of Hungary's population did not have access to adequate nutrition at the beginning of the 1990s. Irregular and insufficient eating habits were strikingly high among those relying on social welfare or possessing a low level of professional training or education.⁷¹ The in-

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ While the National Institute of Foodstuffs and Nutritional Sciences conducted a nationwide examination of the nutritional status for Hungary's population between 1985 and 1988, only the biological and physiological aspects of this study proved to be conclusive. As a result of this factor, the collected data cannot be used to analyze the history of lifestyle or other historical issues. For a comparative analysis of alimentary history in Central and Eastern Europe during the post-socialist period, see Melissa L. Caldwell, ed., *Food and Everyday Life in the Postsocialist World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁷¹ Béla Falussy et al., "A lakosság táplálkozási szokásai: Kutatási beszámoló; Az

crease in prices for foodstuffs combined with the decrease in income that occurred between 1987 and 1993 added to the millions of individuals within these social classes whose daily lives centered around the struggle to attain the basic staples necessary for survival.

In the course of her research conducted in the community of Cserépfalu at the beginning of the 1990s, Anikó Báti examined the eating habits displayed by three generations of individuals.⁷² According to her categorization, the first generation had started a family between 1945 and 1965, the second between 1965 and 1985, and the third followed suit after 1985.



Figure 67. Man cutting bread, 1976 (Fortepan, 88748, Tamás Urbán)

Based on her observations, the oldest generation's diet was less varied. Eating only two meals per day was also common in this group and traditional dishes dominated the menu. Cold food (toasted bread, bacon, milk, and dairy products) were most commonly eaten for breakfast and supper. On weekdays the noon meal usually consisted of two courses featuring soup, noodles, or stewed vegetables as the consumption of meat or meat dishes was rarer. Food preservation was most frequently achieved via canning or smoking. The second generation's habits demonstrated a mixture of tradition and innovation. In other words, while tradition still played a dominant role in formulating their dietary habits, various technological innovations (gas stoves, refrigerators, or other appliances) exerted an equally important influence. Meat consumption rose dramatically in this category. Members of the third generation, however, adjusted their diets to meet the expectations of a more hurried lifestyle. With the exception of holidays, tradition was less important to them and they

1986–87. és az 1993. évi KSH életmód-időmérleg-táplálkozási felvételek főbb eredményei," (manuscript, Budapest: KSH, 1997).

⁷² Anikó Báti, "Tárgyak-technológiák-szokások: Egy borsodi község táplálkozáskultúrájának változásai a 20. század második felében," in *Paraszti múlt és jelen az ezredfordulón*, ed. László Kósa (Szentendre: Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum, 2000), 341–56; Anikó Báti, *Régi és új elemek a Cserépfalui konyhán*, Néprajzi Értekezések, vol. 1 (Budapest: Magyar Néprajzi Társaság, 2008).

were remarkably open to anything new. As a result, they were more accepting of eating patterns that were urban in origin or belonged to healthier diets. On weekdays the family ate only supper together, a meal that was promoted to representing the family's main meal.

Not completely independent of prices, the decrease in food consumption was also brought about by the partial transformation of consumer habits. One of the most characteristic aspects of this period was the explosive increase in variety, a factor that could be seen as being somewhat relative, yet still led to a state of genuine excess in certain cases. As far as quality was concerned, financial circumstances dictated the rapid differentiation of food consumption. Regarding the structure of consumption, between 1987 and 1993 a decline was seen in the purchase of "luxury" items such as alcohol, high-priced meat products, or richer types of meat dishes. The consumption of bacon, cracklings, or more filling yeast breads and pastries rose to a small or medium extent while the increase in stewed vegetables, boiled noodles, one-pot potato dishes, fried bread, bread (served either plain or spread with lard or butter), and tea rose dramatically.

These adjustments in consumption amply demonstrate the transformation in financial circumstances that occurred at this time as a growing number of social classes found themselves sinking into poverty.⁷³ Based on the survey, 1993 saw an increase in the habit of eating plain bread, bread with some sort of a spread, or sandwiches in the mornings and evenings; with the addition of a drink, breakfast and supper thereby came to represent the main meal for many individuals. The daily consumption of milk and dairy products decreased as dishes containing inexpensive or medium-priced cuts of meat appeared at noon. Consuming a simple bowl of meatless, stewed vegetables or what would have ordinarily just been a side dish accompanying meat became more common as baked or boiled noodle dishes once more dominated daily diets. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s it can also be said that the general trend in eating habits displayed the disintegration and impoverishment of Hungary's eating traditions, followed by the relative homogenization of a previously rich variety of regional cooking customs.

⁷³ Béla Falussy et al, "A lakosság táplálkozási szokásai," 8–9.

Conclusions

After surveying and analyzing the topics discussed in this volume, it is only fitting to end with a few concluding remarks. The extended examination of the various areas connected to the study of everyday life in Hungary reveals that even though a kind of modernization and increased usage of technology began in the 1930s, this process occurred at a relatively slow rate and remained limited. Neither World War II nor the 1950s were periods that favored the improvement of living conditions. Instead, wartime destruction combined with the irrationality imposed first by a wartime economy and then a planned economic system meant that Hungarians struggled to regain the level of civilization they had formerly enjoyed. This, somewhat paradoxically, was achieved only during the Kádár era, the longest and most peaceful period of reconstruction in Hungary's twentieth century, although in a way that was often contradictory or marked by the unnecessary waste of energies. As the historian György Gyarmati sums it up,

The Kádár era's final three decades—a period spanning 40 percent of the “short” twentieth century—was a time of regeneration that was not marked by any overt social tremors or obvious political turning points. . . . The other side of the coin is that the existential security the Kádárist system offered was meant not for middle-class citizens, but rather for the masses of status-dependent subjects. Acknowledging the presence of the era's systemic paternalism was the price for the notion of “tomorrow (or next year) things might be just a little bit better,” which was later followed by “oh, to breathe my last as a pensioner receiving social security,” wishes that formed everyday life during the period of consolidation.¹

When all of these factors are taken into consideration, it is obvious that the greatest increase in the standard of living that affected and/or altered the lifestyles of virtually every social group in Hungary occurred between the 1960s and 1970s (See Figure 68). The most important

¹ For more on this subject, see György Gyarmati, “A nosztalgia esete a Kádár-korszakkal,” *Metszetek* 2, nos. 2–3 (2013): 16, http://metszetek.unideb.hu/files/01_gyarmati_gyorgy_0.pdf, accessed July 10, 2021.

aspects of this process consisted of the electrification and mechanization of household appliances, automobilization, the transformation of housing conditions, and the quick spread of modern mass communication. After the misery, privation, and utter defeat experienced during World War II that was further compounded by catastrophic supply shortages during the 1950s, foodstuffs represented Hungarian society's main consumer good during the 1960s. As of the 1970s, the consumption of housing, furnishing, and durable goods (household appliances, television sets, automobiles) became characteristic. Consumerism (or, in rarer cases, the inability to consume) evolved into one of the most significant factors in determining Hungary's society, economy, and mentality. The underlying impetus for this change can be pinpointed in the various methods that were available for procuring extra income, which in turn enabled a relatively lengthy period of dynamic growth in public revenue and consumption. The first phase of this period became famously known as "goulash communism" while the second was dubbed "fridge socialism."² The ironic tone that underlies these terms offers an excellent indication of how ambiguous social conditions were at a time when appearances often existed in direct opposition to the actual reality. When interpreting this phenomenon, it is reasonable to conclude that the emergence of "goulash communism" coincides with the complete consolidation of Kádárist rule over Hungary since a discernible improvement in the quality of living conditions provided the basis for this period's policies that began in the mid-sixties and stretched to the end of the seventies. Yet the emergence of a consumerist orientation was obviously not enough to "save" Hungary's state socialist system; by their very nature, the rather complex array of social and economic mechanisms that are part and parcel of a consumer society represent the polar opposite of state socialist principles.

Under state socialism, the presence of a shortage economy as well as the need to maintain and operate bureaucratic institutions frequently hindered the normal efforts of either individuals or small groups to improve their circumstances. The same purpose was served by the various campaigns that originated in the ideologically determined nature of the state socialist regime, such as the campaigns against the

² S. Nagy, *Fogyasztás és lakáskultúra Magyarországon*, 47–54. The two terms were often used in West European media as a way of distinguishing Hungary from other Eastern European countries.

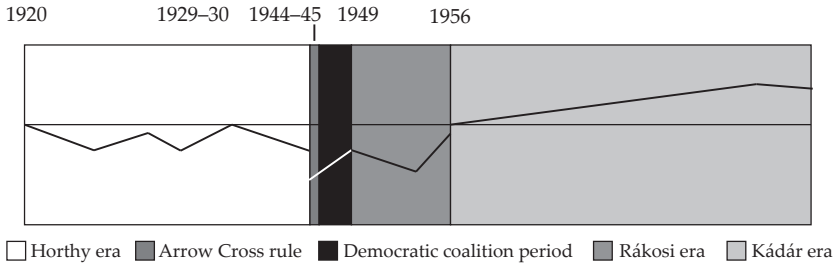


Figure 68. Trends and changes in living standards through Hungary's short twentieth century. Based on György Gyarmati, "A nosztalgia esete a Kádár-korszakkal," *Metszetek* 2, nos. 2–3 (2013): 8.

unwarranted accumulation of income or excessive wealth, labelled as manifestations of a petit bourgeois attitude. At the same time, paradoxically, the Communist Party sought to incorporate into its language of self-legitimation the achievements of those successful private initiatives that, in fact, came into being in opposition to the state socialist system itself. Based on its essential elements, it can be said that this ten- or fifteen-year period saw a civilizing process that mainly occurred independently of the system itself and brought about significant improvements in the living conditions for a broad array of social groups. The reality of everyday life in Hungary throughout the 1960s and 1970s consisted of the step-by-step reacquisition of the private sphere, from both a social as well as an economic standpoint. Initially covertly dependent upon private initiatives as well as families' economic strength and willingness to make sacrifices, the political system came to rely more and more openly on these factors. The increased emphasis and value placed upon consumption, and the relatively "liberal" policies with regard to the activities—whether they be hidden yet semi-legal or legal—conducted within the realm of private economy obviously played an important role in easing social tensions, preserving political stability, and preventing the emergence of conflicts between the ruling power and society.

Another interesting problem is the question of continuity and discontinuity. What the history of everyday life shows in this respect is that when it comes to lifestyle and the social behavior of individuals and groups, these were marked by both the survival and social organizing power of customs, as well as the need to adapt to shifting political and economic circumstance. These circumstances indicate that

political initiatives sparked many types of counter-reactions in the course of everyday life, thereby leading to strategies that regularly crossed political eras or regime changes. Essentially irrespective of social status, the experiences Hungarians had while enduring poverty and overcoming scarcities engendered a deep-rooted compulsion and reflex to hoard food. The similar phenomenon of "standing on more than two feet," a habit that compelled Hungarians to pursue multiple sources of income, was also driven by the relatively low level of average wages. While the structure regarding which groups made up the upper and lower levels of society as far as poverty, wealth, and income inequalities were concerned naturally fluctuated, the regeneration of the system's independent existence also comprises a unique facet of the question of continuity and discontinuity in modern Hungarian society.

The examination of income conditions and consumption shows that Hungary's economy continued to lag behind the European average throughout three-fourths of the past century. The fact that a nineteenth-century type of industrialization actually occurred during the 1950s and 1960s also hindered the nation's ability to close ranks with Europe since this process was founded upon an already obsolete economic structure that demanded the intense input of raw resources and energy. A similar observation can be drawn regarding the fact that large-scale income differences and inequalities were present throughout the everyday life of the period under discussion, albeit to differing degrees. A steady and stable leveling-off of economic means cannot be observed even during the state socialist era that comprised the most long-lasting period within this time frame: despite the system's proclamations, financial inequalities not only continued to exist, but were also regenerated. Irrespective of whatever political system happened to be in power, wealth as well as poverty was an aspect of daily life in twentieth-century Hungary. In spite of the state's relatively strict supervision, a broad array of social groups found ways to supplement incomes, a solution that these individuals understandably strove to implement as widely as possible. This alone contributed to the continuation and reoccurrence of economic inequality. It must also be mentioned that political change exerted a greater influence on the compilation of society's upper class compared to the slightly less palpable impact it had on the poor.

Another definitive characteristic of the period that stretched from World War II to the new millennium was the uncertain and shifting

status of (private) ownership. The state's recurring "hunger" for property and the overexpansion that resulted in an attempt to assuage this need, the sometimes truly radical interference with property relations, and the control (or at least supervision) of how social resources were distributed and utilized were all factors that influenced the nature of ownership in Hungary. Between 1938 and 1944, the reigning Hungarian state first confiscated, then redistributed the property of Hungarian Jews. In 1945, land reforms liquidated large-scale estates, thereby making farmland available to hundreds of thousands of peasant farmers. Beginning in 1948, any property owned in the sectors of industry, agriculture, service, trade, or finance was eliminated in an attempt to produce sources of income that could be operated by the state. Later, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, state property was privatized, a decision that led to a variety of economic, social, and political consequences.

As a result of the measures that were effected following the communist takeover (nationalization, a central distribution system of income, the enforced equalization of wage levels) and the introduction of one-sided economic policies, Hungarians found themselves facing massive property losses at a time when the majority were still struggling to overcome the severe deprivation brought about by the war. To make matters even worse, the process of proletarianization lasted far longer than expected and was never able to attain full implementation. Parallel to this process was the emergence of new elite groups from various social backgrounds whose standard of living and income situation improved significantly, largely thanks to their ability to convert political capital into economic capital.

Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, thanks to the mass pursuance of activities that supplemented income (second jobs, garden plots, working under the table, trading on the black market) income became differentiated at an increasingly dynamic rate. Large numbers of Hungarians were subsequently able to accumulate wealth, albeit in a way that exhibited multiple peculiarities and was mainly kept as far from sight as possible. In spite of its circumstances, this process can be traced via the analysis of certain areas of consumption, such as housing, furnishings, dress, and nutritional intake, including their connected habits.

When examined alongside the various opportunities for participating in consumerist activities, the configuration for income distribution

and its marked differentiation refute the validity of schematic approaches to interpreting this era's social structure. More significantly, consumer behavior and income differentiation additionally underscore the fact that certain processes displayed strong aspects of continuation. Beyond these issues, analyzing the conditions that determined income and consumption during this era allows a far more nuanced image to emerge regarding the structure of Hungarian society at this time. Based on the data, it can justifiably be assumed that—from a historical standpoint—the following social strata were steadily present throughout the past decades:

- a./ a deeply impoverished layer of society consisting of individuals who irregularly earn income or live below subsistence level for long-term periods and therefore struggle daily to survive and cannot participate in consumption,
- b./ the poor, who possess low incomes, exist within proximity of subsistence level, and experience difficulties in surviving,
- c./ the broad number of consumers who possess income beyond their everyday needs, yet are incapable of setting funds aside and therefore consume less than average,
- d./ a similarly large number of individuals who earn average incomes, consume at average levels, and are capable of setting aside funds,
- e./ the well-to-do, who earn above-average incomes, are active consumers, and are able to accumulate goods,
- f./ society's elite level, who earn exceedingly high incomes, can afford luxury items, and live in circumstances that are far above the average.

At multiple points, this hypothetical categorization intersects with the traditional circumstances brought about by education, training, employment, or the type of social stratification that is interpreted based on the kind of work done. After all, certain categories of income/consumption frequently included the members of social groups who displayed the most varied types of training, education, or employment. Reinterpreting the correlations that connect income, consumption, and employment (including how these factors impact social stratification) obviously demands the kind of further research that funda-

mentally contains an examination of the inequalities found within various areas.

The analyses conducted here show that consumption became, especially from the 1960s on, one of the most important means and realms of social representation and distinction—or, in other words, “social competition”—and has remained so even after the fall of communism. In most Hungarian households, material culture underwent a fundamental transformation via a process that became one means of demonstrating social status. The data-based interpretation of these processes reveal that the latter half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a rather ambiguous “culture of appreciation” that acknowledged the value of being “wily” and respected (while simultaneously doubting) personal achievement, the (re)accumulation of wealth, the ability to adjust to economic changes, and the successes that resulted from these traits.

The examination of everyday life has proven itself to be a suitable tool for introducing both the shifts that occurred during this era in the attitudes regarding values and the role played by continuity and discontinuity in influencing this transformation. A rather extensive degree of continuity can be shown in connection to social adaptation as social groups living in various conditions quickly strove to create their own adaptive strategies in response to political and economic conditions that changed with astonishing swiftness at times. It is also quite apparent that Hungary’s present society displays a truly high level of acceptance of social hierarchy, just as society’s individualization (including all of its consequences) has demonstrated an influence that has spanned political eras. At times, these contradictions have led to the emergence of irrational social forms of behavior that have (for shorter or longer periods) gained a strong foothold within Hungarian society.

Similarly, the study of income acquisition in particular furnishes an obvious example of how economic rationality was (from time to time) able to prevail over the aims and expectations that were driven by political ideology. This statement is supported by the fact that—as a result of complex political, economic, and social changes—the demand to establish material prosperity occupied a central role in Hungarian society’s value system by the end of the 1970s. The reason for this can be found in the gradual lessening of the material and political limitations that stemmed from previous eras; in other words,

an inescapably protracted period of poverty was drawing to an end as the conditions for realizing dreams and plans were slowly improving—at least for the majority. This naturally does not mean that the frustration felt by those individuals who found themselves forced to attain their goals within the system's limitations lessened.³

During this period, the most significant change in social mentalities was the increased importance of the forms of behavior connected to economic rationality and the emergence of consumerism. In contrast to this shifting mentality, the strategies used in raising a family or leading a household, as well as certain aspects related to dress and cultural behavior, showed how customs originating in the interwar era were present and able to reappear, and subsequently demonstrate a relatively strong degree of continuity. Beyond these issues, the way in which some social groups were not only vigorously receptive to the modernization of their living conditions but also willing to go to enormous lengths to procure these comforts influenced everyday life during these decades and enacted a powerful influence on the history and society of this era. In conclusion, these issues, factors, and conditions underscore the complex web of changes that made the transformation of Hungarian society into a typical, yet at the same time unique case within Eastern and Central European state socialism.

³ Elemér Hankiss, Róbert Manchin, and László Füstös, *Az életcélok szerepe az emberek életében* (Budapest: MTA Szociológiai Kutató Intézete, 1980).

Appendix

The value of 1 USD in Pengő, 1935-1945

Year	Value of 1 USD
1935	4.40 Pengő
1941	6.90 Pengő
1944	44.20 Pengő
1945 (December 31)	280,000 Pengő
1946 (July 31)	4,600,000,000,000,000 billion (46x10 ²⁹)

The value of USD versus Hungarian Forint (HUF), 1946–2000 (official exchange rate*)

Year	Value of 1 USD in HUF	Value of 100 HUF in USD
1946	11.7 HUF	8.54 USD
1950	11.74 HUF	8.52 USD
1955	11.74 HUF	8.52 USD
1960	11.74 HUF	8.52 USD
1965	11.74 HUF	8.52 USD
1970	30.00 HUF	3.33 USD
1975	20.66 HUF	4.85 USD
1980	32.51 HUF	3.07 USD
1985	50.14 HUF	1.99 USD
1990	63.36 HUF	1.57 USD
1995	125.29 HUF	0.80 USD
2000	282.27 HUF	0.35 USD

* Note that black market values could be 50 to 200 percent higher, depending on the year.

Source: "Dollár árfolyamok Magyarországon 1791 óta," and "A hiperinfláció árai 1945–46-ban," *Ártörténet.hu*, <https://artortenet.hu/dollar-arfolyamok-magyarorszag-on-1791-ota/>; <https://artortenet.hu/a-hiperinflacio-arai/>, accessed July 31, 2021.

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On the cover: Photo by Géza Kriss, Fortepan 192137.

Cover design by Éva Szalay

Central European University Press

Budapest - Vienna - New York

Sales and information: ceupress@press.ceu.edu

Website: <http://www.ceupress.com>

ISBN 978-963-386-376-3



9 789633 863763 9 0000