

“It’s hard to do your duty here.” Cultured Retail Trade in Hungary

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The aims of trade policy in the 1950s and 60s were centred on changing the earlier mentality of commerce.¹ The policy makers sought to establish a new kind of trade, the so-called ‘cultured socialist trade’, whose criteria were promoted in several forums. Those controlling trade tried to leave behind the earlier approaches and methods replacing them with new ones. Accordingly, “Commercial activities should be focussed on polite and considerate work and increasing the quality of service. It should be a basic requirement that is the main expectation when a job is assessed.”²

Socialist commerce tried to be different from its counterpart, i.e. capitalist commerce, in its purpose, as its main aim was to achieve the best possible customer service instead of profit. They also tried to define the differences between forms and methods of socialist commerce and those of capitalist commerce. According to this, both these branches of commerce have a similar content but with a major difference: in the case of capitalists, politeness coupled with humble execution only serves the purpose of gaining profit, whereas in the new system employees could do their jobs “in complete equality” and “politeness by nature” meant that the co-workers were esteemed and consideration was aimed to satisfy their needs.³ The two

¹ After the drastic change in ownership rights, most of the retail trade was conducted in shops owned by the state or co-ops: their proportion was the highest in 1952 (88.5%), but even in 1970, a little over three quarters of them belonged here and 92% of commercial workers were employed in them, and they were responsible for 99% of the turnover, which indicates how private retailing lost ground. Tamás Csató: *A belkereskedelem Magyarországon a 19-20. században* [Internal trade in Hungary in the 19th - 20th centuries] (Budapest: Aula Kiadó – Budapesti Közgazdaságtudományi Egyetem, [1995]), 84-85.

² “Időszerű kereskedelempolitikai kérdések és a belkereskedelem 1966. évi feladatai. Tausz János belkereskedelmi miniszter előadói beszéde az 1966. március 14-i országos értekezleten,” [Current issues in trade policy and the tasks of domestic trade in 1966. A presentation by János Tausz, Minister of Domestic Trade at the meeting held on 14 March, 1966] *Kereskedelmi Értesítő*, Budapest, LIX/12, 21 March 1966, Supplement 11.

³ Ferenc Bihari, *Az eladás művészete* [The art of selling] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1963), 3-5.; “Az új eladási formákról, az udvari-

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salesmen characters in the film called *Állami Áruház* [State Department Store] presented in 1953 provide an excellent example of this approach. The old-fashioned merchant, acted by Kálmán Latabár, a well-known actor of the era, is a *thin eager-beaver* who, according to a complainant, *jumps at the customers squeezing them* in a fur in the summer; he is a *vampire* who *pushes* the customer to the cash desk after the receipt is made out and with his fast assertive way of speech, he *steam-rolls* them. In his reproach, the manager emphasizes this: “You are still selling in the manner of twenty years ago. You see a customer, and you go mad at once. You don’t see the working men in them like you but the 526.40 [HUF] that should be put in the cash register.” The shop assistant providing the positive example in the film, who is later promoted to a manager, is willing to face workplace conflicts rather than sell faulty or unsavoury clothes.

In this study I intend to show what was meant by cultured trade and what steps were taken to establish it, based on mainly the trade press and on the analysis of the documents of the Domestic Trade Ministry. I analyse its realisation in practice mainly in the context of some villages of the former Mezőcsát district, in the Borsod county in North-East Hungary, for which I used trade related complaints, the minutes of council meetings and those of the executive committee, and also the interviews which I had made with sellers and tradesmen of peasant origin.

The shop assistants of socialist trade

It was the Soviet socialist trade created in the 1930s that provided the model to create a socialist trade in Hungary. Based on the research conducted by Amy E. Randall, the Soviet government planned to rationalise and re-define trade by modernizing and extending the commercial infrastructure, by introducing technological and practical innovations and a

asságról, a szállodaipar fejlődéséről beszéltek a felszólalók,” [The speakers talked about the new ways of selling, politeness and the development of hotel industry] *Kirakat*, Budapest, II/10, October 1958, 10; “Néhány szó a szocialista erkölcsről,” [A Few Words on Socialist Morals] *Kirakat*, Budapest, V/12, December 1961, 5; “Mi a különbség a kapitalista és a szocialista kereskedelem között,” [The Difference between Capitalist and Socialist Trading] *Bizományi Híradó*, Budapest, VI/1, 4 April 1965, 6; “Gondolatok a vállalat 20. éves jubileumára,” [Thoughts on the 20th Anniversary of the Company] *Bizományi Híradó*, Budapest, IX/2, 7 November 1968, 32.

new cultivated method of distributing goods (announcing that it was successful, honest and clean). The development of Soviet trade was considered by the political leadership as a means of building a state that served the purpose of bringing the new socialist order, which was said to stand above the capitalist version in terms of its techniques and morals.⁴ The department stores in the big cities were the flagships of these efforts as they were outstanding both in terms of their product range and the quality of service conveying the feeling of luxury to the new Soviet ‘middle class’, which tried to express its privileged position honoured by higher salaries in the material culture too.⁵

To propagate and spread commercial know-how, quite strange means were used such as the commercial novel called *Szívügyünk (Our Labour of Love)*,⁶ which was published in Hungary in 1953 and represented “the everyday work and life of Soviet commercial workers”. The novel was recommended to trade workers by *Kereskedelmi Értésítő* (the official journal of the Ministry of Domestic Trade).⁷ With the promotion of the protagonist of the novel, Lena, who becomes a shop assistant from a cleaning lady then is promoted to the position of a department manager and finally becomes the manager of the shop, one can see the different levels of work in commerce. She is the ideal worker: she is honest, pays attention to cleanliness, responsible, she keeps the regulations, pays attention to her training, she is a big promoter of innovations and tries to provide for the workers as well as possible, even if she has to confront her colleagues or bosses. Her colleagues, embodying different types of shop assistants, show examples of the attitudes to be avoided. There is the ‘shabby’ street cake seller, the head of the delicatessen department, who tries to teach her colleague how to cheat with the scales, and there is a shop assistant who is rude to the customers. One of the central negative characters in the novel is the head of the Department of Supplies at the Vostok factory, whose embezzlements committed at wartime are revealed in the end.

⁴ Amy E. Randall, *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930s* (New York: Palgrave - Macmillan, 2008), 67-111.

⁵ Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practises, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 198-215; Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (Oxford - New York: Berg, 2003), 6-9.

⁶ N. Volkov, *Szívügyünk* (Budapest: Új Magyar Könyvkiadó, 1953).

⁷ *Kereskedelmi Értésítő*, Budapest, XLVI/21, 8 June 1953, 500.

It must have played an important role in propagating commercial know-how that from the 1950s on, there was a huge increase in the numbers of women working in commerce (it was the branch where their percentage was the highest), whereas only half as many of them had commercial education, both among leaders and among shop assistants, as men working in the same positions.⁸ Mrs. András P. received a job at the shop supplying the workers of the power plant in Tiszapalkonya⁹ in the second half of the 50s. She was eighteen and walked to work from her nearby home village. She described her boss as a man who liked cleanliness and required it from his subordinates: *"at that time I wasn't Jolány, I was [called - I. Á. L.] Jolika or Joli.¹⁰ And then my boss told me: – Look, Joli! First we were on a last name basis then he switched to a first name basis, [...] well, I called him neither [...] by his first one, we showed respect and he deserved it and I learnt a lot [from him - I. Á. L.] being a man. [...] I learnt cleanliness and whatever, or preciseness from that man. [...] I just paid attention how a man could control us when there were five or six of us women."*¹¹

⁸ Mária Schadt, *"Feltörekvő dolgozó nő". Nők az ötvenes években* ["Ambitious Working Women". Women in the 50s] (Pécs: Pannónia Könyvek, 2003), 47. In 1952 the Ministry of Domestic Trade prescribed that wherever women can be employed, 80% of the new employees should be women and several positions were listed where only women were to be employed when the new workforce was recruited. "A belkereskedelmi miniszter 1.098. számú utasítása a nődolgozók felvételének szabályozásáról", [Decree 1.098 of the Minister of Domestic Trade on the employment of women workers] *Kereskedelmi Értesítő*, Budapest, XLV/22, 8 June 1952, 414-415.

⁹ The thermal power station in Tiszapalkonya was established during the forced industrialization in the first half of the 1950s. Together with the Tisza Chemical Combined Plant, which was started in 1955, they formed the foundation of the new socialist town of Leninváros, today called Tiszaújváros, a green field investment. The factory complex, which was later complemented with the Tiszai Oil Refinery, and the town were built in a 'townless' region in an area appropriated from the neighbouring villages. The nearby village of Tizzaszederkény was incorporated in the new town by the name 'old town' and the housing estate of the town was built in its outskirts. The town and its plants are situated in the area of the Mezőcsát District or since 1982, when the centre of the district was changed, the Leninváros District.

¹⁰ The fact that she left out the village version of the nickname shows that the interviewee integrated in the urbanised conditions.

¹¹ Interview with Mr. and Mrs. P. András. Tiszapalkonya, 8 February 2011. The names of the interviewees have been altered to protect their personal rights.

Although my women interviewees who worked in the retail sector did not get professional education, they managed to learn more by attending courses, trainings,¹² night schools or learning accountancy. They liked to mention their ability to calculate in their heads¹³ and the love of customers expressed by gratefulness – occasionally even in present days – for the help they used to give, in order to prove that they were suitable for this career. For example, Mrs. András P. served the inhabitants of the neighbouring village in the shop that was maintained by the power plant for the factory's workers, disobeying the orders given by her bosses and not following the directions given in the commercial novel for similar situations. She considered the incorrect handling of state property and the favours she did for the micro-community and her family as morally justified by poverty and penury¹⁴: *"I brought my mother every Saturday everything that I could that I was able to, [...] I didn't pay for that. [...] Even the boss was unaware of that. Maybe he knew about it, but one thing is for sure, we never lacked anything, no, I didn't pay, I didn't pay for the rice, the flour, the sugar, I took sausages home, I took home bread, I almost broke my back [...] I was expected at home, I took home fat, I was expected at home like the Messiah."*¹⁵

The cultural points of view of the new type of commerce modified the role of shop assistants as they were expected to educate the customers by recommending the goods properly and by introducing a new socialist customer taste to them, thus helping customers become modern socialist cultured people.¹⁶ A way of doing this was political cash desk agitation¹⁷

¹² *"There were about every quarter of a year, we don't say school, but a kind of training. And say the doctor gave a presentation on hygiene and on what to pay attention to and the like."* Interview with Mr. and Mrs. P. András. Tiszapalkonya, 8 February 2011.

¹³ *"[B]ut I added like a machine, and never... I was there for three years and never were we in the red and I never made a mistake so no one brought the paper saying that I don't calculate correctly, I didn't calculate correctly. All right, it's not that I want to praise myself, but that was the truth."* Interview with Mr. and Mrs. P. András. Tiszapalkonya, 8 February 2011.

¹⁴ She did not receive with understanding the same request by her neighbour who she mentioned as a kulak.

¹⁵ Interview with Mr. and Mrs. P. András. Tiszapalkonya, 8 February 2011.

¹⁶ Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade*, 209-210. The concept of 'kul'turnost' appeared in the 1930s in the Soviet Union conveying the norms of cultured behaviour to the socially mobile groups with worker-peasant origins. For more on

mentioned in the annual schemes of the well-known Company of State Department Stores or advertisements aimed to boost the standard of living of village people by introducing the use of certain products to them. The cultural programmes combined with clothes and fashion shows that were described in the newspaper column called Progressive methods in *Kereskedelmi Értesítő* had a similarly important role.¹⁸

When discussing the characteristics of cultured commerce, most guidelines were focussed on the proper behaviour of shop assistants, and this

this, see: Kelly Catriona, Vadim Volkov, “Directed Desires: Kul’turnost’ and Consumption,” in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940*, ed. Kelly Catriona, David Shepherd (Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 291-313; Vadim Volkov, “The Concept of Kul’turnost’. Notes on the Stalinist civilizing process,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London - New York: Routledge, 2000), 210-230. In Hungary the linguist József Erdődi published an article on the expansion of the meaning of the word ‘cultured’, which, following the Soviet example, started to comprise people’s behaviour besides their knowledge and mental ability. Expressions like cultured trade, cultured appearance, cultured way of getting around, cultured eating, cultured serving, etc., partly take over the meaning of the word ‘polite’. József Erdődi, “A kulturált szó dicső pályafutása,” [The Glorious Career of the Word “Cultured”] *Magyar Nyelvőr* 88/2 (1964), 136-138. My observations gained credence when I discerned that the contemporary press seem to support the above-mentioned statement. Moreover, the expression ‘cultured’ is often used as a synonym of the words ‘tasty’ or ‘clean, tidy’, and it was also used to express the ‘ability of self-control, self-moderation’.

¹⁷ In the early 50s cash desk agitation meant the efforts made by new, politically educated cadres to reveal those who were said to be the ‘enemies’ of public supply (speculators, those who aggregated products and scaremongers) and to prevent their activities. Judit Tóth, “Áruhalmozás vs. pultagitáció, avagy az ellenség ismét a közellátás vonalán próbál zavart okozni,” [Product Aggregation vs. Shop Counter Agitation or the Enemy Tries to Cause Disturbance on the Front of Public Supply Again] in *Tanulmányok Pest megye múltjából V* [Studies from the History of Pest County V], ed. Anita Kiss (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Pest Megyei Levéltára, 2014), 146-150.

¹⁸ In connection with the propaganda of goods see: “A Népgazdasági Tanács 218/19/1952. N. T. számú határozata a belkereskedelmi piackutatás megszervezéséről és az árupropaganda fejlesztéséről [Decree No. 218/19/1952. N. T. of the People’s Economic Council on the organisation of domestic market research and the development of the propaganda of products],” *Határozatok Tára* 1/19 (1952), 155-157.

point of view remained important until the end of the socialist era. The interviewees themselves also emphasized that they used to work without arguments to the satisfaction of customers. “*I called everyone by their surnames and I said ‘at your service’ to everyone, even the smallest children.*”¹⁹ Recalling his childhood memories, a customer who has grown up since of Mrs. István K., who worked for 15 years in the greengrocer’s of the co-op from the mid 60s on, casts light on some stereotypes associated with state and private shops: “*you always accepted me so heartily and nicely, I thought it was your shop.’ The work was mine and the profit went to the co-op.*”²⁰

In contrast with the memories of the interviewees, official documents, letters of complaint and newspaper articles expose a lot of conflicts indicating that it took several decades to meet the requirements of commercial work laid down in the 1950s. Most commercial complaints sent to the People’s Control Committee of Mezőcsát and after Leninváros was appointed the centre of the district to the PCC of Leninváros between 1968 and 1989 were connected to the village shops and pubs of the district. People’s Control Committees were organised at a national, county and district level from late 1957 on to investigate cases of stealth, cheating, embezzlement and damages caused by inadvertent attitude and the careless treatment of social property. ‘Workers’ could make their oral or written complaints ‘in public interest’.²¹ The majority of complaints were made in

¹⁹ Interview with Mrs. István K. Tiszapalkonya, 6 February 2011.

²⁰ Interview with Mrs. István K. Tiszapalkonya, 6 February 2011. On the role of village shopkeepers, who were understanding, helpful (they provided credit and distributed the goods in an informal way) and were in a close relationship with the inhabitants as a consequence of the size of the village, which decreases the negative picture of state shops, see: Zuzana Búriková, “Consuming Socialism: Domesticated Socialist Shops in the Slovak Village,” in *Thinking Together. Proceedings of the IWM Junior Fellows’ Conference, Winter 2003*, ed. A. Cashin, J. Jirsa (Vienna: IWM, 2003), 1-14.

²¹ Law VII of 1957 on people’s controlling. *Törvények és rendeletek hivatalos gyűjteménye, 1957* [Official Collection of Laws and Regulations 1957] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1958), 49–56; *Törvények és rendeletek hivatalos gyűjteménye, 1958* [Official Collection of Laws and Regulations 1958] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1959), 171-174. In connection with the submissions sent to the PCC I am going to analyse the strategies of the letter writers, their argumentation techniques, their possible motivations as well as the formal and language characteristics of the letters: Ágota Lídia

connection with trade.²² The complaints like the contemporary newspaper articles on the work of the People’s Control Committees, the findings of mystery shopping and the remarks sent in, usually inform us about increased prices, weight reduction, wrong amounts on the receipts, the quality of the service, not keeping the official working hours and unfair advantages given to certain customers (or selling from under the counter as it was widely known).²³ Complaints were made about unofficial price increase; it frequently occurred in the case of meat products (a type of price cheating was the deception of customers, for example when a customer did not know the parts of an animal, so they could sell them cheaper meat at a higher price),²⁴ and in the case of drink portions at cafés

Ispán: „Ha nem segítenek Kádárnak írunk!” A Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottsághoz írt közérdekű bejelentések és panaszlevelek. [„If You don’t Help, We’ll Write to János Kádár” Public Interest Reports and Letters of Complaint Addressed to the People’s Control Committee] *Ethno-Lore: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Néprajztudományi Intézetének Évkönyve XXXI.*, [The Annals of the Institute of Ethnology, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences] ed. Balázs Balogh, Ágota Lídia Ispán, Zoltán Magyar (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2014), 180-194.

²² In their cases it was rather the infringement of personal interests that was emphasized instead of the protection of common/state property; therefore PCC as an organisation began to act like an office of consumer protection.

²³ The nationwide investigation on the trade in farmers’ cooperatives held in 1960 and the annual report of the People’s Control Committee of County BAZ in 1972 mentioned similar experiences. “Jelentés a BAZ. Megyei Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság 1972. évi ellenőrzési tapasztalatairól,” [Report on the experiences of the People’s Control Committee of County BAZ in 1972]; “Jelentés a megyei és járási NEB-okhoz érkezett bejelentések és panaszok alakulásáról,” [Report on the proceedings of the complaints and submissions sent to the county and township PCC’s] /1972./ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltára, [National Archives of Hungary Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archives] (hereafter cited as MNL BAZML) XVII. 1205. Néphatalmi és különleges feladatokra létrejött bizottságok. A Leninvárosi Járási Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság iratai, [Committees formed for the people’s power and diverse tasks. Documents of People’s Control Committee of Leninváros] box 3.

²⁴ Among the complaints against the manager of the butchery in Tiszakeszi in 1988 it was mentioned that “*he cuts pig meat and sells it as carcass meat selling the skin at the price of fat*”. MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1988, box 58.

(*presszó*) and pubs (*kocsma*). For example, in 1969 someone complained that the manager of the drink shop in Szakáld was selling his own low-quality nova wine at the highest price and that he was selling the grape pálinka he had bought in the autumn at the price of plum pálinka in the spring.²⁵ In 1979 a man complained about the drink bar (*bisztró*) in Ároktő where commercial rum was sold at the price of the more expensive Casino rum, and the cheap commercial brandy was sold at the price of Cabinet brandy and mixed pálinka was sold at the price of plum pálinka and coffee and some other drinks were watered down.²⁶ In the case of the drink bar in Tiszatarján an especially surprising complaint was made and it proved to be true: they were serving cognac with gasoline.²⁷ Incorrect scales and non-standard drinking glasses were the most common means of weight or volumetric reduction or in some cases the weight of the wrapping paper was included in the product. Some complained that incorrect change was given back or the changes in the prices were indicated in a confusing way. Quality complaints were mostly made in connection with bread.

In many cases letter writers complained about the quality of the service and the rude way of speaking. A letter writer who claimed to be a mother of three complained about the manager of the greengrocer's in Tiszaszederkény, the old town of Leninváros in 1981: "*If I happen to find it open, I have to serve myself because he is sitting about and is not willing to dirty his hands. It often happens that he drinks wine called 'egri bikavér' with his friends and woe to those entering the shop at that time since they can hear all kinds of swearwords.*"²⁸ In 1975 a complainant complained about the attitude of the manager of the laundry in Mezőcsát: "*if someone takes something to her to be cleaned or washed she looks daggers at them. She says that here again, they are bringing the heap of rags but they take nothing away.*" When the complainant argued about the correctness of saying the weight of the laundry at one sight she said that "*she won't talk to such dogs*".²⁹ The world of drink bars and cafés

²⁵ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Néphatalmi és különleges feladatokra létrejött bizottságok. A Mezőcsáti Járási Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság iratai [Committees formed for the people's power and diverse tasks. Documents of People's Control Committee of Mezőcsát] 1969, box 20.

²⁶ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1979, box 31.

²⁷ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. 1976, box 19.

²⁸ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1981, box 31.

²⁹ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. 1975, box 19.

lacked nice behaviour to an even greater degree. In 1977 as part of a long conflict the leader of the drink shop in Ároktő was accused of the following, but according to the PCC the charges were unsound: “*He tells the customers and guests, I quote ‘you bastard, get out of here’. It happened to me regularly. He is always intoxicated and in my opinion that’s why he behaves like that.*”³⁰ In 1969 the wife of the manager of the drink shop in Szakáld retorted to the ironic remark of a guest in which the guest praised the homemade wine sold at the highest price illegally, “*shut up, drink it and be quiet*”.³¹

In 1977 the Ministry of Domestic Trade issued a decree limiting the sale of alcoholic beverages so as to reduce the cases of intoxication at workplaces and in general excessive drinking. The decree forbade the sale of alcoholic beverages at catering units from the time of opening until 9 a.m.³² The regulation, which was called the ‘9 o’clock regulation’ by the people, was often checked by the local authorities by mystery shopping. According to the investigation carried out in Borsod County, the majority of catering and retail units kept the main provisions of the regulation and half of the catering units changed the time of opening to 9 o’clock. As a result of this, more alcoholic drinks were purchased in the food and grocery shops,³³ and therefore a proposal was made to extend the scope of limitation to the shops too.³⁴ It was in opposition to the regulation that the barely-detectable

³⁰ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. 1977, box 19.

³¹ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. 1969, box 20.

³² “A belkereskedelmi miniszter 19/1977. Bk. M. számú rendelete a szeszes ital értékesítésének korlátozásáról,” [Decree 19/1977. Bk. M. of the Minister of Domestic Trade on the restriction of selling alcoholic beverages] *Törvények és rendeletek hivatalos gyűjteménye, 1977* [The Official Collection of Laws and Regulations 1977] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1978), 514-517.

³³ “A 19/1977. Bk. M. számú kormányrendelet végrehajtásának ellenőrzése a szeszes ital értékesítésének korlátozásáról,” [Checking the execution of Government Decree 19/1977. Bk. M. on the limitation to selling alcoholic beverages.] MNL BAZML XVII. 1205, box 15.

³⁴ Finally, the restriction was only extended to retail units in January 1987. Not much later, in March 1989 the decree on the restriction of alcoholic beverages was repealed by the Parliament for good. “A szeszes italok értékesítésének korlátozása,” [Restriction of selling alcoholic drinks] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XLIII/1, 2 January 1987, 8; “A valóság a szeszrendeletéről,” [The Reality of the Alcohol Decree] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XLV/84, 11 April 1989, 8.

speakeasies sprang up. In these cases checks were made based upon reports. In 1978 a letter was sent from Igrici on this matter: “*in the flat of a widow, Mrs. F. M., there is a real drink shop [...]. It opens as early as 3 a.m. when the workers of the state farm go there and it is open until the evening, after them the workers of the cooperative come.*”³⁵ In 1984 a report drew the attention of the checking authorities to nine people who served drinks at their homes and as this case had already been discussed at the village meeting, the council turned to the Hungarian Customs and Finance Guard.³⁶ In 1986 in Igrici another letter writer’s acquaintance bragged about his ‘cunning’ son-in-law in Mezőcsát, which made the writer inform the People’s Control Committee about it: “*he distils the pálinka himself selling about ten litres for 150 HUF every week and he doesn’t care about the world, he is afraid of no one as he dates the policeman, the council, everyone [...]. He hides the equipment necessary for distilling pálinka in the abandoned neighbouring plots.*”³⁷ The investigation was made difficult both in the case of pubs breaking the rule and in the case of speakeasies by the careful approach and the suspiciousness towards the controllers who arrived in the villages as aliens. Sometimes this is referred to by the letter writers: “*In Tiszakeszi alcoholic drinks were sold above-board but quietly from daybreak at the pub on the bank of the Tisza. People wearing workers’ clothes can drink from early morning. [...] It can be observed in a careful and thoughtful way, although strangers are surely noticed especially if they are well-dressed or come by car. We trust that you can solve the problem by shutting the early morning pub so that the workers could appear at their workplaces sober!*”³⁸

In the complaints the well-known lack of product supply of the era³⁹ was mostly felt in connection with the lack of coal and the lengthy repairs due

³⁵ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. 1978, box 19.

³⁶ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1984, box 41.

³⁷ The investigation carried out by the People’s Control Committee must have been unsuccessful as in 1988 another complaint with the name of the complainant was sent in about the same person, but this time the drunk son-in-law himself gave away the secret of his wealth. MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1986, box 41; MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1988, box 58.

³⁸ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1980, (Tiszakeszi) box 31. For further details, see: “Hajnali ellenőrzésen,” [Early Morning Inspection] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XLIII/62, 14 March 1987, 6.

³⁹ On the shortage of food from the end of World War II to the end of the 1970s, see: Tibor Valuch, *Magyar hétköznapiak: Fejezetek a mindennapi élet történe-*

to the lack of spare parts discussed below.⁴⁰ The recurring investigations in the retail units usually mentioned the issue of product supply. These investigations cast light on the shopkeepers’ everyday struggle for purchasing goods: they did not receive the whole amount of the goods they had ordered, in some cases they got substitute products without any preliminary agreement (for example cherry pepper instead of apple pepper), deliveries were usually late, the missing products had to be picked up and delivered by using their own vehicles, they depended on the suppliers and they did not want to further deteriorate their relationship by law court cases.⁴¹ Due to the lack of goods, personal relationships became more important among commercial workers too. The leader of a café (*presszó*) in Tiszadorogma, who got a share of the profit, supposed in his report that “*it is the personal relationship between friends, relatives or other people*” that governs the distribution of beer: the competing local drink shop was

téből a második világháborútól az ezredfordulóig [Hungarian Daily Lives: Chapters from the History of Everyday Life from the Second World War to the Turn of the Millennium] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2013), 135-159.

⁴⁰ There were many German complaints about the lack of goods and the difficulties it caused in shopping. Their analysis see: Ina Merkel, “‘...in Hoyersverda leben jedenfalls keine so kleinen viereckigen Menschen’: Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR,” in *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte. Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag*, ed. Alf Lüdtke, Peter Becker (Berlin: Akademie – Verlag, 1997), 279-310; Judd Stitzel, “Shopping, Sewing, Networking, Complaining. Consumer Culture and the Relationship between State and Society in the GDR,” in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence, Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 265-278. The Estonian complaints about trade usually highlighted the quality and the organisation of customer service besides the shortage of goods and the difficulties of purchase. Similarly to the examples mentioned by me, impolite service and serving from under the counter, selling alcoholic drinks in food shops and the gathering of drunk people around shops were recurring topics. Reet Ruusmann, “‘The Needs of the Consumers Oblige’: Daily Problems and Criticism of the System in Public Letters in the 1960s and 1980s,” *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 4/2 (2010), 124-127.

⁴¹ “Témavizsgálatok, 1981,” [Analyses of topics 1981] “A települések élelmiszerkereskedelmi ellátásának helyzete. Összefoglaló jelentés Leninváros élelmiszerkereskedelmi ellátásának vizsgálatáról,” [The situation of the food supply chain of the settlements. A comprehensive report on the analysis of the food supply chain in Leninváros] MNL BAZML XVII. 1205, box 22.

supplied with the Borsodi light beer, which sold well, whereas he, like other shops, had to come to terms with selling the less popular Slovakian and other import beers.⁴²

Other complaints were made against the activities of the service providing industry, especially those of the services of the Electric Maintenance Company of the Machine Industry (its Hungarian abbreviation is GELKA) covering the whole region of the country and the units of small-scale industrial cooperatives (KTSZ). According to a 1981 survey, in the Mezőcsát District the repair of radio and television sets was the second most common service required after that of hairdressers',⁴³ and in connection with this, most complainants complained orally or in writing about the lengthy repair period of household devices (mainly TV sets and radios). Although the time required for repairs by GELKA was 2-4 days on average between 1976 and 1980,⁴⁴ due to the lack of spare parts, it was not uncommon to wait several months or in some cases even more. It took more than a year for the local small-scale cooperative to repair a Mezőcsát resident's radio. *"I took the radio back for warranty repair back in 1975 and it has not been completed up to this day [18 February 1977 - I. Á. L.], although I went to urge it every week. In January 1977 K. K. the leader told me that he could not repair it for want of spare parts and as the warranty period had expired, it would not even be replaced either."* Owing to the investigation conducted by the People's Control Committee, the complainant was compensated with a replacement de-

⁴² MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. 1976, box 19.

⁴³ "A lakossági szolgáltatások V. ötéves tervidőszakban történő fejlesztésére tett intézkedések hatása a szolgáltatások színvonalára és a létrehozott kapacitások kihasználása. Összefoglaló jelentés a lakossági szolgáltatást végző vállalatok, szövetkezetek és a magánkisipar tevékenységének vizsgálatáról," [The effect of the measures taken to improve public services during the time of the 5th Five-Year Plan on the quality of services and the degree to which the created capacities were used. A comprehensive report on the activities done by companies, cooperatives and private small-scale industry providing public services.] MNL BAZML XVII. 1205, box 22.

⁴⁴ "Vizsgálati jelentés a Leninvárosi járási-városi Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság 005537. sz. megbízólevele alapján a GELKA Vállalat 0502 sz. Szervizében /Leninváros/ végzett ellenőrzésről," [Report on the investigation conducted in Service No. 0502 of GELKA Company, according to the letter of commission No. 005537 of the People's Control Committee of the District and Town of Leninváros] MNL BAZML XVII. 1205, box 22.

vice.⁴⁵ A private soldier in Tiszakeszi held the carelessness of the GELKA employees responsible for the endless repair period of the faulty cooker he had bought. *"I just can't believe that they couldn't get spare parts for the cooker for sixteen months. [...] Unfortunately, as I am a soldier, I don't have the time to deal with this problem so many times. My wife also goes there in vain, they don't condescend to talk to her, so to say."* The complainant trusting in the intervention and authority of the original addressee, the editors of the journal of the Ministry of Defence, hopes that *"at long last my wife, our little daughter and I can enjoy the tasty meals we could cook on this device."* Although in this case the carelessness seemed to be proved as according to GELKA, the device had long been repaired, it could have been taken away, the shortage of spare parts caused serious problems.⁴⁶ According to the report of the investigation conducted by the PCC in 1981, besides the often experienced spare part shortage, GELKA blamed the centralized spare part supplying system of the company and the sluggish material supply for the lengthy repair periods and as a result of this, most of the working time of the head of the service team and those working at the customer service and in the warehouse was taken up by handling the requests and complaints connected to material shortage.⁴⁷

Many complaints of commercial nature were made in connection with the Trading Company of Fuel and Construction Materials (Tüzép). Although the poor range of fuels and construction materials offered by Tüzép was widely known, most complaints were made about coal selling. Most people complained about the quality of the coal. In 1979 a resident in Hejőkeresztúr bought 4 tons of coal and more than half of it consisted of coal powder. It was attested by several witnesses, *"among them a comrade Policeman"*. The complainant, who described himself as *"a worker and helpless father of two with a small salary"*, complained that the head of the Tüzép tried to persuade him to sift through the coal and then the powder would have been exchanged with coal. *"But I don't have the money and the time to get it sifted. I've already carried half of it into the*

⁴⁵ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. 1977, box 19. (Orally made complaint.)

⁴⁶ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. 1976, box 19.

⁴⁷ These were the reasons that resulted in the GELKA company leaving business so that most service places were transformed into small companies everywhere in the country. *"A szolgáltatás és a tanácsok,"* [Service and Councils] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XL/194, 18 August 1984, 4.

coal shed 30 m away and the other half is in front of my gate since the head of the Tüzép office told me not to carry it inside as the quantity of the powder can be detected more accurately in the open air. However, he said he could not say when he could come to our place.”⁴⁸ However, sifting bad quality coal seems to have been a routine. It also caused problems when private merchants and transporters bought the popular fuels and construction materials, deepening the problem of material shortage and they re-sold the goods at a higher price or in exchange for bribery.⁴⁹ In 1983 a complaint was made about this problem in connection with the Tüzép in Mezőcsát: “I have been informed that the few carriages of coal that arrives at Tüzép every day are bought by the carriers in advance and the people in that district can only purchase it through them. Certainly, at the carriers’ own discretion. Thus people depend on the carriers. Why can’t coal be sold to the workers in the district in 1 or 2 tons of portions and they could employ the carriers?”⁵⁰ (Against the retailers who pushed up prices the police started law processes in several cases and these received media coverage. Retailing and chain trading were widespread in the country at that time; in the newspapers they wrote about the vegetable trading mafia and this phenomenon was extended to the trade of car parts, plumbing and electric assemblies and PB gas.⁵¹) Coal shortage became so constant that in November 1985 the authority introduced advance booking for coal and fire wood. However, according to an investigation carried out by the PCC in June 1986, a lot of local Tüzép did not apply it, and in the case of booking coal mined in Hungary, it was regular to queue up. “Standing in a queue and handing out calling numbers causes tension

⁴⁸ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1979, box 31.

⁴⁹ “Ülést tartott a KNEB,” [The Central People’s Control Committee had a Session] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XL/176, 28 July 1984, 1-2.

⁵⁰ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1983, box 31.

⁵¹ For instance, see: “Árdrágító kiskereskedők,” [Retailors Pushing up Prices] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XL/211, 8 September 1984, 12; “Árdrágítók,” [Price Increaseers] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XL/235, 6 October 1984, 12. As the retailers bought up commodities that were hardly available or not available at all in state operated shops re-sold them with a wide margin, the Ministry of Domestic Trade issued a decree to regulate who can be seller and who can be buyer. “Burjánzó lánckereskedelem,” [Overabundant Chain Trade] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XL/217, 15 September 1984, 2. “Bejelentők – inkognitóban,” [Complainants – in Anonymity] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XLI/82, 9 April 1985, 3.

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among the customers, there are many arguments and the order is often broken.”⁵²

Although there were huge differences between the decades of state socialism concerning the access to consumer products, the complaints about the quality of trade services were of similar nature. The manager of the butchery in Tiszaszederkény, who was accused of rude and brutal behaviour in the paper called *Borsodi Vegyész* (the newspaper of the industrial cities in Borsod County) and who had to supply ten thousand people from the only shop in town traced back the problem to the tension caused by the lack of products in 1964: “There are many people who are rude, demanding, and they don’t understand: if there is nothing, I cannot give anything. Certainly, they think that I sell it to someone else from under the counter. It is not true. It cannot be proved [...] Some people never want to stand in a queue and shout. What can you do in such a situation? I also shout! So please believe me, the customers aren’t angels either. It’s hard to do your duty here.”⁵³ The phenomena connected to shortage economy and the instable attitude towards state (common) property were all obstacles hindering the spreading of cultured trade and generating situations similar to the above-mentioned ones.

The transformation of the retail network

Cultured trade included renovations, with the shops becoming specialized and the introduction of self-service, which made product handling, storing and hygiene better and enhanced the filtering capacity of the system.⁵⁴

⁵² MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. 1986, box 41.

⁵³ “Van-e hús a pult alatt?!...,” [Is There any Meat under the Counter?!...] *Borsodi Vegyész*, Miskolc, I/23, 6 August 1964, 1.

⁵⁴ “Jelentés a fogyasztók érdekvédelmével kapcsolatos vizsgálatok tapasztalatairól a földművesszövetkezeti kereskedelemben,” [Report on the findings of the investigation concerning the protection of consumers in the trading of farmers’ cooperatives] 15 November 1960. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [National Archives of Hungary], (hereafter cited as MNL OL) XIX-G-4-xx, Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium, Kultúrcikk Kereskedelmi Főigazgatóság, [Ministry of Domestic Trade, Cultural Goods Trade Directorate-General] box 85. “650 önkiszolgáló bolt, 30 új vendéglő és többszáz falatozó nyílik az idén vidéken,” [650 self-service shops, 30 new restaurants and hundreds of fast food restaurants will be opened in the country this year] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XVI/36, 12 February 1960, 1.

Although according to the reports, by the early 1960s “the dark, dank shops with bells smelling with paraffin” disappeared from the villages, most trade units were located in private houses, which were equipped with old-fashioned tools and had to struggle with storage difficulties.⁵⁵ According to the report written by the GP in Tiszapalkonya in 1960, one of the two stores in the village – “is a cramped small service room that cannot be called a shop”; it had no storage room, so the crates, bottles, paints and paraffin were stored in the same area as bread, flour and other food. The other grocery shop had a small storage room, but they had no defence against the flies coming from the stall of the co-op, which was 50 metres away, especially in the summer. Although this latter shop was re-located into a self-service unit that year, the drink shop remained near the stall causing a lot of cases of indigestion and an increased number of polio in the village.⁵⁶

The trade policy of the early 50s tried to promote tidy, clean and hygienic shop interiors and product handling by the movement called “Let’s make our shops nicer!” and by awarding the titles of “Nicest shop!”, “Nicest selling place!”, “Nicest shop window”, or with the Voroshin movement imported from the Soviet Union, which tried to strengthen the expectations concerning order and cleanliness in trade through work competition.⁵⁷ The fact that this phenomenon was not isolated is indicated by the educational slide film called *A tisztaság fél egészség* [Tidiness is half

⁵⁵ “Sokat fejlődött a falu kereskedelme,” [Trade has Developed a lot in the Villages] *Földművesszövetkezeti Híradó*, Miskolc, II/11, 5 December 1963, 2; “Előterjesztés a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiumához: Irányelvek a kereskedelmi hálózat rendezéséhez, a régi üzletek átalakításához, összevonásához 1963. október 3,” [A proposition for the College of the Ministry of Domestic Trade: Principles to regulate the trade system and to merge and modify old shops 3 October 1963] MNL OL XIX-G-4-xx, box 82; “A falu és a kereskedelem,” [Trade and Villages] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XVIII/168, 20 July 1962, 3.

⁵⁶ MNL BAZML XXIII. 986/a, Községi tanácsok. A Tiszapalkonyai Községi Tanács iratai, Tanácsülési és vb ülési jegyzőkönyvek [Councils of Villages. The documents of the Tiszapalkonya Council. Minutes of the meetings of the council and executive committee]. “Tanácsülési jegyzőkönyv. Jelentés a közegészségügy helyzetéről Tiszapalkonyán 1960. évben,” [Minutes of the Council’s meeting. Report on the situation of public health care in Tiszapalkonya in 1960] box 1.

⁵⁷ *Kereskedelmi Értésítő*, Budapest, XLV/39, 5 October 1952, 752.

health], which was made in 1953 and drew attention to keeping the rules of hygiene in shops and in catering units as well as keeping our homes, workplace and public places clean. The slide film warned people to abstain from tasting or touching food products and from coughing or sneezing on them and that the shop assistant’s hands should always be clean, they should use clean paper to wrap goods, etc.⁵⁸ Propagating such rules that are now considered elementary indicates that they were not considered common in Hungary in the 50s, and their adoption can be seen as cultured trade gaining ground.⁵⁹

However, the specialization of shops in the 1950s (when a particular group of articles was sold in a special shop) did not live up to the expectations. According to a proposition written to the College of the Ministry of Domestic Trade on the trade system, as a result of overspecialization, in 1963 there were approximately 150 types of shops in the retail sector. When purchasing food, people had to go to 4-5 different shops (grocery, butchery, greengrocer’s, milk, bread, etc.) and the situation was similar in the case of industrial products. According to the writers of the report, even in the villages with a low density of population there were separate shops selling household chemicals, cloths, or stationery, which were not

⁵⁸ *A tisztaság fél egészség.* 1953. The issue of hygiene included the socialist transformation of personal and body hygiene, in fact following middle and high class patterns from the inter-war period, and to achieve this, intensive informative and educational and propaganda activities were done targeting the groups of peasants and workers. For more details on this see: Katalin Juhász, *Body – Odour – Cleanliness within the ‘Happiest Barracks’, Hungary 1960-1989*, manuscript. The study has been published, its Russian version, see: *Teoriya Mody* 26 (2013), 339-363.

⁵⁹ See the announcement of the Public Health Care and Epidemic Centre of Borsod County, which was published in the press, about washing hands, what clothes to wear at the workplace, caring about our nails, coughing and blowing our nose, etc.: “Az élelmezésben dolgozók egyéni tisztaságáról,” [On the Individual Hygiene of those Working in Food Industry]. *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XV/153, 2 July 1959, 4. The announcement of the Hygienic Middle Cadres of Northern Hungary on the importance of improving public hygiene: “A közegészségügy érdekében...,” [In the Interest of Public Hygiene] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XV/165, 16 July 1959, 2. The announcement of the Ministry of Domestic Trade on the storing of meat in summer heat: “Az élelmiszerüzletek fordítsanak fokozott gondot a higiénára,” [Food Shops should pay Special Attention to Hygiene] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XVI/162, 10 July 1960, 2.

economical for lack of customers.⁶⁰ Following the example of supermarkets⁶¹ from 1962-1963 on, self-service ABC stores selling all kinds of everyday consumer goods with large ground plans (between 500 and 1500 m²) first appeared in housing estates and highly frequented places and in the 1970s and 1980s, they began to spring up in villages too.⁶²

The first self-service shops were established somewhat earlier, back in the second half of the 1950s, by modifying traditional shops.⁶³ Self-service system and supermarkets appeared in the USA already in the 30s, in Western Europe only right after the war. As they appeared on the scene, a new kind of attitude was required of the shop assistants and of the customers, which they had to get used to.⁶⁴ For example a village shop manager distinguished two kinds of customers in 1964: “Some of them walked around here as if they had been shopping in self-service shops all their lives. But others... [...] They know that they can take anything from the shelf, but they take nothing. For some reason they just don’t dare to

⁶⁰ “Előterjesztés a Belkereskedelmi Minisztérium Kollégiumához: Irányelvek a kereskedelmi hálózat rendezéséhez, a régi üzletek átalakításához, összevonásához, 1963. október 3,” [A proposition for the College of the Ministry of Domestic Trade: Principles to regulate the trade system and to merge and modify old shops, 3 October 1963] MNL OL XIX-G-4-xx, box 82.

⁶¹ Supermarkets and superettes that had a somewhat smaller ground plan were discussed in several articles in the journal called *Kirakat*. E. g.: *Kirakat*, Budapest, V/6, June 1961, 13; *Kirakat*, VI/3, March 1962, 10-11.; *Kirakat*, VI/4, April 1962, 10.

⁶² The development of commercial units and their system is described by Valuch, *Magyar hétköznapiak*, 83-93.

⁶³ The Hungarian and international experiences of new service methods (self-service, fast service, self choosing, home delivery, etc.) were also regularly discussed in *Kirakat*, and several reports were published in *Északmagyarország* too.

⁶⁴ For the analysis of the consumers’ reaction showing generational differences in connection with this type of trade, which became overwhelmingly popular in Great Britain by the sixties (based on contemporary documents and oral history interviews) see: Andrew Alexander, Simon Phillips, Gareth Shaw, “Retail Innovation and Shopping Practices: Consumers’ Reactions to Self-service Retailing,” *Environment and Planning A*, XL/9 (2008), 2204-2221.; Adrian R. Bailey, Gareth Shaw, Andrew Alexander, Dawn Nell, “Consumer Behaviour and the Life Course: Shopper Reactions to Self-service Grocery Shops and Supermarkets in England c. 1947-75,” *Environment and Planning A*, XLII/6 (2010), 1496-1512.

reach for them. However, they look around near the shelves from which they don’t want to buy anything. Sometimes they ask about something [inquiring] what they are good for. So they already like them.”⁶⁵ During the popularisation of self-service shops in 1960, according to the president of the council in Tiszakeszi, the advantages of the new type of shop lied in the fact that for women who were burdened with both the work out in the fields and with household chores, it was easier to access the products on their way to work or coming home, thus eliminating standing in long queues. The manager of the shop could not show preference to any customer as all the goods are put on the shelves. Moreover, by packing the goods out and weighting them in advance, weight reduction and unfair price increase could be eliminated. Due to the cooperation of the customers, shop assistants did not have to “jump and run around so much”.⁶⁶

It was stealth and the resulting inventory shortage that shop assistants were most worried about in connection with the new type of trade. The cases of shoplifting in the self-service shops were a recurring topic at the sessions of the council and the executive committee in Leninváros. According to the reports, cigarettes, chocolate, candy and drinks were stolen in most cases and their value amounted to 10.60 HUF in 1973, and there were many children and adolescents among the perpetrators. Because taking

⁶⁵ “Fürdősó, zacskós leves,” [Bath Salt, packed Soup] *Földművesszövetkezeti Híradó*, Miskolc, III/3, 5 March 1964, 6. The report about the self-service shop in Mezőkeresztes emphasized the difficulties caused by the use of baskets: as goods can only be put in shopping baskets, they take away their own baskets and bags from the customers, but especially elderly ladies were not willing to part with their market baskets without any argument. “Kiszolgáltam önmagam,” [I served myself] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XV/160, 10 July 1959, 5.

⁶⁶ MNL BAZML XXIII. 1043/a, Községi tanácsok. Tiszakeszi Községi Tanács iratai. Tanácsülési jegyzőkönyvek, [Councils of Villages. The documents of the Tiszakeszi Council. Minutes of the meetings of the council] 6/1960, box 1. A complaint arrived in 1975 in connection with the shop in Szakáld with a content contradicting to what was said by the president of the council of Tiszakeszi: “*In the self-service shop there are plenty of things for you to see, there are 7-8 decagrams missing from each kilo, the goods are not packed out, you have to wait half an hour to get some flour, if I ask for some, the boss says that it’s not our task to do that.*” MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. 1975, box 19. These complaints were rejected by the People’s Control Committee as slanders since besides the aforementioned things, the shop assistants were accused of entering into sexual intercourse at their workplace by the complainant.

records, hearing the witnesses and identification take a lot of time, commercial workers preferred not to report the cases. It can be supposed that the case mentioned and condemned by the district attorney in Mezőcsát in 1973 was not exceptional. In this case the teenagers who were caught stealing were chastised by the shop assistants. As the parents reported the physical punishment applied by the shop assistants to the police twice, the attorney emphasized that shop keepers and shop assistants should learn “there is no vigilante justice”.⁶⁷ The police and the attorney wanted to solve the problem by applying measures intended to educate such as giving presentations at schools, informing the parents, the schools and by improving the methods of control, by meting out stricter punishments.⁶⁸ With regard to the frequency of shoplifting in self-service shops and the ‘social danger’ it posed, it was upgraded to the category of felony from that of offence by the Penal Code in 1971. However, due to the low value of the stolen things, the ‘humane’ sentences and the burden that was suddenly thrust on the organs of criminal investigation, thefts under the value of 500 HUF were relegated to the category of offence in 1973.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ According to the contemporary survey conducted among the self-service stores in Slovenia, it was customary to oblige the suspect to pay back a sum several times higher than the value of the goods stolen, to swear at them, to force them to do unskilled work, to ban them from the shop or to oblige them to do their shopping in that store from that time on. Janez Pecsár, “Az önkiszolgáló áruházakban elkövetett lopások megelőzésének, felderítésének és nyomozásának problémái: V. Mezőnarođnyj Kriminallističeskij Szimpozium, Moskva, 1968,” [The problems of preventing, exploring and investigating cases of shoplifting in self-service supermarkets] *Belügyi Szemle* 7/2 (1969), 25.

⁶⁸ Loránd Polgárdi, “Az önkiszolgáló kereskedelmi egységekben elkövetett lopásokról,” [On shopliftings in the self-service retail units] *Belügyi Szemle* 10/8 (1972), 56-58.; József Ihász, “Az önkiszolgáló rendszerű boltokból történő lopásokról,” [On shopliftings from the self-service shops] *Belügyi Szemle* 10/11 (1972), 54-57.; Sándor Horváth, István Matuz, “Az önkiszolgáló bolti lopások Csongrád megyei tapasztalatai,” [The experiences of shopliftings in the self-service shops of Csongrád County] *Belügyi Szemle* 11/1 (1973), 70-71.; “Az önkiszolgálás kényes kérdése,” [The Delicate Issue of Self-service] *Kirakat*, Budapest, V/6, June 1961, 10.

⁶⁹ 1971. évi 28. sz. tvr. a Btk. módosításáról és kiegészítéséről; 1973. évi 14. sz. tvr. a Btk., valamint a szabálysértésekről szóló törvény módosításáról [On the amendment and completion of Decree Law 28 of 1971; Decree Law 14 of 1973 on the amendment of the Penal Code and the law on delinquencies] *Törvények és Rendeletek Hivatalos Gyűjteménye, 1971* [Official Collection of

In 1960 the president of the council in Tiszakeszi proposed to establish a confectionary beside the self-service shop to promote culturedness and to carry out further specialisation, which he considered important for the cooperative and the economy of the country serving the interest of the whole village. In his opinion, confectionaries were going to have an ever-growing importance with cultural development and the increased expectations as they provided considerable facilities for relaxation and entertainment. Moreover, during the summer they relieve the pressure on housewives by selling soft drinks, ice cream and cakes. He regarded the entertainment opportunities important from the point of view of the youths: it is a means of keeping them in the village.

The cultural role of confectionaries and in general the village catering industry (inns and cafés)⁷⁰, in spite of their limited number⁷¹, was highlighted

Laws and Regulations, 1971] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1972), 203-204, 230 and *Törvények és Rendeletek Hivatalos Gyűjteménye, 1973* [Official Collection of Laws and Regulations, 1973] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1974), 228.

⁷⁰ Eszpresszó/presszó (café): “a small catering unit where machined coffee, cakes, drinks or cold food are sold.” The definition is published in: *Magyar Nyelvőr* 85, no. 1. (1961), 123-124. As cafés (eszpresszó) caught on, it became necessary to give an exact definition of confectionaries. Besides confection producing units or workshops, all the shops were considered confectionaries in which at least 75%, in the confectionaries of farmers’ cooperatives 60%, of the turnover consisted of confections, ice cream and coffee. They were not allowed to sell beer, wine and spirits, except for quality liqueurs. In the villages where there was no state operated confectionary or café (eszpresszó), the confectionary of farmers’ cooperatives was allowed to sell bottled quality beer. “A belkereskedelmi miniszter és a SZÖVOSZ elnöke 21/1959. (K. É. 3.) Bk. M. számú utasítása a cukrászda jellegének meghatározásáról,” [Regulation 21/1959. (K. É. 3.) Bk. M. of the Minister of Domestic Trade and the President of the National Board of Cooperatives (SZÖVOSZ) on the definition of confectionaries] *Tanácsok Közlönye* 7/9 (1959), 73.

⁷¹ In 1965 there were 5 restaurants and inns, 5 confectionaries, 34 drink stores and 11 factory bars in the Mezőcsát District. At a county level, without the big towns such as Kazincbarcika, Ózd, Sátoraljaújhely and Miskolc, there were 45 restaurants and inns, 80 confectionaries and cafés (eszpresszó), 521 drink stores and pubs and 107 factory bars. *Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megye statisztikai évkönyve 1965* [Statistical Yearbook of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County 1965] (Miskolc, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Igazgatósága, 1966), 226.

by the contemporary press. In 1962 the chief cultural lecturer of the Association of County Consumption Cooperatives addressed the tasks of village catering in community culture in an article. In his opinion, each institution has to participate in public education where a large number of workers go, therefore the catering units of farmers' cooperatives⁷² "are to educate village workers how to entertain in a socialist way, and the cooperatives are to provide the facilities for that" since people also demand that these units should become "public places for meeting and entertainment". He thought that besides the entertainment programmes of various quality provided by the catering units of the time (radio, tape recorder, record player, programmes of folk or dance bands and singers' performances) literary evenings should also be organised, possibly with the cooperation of cultural houses, and more educational programmes would be needed (for instance in the places furnished with television, TV nights should be organised). As another example, they reported on the cultural or book corners established in confectionaries and cafés where the guests could borrow periodicals, daily papers, tabloid journals and books containing short stories while they stayed there.⁷³ With the confectionaries, which were sometimes established

⁷² Farmers' cooperatives mainly dealt with the trade of goods in villages: on the one hand, by purchasing agricultural produces, on the other hand, by selling consumer goods through the catering units and the network of village shops mostly operated by this organisation.

⁷³ "Könyvek, folyóiratok, napilapok a falusi eszpresszókbán – Gyarapodik a presszó-vendéglők száma," [Books, Journals, Daily Papers in Village Cafés – The Number of Café-inns is Increasing] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XVIII/135, 12 June 1962, 4. "Kulturpresszó Sárospatakon," [Culture Café in Sárospatak] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XIX/100, 1 May 1963, 6. A similar initiative was called 'LIBPRESSO' (a readers' café (presszó) in a library), and 'MOPRESSO'. Olvasó-eszpresszó (Readers' Café /eszpresszó/). *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XVI/48, 26 February 1960, 1. A "Mopresszó" was established in Gönc in 1967. "What is 'Mopresszó'? – A unit that provides the services of a movie and a café (presszó) in one place, comprising the most comfortable entertainment facilities. Besides, it is an excellent educational factor. For example in Gönc, after work people appear here wearing elegant clothes, the café (presszó) provides them with a wide range of meals and drinks and while they are drinking their beer at the comfortable tables, they can watch the newest films at a modern wide-screen cinema." "Mopresszó a falusi dolgozók szolgálatában," [Mopresszó Serving Village Workers] *Szövetkezeti élet*, Miskolc, V/9, 8 September 1967, 1.

by transforming big drink stores, cafés and buffets they tried to reduce the number of the so-called 'standing bars', their dubious regulars, and to keep entertainment within 'cultured' limits.⁷⁴ The two kinds of catering units are depicted very differently: "Although we haven't managed to eliminate the smoky pubs, drink bars and the standing bars with dubious hygienic conditions completely yet, their number is declining continuously. Modern sunlit clean confectionaries, small inns and cafés (eszpresszó) open, which are preferred by both the youths and the elderly people. Instead of playing cards and showing off drinking shots and their consequences: fighting and knifing, today young people are sitting at the tables of small inns playing chess, talking, listening to music and dancing on the floor of the confectionary, which is brushed clean, and if one of them happens to enter with muddy shoes on, they reprimand the offender themselves..."⁷⁵ As a result of these efforts, a new public place was created for women and children in the villages, which was in contrast with the traditional pubs attended mainly by men. However, the potential of confectionaries and cafés to transfer cultural values was not so highly esteemed a decade later. In practice "most villages made a new pub out of the places called buffet or café according to the inscription."⁷⁶

The decline of the old methods and places of selling

Through the so-called fair departments of companies and cooperatives, state trade also appeared in the traditional places where village people did their shopping, the animal and trade fairs. In this way it managed to cope with the problems of the undeveloped network of village shops while

⁷⁴ "650 önkiszolgáló bolt, 30 új vendéglő és többszáz falatozó nyílik az idén vidéken," [This year 650 self-service shops, 30 new inns and hundreds of snack bars will open in the countryside] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XVI/36, 12 February 1960, 1.

⁷⁵ "A falu és a kereskedelem," [The Village and the Trade] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XVIII/168, 20 July 1962, 3.

⁷⁶ "Falusi cukrászdák," [Village Confectionaries] *Észak-Magyarország*, Miskolc, XXVI/132, 7 June 1970, 7. According to the report, for lack of tourists, they couldn't make use of the kitchen made for the buffet, as local people needed neither lunch nor dinner; there was no music in the room as the farmers' cooperative did not have the record players mended which broke several times; although coffee was also served, wine, beer and pálinka (spirit) were the most frequently consumed drinks.

providing new opportunities for the government to achieve its aim – to reduce the market share of private retail and small-scale private industry. The fair departments were to represent cultured trade both by their appearance and by being tidy. Besides the necessary equipment (tents, canvas, sign-board, lighting materials and tools, transport crates, cash registers, amplifiers) they had to place the goods in a ‘professional, tasty and tidy manner’, to keep everything clean, to treat the customers in an appropriate way and to indicate the prices and stick to them, eliminating the possibility of bargaining.⁷⁷ Besides, as a socialist alternative to the traditional fairs, so-called representative fairs were held (Holiday or Happy Fair on 20 August,⁷⁸ and the Autumn Fair, which was mainly held in October), whose attendance was boosted by advertising them, by organising the transport of village workers at reduced prices and by giving away prizes in lotteries. Those who organised the Holiday Fairs in one district in each of the 19 counties for the first time in 1952 had to supply a wide range of products with the participation of the local retailers and the selected national companies, they had to organise high-quality cultural and sports programmes, and they had to make the event decorative. In Borsod County the fair was organised in Mezőcsát, which, according to a report, started sluggishly, but by the afternoon it attracted masses and the attendance reached 30-40000 instead of the planned 18000. The farmers paid special attention to the pedigree stock exhibited.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ “A belkereskedelmi miniszter 26/1956. (K.É.7.) Bk. M. számú utasítása a vásárlás rendjéről és az állami kiskereskedelmi vállalatok vásárló részlegeinek működéséről,” [Decree 26/1956. (K.É.7.) Bk. M. of the Minister of Domestic Trade on the order of fairs and the operation of the fair departments of state retail companies.] *Kereskedelmi Értesítő*, Budapest, XLIX/7, 13 February 1956, 131-133. “A vásárlás,” [Selling at fairs] *Kereskedelmi Értesítő*, Budapest, XLIX/9, 27 February 1956, 164-165.

⁷⁸ 20 August is a Hungarian religious and national holiday: the day of King Saint Stephen when people commemorate the foundation of the Christian Hungarian state. In the communist regime the earlier religious and national character of this holiday was changed and it was called the holiday of the new bread and after the new socialist constitution was passed on 20 August 1949, it was declared a state holiday as Constitution Day.

⁷⁹ The reports from eight counties wrote about a good atmosphere and turnover; the fair in Kapuvár was mentioned as an exception, where the initial passivity of the people was caused by scaremongering, which said that “anyone buying anything at the fair was to sign a document and to join the cooperative.”

In spite of this, fairs were often criticised as an outdated way of trade since with ‘the socialist re-organisation of agriculture’, peasants traded with livestock among themselves on a reduced scale; moreover, the growing network of village shops also provided a more modern possibility for shopping. Therefore in 1960 the Ministry of Domestic Trade called upon the counties to reduce the number of fairs.⁸⁰ Ethnographer Imre Dankó, who researched the area surrounding the town of Sarkad in Békés County until the mid 60s, found that the farmers’ cooperatives along with the fact that the Crop Trading Company buys out the crops created a competition of the fairs. As he observed it, the fact that the farmers’ cooperatives were selling in the open-air selling places offering the same product range as shops also contributed to the decline of fairs; only those products that were made exclusively by artisans (such as dark coloured clothes, list slippers, jack knives) were in demand.⁸¹ He said that due to the household plots,

“Feljegyzés 8 megyéből beérkezett vidám-vásár jelentésekről,” [A note on the reports on the happy fairs in eight counties] MNL OL XXVII-G-3, Kis-kereskedők Országos Szervezete (KISOSZ), [Retailers’ National Organisation] 26 August 1952, box 18. At the autumn happy fair organised in Miskolc in 1959, 1,700 prizes were given away in the lottery with complete kitchen furniture, two televisions, several motorbikes and household devices among them. “Az idén is megrendezik a hagyományos őszi vásárokat Miskolcon, Szerencsen és Ózdon,” [The traditional autumn fairs will be organised this year too in Miskolc, Szerencs and Ózd] *Északmagyarország*, Miskolc, XV/173, 25 July 1959, 6. The representative fairs were announced in the villages through loudspeakers or drums. MNL BAZML XXIII. 1043/b, Községi tanácsok. Tiszakeszi Községi Tanács iratai. Közigazgatási iratok, [Councils of Villages. The documents of the Tiszakeszi Council. Documents of public administration] 1959, box 1. “A vásárokról,” [On the Fairs] *Kirakat*, Budapest, III/3, March 1959, 10.

⁸⁰ “Csökkentik a vásárok számát,” [The Number of Fairs is decreased] *Kirakat*, Budapest, IV/2, February 1960, 16. As a result of the directive, in County Győr the number of annual trade and animal fairs decreased from 160 to 110, in County Szolnok from 205 to 143, in County Veszprém from 193 to 105, in County Komárom from 66 to 37. On the topic, see: György Moldova, “Vásározók végnapjai,” [The Last Throes of Fairs] in György Moldova, *Rongy és arany: Ríportok*, [Rags and Riches: Reports] (Budapest: Kozmosz, 1969), 58–67.

⁸¹ Therefore in 1952 local state shops were ordered to appear at fairs with the goods of private retailers that were much in demand (candy, toys, trinkets and tawdries, shawls), and in 1955 an exact list of goods was given to the fair departments: this way they tried to avoid the possibility that any type of product could be available only at private retail and artisans’ shops. “A belkereskedelmi

animal fairs remained important, although their number and extent diminished, because they were the only occasions when people could buy and sell animals at prices that were not set.⁸² Relying on the fairs in Pétervásár

miniszter 3.028. Bk. M. számú utasítása a helyi kereskedelemnek a vásárokon történő részvételéről [Decree 3.028 Bk. M. of the Minister of Domestic Trade on the appear of the local shops at fairs] *Kereskedelmi Értesítő*, Budapest, XLV/43, 5 November 1952, 836; “A belkereskedelmi miniszter 155/1955. Bk. M. számú utasítása a vásározó részlegek cikklisójáról” [Decree 155 Bk. M. 1955 of the Minister of Domestic Trade on the fair departments’ list of goods] *Kereskedelmi Értesítő*, Budapest, XLVIII/43, 8 November 1955, 773-778. Another market segment was found by private retailers at the sites of pilgrimage (e. g. Máriapócs), where state trade and the cooperatives have not yet appeared “saying ‘We do not support the clerical reaction’”, which is not right according to the writer of the article. “Az Úr tudja, látja, meg is bocsátja,” [The Lord knows, sees and forgives] *Kirakat*, Budapest, IV/12, December 1960, 7. The private trade of Borsod County was characterised by the following conditions. Between 1960 and 1965 the number of private retailers decreased from 513 to 442, two thirds of whom were from Miskolc. Within the county their number was the lowest in the Mezőcsát District: 4 in 1960, then 3 people were private retailers. In the county their distribution remained stable with a slight fluctuation of a few percentages. Taking the biggest groups of the category of retail shopkeepers, 22-26% of them were greengrocers, approximately 15% of them were toy and tawdry seller, 13% sold tobacco, 10-10% of them had second hand shops or groceries respectively and 7-9% sold textile, clothes and fashion products. In the county the number of those in the private catering industry decreased from 24 to 16 in five years, 80% of whom had a cook-shop. My own calculation based upon the data of the Central Statistical Office. *Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megye fontosabb statisztikai adatai 1963* [More important statistical data of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County 1963] (Miskolc, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Igazgatósága, 1964), 240; *Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megye fontosabb statisztikai adatai 1964* [More Important Statistical Data of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County 1964] (Miskolc, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Igazgatósága, 1965), 234; *Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megye statisztikai évkönyve 1965* [Statistical Yearbook of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County 1965] (Miskolc, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Igazgatósága, 1966), 233.

⁸² Imre Dankó, “Életmódbeli változások a dél-bihari síkság parasztságának felszabadulás utáni életében,” [Changes in the Lifestyle of Peasants in the Plain in Southern Bihar after World War II] *Bihari Múzeum Évkönyve, I.* [Yearbook of Museum of Bihar, I.], ed. Zoltán Héthy (Berettyóújfalu: Bihari Múzeum, 1976), 187-188.

and in Mezőcsát, as a justification of the decline in the number of fairs, a newspaper article in 1962 lists similar arguments: only the older generation goes shopping in fairs, the youths “prefer to go to shops among cultured circumstances and whenever they want to”, since fairs are outdated both in terms of tidiness (according to the author one has to walk “in mud reaching up to the knee” to get to the fair on the edge of the village and “the many weather-beaten patched tents are an eyesore”) and the quality of the goods (“most sellers on the fair tried to thrust mawkish gypsum casts called works of art, tapestry depicting lilac deer grazing blue grass, tawdry toys and household tools, poor quality shawls, etc. on the villagers slushing in the mud.”)⁸³

Almost all of the village people interviewed by me mentioned that they sold fattened animals – piglets, pigs, calves and bulls – at the nearby fair, while the things necessary for village life, such as young plants, chickens and tools, were purchased there. However, some of them had reservations concerning fairs, partly reflecting the reasons given by the contemporary press. The following factors played a role in the decline of the importance of fairs, although at a different degree in the case of each interviewee: the change in the rhythm of shopping (e. g. for those villagers who worked in factories it was impossible to do the shopping in the morning on weekdays), the poor quality of the products on offer at fairs, the accessibility of the venue (the fields where fairs were organised were relocated to the edges of the villages) and the changes in customer habits (the rejection of the crowd in fairs and the rejection of bargaining). It made the common acceptance of the Holiday Fair more difficult that as the peasants were organised in cooperatives, they only got a relatively big income after the annual report at the end of the year and not after the harvest. Therefore instead of the representative fairs, which lost their significance by 1961, the occasional open-air sales were supported, organised at the time of the annual reports.⁸⁴

As stated above, state trade in markets and fairs rejected the traditional behaviour such as bargaining according to the customary choreography

⁸³ “Egy vásár tapasztalatai,” [The Experiences of a Fair] *Kirakat*, Budapest, VI/12, December 1962, 21.

⁸⁴ “Az 1960. évi vásárok eredményeiről,” [On the Results of the Fairs of 1960] *Kirakat*, Budapest, V/2, February 1961, 10; “Vásározás a kereskedelem fontos feladata,” [Going to Fairs is an Important Task of Trade] *Kirakat*, Budapest, VI/2, February 1962, 10.

(criticizing the goods, going away and returning, etc.).⁸⁵ Fixed prices made shopping more reserved, which corresponded to the conception of cultured commerce. It also fitted in the process in which bargaining as a means of sales in shops was eliminated a little earlier.⁸⁶ József M. – who used to be the apprentice of a private ironmonger before owning his own business, which was then nationalised in 1950, after which József M. became the leader of a state-run shop – says in an interview that bargaining was customary in trade before World War II, and a great stress was laid on it as a basic commercial technique by his boss at that time, who owned the shop. József M. connected its popularity to customers' habits: “[I]n those days people liked haggling because there were no fixed prices like these days, [...] now you can't haggle for sure but back then if anyone came in and couldn't drive a bargain, if no price reduction was given, they didn't feel comfortable, do you see?” “[W]ell, you had to be a terribly good speaker. You had to know the customer's whims and habits and when they came in, you were taught to get to know them. [...] After the war, when I became a private entrepreneur, I became disgusted with it, I [thought - I. Á. L.] it was stupid, and I saw that I only cheat the customers with it, [...] that's the price, I wrote it on the product and I didn't reduce the price by a penny, neither did I want a penny too much.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ For further details, see: Imre Dankó, “Piaci és vásári viselkedésformák,” [Behaviour Patterns in Markets and Fairs] in *Népi Kultúra – Népi Társadalom: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Néprajzi Kutató Csoportjának Évkönyve XI-XII*, [Folk Culture – Folk Society: The Annals of the Ethnographic Research Group of the Hungarian Science Academy XI-XII] ed. László Kósa (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), 155-189.

⁸⁶ In 1943 the Minister of Trade and Traffic issued a decree providing that merchants and artisans were to indicate the prices on the goods in their shops (there were some exceptions such as ironmongers, jewellery and toiletry shops). “A m. kir. kereskedelem- és közlekedésügyi miniszter 1943. évi 60.000. K. K. M. sz. rendelete, az áruk számlázásáról és vételárak feltüntetéséről,” [Decree 60.000 K. K. M. 1943 of the Hungarian Royal Trade and Transportation Minister on the billing of goods and the indication of the selling price] in *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára* [Inventory of Hungarian Decrees] 77/2 (1943), 1083-1086.

⁸⁷ Interview with József M. Polgár, 9 April 2011, 2 and 20.

Although a negative attitude towards bargaining already appeared before 1945,⁸⁸ the price system set by the authorities of the ‘honest’ socialist state trade condemning profit orientation and treating the customer as a partner also contributed to the disappearance of the method of bargaining.⁸⁹ The price system became more liberal during the economic reforms (New Economic Mechanism) in 1968. After which a trading company or cooperative was free to set the prices, except for some products, according to the changes in market demand or supply. József M. talked about its significance in an interview: “Since ‘68 fixed prices became adjustable. It began then, some shop leaders were given permission to change the prices of goods, so they said [...]. Television was in rage [...] I, it cost 4200 and it was so popular that I can sell it for 4300. They said I could do it. But I reduce the price of another article a little that was not so popular. It was up to me to see it, if I trade well and there is a little margin, we can share it with the company. They were interested in making profit. [...]

⁸⁸ The local newspaper called *Mezőcsáti Újság* published a series of two articles back in 1911 with the title “Down with bargaining!”, in which the writer considers it to be a sick symptom of trade, especially because of its time consuming nature. The author spent 1 ½ and 2 ½ hours on bargaining in a clothes shop and a shoe shop respectively. “Le az alkuval! I.,” *Mezőcsáti Újság*, Mezőcsát, I/9, 12 November 1911. 2. and “Le az alkuval! II.,” *Mezőcsáti Újság*, Mezőcsát, I/10, 19 November 1911, 2. For more on this, see: Andor Tibor – Kálmán v. Pataky, *Az eladás művészete* [The Art of Selling] (Budapest: Szerzői kiadás, 1932), 45-52. Richard Sennett in his work called *The Fall of Public Man* analysing the three innovations of a small retail store opened in Paris in 1852 – all the goods were sold only in big amounts and with a narrow margin, they worked with fixed prices and the customers could look around without feeling obliged to purchase – discusses the effect of fixed prices on customer habits and the decline of bargaining. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge - London - Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 141-143.

⁸⁹ The general reform of prices and wages was carried out together with the end of rationing at the end of 1951. Seasonal products, such as vegetables and fruits, were the only exceptions to the retail price system set nationwide; everywhere, their price was ‘free’ depending on the weather and the production. When setting the prices, it was social, health care and child care considerations that were taken into account instead of the production costs, and it also made a difference whether a particular product was basic or ‘luxury’ product. Ádám Marton, “Inflation in Hungary after the Second World War,” *Hungarian Statistical Review* 90/15 (2012), 6-7.

*Béla Biszku, he was against it. It is not allowed. There is no building capitalism in socialism. This was socialist trade.*⁹⁰

József M. was ironic when he remembered the lectures when bank and financial experts started to teach him and his colleagues who were socialized in the old era of private trade that “*in trading one can trade*”.⁹¹ Besides the above mentioned flexible price mechanism, such market regulators appeared in the system of planned economy as the acknowledgement of commercial risks (product supply, defining prices) or the possibility of “*trade competition serving the interests of customers*”.⁹² During the economic reforms in 1968, the real meaning of trade, which they tried to forget, was brought back, which they tried to reduce to the concept of culturedness in the time of the socialist distribution of goods and the planned economy, which mainly meant the superficial phenomena such as being tidy and clean, polite shop assistants, modern shop network and new ways of serving.

Conclusions

In my study I analysed the transformation of the locales and methods of traditional, mostly rural shopping in the 1950s-60s. The background for the socialist modernization of the former trade infrastructure and methods was provided by the conception of “*cultured trade*”. Among the most important elements, we can highlight order and cleanliness; the polite shop assistants, who were expected to educate their customers by introducing them to a new socialist taste in consumption beyond an adequate recommendation of the goods; the modern chain of shops (which included refurbishments, specialisation of the shops and the creation of ABC shops);

⁹⁰ Interview with József M. Polgár, 9 April 2011, 23. Béla Biszku, who was the Minister of Interior Affairs in the Kádár government inaugurated in 1957 (1957-1961), one of the masterminds of the reprisals after 1956, the Deputy Head of the Council of Ministers (1961-1962), Member and Secretary of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (1962-1978) was removed from the circle of János Kádár, due to the reforms introduced in the New Economic Mechanism.

⁹¹ Interview with József M. Polgár, 9 April 2011, 23.

⁹² Ferenc Zala, “A fogyasztási cikkek piaca és a kereskedelem működésének új vonásai,” [The Market of Consumer Goods and the New Features of Trade] *Közgazdasági Szemle* 14/4 (1967), 457*458.

as well as new service forms, mostly the introduction of self-service. Claiming these characteristics, the cultured trade tried to distance itself from the past capitalist and market-driven trade methods and practice. The politeness deriving from character stood in place of humility. The narrow, dark grocer shops were to be replaced by modern ones and new forms of service (e.g. self-service) and the taverns characterized with shady clients by cafés and confectioner's. The state trade appeared at open fairs with the so-called fair departments of companies and cooperatives, where they had to represent the cultured trade and with the use of fixed prices, they excluded the method of bargaining from their repertory. They experimented with the so-called representative fairs organized as the socialist alternative of traditional fairs, but as collectivisation went on, they considered the whole fair system old fashioned. In accordance with it, the system expected a different, more solid behaviour, tidy, clean appearance from the customers on the spots. Since this change proved to be an extremely complex process, in which there were several factors, their exploration could not have been full-scale. From the side of state and cooperative trade the greatest obstacles of its realization were the difficulties in the supply of goods of the era and the odd relations toward social property well illustrated by the announcements written to People's Control Committee. At the same time, the memories of some of the interviewees working in trade show how hygiene and politeness became requirements during their work. The transition of villagers from markets and fairs to modern shops was aided by administrative measures to reduce the number of fairs, by the loss of importance of fairs due to collectivisation by the re-evaluation of consumption, and finally by the change in shopping preferences.