

## Cultured Way of Life Depicted in the Hungarian-Language Press

The communist system considered cultural revolution to be part of the radical transformation of society. The goal was to make all the values of the socialist culture (based on a scientific materialist worldview and Marxist-Leninist ideology) a so-called public domain of the people in place of the old bourgeois culture and to increase, as was claimed, “the standard of mass education and culture in a degree never seen before”. Apart from the overall transformation of the educational system, the new Soviet system of out-of-school cultural and political education served this purpose. Besides the red corners, reading halls, workers’ clubs, cultural houses, moving libraries, and so forth that sprang up in great numbers, also press, radio, cinema, and theatre became, according to the slogans, “the means of communist education and enlightenment of the working masses”. The cultural revolution was expected to gradually reduce the distance between the cultural life of physical and mental workers and to abolish the differences between the town and the village, bringing about their cultural equality (Kim 1961: 738–745).

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The head secretary of the Hungarian Workers’ Party, Mátyás Rákosi, in his speech announcing the introduction of co-ops, outlined the future in the following terms in 1948:

Our aim is that working people could benefit from the blessings of culture not just in the city but also in the village: their house should be hygienic, fit for humans, electricity and water pipes should be installed. Their children could go to secondary school or university. If they are ill, they should receive good doctors, if their wives give birth, a clinic or a maternity ward should be at their disposal. They could read books and newspapers, listen to the radio, the village should have a cinema—all the machines saving labour and increasing productivity should be at their disposal. In simple words: the difference between the town and the village should disappear (Rákosi 1952: 240).

The description of the past and the present in the culture, the education, and the infrastructure of villages and the changes in the village-town relations became a trope in political speeches, newspaper articles, and literary interviews of that era. Besides the “victory” reports on the fast construction of the infrastructure of cultural institutions in villages, the reports on peasants using these facilities intensively and continuing their self-education at home were emphasized equally.

Just to highlight a few elements from the complicated process of folk and self-education, I intend only to investigate who were considered cultured and uncultured people—namely, those Others, who were different from the system’s officially advertised self-image—by the communist regime at the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s, the way it was represented in the press, and what measures were taken to promote the behaviour it supported. The latter intent suggests that the definition and propagation of the criteria of cultured behaviour was emphasised primarily, and—despite showing specific examples to avoid—these criteria make it possible to unveil, almost as dichotomic variables, the characteristics of behaving in an uncultured way. My primary sources were *Szabad Föld* (‘Free Land’), the weekly paper published by the Hungarian Communist Party from 1945 on (whose first editor in chief was Imre Nagy, the prime minister of Hungary in 1956 at the time of the revolution, who died as a martyr) and *Északmagyarország* (‘Northern Hungary’), the central daily paper of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, the region my research was focused on. Both papers were under strict control of the ruling party, but in spite of the similar column layouts (for example foreign affairs, party affairs, home affairs), there were also differences. The national weekly paper was covering news mainly about the life of the farmers and agricultural phenomena, while the county daily paper was publishing writings for the residents (workers, farmers, co-op workers) of different kinds of settlements (cities, towns) of the region. The tone and contents of the articles were quite schematic, which was a feature of both newspapers.

### The Reading Village

Reading was part of the image of a cultured, educated man, although during the organisation of communism, reading was not considered a value in itself. According to Lenin, illiteracy was an obstacle for political education. Its elimination was not a political aim but a prerequisite for talking about politics. Illiterate person was a political outsider and could only rely on rumours, tales, and prejudices (Kenez 1985: 72). Literacy was a tool in the hands of the regime, which can use it to spread its ideology and to move masses according to its interest, and after stabilizing its power, this tool could play an important role in building a modern economy because a literate person’s productivity is much higher than an illiterate’s, as was stated by a contemporary survey (Ibid.: 83, 145–146).

While in the Soviet press between the two world wars, or the Yugoslavian press after 1945, a strong campaign was going on to eliminate illiteracy, which mainly concerned village people. In the Hungarian peasant paper few courses were announced where adults were taught how to write and read. The causes of the differences between those countries can be explained by the different dates of the instalment of the communist ideology on one hand and the dissimilar levels of

illiteracy in the respective regions on the other.<sup>1</sup> In the Hungarian adaptation of communism, eliminating illiteracy was not considered to be a cardinal issue, as in 1949, 94 percent of the population above age 6 could read and write.<sup>2</sup> From the beginning, the campaign in Hungary was focussed on encouraging people to read instead of propagating literacy as such. With reducing illiteracy in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the emphasis had shifted to promotion of reading in those countries too.<sup>3</sup>

When popularizing reading, books were depicted as “the truest friends of working people”, which teach, educate, and entertain like papers. In his 1950 editorial popularizing reading papers, Prime Minister István Dobi referred to reading newspapers as the most important tool to gain education, to widen one’s perspective. By wide perspective he meant understanding the worldwide political importance of the struggle for building socialism and gaining professional knowledge ensuring the increase of material wealth. He was also intent on changing the negative attitude shown by village people towards reading, which was explained by earlier conditions. Refuting their supposedly characteristic objections Dobi emphasized that in the current fast-developing world one could not insist on their fathers’ backward conceptions. By the decrease of the working hours anyone could find time for reading if they wanted to and the prices of newspapers could not hinder them anymore.<sup>4</sup> Complying with Lenin’s thoughts, books and press, like a lot of other folk-educating activities such as educational lectures, were considered to be means for helping peasants who had been intentionally kept in a state of ignorance in the previous regime. Reading the newspapers also helped to raise political awareness. This is indicated by the metaphor of the book/newspaper as a weapon and its depiction in pictures<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 1).

Infrastructure was reorganized to popularize reading (Fig. 2). As part of this, to replenish the supply of the library system largely destroyed in World War II, libraries were reorganized; the communists aimed to provide each community with a library. Weekly papers brought regular reports on the openings of village

<sup>1</sup> According to the official statistics, in 1926 in the Soviet Union 56.6% of the population was literate, in 1939 their percentage increased to 87.4%; among village people the literacy rate was lower, 50.5% and 84% respectively; *A Szovjetunió* (“The Soviet Union”) 1979: 47. In Yugoslavia, according to the 1948 census, 25.4% of the population was illiterate, which mainly concerned Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo (Miljković 1986: 198).

<sup>2</sup> 1949. évi népszámlálás 9. 1950.

<sup>3</sup> This is underlined by the fact that in the Soviet Union the meaning of the expression “cultured” went through a change in the 1930s, since in the beginning it meant literacy but later became the synonym for “educatedness” (Volkov 2000: 223–224).

<sup>4</sup> Dobi I. “Újságolvasással—a művelt faluért” (“Reading Newspapers—for the Educated Village”), *Szabad Föld*, December 3, 1950: 1.

<sup>5</sup> “A könyvnapok előtt” (“Before the Book Days”), *Szabad Föld*, May 28, 1950: 1; “A könyvek a mi jóbarátaink...” (“Books Are Our Friends...”), *Szabad Föld*, May 20, 1951: 7; “December 18: *Szabad Föld* sajtónap!” (“December, 18: *Szabad Föld* Open Press Day!”), *Szabad Föld*, December 18, 1949: 5.

libraries and on the villagers who borrowed books from them; sometimes the papers featured stories about the problems such as negligent librarians or unsuitable library rooms that was caused by a sudden increase in the number of libraries (Fig. 3). “Book days”, held in June from 1929 onwards and, later, book weeks, book sessions, reader-writer meetings, and various thematic book fairs, which were extended to villages and factories, were meant to make people buy books (Fig. 4). In villages, books were sold in the stores of agricultural cooperatives, but sales was impeded by the fact it was usually considered a secondary task, and on top of that, the supply of the books in demand was not adequate. The hardships coming from the underdeveloped system of village shops were relieved by introducing “rolling bookshops”, following the Soviet example (Halász 2013: 143).<sup>6</sup>

Readers’ clubs and farmers’ clubs, which were banned in 1948 and re-established in 1950, organized the cultural and public life of the local community like their predecessors. According to the articles presenting the life of readers’ clubs, choosing the correct works and establishing their ideologically correct interpretation were facilitated by the fact that literary and agricultural works and those covering the theory of socialism were discussed under the leadership of a local party activist.<sup>7</sup> The organization of the readers’ movement to discuss in public the book based on the 1925 trial of Mátyás Rákosi served a similar purpose<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 5). According to the papers, a well-functioning farmers’ club provided facilities for discussions about the world’s and the village’s affairs, offered educational and professional lectures, courses, entertainment (chess, billiard, radio, skittles) and made professional and literary books, newspapers, and magazines available for the members.

The regime that defined itself by always comparing the progressive present to the underdeveloped past in all areas of life contrasted the new with the old in readings too. It reprimanded popular pulp fiction, horror stories, and religious writings that “dumbed people” and were to be replaced by cheap, educational, and serious works.<sup>9</sup> However, calendars, which had been favoured by peasants for a long time

<sup>6</sup> “Falusi könyvnapok” (‘Village Book Days’), *Szabad Föld*, June 12, 1949: 11.

<sup>7</sup> “Tótkomlóson is megkezdtek munkájukat az olvasókörök” (‘Reading Clubs Have Been Started in Tótkomlóson Too’), *Szabad Föld*, January 22, 1950: 4; “Politikai- és olvasókörök a DISZ-szervezetekben” (‘Political and Reading Clubs in the DISZ Organizations’), *Szabad Föld*, January 7, 1951: 11; “Közösen tárgyaljuk meg a Szabad Föld cikkeit. A Szabad Föld olvasókör munkája Petrikeresztúron” (‘We Discuss the Articles of *Szabad Föld* Together. The Work of *Szabad Föld* Readers’ Club in Petrikeresztúr’), *Szabad Föld*, December 9, 1951: 6.

<sup>8</sup> “Szervezzük meg a ‘Rákosi-per’ olvasómozgalmat!” (‘Let’s Organize the Readers’ Movement of the Rákosi Trial’), *Szabad Föld*, July 16, 1950: 4; “Olvasómozgalom indul a ‘Rákosi-per’ tanulmányozására” (‘A Readers’ Club Was Started to Study the Rákosi Trial’), *Szabad Föld*, July 2, 1950, 4; Urbán E. “A falusi népművelés frontján” (‘On the Frontline of Village Folk Education’), *Szabad Föld*, February 12, 1950: 5.

<sup>9</sup> “Száz népkönyvtár...” (‘A Hundred Folk Libraries’), *Szabad Föld*, April 20, 1947: 3; “Bealkonyodott már a Bogár Imre-féle vásári ponyvának. Olcsó és tanulságos könyveket árusítanak a szövetkezetek” (‘The Days of Street Pulp Fiction are Over’), *Szabad Föld*, December 12, 1948: 7; Urbán E. “Könyvet a kézbe” (‘Take a Book’), *Szabad Föld*, February 26, 1950: 11.

and were of varied quality, were retained. The predecessor of *Kincses Kalendárium* ('Treasure Almanac'), which was published by the newspaper called *Szabad Föld* from 1946 on, was started in 1896 for the middle class with traditional taste and for the petite bourgeoisie. Gábor I. Kovács's research showed that after World War I, with the increased possibilities of gaining information, calendars lost their prominent position in peasant households. However, they played a more important role in spreading agricultural knowledge between the two world wars. Calendars, whose target audience was made up of peasants, contained an increasing amount of practical knowledge, mainly agricultural and, as a new element, sales-related economic information, reflecting the modernization process of peasant farming (Kovács 1988). In the new issues of *Kincses Kalendárium*, besides poems by Hungarian and international poets and writers, the most important monthly duties in agriculture, a calendar, a list of fairs, entertaining readings, crosswords, colour pictures, and stories for women and children were also included. In the agricultural articles of the calendar, as in the papers, the propagation of co-ops was emphasized. This work that was published in a million copies was said to serve the reading demands of the family members of all ages and sexes.

Numerous cheap series of books were started. The series called *Szabad Föld Könyvtár* ('Szabad Föld Library') was made up of 20- to 30-page-long booklets published weekly, which discussed the current issues of politics, social sciences, history, literature, and agriculture.<sup>10</sup> Literary works were published in great numbers from 1954 in the series called *Olcsó Könyvtár* ('Cheap Library') and from 1956 in the series called *Szabad Föld Kiskönyvtár* ('Szabad Föld Small Library'). Mór Jókai, Kálmán Mikszáth, and Zsigmond Móricz, who wrote in a romantic and realist style depicting the world of peasants, and the romantic poets of the nineteenth century Sándor Petőfi and János Arany were the writers whose works were published in the greatest number and which were the most popular with villagers. Among Soviet writers, Mikhail Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* and *The Mother* by Maxim Gorky were published in the greatest number.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from literary and Marxist-Leninist works, the professional books on the latest achievements of Soviet and Hungarian agrarian science were popularized, and their number increased greatly following the establishment of socialist publishing houses. The new farmers and co-op workers who had been given plots recently and who learnt farming by reading books on agriculture, who educated themselves on their own, and who produced extraordinary results were a recurring motif in

<sup>10</sup> "Olcsó, hasznos olvasnivalót a falunak!" ('Cheap and Useful Reading for the Village!'), *Szabad Föld*, February 2, 1947: 1.

<sup>11</sup> For more on popular literature, see Romsics 2010: 288.

newspaper columns<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 6). At the same time, expert works aimed at both agricultural experts and uneducated farmers, which resulted in the latter being unable to understand the technical terms and missing a clear and understandable explanation of the new methods and the presentation of practical experiences. Moreover, in connection with book distribution, it was mentioned that the local peculiarities were ignored and that availability was poor.<sup>13</sup>

The role of the press in building the communist system is well known. As *Szabad Föld* was assigned an important role in agitating peasantry, it tried to reach a huge circle of readers. The first *Szabad Föld* campaign was started in January 1949, in accordance with the establishment of local organizations of the new peasant mass movement called Dolgozó Parasztok és Földmunkások Országos Szövetsége ('Working Peasants and Landworkers' National Alliance'), which aimed to gain tens of thousands of subscribers. The motto of the campaign was "*Szabad Föld* should be on the table of each working peasant family".<sup>14</sup> In the paper, numerous "methodological" articles were published on the increase in the number of subscribers. It was thought that the effective way would be if village party members, the representatives of mass organizations and mass educators could carry out agitations in houses addressing each family in the village.<sup>15</sup> According to an article, a vil-

<sup>12</sup> For example: "Ilonkának fényes csizma, Lajcsinak meleg kabát. Mit jelent a *Szabad Föld* Erdősék számára?" ('Shiny Boots for Ilonka, Warm Coat for Lajcsi. What is *Szabad Föld* for the Erdős Family?'), *Szabad Föld*, December 25, 1949: 11; "Tót Jánosnak jóbarátja, segítőtársa a könyv" ('Books are János Tót's Friends and Helping Hands'), *Szabad Föld*, June 4, 1950: 12; "A csányi 'Kossuth'-tszcs tagjai sokat tanulnak a *Szabad Föld* szakkönyveiből" ('The Members of 'Kossuth' Co-op in Csány Learn a Lot from the Professional Articles in *Szabad Föld*'), *Szabad Föld*, April 22, 1951: 6; "Jobban megy a gazdálkodás, mióta szakkönyveket olvasok" ('Farming Has Become Easier for Me since I Have Been Reading Professional Books'), *Szabad Föld*, November 25, 1951: 7; "Sokat tanultam a pályázaton nyert könyvből" ('I Have Learnt a Lot from the Book I Won at the Competition'), *Szabad Föld*, June 15, 1952: 6; "Szorgalmasan tanulmányozzuk a szakkönyveket" ('We Are Studying Professional Books Industrious'), *Szabad Föld*, July 13, 1952: 6; "Érdemes szakkönyveket olvasni!" ('It is Worth Reading Professional Books!'), *Szabad Föld*, April 19, 1953: 7; "Izsákon nagy az olvasási kedv—csak kevés a szakkönyv" ('In Izsák There Is a Great Demand for Reading—But There are Only a Few Professional Books'), *Szabad Föld*, February 13, 1955: 5; "Szabó gazda 7 szakkönyvet vásárolt" ('Mr Szabó, a Farmer, Bought 7 Professional Books'), *Szabad Föld*, February 27, 1955: 6.

<sup>13</sup> "Ötszázan vettek részt a nyírlugosi *Szabad Föld* olvasóértekezleten" ('Five Hundred People Took Part in the Readers' Session in Nyírlugos'), *Szabad Föld*, December 21, 1952: 6; "Több és jobb szakkönyvvel a mezőgazdaság fejlesztéséért!" ('With More and Better Books for the Development of Agriculture!'), *Szabad Föld*, April 11, 1954: 4; "Több hasznos mezőgazdasági szakkönyvet a falunak!" ('More Useful Scientific Books on Agriculture for the Village!'), *Szabad Föld*, January 30, 1955: 5.

<sup>14</sup> Szűcs F. "Tegyük a *Szabad Földet* a falu legolvasottabb újságjává!" ('Let's Make *Szabad Föld* the Most Popular Paper in the Village!'), *Szabad Föld*, January 16, 1949: 4.

<sup>15</sup> "A *Szabad Föld*-kampány sikerének titka: a jól megszervezett háziagitáció!" ('The Secret to the Success of the *Szabad Föld* Campaign is Well-Organized Home Agitation!'), *Szabad Föld*, February 13, 1949: 5; "*Szabad Föld*-kampány záró agitációs hete!" ('The Finishing Agitation Week of the *Szabad Föld* Campaign!'), *Szabad Föld*, February 27, 1949: 1.

lage mass educator who was set as an example “goes and sees the families who in his/her area, reading out the most interesting articles from the latest issue of *Szabad Föld* every morning and evening. In many places they don't want to let him/her go!” Five thousand books were given as rewards to mass educators who acquired a lot of subscribers, and ten lucky subscribers won study visits to the Soviet Union; as the newspaper put it: “It is a secret desire of each working peasant to visit the Soviet Union to study the most advanced agriculture in the world”<sup>16</sup> (Fig. 7). A great number of photo articles were published on the process of collecting subscribers and the happy purchasers; they were even depicted in the column called “Children, let's draw” (Figs 8 and 9).

After the mailmen were allowed to register new subscriptions (they were even given a commission according to the number of subscriptions),<sup>17</sup> postmen appeared as recurring positive figures in newspapers; numerous pictures of them were published showing them as they were struggling to deliver *Szabad Föld* to their readers on the godforsaken dirtroads in the farmlands.<sup>18</sup> Due to these large-scale campaigns, the circulation numbers of *Szabad Föld* increased fast. According to the data published in this paper, in 1955, 460,000 copies were published, but the official statistics show that circulation peaked at 457,000 in 1961. Afterwards, the number of copies declined continuously, sinking below 400,000 copies by the end of the 1960s (*Kultúrstatistikai adattár 1962*: 100; *Közművelődési adatgyűjtemény*: 82).<sup>19</sup> All in all, in the 1950s, only the central daily paper (*Szabad Nép* [‘Free People’] and later *Népszabadság* [‘People's Freedom’]) had bigger circulation.

From time to time, the newspaper tried to determine what people thought about *Szabad Föld* with the help of reader sessions in which some editors also

<sup>16</sup> “A *Szabad Föld* tíz előfizetője tanulmányútra megy a Szovjetunióba!” (“Ten Subscribers of *Szabad Föld* Go for a Study Tour in Soviet Union”), *Szabad Föld*, December 4, 1949: 5; “5000 jutalomkönyv a *Szabad Föld* legjobb előfizetőgyűjtőinek” (“5000 Book Rewards to Those Who Acquired the Most Subscribers of *Szabad Föld*”), *Szabad Föld*, December 11, 1949: 5.

<sup>17</sup> “Köszönjük a postásoknak!” (“Thank You, Postal Workers!”), *Szabad Föld*, August 7, 1949: 5.

<sup>18</sup> “Beszéljünk a tanyai kézbesítésről!” (“Let's Talk about Deliveries to Farms”), *Szabad Föld*, January 11, 1950: 6; “A falusi postás a sajtó fáradhatatlan munkatársa” (“Village Postmen are the Tireless Co-workers of the Press”), *Szabad Föld*, November 25, 1951: 7; “A tanyavilág fáradhatatlan apostola” (“The Tireless Apostle of Farms”), *Szabad Föld*, January 6, 1952: 7; “Aki naponta 46 kilométert fáradsz a tanyavilágban...” (“Who Toils 46 Kilometres in the Farmlands”), *Szabad Föld*, October 12, 1952: 8; “Szipli György tabi postás öt vasárnap 358 új előfizetőt szerzett a *Szabad Föld*nek” (“György Szipli, the Postman in Tab Gained 358 Subscribers to *Szabad Föld* in Five Sundays”), *Szabad Föld*, November 16, 1952: 4; “Köszönjük postásainknak” (“We are Grateful to Our Postmen”), *Szabad Föld*, February 1, 1953: 6; “A párt-sajtó fáradhatatlan terjesztője. Tíz éve kézbesíti Mezőhegyesen a Szabad Földet Morár Antal postás” (“The Tireless Promoter of Party Papers. Postman Antal Morár has Been Delivering *Szabad Föld* in Mezőhegyes for Ten Years”), *Szabad Föld*, August 28, 1955: 6.

<sup>19</sup> “Hogyan növekedett a *Szabad Föld* olvasóinak és levelezőinek tábora?” (“How has the Readership and Correspondent Numbers of *Szabad Föld* Grown?”), *Szabad Föld*, August 28, 1955: 5.

participated or surveys that were published in the paper<sup>20</sup> (Fig. 10). The editor's summary of the answers sent to the surveys of 1948 and 1954 brought similar results. According to them, readers require the articles that sum up the essence of the decrees. In accordance with the readers' letters published in the paper and the intentions of the editors, agricultural texts are mentioned among the useful writings that were read most together with the correspondence column discussing the varied topics of everyday life. Although it was published in the yearly calendar, a list of the weekly fairs was needed; moreover, the readers wanted to be informed about the weather, market prices and the radio programme. Readers generally asked for more stories, poems, and funny stories, and women readers expected more recipes, health advice, descriptions of handicraft, and methods of child care. These requests may have mirrored the real wishes of the readers in general. Young children asked for more fairy tales and other youngsters wanted a longer sports column. As criticisms, surveys mentioned that editorials were too lengthy and that articles contained too many clichés. As can be seen, the newspaper, which defined itself as a family magazine, underperformed in those topics that might have attracted the attention of the other members of the family, not just the head of it.

### The Visual Representation of the Consumption of Culture

In the visual representation of the aforementioned forms of consuming culture, *Szabad Föld* published mainly figures showing development and future plans, the advertisements of particular products, caricatures focussing on contradictions, and photos suggesting an idyllic atmosphere. In this chapter these idyllic images are discussed.

Photography was also defined by socialist-realism in the 1950s; the photos emit optimism and harmony, showing either hard-working people or carefree children playing. Nevertheless, contemporary pictures resemble the so-called Hungarian style that dominated in the years before the war, which was characterised by a happy, idyllic mood, the romantic depiction of peasant life, and the Hungarian landscape (Simon 2000: 221).<sup>21</sup> This resemblance can partly be explained by the fact that some photographers who became well known before the war could carry on working with various Hungarian photo and editing companies. While the theme, the message and the point of view of the pictures changed, the technology of pho-

<sup>20</sup> "Hűségért hűséget!" ('Faith for Faith!'), *Szabad Föld*, May 23, 1948: 3; "Mefogadjuk olvasóink tanácsait" ('We Take our Readers' Advice'), *Szabad Föld*, February 14, 1954: 6; "A *Szabad Föld* olvasókonferenciák tanulsága" ('The Conclusion of *Szabad Föld* Readers' Conferences'), *Szabad Föld*, February 19, 1950: 5.

<sup>21</sup> The expression was used for collections sent to foreign exhibitions from Hungary. They were named "Hungarian style" collections due to their topics. One of the most defining features was making photos in backlight, showing the air and sunrays (Stemlerné Balog 2009: 137).



tography (such as under-cabinet lighting and the application of many grey shades) remained the same for a long time (Stemlerné Balog 2009: 190, 199).

Books were published by contemporary photo artists and press photographers, which gave advice on how to take good photos and contained good interview photos that helped those interested to understand the change in content and conception of photos. In a book published in 1955 by Jenő Sevcsik, he mentions that it is an important task of contemporary art to depict social changes; for example, the way the socialist system, unlike other societies, cares about the welfare, rest, and entertainment of workers. According to Sevcsik, the message to be highlighted is that a socialist culture provides an experience of a higher level, while the number of visitors to theatres, museums, and exhibitions multiplies and even the cultural needs of the remotest villages are satisfied:

Museums and theatres are full of people who had neither opportunity nor wish for such entertainment in the past. Travelling exhibitions, operas and village theatres were intended to satisfy the cultural needs of the remotest villages. In our pictures we do not only have to present works of art and performances of higher quality, but also the changed new audience. ... After a careful observation we should choose those members of the audience whose faces reflect the experience in the most striking way and therefore they have an even more amazing effect. ... We can see readers everywhere, at home, in the parks, while traveling and in libraries. Reading people express our new life the best and therefore they constitute one of our most beautiful topics (Sevcsik 1955: 146–147; Fig. 11).

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What about reality, which was not completely identical to the world depicted on the photos? The author also emphasized that a photo cannot be considered an identical image of reality as it can vary according to the photographer, the photographer's purpose, and what means he or she applied (Ibid.: 135). The photo artist Károly Escher considered the photos showing social topics, such as shanty towns, taken before the war, as critical, revealing reality; whereas those taken after the war were seen by him as educational, drawing on the new social order. As Escher wrote, "Contemporary society is not a 'static' topic by far. Its topic is not (only) the existing reality, but also what is going to be. ... We must aim to take photos of the changing and developing reality, society as it is changing, the new type of human, man who can use the technological advancement and constructions, who controls them and considers them natural." However, in his book, written at the end of the 1950s, he warns us of the monotonousness that was dominating contemporary photography: he thought there were too many documentary photos of nursery schools, bridges, factories, and heroic workers that hid the dirtiness of real work (Escher 1959: 54, 62–70).

### Listening to the Radio and Watching Television

Besides the peasants reading newspapers, radio listening was also encouraged to a growing extent because, as an article put it in 1949, “Listening to the radio is included in the concept of modern cultured man as well as reading newspapers or using soap”.<sup>22</sup> However, according to a 1948 survey, only 7 percent of radio listeners were peasants.<sup>23</sup> In accordance with the daily routine of husbandry (starting work early and going to bed early), a lot of people listened to the radio only on Sundays, therefore, in the readers’ letters they articulated their dissatisfaction with the amount of the monthly radio tax, as these country people had limited possibilities for listening to the radio.<sup>24</sup> The price of radios also deterred many peasants from purchasing them. Most of the elderly people I interviewed remembered the names of those people who were the first to purchase radios in their villages in the period before World War II. The radio broadcasts of some significant events (such as the funeral of the son of Governor Horthy Miklós or the occupation of some northern parts of the former Kingdom of Hungary, today part of Slovakia, in 1938) attracted masses of people: “So when the radio broadcast the occupation of the northern territories, about 80–100 people sat around in the yard of the cantor’s house listening to the radio [laughing]. . . . So 3–4 people had such radios” (Interview with Mr O. Mihály, Tiszapalkonya, November 15, 2008).

Following an order of the Supreme Council of Economy in 1948, the first cheap public radios were manufactured that could be paid in instalments (and only broadcast inland programmes); moreover, it was ordered that farmers’ clubs, cultural houses, and the headquarters of other village organizations were to be equipped with radios; and in those places where electricity had not yet been installed, it was suggested that landline radios should be installed.<sup>25</sup> A similar process was repeated when watching TV caught on<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 12).

A huge campaign was launched to promote the organization of so-called radio clubs in the press.<sup>27</sup> According to reports published in the newspapers, the participants had a lively discussion of what they had heard after listening to the programmes, for example, on the three-year plan or the obligatory delivery led by

<sup>22</sup> “Hallgassuk csoportosan a Magyar Rádiót. Rádió hallgatókört a DéFOSZ-ban” (‘Let’s Listen to Hungarian Radio Together! A Club for Radio Listeners in DéFOSZ’), *Szabad Föld*, April 17, 1949: 7.

<sup>23</sup> “Olcsó rádiót a falunak!” (‘Cheap Radio to the Village!’), *Szabad Föld*, May 30, 1948: 5.

<sup>24</sup> “Örömmel hallgatnánk a rádiót, ha fele lenne az adója” (‘We Would be Glad to Listen to the Radio if the Tax on it Was only Half as High’), *Szabad Föld*, March 28, 1948: 1.

<sup>25</sup> “Rádiót kapnak a falusi gazdakörök és kultúrházak” (‘Village Farmers’ Clubs and Cultural Houses Will be Furnished with Radios’), *Szabad Föld*, May 1, 1948: 3; “Olcsó rádiót a falunak!” (‘Cheap Radio to the Village!’), *Szabad Föld*, May 30, 1948: 5.

<sup>26</sup> For more details on see Pušnik 2010.

<sup>27</sup> “Hallgassuk csoportosan a magyar Rádiót!” (‘Let’s Listen to Hungarian Radio Together!’), *Szabad Föld*, June 13, 1948: 6.

a “progressive minded farmer” or a local intellectual, similarly to discussions that took place after common book or newspaper readings.<sup>28</sup>

Although the readers’ letters mainly described the agricultural educational programmes as useful, the content of the programmes broadcast on the radio did not nearly satisfy the requirements of the village listeners. According to criticism in the correspondence column in 1948, most programmes were not understood and the village listeners enjoyed only *Falurádió* (‘Village Radio’), the Voice of the Village, the newsreel, some lectures, and gypsy music. The author of the letter said that villagers would like to listen in the mornings to things “which would draw our attention to the daily tasks and provide us with useful advice concerning not only agriculture, but also our behaviour and consciousness”. The “singsong” music broadcast at lunchtime was turned off, and neither did they enjoy operas and the more serious plays and poems because, as the writer of the letter, put it, “First we have to learn to delight in them”. Instead of this type of programming, the writer asked for more theatrical comedies and easy entertaining music in the evening.<sup>29</sup>

Thirteen years later, a 1961 report on the programmes of the Hungarian Radio and Television intended for the village<sup>30</sup> still recounted similar experiences, and they tried to revise the programming in line with the peasants’ taste and way of thinking (attempting to shape their tastes at the same time). In the case of information genres, the most popular radio programme, *Téli órák—hasznos mulatságok* (‘Winter Hours—Useful Pastimes’), was considered to be a modernized version of the calendar format popular with peasants. Compared to other groups in the society, in the case of peasants, a greater stress was laid on the format and clever genre-related solutions: the personal tone and the sensational way of performing contributed to the popularity of radio-play biographies, personal narratives, and information programmes. However, popular literary and musical programmes with regular listeners were required to propagate a more modern way of thinking and display a higher standard of content. To decrease the role of Hungarian

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<sup>28</sup> “Kövessük példájukat! Így hallgatják a Falu Hangját a jászberényi gazdák” (‘Let’s Follow Suit! This is the Way Farmers in Jászberény Listen to *Falu Hangja* [‘The Voice of the Village!’]), *Szabad Föld*, August 8, 1948: 7; “A közös rádió művelje, szórakoztassa a falu egész dolgozó parasztságát!...” (‘Common Radio Should Educate and Entertain the Working Peasants in the Village!...’), *Szabad Föld*, March 6, 1949: 7; “Hallgassuk csoportosan a Magyar Rádiót. Rádió hallgatókört a DéFOSz-ban” (‘Let’s Listen to Hungarian Radio Together! A Club for Radio Listeners in DéFOSZ’), *Szabad Föld*, April 17, 1949: 7; “A gépállomások járnak az élen a közös rádióhallgatás megszervezésében” (‘It Is the Machine Stations that Are the Vanguard of Organizing Common Radio Listening’), *Szabad Föld*, April 24, 1949: 11; “Kedvezményes rádióelőfizetési lehetőség a dolgozó parasztságnak! stb” (‘A Possibility for Discount Radio Subscription for Peasants! etc.’), *Szabad Föld*, May 1, 1949: 7.

<sup>29</sup> “Mít kíván a parasztember a Magyar Rádiótól?” (‘What do Farmers Want from Hungarian Radio?’), *Szabad Föld*, April 18, 1948: 4.

<sup>30</sup> *A Magyar Rádió és Televízió műsorainak szerepe a falu kulturális színvonalának emelésében* (‘The Role of Hungarian Radio and Television in Elevating the Cultural Level of the Village’), National Archives of Hungary M-KS 288-22; MSZMP, *Agitációs és Propaganda Osztály iratai* (‘Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party. Documents of Agitation and Propaganda Department’) 1961, box 7.

songs, their amount was reduced to the benefit of folk music, especially in the main programme time (as was noted, a lot of peasant listeners complained about the reduction), and Hungarian songs were almost completely missing from the TV programmes. Special attention was paid to promote classical music (e.g. with symphonic versions of folk songs), and the writers of the reports had high expectations concerning opera broadcasts on television, hoping that the attractive staging would overcome the aversion shown towards classical music. In the letters sent in by the villagers concerning the news programmes they missed the clear style, simple way of writing and language that the writers of these reports considered important to counterbalance the style of the radio programmes of the “enemy”, this way dissuading them from listening to those programmes.<sup>31</sup>

### Cultured Behaviour

The concept of being cultured favoured by the communist system did not only include mental culture. According to the writer of a 1959 article, being cultured must include all segments of our lives and those people “limiting it to a wide education, literary knowledge and theatre” interpret it poorly.<sup>32</sup> The author stresses that being cultured also included bodily cleanliness and moral purity; it can be discovered “in the nicely washed shirt, the neatly clothed children, the clean and sunny parks—and even more in the clear, meaningful, interesting and honest human relations”.

The background of this wide interpretation of culture can be seen in the concept of *kulturnost*, which appeared in the Soviet Union in the 1930s conveying the normative rules of cultured behaviour to the groups of worker-peasant origin. According to the research, although culture has never been defined exactly, it meant proper clothes and appearance, personal care, cleanliness, and tidiness in the beginning, and later the influence of culture spread across everyday life, the objects surrounding a person, which were hoped to change the old elements of customs and behaviour. By the end of the 1930s, the emphasis gradually shifted from the outer characteristics to the inner features of people—first to the linguistic (correct, literary speech, education) then to the political aspects (Cattriona & Volkov 1998; Volkov 2000).

In Hungary, linguist József Erdődi, in his article published in 1964, based on the experiences of the previous years, thought that the word “cultured”, which had only been used in connection with the knowledge and mental abilities of people following the German concept of culture, took up a wider meaning including to a greater extent the behaviour of people. Such collocations caught on as cultured trade, cultured appearance, cultured way of getting around, cultured way of din-

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<sup>31</sup> The most known ones—though the source didn’t name them—were Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, and the Hungarian programmes of the BBC. Regular radio programmes in Hungarian were also broadcast from Paris, Madrid, Italy, the Vatican, and Turkey (Vámos 2005: 124).

<sup>32</sup> “A mindennapok kultúrája” (“The Culture of Everyday Life”), *Népszava*, June 21, 1959: 4.

ing, cultured way of providing services, and so forth, replacing the word “polite” to some extent. In his opinion, this change can be traced back to the appearance of the word “culture article” borrowed from Russian. The meaning of the Hungarian word *kultúra* for culture was modified in accordance with the Russian word *культура* for culture, which comprises the notions of education and civilization, and according to Erdődi, this explains the fact that the carelessly adopted collocations do not fit the Hungarian word for culture, which had only signified spiritual education (Erdődi 1964: 136–138).<sup>33</sup>

The word cultured became a recurring element of contemporary language use. The observations I made when I surveyed the press seem to support the observations made by the linguist.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, besides politeness, the word cultured was used synonymously with the words *tasteful* (e.g. for cultured clothing, a cultured flat)<sup>35</sup> or *clean, tidy* (e.g. for cultured environment)<sup>36</sup>. On the one hand, the requirement of cleanliness referred to the environment. The 1953 educational slide show called

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<sup>33</sup> The overall picture could be elaborated through conceptual historical examinations. The supposed first appearance of the Hungarian expression *kulturáltság* (‘being cultured’) in the press in 1912 was the topic of an article published in *Magyar Nyelvőr*, a Hungarian linguistic journal, in 1913. In this paper the author expressed his displeasure with this word because it occupied the place of another word *műveltség* (‘being educated’), which means knowledge obtained by education (Alexander 1913). The overall picture could be elaborated through conceptual historical examinations. The supposed first appearance of the Hungarian expression *kulturáltság* (‘being cultured’) in the press in 1912 was the topic of an article published in *Magyar Nyelvőr*, a Hungarian linguistic journal, in 1913. In this paper the author expressed his displeasure with this word because it occupied the place of another word *műveltség* (‘being educated’), which means knowledge obtained by education (Alexander 1913). The oral history interviews were done for my dissertation “The Countryside of the Town. Lifestyle change of the rural society after 1945 under the influence of urbanization” (2014). The majority of the interviewees were born in the 1920s and 30s in the southeastern part of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County and were socialized within the frames of the traditional peasants’ world. I made life-course and semi-structured interviews (for example about the transformation of consumer habits and the spread of household technology). The names of the interviewees have been altered to protect their privacy.

<sup>34</sup> The workers of the Miskolc Bus Company (mainly the conductors) started a competition to establish more-cultured travelling conditions, which was defined as “a competition of politeness” in an announcement that was aimed to involve passengers too: “A kulturáltabb közlekedésért” (‘For More Cultured Code of Conduct in Traffic’), *Északmagyarország*, February 23, 1960: 3; On the cultured way of travelling (on trams): “Csak kultúrember módjára!” (‘Just Like Cultured People!’), *Északmagyarország*, May 12, 1957: 2.

<sup>35</sup> “A divatról, az öltözködésről” (‘On Fashion and Clothing’), *Északmagyarország*, December 11, 1959: 2. According to this short piece of news, it is the Dress Makers’ Cooperative that plays a leading role in shaping cultured clothing in Miskolc, enabling us “to get dressed in accordance with good taste”: “A dolgozó ember kulturált lakása” (‘The Cultured Flat of Working People’), *Északmagyarország*, July 29, 1962: 6. In this case, besides the stylish layout, “modern household machines, the fashionable furniture, carpet and ornaments” are inseparable from the concept of a cultured flat.

<sup>36</sup> “Kulturáltabb környezetet a mezőkövesdi Utasellátóban!” (‘A More Cultured Environment to Utasellátó [a catering organization] in Mezőkövesd!’), *Északmagyarország*, July 21, 1959: 3. In place of the rundown “crowded, unfriendly environment”, the passengers deserve a “friendlier and cleaner environment”: “Gyorsabb és kulturáltabb a vasúti közlekedés” (‘Faster and More Cultured Railway Traffic’), *Északmagyarország*, May 15, 1963: 2.

*Cleanliness is Halfway through Health*, besides drawing attention to the importance of keeping homes, workplaces, and public places clean, stressed that it was also important to keep the rules of hygiene in shops and catering. The press campaign became especially strong in April, when “clean weeks” and “clean months” were sponsored by the socialist competition movement (making houses, yards, streets and communities compete with one another).<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, cleanliness could also refer to good personal hygiene. Thus, the importance of washing hands and brushing teeth was propagated, but even in the promotion of drinking glasses where the hygienic advantages of using separate glasses were emphasized (Figs 13 and 14). Moreover, village volunteers were trained to be health care inspectors in one- or two-week long courses (later these were extended to six and eight weeks), whose task was to enforce the health care and hygienic rules in their villages.<sup>38</sup> In 1949, *Szabad Föld* started a health care advisory column, in which Dr Buga, who was well known in the socialist era for his educational work, taught the importance of hygiene and basic health care knowledge. Moreover, by organizing an educational lecture series were held to fight superstitions and quackery.<sup>39</sup>

Similar to the Soviet example, inner traits of people (as the example below goes to show, the ability of being moderate and self-possessed) were seen as important as external features. These were also included in the concept of being cultured.

<sup>37</sup> “Tisztasági hét lesz április 16–23-ig” (“There Will Be a Week of Tidiness Announced Between April 16 to 23”), *Szabad Föld*, April 16, 1950: 11; “A tornác is ragyog a tisztaságtól...” (“The Veranda Shines with Tidiness”), *Szabad Föld*, April 23, 1950: 4; “Csinos, tiszta lakásban jobban érzi magát,—s boldogabb az ember. Tisztasági verseny Hajdúnánáson” (“You Will Feel Better in a Tidy, Clean Flat—and You Will Be Happier. A Tidiness Competition in Hajdúnánás”), *Szabad Föld*, December 4, 1949: 13; “Tisztasági verseny a csongrádmegyei termelőszövetkezetek között” (“A Tidiness Competition Between the Co-ops in Csongrád County”), *Szabad Föld*, February 5, 1950: 6; “Kié lesz a legtisztább ház?” (“Whose House Is the Tidiest?”), *Szabad Föld*, June 3, 1956: 2; “A tisztasági hónap után” (“After the Month of Tidiness”), *Szabad Föld*, May 8, 1955: 7; “Fokozottabb gondot a tisztaságra” (“More Care for Tidiness”), *Szabad Föld*, March 30, 1958: 9.

<sup>38</sup> “Népi egészségőrök vigyáznak a falu tisztaságára és egészségére” (“People’s Health Care Controllers Are Watching the Tidiness and Health of the Village”), *Szabad Föld*, November 16, 1947: 8; “Legnagyobb kincsünk: az ember. Így küzd a demokrácia a falu egészségéért” (“Our Greatest Treasure: Man. This Is How Democracy Struggles for a Healthy Village”), *Szabad Föld*, May 8, 1949: 2; “Asszonyok őrködnék népünk egészsége felett” (“Women Are Watching the Health of Our People”), *Szabad Föld*, February 15, 1948: 5; “Így dolgoznak a szolnokmegyei egészségőr-lányok” (“This Is How Health Controller Girls Work in Szolnok County”), *Szabad Föld*, April 11, 1948: 7; “A falu egészségének őre” (“The Guardian of the Health of the Village”), *Szabad Föld*, September 18, 1949: 10; “Szilágyi Marika, a falu egészségének őre” (“Marika Szilágyi, the Guardian of the Health of the Village”), *Szabad Föld*, October 14, 1951: 7.

<sup>39</sup> “Hadüzenet a babonának és a kuruzslásnak. Hatezer felvilágosító előadás a falvakban” (“War on Superstition and Quacks”), *Szabad Föld*, September 26, 1948: 7. The Ministry of People’s Welfare published eight booklets in 1949 on the most important daily health care issues of the village that were all translations of works by Soviet authors; “Filléres füzetek az egészségről” (“Penny Booklets on Health”), *Szabad Föld*, May 22, 1949: 11; “A Magyar Vöröskereszt felvilágosító munkája a szolnoki tanyavilágban” (“The Educational Work Done by Hungarian Red Cross in the Farmlands Around Szolnok”), *Szabad Föld*, January 15, 1950: 12.

In 1960, an article commenting on a theatrical performance watched mainly by people working in big factories discussed cultured behaviour, appropriate clothes and manners at cultural events. Reflecting on the latter, the writer mentioned,

In this field there is a lot to do. It still happens many times that visitors who arrive late argue loudly with the usher. They take out their anger on the usher or the cloak room assistant who are at hand ..., they make noise disturbing the audience's enjoyment of the play. They discuss the possible twists and turns in the story in a lively conversation. In the cinemas they often interfere with the viewing of the movie with loud comments and tasteless remarks. ... A collective participation in the performances requires discipline from each visitor. Discipline and cultured behaviour.<sup>40</sup>

Further following the use of the word “cultured”, it turns out that due to its widened use propagated through decades, in the present day, Hungarian usage has completely absorbed the word “cultured” in referring to behaviour and it even appears in new collocations. One of the villagers I interviewed, who was born in 1933 (Mrs István K.), used this word in the sense it was invented for people with an agricultural background in the 1950s–60s, when she was talking about how she ironed the shirt and prepared a tie for her son, who lived in a student hostel, for Sunday.

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Well, my son attended a vocational school for the electric industry .... Then they were taught that they were cultured people, as the headmaster of the vocational school for electric engineering said ... ‘You should learn that you are cultured, the whole world is looking at you because it is electricity that will elevate Hungary!’ They had to wear a tie at school, so I knitted a tie for him, I put nice things, rubber on it [below it], and then ... a jacket had to be had on the shirt... and the like .... [They said], it is them who carry culture. They do, do they. With knives and forks, the clothes had to be neatly folded in the wardrobe, oh, there was such an order there ... (Mrs István K., Tiszapalkonya, July 28, 2011).

The successful integration of the word cultured into colloquial speech was probably facilitated by the fact that it lacked any direct ideological concept, unlike the concepts of the socialist man or woman and the socialist way of life, which partly overlapped but constituted a bigger category.

## Conclusion

The communist regime considered different media highly important due to the role they played in forming public opinion, mediating culture, and educating peo-

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<sup>40</sup> “A kulturált magatartásról” (‘On Cultured Behaviour’), *Északmagyarország*, February 19, 1960: 5.

ple, which was a significant element of the process in which social and demographical differences between village and town were reduced. In practice the elimination of these differences meant that the characteristic lifestyle and taste of the peasants was adapted to those of the townspeople, and the criteria were summed up in the Soviet normative concept of *kulturnost*, culturedness. The articles published in the newspapers about cultured people constituted a kind of code of conduct with guidelines for cultural expectations and rules for behaviour.

Transmitting culture and its propaganda becomes effective only if a wide range of society consumes it, therefore peasants who were the least involved in its consumption were the target group of campaigns in various types of media (books, press, radio, television) in organized to persuade them to become regular consumers. Newspaper articles and reports discussing this topic provide examples of the contact points and fine transitions between the different forms of communication and varied technological background used in the process.

Although there were some differences in the ways the various media were used (in accordance with the work schedule of peasants, winter reading, weekly papers and listening to the radio and later watching TV daily was propagated), they remained largely the same. By developing the technological and infrastructural background necessary for consuming culture (e.g. electricity and cultural facilities such as libraries, culture houses, cinemas) relatively quickly in the countryside, it was thought that equal accessibility to culture was provided (e.g. electricity was called “light that brings culture” in the papers). However, it can be seen that the availability of various forms of media did not necessarily modify the traditional interests of peasants instantly and did not provide the ability to take everything in. Although the former characteristics of peasants’ consumption of culture were rejected, their needs had to be taken into consideration so that they could become the audience. Besides the programming content (in radio and print) thought to be valuable, popular content (e.g. Hungarian songs) had to be tolerated too. Moreover, to transmit new content, the adaptation of certain genres (calendars) and language styles (sensational reporting, simple wording) seemed to serve the purpose instead of neglecting such content.

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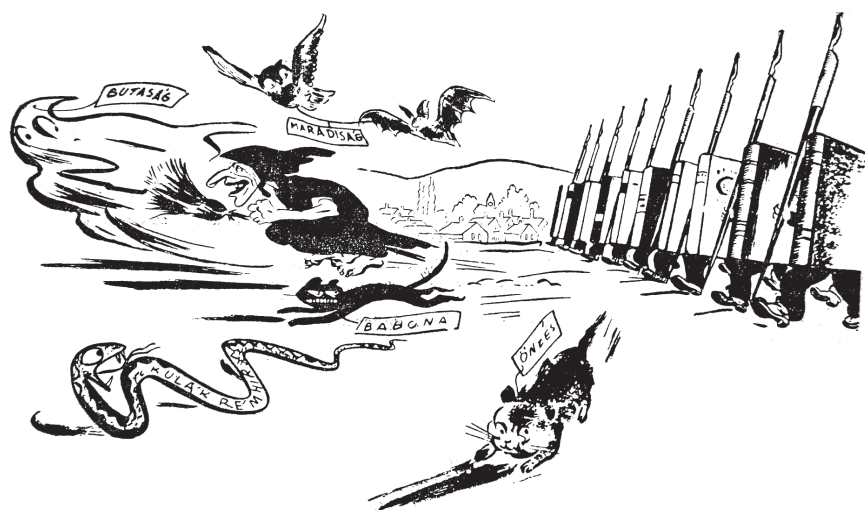
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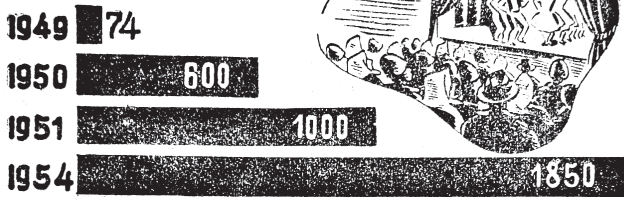


A good book is a weapon in the hands of the people! This is the end—the books are coming!  
(against stupidity, backwardness, superstitions, scaremongering kulaks, selfishness).

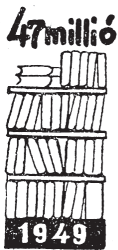
1 Szabad Föld, 1951, September 9, p. 2.

## Ötéves tervvel a művelt, szocialista faluért

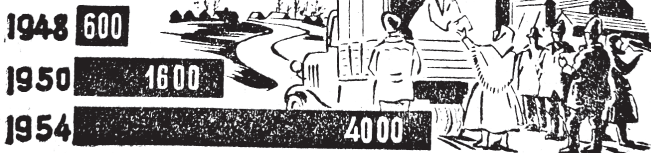
### FALUSI KULTURÓTHON



### KÖNYV



### FALUSI VANDOR KÖNYVTÁR



Five-year plan for the educated, socialist village  
(village cultural houses, books, moving libraries).

*Szabad Föld*, 1951, April 1, p. 8.



Culture for the village! Opening the 500<sup>th</sup> people's library in Véménd.

- Put aside that lamp! Now this will truly glow.

3 *Képes Szabad Föld*, 1948, January 11.





Join the readers' movement! You brought such a bright light inside!

My eyes are playing tricks on me!

- If you were reading, there would be light in your head as well!



I'm better with farming, ever since I've been reading specialist books.  
How the Kocsis family learns and gets educated.

*Szabad Föld*, 1951, November 25, p. 7.

# AKAR SZ TANULMÁNYÚTRA MENNI A SZOVJETUNIÓBA? MEHETSZ!



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*Szabad Föld*, 1954, February 28, p. 6.



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Working farmers in Regöly municipality welcomed wholeheartedly  
the reader conference held by *Szabad Föld*.

*Szabad Föld*, 1950, February 19, p. 5. 10



11 ..... Winter Evening in Pátka (performance of the Village Theatre)  
*Szabad Föld*, 1958, December 25, p. 6.

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You can use vouchers, purchase it on credit and in instalments.

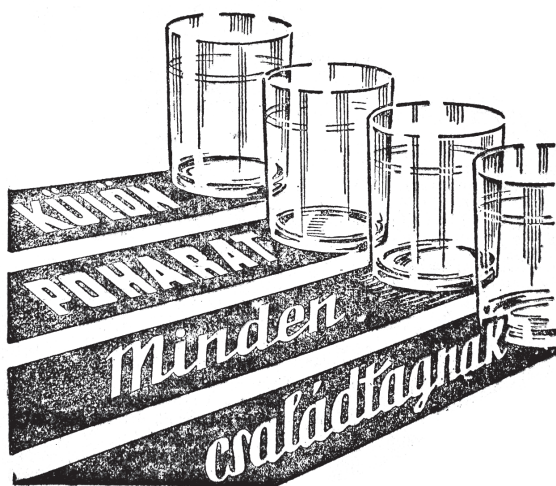
*Szabad Föld*, 1950, July 16, p. 12.

13 Mother teaches in this way too... Every day twice with toothpaste.

*Szabad Föld*, 1950, July 9, p. 12.



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Own glass for each family member.

14 *Szabad Föld*, 1950, August 27, p. 9.