

## Urban Socialism and Everyday Life in Sztálinváros

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Social and regional inequalities have always been and still constitute the central issues of town planning and of regional and settlement policies. The official ideology of Eastern Bloc countries in that respect proclaimed egalitarian principles, which presupposed the eradication of underdevelopment of underprivileged social groups. The official discourse on town planning and regional development promoted the same goals. The new socialist towns were to represent the official images of cities of the future, “where there will be no poverty, beggars, and periphery” (Sándor 1951: 23). However, the principles proclaimed by ideology on the one hand and the unofficial as well as the Western image of Hungarian urban development during socialism on the other hand contradicted each other daily. Segregation, urban poverty, and poor housing conditions caught the eye of anyone who analysed socialist urbanisation processes in Hungary.

Sociologist Iván Szelényi's model of urban social in-

*The first street (mid-1950s)*



equalities in socialism became one of the best known concepts on socialist urbanisation, based mainly on research made in new housing areas. It becomes evident from Szelényi's work that urban segregation took place also in non-market or pseudo-market conditions which were created by the command economy and the socialist state. The main reason for this phenomenon was “that the different institutions [...] need a different structure of workforce, and that is why the housing districts allocated near to such kind of ‘symbiotic complexes’ will have potentially different social structures” (Szelényi 1990: 99–102; see also Szelényi 1983).

Segregation, poverty, and urban inequalities characterised not only Budapest, but also small and middle-sized Hungarian towns.<sup>1</sup> Though officially these tendencies were never fully admitted, the changes in Hungarian urban planning, in the treatment of regional differences, and in settlement policies clearly indicated that planners and politicians were conscious of these challenges and from decade to decade devised new policies to address these issues.

### Planning everyday life: socialist cities from above

The first important regulation for socialist town planning, the “National Building Act” (*Országos Építészeti Szabályzat*), appeared in Hungary in 1947. Most parts of this act tried to regulate the chaotic post-war rebuilding process of towns (approximately 18 percent of residential areas had been destroyed during World War II). At this time the most significant objective was to build new, planned towns instead of restoring the old, “provisionally built” settlements. This was related to the need for a new kind of workforce by the newly introduced planning periods for industrialisation. Corresponding to this objective, the haphazard building of houses outside towns and villages was banned by the government in 1949 in order “to increase the level of communal life” (Sós 1959: 15).

The first socialist regional planning institute (*Területrendezési Intézet, Institute for Regional Organisation*) was established in 1948, but most of the plans drafted by this institute were never put into practice because settlement policy and town planning during this period (1948–1956) were subordinated to economic policy (Germuska 2002). The Three-Year Plan (1947–1949) and the first Five-Year Plan (1950–1955) had much more influence on urban planning than the institutes created for this purpose. The Institute for Regional Organisation was dissolved in 1952, and most of its responsibilities were transferred to the Regional Planning Department of the National Planning Office (Belényi 1996: 102–3), which indicates that urban planning was a function of economic planning. Most plans for the settlement policy between 1949 and 1956 were drafted by the National Planning Office (*Országos Tervhivatal*) and by the Committee for National Economy (*Népgazdasági Tanács*), but these plans were never published. These secretive plans clearly reveal the idea of urban planning of the leaders of the socialist command economy. Most of the plans are full of ideological concepts, e.g. that the most important goals of urban planning are “to promote the leading position of the working class” and “to provide for the planned socialist industrialisation which would be the basis of the new settlement policy” (Hajdú 1989).

One of the most important intentions of the state was to restrict the economic autonomy of local authorities in order to subordinate local settlement policy and urban planning to national economic policy. This process started immediately after World War II, when the budget provisioned for reconstruction was centralised. The state restricted first of all the budgets of agricultural towns (*mezővárosok*)<sup>2</sup>, mainly in the ‘Alföld’, the region of the great plains (Belényi 1996: 74). The adaptation of the centralised Soviet council-system (*tanácsrendszer*) in 1950 made local authorities wholly dependent on central directives, and they lost their relative financial autonomy (their budget was fixed at the Ministry of the Interior).<sup>3</sup>

National settlement policy between 1947–53 supported mainly old and new industrial towns. The main problem of agricultural towns was that until the 1960s no new factories were built there, which accordingly limited the budget allocated to them by the central government. Migration processes during this period therefore were clearly directed from the agricultural towns of the Alföld area to Budapest and the subsidized industrial towns, the ‘socialist cities’, among them Sztálinváros, the first socialist city in Hungary (Belényi 1996: 162).<sup>4</sup>

During this period regional planning and settlement policy consisted in improving the infrastructure of old and newly established industrial towns that became centres of their regions. Although the propaganda proclaimed that regional policy was to level town-countryside differences and decrease the contrast between underdeveloped and developed regions, in reality most of the funds from regional development programmes went to the (heavy) industrial sector. Accordingly, the beneficiaries of socialist settlement and investment policies were the industrial regions (Germuska/Pál 2001: 77).<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, most of the urban plans of this period were dealing with “socialist towns”, which were not only a symbol of the socialist system but also the manifestations of its new urban planning programmes. In regime propaganda, these towns symbolized the ideas of planners and architectures in which technology and nature no longer contradicted each other, in which the urban and the rural no longer confronted each other as strangers, and in which factory and home were not separated by long distances and would thus save the workers time and energy. The main goal of the architectural appearance of these towns was to demonstrate the socialist principles and to show the people “the socialist modes of behaviour”. According to the concepts of city planners the spatial structure of these new, “socialist” towns had to be clear and transparent in order to facilitate the control of the everyday activities of people living in them. City centre and main street had special importance in socialist towns: they were the places where people would parade, primarily on May Day, which in propaganda was represented as the main holiday of the working class. One of the most important functions of socialist cities was to turn their inhabitants into “socialist people”. The planning instruments of this training process were: (1) the urban spaces and places, which would be designed in order to raise the level of “collective spirit” and “communal life”; (2) public buildings, such as offices, cinemas, theatres, restaurants, and “houses of culture”; and (3) the form of the houses, which were mostly devoid of “fussy decorations” (Weiner 1959, Horváth 2002).

Socialist urban planning defined itself in contrast to “capitalist urban planning” at that time. The official model for Hungarian planners was Soviet urban planning, which had tried to demonstrate that socialist town planning was more egalitarian and functioned better than capitalist one. “The joyless monsters of skyscrapers in New York and in Chicago symbolise the slavery of soulless and mechanical ‘business’ [...]. The

skyscrapers of Moscow serve the whole city: Their monumental and graceful forms fix the new architectural scale of the capital” (Arkin 1953: 64). Every new town, every new district, and every new building had to be a symbol of “socialist society”, and they were planned and criticised from an ideological point of view. The most significant period of adaptation of Soviet urban planning and settlement policy was between 1952–53 when, following Soviet practice, a rayon-system was planned for Hungary in order to replace traditional regional networks (*megye*) by economic districts (*rayons*). However, due to the policy changes under the government of Imre Nagy, this plan was not realised (Belényi 1996: 102–7).

### Answers to the housing crisis

In 1949, there were about 1.8 million residential houses and buildings in Hungary. 98.3 percent of them were one-storied buildings (in the old districts of Budapest the percentage was 73.6 percent), and 84.3 percent of them contained only one apartment. The dominant house-type was the detached (family) house, not only in villages but also in urban areas, and even in Budapest. 98 percent of houses and apartments were private ones. Urban apartments (mainly in urban blocks of flats) were nationalised in 1952.<sup>6</sup> Approximately six million people (60 percent of the total population) lived in single-room apartments (on average, 3.41 shared one room), and 421.000 people lived in three-rooms apartments. Only 10.1 percent of the apartments had a bathroom (in Budapest: 35 percent, in other towns: 7–13 percent).<sup>7</sup>

The shortage of flats was one of the most serious problems of the period (mainly in industrial areas), and the planning institutes<sup>8</sup> tried to solve this problem by standardised mass-production of apartments. The first plans for the standardised blocks of flats (so called *típuslakóház*) were drawn in 1947, and the building of these “new-type houses” began in 1948 (Prakfalvy 1998; Gádoros 1946). In 1947–8 there also were plans for standardised individual (family) houses as “the best types of houses for families with many children”, but because of their costs they were never realised (Gádoros 1948: 13). The same architect who had propagated the individual (family) houses in 1948 wrote about this type of houses only a year later that they “are not only expensive, because of the building costs, but the inhabitants of the detached family houses are inclined to fall out of communal life or to become individuals under the protection of their fences” (Gádoros 1949). The reason for building standardised apartment blocks was mainly a financial one, but there existed ideological implications as well. This phenomenon characterised the whole urban planning process in Hungary in the socialist period, not only in the early fifties but also in the sixties and the seventies. Urban planning and the centralised allocation system of flats were subordinated to economic policy, but in the official discourse they served ideological purposes, too.

The 1948 prototype of standardised flats included a living room, a small bedroom (because modern

people use this room only for sleeping), a small kitchen, a small antechamber, a bathroom and a toilet. Such a flat measured about 50 sq. m. Due to financial pressures these flats had to be “modernised”, so the kitchen (“modern” and “socialist” people would not cook at home) and the antechamber got smaller, and toilet and bathroom were put together. As a result the little bedroom could be enlarged again and the flats would be called “two-room apartments” in 1949. After 1949 this type of “two-room apartments” became the prototype of standardised apartments. The population was required to learn new words related to housing such as “half-room”, “sleeping cabin” (*hálófülke*) instead of bedroom, “eating cabin” (*étkezőfülke*) instead of dining room, “hipbath” or “*Sitzbad*” instead of bath-tube (Ifj. Kismarty-Lechner 1947: 5–13).

However, people emerging from their ruined flats and not having enjoyed warm running water were generally content with their new homes, as the results of an official local survey, conducted in some of the new housing estates of Budapest, indicated in 1949. The tenants of the standardised flats only had problems with the big windows, and they disliked the central heating because it was much more expensive than the old system of individual heating (Preisich 1949). Some of these new buildings were called “Buildings of Ace-Workers” because most of the flats went to the “ace-workers” and “stachanovists” of the mass-production. In contrast to the official survey the tenants of these houses were not really satisfied with their new apartments because of the high costs at the end of the year, when they had to pay the bills for the allegedly “economical” central heating. They applied for permission to replace the central heating with their old stoves, usually gas- and coal-stoves.<sup>9</sup> When permission was granted by the authorities, almost 90 percent of them wanted to move to other, more affordable apartments. The caretakers (*házmester*) of the new apartment blocs, who had become the second-eyes of the authorities by controlling the everyday life of the tenants, regularly wrote about the “unrest” because of the high costs of these flats.<sup>10</sup> The only way to end the grumbling was to lower the costs of apartments, which was done in 1950, mostly for propagandistic reasons.<sup>11</sup>

After Stalin’s death and with the new policy of Imre Nagy’s government, national settlement policy underwent a light modification in 1953. The most important change was that underdeveloped agricultural regions would get much more attention. In 1954 many industrial investments were stopped, but because of the confusion and the short notice of these new policies, the new ideas would never be realised. But after 1953 the state never again showed such a liking of “socialist towns” as before. Budapest, however, could keep its leading position in terms of allocated investments. This continuity in urban policy making can be illustrated by a quote from Mátyás Rákosi. As General Secretary of the Communist Party (MDP) he tried to explain at the end of 1954 why Budapest must have more apartments than rural towns: “It is not the same, if 1.700 thousands [sic] of rural people or 1.700 thousands of the inhabitants of Budapest are grumbling about bad housing conditions.”<sup>12</sup>

Although Budapest and the industrial towns had a special function in urban planning and settlement policy, the major part of investments went to industry as such and not to urban infrastructure or residential areas. Between 1949 and 1953 the average number of newly built flats in Budapest comprised only 800 annually. The economic policy of Imre Nagy’s government, however, was much more oriented towards consumption, and planning for some of the new small housing estates began already in 1954. Due to this new policy, 7.820 new apartments were constructed in Budapest in the years 1954–5.<sup>13</sup> The government tried to solve the housing shortage also by supporting the building of individual family houses, which were built as private houses (Gábor/Győri: 121). The policy of increasing the number of flats served as a general strategy for reducing social and urban inequalities not only during this short time period but also during the whole Kádár era.

### Everyday Sztálinváros: Vignettes of the First Socialist City in Hungary from Below

Political and social elites have long used the establishment and planning of cities as a means of highlighting their power and advancing their own programme of social transformation. Sztálinváros was not simply brought into being by the socialist state in order to realize concrete goals related to the development of Hungary’s armaments’ industry or other social policy measures, but to demonstrate the strength of the country’s new rulers. Rulers have dreamed for time immemorial as to how to create cities from scratch, and how to create civilization out of wilderness. Even so, Sztálinváros did not, or only in a very restricted sense, meet the criteria of a city in the eyes of its contemporaries. In order to ensure that its residents began to consider the settlement in which they lived as a city, the social definition of a city as such had to be changed. In this process a decisive role was played by official discourse which privileged the representation of the construction of the city as the struggle between the urban and the non-urban and, referring to older analogies, as the struggle between the civilized and the savage.

The construction of the city, some 70 kilometres south of Budapest, began in the spring of 1950. On November 7th, 1951, the town was awarded the name of Stalin. With the exception of a short period in autumn 1956 when it was called Dunapentele, it retained the name Sztálinváros until November 25th, 1961. At that time the city, which had been built from nothing during the previous decade, reached a population of over 30.000 inhabitants. The name was finally changed, after the XXII. Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in October 1961 had initiated a new campaign of de-Stalinization, which spread also to the other socialist countries. As a part of this campaign Stalingrad in the Soviet Union was re-named Volgograd, Hungary’s Sztálinváros became Dunaújváros, and East Germany’s Stalinstadt was re-named Eisenhüttenstadt.

The vitality of the town was represented by the age structure of its inhabitants: Stalintown was an

industrial town of the “youth” and as the propaganda suggested, the town was built according to the wishes of the people who lived in it. The images of heroic workers and a “classless society” were also common images to present the “socialist way of life” of workers that prevailed in the “socialist town” (Weiner 1963; Palotai/Palotai 1951; Ember 1953). In memoirs and police reports, though, there is also another “story” to be told about this “socialist city”: Stalintown was a town of “juvenile delinquency”, where more pubs and prostitutes were to be found than in the whole county (Tapolczai 1977: 41; Földes 1984: 197–8; Miskolczi 1980: 13–30; Interview with Ferenc Lombos).<sup>14</sup> Pub scandals were often mentioned in connection with the appearance of a gang of working class boys (*jampecek*). This group represented “juvenile delinquency” and “hooliganism” in the local newspaper and in the official discourse.

What does *jampec* mean and where does it come from? The first recorded mention dates from 1928; according to the historical-etymological dictionary of the Hungarian language, it means an idle, good-for-nothing youth who dresses and behaves in a conspicuous fashion.<sup>15</sup> The figure of a *jampec* is associated primarily with fashion. Before the Second World War it denoted mainly the dandies from wealthy families, who were known for their extravagant lifestyle and enthusiasm for ‘modern’ things (dance, crime stories, motorcycles, and Kodak cameras) as well as their conspicuous dance styles and multitude of successive lovers. There exists a sarcastic song from 1933 which described the *jampec* in these terms, beginning with “Oh world of old / Oh bygone failure [*kampec*] / I’m the fine, sturdy / Local *jampec* / I’m a modern youth / Malign me who dares / I make big demands / Fight me, blockhead”.<sup>16</sup> The figure of the *jampec* in common parlance also meant a worldly, independent, extravagant lifestyle, and therefore was able to serve as an attractive role model for skilled young workers, who earned decent wages after the Second World War.

It is clear from numerous accounts that clothing was the main distinguishing mark. A *jampec* would wear a black or brightly coloured shirt, a patterned tie or red spotted scarf, a jacket with padded shoulders, drainpipe trousers, striped socks, coloured, rubber-soled shoes, and a cowboy-style hat. A girl would wear a tight skirt and floppy jacket and a ponytail. Later, it was the *jampecs* who pioneered jeans, the article of clothing that ostensibly abolished the distinctions between classes and sexes. These various parts of clothing alone would give someone the appearance of a *jampec*, there was no need to invest in the full gear. The dress of the young men was even more striking because such male fashion as brighter clothes in more expensive fabrics had traditionally been confined to subcultures ever since the mid-19th century. Work and career had become the main measure of value in the men’s world, while the appearance and dress of women came to symbolize family prosperity (Craik 1995). In the case of women, it was a mark of rebellion to dress in a more puritan way, to don garments associated with groups further down the social scale, or to wear men’s clothes. *Jampec* clothing as a status symbol lent an urban charac-

ter to working-class youth, who obtained it on the black market. Along came the excitement of group affiliation and the association with Western values. “They looked suspiciously on us when we walked in, not as show-offs. But we had our *jampi* [nickname of *jampec*] shoes, thick soles, rubber welts. They still didn’t... I didn’t wear them to work. They were for weekends. We went off in our *jampi* shoes to loaf around with friends. Big leather jackets, the lot... There were dealers in the South Town, three of them. I don’t know their names, *Frici*, or something like that, they brought in the stuff. I think from Yugoslavia or the South Country... It was a big thing that you could buy it on the side, in instalments. You had to have connections to get hold of it, because they were bringing it in... People envied each other for where they’d bought this stuff. They’d stare at a good pair of drainpipes... And there were the young people at work, they didn’t buy on instalments, they borrowed the gear from somewhere. Then I tried to buy a simple flannel shirt, right in fashion then. Drainpipes, thick-soled and real sponge-rubber shoes, *Gojzer* [waterproofing suede, similar to suede Gibson-style shoes with thick crepe soles of the teddy boys]. The shoes were very hardwearing, unfortunately I can’t show them to you.” So a man explained who had worked on a skilled job in Sztálinváros in the 1950s. Incidentally, the stereotypes of the period prompted him to point out that he had never been a *jampec* or anything of the kind.<sup>17</sup>

The expressive *jampec* clothes were combined with other habits regarded as conspicuous, such as “wild dancing” and use of frequent “Pest” expressions in speech. Another characteristic was a propensity to tell “impudent” jokes. The uniformity of dress and hairstyle, dance patterns, and spoken language all served to distinguish these youths from others in the city. Changes in hairstyle and clothes would tell passers-by in the street that this group was off to enjoy themselves and defied the constraints of workplace, party, or state.

Condemnation of the *jampec* included condemning Western consumer patterns. The *jampec* were not alone in that, of course. British teddy boys, mods or rockers were targets for the press, partly because of their habits as consumers. But the dress or music characteristic of a Western lifestyle was still more of a challenge to the socialist state. An important function of the officially projected *jampec* image was to present, by condemning deviant values, the official expectations how young people should behave (this did not mean that those young people whom the press identified because of their physical appearance or way of life to be *jampec*, did not exist). Propagandists were keen to introduce the power of socialism into their depiction of the activities of young people. Socialism would be projected as a force supported by “the young” and as “the future”. Other propaganda stock images included those of “heroic builders” and “classless society”. The image of the *jampec*, in this context, featured in the official propaganda and the press as a means of distinguishing in detail those patterns of behaviour which young people were expected to reject. The *jampec* way of life was depicted as conflicting with the officially expected norms and was part of a blanket condemnation of all

Western influence, because the *jampec* could not have resulted from planned economy and socialist education. The campaign against the *jampec* was simultaneously a struggle against individualism and for collectivism and socialist justice, as opposed to representations of capitalism in the official discourse. So the main importance of the *jampec* phenomenon to official discourse in the 1950s was to demonstrate the distinction between the desired “socialist” behavioural patterns and the undesirable “capitalist” ones. That is why the *jampec* phenomenon figured so prominently in the newspaper of the first socialist town.

The cultural conflict involved in urbanization can be shown by the story of the best-known pub of Stalintown, “*Késdobáló*” (“The Knife-Thrower”). The story of this pub represented the most important conflict between “urban” and “rural” lifestyles, which played a very significant role in official discourse. The pub was opened when the town was founded in 1950. The visitors of the pub were mainly semi-skilled workers and bricklayers. As the occupational structure of the town changed, many articles about scandals in the pub were published in the local press. The pub started to become the symbol of “non-urban” and “non-socialist” life and its customers were described as “villains” and “villagers”. By the end of 1954 the municipal authorities closed the pub in order to facilitate the spread of a “socialist way of life” throughout the “town of socialist workers”.

Pubs had a special importance in the public sphere of Stalintown. There the immigrants created a distinctive social institution of their own which symbolised not only the rejection of some of the essentials of the officially prescribed lifestyle, but also the acceptance of alternative public modes of sociability and solidarity (Horváth 2000b; 2004: 158–72). “The Knife-Thrower” was located at one of the major transportation junctions in the city – the Peace Square (*Béke tér*). It began as a “bar” in one of the barracks. By 1953 the local newspaper had become interested in events there that demonstrated that the pub and its regular clients had become undesirable in the eyes of the general public of the town. The report described a pub that was full of drunken patrons, while shouting and tuneless singing disturbed the peace in the area. Those who entered the pub, according to the newspaper, were threatened with the danger that they would be beaten by one of the drunkards frequenting the pub, or that they even might be stabbed. The dangerous nature of the pub was increased by the proximity of the bus station, as a consequence of which, the local newspaper concluded, the bar had become a favoured location for fights between people travelling through the town.<sup>18</sup> The author of the article was most offended by the fact that visitors to the pub harassed passers-by, giving the whole district a notorious reputation.

The past of the “Knife-Thrower” went right back to the “heroic period” of the early construction of the city. In 1950 Peace Square had been nothing more than cornfields. When the first construction workers arrived, on one side of what later became the square, the first barracks were built. These were the first build-

ings in Sztálinváros, and it was in this district that the first offices and facilities for accommodation were built. In 1953 the “Knife-Thrower” was housed in one of these early barracks: “... time has to some extent worn out the buildings, and it is not a real surprise that the workers went into this smoky and filthy place only for a glass of something with poor expectations.”<sup>19</sup> The buildings that would later form the Peace Square generated the impression that this would become the future city centre. Many believed “that the heart of the construction site beats here”. The first general store also opened there (Miskolczi 1975: 37). Not too far away one could find the first factory canteen, which catered to those who worked on the site (*ibid.*, 39). Therefore, whoever arrived in the city, could credibly believe that Peace Square was the city’s heart even though, according to the final city plan, it actually lay outside the real centre.

The first residential areas sprang up to the west of Peace Square: the barracks, the Attila József House of Culture (in a barrack), the general store, and the construction site’s occupational health centre. On the other side, to the east of Peace Square, the first residential houses of the city were built. Thus, for the first residents of the city (construction workers), Peace Square was located half way from home to work and back again. The buses that carried workers who lived in the neighbouring villages departed and arrived also from the square. For this reason Peace Square became one of the first landmarks of the new city, while the “Knife-Thrower” became its heart. For those arriving in the city, or for those leaving, the first and last thing they would see of the city was the crowd on Peace Square around the pub. According to one resident who worked in the city at that time “the buses waited in Peace Square at around five. The people leaving work on the construction site gathered there. There was an incredible crowd here! Outside the door of the general store there wound long queues” (Miskolczi 1980: 20).

Even in 1953 most Hungarians could see Stalintown only as a “surreal dream”. The future writer, Bulcsú Bertha, arrived in the city shortly after graduating from high school, and he gained a strong impression of Peace Square and those who populated it. He equated the city with the pub he found there: “... immediately behind the bar in Peace Square was a wood, with newly planted three or four metre-high trees. The back windows of the pub were open to the wood. When there were huge fights they opened the windows, so the winners could throw out the losers, or the waiters shouted out into the wood. By the time the police arrived, everyone was quietly sipping their wine, or more precisely their beer laced with rum, because that was the fashion at that time” (Bertha 1986). During the course of 1953 the police was frequently called to the “Knife-Thrower”.

In 1953 the construction of the city centre was complete and Peace Square, on its fringe, did not conform to the ideals of an “urban” life-style that the city council sought to promote. The pub on Peace Square was the pub of those who lived in the “barrack village” and of the “village dwellers” that commuted from rural

areas. As a consequence, the struggle against the “Knife-Thrower” became a symbol of the struggle between “rural” and “urban” within the developing city.

Renovation and police raids failed to solve the problem of the “Knife-Thrower”. In June 1954 a fight outside the pub ended in the death of one of the combatants.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence, the local authorities raised the issue with the Mining Food Supply Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Commerce, which ran the “Knife-Thrower”. The directorate resisted the closure of the pub on several occasions, warning that the closure of the establishment would cause it a serious loss of income (Tapolczai 1977: 44). The local council eventually emerged victorious and on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1954,

*Restaurant "Peace" (mid-1950s)*



the local newspaper was able to announce the closure of the “Knife-Thrower” (according to other nicknames the “Leper”, “Scream”, “Meat Market”, or “Little Tango”).<sup>21</sup>

Culture is one of the genres of social communication that constitutes the public sphere. The conventional discourse about an undifferentiated “culture of socialist cities” suggested that almost everyone shared the same set of values. A look at the pubs, family trials, or youth cultures of socialist cities calls this myth of cultural consensus into question. One of the persistent myths about socialist cities was the notion that most people accepted the opposite mythology of the town centred on acquisitive individualism, a kind of gold rush, and the chaos of socialist cities. The myth of solidarity was one of the first myths that appeared in the mythology of Stalintown, and this as well as the myth of the heroic founders belonged to the identity of the towns’ inhabitants. The culture of the pubs of Stalintown and the youth subculture were alternative but not counter-cultural phenomena. The official discourse, though, suggested that pub-culture and some of the forms of youth-culture were countercultural phenomena as officially all non-planned and non-official phenomena were stigmatized. This approach generated a public debate about pubs and the role of the youth in socialist towns. In this debate, pubs and their clients were represented as “non-urban” and “non-socialist” phenomena. At the same time, youth who followed Western modes

of behaviour were represented as “delinquent boys” or “hooligans” in the public discourse.

For many members of the “upper classes” and the members of the local authorities of Stalintown, going to the pub and enjoying public celebrations seemed typical of working-class recreation. However, many of them similarly viewed workers who drank quite openly as an affront to modesty and decency. The notion of the public became therefore more limited in order to exclude many forms of public entertainment, like going to pubs. The local authorities thus perceived this form of working-class recreation as a challenge to the dominant culture, to family and factory, to socialism and socialist property. They responded to this presumed challenge by a variety of campaigns aimed at changing or restricting pub culture through articles in the local newspaper, police controls, and administrative measures.

Stalintown police had been implementing a policy of containing pub culture after 1954, introducing a classification system for pubs on the basis of social class. The police differentiated acceptable and unacceptable pubs according to their clientele. The first and second class pubs in the downtown area could be tolerated because of their affluent clientele, but the third or fourth class ones were associated with semi-skilled workers and bricklayers, so the police directed their activities primarily against these “underclass institutions”. The main idea was that the town centre must be cleared. In the first years the police did not regard pubs and drinking as primary targets for police action. As the occupational structure of the town changed and a new myth of its founders had to be constructed, arrests in pubs rose quite dramatically. It is also clear that these arrests depended not only on the police policy but also on the available manpower of the police and official expectations. The crime rate in Stalintown was the highest in Hungary in the fifties not because of the high rate of immigration of criminals, but due to the stricter police control in socialist towns and the specific attitudes of the police, who arrested semi-skilled workers taking part in pub scandals.<sup>22</sup>

The discourse of the local authorities of Stalintown presented these interclass conflicts quite often in terms of the different lifestyle of rural people coming to the town. Stalintown, like other socialist towns, was growing at a rapid rate and much of the growth was directly attributed to massive rural immigration. People with rural background were characterised by official discourse as having disordered and untidy lives and being almost totally devoid of local community relations. Instead, their social relations were characterised by spontaneity and capriciousness and that is why they were often placed at the margin of society. Their lifestyle was frequently represented by stories about animals that were raised in bathrooms, scandals in pubs, immorality of country girls who had moved alone to work at the factory, etc. This discourse led these people to participate in the local society only in limited and highly selective ways. The cultural conflict involved in urban adjustment had a significant role in the discourse, but its main function was to demonstrate the official attempt that tended to represent Stalintown as

a classless society and to level urban-rural differences (Horváth 2000c).

Those residents of the city who kept animals were regarded in popular discourse as being villagers. In the barracks and camps of the Radar district of the city the local council attempted several times to ban the keeping of pigs, but it never succeeded.<sup>23</sup> In the multi-storey blocks of flats the residents regularly prepared newly slaughtered pigs for storage or consumption in the common washhouse. The plans for houses with gardens to be built in a planned garden suburb of the city envisioned only wooden sheds or chicken huts but no pens for pigs.<sup>24</sup> It is noteworthy that at the same time many of the first people who took state-subsidized credits from the State Savings Bank for the construction of private houses did not spend their loans only on fridges, radios, or mass-produced furniture but also to buy a pig. Many people who lived in flats that were furnished with mass manufactured furniture kept their pigs at a house

*Open air pub (mid-1950s)*



in the “old areas” of the city, and then prepared their pig for conservation or immediate consumption in the common washhouse of their block, after slaughtering it where it was kept.<sup>25</sup>

Newspaper articles on barrack-slums and judicial proceedings against people living there highlight the transformation of images and stereotypes of the barracks. This discourse was the dramatic essence of the story of Stalintown because the bricklayers, who built the residential houses, normally lived in barracks for many years whilst the flats usually went to engineers and skilled workers. The petty crime and violence of the barrack-slums filled the first pages of Stalintown’s more sensational newspaper. The inhabitants of the slums were identified as deviants, supporting thus the legitimacy of the centralised flat allocation system. The main economic function of the slums in Stalintown was that the “dirty work” was done by their inhabitants. The discursive existence of slums developed by local newspapers and officials supported the status of those who were not living in such poor conditions but in planned flats. Social mobility was a particularly important goal of the state socialist system, and people needed to know

exactly where they stood. The discourse on the barrack-slums in Stalintown helped all those living in planned flats to feel fortunate for being spared poverty that officially did not even exist in socialism (Horváth 2000d). The official discourse about and the image of families living in Stalintown were particularly influenced by “the myth of the declining family”. This image was substantiated by the high rates of divorce, abortion and so-called hooliganism. Its rationale was to foster the idea that in urban, industrial societies, family is no longer the primary unit of economic production. However, oral history interviews and private letters of villagers living in Stalintown show that the people were concerned about close kinship ties and even kept many of their former social practices in town (Dobos 1981, 1984).<sup>26</sup> The official image of families in Stalintown and the urban paradigm of family life of socialist cities worked at the macro-level characteristics of the city. However, it did not hold true at the level of neighbourhood and family that were more integrated and more personal. The villagers in Stalintown regularly visited their kin in the countryside. The first generation of immigrants tended to settle in urban areas where they had already kin, and migration to Stalintown was kin-related similar to other industrial cities.

### Summary

The city and those who lived in it were interpreted and represented in different ways. A city can just as easily be characterized by the desires of its planners as by the ways in which its builders deviate from those plans or by the residents appropriation of the place in which they live. In complete contradiction to the expectations of its planners, Sztálinváros never truly became the model socialist city, neither in the eyes of its residents nor in the eyes of those who lived in other parts of the county – nor did it become the “best” of the cities in the country, either in the ways socialist ideology or society defined the “best”. At the same time different social groups – the intelligentsia, skilled workers, rural migrants, or writers of propagandistic texts – ascribed different meanings to the notion of the city with respect to Sztálinváros. Similarly, the process that can be understood as “the attempt to create a new culture” that was central to the official discourse on the construction of socialism and the attempts to shape “a new socialist person” carried completely different meanings for various social groups. Sztálinváros’s history can be understood as the history of an entirely new settlement, where some social groups from pre-socialist society confronted new conditions, which were largely the product of state action. The results of this interaction formed, re-shaped, and determined the social processes of the socialist decades.

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#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See the case studies of this phenomenon at Pécs, Szeged, Salgótarján, Veszprém, Miskolc, Debrecen, Békés, Kazincbarcika, and Sztálinváros (Dunaújváros). (Béres 1983, Saád 1977, Tóth 1978, Andor – Hidy 1986: 107, Kovács 1987, Papp 1987, Szirmai 1988, Szelényi 1990: 114, Horváth 2000a).
- <sup>2</sup> These towns had their economic production largely from agriculture.
- <sup>3</sup> 1950. (V.11.) I. tv. [Act of Parliament 11.05.1950]
- <sup>4</sup> E.g. in 1960 almost 10% of the inhabitants of Budapest lived in the 'Álföld'-area in 1949.
- <sup>5</sup> The new official manifestation of the classification system of Hungarian cities was created in 1951. The first group of cities included mainly industrial towns: Budapest, Miskolc, Komló, Pécs, Ózd, Szeged, Szekesfehervár, Győr, Mosonmagyaróvár, Sopron, Lőrinci, Esztergom-Dorog, Tatabánya, Salgótarján, Szigetszentmiklós, Szombathely, Ajka, Várpalota (Germuska 2001: 131).
- <sup>6</sup> All of the leased buildings were nationalised, among them the old block of flats. Elnöki Tanács 1952. (II.17.) 4. sz. törvényerejű rendelete. [Law-decree of the Presidential Council]
- <sup>7</sup> 1949. évi Népszámlálás. 4. kötet. Épület és Lakásstatistikai eredmények. [National Census 1949. Vol. IV. Housing and Apartment Data] Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1950, 9–29.
- <sup>8</sup> Some of the most important were: Építéstudományi Intézet, Városépítési Tervező Vállalat (VÁTI), Budapesti Városépítési Vállalat (BUVÁTI).
- <sup>9</sup> Politikatörténeti Intézet Levéltára. Szakszervezetek Központi Levéltára. (PIL. SZKL) [Central Archive of Unions in the Archive of Institute of Political History]. Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa. (SZOT) [Central Committee of Unions] Bér- és Termelés. [Dep. of Income and Production] 1949. 11/66.
- <sup>10</sup> PIL. SZKL. SZOT. Szoc.pol. [Dep. of Social Policy] 1949. 3/13.
- <sup>11</sup> PIL. SZKL. SZOT. Szoc.pol. 1950. 4/14.
- <sup>12</sup> PIL. 276. f. P.B. 1889. Az MDP Politikai Bizottsága 1954. december 6-i ülése. In: Belényi 1996: 123.
- <sup>13</sup> Datas from: Preisich 1998.
- <sup>14</sup> Történeti Hivatal. [Office of History, today Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Szaklevéltára]. O – 13582.
- <sup>15</sup> The combination, Yiddish in origin, means 'great prick' in both senses. The analogous Hungarian combination is probably earlier and lexical development to 'very stupid' and then 'fashion-mad' would have occurred in Hungarian (Benkő 1970: 258–9).
- <sup>16</sup> A debreceni jampec dalol [The Debrecen jampec sings.] Text published in the newspaper *Debreceni Független Újság*, February 12, 1933, 7.
- <sup>17</sup> Recollection by János B., March 26, 2001.
- <sup>18</sup> Sztálinvárosi Hírlap [Sztálinváros Daily] 20th October 1953, 2.
- <sup>19</sup> Sztálinvárosi Hírlap 31st December 1953, 5.
- <sup>20</sup> Sztálinvárosi Hírlap, 25th June 1954., 4
- <sup>21</sup> Sztálinvárosi Hírlap, 8th October 1954., 3.
- <sup>22</sup> Fejér Megyei Levéltár [FML]. Fejér Megyei Rendőrfőkapitányság iratai. [Fejér County Archive. Documents of Police of Fejér County]
- <sup>23</sup> FML. XXIII / 502. 16. d. 9th November 1959.
- <sup>24</sup> FML. XXIII / 502. 13. d. 27th December 1957.
- <sup>25</sup> FML. XXIII / 502. 16. d. 14th December 1959.
- <sup>26</sup> FML. XXXI / 18. Dr. Tirpák Endre ügyvéd iratai. 6. d. 6/17. Private letters.