By providing a survey of consumption and lifestyle in Hungary during the second half of the twentieth century, this book shows how ordinary people lived during and after transitions regime changes. After an introduction covering the late 1930s, the study centers on the communist era, and goes on to describe changes in the post-communist period with its legacy of state socialism.

Tibor Valuch poses a series of questions. Who could be called rich or poor and how did they live in the various periods? How did living, furnishing, clothing, leisure, and consumption mirror the structure of the society and its transformations? How did people accommodate their lifestyles to the political and social system? How did the regime impact consumption after the communist takeover, and how did consumption habits change after the demise of state socialism? The answers, based on micro-histories, statistical data, population surveys and surveys help to understand the complexities of daily life, not only in Hungary, but also in other communist regimes in East Central Europe, with insights on their antecedents and affinities.

“Anyone interested in the everyday life of workers, peasants and those belonging to the middle classes under communism will find a wealth of original insights in this inspiring book by Tibor Valuch, in particular regarding the emergence of a consumerist consumer society and the persisting social inequalities under communism. I find it particularly intriguing that he does not end his story with the end of communism but continues it into the post-communist era, which offers fascinating perspectives on the huge changes that in particular workers had to cope with in the period of massive deindustrialization that hit many industrial regimes in East Central and Eastern Europe.”

Stefan Berger, Ruhr University Bochum

“Tibor Valuch’s extraordinary book provides a revealing window onto how ordinary citizens experienced historic transformations during the once-socialist period and in the decade after its collapse. It deftlymarshalls an astonishing array of materials to tell this story, from state initiatives to the details of the consumer culture emerging in everyday life.”

Kosarina Fehér, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

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