Everyday Life under Communism and After

Valuch, Tibor

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Chapter Four

This Is How We Lived: Housing Conditions, Usage of Living Space, and Interior Decoration

The general characteristics determining housing and the state of urban housing

In the middle of the twentieth century, the housing situation in Hungary was worse than the European average as the level of comfort and furnishings found in Hungarian homes did not meet the European standards of the time. To best demonstrate this fact, statistics from 1939 reveal that out of nearly 270,000 apartments located in Budapest, only 50,000 had indoor plumbing, while 140,000 apartments lacked gas or electricity. A further ten thousand basement apartments were what more than twenty thousand people called “home.” According to data collected by the Hungarian Royal Office of Statistics in 1941, thirty percent of the inhabitants living in Szeged, one of Hungary’s larger cities, had to share one room with five or more people, a situation that affected approximately forty-one thousand people. These numbers alone testify to the low level of comfort and high density of people that characterized Hungary’s housing conditions throughout the 1930s and 1940s. As one of the most essential factors in determining everyday life, the issue of housing underwent noticeable changes in the second half of the twentieth century, a period during which the general trend demonstrated an increase not only in the number of apartments and houses, but also in the size of these structures. The comfort offered by these dwellings showed an overall improvement, a tendency which continued to grow after the fall of communism between 1989 and 1990; the post-communist era, however, also saw a sharp increase in the differences determining living conditions and the quality of housing available to those occupying a place at the top versus the bottom of society.

Throughout the 1950s, most homes were constructed in industrial centers and cities that had been fashioned after the state socialist
model. Since the populations of these areas grew at a rate that rapidly outstripped the number of available dwellings due to the forced speed with which industry was being developed, the density of people living within one residence continued to grow. While in 1949 there were 365 residents to every 100 apartments, by 1955 this number had risen to 373. Partially due to the housing shortage, the number of one-room homes also increased significantly. Similarly, 195,671 people were living in the 32,225 shared tenancies available in Budapest; in cities located elsewhere in Hungary, 95,358 individuals lived in the 15,009 apartments of this type.\(^1\) In the mid-fifties, out of Budapest’s 479,971 apartments, 4.7 percent had an area no larger than 10 square meters, while another 41.3 percent hovered between 11 and 20 square meters. A further 18.3 percent of apartments were between 21 and 30 square meters, meaning that two-thirds of the city’s housing consisted of homes that were smaller than 30 square meters in size, while at the same time only 8.6 percent of apartments could boast an area larger than 61 square meters.

In their study summarizing the data collected during a housing census taken on July 1, 1954, for usage by Hungary’s political leadership, the Central Office of Statistics’ (KSH) researchers emphasized the following:

> The growth in available housing is generally far behind the increase in population, thereby leading to a noticeable worsening of housing conditions. The number of “emergency” (a term used to describe businesses, workshops, cells, or other types of spaces that were turned into living areas)\(^2\) and shared apartments has risen significantly. During the period that has passed since the previous population census, the large number of dwellings that were either demolished or put to other uses has only exacerbated the situation.

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\(^1\) *Adatok és adalékok a népgazdaság fejlődésének a tanulmányozásához 1949–1955* (Budapest: KSH, 1957). The concept of shared tenancies or housing was “invented” during the first half of the 1950s and consisted of tenants who paid rent for the exclusive usage of one or more rooms in an apartment, while other spaces (such as the entryway, kitchen, and bathroom) were used by all the tenants. So as to mitigate the housing shortage that emerged following World War II, multiple families were moved into any larger-sized apartments, the space of which was parceled out among the residents. Shared tenancies were gradually phased out of usage beginning in the 1960s.

\(^2\) According to the terminology used in Hungary, any building or living space that had originally not been intended for residential purposes and was therefore essentially only suitable for protecting the inhabitants from the elements was labeled as an emergency residence or apartment.
At most, the current pace of the construction of residential structures can only match the natural increase in population: based on the national average, however, this pace remains lower than necessary, thereby leading to a further deterioration in housing conditions.3

Quite understandably, a study analyzing the housing situation that was prepared at the behest of the Patriotic Popular Front Committee for Housing Policies at the beginning of the 1960s only emphasized the positive trends that took place in the decade following 1945; in contradiction to the practice of the time, the examination surprisingly enough contained an evaluation of the difficulties found in various areas and the problems remaining to be solved.4 Among other issues, the fact was pointed out that the average number of rooms in a residence had only risen by a slight degree: in 1949, a home consisted of 1.4 rooms on average, a figure that was only 1.5 rooms per residence eleven years later. Other than this, the number and percentage of two- to three-room homes was only increasing at a remarkably slow pace. It must be mentioned that during this period construction could be accomplished either via state support or by raising the money and resources for building a home via private means. Taking advantage of state support usually involved—as I shall soon examine—living in a housing estate unit styled after the Soviet model, a privilege that was only accorded to those deemed to be worthy citizens of the state socialist system and therefore deserving of support based on the system’s approach to solving social issues. Private construction, the only other possibility, demanded that potential homeowners pool their financial resources, labor, and building materials in order to construct a house of their own. While, on the surface, state control during this period appeared invincible, in reality the number of privately-constructed homes was always higher than that of state-funded buildings. This peculiarity characterized the era’s housing issues until the middle of the 1970s, when the number of state-funded versus privately-constructed structures was roughly equal, meaning that out of the one hundred thousand apartment buildings erected in 1976, half were supported by the state while the other half resulted from private

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efforts. Yet another phenomenon related to this period is the fact that houses with multiple rooms were mostly built during the fifties and by private means. As far as home furnishings and fittings were concerned, other than the relatively quick spread of electricity, very little changed during the fifteen years that followed World War II, a situation that was particularly true in villages.

State-supported construction initially took the form of five-story cement structures designed as standardized neighborhood units or housing estates, the mass appearance of which fundamentally transformed cities and city life in Hungary, a country where the tallest apartment building had rarely exceeded four floors. Notwithstanding a handful of exceptions, these settlements were all located in cities and therefore had a far-reaching effect in altering urban behavior and lifestyles. By the 1960s, this type of housing solution enabled the construction of state-funded housing not only to accelerate, but also to become widespread. To pave the way for the state housing program, in 1962 the Hungarian government purchased the Soviet Union’s latest technology in housing construction, the technique of constructing six-, eight-, or even ten-story apartment buildings using mass-produced, prefabricated concrete panels that were used for structural elements as well as facades. This created the need for new factories producing these housing materials, as is clear from a report by the minister of construction:

In the interest of speeding up the construction of housing, eliminating the industry’s seasonal nature, increasing the demand for quality, and putting building materials to appropriate use, the third five-year plan intensifies its focus on getting house-building plants into operating order. One of the most significant steps made to this end will be to put the House-building Plant purchased from the Soviet Union into operation. Within the house-building plant’s system, tasks will primarily be performed on site and in nearly industrial-grade surroundings. Assembling and completing the buildings will essentially be possible on any day of the year, no matter the weather, and can therefore be accomplished at a regular rate. Currently the products and apartments manufactured by the House-building Plant have met with a number of objections. Worries have been specifically expressed regarding the 2.55-meter height of the walls and the 3.08-meter width of a room that is 18 m² in area. Since the construction of modern housing cannot be separated from the issue of modern furnishings, as the apartments are developed we will strive to replace individual wardrobes—as traditional pieces of furniture—with built-in cabinets. In reference to certain aspects,
the standard designs . . . deviate from the regulations laid out by the
National Building Code.\textsuperscript{5}

Various documents designated 1966 as the year for launching the
construction of large-scale, Soviet-type prefabricated panel houses.
In contrast to Hungary’s building code at the time, the height for
each story was to be 2.7 meters, which meant decreasing the inter-
nal height for the rooms to 2.5 meters. Contrary to the standards of
the time, the largest room in one-third of these apartments did not
reach the minimum size of 18 square meters. As far as the heating and
plumbing were concerned, “In accordance with the Soviet model,
the central heating and plumbing system does not necessitate the in-
stallation of gas meters for the cookstoves in each apartment. All one-
room apartments will include built-in furnishings, artificial light, and
interior kitchens equipped with their own ventilation system.”\textsuperscript{6} The
rationale behind these decisions was that modifying the equipment
shipped from the Soviet Union for mass-producing housing elements
would not only cost more, it would also delay the construction of
house-building plants for years to come. Other than supporting the
introduction of the Soviet Union’s latest technology in Hungary, it
was additionally reasoned that

based on both technical and economic indicators as well as on its technique
of execution, the prefabricated panel method of construction currently rep-
resents one of the most developed means for building known today and
can therefore completely satisfy the growing demand for housing that can
be built in a way that is both quick and inexpensive. (The allotted time for
construction is decreased by 50 to 60 percent while construction costs are
lowered by 8 to 10 percent in comparison to traditional methods.) . . . Our
country already commands the technical means necessary for introducing
the panel type of building method. The studies we have conducted and the
panel structures that have already been erected are ample proof of the fact
that—given proper technical and economic preparation—a significant pro-
portion of the housing construction program can be attained via the panel
construction method. . . . The advantages to the prefabricated panel construc-
tion method only appear in full if the necessary preconditions have been put
in place for guaranteeing the type of circumstances that truly approach those

\textsuperscript{5} Letter from Minister of Construction Affairs Rezső Trautmann to Vice-President of
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
entailing mass manufacturing. . . . Among other things, the panel construction method exclusively demands the building of larger, adjoining housing estates.\(^7\)

The apartments built in these housing estates were either small or moderate in size; two-thirds of these dwellings were located in structures made out of prefabricated concrete panels and categorized as either medium-high or high buildings. According to the description provided by a 1970 issue of the magazine *Lakáskultúra* (Interior Decoration), “numerous cities are seeing the hearteningly swift construction of hundreds or even thousands of apartment buildings made to the specifications of the Soviet-style house-building plant that has been in production for over a year now.”\(^8\) Populated on average by twenty to forty thousand people, these housing estates were initially established on city outskirts, but later crept closer and closer to occupy locations within urban centers. It was not uncommon for a city’s historical district to fall victim to this process of “modernization”; to mention just a few cases, Budapest’s oldest district, Óbuda, as well as the urban centers of Debrecen and Kecskemét completely lost their historical character. To make matters worse, neither those who commissioned the project, nor the contractors responsible for building these structures devoted any sort of attention toward ensuring that these new examples of “socialist” architecture would blend in with the older buildings already present in the surrounding area.

To cite one example, construction of the Derkovits housing estate in Szombathely, a city located in Hungary’s western region, began in 1961 on twenty-six hectares of land found north-west of the city. The majority of the structures established here belonged to the “medium block” category of apartments building and therefore consisted of only four stories equipped with central heating and topped with a flat roof. The plans, however, included designs for the construction of seven eight-story and one twelve-story structure; an eleven-story building (featuring a basement, a ground floor, and nine additional floors) was finally completed between 1964 and 1965, thereby representing the first appearance of a structure belonging to the medium-high category. The housing estate offered a total of 3,241 apartments,


\(^8\) *Lakáskultúra*, no. 6 (1970): 23.
of which more than half were two-room dwellings. Forty percent contained apartments with one-and-a-half rooms, while fifteen one-room and seventy-eight three-room homes could be found in the entire development, which housed a total of 11,740 people.9

The development of housing estates in Hungary’s cities rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. As happened in the cities of Kazincbarcika, Komló, Tatabánya, Ajka, Dunáujváros, and Ózd, industrial and residential areas were often placed far too close to one another, leading to situations in which inhabitants were exposed to the dangers of industrial pollution, not to mention the fact that constructing these housing estates significantly reduced the amount of land that could be utilized for recreational purposes. In choosing the sites for these developments, the factors determining the quality of lifestyle that would later be led by the estates’ occupants were mostly ignored. Since planning and construction also had to accommodate the restraints imposed by the existing city structure and the need to provide transportation, the housing estates built from the 1960s to the 1980s consequently presented a visually bleak image that was further compounded by a dismal lack of functionality.

A form that was generally no more than either a four-story rectangular shape lying horizontally or a ten-story rectangle standing vertically, these structures inevitably entailed very modestly sized apartments

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(54 square meters on average) and an atmosphere of visual and aesthetic monotony. Not only could very little furniture be placed in the minimal living space contained in a housing estate apartment, the type of furnishings that did fit in was also so unvaried in style and form that creating a visually diverse, stimulating interior—at least according to traditional taste—was virtually impossible. The spaces in these dwellings can be summarized as serving the purpose of maintaining basic, biological functions and no more: they were completely inadequate for conducting any type of social activity, such as holding family events, parties for friends, etc. Regarding the poor quality of life and living circumstances engendered by these Soviet-type prefabricated panel structures, the housing estates that were constructed during the 1980s with the aim of at least somewhat accommodating their surroundings (such as the Gazdagrét development found in Budapest) or presenting an image that was visually more stimulating, formally more exciting, and only contained a medium number of floors as opposed to towering over the city (the Tócó Valley housing estates in Debrecen) were the exception rather than the rule.10 “The massive construction projects being launched as a part of the third five-year plan have been conceived in the name of creating new city districts and housing factories. Between 1966 and 1970 thirty thousand apartments were built in Budapest with an average area of 51 square meters. . . . Ten-story structures are characteristic of this period, with each featuring express elevators, garbage chutes leading to incinerators, and ventilation systems. While designing the five-year plan, the idea to serve the population’s needs by including businesses, schools, and kindergartens in the construction of housing estates was also formulated.”11 In 1985, 1.6 million people lived in the 518,000 apartments found in the nation’s 408 housing estates.

10 In the case of housing estates, the fact that the apartment model they offered (two living rooms with full comfort) became widespread led to a significant improvement in the lives of many, particularly from the point of view that their construction was a relatively swift solution to increasing access to running water and bathrooms. The issue of what lifestyle improvements housing estates may have brought in areas other than basic facilities remains highly debatable. The social prestige held by housing estates changed vastly in the decades following communism and was dependent on factors such as location, construction, or the residents’ social characteristics and status.

By the end of the 1980s, the state-sponsored mass construction of housing projects had practically come to an end; no more standardized “panel” structures were built during the 1990s, although it cannot be forgotten that the concept of “humanized panel houses” appeared at this time. Compared to the previous style, this type had fewer floors and a peaked instead of a flat roof, turned the attic space into loft apartments, and attempted to create more aesthetic and livable spaces by using a greater variety of forms. Examples of this kind of structure can be found in the housing estates built in the Káposztásmegyer area of Budapest, or the units located on Vezér Street in Debrecen. Further attempts were made to apply panel construction techniques to family homes, an experiment that left its mark on houses found in Debrecen, Szeged, Szolnok, and Budapest. Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, the dreary forms fabricated in home construction factories were exchanged for homes that were built to reflect personal tastes while additionally accommodating either one or multiple families as an increasing number of family homes were being built instead of housing estates. The new millennium then saw the arrival of new kinds of housing developments constructed by private investors or
housing “parks,” a type of development in which a large tract of land is divided into individual plots that are then privately developed according to each homeowner’s taste and budget.

Other than satisfying Hungary’s massive need for homes, housing estates were also intended to speed up the process of improving social conditions by combining ideology with technology. For a time at least, the construction of housing units did succeed in establishing equal conditions among different social classes; this state, however, only lasted until the 1970s, when a process of differentiation began that gained increasing momentum throughout the 1980s. From this point on, a significant number of the apartments located in housing estates changed hands as all those who could afford to switched their units for better-quality homes. As a rule, the families who moved into the housing estates arrived from conditions that were far worse both financially and socially. It must also be emphasized that living on a floor in a multi-story building entails a markedly different way of life compared to that offered by the greater isolation found in a street of one-level family homes located in a small town or a village that
almost exclusively contains single homes. In every instance there was no close relationship, however, between the size of the town and the choice of construction: residential areas containing mostly family homes existed in great numbers throughout most of Hungary’s large and small cities or towns. In 1970, for example, 43 percent of Budapest’s population lived in a one-level home.

In the decades following 1945 the size of homes increased significantly as only one out of ten dwellings built before 1960 could boast of a floor plan that was 100 square meters or larger, a percentage that rose to be four times greater in twenty-five years. While one-room homes formed more than two-thirds of Hungary’s housing in 1949, by 1990 the highest percentage was for two-room homes. In other words, throughout this period the two-room model had become widespread, meaning that the average number of rooms found in a dwelling also increased. While one-twentieth of Hungary’s housing contained three or more rooms in 1949, by 1990 two-fifths of all homes had more than two rooms. The level of comfort, fittings, facilities, equipment, and furnishings found in Hungarian homes also underwent major changes in the decades following World War II.

Table 11. Changes in residential access to utilities and facilities from 1949 to 1995 (by percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indoor plumbing</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>89.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas lines</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to public water/sewage system</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathroom</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central heating</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As far as heating was concerned, wood-, coal-, or oil-burning stoves were gradually replaced by central heating or heating systems that utilized natural gas. Access to electricity became almost total, just as more than four-fifths of all homes had indoor plumbing, a toilet, and
a bathroom by the middle of the 1990s. In essence, access to public utilities remained the only area during this period to display a relatively lower level of dynamic development. In the first half of the 1950s, for example, out of Hungary’s sixty-two cities only fifty had their own water and sewage system. In the city of Pécs, 41 percent of residences were not connected to the city water system, a percentage that rose to 66 percent in the city of Szolnok. Not only were city water mains fairly crude, but by the 1950s the systems that were already in use had become outdated. Notable regional differences emerge regarding the facilities provided by Hungary’s homes as the percentage of fully-equipped dwellings was larger in the capital city and other large cities (with a population of one hundred thousand or more) compared to the level of amenities available in regions mostly dotted with small villages.

The level of urban housing that was available during this period was heavily influenced by the fact that a rather significant number of Hungary’s rural population had been moving into urban centers for decades, resulting in a constant lack of housing. The state socialist system placed residences within the category of social benefits; once housing fell under central administration and decision-making, the mechanisms used for reallocating homes or apartments created a vast degree of inequality due to the fact that housing policies showed an entirely different picture on paper than in practice. While in theory everyone had an equal chance of gaining access to housing, in practice the state only provided a significant level of support for urban housing, while rural housing remained neglected. Other than the financial support provided to encourage couples to have children (a program known as “social policy”), the opportunities available to rural families attempting to borrow money from banks for the purpose of building their own home in a village were far less favorable, as “nearly half of the nation’s population was not affected by the centralized housing policy.” 12 In 1981, 87 percent of those who gained access to a residence located in small communities either built, bought, or inherited their home. A directive issued in 1955 casts further light on the peculiar reality that emerged out of the period’s ideals regarding social equality: “In the interest of creating an appropriate appearance for cities, in cities the better-quality areas can be designated as

separate residential areas set aside for homes for those rewarded by the state on the basis of their merit (those decorated by the state, the recipients of the Kossuth Award, artists, scientists, etc.). It is compulsory to build houses that are architecturally higher in quality in these areas."

The issue of inequality was addressed in a proposal put forth by the Ministry of Building Affairs in 1962:

The essence of the issue that remains to be solved lies in the fact that the way in which different social levels of the population participate in the mutual grand social effort that is needed to realize the fifteen-year housing development program is disproportionate to one another. One part of society—mostly those with better means and a higher level of income—was able to gain or is currently gaining access to state-funded, low-cost tenancies without having to make any type of financial sacrifice. The rent for these apartments does not even cover the expenses the state expends for building maintenance; others are simultaneously forced to take on conditions that far exceed their financial capacity in order to have their own home, privately-owned apartment, or cooperative residence. . . . Nearly 90 percent of our urban population is a worker living on his or her own wages. The time when our entire population will be living on his or her own wages alone is not distant. While the principle of distribution according to labor has still not been perfectly achieved in our country, the difference among wage-earners is generally speaking not large enough to justify the need for them to satisfy their demand for housing based on such disparate financial circumstances. . . . According to our observations, the majority of wage earners who build their own home do not set aside the sum needed for the down-payment that precedes construction out of their working wage. Instead, it is usually due to some exceptional circumstance (selling their rural home, relatives sending money from abroad, inheritance, winning the lottery, etc.) that they manage to do so. Nor is the number of those who build homes based on sources of unverifiable and illegal income—marketeering or tips, for example—insignificant.

The inequalities that emerged in connection to the housing situation were noticeable throughout Hungary’s state socialist period and continued to grow. Once the Iron Curtain fell, this process of differentiation

13 The Kossuth Award was established in 1948 to commemorate the centenary of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. The award is the highest state award given to those who have made great achievements in the fields of Hungarian culture and science.


15 “Kiegészítések a ‘Lakáspolitikánk időszerű kérdései’ című előterjesztés tervezet- hez,” Az Építésügyi Minisztérium iratai, MNL OL, XIX-D-3-j. 6. d.
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sped up even more: in 2005 Hungary contained a total of 4,173,000 dwellings, a number that was 2.7 percent higher than what it had been in 2001. Within the same period, the percentage of occupied housing rose from 91.6 percent to 94.4 percent, thereby exceeding the number of 3,937,000 dwellings. The majority of these (32 percent) were located in villages, while 20 percent could be found in county seats; an additional 20 percent were in Budapest. The remaining 28 percent were spread throughout Hungary’s remaining cities.

Table 12. Housing and the number of residential homes, occupants, and density of occupants from 1970 to 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Residences</th>
<th>Occupied Residences</th>
<th>Occupants (in thousands)</th>
<th>For every 100 occupied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number (in thousands)</td>
<td>According to percentage from previous national census</td>
<td>Number (in thousands)</td>
<td>According to percentage from previous national census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>3,118</td>
<td>113.1</td>
<td>3,034</td>
<td>111.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3,542</td>
<td>113.6</td>
<td>3,417</td>
<td>112.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3,853</td>
<td>108.8</td>
<td>3,688</td>
<td>107.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>4,065</td>
<td>105.5</td>
<td>3,724</td>
<td>101.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>4,173</td>
<td>102.7</td>
<td>3,937</td>
<td>105.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>4,390</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>3,912</td>
<td>99.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Further detailed statistics regarding housing are provided by the 2005 microcensus, a smaller census prepared for the purpose of gathering representative statistical data between national censuses. These factors are primarily why I draw my data from this source. The volume in which the data gathered during the 2011 national census was published contains far less detailed information, Népszámlálás, 2011, vol. 3, Országos adatok (Budapest: KSH, 2013).
Together with the decrease in Hungary’s population, the increase by more than 200,000 residential dwellings led to an improvement in the indicator for the average density of people living in each home, which fell from 2.67 to 2.51. It should not be forgotten that this national average in effect disguises the remarkable differences that emerge when the issue is examined from the point of view of type of settlement, as the situation in Hungary’s large cities was far better than the average suggests. In Budapest, for example, there were only 213 inhabitants per every one hundred homes, while county seats had 240 inhabitants per the same number. While other cities and villages displayed much larger averages (262 inhabitants per every one hundred town dwellings versus 272 inhabitants per every one hundred village dwellings), the difference between these values was smaller.

This description of the changes in the amount of living space that has become available to Hungarians can be further refined by comparing the number of occupants found in each residence to the number of rooms. Between 2001 and 2005, the number of occupants for every one hundred rooms found in residential dwellings decreased from 103 to 95. The indicator for county seats (94) is even smaller compared to the national average, while the capital city offers the best conditions for its occupants given its indicator of 88. The average is slightly higher in Hungary’s other cities (96) and villages or smaller towns (97). According to this data, appearances suggest that every room has only one occupant. If, however, we examine how many occupants can be found per room, it can be seen that the average of one occupant per room is only true for 2,830,000 dwellings, in other words 72 percent of Hungary’s residences. A further 24 percent (955,000 homes) have more than one, but no more than two occupants per room, while the remaining 4 percent (153,000 homes) house more than two people per room, a condition that can be judged as relatively crowded. In Hungary the reality of housing two people per room is viewed as fairly acceptable: based on this premise, three people per a one-room, five per a two-room, or seven per a three-room home is overly crowded. Based on the data collected in the microcensus illustrated in the graph above, four percent (156,000 homes) fall into this latter category. Furthermore, eight percent of Hungary’s population (more than 825,000 individuals) reside in dwellings in which the density is above five; in these cases, it can justifiably be stated that these occupants are most likely dissatisfied with their housing conditions.
When analyzing the size of dwellings based on the number of rooms, it can be stated that no meaningful changes occurred between the 1990s and the 2000s. Although the percentage of two-room homes continues to be the highest (39.5 percent), when grouped together larger homes (containing three or more rooms) absolutely represent the majority at 50.4 percent. When assessed by size of community, the data continues to demonstrate percentages that approach those found on the national level. When working downward in the hierarchy of community size (from Budapest, the capital city, to the smallest villages), the percentage of small homes generally decreases while that for large homes increases. Without going into exhaustive detail, the following values reveal some discrepancies in comparison to the average: in the capital city, one-room homes can be found at 19.2 percent, a number almost double the national value of 10.1 percent. While this phenomenon can naturally be explained by historical factors, it must also be mentioned that the emphasis placed on the supply of housing in Hungary’s capital city has always played a definitive role. In county seats, the percentage of two-room homes (39.5 percent) is six percent higher, while in villages or small towns this indicator is five percent lower than the national average. In Budapest, the ratio of three-room (or larger) homes is five to six percent lower than the national average, while both values are far higher (at six and three percent, respectively) in small municipalities. These figures amply

demonstrate the fact that at least 100,000 to 110,000 dwellings are occupied by more than three people per room. Within this number, a little more than 70,000 homes have at least four people per room. In summary, from the point of view of the density of living conditions, a minimum of 500,000 individuals can be estimated as currently residing in the least favorable circumstances.

Table 13. Conditions in occupied residences based on number of rooms and occupants in 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupied by number of people</th>
<th>1-2</th>
<th>3-4</th>
<th>5-6</th>
<th>7-8</th>
<th>9 and more</th>
<th>Homes without occupants</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of rooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>308,098</td>
<td>51,653</td>
<td>9,175</td>
<td>1,508</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>25,560</td>
<td>396,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,050,044</td>
<td>402,321</td>
<td>59,734</td>
<td>5,848</td>
<td>2,223</td>
<td>36,245</td>
<td>1,315,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>622,887</td>
<td>531,185</td>
<td>120,132</td>
<td>14,774</td>
<td>5,087</td>
<td>21,113</td>
<td>1,315,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 and more</td>
<td>189,996</td>
<td>324,668</td>
<td>120,414</td>
<td>17,752</td>
<td>50,256</td>
<td>11,293</td>
<td>669,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,171,025</td>
<td>1,309,827</td>
<td>309,455</td>
<td>39,882</td>
<td>12,858</td>
<td>94,211</td>
<td>3,937,258</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Compared to the number of bedrooms, a home’s size presents an even more accurate measure of the realities and circumstances surrounding Hungary’s housing situation. Between 2005 and 2011 the mean national area for a residence in Hungary was 78 square meters, a sum that represented an increase of 3 square meters in comparison to 2001. While this does not signal a significant improvement, the fact that homes were increasingly being constructed with the aim of satisfying a certain level of quality must also be taken into consideration. One indication of this shift is the growing trend toward larger floor plans. When categorizing Hungary’s occupied residencies according to area, in 2001 the group representing the average (60–79 square meters) proved to be the largest at 23 percent. Based on data gathered in 2005, dwellings with an area larger than 100 square meters had already taken the lead (25 percent) and subsequently made up over 980,000 homes in Hungary, a phenomenon that obviously owed
much to the spike in home construction that occurred at the beginning of the new millennium. Based on the area of residential homes, the percentage for homes that are smaller than 60 square meters was the highest in Budapest and county seats (56 and 50 percent respectively), while dwellings in Hungary’s other cities and small towns or communities averaged between 60 and 99 square meters (45 and 50 percent respectively). In contrast to the size of the residence’s location, the percentage of homes with floor plans exceeding 100 square meters grows from 11 percent in Budapest to 37 percent in small communities, a phenomenon that indicates the need to take the factor of location into account when assessing the data for housing.

In 2011, 9.1 percent of residential homes had only one room, while 37 percent had two rooms, 33 percent had three rooms, and 21 percent had four or more rooms. The percentage of homes with more rooms is once again higher in cities that are not county seats as well as in small towns and villages. In Budapest one-room homes made up 17 percent, a figure eight percent higher than the national average, while in county seats this number was 9.3 percent, compared to 7.2 percent in other types of cities and 5.7 percent in small communities. The occurrence of two-room homes in Budapest and county seats was also higher compared to the national average. In other cities the number of homes with three or more rooms was well over 50 percent, a figure overshadowed only by the higher than 60 percent rate exhibited by small communities.

The average area for residential homes in 2011 was 78 square meters, a sum that had increased by 3 square meters compared to the average found in the population census of 2001. Similar to the increase in rooms, the change in larger floor plans was influenced by the number of newly constructed, larger dwellings resulting in a decrease in the percentage of smaller-sized homes and an increase of the figure for larger ones. The rate at which homes greater than 100 square meters in size have grown is particularly noteworthy: today every fourth home in Hungary belongs to this category.

In reference to the level of facilities and access to public utilities, the situation improved in the first half of the new millennium, but obviously at a slower pace following the nearly 90 percent rate of development reached between 1990 and 2001 in all areas except for access to municipal wastewater management and natural gas lines. It therefore follows that increased development is mainly observable in the areas of sewage and natural gas systems, which have grown
by 10 percent and 5.5 percent respectively since 2001. Improvements in public sewage systems can also be seen in the increased number of homes fitted with flush toilets, the percentage of which grew by 4 percent in under five years. The majority of occupied dwellings (57.7 percent) contain central heating, which saw a 3 percent rate of increase between 2001 and 2005. The facilities found in tenancies essentially display the same indicators as residential homes; a total rate of one- to two-percent is the extent of divergence between the two, to the benefit of residential homes.

The degree of comfort offered by homes also improved to a moderate extent. Based on the data, the number and percentage of better-quality, more comfortable homes rose. Between 2001 and 2005 the rate of residences possessing a full range of utilities and facilities rose by four percent. Although the category for homes displaying a full-comfort level also expanded, this growth only equaled one percent. Not only did the percentage of homes falling into the category of minimal comfort decrease, but the dwellings providing no comfort also fell by three percent. When evaluating these numbers, it must be mentioned that the homes built during the past few years have almost exclusively belonged to the full comfort category, while most of the dwellings that were liquidated exhibited a low level of comfort. Subsequently, Hungary’s growth in housing has primarily consisted of full-comfort homes, a factor that has contributed to raising the average level. This phenomenon also means that the percentage of homes in the lowest category most likely fell without decreasing in reality, as the number of these homes remained the same. Nor should it be forgotten that public utilities are generally available for those living in the very worst conditions, but their home may have been disconnected from the grid, a circumstance that housing statistics are not equipped to assess.

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17 According to the definition used by Hungary’s KSH, a dwelling is assigned to the “full comfort” category if it has at least one room exceeding 12 square meters, areas for cooking and bathing, a toilet, is heated by central means (which can either be municipal heating, a central system, or heat distribution system) while additionally ensuring electricity, water, hot water, and access to a sewage system. The heating for medium-comfort homes is different compared to full-comfort ones: instead of central heating, each room is heated separately. In half-comfort homes either a bathroom or a toilet is missing; out of all utilities, only electricity and water is ensured. Among the specifics listed for the other comfort levels in housing, homes with no comfort have at least one room, an area for cooking, and can be heated by some type of means. Temporary housing (issued by local or state governments in emergency situations) or other forms of similar housing cannot be included in any of the categories listed above.
Table 14. Level of comfort in residential homes, 1990–2011 (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Full-comfort homes</th>
<th>Medium-comfort homes</th>
<th>Half-comfort</th>
<th>No level of comfort</th>
<th>Temporary housing or other types of dwelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3,697,996</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>3,723,509</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3,937,258</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>4,390,302</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* calculated together with temporary housing or other types of dwellings

Between 2001 and 2011 the rate for homes falling into the two highest categories of comfort rose by ten percent; the number of dwellings belonging to the two lowest categories decreased by eight percent. During the period when Hungary was shifting toward a democratic political system, the number of temporary or similar types of dwellings totaled 133,000, a figure that rose by nearly 5,000 dwellings during the 1990s. In the first years of the new millennium, nearly 100,000 dwellings served as temporary housing. This statistic, however, provides more of an indication of the effects of plans regarding resettlement and community rehabilitation (or reurbanization), rather than demonstrating a genuine decrease in the number of individuals enduring the lowest level of poverty.

Together with size, construction, and form, the location where a dwelling is situated within a community also represents the owner’s social status. Housing’s function in representing social status has played an increasing role in post-communist Hungary. The first indication of this change can be traced to the latter part of the 1980s, when home architecture began to emphasize a metropolitan, bourgeois style imitating the villas that conveyed the image that a strengthening, prosperous middle-class desired to project of itself, even at the cost of occasionally falling into an alarmingly kitschy excess. Still present today, this form of self-representation took on an even greater hold beginning in the mid-nineties as privately-owned housing parks and developments containing new types of family or row houses presented
an alternative option for housing. In rarer instances, residential areas featuring three- or four-floor apartment buildings were also established. Throughout the 1990s, the monotonous architectural forms churned out by house-building plants were gradually exchanged for private homes or apartment buildings that reflected the owners’ personal taste. Instead of housing estates, construction increasingly took place in areas that had been intended for family homes.

A state of equilibrium simultaneously accompanied by a vigorous process of polarization can be observed in the changes that took place in connection to the facilities found in Hungary’s homes: while balance was achieved thanks to a more or less general increase in comfort levels, the ever-widening gap that grew between the well-off and those existing in deep poverty on society’s margins created a difference in conditions that soon appeared insurmountable. In the former case, owning a residence that was several hundred—or even a thousand—square meters in size and boasted every type of luxury facility that could be imagined was quite common; in the latter case, temporary housing, dwellings containing only one room and a kitchen, or a home with at most two rooms and perhaps access to public utilities was just as characteristic.

Table 15. Selected indicators demonstrating changes in Hungary’s housing from 1990 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>January 1, 1990</th>
<th>February 1, 2001</th>
<th>January 1, 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of homes (in thousands)x</td>
<td>3,853</td>
<td>4,065</td>
<td>4,303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-room (percent)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-room (percent)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three rooms or more (percent)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupants per 100 homes</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupants per 100 rooms</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to indoor plumbingxx (percent)</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With flush toilet (percent)</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With bathing facilities (percent)</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


x Combined data for occupied, unoccupied, and holiday residences

xx Including both homes connected to public water systems and those reliant on private water sources
Based on these statistics, it can be stated that following the millennium residential real estate experienced a slightly more dynamic period of growth. The ratio of number of rooms to every one hundred dwellings furthermore demonstrates a general improvement in the quality of living conditions, a fact supported by the decrease in the density of occupants per room. Another trend worth mentioning is the rise in homes possessing flush toilets and bathrooms, a phenomenon that began to gain momentum in the 1990s. In 2011, 98 percent of Hungary’s homes had running water; out of these, 96 percent were connected to municipal water utilities, while 2.2 percent drew from private water sources. Compared to the previous population census, the percentage of homes provided with indoor plumbing had grown by five percent. Similarly, five percent more residences had access to hot water as 95 percent of all homes could use hot water indoors.

Since 98 percent of occupied residences are connected to sewers, it can be said that the issue of wastewater management has been solved. The largest advance in developing the public sewage system occurred in 2001, when 56 percent of occupied residences were connected to public sewer systems. By 2011, this percentage had grown to 77 percent; currently, the percentage of homes that rely on their own septic system has decreased and is only 21 percent. Between 2001 and 2011 eight percent more homes had flush toilets, increasing this number to a total of 94 percent. In spite of these indicators regarding facilities, more than 90,000 homes had no access to either indoor plumbing or to municipal wastewater systems. Flush toilets or hot water was not found in more than 200,000 homes throughout Hungary. These circumstances further demonstrate the fact that a significant proportion of Hungarians belonging to certain social classes were still living in homes possessing a very low level of comfort and facilities during the years following the first decade of the millennium. The largest percentage of residences demonstrating the fewest facilities was found in the counties of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. While assessing Hungary’s housing statistics reveals that the number of bedrooms and access to facilities found in homes built during the post-communist period was generally high as more and more owners constructed dwellings with three, four, or even more rooms, this overall improvement tends to put a more positive spin on the facts connected to the actual situation surrounding living conditions in Hungary.
**Village houses, village dwellings**

From the end of the 1930s to the middle of the 1960s, very little changed regarding the housing conditions found in Hungary’s villages as interiors, furnishings, and facilities continued to follow traditions established in previous decades.知 as a “long” house in Hungarian, the traditional village house was usually built of brick, was situated perpendicularly to the street, and the floor plan was divided into either three or four spaces containing a room, a kitchen, perhaps a second room, and a storage room for foodstuffs.

Following the changes that took place in the first half of the twentieth century, after 1945 it grew increasingly rarer to build kitchens that had their own chimney, a traditional architectural element that allowed families to use a brick oven for cooking, baking, and heating purposes. Houses were designed to allow for the later addition of another room, storage room, or any structure necessary for agricultural reasons, such as a cellar, shed, pigsty, or henhouse. Practically speaking, the inner structure of residential buildings was remarkably similar in villages throughout Hungary. During the second half of the

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twentieth century, traditional modes of architecture not only became rarer, but construction materials also changed dramatically. Traditional tamped mud walls or homes made of sun-dried earthen bricks, were gradually replaced by brick dwellings, just as thatched roofs made of straw or reed were exchanged for tile roofs.

In the mid-fifties new standard designs were created for village dwellers as the Industrial Building Design Company was charged with planning homes that suited agricultural purposes in the form of a one room structures that could be expanded at a later date, or two-room structures. The area for one-room homes was set at 32 square meters while two-room dwellings were 41 square meters. These homes included electricity, were heated by a tile stove, and included a kitchen range for cooking; indoor plumbing and access to a municipal wastewater system, however, were not a part of the design. In one-room homes, the entryway, porch, bathing facilities, storage room, and kitchen with eating area were all contained in one space, while two-room homes separated the living area from the bedrooms. These plans did not prove to be very popular.

After the process of state collectivization drew to a close, the gradual move to unify construction methods was begun. As of the 1960s, these attempts to standardize architecture led to the practical disappearance of regional differences in Hungarian architecture. As the new fashion for square houses—“cube houses” as they are called in Hungarian—took hold, another room was added to the area that faced the street in traditional long houses and a hipped roof was raised above the walls (See Figures 35 and 38). Another characteristic move was to demolish the old house entirely and build a new, square house in its place based on a standard design that employed modern materials and included a hip roof.

When they first began to be built, these structures did not include any agricultural outbuildings; later, as the political system made allowances for small household farms and small-scale agricultural production, it became obvious that further areas would be needed for performing various farm tasks, processing and storing crops, and maintaining livestock. As a result, the square form originally used in the floor plan for this type of house gradually came to take on an L shape. Beginning in the 1970s, in many places a half-floor was

added to the building, which meant that ten or twelve steps had to be climbed to reach the bedrooms while the floor below was partially recessed below ground level. By doing so, homeowners gained a few extra rooms on the ground floor, such as pantries or storage rooms that could be used for agricultural purposes. It was also quite common for these buildings to feature a lower and an upper (summer and winter) kitchen, a solution that was in keeping with earlier styles. The total area occupied by these homes could reach anywhere from 150 to 170 square meters; the living area containing two to three rooms was usually 75 to 90 square meters. As another adjustment to the square house design, the construction of genuine two-level homes began to spread through villages at the end of the 1970s, resulting in structures that were no longer cube in shape, but rather rectangular cuboid. This period also marked the time when various construction methods for different kinds of multi-story homes were introduced to Hungarian villages, including the two-story A-frame type of house usually found.

*Figure 35. Floor plan for a “square” house. Based on Balassa, *Magyar Néprajz*, vol. 4, *Életmód*, 384.*
in the Alps. In these homes the loft area under the eaves was usually turned into living space, thereby creating three levels and making way for a separate living room. The total usable floor space found in this type of home commonly reached 200 square meters.

Between 1949 and 1960 the housing conditions found in smaller communities or villages only improved slightly in that the percentage of traditional mudbrick homes decreased while the average number of rooms found in a rural home increased. The level of facilities found in homes throughout the fifties, however, barely showed any noteworthy change. A community health survey conducted between 1958 and 1959 in four villages located in Baranya County—Berkesd, Ellend, Pekesd, and Szilágy—revealed that all of the homes were without exception old buildings that followed the traditional design of two windows on the building’s street-facing façade, with a long side-porch running the length of the building. Nearly nine-tenths of the homes had been built of mudbricks, with homes built of brick or stone occurring at an average that was only slightly more than one-tenth. Residential buildings usually had two rooms, or three rooms in rare instances. A kitchen and a room for food storage was also included, with a summer kitchen frequently found somewhere on the property:

According to the general, village custom, most of the living spaces remain unused. The room facing the street, the so-called clean room, is only used for special occasions. The family usually spends most of its time in the kitchen, or in the living area that also serves as a kitchen following the installation of a cooking range. The living areas are usually 3.5 meters by 4 meters in size, or 4.5 by 5 meters. The ceilings are around 2.6 meters high, but there are some that are lower. Compared to the size of the rooms, the windows are small, especially in old buildings. Seventy-five percent of the living areas have dirt floors; we only found covered floors in 15 percent of homes. Cement slab floors have recently gained in popularity because they are easier to clean and inexpensive, but we do not recommend this solution for reasons of health.

21 In more well-to-do traditional peasant homes, the room that looked onto the street was reserved for representational purposes and only used in rare cases, such as when important guests (for example the village priest) visited the home. Known as the tisztszoba (clean room) in Hungarian, the closest equivalent to this custom would be the parlor found in nineteenth- or early twentieth-century farm homes.
22 Kienle and Kun, “Négy Baranya megyei község.”
Wastewater disposal and the lack of outhouses also posed serious health problems:

In our communities the hygienic management of rubbish, manure, and human waste remains unsolved. Household waste is usually scattered about the yard. In some instances, the final resting place for garbage is a manure pile placed not very far from the house itself. Management of manure or its placement remains unsolved. Once hauled from stables or sties, the manure is habitually gathered into a pile. Here, it is constantly washed away by precipitation and therefore loses some of its fertilizing value while the wastewater flowing down from hills frequently pollutes the water in wells that were often not constructed properly. The situation is further worsened by the fact that manure piles also contain human waste since the management of human waste also remains unsolved. Roughly ten percent of the homes found in these villages have no outhouse at all, while the ones that do exist are unacceptable from the point of view of hygiene. Due to the factors listed above, manure and human waste are easily accessible to flies and pollution of the groundwater is also possible. With time, the decomposed manure and human waste can become air-born and pollute the air as well. In our villages the water supply is ensured by wells found in the yards of houses. Most of these hand-dug wells bring water to the surface via side-wheels or a well sweep. Due to faulty walls in the well shaft or defective covers, most of the wells with pumps are not acceptable for health reasons either. The majority of wells were placed at the lowest part of the yard; since the stables and manure pile are located at a higher point, wastewater from these areas flows toward the well. In many places the well is immediately next to the stable or animal pens. Due to the lack of a surrounding wall or the well’s bad structure, it is possible for surface water to trickle into the wells.\textsuperscript{23}

For homes located outside of the main community, the situation was even worse than that found in villages as the lack of plumbing or sewer drains fundamentally influenced the quality of life. True changes in this area only began to take effect during the 1970s. At the end of the 1960s, fairly large differences in access to municipal utilities could still be observed: to mention one example, while 53 percent of the homes found in towns located in Komárom County had plumbing, the same facility was only found in eight percent of homes in Szabolcs-Szatmár County. Only five percent of residences located in Hajdú-Bihar County could say the same.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
Although the process of introducing electricity to rural communities was completed in 1966, this does not mean that the electrical lines reached every home in every community. Naturally, gaining access to electricity improved living conditions while also accelerating the changes that were occurring in daily lifestyles. Among other things, electric power made housework easier, thereby altering the order in which daily activities were conducted. Thanks to electricity, devices for modern mass communication gained ground throughout the nation, resulting in changes in how culture was consumed. Electricity also enabled the introduction of other types of utilities: without electricity, installation of essential devices like electric pumps or water
tanks (that could be used to heat water) would have been impossible. During the 1960s, these changes barely made their influence felt as they only became present in mass proportions in the following decade.

In 1960, Hungary’s smaller towns and communities contained 1.57 million residences that were home to 5.8 million individuals with an average of 363 people per every hundred dwellings. Based on data collected in the 1960 census, 57 percent of the nation’s residential buildings (60 percent of Hungary’s housing) were situated in villages. In under ten years the number of village homes rose to 1.69 million. The low level of living conditions village homes provided compared to the average at the time is amply demonstrated by the fact that there

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were only 131 rooms to every 100 homes. This figure reflects the reality that a definite majority of village dwellings only had one room at the beginning of the 1960s, at a time when the process of state collectivization was simultaneously occurring. Due to the lower number of rooms and higher number of family members, the density of people per room was generally higher for rural homes compared to urban ones. In 1970, based on the occupation of the head of the household, the density found in the homes of those who did non-agricultural physical labor was the highest, with 366 people per every one hundred rooms. In the case of agricultural workers, this figure was only 351, yet it cannot be forgotten that their homes also provided the fewest facilities. In 1970, for example, only 2.3 percent of residences in which the head of the household worked in agriculture had a flush toilet, while 5.1 percent had indoor plumbing and 78.9 percent had electricity. Throughout the decade the density of occupants found in rural homes decreased, even if at a rate that was slower compared to the national average. Other than the gradual increase that occurred regarding the size of homes and number of rooms found in newly-built residences, this trend was further influenced by the demographic factors of emigration and the average decrease in the number of children being born. During the 1960 census 600,000 mudbrick or mudwalled dwellings were recorded. The majority of rural homes (93.5 percent) fell into the category of having no comfort, while the percentage of homes with comfort totaled 2.5 percent, and 4 percent of residences belonged to the half-comfort category. Although these indicators of available facilities improved somewhat by 1970, genuine change only occurred during the following decade.

Table 16. Occupied residences distributed by facilities and size of community in 1970 (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Full comfort</th>
<th>Half-comfort</th>
<th>No comfort</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small towns/villages</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to the conditions regarding facilities, the floor space found in rural homes increased during the 1960s. According to data from 1970, in under ten years the number of one-room homes decreased by 202,000 while the figure for two-room homes rose by 264,000. A significant amount of growth was also seen in homes with three or more rooms: from 44,000 in 1960, the number for this type of dwelling rose to 140,000. Naturally, this shift does not mean that the construction boom in new residences was responsible for each case since rural housing only increased by 160,000 dwellings throughout the decade. Instead, these numbers indicate the influential role played by home renovation, additions, and remodeling in improving the rural housing situation. At the beginning of the 1970s, however, between 53 percent and 59 percent of the rural homes located within the counties found in Hungary’s Great Plain region (Csongrád, Békés, Bács-Kiskun, and Hajdú) were still one-room dwellings. It can therefore be concluded that the growth in the number of rooms per home was due to both the renovation of older structures and the fact that the majority of newly-built residences were designed to contain at least two rooms.

Table 17. Number of rooms in rural residences between 1949 and 1970 (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>One room</th>
<th>Two rooms</th>
<th>Three or more rooms</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The average width of a traditional house was between six and seven meters while the length was fourteen to sixteen meters. Other than the basic floor plan that separated the building’s space into three areas, a style of home known as the “middle-class peasant” type of structure was also characteristically found during the mid-twentieth century. Although the width for this kind of home did not deviate much from the previous type, four or more rooms were included in the plan along with a porch; the length of the house was usually nine to ten meters longer than a traditional dwelling. In traditional homes, plank flooring was used in rooms while other areas had tamped earthen
or—in rare instances, such as in the homes of wealthier peasants—tile floors. Following the changes that occurred in the first half of the century, during the postwar period it was not common to have a kitchen with its own chimney and brick oven; by the end of the 1940s, this feature was removed from most homes throughout Hungary. After converting the chimney space into a part of the attic, tile stoves and iron-lidded cookstoves replaced the brick ovens that had once played an essential role in providing a means for both cooking and heating. Beginning in the 1970s, gas stoves were used instead. The installation of indoor plumbing was another important issue for the renovation of old homes. By the 1970s, it had become common for newly constructed houses to include plumbing, though due to the uneven quality of the community’s available infrastructure it was not unheard of for the bathroom and the toilet to be completed long before access to the town water system could be attained. Rural homeowners also had to accept a far greater role in financing the development of a municipal water, waste, and natural gas network than urban homeowners did.

Other than the appearance of newly constructed homes, traditional-style peasant homes also remained a part of a community’s architectural make-up, although to differing degrees depending on the given region. “In the case of newly renovated peasant houses,” according to a study on interior design habits, “two solutions are used for modernizing the structure. Either the building’s original plan is kept with the addition of a larger kitchen and bathroom, or the addition is placed at a right angle to the original building.” What fate awaited traditional structures was not only determined by building trends, changing habits, or different social expectations occurring on the micro-level, but also by the structure’s condition. If the original building was in good shape, renovation was more common. If, however, the structure could not be used for further construction, it was demolished. In most cases renovation also involved increasing the number of rooms. The storage room was frequently converted into a bathroom and the house’s rectangular floor plan was changed into an L-shape. The kitchen and the bathroom often ended up next to one another not only because the storage room was used to add a bathroom to the house, but also because bathing had customarily been done in the kitchen. Larger windows were installed, thereby increasing the amount of light entering these renovated peasant homes.

Similarly, the addition of electricity, plumbing, and a septic system also increased the dwelling’s level of comfort. Increasing the amount of living space generally entailed decreasing the space used for agricultural purposes or altering the original usage of this area; when modernizing older homes possessing a traditional porch running the length of the building, it became popular to wall in the porch area and turn it into a hall or storage area.

Long houses had originally been designed and built so as to allow homeowners to add new rooms, storage areas, or outbuildings to the structure at a later date. While different regions had their own architectural features and characteristics, home interiors were strikingly similar throughout Hungarian villages everywhere. These village homes “made new” looked out on the street through wide, double windows. Previously used to store wheat, corn, smoked meats, or other agricultural products, the attic lost its relevance regarding farming. The courtyards of modern village homes, however, preserved their connection to the material world of peasant farming, even though some major changes occurred in this aspect as well. In many cases the stable was replaced by a garage while the shed was converted into a workshop.

It must not be forgotten that before collectivization, the demands placed by agricultural production and a family’s focus on fulfilling these requirements were the primary factors in determining a dwelling’s size, how it was separated into different areas, its interior arrangements, the courtyard’s functionality, and the placement of any additional outbuildings. Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, the floor plan, location, and lack of agricultural outbuildings reflected how newly built homes were intended to fulfill a different function: as family life centered less and less around agricultural production, the issue of comfort and convenience came to the forefront. Just by their appearance, the swift spread of square houses featuring hip roofs clearly demonstrated the extent to which Hungary’s social and economic circumstances had changed, thereby ushering in new forms of lifestyles. This change remained influential until the agricultural role played by the farming of household plots and small-time agricultural production began to gain traction, opening the path for villagers to access new sources of (semi-legal) private income.

In spite of these alterations, most village dwellings continued to feature a courtyard that was intended for agricultural purposes. (It must be mentioned that in Hungary cellars, stables, sheds, and animal
pens were generally added on as a continuation of the house itself; technically speaking, these are not outbuildings since they are not always a separate structure.) Whatever stables, animal pens, or agricultural equipment that remained in the family’s keeping following collectivization and the social changes that occurred as peasant farmers were forced to join the workforce became an inseparable part of the double function these individuals fulfilled. Whether as employees who worked by day at state-run companies and continued to farm small, household plots in their free time and on weekends, or as employees who also established their own small-time businesses “on the side,” by the beginning of the 1970s it became obvious that a vast proportion of newly constructed homes had retained some form of agricultural function. While this function differed from the way agricultural production had been conducted before collectivization, it continued within certain restrictions, a phenomenon that is best demonstrated by the way in which agricultural outbuildings were continuously added on to new homes, yet constructed with shorter and shorter interior heights that ultimately made the resultant structure less conspicuous.

In the beginning, most new homes were only one level, even though homes with half-stories or an entire first floor were built in hill regions. Originally rather puritan in form, various decorative elements (pedestals, columns, terraces) gradually created an aesthetically less rigid appearance. In the case of a new home, as of the mid-seventies it became increasingly common to include the work areas, workshops, garages, toolsheds, or storage rooms necessary for the jobs many villagers took on to supplement their main income. This phenomenon eventually fueled the spread of one- or two-story homes. Rather than bringing about the strict uniformization and standardization of rural dwellings, the housing policies and programs introduced during Hungary’s state socialist era resulted in an amalgamation of styles, structures, and aims that indelibly altered the appearance of villages while also preserving the effects of certain political and social pressures rural families faced during the postwar period.

Whether a house was renovated or abandoned in favor of constructing a new one also depended heavily on a family’s generational make-up and financial circumstances. During the 1960s and 1970s, members of the oldest generation usually had to be satisfied with either renovating their home or only making a few additions since the trifling pension they received for their few years of work on the col-
lective farm did not allow for any kind of more substantial alteration. Older homeowners, for example, were generally more likely to modernize the appearance of their home’s façade by changing the front windows; more extensive renovations or the construction of a new house were more characteristic of middle-aged or young homeowners who had access to more stable incomes. Since home construction was a venture that demanded the largest form of investment allowed at the time, a minimum of two incomes, reliable financial circumstances, and—in the case of young homeowners—the strong support of parents as well as an extensive network of relatives was needed.

At times the construction regulations and architectural approach that characterized the era influenced how living spaces could be developed, or even made it far more difficult to achieve the kind of dwelling a homeowner wanted. According to the prevailing concept that dominated the early 1970s, most designers aimed to minimize living space based on the size of the family that would later occupy the home. This habit of calculating a design based on a minimal amount of living space also influenced how the requirements for granting credit were set as any homeowner desiring to build a dwelling that was larger than the area deemed legitimate was either refused credit or only given credit based on far less favorable conditions. Since housing remained one of the most unsolved—and therefore most serious—issues during Hungary’s state socialist period, a significant number of families understandably tried to build a new home that would fulfill the needs of their growing or future children. Many homeowners subsequently overstepped the requirements regarding size that had been laid out in the era’s laws.

As lifestyles changed, this shift also immediately expressed itself in a departure from traditional forms of home construction. Building a new house provided homeowners with the opportunity to demonstrate their changed social status; whether this included a genuine or only presumed increase in rank within the local context, the intent to distance oneself from the outer trappings of a peasant lifestyle was clear. Access to quality building materials and the abundance or perhaps lack of financial resources were also factors in determining what mode of construction could be adopted. In reality, the desire to gain access to the basic elements of a civilized life—clean water, indoor plumbing, sanitation, electricity—was the driving force behind the wave of home construction that swept through Hungary’s rural communities at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.
Taking on this type of task required monumental effort: compared to city dwellers, those living in rural communities were practically forced to organize their own labor and finances in order to alter their living conditions and environment.\(^{25}\)

Other than financial restrictions, the quick spread of the square house design was fueled not only by changing social conditions and the creation of standard designs, but also by the current trends and fads of the time, which were often reinforced by whatever local mason the homeowner was able to entrust with building the new structure. It must not be forgotten how many individuals truly believed at the time that ridding their environment of all the outer appearances and forms that—to them—spoke of the toil and frequently miserable conditions experienced in the peasant lifestyle of the previous decades would truly “liberate” them of this past. Beyond this compulsion to reject (either completely or only partly) a traditional housing type that reflected the norms of Hungary’s historical peasant class, these new homes also indicated attempts to imitate an urban lifestyle and the desire to rise within the social hierarchy.

From the point of view of architecture, an important change was that—in contrast to the way that traditional peasant homes allowed other views and aspects of the village to remain visible—square houses, according to a contemporary study on village housing, “stifle natural spatial elements as the addition of another floor allows their bulk to rise above them, thereby narrowing and enclosing the image of the entire street. This wall-like enclosure becomes particularly oppressive and confining when new houses have been built directly on the edge of the sidewalk, without any bit of an area left for a flower garden in front of the house, or in places where no space for a yard or garden was left between houses, thereby leading to streets featuring dense groupings of two-floor block houses.”\(^{26}\)

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\(^{25}\) As a result of the shortage economy that existed, it was extremely difficult for a private citizen to obtain construction materials which were primarily earmarked for state-funded building projects. This circumstance explains the spread of corruption through brick factories and construction yards where “customers” could only gain access to the necessary bricks, tiles, or other materials by bribing one of the employees. Other than the standardized designs used at the time, the difficulty in obtaining construction materials was another factor in determining the very similar outer appearance of the square houses built in the 1960s. Homeowners tried to relieve the resultant visual monotony by adding some form of decoration, such as a different type of plaster or a custom-made fence.

and the limited opportunities offered at the time, another component in the dominant appearance of square houses throughout Hungary’s countryside lies in the fact that many of the initial standard designs for these square-shaped structures were included in propaganda booklets that provided information on the requirements for receiving a loan from the state bank, OTP. Touted as the cheapest form of structure, these illustrations of very similar buildings were disseminated via the credit application process. In many instances, neighbors simply borrowed plans from one another; following a few changes, these were routinely accepted by the building authority. The technical restrictions imposed by the limited selection of construction materials, fittings, doors, and windows further emphasized the relatively monotonous image projected by these structures. The final result was not primarily due to a lack of consumer demand for quality or taste, but rather lay in the interplay of a variety of combined factors that reinforced one another and consequently led to the emergence of a rather unimaginative conceptualization of a “modern” village.

Both local and national authorities paid close attention to these changes in an attempt to guide the building plans selected by homeowners. In 1972, the Bács-Kiskun County Committee as well as the Ministry for Building Affairs and City Planning announced a national public competition for “the acquisition of design ideas for the construction of the types of home that primarily suit the needs of the nation’s farming population.” As a requirement of this design competition, submissions were expected to present ideas that would take into consideration the special requirements of those working in agriculture while also allowing for the creation of modern living conditions. When formulating the terms for acceptable designs, the competition committee worked on the assumption that village homes would continue to combine living space with the need to fulfill an agricultural role; even if farming was done at a much reduced level compared to what it had been before collectivization, small-time agricultural production had not come to a complete halt due to the farming of household plots and other supplementary activities. This factor explains why submissions were to contain “designs for out-buildings that architecturally harmonized with the structures used as dwellings.”

The homes were furthermore to be either one level

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or have only one floor and contain an area no larger than 80 square meters for a four-member family or 100 square meters for a six-member family. Larger homes also had to be suitable for the coexistence of multiple generations. The requirements for each home design contained a combined kitchen and dining area, a bathroom large enough for an electric washtub and spin dryer, and a separate toilet. The projected outbuildings that were attached to each category all included a summer kitchen, pens for raising farm animals, storage areas for implements and firewood, and a garage. The competition organizers emphasized the importance of keeping in mind the fact that “construction must usually be solved on a private basis.” The inclusion of electricity and plumbing was listed as a general expectation.

How housing plots were used changed along with the transformation in housing types since the significant changes brought about by collectivization fundamentally influenced the lifestyle alterations that were emerging throughout the 1960s. Numerous elements related to the characteristically close relationship between nature and rural life still remained present:

Just as workers employed in industry have appeared in villages, so has the lifestyle of agricultural workers also changed thanks to the industrialized and centralized management of collective farming. . . As certain functions disappear, areas of land are becoming superfluous exactly at the moment when new needs are making themselves known (such as storage for vehicles), which can be solved by razing unused outbuildings, building new ones, or keeping the existent structure and adapting it to a new function. . . While front gardens are still found, they are increasingly put to use for growing flowers, just as the courtyard has taken on combined functions as an area for traffic, keeping animals, or other types of usages. The back garden is furthermore used for growing vegetables or fruit trees.28

In her examination of Békés County in the early 1970s, Ágnes Losonczi attempted to answer the question of what elements comprised the ideal rural home.29 Slightly more than half of those surveyed answered that a family house with a small garden represented their ideal home, while one-fourth would have preferred a family house with a large garden. Every tenth participant chose the type of multi-story apartment building preferred by tenants, while the rest emphasized

29 Losonczi, Az életmód az időben, 426–29.
the advantages of a villa-like house. The housing estate apartments that were so characteristic of this period were far from being held as the ideal home. In their aim to adopt “citified” habits, Hungary’s rural population primarily chose the urban, lower middle-class lifestyle as their model, which meant a family home and an improved level of comfort in their living conditions. Owning a family home and surrounding garden not only bolstered the continued existence of the mentality regarding private ownership, it also provided enough land for maintaining a kitchen garden that subsequently played a large role in sustaining the family’s access to food and additional income.

In the village of Atkár located in Heves County, the seventy homes built between 1960 and 1980 can be placed into two categories based on their floor plans: the one type was a local interpretation of the usual square house containing two to three rooms, an entryway, kitchen and either space for a future bathroom or an actual bathroom in 80–130 square meters of space. The other was a multi-story structure influenced by urban designs that reached 150 square meters or more in area. Oil heating was most common in both cases: “Homeowners who follow urban norms consciously set their family homes apart
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from the city’s ‘teeny-tiny’ apartments and are proud of how spacious their homes are, yet still take the city as their example when it comes to the comforts that they want.”

As of the 1970s, rural families were building homes that displayed many kinds of style elements, reflected their financial position, and served the purpose of bettering their living conditions.

For those without a home: apartments for rent, beds to let, and work dormitories

Combined with the constant housing shortage, the population migration that was occurring within Hungary led to a heightened demand for rental apartments, a bed that was “let out” for a given amount of time, or a place in any of the various forms of accommodation that were available. In the mid-forties, the number of tenants found in cities located outside of Budapest was 90,000, with an additional 45,000 renting beds. In the summer of 1954, 127,000 people were living as tenants in Budapest, while 43,000 were renting beds. Based on data collected by the KSH, at the same time “eleven thousand more businesses, workshops, warehouses, cellars, etc., were being used as dwellings by a total of thirty thousand more individuals compared to the statistics gathered on January 1, 1949.”

In Budapest, 55,000 people lived in workers’ dormitories, a figure that was 43,000 for the rest of Hungary’s cities. Two-thirds of the residences that rented out beds only had one room, a fact that indicates the owner or lease-holder was facing poverty as well and used this method to supplement his or her income. Due to the housing shortage and the mass emigration of people from the countryside to Budapest, any type of lease (whether an apartment or a bed) was rather expensive, particularly in comparison to the average monthly wage. In the capital city it was not uncommon for a room to cost three hundred to four hundred forints a month (or perhaps even more), a sum that was equal to two-thirds of the average monthly wage. To offer a means of comparison, it must be mentioned that the monthly rent for a one-room apartment with


a kitchen located in a building owned by the local Property Maintenance Company only cost 58.6 forints a month, as opposed to 111.3 forints a month for a two-room apartment.32

At the beginning of the sixties, over 80,000 tenants (leasing either an apartment or a bed) were living in nearly 50,000 rentals in Budapest, a figure that was roughly the same in the rest of Hungary’s cities. Primarily due to the expanded capacity of workers’ dormitories, during the following decades the number of those leasing a bed fell steadily; the demand for sub-leases, however, did not diminish as housing shortages and the need to travel farther away for work opportunities continued to influence the housing situation. At the beginning of the 1980s, three to five percent of Hungary’s population was living in a sub(let) apartment.

Renting an apartment or a bed continued to be expensive compared to wages and tenants had no choice but to accept whatever demands or rules the owner or leaseholder made regarding either the tenant’s behavior or usage of the apartment. In many places written “rules of the house” were hung up on a wall and prohibited things like inviting visitors to the apartment, smoking, or in some cases even the use of the kitchen. Usage of the toilet and bathroom was also strictly regulated. Depictions of the relationship between a tenant and his or her shrewish, nagging landlady abounded in humor sketches of the time.

In accordance with the social policies followed by large companies at the time, the employer usually provided temporary lodgings for employees who had to commute from farther away or gave some form of financial support toward their living expenses. In the city of Ózd, some of these commuting workers were able to get a place in the factory barracks while others were given “quarters,” which meant paying rent for a bed and modest provisions.33 A third group

32 Following the communist takeover of Hungary, beginning in 1952 all buildings containing multiple apartments were, according to the law, “apartments that exceed the permitted size and number of rooms for a justifiable housing need” and were therefore placed under state control. Consequently, the number of state-owned apartments rose significantly, particularly in cities. In villages most homes remained privately owned because their size and number of rooms were smaller. State-owned property maintenance companies, called Ingatlankezelő Vállalt (IKV), were responsible for leasing and maintaining these state-owned properties.

33 From the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century Ózd was one of the centers for iron-smelting and metallurgy in Hungary. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Ózd Ironworks Factory employed 14,000 people. Beginning in World War
had no choice but to walk or bicycle ten to twenty kilometers a day to get to work as the available capacity in workers’ dormitories had already proven insufficient in the 1940s. Due to overcrowding and crude sanitation, living conditions at the workers’ dormitories in Ózd were truly poor. This situation did not change much between the 1940s and 1950s. Following an inspection held jointly by the police, the factory operation committee and its committee for social affairs, and employees from the Center for Heavy Industry in August 1947, the following results were described in the subsequent report:

we had six women handed over to the vice squad; one was arrested for selling the fifty liters of wine illegally (we confiscated the fifty liters) on the dormitory premises. Ten men were handed over to the police’s public order department because they had not been issued a residential permit by the police and could not certify their presence in the dormitory. We reached the conclusion that conditions truly are unbearable in the dormitory. There is no supervision, no organizing committee, and no form of registry is kept of the residents. The level of filth and squalor found in each and every room is unspeakable: the rooms are vermin-infested and a suitable list of regulations had not been posted anywhere. Women and men lay in the same room (in the same bed) and in many cases two or even three men share one bed, or at least a sleeping place that is used as a bed. The kitchen and dining area are in utter squalor. The lavatories are so filthy as to be unusable.... According to the residents’ opinions the company is required to provide free living quarters and they are not required to maintain cleanliness or pay rent; indeed, it must be said that they are not asked to contribute toward their living expenses.34

In an attempt to improve the situation in workers’ dormitories, the NIK (Nehézipari Központ, Center of Heavy Industry) directed the factory operations committee to arrange for order to be established in the dormitories. Monetary aid was granted for completing construction of the new workers’ barracks that had been started in 1947 and

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designed to contain room for two hundred beds. The largest workers’ dormitory, the Hétes Barrack, was renovated and new workers’ dormitories were built during the following years. By the end of the 1950s, the factory operated six dormitories—with a total of 764 beds—for its employees. The conditions at each barrack were quite varied and included anything from barracks with sleeping quarters for thirty to forty people at a time to hotel-like buildings with only four beds per room. According to the plans of the Ózd City Council, “The Béke dormitory will have room for four hundred beds, out of which eighty have already been occupied. Construction of the workers’ dormitory must be completed by the fourth quarter, in April 1960. Once the dormitory is in operation, we will have provided the iron foundry’s workers with the type of civilized, modern living quarters that is worthy of representing the speedy advances being made in our social and cultural life.” In 1960, the cost of operating the workers’ dormitories equaled 2.2 million forints, thirty-five percent of which was covered by the fees paid by the workers themselves.

Throughout the entire nation, the effort to develop a network of workers’ dormitories sped up during the 1950s as the system’s contrived push to increase industrial development increased the demand for workers, who in turn were forced to work in places that were too far away for them to commute from their permanent residence. Most of the dormitories built at this time were fairly simple and only provided a primitive level of comfort, if any at all. Those who built the new industrial town of Sztálinváros or worked at the ironworks spent years living in barracks; the situation was similar in other industrial cities. The deplorable conditions were also reported on in a contemporary weekly:


36 During the period when the communist system rose to power, “socialist cities” were created in which urban spaces that reflected “a collectivist attitude” were established around either an old or a new industrial center. In Hungary a village located on the Danube, Dunapentele, became the center for the nation’s largest ironworks, around which a new city was erected in reflection of the era’s ideological and political requirements. This city was named Sztálinváros, or Stalin-City. See Sándor Horváth, Stalinism Reloaded: Everyday Life in Stalin-City, Hungary (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017). See also Sándor Horváth, A kapu és a határ: Mindennapi Sztálinváros (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2004).
“Take a look at the Lepers’ Colony, comrade,” they say, “and you’ll understand right away why we’re dissatisfied.” “Lepers’ Colony” is what we call the women’s dormitory. . . . The women’s dormitory is at the absolute end of the barracks camp and maybe a whole thirty meters from the hog pens. So now you can understand why the rooms are filled with flies even now in the middle of winter. An area that’s three paces long, three paces wide and has a stone floor: that’s Valéria Berzseni and Mária Győri’s room. Two beds, one wardrobe, a table and one chair are in this tiny room. And what a bleak home it is! Bleak and cold. . . . The opposite room belongs to Erzsi Farkas, Mrs. János Müller, and Piroska Labancz. The floor is stone, and there’s no stove here either. . . . “That there is our full comfort,” says Vera Bertók with black humor. She points to a little hut with a collapsed door. It’s at least thirty paces from the “living” quarters. “If you can call it that, there’s our bathroom.” Six meters long and six meters wide, two showerheads stand in the middle of this roofless “room.” It must be pleasant to “bathe” here, under the clouds —especially in winter.37

Many accepted the worse conditions because a workers’ dormitory cost far less than leasing a bed or an apartment. In 1955, 110,000 individuals lived in this type of a dormitory; by 1961, this number had risen to 225,000. At the end of the 1970s, workers’ dormitories only had 150,000 occupants and by the middle of the 1980s this figure was between 120,000 and 130,000 people.38 Most of the workers’ dormitories were shut down during the decade following the fall of communism.

The level of comfort found in dormitories built in the 1960s showed some improvement. Generally speaking, the rooms had six to eight beds, or only four in rarer instances. Each floor had its own lavatories and kitchens. In some cases, there were also areas for socializing. Overcrowding, however, continued to remain a problem and it was common for eight people to sleep on bunk beds put into rooms that had originally been designed to fit only four occupants. The furnishings found in the rooms and social areas were usually quite plain. According to official expectations, the aim for these institutions was to establish “the framework for socialist communal life,” a goal that mostly resulted in total failure since attaining it meant regulating every single aspect of what the residents could or could not do on the

premises. Other than the official “house rules,” the unwritten laws developed by the other inhabitants were frequently more important to follow. Alcoholism, fistfights, and smaller or larger instances of theft were part and parcel of daily life in a workers’ dormitory.39 Instead of going to the library, attending the theater, or participating in officially organized and sanctioned work, cleanliness, or cultural competitions, workers were usually more inclined to go to bars or play cards. If any seats were left in the “culture room,” then there were times when watching television was preferred. Watching television was in fact the only free time activity mentioned by sources that proved capable of regularly bringing together a significant percentage of dormitory residents. A new form of entertainment in 1960s Hungary, watching television quickly became a favorite form of relaxation in the workers’ dormitories: “Not even standing room is left when international soccer matches or the popular show ‘Angel’ is being broadcast. Thirty to

forty people crowd into the small room. The last time ‘unidentified individuals’ removed the door of the room, so it would be easier to see the screen, but they forgot to put the door back on its hinges.’”

For many, the workers’ dormitory represented an intermediate step on the ladder to the better social position that they longed to attain. Getting used to this new environment, however, was not without hardships, as illustrated by an interview from a 1977 sociography:

I left home on April 1, 1975. I waited till I was sixteen. It was all I could do to wait. I’d had enough of home. . . . After the factory, we arranged things at the workers’ dorm next. The woman at the door sent me to the lady in charge of supervising the number two shift. She arranged everything for me. She told me if there was any problem, I was to tell her. She had me read the house rules and told me they were to be kept, too. I ended up in Room 17. I put my stuff into one part of a metal locker in the hall. Out of the two keys to it, I got one and had to give the other one to the supervisor. They said she’d be checking to see if it was being kept tidy. They showed me my bed. Nobody said a word to me, so I lay down on the bed and waited for night to come. . . . In the beginning I liked being at the factory better than at the dorm. My roommates acted strange with me. I couldn’t say a word to anybody for days at a time. And I could tell they were watching me. Maybe I should have started talking about myself, but I didn’t exchange a word with anybody in that room. They couldn’t even be bothered to say hi to me. There’s no way I would have gotten used to this, so it’s lucky that I landed in another room.”

Many found themselves incapable of enduring the conditions and circumstances found in the workers’ dormitories for a lengthy period of time and either fled to another kind of residence or moved back to their initial point of origin. For others, as they increasingly became estranged from friends, family, and the social expectations that were upheld “back home,” the dormitory became their only permanent residence. During the economic restructuring that occurred in the 1990s following Hungary’s shift from state socialism, not only were many factories shut down, but the dormitories that they had operated were also closed, meaning that this particular social group suddenly

40 Építők Bartók Béla Úti Munkásszálló Híradója, no. 8 (1966). Quoted in Kohut, “Erkölcsi téren ma már a szállókon rend van,” 68. The show discussed is the UK TV series The Saint starring Roger Moore, which was broadcast in Hungary under the title The Adventures of the Angel and was highly popular.

found itself without either a job or a place to live. In many cases these individuals ended up on the streets, homeless. While homelessness—or at least potential homelessness—existed under state socialism, it was as carefully hidden as poverty was and therefore did not appear to exist. When the political system turned to democracy, the fact that individuals were living on the streets suddenly became painfully visible to Hungarian society as a whole.

**Living in dire straits—slums, shantytowns, and ghettos**

After World War I the already appalling housing situation that was widespread among Hungary’s lower social classes deteriorated even more when waves of refugees—mostly fleeing areas that had once belonged to Hungary, but were made a part of Romania, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Yugoslavia following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920—arrived in the capital city. By October of 1920, nearly five thousand refugees were living in cattle cars, a situation that compelled Budapest’s city council to request aid from the state government. Seventeen emergency apartment complexes were built, comprising a total of 6,200 apartments. While the complex on Pongrácz Street was one type of emergency apartment complex that was established for former government employees in need of temporary living accommodations, the two-room apartments found in this complex were far from the norm experienced by most who found themselves living in more makeshift accommodations. The Mária Valéria complex was one such type of emergency dwelling and consisted of a wooden barracks that had previously served as a military hospital. Eight thousand people crowded into the 1,050 rooms that were essentially all this building offered since it included no form of basic comfort, such as indoor plumbing, etc. During the 1930s, the complex was expanded and by 1940 it contained 1,776 apartments. Three well-defined areas could be found in the complex: to the southeast, in the direction of Határ Street, fifty-four wooden barracks were turned into brick buildings that became the “small apartment complex.” (These brick structures still existed during the lengthy construction of the Attila József housing estate which took place in two phases, the first from 1957 to 1967 and the second from 1979 to 1981.) A further eighty wooden barracks stood in the complex’s central area; this section was where the worst conditions could be found. The third area consisted of sixteen larger
brick structures that were located along Ecseri Street. In 1927, residents received permission to use the area in front of the barracks (no wider than one-and-a-half meters and only as long as the barracks itself) as a garden patch. Once these gardens were fenced in, the rows between each barracks were effectively turned into narrow streets. An illusion of comfort and sanitation was provided by the latrine and showers placed at the end of the barracks. Yet conditions remained dire, occasionally requiring the intervention of authorities, as illustrated by a 1940 report of the mayor of Pesterzsébet:

In my town the forty-seven families (seventy-six adults and 119 children) living in forty-three rooms found at 50 Határ Street are waiting in the dead of winter, surrounded by unimaginable circumstances, for the authorities to provide some form of help. Since the shantytown’s residents were in danger of freezing to death, on February 23 I established a children’s home that continues to operate until this day. There, forty-six children between the ages of three and thirteen are cared for by a public nurse and receive provisions throughout the entire day. . . . After they are disinfected, bathed, and have had their hair cut, the children referred to our home leave their clothes at the shantytown and change into clothing purchased for this very purpose by the city, under whose care they now fall. Placing the children of the very poor into this type of facility has somewhat eased the miserable conditions that the shantytown’s residents are forced to endure.

At the end of the 1930s, Budapest contained dozens of shantytowns where conditions were similarly inhumane. Temporary emergency dwellings, “cave homes” dug out of limestone hills, barracks converted into housing, and other types of structures used as homes all belong to the story of daily life in Hungary as it unfolded throughout the past seventy-five years. While various campaigns were repeatedly

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43 “Pesterzsébet polgármesterének jelentése,” Alispáni iratok, MNL PML, 408.u., April 19, 1940.
44 According to its statistical definition, a temporary or emergency dwelling has at least one area that is larger than 6 square meters, a window or glass door, can be heated, and includes a toilet (or outhouse) and water. Dwellings categorized as “other” consist of an area or groups of areas that do not fulfill even the requirements for an emergency dwelling and only have one area that is at least 4 square meters in size, or if they have more than one area and contain a living space used as a room, then the room’s size must be minimum of 4 or a maximum of 6 square meters.
organized to eliminate these kinds of housing conditions, other than
a few rare instances or certain areas that drew greater attention (such
as the Mária Valéria complex), these attempts either ended in failure
or occurred over an interminably long amount of time. After commu-
nism gained control between 1948 and 1949, shantytowns and tem-
porary forms of housing were both politically and ideologically un-
desirable: despite this fact, removing them was never accomplished
even under state socialism. Among the many reasons for this, the
main one was the fact that a level of deep poverty was always present
(although to differing degrees) and always reemerged in Hungarian
society throughout the second half of the twentieth century; for those
who belonged to this social group, no other way existed for them
to put a roof over their heads. While the lack of statistics makes it
impossible to provide the exact number of individuals, according to
the most conservative estimates at least two to three hundred thou-
sand people lived in slums or Roma settlements in the 1950s. In 1949,
slightly more than six thousand structures (huts, shanties, shacks,
boats, caves, ruins, or other buildings) existed in Budapest alone that
should not have functioned as dwellings for the twenty-five thousand
individuals who were occupying them. In more fortunate cases, the
buildings in these slum settlements had stable walls and were barrack-
like structures that were usually quite run-down on the outside and
in a state of disrepair within. The living areas were often one room
or a room and a kitchen and each one usually housed eight to ten
people. The type of hut found in Roma settlements were mainly low
structures made of dirt bricks, with dirt floors and one or two rooms
for eight to twelve people.45

In the spring of 1956, in accordance with a governmental direc-
tive, county councils had every town compile a report regarding cave
dwellings and their occupants. One such report from the Szentendre
District Council informed the county “that individuals are living in
caves in two of the communities in our district. Eight families can
be found living in caves within the town limits of Budakalász and
sixteen families in Visegrád. Out of these, six have a small room built
in front of the caves, the rest were exclusively dug into the earth.”46
Two earthen huts were registered in Szentendre while families were

45 The data come from contemporary housing statistics collections.
46 “A Szentendrei Járási Tanács jelentése a barlanglakásokról,” A Város és Község-
known to be living in ninety-nine cellar homes and twenty-nine cave dwellings in the Buda district. Based on the report summary, no other forms of this type of “home” were found in other parts of Pest County. To offer a further explanation of what these cave dwellings were, it must be mentioned that cave homes were commonly found in mountainous or hill regions where the type of stone (usually sandstone or limestone) was such that individuals in need of shelter could carve a home into the hillside or mountainside (See Figure 40). Budafok and Sirok are examples of villages where cave homes were possible. While various types existed, the most common variation was to dig out a cave with one or two living spaces, or to build an entryway in front of a cave. Earthen huts were slightly different in that these structures were roughly two meters high, out of which one meter was below ground. From the outside, only a wall that was between sixty and eighty centimeters high and the roof could be seen.

On the national level, the most widespread usage of cave dwellings was found in Sirok: 131 individuals were living in the forty-one cave dwellings found in the town. Used as residences, these cave dwellings were between 12 and 28 square meters and the people who lived in them were mainly industrial workers, seasonal agricultural

Figure 40. Cave dwelling in the village of Sály, 1972 (photo by János Kende, Fortepan, 185079)
workers, agricultural workers, private farmers with only one to three hectares, or miners. In a report from 1954, other than Sirok, the town of Eg ereszalók was also reported to contain sixteen cave dwellings with a total of sixty inhabitants whose occupations were not vastly different from those listed in Sirok. The documents also referred to the fact that the situation could only be solved via state aid since there was no way for the inhabitants to improve their situation on their own as they all lacked financial resources and earned extremely low wages. Attention was also drawn to the fact that if the caves’ inhabitants were relocated to new, modern apartments as part of some type of campaign, it is absolutely imperative that the old, abandoned cave dwellings be razed or rendered in some way uninhabitable because the current residents believe that they can sell their cave dwellings once they have been relocated. The demand for homes like these is quite high as they barely need heating in winter and are cool in summer. The best way to ensure that the continued usage of these structures is stopped is to place them under state or town control and have them put toward a more appropriate use, such as wine cellars or warehouses.

Since the planned measures were carried out only partially and very slowly, cave dwellings continued to remain occupied.

In 1962, another governmental directive ordered the evaluation of “the number of families living in temporary structures (construction site buildings, barracks, etc.) and their financial situation within the capital city and other large cities. The amount of space in these residences and its distribution are to be included for the purpose of forming recommendations concerning how to liquidate these structures.”

In 1964, the Institute for Construction Organization and Management


49 For a discussion on social policy and politics in the Kádár era, see Sándor Horváth, Két emelet boldogság: Mindennapi szociálpolitika Budapesten a Kádár-korszakban (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2012), 266.

EVERYDAY LIFE UNDER COMMUNISM AND AFTER

prepared this national survey. According to the national results, a total of 21,033 buildings stood in 1,190 slums (euphemistically referred to as “socially unacceptable” settlements). All in all, 119,820 people were living in the 27,258 dwellings that were registered. The most slums were found in Borsod County (168, totaling 23,275 occupants), Szabolcs-Szatmár County (151, totaling 12,912 occupants) and Nógrád County (139, totaling 11,161 occupants). In the 3,137 homes located in Budapest’s 45 slums, 10,008 occupants were registered. Two-thirds of these slums were situated within the city limits while one-third existed on the outskirts of Budapest. The highest number of occupants (1,870) lived in the Százados Street housing estates found in Budapest’s eighth district. The Tomori settlement in the thirteenth district (with 1,158 occupants), the Hárosi illegal settlement. 52

Figure 41. Slums in Budapest: houses of the Százados Road housing estate, 1978 (photo by István Harmath, MNM TF, 78.18O9)


52 In Hungary any area that was not suitable for residential purposes, yet still contained structures (huts, shanties, shacks, etc.) that had been spontaneously built without municipal permission was classified as an illegal settlement. Starting in the 1960s when authorities enforced stricter regulations for moving into the capital
(1,000 occupants), the Mihalkovics Street settlement in the second district (518 occupants), and the Madarász settlement in the thirteenth district (498 occupants) displayed the highest numbers. Whether in Budapest or the countryside, the buildings found in slums were mostly made of mud bricks; a smaller number had been tacked together out of mixed construction materials. In many places barracks were being used as places to live, and an additional twenty-three settlements consisted entirely of cave dwellings.

In the 1960s, as a consequence of the massive influx of people seeking work in the capital city, new slum settlements emerged in the suburbs around Budapest, where many lived in shanties and shacks that were improvised out of wood and leftover construction materials. In 1980, the number of occupied “homes” made of tin, wood, wood sheeting, and paper was 2,131 in Budapest and 2,356 in the countryside. Based on conservative estimates made at the beginning of the 1980s, between eighty and ninety thousand individuals were living in temporary residences while a further twenty to thirty thousand were estimated to be homeless. Throughout the nation a total of 266 cave dwellings—either dug into the earth or out of a hillside—were still in use and numerous slum settlements had existed for decades.

One such example was a housing estate built in 1937 that became known by the notorious nickname of Dzsumbuj, a slang term for chaos or a wild ruckus. For decades, the three buildings it contained had originally provided rental apartments owned by the capital city. During the 1970s and 1980s, the people who lived in these buildings were employed at the local factories as mainly semi-skilled workers or skilled laborers and had taken up residence in the 28 square meter apartments (one room and a kitchen) found here in the hopes of eventually gaining a better livelihood. Very few, however, were able to climb their way out of the poverty that only grew deeper and deeper; in spite of numerous attempts to shut it down, the Dzsumbuj was always populated by new arrivals, including squatters. The twenty-first century had already reached its first decade when most of its city, many attempted to solve their need for shelter by building some type of structure on the outskirts of Budapest or on the edges of towns that were suburbs to the capital city. After a lengthy process, a few of these buildings were razed, but the majority were granted a building permit. It was not uncommon for authorities to rezone these illegally established areas as residential districts.

53 See Péter Ambrus, A Dzsumbuj (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1988).
inhabitants were relocated and two out of the three buildings were razed. The following is a description of everyday life in Dzsumbuj, as a first-hand experience of what living in the “wild ruckus” of a working-class housing estate was like:

There are three buildings in the housing estate on Illatos Street. We call them “six houses” as a joke. . . . A stairway connects two houses but they count as one house according to the letters they were marked with, A, B and C. . . . The A and C buildings are smaller, there are only one hundred-thirty apartments in these buildings, with one room and a kitchen each. The B building is larger, there are one hundred-sixty apartments in it and you can add another twenty apartments that were converted out of the laundry rooms. . . . It’s not just because all the doors and windows face the corridor—there’s ten meters at most between apartments there—that we know every little thing about each other. It’s also because all the bedroom windows in the back of the house face the bedroom windows in the front of the next building. . . . Whether I want to or not, I hear it when my neighbor comes home, whether he’s stinking drunk or just started to hit the sauce. Whether he’s lost all of his money betting on the horses or playing at cards, or that another neighbor calls me a fucking whore, because my schedule and my work is different from the schedules and the work held by the others here in the Dzsumbuj.54

All of the issues that had been “swept under the rug” during the state socialist era emerged tenfold following Hungary’s transition to a democratic system. The fact that certain levels of society swiftly fell into poverty, were marginalized, or sank into deep poverty exerted a lasting effect on the housing situation in post-communist Hungary. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, 260,000 residences lacked any level of comfort while nearly 100,000 emergency municipal residences or temporary dwellings were occupied by society’s most deprived. This figure indicates that hardship and privation define the living conditions for nearly 1.2 million people living in Hungary today, a number representing nine to ten percent of the nation’s total population.

Similarly, as slum settlements and shantytowns were repopulated in the two decades that followed the fall of the Iron Curtain, segregation—on the basis of finances and ethnicity—gradually overcame

Hungarian society. In certain areas of Budapest and the country that count as disadvantaged from the point of view of employment (such as Borsod or Szabolcs-Szatmár Counties), or in areas dotted with tiny villages, communities emerged that displayed a ghettoization brought about by deep poverty and partially by ethnicity as well. At the dawning of the new millennium, roughly 100,000 individuals were living in the 538 slum settlements found throughout the country, surrounded by catastrophic conditions from the point of view of both infrastructure and public health. According to research done by Veronika Domokos, in 2010, 1,633 segregated areas were registered in Hungary’s 823 towns and the capital’s ten districts, spanning a population of 280,000 to 315,000 individuals.55

Figure 42. The former steelworkers’ housing estate, now a ghetto, Hétes telep at Ózd, 2012

By the year 2000, the Hétes Roma settlement in the town of Ózd had become known as one of the most notorious sites of ghettoization. This part of the city had been built in the first half of the twentieth century to provide residences for the ironworks factory’s skilled labor and mid-level managers; the level of comfort and facilities it offered reflected the period of its construction. Until the 1960s, the Hétes district represented a prestigious address. In the 1970s, the homes in the Hétes district constantly changed hands. Then, when the metalworks factory closed, the buildings that had been rented out by the factory were put into the hands of the municipality after 1990. Today the dilapidated houses here are exclusively inhabited by nearly four hundred Roma individuals, who live here without any type of facilities. According to a 2001 news report,

The level of poverty within the settlement is immeasurable. As we learned, the only certain form of income for the Roma is the family stipend.56 The Roma who live in Hétes cannot get jobs in Ózd because there is no longer any need for an untrained workforce. Since the majority are squatters, they cannot apply for social welfare from the city. Constant hunger is the most significant issue that these families face. The residents gather iron from the slag heap that stands opposite of the settlement. Before the fall of communism, the foundry had churned out massive amounts of slag that still had a high iron content; today the Roma “mine” this slag heap for scrap iron. With one day of strenuous labor, the amount of scrap iron that can be collected is worth one thousand forints. Also, a source of good quality coke, the slag heap provides the settlement with fuel for heating. At the moment a two-wheeled handcart filled with tree branches is being put up against the wall of one of the hovels. They say that they’re leaving it there because police were seen down below. As we discover, the other important source of income for the Roma here is stolen wood. Used for fuel, they sell the wood to the settlement’s residents. One wheelbarrow’s worth of wood costs one

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56 In various forms, the family stipend has existed as a government benefit or supplementary form of income since the mid-twentieth century and is issued to support families raising children under eighteen years of age. The amount was generally determined by the number of children in the family and was—at times—only granted if parents were employed. During the period of transition that occurred after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the family stipend was interpreted as a civil right and therefore issued to any parent raising a minor.
thousand forints, but everyone buys a washtub of wood for two hundred. The Roma who dig for iron in the slag heap do not have time to gather firewood. . . . Many people make a living as moneylenders. Anyone with an extra thousand forints lends it at 70 percent interest, until the next family stipend arrives. Despite the inhumane conditions, having a house is highly valued at the settlement. The minute someone moves and word spreads, the vacant hovel is immediately occupied. If a house stands empty for even one day, the neighbors instantly start taking the walls apart since they can earn enough money for a day’s worth of food by selling the bricks.57

This description provides just one example of the process of ghettoization that has begun in many of the hundreds of slums found throughout Hungary today.58 The emergence of ghettoizing slums was one of the many consequences that originated from the economic and social changes Hungary underwent as a result of the transition from state socialism to capitalism. Virtually overnight, massive layoffs occurred throughout numerous communities, leading to a rapidly growing chasm in social equality. Those individuals (and their families) who found themselves permanently squeezed out of the job market were effectively closed off from the majority and consequently came to occupy the social fringes that gradually transformed into increasingly isolated slums.

The general characteristics of changes in home interiors

Defined by social status, hierarchy, tradition, and financial position or circumstances, pre-war habits in interior design changed very little—or not at all—during the 1940s. Barring minor adjustments, three basic types of dwellings continued to exist in Hungary: middle-class, working-class, and peasant homes, each of which brought with them their own customary appearance.59 When furnishing and using the

59 After communism rose to power, the style and approach to home interiors that was characteristic of middle-class homes underwent great changes. In particular, maintaining the type of home previously owned by the (upper) middle-class became
interior living spaces of their homes, most homeowners followed the examples set by other members of the same social class who lived a similar lifestyle. The changes that occurred in home interiors during this period reflect shifts in traditions and cultural habits. To mention one example, as television became more widespread during the 1960s, the Tavasz, Kékes, or Duna television sets that were popular at the time were frequently placed in a central part of the home, a choice that was partly made to make watching easier, but also demonstrates how televisions were valued as status symbols by virtually every social class in Hungary.

Attempts to create a private sphere similarly indicate a change in lifestyle that demonstrates the desire to follow Western European consumer society. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, altering the style and kind of furnishings or modernizing home appliances was severely hindered by a relatively restricted selection and financial circumstances. During the first two decades of state socialism, the amount earmarked for household goods or furnishings in family budgets was regularly quite small. In 1956, for example, according to calculations made by the National Council of Trade Unions (SZOT) based on the minimum wage, nine-tenths of all families were not able to buy furniture; at the time, an average set of furniture for one room was between eight and twelve thousand forints. Half of all families could not produce the 1,200 forints that were judged to be the minimum amount required per year for household goods. “Working class families,” noted the report, “usually only possess the three to four bedsheets that are necessary; more than one-third of families either have fewer, or none at all. . . . In some families (especially in large families) the bedding is never changed at the same time. Instead, they change the sheets for only one or two beds and sleep on rags, straw, etc.”

As of the 1970s, a growing number of Hungarian families were able to afford furnishings and household items, a development that led to an increase in demand and expectations. As shortages gradually

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significantly more difficult. As it later turned out, the seeming disappearance of this kind of approach to home interiors was only temporary: in a modernized form, the middle-class and upper-class style of home has come to represent a kind of ideal style of home following the 1989 political transition.

The selection of goods slowly began to improve. “Under state socialism,” Katalin S. Nagy notes in her work on home decoration in the 1970s, “Hungarians were eager to arrange their private spaces the same way that other members of a twentieth-century consumer society did, meaning that they focused on consumption and were motivated by the need to satisfy their urges and experience joy in their surroundings. They did not follow the puritan, practical, thrifty décor typically found in bourgeois homes, but rather the modern, consumerist tendency to accumulate masses of objects.”

The large-scale changes in social position and residence that occurred throughout the fifties and sixties in Hungary obviously influenced habits too, given the fact that those who moved from the countryside to the city not only changed their location, but their lifestyle as well. One unique aspect of Hungarian homes was the low number of rooms, which subsequently rendered it impossible for residents to designate different functions to separate rooms. Access to privacy—one of the defining characteristics of modern living spaces—was similarly difficult to obtain.

In the middle of the twentieth century how home interiors were furnished, developed, and decorated provided a fairly exact representation of the owner’s social status and financial position. Based on the quality and condition of furnishings and the number of objects in his or her home, placing an individual within a certain social category could be done with relative ease. Primarily due to the general state of poverty and lack of goods that typified the 1950s and 1960s, living spaces lost some of their ability to signify social status, even though the high-prestige objects that had been previously procured did not lose their value entirely. Beginning at the end of the 1960s, living spaces started to regain this symbolic function; during the following decade, décor became a permanent means for expressing social prestige, as it still is today. The habits and financial situation that were characteristic of certain social groups exerted a rather strong influence on interior design and furniture selection; while some customs did cross social boundaries, for a very long time these were the exceptions that only proved the rule. In the decades of the sixties and the seventies, it became increasingly rare to find a home interior that followed the purely peasant, working-class, or middle-class example;

at this time, different traditions, customs, and lifestyles were intermixing and adding layer upon layer to one another, a circumstance that obviously owed much to the fact that Hungary’s population was undergoing a massive emigration from village to town to city.

It also cannot be forgotten that changes in the interior arrangement of homes was naturally related to alterations in how living space was used and furnishings were added to the home. In working class or peasant households, the kitchen’s primary role slowly decreased as the increase in rooms made it possible for residents to separate their activities. In cities, as the appearance of the new minimal norm, the “two rooms with full comfort,” became widespread, this type of space had the greatest effect on how living space was used and furnished.

Based on her research conducted during the 1970s, Katalin S. Nagy was able to establish five rural, five urban, and five rural-urban forms of interior style. Her work provides a detailed analysis of the characteristic features found in the following types of interiors: the feudal peasant home; the middle-class peasant home; the rural lower middle-class home; the rural square house home; the rural modern home; the impoverished rural and urban home; the traditional urban working-class home; the urban lower middle-class home; the urban middle-class housing estate home; the quasi-modern home; and the rural and urban white-collar home. Based on S. Nagy’s categories, I will summarize the characteristic features found in both urban (including working-class and lower middle-class homes) and rural interiors in the following sections. Further attention will be directed to a brief overview of two of the era’s most typical living spaces, the housing estate apartment and the weekend or vacation home.

**Working-class and middle-class homes**

A vast proportion of urban, working-class homes were built at the turn of the twentieth century; in the decades following World War II, primarily between 1945 and 1965, this type of home was mainly found in tenement buildings that had been constructed during the interwar period. In the first half of the twentieth century, better-quality working-class apartments were more commonly found in factory

“colonies” (as they were called) that were built in the towns of Ózd, Diósgyőr, and Salgótarján. The MÁVAG colony, constructed on the site of the Gasworks Company in Óbuda, is another example worthy of mention.\textsuperscript{63} Generally one room and a kitchen—or more rarely two rooms and a kitchen—the facilities for these apartments were provided by a water pump and electricity, in some less common instances. Including a bathroom or toilet was not even considered at the time of construction; later, when the buildings were modernized, the lack of room proved a serious obstacle to making this addition.

In the 1950s, a small percentage of the wave of “new workers” who were arriving in Hungary’s cities were able to establish a household in homes that had generally been seized from their previous middle-class owners and were then used to reward those deemed to be loyal members of the new political system and therefore worthy of promotion. Beginning in the mid-sixties, the vast majority of the people who moved to the city ended up living in one of the new housing estates.

The working-class apartments constructed in the 1940s and 1950s were mostly located in three- or four-story buildings and averaged 45 to 60 square meters in size. For the most part these dwellings either offered a half-level of comfort or — more rarely — fit into the category of full comfort. After 1945, it was suggested that colonies containing family homes for workers should be established, but this idea was viewed as being “anti-collective” once the communist takeover occurred in 1948. As a type of housing that emerged in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the workers’ colony cannot be directly compared to a housing estate or development. In Hungary at least this type of residential area consisted of much smaller, one-level buildings. The largest colonies housed between eighty and one hundred families and were built by large companies for the purpose of maintaining a hold on the most important members of their workforce. Life at these colonies was strictly regulated; noise or creating any type of a “scene” was forbidden. Factory gardeners provided residents with plants for flowers and made sure the area was properly maintained. Since rent was either extremely low or nonexistent, an apartment in

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house construction and standardized designs. As a study analyzing lifestyle changes in postwar Hungary points out, “Apartments built according to the 1948 standardized designs usually contained one living room and a sleeping alcove, along with a kitchen, an entryway, a bathroom, and a toilet. The size of the apartments was set at around 50 square meters. By 1949 the size of the ‘sleeping alcove’ was first increased by decreasing the size of the entryway, then the bathroom and toilet were combined. The size of the kitchen was cut, and finally the separate pantry was removed altogether. This was how apartments could be made to count as two-room homes.”

In the 1950s and 1960s, the interior spaces in small or two-room apartments were frequently divided with a curtain in order to create a “children’s room,” to make a part of the kitchen into “the bathroom,” or to turn a corner of the only room into the “master bedroom” for the parents.

Furnishing and decorating apartments that only had two or three spaces was absolutely dictated by practicality and the need to put each and every square meter to optimal use.

Adding a separate bathroom to working-class (or peasant) dwellings only began to spread in the second half of the 1960s. The ultimate goal for modernizing homes was to gain access to running cold and hot water, a flush toilet, and a bathroom. Until homes possessed a bathroom, bathing and washing was generally done in the kitchen. In working-class apartments that had one room and a kitchen, or even two rooms, living space was put to maximum usage since a way had to be found to solve virtually every aspect of life (sleeping, eating, relaxation, bathing, entertainment) within very narrow confines. At the end of the 1940s, a survey completed with the inhabitants of a newly built apartment building contained the following results: “Anywhere from two to fourteen people were living in the apartments, with an average of four to seven individuals per home. . . . In residences with eight to ten individuals living in a two-room apartment, the men slept in one room while the women occupied the other. . . . Family

a workers’ colony was also a form of social benefit that represented an enormous improvement for the family as these homes were much better quality and far more affordable than the average residence of the period. As owner of the property, the factory could give notice at any point and revoke the occupants’ lease.


Mária Pataki, A dolgozó nő háztartása (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Kiadó, 1956).
life still takes place in the kitchen as this is where they cook, eat, and wash. True, one-third of the building’s inhabitants spent the day in the room, where the children played and studied while the adults listened to the radio. Some even ate in the room.” In working-class apartments the number of sleeping places was frequently lower than the number of occupants, even in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the midst of the many changes occurring in living circumstances, it was still typical for urban, working-class apartments to display fashions originating from the 1920s or 1930s. The indispensable


furnishings for a one-and-a-half- or two-room apartment, or an apartment consisting of one room and a kitchen, included a twin bed, a dark-colored, usually double-doored wardrobe where clothes could be hung, and/or a combined wardrobe that could be used for storing both practical and decorative items. In some cases, a clothes press or—in rare instances—a vitrine cabinet was used. The furnishings for most working-class apartments contained additional sleeping places in the form of iron-framed beds. For shift managers who lived among skilled workers, but in the better circumstances offered by two-room apartments, having the ability to furnish one room with a set of bedroom furniture and leave the other room free for representative and social purposes was a mark of status.

At the end of the 1960s, the two-room apartments found in the colony named the Ózd Metallurgical Works New Settlement had running water, electricity and contained a set of bedroom furniture in the smaller room. Painted yellow, the set included a double bed, a nightstand, a wardrobe, two chairs, and a round table covered with

*Figure 46. The furnishing of a room in the apartment of Rezső Hampl Jr., a mechanic in Budapest, district 13, Tahi Street 26 (Photograph by Csaba Gabler, MNM TF, 73.142)*
a small, crocheted tablecloth. By day the fold-out bed found in the other room functioned as a sofa and was accompanied by two large armchairs, a coffee table, a wardrobe with hooks for hanging clothes, and a combined wardrobe. Heat was provided by a tile stove, a factor that influenced the placement of the room’s other furniture. As of the beginning of the 1970s, television sets were featured among the appliances found in living spaces. Family photos, paintings, religious symbols, and reproductions of paintings or other artworks also appeared on the walls of the main room. Other than the kitchen furnishings that were painted white and green, a relatively large table (with a drawer under the tabletop), four or five stools, a chest for clothes or laundry, and a cookstove used for cooking and baking could be found in the kitchen. The chest used to store coal was either placed in the kitchen or in the entryway, which was large enough to contain a coat stand, a small-sized table, two chairs, a radio, and a shelf used to display knickknacks. Usually done in redwork, embroidered wall-coverings decorated the entryway and kitchen while simultaneously displaying quotations underscoring the importance of the home.

At the beginning of the 1950s, the four-floor buildings constructed in the Táncsics settlement in Ózd provided workers with apartments that had either one-and-a-half or two-and-a-half rooms. Accessed through the entryway, the kitchen in these apartments contained an enclosed kitchen cabinet, a kitchen table, a spigot and sink attached to the wall, a gas cookstove, and a refrigerator at the end of the 1960s. Ceramic plates, wall-coverings, and a calendar decorated the walls. Also accessed from the entryway, the largest room in the apartment had a row of cabinets lining the longer wall. Used to store bedding, the large-sized chest of drawers next to these cabinets also displayed ceramic knickknacks. An ornamental—or at least ornate—hanging lamp with either three or five arms provided light. In the 1970s “bar cabinets” that also provided mood lighting became extremely popular; by the end of the 1970s, various versions of this type of furniture were being used as TV stands. A coffee table and two shell-backed, upholstered armchairs stood in the middle of the room. Since these apartments had a smaller room and a sleeping alcove, the beds were usually placed here, but it was also common for the smaller room to be converted into a bedroom. Due to the size of the room, using the smaller room as a bedroom meant that the two beds could only be

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placed one after another, with the footboard of one bed flush against the headboard of the second bed. A wall hanging was placed above the bed to protect the wall from being soiled. A hanging lamp with either one or two arms was used for light.

Despite the improvements listed above, a good many working-class apartments still only provided the narrow amount of living space contained in one room and a kitchen. Furnishing these two areas largely depended on the room’s function and the number of people living there since these homes were rather crowded, especially at night. Another noticeable aspect reflected how “those who moved to the city from a rural environment to work in factories brought with them the middle-class peasant style of interior design while simultaneously copying the style of furnishings used in lower-middle-class urban homes, the social group they strove to resemble the most.”\textsuperscript{69} Taken at the beginning of the 1970s, a photo series illustrating the two-room apartment owned by Rezső Hampl Jr., a lathe operator who lived in Budapest’s thirteenth district, offers an excellent example of this type of interior (see Figure 46). As housing estates became widespread during the 1970s, the interiors found in these block buildings brought about a more uniform appearance in working-class apartments. In the 1980s and 1990s, the working-class homes that had once been constructed in workers’ settlements or colonies inadvertently preserved the habits and décor of their inhabitants, thereby evolving into what could be interpreted as a unique cultural or generational relic or as an increasingly segregated, ghettoized section of the city where they were located. However they may be viewed, the interiors found in these apartments demonstrate living spaces formed by either poverty or the ethnic characteristics of Hungary’s Roma inhabitants.

In appearance, the urban (lower) middle-class home interior could be classified neither as peasant nor middle class and consisted of a living space that was only loosely related to the characteristic architectural forms that were typical of the twentieth century, as this kind of style could be found in tenements built at the turn of the twentieth century or during the interwar period, in apartments found in state socialist housing estates, or even in the two-room family homes located in the suburbs of Budapest. This is not to say that the apartment’s location did not influence how living spaces were used as the high interiors (four meters) found in older buildings created a far

\textsuperscript{69} S. Nagy, \textit{Lakberendezési szokások}, 119.
more spacious interior compared to the 2.7 meters generally allowed for homes constructed after the war. As the different technology utilized in erecting Soviet-type structures already determined how living spaces could be furnished and used, these homes emphasized the feeling that their inhabitants belonged to a similar social class even though the group that had been known as “the lower middle class” in the pre-war period had already experienced significant changes. It can, however, be said that in the case of this type of home, living spaces possessed an above-average role in demonstrating and displaying social status.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what type of individual belonged to the social class whose style in furnishing and decorating home interiors followed (with only a few, small alterations) the example set by Hungary’s lower middle class during the interwar period. While as a designation it referred less and less to a social class during the postwar decades, the category of “lower middle class” possessed a content that continued to represent a certain lifestyle and attitude. In the interwar years this class, which was mostly comprised of state functionaries, soldiers, and civil servants, felt a strong desire and pressure to prove their ability to move up the social ladder. Other than the fashion of the time, this added motivation explains why it was the habit to fill a relatively small apartment with massive furnishings. A kind of compulsion to amass accumulations of objects was also characteristic of this type of lifestyle. The apartment or home’s role as a representation of social status was particularly apparent in the room used as a living room which therefore combined the functions of dining room, study, and sitting room, while the second room was used as a bedroom.

In residences that followed lower middle-class habits regarding furnishings, décor, and the usage of living space after 1945, the

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70 The communist takeover of Hungary in 1948–49 brought with it ideologically and politically supported changes in social mobility, resulting in a kind of mass migration that could be physical (as in relocation), social (becoming a member of a new social group), or both. Those who had once been members of the lower middle-class and earned a living as small-time businessowners during the interwar period were stripped of their property and often became workers in a factory or industrial collective. Some former bureaucrats were dismissed from their position for political reasons and replaced with politically acceptable Party members. Despite sinking to a lower social level, numerous aspects characteristic of the lower middle-class mentality remained present in Hungarian society and could be observed in home interiors.
significance possessed by other areas of the home generally maintained their original function. Used for food preparation and informal dining, the kitchen was also the place where less important daily visitors were received and—in some cases—where the family bathed and saw to their other hygienic needs. Also functioning as a sort of “walk-in closet,” the entryway was where clothes were stored and changed, other than serving the more common function of allowing people to enter or leave the dwelling. As its central space, the living room was reserved for representation and therefore was where the family’s ownership of certain valuable possessions was placed on display. The living room also fulfilled social functions as the place where guests were received, family celebrations were held, and free time was spent. In the smaller apartments found in housing estates, these functions had to be combined; once it became customary to provide children with a separate bedroom, the room used as a living room by day was converted into a bedroom at night. The high number of objects found in a relatively small space therefore played a defining role in how living spaces were developed since the need for each space to perform multiple functions led to a unique clutter of items. These characteristics also served to present an image of the residents’ social status in a way that would be as complete as possible.

It must be stressed that during the Kádár era the interiors of homes occupied by lower-middle-class families reflected both the customs that had been upheld by the historical lower middle class while also demonstrating the taste of a newly-formed social group that had emerged from this past and was still heavily influenced by its predecessors’ norms. The residents of these living spaces regularly persisted in upholding the rules and habits that had formed from generation to generation: maintaining an orderly household, for example, was one such custom, or the habit of putting objects back in their place the minute the room’s function changed. The uniform interiors and purely functional nature of the objects that were intended to reflect and promote a Soviet-type lifestyle placed serious constraints on creating a lower middle-class interior. It was for this reason that many were forced to replace heavy, craftsman-made bedroom furnishings, dining room sets, and sideboards with rows of cabinets that were both easier to assemble and to maintain. In the 1960s and 1970s other characteristic furnishings included a glass display cabinet, a fold-out bed that frequently had an overhead light at the headboard, a coffee
EVERYDAY LIFE UNDER COMMUNISM AND AFTER

A peculiar form of object worship could also be observed in these home interiors as owners strove to use an accumulation of both practical and ornamental items to indicate their financial position. This aim resulted in an endless number of vases, ornamental plates, porcelain figurines of Hungarian shepherds, galloping horses, cats, dogs, nude women, bounding stags, any other variety of painted or unpainted knickknacks, tea sets, collections of shot glasses, and hand-embroidered or crocheted tablecloths. In the 1970s a new habit swept through Hungary’s homes: as a sign of the family’s ability to gain access to Western goods, bottles of hard-to-obtain, expensive, brand-name alcoholic drinks were proudly placed on exhibition atop the row of cabinets found in the main room. A triple mirror was another commonly found item in lower middle-class homes; the glass vitrine that it stood on offered another opportunity to display objects that were not for everyday use and possessed a varying degree of value and quality. The television set also had a prominent place in this type of home and was—as was also typical of many rural homes—topped with a lace doily or piece of textile, then covered with more decorative objects. Decorative pillows were also placed on the armchairs, the beds, and the sofas. Since home furnishings, decorations, and household goods were highly prized, protective coverings were often used to preserve the upholstery. Cloths were put on rugs for the same purpose. Great care was taken in keeping the home clean and maintaining a well-tended environment. To a certain extent, it can be said that this specific style of using and furnishing living spaces is an example that continues to this day.

Just as the lower middle-class approach to interior design is still present in homes today, the interior style that can be connected to Hungary’s (upper) middle-class homes has reappeared again and again—albeit with some adaptations made due to changes stemming from different social circumstances and fashions—in the decades following the end of communism. In these homes, the large size (anywhere between 200 and 500 square meters), extensive facilities, above-average number of rooms (six to eight), the distribution of functions, the quality of
construction, the selection of furnishings, and the exceptional value of the home itself all contribute toward transforming this kind of dwelling into an effective symbol of social status and wealth. As strange as it may seem, the lower middle-class style of interior decoration provided an example that not only continued to exist under state socialism, it also proved to be widespread as the middle-class norm for white-collar government employees. In contrast, before 1989 the middle-class interior was only found in a rather narrow section of society where it reproduced itself within the confined circumstances of, for example, the homes of well-to-do doctors or lawyers. In the 1980s a new social class of successful entrepreneurs emerged who possessed the wealth and means to represent their new social status via their homes and the objects that decorated their interiors. Once virtually all restrictions on obtaining personal property were lifted between 1989 and 1990, the lifestyle followed by the prosperous quickly reflected this change. Nowadays the lower-middle-class home interior refers to a smaller living space decorated with less expensive items while the reemergence of the middle-class interior expresses its separate identity from other social groups by drawing upon the middle-class mentality from the prewar period in issues regarding values, style, and size.

**Rural and peasant interiors**

In the decades following the end of World War II, the transformation that the interiors of rural homes underwent regarding furnishing and usage was equally influenced by tradition, fashion trends, residents’ social status, and the type of dwelling that was available. It must not be forgotten that different objects and customs prevailed in peasant homes as opposed to rural houses that had been remodeled or modernized to some extent. As of the 1960s, the mass construction of square houses was followed by the quick spread (in the 1970s and 1980s) of steep-roofed, two-story homes that reflected the attempt to adopt a more suburban style of home.

Based on observations made by Katalin S. Nagy, in the 1960s the traditional homes that were divided into three basic living spaces characteristically exhibited the feudal-peasant style of interior decoration. Namely, furnishings were subordinated to function and interior spaces were defined to reflect aspects related to work and prestige.
The traditions connected to this type of interior continue to thrive even in places where the peasant culture, customs, norms and objects appear to have been abandoned.\textsuperscript{71} If multiple generations were living in a traditional long house, the occupants typically lived together in one room. Only in the case of wealthier families who possessed four or more living spaces and could set aside an area for sleeping was it true that the youngest married couple usually slept in an unheated separate bedroom.

In earlier versions of the square house, the kitchen and one room were accessed from the entryway. The other rooms and the pantry could then be reached through the kitchen. In later designs, an entryway or hallway that was one-and-a-half meters wide ran through the dwelling’s interior with two similarly-sized sections on each side. Two rooms were located in the part of the house that faced the street, while a kitchen and frequently another room, a pantry, and a bathroom lined the courtyard, behind the “square” that housed the two front rooms. The size of the windows increased noticeably, which was not only a sign of the attempt to modernize the structure, but also due to the circumstance that only one window size (1.5 meters by 1.8 to 2.0 meters) was available.

The previous rectangular form found in traditional peasant homes was changed to a square that was either eight meters by eight meters, or ten meters by ten meters in size. Fully occupying these homes was a process that took time:

The back of the house is the first part to be put into use, as this includes the kitchen, the smaller room, the pantry and the connecting hall. The layout for the rooms is highly reminiscent of the older buildings that were divided into three sections, just as the hall resembles the traditional porch that runs the length of one side of the building. The next space to be occupied is the smaller room that falls a bit farther away from the entrance, where either older family members or the children are placed. The room that is closest to the entranceway that is accessed from the street—the future “clean room”—remains incomplete in most instances, just as the bathroom does.\textsuperscript{72}

While running water, electricity, and sewage pipes were added to these houses either during construction or in the years that followed, the outhouse remained a part of the courtyard. According to S. Nagy’s

\textsuperscript{71} S. Nagy, Lakberendezési szokások, 69.
\textsuperscript{72} S. Nagy, Lakásmód, lakáskultúra Telkibánya 1975–1978, 83.
research, in 1975 more than one-third of the homes found in the village of Telkibánya located in Northern Hungary had bathrooms; half of these were in actual use. One-sixth of the village’s residences had running water and one-tenth contained a flush toilet. Other than the more typical wood-burning cookstove, stoves that were fueled with gas cylinders were becoming increasingly common.

While occupants of the earlier design of square houses only used the smaller section of the dwelling (the kitchen and one room) on a daily basis, the remaining larger part served representational purposes and was therefore only used for guests or celebrations. In contrast to this habit, the newly-constructed houses that often boasted an additional floor increasingly provided separate rooms for different generations of the family. Parents, for example, had their own bedroom and the custom of placing children in their own room became more widespread. The house’s largest room served as the living room (where the television was naturally placed), guest room, and parlor. In two-floor residences the lower level was generally the area for carrying out daily activities while bedrooms were found on the upper level. Adding a bathroom to the upstairs area became fashionable in the 1980s. The basement was used for work purposes (either agricultural or other) and was usually where a summer or additional kitchen was placed. The kitchen on the ground floor generally had two entrances: one from the street, through the entryway, and another from the courtyard which allowed for easy access to the garden, an important indication that the home and agriculture still co-existed in a unity that influenced how living spaces were used and developed.

In villages, the furnishings and household items found inside homes were exchanged for other options just as the outward appearance and floor plan of homes underwent a dynamic transformation that also affected how interiors were used. Rooms increasingly functioned as living spaces, a phenomenon reinforced by the fact that men were more likely to sleep inside the house rather than in the stables, a habit that would have been unheard of in a traditional peasant home. The summer kitchen slowly lost its function as an additional sleeping space. Adopting new customs, however, frequently took a long time: bathrooms were often left untouched, their only purpose to serve as a status symbol that often remained unused because there was no way to heat them in winter. While a new dining room stood next to the kitchenette that still awaited the final touches, daily life
took place in the old kitchen, or perhaps on the veranda, where visitors were hosted, the children did their homework, and the young wife of the family kept her sewing machine. Until the separate bathroom was completed, or the family became accustomed to bathing in new surroundings, personal hygiene was taken care of in the kitchen, obviously yet another factor that influenced how living spaces were used.

Both changes in how homes were utilized and the aim to modernize daily habits were furthered by the fact that it was becoming far rarer for multiple generations to share the same home. The reorganization of rural living spaces was equally determined by the strength of tradition and the extent to which individuals were willing to accept recent innovations. Directly after World War II, most peasant households contained furnishings and household items that had been exclusively prepared by local craftsmen; factory-made furniture only became widespread in the decades following the war. Only wealthy farmers were the exception to this habit, as in their case following the example set by the urban middle-class frequently proved more definitive.

Until the beginning of the 1960s, the most important furniture found in the homes of well-to-do peasant farming families included two wardrobes, two nightstands, a mirror, two beds, chairs, and a table, all of which had most likely been made by a local craftsman. These furnishings were arranged in a symmetrical or central order. In the former case, the beds were placed against the farthest walls, the wardrobes stood at the feet of the beds and the table and chairs were in the center of the room. When centrally arranged the beds were placed alongside one another in the middle of the room. The hardwood, rectangular table and chairs were put at the feet of the beds and the wardrobes stood along the walls. At the beginning of this era a third arrangement—known as “the corner interior” — was also quite common. In this configuration, a stove or brick oven stood in the corner opposite the wall facing the street; the table and chairs or corner bench were placed next to the stove, with a wardrobe or bureau standing behind. The beds were then placed against the opposite wall.

Based on observations conducted in the village of Átány during the 1950s and 1960s, the presence of a table is what made a space into a room.73 Tables were viewed as almost ceremonial objects and

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73 Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer, Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1997). For a more complete edition of this work, see Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer, “Mi, korrekt parasztok…” Hagyományos élet Átányon (Budapest: Korall Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület, 2010).
it was quite common for only clean work to be done at a table. Chairs or a corner bench often accompanied the table. The other prominent piece of furniture found in the room was the bed, a ceremonial piece that was piled high—almost to the ceiling—with pillows and highly decorated embroidered coverings that had almost definitely arrived in the home as part of the wife’s dowry and were therefore only put to actual use in very exceptional cases. Other than these pieces, the room contained beds for sleeping, clothing wardrobes, and chests for storing possessions. A mirror, coat peg rack, and pendulum clock fulfilled a decorative purpose that was also practical in nature. Further ornaments included devotional items expressing the family’s religious denomination, souvenirs brought home from the male members’ military service, and family photos, with one wall for those still alive and another for those no longer alive. When necessary, children’s furniture was added to these objects. In homes that had room for a “clean room,” the more valuable, representative pieces of furniture were naturally found here; smaller, shabbier, less valuable furnishings were placed in the “everyday” room: “Until the 1970s, the reigning norm was that a married couple would spend their entire life among the furnishings received on their wedding day or purchased in the first years of their marriage. For those who were married in the fifties, this custom began to change in the 1970s, meaning that a married couple could buy many sets of furniture and change the items in their surroundings many times.”

The first significant shift in the interiors found in rural homes occurred in the second half of the 1960s as factory-made furniture appeared in the homes of newlyweds. In this case the furnishings were

generally a fold-out double daybed, two cabinets, a varnished table, and four upholstered armchairs. In the next period, which began in the mid-seventies, rows of cabinets appeared in rural household interiors which also contained two armchairs, two chairs, a coffee table, a daybed that could be used as a bed, and a row of cabinets that consisted of four to five elements. The following modernizing trend brought the innovation of the double bed, the creation of a separate dining area, and furnishings that paralleled the increased number of rooms.

When decorating the interior, the previously widespread presence of pictures featuring holy saints or family members was eventually replaced by embroidery, needlework, and images made by rug hooking, a hobby that reached great popularity in the mid-seventies. Both peasant, rural, and lower-middle-class homes came to feature rugs displaying the head of a dog, flowers, or different figures that were hooked based on patterns published in the popular women’s weekly Nők Lapja, then hung up as decoration. For a while wrought-iron objects—lamps, candlestick holders, flower planters—enjoyed great favor as homeowners attempted to break the monotonous sight of the row of cabinets by adding small arrangements of objects. As was already described in the case of lower-middle-class homes, a plethora of ornamental objects was also typical of rural interiors throughout the 1970s and 1980s: “The items placed in the home frequently fulfill a purpose that completely opposes the object’s original function or were only purchased for the sake of prestige. This is why the new row of cabinets or new set of chairs often remains untouched, nothing more than a decoration.”

At times the role of symbolizing prestige or providing ornamentation also emerged in the case of new pieces of furniture or household items: “Village dwellers are far more likely to preserve and take good care of durable consumer goods than city dwellers. In Atkár’s homes the television occupies a central position, is surrounded by pictures or knickknacks, and is covered with an embroidered cloth. Similar emphasis was placed on the refrigerator, with emphasis being placed on what type and size of appliance they had been able to buy.” While petroleum or oil lamps provided light in rural homes during the 1950s, these light sources were replaced by electricity in the following decade-and-a-half.

75 Lammel, “Kontinuitás, átrétegződés, akkulturáció,” 335.
76 Ibid., 338.
In rural regions, a home’s appearance and facilities heavily depended on the given community’s expectations, the opportunities that were available locally, and the family’s internal organization and ability to muster its financial and physical resources. How living spaces were organized and used was determined by tradition as well as the family’s financial position and the structure of its activities. Other than these factors, it must not be forgotten that a house naturally possessed value: from 1949 to 1989 homes were the only form of private property that was legally permitted in Hungary.

As circumstances altered, how rural families used, furnished, and decorated their homes also changed with time. According to the contemporary sociological observations of Ágnes Losonczi,

A home not only determines the variety of lifestyle options that are open to its occupants—such as what it provides from the point of view of protection, or biological, family, and social functions—but with its firm walls a home also defines the quality of co-existence within a family, the course, level, content, and atmosphere of daily activities. The more a home’s function is reduced to one living space, the more reduced the family’s lifestyle is. The more monotonous the interior is, the less likely it is that any kind of differentiation will be made among daily activities, leading to a reduction of space and opportunities for a richer, more complex lifestyle. As regards content, the narrower the scene for conducting the tasks of everyday life is, the greater the chance there will be for conflicts to erupt and develop among co-inhabitants.77

In the case of rural residences, the representational role possessed by homes remained important, meaning that families strove to create and use living spaces in a way that suitably reflected their social status. This representational aim was true on both the micro- and the macro-level and was most commonly used to express the family’s altered social standing, even if attaining the objects, facilities, etc. that symbolized this required enormous sacrifice. In rural homes, the “clean room” was the traditional space for representing social status, a custom that mainly remained present throughout the 1960s and was only changed when televisions appeared in homes. As a “rare treasure and status symbol,” the television was often placed in this room, an addition that transformed it from being a space that was only used on rare, important occasions, to the place where family and friends regularly

77 Losonczi, Az életmód az időben, 415.
gathered to watch the latest program. With time, this cultural function slowly turned the “clean room” into either a regularly used room, or a room that followed the urban example of living rooms and continued to maintain a representational role via the furnishings and decorative items that were found there.

Changing household items and the entire or partial function of living spaces was a process that occurred over a lengthy amount of time and was largely dependent on the family’s social position and generational identity. Older individuals generally clung to their usual lifestyle and the objects that they had always used in the course of their daily activities. The majority of older people who lived alone only had access to very limited funds (either from land rents or a pension from the collective farm), a factor that made it impossible for them to make any changes. For those with limited financial resources, modernizing their home or building a new one was such a burden that new household items could only be purchased over a period of time.\textsuperscript{78} In rural communities, acquiring household items was an investment that most felt had to be accomplished during the first years when a family was started. Great care was taken to choose the best possible quality and then preserve the item’s condition as much as possible, since new purchases were rare. As the customs and mind-set that accompany consumerism began to gain a foothold in Hungarian society, these habits lost their relevance. By the new millennium, how rural families furnished and used their living spaces was increasingly determined by their financial circumstances and the generation to which they belonged; whatever micro-social expectations their close surroundings may have held mattered far less.

\textbf{The interior world of Soviet-type housing estates}

In cities the spread of homes built out of industrially manufactured elements and the minimum norm of “two rooms with full comfort” that these structures offered exerted the greatest influence on how living spaces could be utilized and furnished. During the 1950s and

\textsuperscript{78} For further details, see S. Nagy, \textit{Lakberendezési szokások}; Fél and Hofer, \textit{Arányok és mértékek a paraszti gazdálkodásban}; Iván Balassa, ed., \textit{Magyar Néprajz}, vol. 4, \textit{Életmód} (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997); Szuhay, “Az életmód változása a magyarországi falvakban.”
1960s, the type of furnishings, household items, or décor that would have previously indicated social status was somewhat relegated to the background. In the case of the apartments found in mass-constructed, Soviet-type housing estates, the economic and production prerequisites determined by the construction technology had a major influence on the size of apartment interiors. In apartments that were the same type and had the same size and number of rooms, the fact that windows, radiators, bathrooms, toilets, built-in cabinets, and kitchen cupboards were all installed in the same place meant that few individual choices could be made regarding how the space could be used or furnished. Pre-determining these factors naturally reflected certain political and ideological goals as well since these types of spaces sped up the uniformization of interiors inhabited by people who had once come from different social classes and backgrounds. Similar to the situation in old, pre-war apartment buildings, those living in housing estates had no choice but to be familiar with one another’s personal lives, at least as far as the occupants living on the same floor were concerned. Due to technical and design shortcomings, living in this kind of apartment meant knowing what the neighbors (either above, below, or next door) were cooking for dinner, when someone was using the bathroom, what music they listened to on the radio or cassette player, which programs they watched on TV, etc. Containing sixty to eighty apartments, these eight- to ten-floor buildings did not separate people only from a physical point of view: the total lack of social spaces in a stairway that provided homes for two hundred to three hundred people meant that residents barely knew their neighbors, a circumstance that was further aggravated by the high fluctuation in population. The physical separation that the building’s structure imposed on its occupants resulted in a lack of personal contact or communication, a factor that further hampered the utilization and development of joint spaces. It must also be mentioned that the condition of these joint spaces (halls, elevators, balconies, and storage units) frequently fell into disrepair much faster than apartment interiors did.

Eight types of apartments could be found in buildings that had five to ten floors; their interiors were determined by the fact that apartments were made of main unit cells that are 3.6 meters wide along the axis of the wall and 5.4 meters long. Since the walls are fifteen centimeters thick, this means that each room is an area of 3.45 meters
by 5.25 meters. . . . All apartments characteristically contain the following: the entryway includes built-in, floor-to-ceiling cabinets. The bathroom and toilet are built-in cabins that were completely outfitted and assembled in the factory. Built-in furniture (cupboards, sink, table, gas stove) is found in the kitchen along with a cabinet that serves as a pantry. A place has been provided for a refrigerator. In small apartments with one-and-a-half rooms, there are only interior kitchenettes with vent hoods for ventilation. Glued parquet installed on a rubber underlayment covers the floors of the rooms; the other floor surfaces are vinyl resting on a foam underlayment. Wallpaper covers the walls and plastic tiles surface the walls of the kitchen and bathroom. The ceilings are plastered white. Each apartment has central heating that also provides a constant supply of centrally heated hot water.79

During the 1970s, the interiors found in housing estate apartments were determined far more by the apartment’s size than by the occupants’ social position. As a result of panel manufacturing technology, each wall in both rooms of a two-room apartment was completely occupied by a radiator that was located under the window. The longer wall was therefore the only remaining space for the row of cabinets

that was favored at the time. By the second half of the 1970s, furniture manufactured as easily-assembled separate elements appeared in the room: a daybed (used as a sofa during the day) was placed opposite the window while a coffee table, two armchairs, and perhaps a round or square pouf seat (used as an additional “chair”) was also included. Shelves were often placed on empty wall spaces. Within the narrow confines of a housing estate apartment, it was also fashionable to make walls seem larger by hanging a huge poster (usually depicting an enlarged landscape or nature scene) that covered the entire surface. Serving as living room and bedroom, the placement of electric outlets in the larger-sized room found in these apartments determined not only where the television or other electronic devices could be placed, but also added the function of entertainment to a room that was already fulfilling dual roles.

Built-in cabinets were also included in these apartments as storage areas for clothing or other items. The smaller room functioned as a room for the children and contained a daybed or crib (depending on the child’s age), shelves, a desk, and chairs. Bathrooms were one unit built into the apartment, while the kitchen had a built-in cupboard containing a sink. Next to the gas stove there was a second cabinet used for storing foodstuffs above and with a space for the refrigerator left below. The size of this cabinet determined what size refrigerator could be installed in the kitchen. Already very small in size, these kitchens had just enough room for an even smaller-sized table, or a narrow “dining counter” installed under the window. In some variations on this floor plan, a glass wall divided the dining area from the kitchen.

At the beginning of the 1980s, an apartment with one room and two half-rooms located in the ten-story housing estate found in the Békásmegyer area of Budapest had an entryway where built-in cabinets provided storage, a coat rack, and a cabinet for storing shoes. An L-shaped sofa was placed next to the wall, with the smaller end of the sofa jutting out into the middle of the room. A coffee table that was on wheels, a row of cabinets containing a built-in desk, and a bar cabinet that also served as a TV stand could be found in the larger room. Between 5 and 7 square meters in size, the half-rooms were set

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80 At the time, a room’s surface area was classified as either a whole or a half room; any room smaller than 10–12 square meters was a half room while any room larger than this was a whole room.
aside for the children and contained a crib or daybed, a small-sized clothing rack and cabinet, a bookshelf, and a desk. In the decades following the end of communism, slight changes were made in how the living spaces in housing estate apartments were utilized and furnished. By removing non-supporting walls and replacing doors with arches, it was frequently possible to remodel the apartment’s interior and thereby create spaces that diverged from the usual examples and reflected some degree of individual taste.

**Summer and weekend homes**

At the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, a large percentage of the vacation resorts or summer homes that had previously been privately owned became state property. In the years that followed, labor unions were responsible for arranging “organized vacations for the workers.” Private ownership of vacation homes began to reemerge during the 1960s and gradually became another form of status symbol. In Hungary a plot of land that was one hundred to two hundred square meters in size was classified as a “weekend plot” where a vacation or weekend house could be built. A privilege that had previously only been available to the elite upper classes (naturally in a far different form) became available to the masses during this period. In 1980, nearly 120,000 privately-owned vacation homes had been registered, but this number was most likely far larger given the fact that many were willing to “camp out” in a toolshed or some sort of homemade shack that stood on a few hundred square meters of land.

Vacation homes constructed in favorable areas that boasted a proximity to lakes, rivers, or forests often served as a means of private investment. As of the beginning of the 1970s, renting out a room in a vacation house located on Lake Balaton or Lake Velence became a widespread practice that could engender a significant amount of supplementary income for the owners. Hobby gardens sprung up in zones located on the outskirts of larger cities and became places where amateur gardeners could relax while simultaneously producing fruit and vegetables for their families. Partly a result of fashion, the popularity enjoyed by weekend houses and garden plots also owed much to the quickening accumulation of private income as the legitimacy of the era’s political leadership was strengthened by turning a blind eye to the reemergence of private ownership.
From both an architectural and aesthetic point of view, vacation homes constructed between the 1960s and 1980s displayed a wide range of variety and could include structures such as a railway car or truck cab rendered livable, a handmade shack totaling eight to ten square meters in size, a small wooden or brick structure, or a multi-story, elegantly furnished villa. Due to the size of the plot of land, most vacation homes were rather small; only one-third had more than two rooms. These circumstances were naturally further influenced by the fact that—even in the mid-seventies—it was not possible to get a bank loan for building a vacation home, therefore property owners were forced to build the kind of structure that they could afford. In certain areas minimal access to public facilities (electricity at most) resulted in the formation of shantytowns. Beginning in the 1970s, parts of small villages or mountainside communities that were losing their populations were transformed into areas for vacation homes.

The layout and usage of vacation homes was obviously determined by the structure’s size. In smaller houses the living area was not strictly separated from the area where gardening tools were stored. Houses primarily built for vacation purposes basically followed the same functional order found in permanent residences. The quality of household items was very different as objects that had been discarded from the “city house” frequently found a home at the weekend house or bungalow, which subsequently became a refuge for furnishings or appliances that had fallen out of fashion, such as combined cabinets, daybeds, rows of cabinets, cookstoves, or refrigerators. In summer homes built purely for the sake of relaxation and vacationing, the well-to-do usually had new and fashionable furniture. As an effect of the financial growth that occurred between the 1970s and 1980s, those belonging to the wealthiest social groups were able to reproduce the same circumstances in their vacation home that they enjoyed at their permanent residence. When the Iron Curtain fell, the further growth and strengthening of the position enjoyed by Hungary’s “upper ten thousand” led to the emergence of a unique style of architecture in vacation homes. For the very wealthy, other than a second, third, or even fourth vacation home built in Hungary’s most popular resort towns, it was also not uncommon to own a summer home in a European resort. While luxurious surroundings reemerged as the hallmark of the upper crust, the 1990s saw a reduction in vacation homes for middle- and lower-middle-class individuals, in spite
of the fact that this opportunity had been a commonplace and widespread option for these same social groups in the 1980s. As incomes changed and families became more impoverished, maintaining a second property for the sake of intermittent usage became increasingly impossible. Many individuals tried to cut living expenses by moving from their housing estate apartment to live in these seasonal structures instead.