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"Our Greatest Treasure, the Child": The Politics of Child Care in Hungary, 1945–1956

Abstract

This article explores child care and preschool educational policies in Hungary from the end of World War II until the 1956 revolution, focusing mainly on the forms of organization of preschool education, methods of financing, and the quality of educational facilities. Special attention is devoted to the gender dimension of the educational system, provisions concerning women's employment, and women's entitlements as mothers and caregivers. The article considers preschool education as the point of collision between (forced) productive *and* reproductive *roles of women in the socialist system. In addition to analyzing the legislation on child care, the article studies the different stages of the policy process, in an effort to identify how competing discourses on welfare policies by multiple actors and agencies—such as the state, parties, local and county administrators, various interest groups, the women's movement, and parents—were strategically used in political narratives striving for dominance in the political field. It is also concerned with the implementation of these laws, and with their effect upon those directly affected by these policies.*

The issue of child care sheds light on the main features of the social policy toward women and children during socialism. The received wisdom is that—at least from a legal point of view—socialist systems provided "universal"[1] and equal work and educational opportunities for men and women alike. By focusing on child care

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services in Hungary from a long-term historical perspective, I challenge this assumption on multiple levels.

First, I argue that—despite the social and political breakthrough of the new regime—the socialist period in Hungary did not represent a total departure from the past in all aspects of the society. I document the ways in which the structure of the child care system continued and even completed *longue-durée* processes that started in the nineteenth century and were crystallized in the interwar period. To highlight the complex pattern of continuities and discontinuities of the socialist regime with previous political regimes, I focus on a particularly formative period: 1945–1956. This interval encompasses both the transition from pre-socialist to socialist social policy and the articulation of the new socialist system that would function, with certain additions and amendments, until 1989.

Second, I argue that the socialist child care system was not universal, but selective and in many aspects discriminatory: against women's participation in economic production, against members of certain social strata, and against certain age groups, such as preschoolers. The child care system was neither unified nor centralized. The socialist state in the formative period gradually but totally withdrew from child care services, completing a process that had started earlier. It transferred all matters of financial and organizational responsibility to local, district, and county administration or other providers (such as factories), but preserved a general administrative, ideological, and political control over the system. The withdrawal of the state gave room to conflicts of interest among various social and political actors at the local and county level, between employees and employers, and between different factories, industries, and ministries, which together shaped the outcome of a heterogeneous system.

Third, I suggest that, contrary to common expectations, welfare developments in socialist countries were in many aspects comparable to similar phenomena and trends appearing simultaneously in Western Europe, and thus should not be discussed separately, as a unique and largely isolated historical experience.

The article consists of five parts. The introductory section briefly reviews the main scholarly approaches to welfare systems, and the employment of women and its impact on gender relations and division of labor in families. The second part delineates long-term characteristics of the child care system in Hungary, highlighting structural continuities and discontinuities. After summarizing the characteristics of socialist welfare in Hungary, the third and main part focuses on the evolution of the Hungarian child care system in 1945–1956 at the level of the central legislation. Based on archival research, the fourth part presents a comparison of social structures and actors

shaping the outcome of central legislation on child care. I take into account reactions of local, district, and county administrators involved in funding and maintaining territorial kindergartens on the one hand, and leaders of different industrial units, their trade unions, and respective ministries engaged in running factory kindergartens on the other hand. On the basis of this case study, the last section offers more general conclusions concerning the nature of the socialist regime and its relationship to social policy concerning women and children.

Welfare Theories and the Issue of Child Care

The research agenda of my study has been stimulated by several limitations of the available works on welfare systems and their connection with issues of child care and women's participation to the labor market. First, classical "mainstream" welfare typologies are based on a comparison of national systems. These theoretically minded sociological studies were generally written in the 1970s or later decades, truncating the historical dimension of their research (Esping-Andersen 1990). Few studies went further back in time to compare local and regional approaches to the question of welfare (Slack 1990; King 1997).

Second, a majority of studies focus primarily on West European countries. In view of certain socio-political variables, these countries are classified as social-democratic, corporatist-conservative, and liberal welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990). Since case studies concentrating on Central and Eastern Europe are quite rare (Deacon and Szalai 1990; Deacon 1992), socialist countries have rarely been included in pan-European comparisons with Western countries, but are usually grouped separately as "socialist welfare-states," conceived as having no direct connection to Western Europe. Few studies try to overcome these limitations by pointing to the common origins of West and East European welfare structures in the nineteenth century and their long-term continuities in Communist as well as democratic market societies; nor do they document the underlying corporatist-conservative features of socialist welfare systems (for the case of Hungary, see Ferge 1986).

Third, studies of welfare have generally overlooked the importance of the evolution of organized forms of child care as principal services enabling mothers' labor market participation (Melhuish and Moss 1991; Lamb et al. 1992; Gustavson 1994; Rose 1999). The issue of child care has been approached mainly by sociological and historical works focusing on the emergence of the family model with two working parents, on the increasing participation of wives and mothers

in the workforce, and on the effect of parental employment on the gender division of child care in the family (Borman 1984; Lewis and Lewis 1996).

Fourth, the issue of child care[2] and preschool education in post-1945 Hungary is largely under-studied, in contrast with the history of kindergartens in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries (Vág, Orosz, and Zibolen 1962; Vág 1991; Vág and Scheipl 1993; Vág 1994; Szekerczés 1991). Research on the gender practices of the Hungarian welfare state in general is only in its initial stages, and basic reference works are still lacking (notable exceptions are Goven 1993 and Haney 2002). There are only a few comprehensive works that explore state policies regarding the interdependent issues of family, women, and children (Zimmermann 1999).

The Hungarian case study resembles other cases in the Eastern bloc. The lack of a well-developed child care system under early socialism can be explained by the fact that these regimes' "extensive" employment policies not only failed to provide welfare services for their workers, but were also ambivalent toward building a female labor force (Heinen 2002; Ilic 1999; Ilic 2001).

Feminist theorists of welfare have emphasized that while entitlements and provisions for men aim to *decommodify*, the specific interest of women lies precisely in their *commodification* (O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1993). Since their wage-earning activities are limited by their social activity as mothers and caregivers, the availability of provisions and services such as crèches or child care centers determines their ability to mediate this tension. Classical welfare typologies have been revised and reclassified by taking into account gender as an analytical category, introducing new variables, and concentrating on other welfare provisions beyond entitlements such as family allowance and maternity benefits (Ruggie 1984; Gordon 1990; Leira 1992; Borchorst 1994; Lewis 1993; Sainsbury 1994 and 1996; Bergqvist et al. 1999).

Gender studies of welfare usually cover the "long nineteenth century" and the interwar period (Bock and Thane 1991; Stewart 1989; Marks 1996; Duchen 1994). They highlight states' vested interest in protective measures, pointing out that policies toward children, including child care, were often directly connected with efforts to stop population decline, improve the standard of health, and reduce high mortality rates in order to protect the country's economic and military potential. Often, they show, states' interests were couched as *children's* interests. Such a focus tends to obscure the ways in which child care also served *mothers*' needs as workers, and what they did in the absence of state-sponsored services. Recent studies of the evolution and structural characteristics of national child care systems in

various countries (Gornick, Meyers, and Ross 1997; Rose 1999; Berry 1999; Michel 1999; Michel and Mahon 2002; Kirschenbaum 2001; Brennan 1998) have taken a more comprehensive approach, considering child care from the perspective of the interests of mothers as well as children. They concentrate on public debates over the interwoven and often conflicting interests of the state, philanthropic, and volunteer organizations, and on their outcome as reflected in child care legislation and practices. Finegrained social histories have also been able to capture what Sonya Michel (1999) calls "maternal invention"—age-old solutions of working-class women to the problem of child care, such as entrusting children to charitable day nurseries, relatives, or neighbors; carrying them to the factory or agricultural fields; locking them up in apartments; or letting them out in the street for the entire day. These studies show that a dual emphasis on both state policies and mothers' agency can better explain the history of child care policy and its impact on women as mothers and workers over time. My study of Hungary is informed by this new academic interest in the long-term development of national child care services for preschoolers and its implications for women.

Child Care Services in Pre-Socialist Hungary

Kindergartens have a long history in Hungary, corresponding with the main stages of the process of nation- and state-building. A patriotic aristocratic woman, Countess Teréz Brunszvik, established the first "kindergarten" in 1828, with the goal of promoting Hungarian national values beyond the care and education of small children. In 1836 an association was formed for establishing kindergartens, with another prominent aristocrat, Count Leó Festetich, as one of its initiators and its first chair. The association co-opted revolutionary male politicians by including figures such as Lajos Kossuth, who became the governor of Hungary during the war of independence in 1849, in its leadership, and participated in a more general movement of national awakening against Habsburg domination, encouraging the civil activities of a wide social middle stratum. After the defeat of the 1848–1849 revolution, the Habsburg neo-absolutist regime that followed repressed civil associations, since they were considered places of national resistance, forcing many kindergartens to close their doors.

The political compromise reached in 1867 between Hungary and the Habsburg house—known as the *Ausgleich*—which led to the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, inaugurated a new stage in the development of kindergartens[3] that was linked with the national question and with the process of industrialization. In the

last quarter of the nineteenth century, non-Hungarian ethnic groups represented more than 50 percent of the total population of the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (Hanák and Mucsi 1978, 413–19). In order to foster the cultural assimilation of various ethnic groups, the Hungarian government initiated a strong educational offensive at all levels and consequently gradually became an important provider of child care services.[4] In 1879 the first state-financed kindergarten was established in Northern Hungary (in an industrial town with several distilleries, a tannery, and a sawmill),[5] and their number grew dynamically from the early 1880s onward.[6] During these years, official education policy took a radical turn. Care for the (poor and needy) children was no longer perceived as a task belonging "exclusively" to the family or to philanthropic activity within the sphere of civil society (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1876, 181–82). Instead, due to the "urgent necessity" to establish kindergartens, the state assumed the role of "initiator" (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1886, 92–93; Hungarian Ministry of Education 1887, 99–100). However, the state reserved its right to establish such institutions only "in certain places, where the interest of the state and the society requires them" (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1887, 99–100).

Although it corresponded to a wider international trend, the increased state participation in founding new kindergartens had in fact strong national connotations. In order to promote the cultural homogenization of the society, state-sponsored kindergartens were concentrated in regions dominated by ethnic minorities, such as Northern Hungary and Transylvania.[7] Another priority was (heavy) industrial and mining areas with high concentrations of working-class families, such as Northern Hungary and most of the capital, Budapest. The Ministry of Education emphasized that the aim of these institutions was to promote the Hungarian language and sustain religious values (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1908, 8 and 11–13).[8] At the same time, many Hungarian agricultural counties lacked state-financed kindergartens, relying instead on a network of locally founded or charitable child care services placed under the administrative supervision of the Ministry of the Interior.

As the role of the state increased, a law regulating kindergartens was adopted in 1891. It approved three different types of institutions, according to the care they provided: (1) kindergartens providing educational training in the morning and in the afternoon, sending children home for lunch; (2) child care centers providing care and nutrition; and (3) summer child care centers, providing care and meals for peasant children during the agricultural labor season, from early morning until late evening.[9] Localities, civil or religious organizations, foundations, or private persons could maintain all types.

Nevertheless, the law stipulated the obligation of local administration to establish and finance child care institutions. As a function of the number of preschool children and the level of taxation revenues of the community, larger cities and towns were obliged to set up kindergartens providing education, and smaller localities to organize child care centers, while villages had to set up summer child care centers (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1908, 7–8). The law declared that attendance at kindergarten was mandatory for children between the ages of three and six, except for those who could be proven to be provided for at home, namely, children from middle-class backgrounds (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1908, 7–8).

The 1891 law had numerous shortcomings. For example, it failed to stipulate in detail the rights and duties of local authorities in administering kindergartens; to ensure proper central supervision over the implementation of the law; to set official standards for the salaries of the (already almost exclusively female) personnel; or to specify the level of state financial support for running kindergartens. Although local communities were legally obliged to maintain kindergartens, in practice they often avoided expenditures for such institutions, favoring other priorities and objectives. As a result, only one-third of the local communities had kindergartens before World War I (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1908, 7–8). When local communities ran care institutions, their declared aim was different from that of the state, since they concentrated on local social problems and not on the "national" question. The state nevertheless continued to be involved in establishing and financing kindergartens, building up its own network.

As a result of efforts to expand the network of state-financed kindergartens, their number grew the most dynamically, almost tenfold in twenty years, from 57 in 1886 to 527 in 1906.[10] At the beginning of the twentieth century, the child care system in Hungary had thus become quite heterogeneous, comprising a variety of network services that functioned simultaneously, reflecting the divergent aims and even competing interests of the state, local communities, middle-class charity associations, and religious organizations. This was manifest in the types of kindergartens the different interest groups maintained: the state was concerned with the education of children, not with their daily care.[11] In comparison, localities preferred to run child care centers, mostly in their cheapest form—the summer child care centers in agricultural counties (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1908, 7–8).

In sum, the pre–World War I child care system in Hungary exhibited several features that were to have a long-term impact. First, in theory, the kindergarten legislation contained a universalistic principle, declaring the attendance of kindergartens mandatory. In practice, however, this principle was diluted by unequal access to preschool

education for children in different parts of the society, and by the dispensations granted to middle-class children. Second, different agencies and interest groups pursued different child care goals. State kindergartens focused on the *Magyarization* of children of ethnic minorities and stipulated high fines for non-Hungarian or working-class parents who refused to enroll their children in kindergartens. Child care centers financed by local communities aimed to secure cheap seasonal female labor for agriculture, and thus enabled women to participate in the labor market, but only at certain times of the year. Civil, charitable, or religious organizations functioned as welfare institutions targeting the children of the most disadvantaged strata of the society. Third, the administrative supervision of kindergartens was shared by the Ministry of Education, which regulated the content of their educational programs, and the Ministry of the Interior, which supervised legal compliance, social utility, and financial provisions at the local level. Over time, the role of the Ministry of the Interior grew in importance. Consequently, kindergartens became politicized institutions, aimed at the cultural homogenization of minorities, social control of the working class, and central supervision of local communities.

World War I had a strong impact on Hungarian society and politics, with a direct effect on the education system. Following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory, including much of its heavy and mining industries, with their extensive network of state-built kindergartens, located in Southern Slovakia and Transylvania. In postwar Hungary, state-financed kindergartens existed mostly on the peripheries of Budapest, a metropolis where heavy and light industries were concentrated. As Hungary became an ethnically homogeneous country, the state lost one of its main political interests in establishing new kindergartens, not to mention experiencing considerable economic and financial difficulties. As a result of these hardships, the number of kindergartens financed by local communities grew slowly. Instead of state- or locally financed child care institutions, new forms of heterogeneous and temporary centers appeared, sponsored by middle-class female philanthropists and especially by religious organizations.

During the interwar period, the only important amendment to the 1891 law was adopted in 1936, as part of a wider legal package on demographic policy. Facing a population decrease, the authoritarian political regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy banned abortion but granted certain welfare provisions aimed at preserving and protecting the Hungarian race ("*faj*").[12] As part of this pronatalist policy, in 1936, kindergartens shifted their focus from the education of children to improving their health, with a special emphasis on the poorest

strata of the society. In order to fulfill this task of national importance, required by "the interest of the future generation," control over the budget of the kindergartens and their supervision was transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of the Interior (a feature that, as we shall see, was preserved in the socialist regime as well). Although the influence of the Ministry of the Interior had been felt by local services starting in the late 1880s, under the 1936 law it took predominance, and in this way, the state gained supervision over non-state-financed child care institutions. The Ministry of Education retained control over the content of the education programs, but lost its right to found new kindergartens.

Kindergarten in the interwar period thus neglected the specific interests of working mothers, focusing instead on the "interests" of children, defined by those who spoke on their behalf. Very few kindergartens and/or child care centers aimed to reconcile their services with the interests and needs of working mothers. Child care services were important to the state only insofar as they paved the way for intrusion into the private sphere by authoritarian ideologies capitalizing on the interests of the children (as the state defined them).

Welfare Policy and Child Care in Socialist Hungary

In order to explain the evolution of child care under socialism in Hungary, I now turn to a brief discussion of the main features of welfare and reproduction policies. The Hungarian welfare system evolved from a predominantly conservative-corporatist type in the interwar periods, to a socialist and state-controlled type under the Communist regime, preserving many features from the previous period (Ferge 1986).

Under the socialist regime, the welfare system underwent multiple changes. Notwithstanding some long-lasting social policy trends, one can distinguish several periods. The abolition of an autonomous social policy in the 1950s, its revival in the 1960s and 1970s, and its expansion in the 1980s marked the evolution of the Hungarian welfare system. Since the late 1980s, the state-controlled welfare system has been gradually replaced by a new "mixed" welfare model.

In the first postwar years, the state for the first time developed a comprehensive social policy. Starting in 1948, however, a new Stalinist leadership abolished the market economy, and with it, dismantled social policy as a separate institutionalized sphere. Except for social insurance entitlements related to labor policy, all welfare institutions and provisions were canceled, while the Ministry of Welfare was replaced with the Ministry of Health (1950; see Ferge 1986). Later, under the impact of the 1956 revolution, the regime liberalized family-based production

(the so-called "secondary economy") and developed a comprehensive social policy encompassing full employment, and the expansion of the retirement system and other social entitlements (Heinrich 1986). Starting in the 1960s, the level of social benefits increased and new benefits were granted, including child care grants for three years in 1967. The Social Security Act of 1975 introduced general access to health services and unified formerly diversified benefits. There were also changes in the methods of financing social insurance, which were covered from the state budget, and employer and employee contributions.

Welfare, Workforce, and Reproduction

In the early 1950s, the drive of the Communist regime toward rapid industrialization generated an imperative need for labor force. This need was partially filled with women's employment. The principles of "state feminism" elaborated in 1951 promoted a family model that assumed that women would be wage earners like their husbands (Pető and Rásky 1999). As Gail Kligman's work on Communist Romania also points out, the transformation of gender relations and the control of reproduction were essential dimensions in building the socialist state. But the formal legal emancipation of women and their integration into the labor force resulted, in practice, in a double or even triple burden for women, "if one adds childbearing" (Kligman 1998). Under the paternalist structure of the socialist state, gender emancipation did not mean equality of rights and opportunity; what men and women had in common was "their labor power, which, from a sociological point of view, made them equal under the law." Apart from this, the traditional subordination of women in family and society and the feminization of lower-paid sectors of the economy continued unaltered, while strategic economic sectors were monopolized by male workers (Kligman 1998).

As in Romania, women's full employment in Hungary generated a tension between the demand for women's labor and the task of national reproduction. Given the severe decline in the birth rate in the early 1950s, the regime launched a sustained pronatalist policy, which had as its main component the 1953 interdiction of abortion.[13] Since the implementation of the law was strictly controlled, it was very effective in raising the number of births in short time. However, the population boom challenged the state to reorganize and enhance preschool education in order to absorb the great number of small children and facilitate women's continuing participation in the workforce. In other words, the abortion ban led to a collision between women's *productive* and *reproductive* roles. While the 1949 constitution claimed the right of equal (and mandatory) work for

men and women, other laws blocked women's participation in the labor market. This consolidated women's triple burden as childbearers, workers, and caregivers, while also placing added strain on families. Instead of increasing women's participation in the workforce, the abortion ban actually led to a high number of death due to illegal abortions, contributing significantly to the popular dissatisfaction that eventually led to the 1956 revolution.

The political change that occurred in 1956 had further important consequences for women's status. On the one hand, the regime was forced to strengthen its demographic policy, in reaction to Hungary's declining population. On the other hand, there was also an ideological and practical rehabilitation of the family, which allowed the consolidation of autonomy in the private sphere. In order to reconcile these social aspects, women's temporary exit from full employment became semi-legalized through a series of employment regulations: the introduction of a child care allowance for a period that varied between one and a half and three years in 1967, a job-protecting social-security benefit facilitating child care at home during the first three years of life, together with additional paid sick leave to care for sick schoolchildren, and early retirement for women.

The 1970s were dedicated to the development of light industry, resulting in a steady rise in the standard of living. Even more than before, women became targets of social policy. They were entitled to a pregnancy allowance, free medical care, and employment security. The constant increase in the number of child care facilities such as crèches and all-day kindergartens assisted mothers' employment. Due to the decline in the number of births, in the 1980s kindergarten services could provide all-day services for almost all preschoolers in Hungary, a rate of coverage seconded only to East Germany. On the whole, Hungarian social support for families, children, and youth in the years between 1945 and 1989 appears to have been shaped primarily by the dominant political ideology and its corresponding centralized system of planning (Kolosi and Wnuk-Lipinski 1983); only coincidentally did it also benefit women and children.

Child Care during the Transition to State Socialism

The evolution of welfare facilities had a strong impact on child care policies. Although Hungarian political life after 1945 was initially dominated by a coalition of parties that included the Communists, the Ministry of Welfare was controlled from the beginning by the Communist Party. In order to increase its popularity and gain full control over the political power, the women's section of the party published programs promising extensive welfare services for the population that had been greatly affected by the war, including child

care, extended education for adults, and welfare provisions for mothers.[14] The Communists claimed to take the burden of child care from the shoulders of the parents (mothers), using the slogan "Our greatest treasure is the child."[15] After years of war, inflation, economical shortages, and high unemployment, these promises proved successful, but they were not fulfilled. Largely publicized, the slogan soon became an argument for parents claiming their right (their *children's* right) to child care services from the state.

In the first postwar years, due to economic hardship as well as the ravages of the war, which had strongly affected the buildings and equipment of kindergartens), child care networks faced great shortages, were deprived of financial support, and had to rely extensively on the volunteer activity of parents and on international aid for nutrition.[16] Because of budget cuts, only state kindergartens received financial aid.[17] In cases where buildings were usable, children sat on wooden boards placed on bricks, had no toys, and slept on tables.[18] In order to become eligible for state support, numerous kindergartens maintained by localities demanded to be "nationalized," but their requests were usually rejected.[19]

In the winter of 1946–1947, monthly reports highlighted that one-half to one-third of registered children could not attend kindergartens due to illness or lack of appropriate clothing and shoes.[20] Most local kindergartens operated only in the morning, since they had no heating and could not keep children the entire day in cold rooms.[21] The most critical provisions, such as food, were almost totally unavailable.[22] To counter shortages, parents often sent children to kindergartens with bread for lunch and wood for heating on their backs.[23]

Due to its concentration of workers in heavy industry, Budapest received favorable treatment, including substantial financial support, from the state.[24] Nevertheless, in both the heavy and light industrial zones of the capital, it was workers who repaired, financed, and furnished many state kindergartens, transforming them into "factory" child care centers.[25] The state did not hinder this process, but initiated a trend that would accelerate over time: slowly retreating as a provider of child care provisions, while at the same time gaining supervision and authority over child care institutions supported by other interest groups.[26]

In addition to shortages, the administration of kindergartens became further complicated. In 1945 it was formally transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Welfare, which was granted authority over opening, personnel decisions, and the like. The Ministry of Education continued to supervise educational programs; the Ministry of the Interior supervised the implementation

of the laws at the local level; and the Ministry of Finance controlled the budget and approved investments. The Ministry of Finance became particularly important, since it had the last word in every decision concerning support to kindergartens.

This complicated structure generated numerous inter-ministerial conflicts and administrative ambiguities, since each ministry had its own vision and set of priorities. For example, the Ministry of Welfare defined kindergartens as *educational* institutions,[27] since it did not have the financial means to turn them into child care centers with meals and extended opening hours, thus providing services for hungry children and their working or unemployed parents verging on the edge of survival. On 14 September 1946, the Ministry of Welfare introduced a new curriculum into kindergartens.[28] Although its content was progressive (for example, eliminating mandatory prayer), it was nevertheless strictly gendered (boys, for instance, were required to organize "war-games, . . . draw images of war and of the enemy"); the educational program also overestimated preschoolers' capacity for understanding (for example, children were expected to learn by heart the poems of great European and Hungarian poets and writers). Overall, in the first postwar years not only did the reconstruction of child care facilities not advance, but the state had already begun to signal its uninterest in child care despite its political propaganda on the issue.

The Communist Takeover and Child Care Policies

The Communist takeover in 1948 did not lead to active state involvement in child care. Despite promises, preschool educational institutions did not receive even the minimal monthly financial aid, a situation that made it impossible for summer child care centers to function during the harvest season.[29] The only tangible changes occurred in the administration of kindergartens, which was switched from the Ministry of Welfare to the Ministry of Education (Order 4073/1949, July 1949). This change altered yet again the aims and priorities of child care services. Under the Ministry of Education, the new declared task of kindergartens was surprisingly the *care*, not the education, of children. The Ministry of Finance still retained the upper hand in the organization and financing of the child care system in Hungary, assisted only by the Ministry of Education.

The influence of the Ministry of Finance on child care can be illustrated by regulations on nutrition fees. Providing meals for preschoolers was one of the most difficult challenges faced by the postwar child care system. Kindergartens supplied morning and afternoon education but sent children home during lunchtime. In contrast, child care

institutions—with or without educational context—were accustomed to providing meals and thus better served the interests of both mothers and children. Not only was this practice better for their health, but parents did not have to interrupt their working hours in the middle of the day to pick up their children and go back and forth between the kindergarten and home. Beyond the loss of working time, this could also mean extreme physical effort, since it involved carrying children on their backs in mud and in cold weather, without appropriate clothing, or giving up care services altogether and instead locking up children at home for the entire day.[30] After the war, nutrition was usually provided free by international aid organizations. As time passed and economic conditions stabilized, localities and factories started to provide food from their own budgets or for a minimal fee paid by the parents. Fees for alimentation usually made up 5 to 7 percent of the parents' salaries, and this required state regulation and unification.

In November 1951, the government initiated a campaign for increasing and easing the participation of women and mothers in production. To this end, it claimed to introduce unified fees for meals in child care institutions. However, in territorially organized kindergartens the newly introduced fees were not uniform but rather increased: starting in January 1952, the Ministry of Finance demanded the payment of one extra Forint for daily meals for each child. Although county councils claimed that the total fees were scaled to fit "the social situation and salaries of the parents,"[31] the raise resulted in double or even triple prices.[32]

Parents were unable to pay the high amounts, especially peasants, who also carried the burden of heavy forced requisitions of agricultural products.[33] As a consequence, children were taken out of child care institutions, thus jeopardizing either their proper care during working hours or their mothers' participation in the labor force.[34] In addition to high fees, cold weather, bad roads, and lack of heating also contributed to the total depopulation of many kindergartens. Desperate kindergarten teachers were advised by the Ministry of Education *to educate parents*—to explain "the moral importance" of paying the high fees and to point out "that in any event they could not manage to feed their children at home three times a day for the same amount."[35] (In reality, this statement was a gross distortion, since children did not receive breakfast and dinner in kindergartens!) In factory kindergartens, leaders and trade unions often understood the importance of the service and covered or waived meal fees for the children of their workers, but the Ministry of Education tried to put an end to this practice, since it undermined others' effort to pay the high fees.[36]

Legislating Child Care

It was only in 1953 that a new law on kindergartens was adopted at the initiative of the Ministry of Education (replacing the 1891 law amended in 1936), creating a "unified" system of kindergarten education.[37] Despite appearances, child care services were not presented as universal educational institutions in the interest of all preschoolers: not all children merited the right to become "healthy, brave, disciplined and self-conscious people" with the help of a socialist kindergarten. The law was aimed only at providing child care for working mothers. Four years after the state introduced the *universal* right and obligation for women to work and thus participate in the socialist *production* (1949), the state legislated the means of enabling mothers with preschool-aged children to enter the labor force. The law granted access to services for two-and-a-half-year-old children only in the event that their two *employed* parents or single mothers could not provide care "in other ways."[38] This paragraph was used to regulate the access of all preschoolers.[39] In principle, children registered in previous years could not be removed from kindergarten, even if their mothers stopped working. In practice, however, children of non-employed or sick mothers were not admitted at all.[40] In case a working mother applied, children of non-employed or sick mothers were expelled from the kindergarten.[41] Children of poor and needy mothers were admitted only if there were places available.[42]

Access to child care services was regulated by local committees made up of individuals appointed from the representatives of the Communist Party and different social organizations. These committees distinguished among children on the basis of the political and social characteristics of their parents. Children of peasant women (those working their own fields or household plots) who were married to factory workers were often denied places on the grounds that their mothers were "not employed."[43] Children of former members of interwar socio-economic elites were also highly likely to be excluded.[44] However, those who could remain in positions of authority under Communism often managed to ensure access to kindergarten for their own children in the countryside as well.[45]

The law preserved the variety of child care institutions, such as kindergartens, kindergartens with child care services, child care centers, and summer day care centers. However, administratively, only localities and factories could establish and run such institutions. The state totally retreated as a child care provider. One of the many steps in this direction had in fact been taken in 1950, when a new law regulating salary standards for kindergarten personnel stipulated that they should be paid by local councils or by factories, offices, agricultural

cooperatives, or social organizations.[46] The new 1953 law also preserved this feature. Moreover, all existing state kindergartens were transferred to the jurisdiction of local communities, which had to fully cover their costs. In order to function, all preschool institutions had to be approved first by the financial department of county councils and then by the Ministry of Education.

Although private kindergartens or child care institutions financed by foundations or civil or religious associations were forbidden in 1948, informal networks of child care arrangements continued to function in Budapest and in other major cities during the 1950s, especially in districts with a high number of women working in factories or government offices. According to a report of the Budapest city council written in November 1951, there were 22 (known) private kindergartens staffed by freelance kindergarten teachers or untrained personnel and charging quite high fees in the city.[47] Since these informal child care arrangements lacked buildings of their own, children were taken on long supervised walks in the city. These were not idyllic excursions into nature, but daily taxing experiences during which children spent the whole day in the open, even in winter and without proper clothing.

A government order issued on 22 February 1952 banned private kindergartens,[48] prompting numerous kindergarten teachers offering education in languages or music to apply to the Ministry of Education for permission to continue their activities in order to earn a livelihood.[49] Their requests were supported by parents badly needing child care facilities, among them many Communist Party members and working mothers active in women's organizations, who argued tactically that the "People's democracy allows working parents to provide their children with education in languages"[50]—but to no avail. Nevertheless, despite the official ban, these kinds of informal private arrangements of child care did not cease to exist even in the 1960s. Although the Ministry did not openly support them, it tolerated their presence. For their part, local administrators often backed the activity of private kindergartens, since legal institutions could not fully meet the demand.[51] These informal kindergartens were nevertheless continuously monitored, becoming the subject of recurrent debates in the Ministry of Education.[52]

The Ministry of Education preserved pedagogical control over kindergartens but exercised it through the administrations of county and district councils. The most important organ in the administration of territorial kindergartens was the executive county committee, which made decisions over the budget, approving or refusing new funding. Kindergartens and child care services provided in parents' working places from workers' welfare funds were not fully visible, since the Ministry of Education did not possess accurate information

about them. To enhance administrative control over these institutions,[53] the 1953 law regulated and rigidly fixed the opening hours of factory kindergartens as well.[54] This regulation was difficult to meet: agricultural cooperatives, three-shift factories, and offices had different working hours, and the law did not accommodate workers' schedules. As a result, in situations in which parents went to work at 6 A.M., they had no choice but to leave their children in front of the territorially organized kindergartens—even in winter—where they waited until opening hours; in the late afternoon, since kindergartens closed at 4 P.M. while parents finished working at 6 P.M., children waited on the street for hours.[55] In vain, parents complained at local councils about the inflexibility of the central administration.

In order to implement the 1953 law, the Ministry of Education sent questionnaires to various ministries, county authorities, trade unions, and kindergarten teachers for feedback.[56] At the grass-roots level, kindergarten teachers raised concrete issues and suggested comprehensive amendments, demanding direct participation in the decision-making process over the budget of kindergartens at both the local and county levels and greater state involvement in financing.[57] Economic ministries approached the question of child care as a function of the gender composition of their labor pools. For example, the Ministry of Light Industry, motivated by the need to secure their stable female labor force, proposed that opening hours of kindergartens flexibly correspond to the working hours of parents, even of those who worked in three-shift factories, and that child care also be made available to school-aged children in the same place during the night.[58] None of these proposals were accepted.

Beyond these shortcomings of the 1953 law regulating kindergartens, other structural contradictions affected mothers' labor market participation. The law on kindergartens collided with the law for the "protection" of mothers and children, also introduced in 1953, which, in reality, excluded women from highly paid heavy industrial jobs and night shifts.[59] It therefore closed down six-day care centers[60] in light, heavy, traffic, and construction industries since they were considered to be "harming family relations." It was at this time that the law banning abortion was also passed,[61] putting women's productive and reproductive roles on a collision course without providing the means for reconciling the state's extensive labor and population policies. This unresolved triple pressure on women implied that, when it came to women, *reproduction* was considered economically more profitable than *production*.

In 1955, the Ministry of Finance replaced the uniform nutrition fee with a sliding scale that meant higher fees for parents with higher salaries. At the same time, however, the law set standards for nutrition,

differentiating among children according to the social strata of their parents. In agricultural zones, only a morning snack and lunch were provided for 4.20 Forints, while in industrial zones, a morning snack, lunch, and an afternoon snack were provided for 6 Forints. Although lower-paid parents could not afford the higher fees, their children suffered from less generous meal provisions; peasants working in agriculture, for example, paid only 4.20 Forints, but since their children spent more time in care during periods of intensive agricultural labor, they ended up suffering the consequences of fewer meals.[62] Local councils, employers, welfare funds, or trade unions covered large parts of the prescribed fees, but these subsidies varied. In factories, parents' contribution could not exceed 2 Forints a day per child, while in offices, it was set to the parents' salaries and number of children and varied between 5 and 15 percent. In agricultural zones, 1.60 Forints had to be paid, all one week in advance, and in case of sicknesses, fees were often not refunded.

Locally run kindergartens were very crowded and could not maintain the ratio of space per child stated in the 1953 law (1.7 square meters per child), since they were often functioning at 120-percent capacity.[63] Factory kindergartens were less crowded (with the notable exception of kindergartens in heavy industry factories). This was because, in 1954, the council of ministries stipulated that the network of territorially organized kindergartens should be expanded, not the one by factories.[64] In order to prepare already overcrowded local kindergartens for the birth boom that had resulted from the 1953 ban on abortions without investments from the central budget, it was decided, in 1955, to nationalize all factory-run kindergartens running at less than 85 percent of capacity, including their financing (namely, the workers' welfare funds).[65] Previously, underused factory kindergartens had been nationalized only occasionally; local councils could pressure employers and factory leaders to accept children from the locality into their kindergartens.[66] In the countryside, the equipment of summer day-care centers of agricultural cooperatives were often nationalized, since they were not in use for the entire year, and their possessions were turned over to local kindergartens.[67] But the 1955 order went much further.

The Ministry of Education could not execute the order in time, due to the lack of reliable statistics and the resistance of factories to reporting on their child care facilities. Still, local councils nationalized a considerable number of factory kindergartens: on average, 30 percent of those in each county.[68] Often the process took place without the knowledge of factory employers and workers' committees, stirring fierce resistance among parents as well, "since those kindergartens were built and maintained with workers' unpaid work and

welfare fund," as well as the contributions of trade unions.[69] Outraged factory leaders, trade unionists, administrators of different ministries, and working parents sought to reclaim their property, denouncing nationalization as a "stupid order" that "capitalizes on what factories achieved by overcoming great difficulties,"[70] but their requests were refused in the baldest terms.[71] Their funds were turned over to local councils, and children from the local area were placed in factory kindergartens.[72] The nationalization of factory kindergartens and their transformation into territorial ones resulted in overcrowded facilities, a sharp decrease in the quality of services and higher fees paid by parents working in the factory.[73]

Although factory kindergartens had higher nutrition standards than local kindergartens, parents were used to paying less, since the cost was partly subsidized by trade union and welfare funds.[74] Thus, nationalization meant not only that parents working in factories lost their property and welfare allocation, but also that they had to pay more for inferior services.[75] Parents whose children were transferred from district to newly nationalized kindergartens, however, found it outrageous that they had to pay higher fees than factory workers, whose child care costs were still partially subsidized.[76] Furthermore, nationalization generated additional unsolvable problems: many factory kindergartens were mixed-age institutions, providing care for babies, preschoolers, and students.[77] Nationalization in these cases meant that babies and school-aged children had first to be transferred to other institutions. Parents with several children thus had to transport their children to different institutions, often located at considerable distances.

After the 1956 revolution, local councils and factory workers were granted more authority, and trade unions gained more initiative. But this did not necessarily positively affect child care services. In 1957, the national trade union organization demanded that its members should be given priority for kindergarten services. The Ministry of Education disagreed, stating that kindergartens were social and educational institutions that had to give priority to children of needy mothers.[78] Significantly, the Ministry did not appeal to any principle of universal service or provision as a social right. Kindergartens were institutions for *needy* working mothers, not for organized, working, or not working mothers in general. Although the Ministry claimed that it was preparing children for primary school, preschool education was not universally available. The 1956 revolution did not improve child care services, although previously nationalized institutions of heavy industrial factories were de-nationalized. Women's request to create private (informal) kindergartens as self-help arrangements for enhancing limited services—in an effort to "make

the best of the situation"—published in the journal of the women's section of the Communist Party in 1957, did not materialize.[79]

Social Structures and Local Actors

The socialist system had extensive productive and reproductive needs, and (working) parents—mostly mothers—had to cope with the lack of autonomous, high-quality, affordable, and "universal" welfare provisions for their children. I argue that child care policies were shaped by a multitude of actors and interest groups acting at various levels. First, there was the Communist Party, acting through its representatives at various levels of the administration, who were animated by their divergent political and economic aims. Second, there were trade unions, factory leaders, and members of agricultural cooperatives, offices, and ministries with a heterogeneous social and gender composition, defending various welfare interests for their own workers and exercising unequal powers of influence over the administration. Third, there were women's organizations demanding and coping with child care assistance and welfare facilities to relieve their double burden of household and productive work. While highly diverse, these actors were often also parents; thus parenthood often combined with the actors' position in the highly hierarchical and gendered socialist regime to motivate their reactions to the problem of child care services.

In order to illustrate the interaction among these actors and how it shaped the outcome of the central legislation over preschool education, this section explores child care services at the local level from 1945 to 1956. My discussion focuses on the two main legal providers and maintainers of child care, namely, localities and factories. These distinct types of child care institutions involved different administrations and interest groups at various levels, thus forming two complex parallel structures: territorial kindergartens dependent on local, district, and county administrations; and factory kindergartens in different branches of industry with their trade unions and ministries. Due to the multiplicity of actors and interest groups involved, the two structures often overlapped or collided at various levels of administration. In analyzing them, I address the following questions: How did county, district, and local administrators react to the need for child care? What types of local child care institutions did district and county administrators support? How did they interpret central orders concerning the issue? I also examine the motivation of leaders of factories in light and heavy industries in opening kindergartens for their workers, and how their trade unions and ministries lobbied for child care services at the governmental level, asking what kind of services they prioritized.

My research samples originate mostly in two distinct counties: Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, situated in northern Hungary and traditionally dominated by heavy industry; and Bács-Kiskun, situated in middle to southern Hungary and specializing in agriculture. Although the economic structure of both these counties evolved over time toward more mixed economies, the dominance of certain types of industry in the given period underscores the relevance of socio-economic context over patterns of preschool education.

Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, composed of three former counties, had a heterogeneous socio-economic structure. Almost half the population worked in heavy industry and mining, while one-third was engaged in agricultural activities. From 1945 to 1956, the county was a main target of the campaign for socialist industrialization. As a result of input from labor immigrants who benefited from employment opportunities in the socialist sector, its population grew rapidly. The socio-economic composition of the county affected the evolution of its child care system, while the population growth increased utilization. Agricultural regions organized mainly local kindergartens and summer child care centers, while factory kindergartens were concentrated mainly in regions dominated by heavy industry. All were heavily crowded, far above the national average.

Independent farmers, who had consolidated their estates as a result of agrarian reform, dominated agriculture in Bács-Kiskun county. Because of the economic self-sufficiency of the peasant family unit, the process of land collectivization in the county initiated in 1948 proceeded slowly. Given the socio-economic structure of Bács-Kiskun, child care institutions differed from those operating in more urbanized and industrialized regions. Organized child care could run mostly during the agricultural season, not throughout the year. Although there were numerous summer child care centers in the region, the few regular kindergartens and day care centers functioned mostly in towns (hardly any state kindergartens were founded in the county). Villages had small populations, households were scattered over a larger territory, and the number of preschool children was low and could assemble only with great difficulty. As a result, the child-teacher ratio was superior to that prevailing in heavy industrial regions, where kindergartens were overcrowded.

In order to explain the evolution of child care in these counties, I must spell out the relationship between local and county authorities on the one hand, and leaders of agricultural cooperatives, factories, and local administration on the other. In general, localities were interested in founding new kindergartens. Members of the local executive committee, employers, employees, and local women's organizations advocated the extension of child care services in order to

increase production by bringing women into the labor market. But while recognizing the need for child care, local councils did not consider it an absolute priority. Child care centers were generally organized in nationalized buildings or ruined facilities. Due to minimal administrative support, they had to rely heavily on the volunteer activity of parents to improve the very poor conditions and raise standards.[80]

In addition, the autonomy of local councils was strictly limited. In the event that they intended to open new kindergartens, local authorities could not appeal directly to the Ministry of Education, but had to gain successive approvals from the financial departments of the district and then the county administration, which functioned as a filter between local and central organs and had the last word on such decisions. This intermediary county level was dominated by appointed administrators who had no interest in supporting child care, but wanted—on the contrary—to save money on it for other goals. Since county administration had the right to approve local budgets for localities, it often reversed local decisions, at times even refusing to release centrally allocated investments for local kindergartens in favor of "more important priorities."[81] Although urged by desperate parents to intervene, local councils had no means to pressure county administration to reconsider its decisions. The only solution was to address letters of complaint to the Department for Kindergartens in the Ministry of Education, blaming the county administration for not treating children as their "greatest treasure."[82] For its part, the Ministry of Education lacked both financial resources to assist new kindergartens and effective means to pressure county organs to implement its central decisions.

In agricultural cooperatives, employers and local administrations understood that the lack of child care hindered the employment of women, resulting in labor shortages during the harvest season.[83] Agricultural cooperatives were, however, too weak to provide such services, while county and district leaders had different priorities.[84] For the central administration, agriculture was not important, and party ideology did not favor welfare services for peasantry. The structure of peasant households and their territorial dispersion posed an additional obstacle to organized child care. Unlike in cities, preschool children in the countryside were spread over a large territory, making smaller child care institutions particularly expensive. The potential for child care services in rural areas was further hindered by the lack of trained, well-paid teaching personnel, and by the high fees demanded for minimal nutrition.[85]

Although cooperatives and local councils in agricultural counties often worked together to organize child care facilities, they could not

meet the demands of the working peasants.[86] Reflecting the different priorities set by the Party, the number and quality of summer child care centers in agricultural areas decreased year by year in the 1950s. Since they functioned for long opening hours, summer child care centers had to provide more food for their children and pay higher personnel costs, which could not be covered by cooperatives or the local administration.[87] Using mothers' evident interest in joining the labor force as leverage, the Ministry of Agriculture demanded a radical increase in state support for summer child care centers.[88] But interministerial meetings on improving these centers, attended by the Planning Office, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Education, failed to reach an agreement on central financial support.[89] In 1952 the Ministry of Education tried to make up for financial shortages by mobilizing parents and local women's organizations (self-help organizations at the local level), relying on their unpaid work and material contribution.[90] Women's organizations participated most actively in organizing and maintaining summer day-care centers in agricultural areas.[91]

The financial crisis of the summer day-care centers became acute in the mid-1950s.[92] In 1954 the Ministry of Education acknowledged that it lacked money to train leaders for the summer centers (although the previous year, training sessions had lasted for only three days), or to reprint a guiding textbook.[93] The Ministry appealed for resources from the local counties and cooperatives whose workers needed day care services. To cover shortages in the centers, local organizations had to conduct "educational work" among parents in order to convince them to "donate with pleasure objects to the kindergarten, such as furniture, pots, and blankets,"[94] and relied on the voluntary activity of local women's organizations.[95] The women's organizations in particular responded well to the call for help, providing personnel at no cost, including cooks and nurses, and collecting funds, among other things.

Different industries, ministries, and trade unions approached the problem of child care as a function of the gender composition of their labor force. For example, the mother and child protective legislation in 1953, and its consecutive amendments in 1954 and 1955, abolished six-day kindergartens, transforming them into simple child care centers.[96] Before taking this measure, the Ministry of Education demanded information from factories and localities about whether they ran such centers.[97] The questionnaire revealed that there were many such unregistered institutions maintained by factories employing mainly women. Leaders of textile, paper, timber, traffic, and construction industrial units, backed by their ministries and trade unions, lobbied successfully to preserve these institutions.[98] In contrast, neither

the Ministry of Heavy Industry nor the heavy industrial trade union tried to preserve theirs (though the Ministry of Education would have approved them!), telling their desperate factory leaders and workers that they did not have funds to maintain such operations.[99] This example shows that services provided by factories depended on the "traditional"—in other word, *utilitarian*—attitude of each industry toward its female workforce, the gender division of labor and segregation of work, and the strength of their trade unionism.

Heavy industrial factories were in the best position to finance and run child day-care services, since they had abundant resources for workers' welfare funds. However, the leadership of heavy industry units and their trade union organizations rarely showed a genuine interest in providing child care for their own workers. Since they offered jobs with high salaries for skilled working men and lacked a significant number of skilled female workers, these units neglected child care services, which were generally supposed to be provided in the family by mothers (even if they worked on the household plot).

Light industry, such as textiles, employing mostly mothers (often single, with small children), was not a priority in Hungary in the 1950s. In their efforts to rebuild the country and increase capital accumulation for further investment, the Hungarian Communist Party emulated the economic model of the Soviet Union, which was based on heavy industry. As a result, light industrial units had the lowest allocations for welfare services, and factories usually lacked funds of their own to invest. One would therefore suppose that in such cases the child care system required greater contributions from parents (mostly mothers). In practice, however, parents in light industrial units paid the lowest fees or even nothing at all, while services were often of the highest level.[100] That was because in traditionally low-paid and unskilled professions dominated by women, the factory directors, trade unions, and ministerial organizations understood and supported the need for child care and defended mothers' interests in order to maintain a cheap and stable labor force. All-day kindergartens were regarded as priority services, to be defended against state control and central legislation.[101] Light industrial factories also demanded unified care centers that merged the functions of care for nursing babies, preschoolers, and students in order to ease parents' and children's life. Neither officials in the Ministry of Education nor county administrators valued these proposals, and they refused to approve them.[102]

Although central legislation was restrictive, the gradual retreat of the state from child care services made it possible for different interest groups and actors on local and county, factory and industry levels to actively shape child care provisions according to their own interests.

This trend led to provisions that can be characterized as "liberal," since often they aimed to make a profit on kindergarten services. In 1952, for example, county financial departments set fees for meals without taking into account the difficult financial burden they imposed on parents or the negative impact they had on children whose parents could not afford to pay.[103]

In addition to county administrators, private local actors soon realized that providing child care services could become a profitable business. The state entrusted the maintenance of kindergartens to local and factory units, transferring control over fees for meals to "private" providers. This practice allowed providers to treat child care services not as welfare or educational institutions in the interest of working mothers or their children, but as profit-oriented enterprises. In certain fields of traditionally male-dominated light industrial and heavy industrial factories, factory leaders and workers' committees set unreasonably high fees for meals, often bluntly recognizing that it was in their interest to capitalize on these otherwise "non-profit" services.[104] At the same time, male-dominated professions and trade unions were neglecting child care services altogether, despite the fact that they also employed a high number of women. Instead, they redirected investment and welfare funds to other "priorities," such as maintaining three football teams, as was the case with the national printing industry.[105] Contrary to their approach, light industries (and agricultural cooperatives) with high concentrations of working mothers facilitated work-family resolutions by offering kindergartens with flexible hours, six-day care services, and minimal or waived fees for meals.[106]

Given local specificity and the reactions of the various interest groups, the degree of cooperation between local councils, district administration, and factory leadership on child care issues differed considerably according to the socio-economic context. In agricultural counties, local actors were forced to cooperate with one another due to inadequate budgets and the poor quality of child care provided by cooperatives. A typical solution was that an agricultural cooperative provided the building, while the local council (partially) covered maintenance costs. Repairs and furnishing were supplied by the voluntary work of the peasant parents living in the village.[107]

In regions dominated by heavy industry, other examples of collaboration could be found. Leaders of heavy industrial units convinced the local administration to run kindergartens for workers' children out of the budget allocated to local kindergartens.[108] Leaders of light industry could not have the same impact on local administration.[109] Moreover, factory kindergartens often had to fight with the local administration for the right to bar local children whose parents did

not work in the factory. Such cases were especially common where there was a high number of female workers.

Numerous documents indicate that leaders of heavy industrial units and county administration paid the least attention to child care services. Letters of complaint written by desperate parents and local councils about the low level and discriminatory character of kindergarten services flooded the Ministry of Education.[110] In response, the Ministry sent supervisors and pressured county administrators to maintain child care services.[111] One of the supervisors blamed the county council for not living up to the slogan "Our greatest treasure is the child." County administrators cynically rejected both local and ministerial requests, often not even bothering to make formal promises to improve the situation.[112] Instead, just before the outbreak of the 1956 revolution, heavy industrial leaders demanded the nationalization of their factory kindergartens in order to shed what they regarded as a "burden."[113] After the revolution, the same leaders demanded that their child care institutions be *de*-nationalized—and they were the only ones to be granted this privilege.[114]

County administrators and party functionaries in positions of authority established exclusive "factory" kindergartens that only their children could attend, and where, not surprisingly, they were better provided for than in other facilities. Such kindergartens were often maintained with funds from county or city budgets.[115] In other words, members of county councils and leaders of central industrial units and ministries differentiated financially between kindergartens and provided better services for the children of powerful parents, in direct contradiction with "equalitarian" legislation and the prevailing norms governing child care services.

Conclusion

Welfare typologies assert that socialist countries came close to a system of welfare/workforce universalism, given the legalization of equal and mandatory work participation of women. Such typologies take ideology at its face value, but they do not confront it with actual practices. In socialist Hungary, access, quality, and financing methods were far from universal. Although the state proclaimed formal civil and political equality, it nevertheless differentiated among working mothers according to their social categories. Children were also classified according to the social status and political affiliation of the parents. Moreover, various types of kindergartens were established to target different geographical areas and socio-professional categories, and services for children, such as nutrition, differed significantly.

The study of child care services in Hungary between 1945 and 1956 is important because this formative period brought to fruition a process that had started earlier, namely, the gradual retreat of the state as one of the providers of preschool education, while at the same time crystallizing the main structure that was to characterize socialist child care in the following decades, even after welfare policy toward women began to improve from the late 1960s. While the state preserved administrative and pedagogical control over preschool education, it nevertheless allowed other providers to define and shape child care services according to their own interests.

My analysis of the Hungarian child care system thus challenges our image about the nature of socialist regimes. The common wisdom is that such regimes were highly centralized systems in which decisions were made solely at the upper, or centralized, level. The issue of child care in Hungary, however, provides us with a different picture, one in which policy was an outcome of intense negotiations among various social actors and interest groups, such as the parents, local elected and appointed administrators, women's organizations, trade unions, and various industries, as well as the central government and the Communist Party.[116] Each of these political actors had different material interests and ideological attitudes toward women's labor force participation, and all of them shaped the final outcome of the child care practices, although at different levels and to different degrees.

In this sense, my study is in keeping with the "social turn" in the study of socialist regimes (Case 1987; Suny 1983 and 1994; Fitzpatrick et al. 1991; Fitzpatrick 1999). Based on new types of archival materials and oral testimonies, social historians have undermined the image of an "all-mighty state" and a classless society that allegedly characterized Soviet-type totalitarian regimes. Instead they point to the plurality of interest groups and the ways in which they clashed in the political sphere and negotiated their divergent interests, managing to shape the outcome of the decision-making process. The analysis of welfare and child care policies at the local level reveal that the unified Party-State did not speak with one voice. Moreover, it often pursued a reactive and pragmatic approach to socio-economic problems rather than an ideological-normative one, relying on or accommodating local "private" or civic initiatives.

A relevant example is the role played by parents in child care policy. Although they lived in a centralized system that repressed private initiatives and disregarded individual interests, some parents nevertheless managed to carve out a public space of their own, and to create their own child care systems, often relying on their own voluntary efforts and material contributions. These semi-legal alternatives,

ranging from private, informal kindergartens up to the factory kindergartens caring for preschool and school-aged children, were not supported by the central state administration, but were not blocked at the local level. In order to save resources from the central budget, the state, by tolerating informal arrangements, in effect encouraged workers' participation in the child care system, relied on the voluntary activity of local women's organizations, and required the unpaid work of parents and their financial and material contribution. Child care policies in Hungary thus underscore the failure of the socialist paternalist state to genuinely emancipate women, aggravating the contradiction between their productive and reproductive roles. The inability of the state to fulfill its welfare promises, coupled with a demand for their full labor participation and a ban on abortion, put a "triple burden" on socialist women.

On the basis of this case study, I argue that one cannot speak of a unified child care system in Hungary in the early phase of the socialist period. True, pre-socialist central legislation and traditional attitudes toward child care favored an (apparently) corporatist-conservative system. But under the umbrella provided by national socialist legislation, localities dominated by heavy or light industry or agriculture, and different factories, established their own practical ways for providing child care services. This diversity was facilitated by the attitude of the central administration, which had no real interest in providing universal access to child care or allocating the necessary resources, exerted rather weak control over the administration of child care facilities, and enabled different interest groups to act as providers with their own differing aims and definitions of child care services.

The withdrawal of the state dismembered the centrally financed network, thus affecting the overall organization of the child care system. As administration was ambiguously shared, the system allowed state officials to avoid taking full responsibility for child care provisions. This strategy was yet another way for the state to step back, absolving its own agencies from full financial responsibility for child care. At the same time, the state preserved political control over the system by prohibiting certain types of child care institutions and controlling pedagogical programs and local financial investments. A comparison of the outcomes of the child care system in specific counties and industries suggests that the whole range of mainstream welfare typologies, namely liberal, conservative-corporatist, or more social-democratic, was represented in socialist Hungary. In other words, under a repressive political regime with allegedly monolithic state control and "unified" legislation, local socio-economic and political features could still determine welfare provisions for child

care. These characteristics may serve as a basis for a pan-European comparison, including Western as well as Eastern experiences.

NOTES

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1. I employ the term "universal" in the sense that everybody can have access to welfare services, but not as social rights on the basis of citizenship. The first welfare service introduced as a social right in Hungary was free access to health care in 1975, but other substantial provisions did not follow.

2. In this article, I will use the following terms for different child care services: kindergarten (*óvoda*) for institutions providing education in morning and afternoon sessions; care center (*napközi, napköziotthon*) to denote places providing nutrition and sleeping facilities (with or without education); and all-day kindergarten (*napköziotthonos óvoda*), referring to a special type of socialist institution operating for longer opening hours, focusing on the education of children and also providing alimentation and an afternoon nap. Note, however, that kindergarten (*óvoda*) appears often as a generic term for different child care institutions in the sources I have consulted. Thus, often one can only guess which actual types of child care are referred to. In the case of factories, one can safely suppose that their "kindergartens" functioned as care centers or all-day kindergartens. The most general name for child care institutions in the nineteenth century (*kisdedóvók*) is not in use anymore. Nor are other terms referring to specific historical forms of child care such as mixed institutions, which were common. In recent works, they are all generically called kindergartens (*óvodák*).

3. The first Fröbel kindergartens providing education for children were founded in Hungary in the late 1860s, and their number grew at a fast pace. In the mid-1870s, the kindergarten association was transformed into a national Fröbel association.

4. Although the number of kindergartens grew from 130 in 1869 to 215 in 1875–1876, enrolling 18,624 children and employing 315 kindergarten teachers, these institutions were supported by charitable, religious, and women's organizations, with the state financing less than one-tenth of their expenses as aid (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1887, 13; Hungarian Ministry of Education 1878, 352).

5. At the time, out of a total number of 257 institutions, 33 were financed by communal councils, 36 by different foundations, 86 by civil-mostly women's-associations, 66 by private persons-basically, kindergarten teachers-and 36 by religious organizations (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1880, 240).

6. In 1885–1886, there were 41 kindergartens financed by the state (out of a total of 483), twice as many as in the previous year (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1886, 92–93; Hungarian Ministry of Education 1887, 99–100).

7. See the map in Hungarian Ministry of Education 1888, 142.

8. Education in Hungary 1908, 8 and 11–13.

9. Hungarian Ministry of Education 1908, 7–8. The level of the required training for teachers differed considerably in the three types of institutions for small children: kindergarten teachers needed two years of training, and child care personnel six months, while the summer child care personnel got only six weeks of training.

10. In 1906, there were 2,595 child care institutions in Hungary, enrolling 21 percent of the total preschool population. In addition, there were also 645 kindergartens financed by local communities, 185 by the Roman Catholic Church, 43 by other religious organization, 130 by civil associations, and 66 by private initiatives, out of a total number of 1631 kindergartens (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1908, 7–8).

11. Among its 527 kindergartens, only 30 provided child care, and only 25 were summer child care centers in 1906 (Hungarian Ministry of Education 1908, 7–8).

12. *Magyar Törvénytár* [Hungarian Collection of Laws] 1936.

13. *Magyar Közlöny* [Hungarian Gazette] 8 February 1953, 9:5, 46; Order of the Council of the Ministry, 1.004/1953).

14. Plan about the child care services in the Three-Year Plan: MOL, NMI, XIX-C-1-n-OV-182-8-1947. Bíró 1947; MNDSz 1947; Járó 1947.

15. Ibid. *Legdrágább kincsünk a gyermek*. (S.j.), (S.n.), 1952.

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17. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-91800.54-1946. B.60.

18. MOL, Oktatásügyi Minisztérium iratai [Materials of the Ministry of Public Education—OMi], XIX-C-1-g-90.591-1947. B.60.

19. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-91768.55-1946. B.60.

20. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-80.628-1947. B.57. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-90.710-1947. B.60. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-90.476-1947. B.60. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-84.299-1947. B.59.

21. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-84.299-1947. B.59. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-84.298-1947. B.59.

22. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-84.299-1947. B.59. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-84.298-1947. B.59.

23. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-80.628-1947. B.57.

24. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-91.768-1947. B.60.

25. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-80.753-1947. B.57.

26. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-91.768-1947. B.60.

27. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-80.008.-1947. 1–14.

28. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-80.008.-1947. 1–14.

29. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-124369-1948. B.88. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-123510-1948. B.88.

30. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-015-A-1951. B.96. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-0421-m/1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-A2/2-1954. B.130. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-B8-1954. B.130.

31. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-022-1952. B.96. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-026-1952. B.96.

32. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1118-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-015-A-1951.

33. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-103-1952. B.96.

34. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-024-É.-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-118-1952. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-0421-m-1952.

35. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-118-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-327-K-1952. B.96. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-015-A-1951. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-0421-m/1952.

36. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-278-1952.

37. *Magyar Közlöny* [Hungarian Gazette] 24 March 1953, 9:9, 72–73. About its execution: *Oktatásügyi Közlöny* [Gazette of Public Education] 1953, no. 1, 35–39. Order by the Ministry of Education (851-29/4/1953).

38. *Magyar Közlöny* [Hungarian Gazette] 24 March 1953, 9:9, 72–73.

39. *Oktatásügyi Közlöny* [Gazette of Public Education] 1953, no. 1, 35–39. Order by the Ministry of Education (851-29/4/1953) to execute the 1953 law.

40. Ibid.

41. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-Sz13/2-1956. B.212. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-2229-Me-1952. B.96.

42. MOL, Művelődési Minisztérium iratai [Materials of the Ministry of Education-MMi] XIX-I-2-f-851-D/3-1957. B.212.

43. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-2229-Me-1952. B.96. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-10/2/1954.

44. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-2229-Me-1952. B.96. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-2233-1952.

45. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-10/2/1954. B.130.

46. See the order by the government: 403/1949/118. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-056-1953. B.96.

47. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-042-m-1952. B.96.

48. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-042-m-1952. B.96.

49. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1117-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1116-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1115-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1120-1952.

50. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1113-B-1952. B.96.

51. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-0426-1952. B.96.

52. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-1-1955. 249–50. B.123. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-1/163-1955. B.123.

53. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-13/5/1955. 84–90.

54. *Oktatásügyi Közlöny* [Gazette of Public Education] 1953, No. 1, 36. Order by the Ministry of Education (851-29/4/1953) to execute the 1953 law.

55. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-B9/1957. B.212.
56. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-7-1954. B.130.
57. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-88-3-1953. B.130.
58. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-26-1954. B.130.
59. *Magyar Közlöny* [Hungarian Gazette] 8 February 1953, 9:5, 41–45. Order of the Council of Ministry, 1.004/1953. Order: 8-2/1953. K. M. *Közoktatásügyi Közlöny* [Hungarian Gazette] 12 March 1953, no. 5, 8-3/1953. FOM, *Felsőoktatási Közlöny* [Gazette of Higher Education] 28 March 1953, no. 2, 8-3/3/1953. O. M. EÜM. *Oktatásügyi Közlöny* [Hungarian Gazette] 19 August 1953, no 3.
60. After working hours, women employed in three shifts went home to sleep and then picked up their children from the care center in the factory. In the construction industry, however, care centers were at considerable distances from the building sites. Since parents could not commute every day, their children needed continuous care during the workday; from this derives the name of the six-day child center (*hatnapos napközi*).
61. *Magyar Közlöny* [Hungarian Gazette] 8 February 1953, 9:5, 46. Order of the Council of Ministry, 1.004/1953.
62. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-13/2-1955. B.123.
63. MOL, MMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-D3-1957. B.212.
64. See Order no 2.258/82/1954 adopted on 31 December 1954.
65. See Order of the Ministry of Education: 38/9 October 1955.
66. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-U4-1953.
67. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-24/255-1955. B.123.
68. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-8/7-1955.-137. B.123.
69. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-13/5-1955. B.123.
70. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-K9-1955. B.123.
71. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-8/8-1955. B.123. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-38-1955. B.123.
72. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-8/8-1955. B.123. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-8/7-1955. B.123. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-K9/1955. B.123. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-K12/1955. B.123.
73. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-C2/1956. B.212. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-K20-1955. B.123.
74. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-8/6-1955. B.130.
75. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-C2/1956. B.212.
76. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-K16-1955. B.123.
77. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-116-B-1952. B.96. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-8/6-1955. B.123.
78. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-3/1957. B.212.
79. *Nők Lapja* [Women's Journal] 31 January 1957. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-2-1956-57. B.212.
80. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-103-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-K8-1956-57. B.212.
81. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-116252-1948. B.88. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1126-B-1952. B.96. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-6-a-851-U1/1953. B.213. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-177-1952. B.96.

82. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-B22-1953. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1126-B-1952. B.96.
83. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851.0437-Bp/1952. B.96. 140–43.
84. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-068-T-1952. B.96. 253.
85. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851.-Ny-0433/1952. B.96. 155–56.
86. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-18/3-1957. B.212.
87. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-21/1954. B.130.
88. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-0437-Bp./1952. 140–43.
89. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-0437-Bp/1952. B.96.
90. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-068-T-1952. B.96.
91. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g-2.t.-91.148-1947. B.60. MOL, NMi, XIX-C-1-g.123.337-1948. B.88.
92. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-21/1954. B.130. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-13/5/1955. 84–90. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-K9/1955. B.123.
93. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-21/1954. B.130.
94. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-21/1954. B.130.
95. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-K9/1955. B.123.
96. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-5/4-1955. 175.
97. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-5/2-1955. 246, MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-5/3-1955. 248.
98. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-5/4-1955. 176–204, MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-5/3-1955. 209–34.
99. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-5/3-1955. 207, 236-239, MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-5/4-1955. 205.
100. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1141-B-1952. B.96. Surely this does not mean that there are no exceptions to this rule. See MOL, NMi, XIX-C-I-g-128.832-1949. B.145.
101. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-116-B-1952. B.96.
102. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-116-B-1952.
103. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-0421-m/1952. B.96.
104. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1132-B-1952. B.96.
105. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1132-B-1952. B.96.
106. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1132-B-1952. B.96. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-1141-B-1952. B.96.
107. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-B11-1953.
108. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-2221-M-1952. B.96. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-226-Mi-1952. B.96. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-2211-Mi-1952. B.96.
109. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-M6-1953.
110. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-244-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-242-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-276-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-M4/2-1956-57. B.212.
111. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-244-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-242-1952. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-B/27/1955. B.123.
112. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-244-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-242-1952. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-243-1952.
113. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-N5-1956-57. B.212.
114. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-2-f-851-O/1-1956-57. B.212.

115. MOL, OMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-2153-1952. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-226-Mi-1952. B.96. MOL, KMi, XIX-I-5-a-851-221-Mi-1952. B.96.

116. Note the conspicuous absence of churches as providers of child care services. While in the nineteenth century and in the interwar period, Catholic and Protestant churches and different religious organizations had fulfilled an important role in caring for the needy, after the Communist takeover, the activities of the former became severely curtailed and the latter were dissolved. This example points to the variety of child care in socialist countries: unlike in Poland (Heinen 2002), in Hungary, churches did not shape the public debate about child care.

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