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DIE WELT DER SLAVEN SAMMELBÄNDE · СБОРНИКИ

Herausgegeben von
Peter Rehder (München) und Igor Smirnov (Konstanz)

Band 54



2014
Verlag Otto Sagner
München – Berlin – Washington/D.C.

Fashion, Consumption
and Everyday Culture
in the Soviet Union
between 1945 and 1985

Edited by

Eva Hausbacher
Elena Huber
Julia Hargaßner



2014
Verlag Otto Sagner
München – Berlin – Washington/D.C.

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SOMETHING NEW IN THE EASTERN MARKET

Polish Perceptions of the Developing Soviet Consumerism, 1961-1972

MILA OIVA, TURKU

In the export to the Soviet Union, we are encountering the typical buyers' market. Therefore, it is extremely important that we take into account the quality of our export products, in order to keep up with the competition.

(A paraphrase from a report of the Polish Ministry for Foreign Trade, 1968)

At the beginning of the 1960s, Polish exporters of ready-to-wear clothes started to market their products in the Soviet Union.¹ By the end of the decade, the Soviet market had become a highly competed one. To be able to succeed in the tightening competition, the Polish exporters were forced to start analysing how to satisfy the Soviet consumer – a new actor in the field of trade activities. The aim of this article is to explain why our general understanding, according to which shortages of the planned economies marginalized consumers into insignificant actors, contradicts partly the above explained development, visible in my primary sources (KORNAI 1992: 244–248, 271, BEREND 2009: 21, HARDY 2009: 20–30). The article will tackle the contradiction by examining how Polish exporters of ready-to-wear clothes perceived the consumers' role in the developing Soviet consumer culture, and how Polish foreign trade sales activities responded to the increasing importance of the consumers in the Soviet Union, from the early 1960s to the early 1970s. I aim to reach a more nuanced approach to the shifting role and the meaning of the consumers in the Soviet Union through the following research questions: what was the most important Soviet target group for the Polish marketers, and how did the changing Polish export activities reflect the shifting importance of the different groups? Looking at the role of the Soviet consumers from the perspective of the Polish foreign traders illuminates the more competitive part of the Soviet market – the import market – and gives the perspective of a trader from outside of the Soviet consumer culture.

The main sources of this research consist of the internal correspondence and reports of the Polish *Association of Clothing Industries (ZPO)*² and foreign trade companies.³ These documents allow analysing how the Polish clothing exporters depicted the Soviet market: whose opinion – that of the Soviet wholesale purchasers, the clothing professionals or the consumers – was the most significant from the point of view of the traders? In the early 1960s the major target groups of the Polish clothing exporters were the wholesale purchasers and the clothing professionals, but towards the end of the decade the consumers started to gain more attention. The wholesale purchasers were representatives of the Soviet foreign trade organization *Raznoeksport* and the supply organizations of the Soviet republics. They were in charge of

¹ This article is a revised version of an article published in Finnish in *Idäntutkimus* 2, 2014. I wish to thank all the anonymous reviewers and Dr. Suvi Kansikas for their valuable comments.

² The Association of Clothing Industries, *Zjednoczenie Przemysłu Odzieżowego (ZPO)*, was responsible for coordinating the clothing production of the state owned factories, and starting from the early 1960s also for organizing export together with the foreign trade companies.

³ The main exporters of ready-to-wear were foreign trade company CETEBE (1949–1962) and Confexim (1963–1971). In addition to these companies Coopexim exported clothes produced by the cooperatives' and Prodimec clothes of the few private clothing producers. (APL collections 354, 355, 402 and AAN collection 351, JASIŃSKI 2011: 279-280, POLISH FOREIGN TRADE ENTERPRISES 1964).

choosing the concrete clothing models to be imported, and the price negotiations with the Polish foreign traders. The Soviet clothing professionals were a diverse group, whose common nominator had a job related to the clothing production and fashion. The designers, representatives of the retail stores and the clothing factories, art professionals and for example journalists and photographers of the magazines represented the different sections of the diversified clothing sector. They could act as arbiters in the committees, which determined what kinds of clothing models were to be considered as desirable and to be produced in the Soviet Union (ZAHAROVA 2011: 103–112, GRONOW & ZHURAVLEV 2010: 27–28). Consumers formed the third group, which was composed of the Soviet citizens, in all their diversity.

Consumer cultures are often studied as one country's internal development. By studying the development of the Soviet consumer culture from the point of view of the Polish clothing exporters, the object of the study becomes placed into a wider context of mutual communication and cultural differences between the socialist states, as well as the global trends. From the Polish perspective, the Soviet consumer culture was different from the domestic one, and it often seemed to be less developed. In general, in comparison with the Soviet Union, Poland has often been described as ideologically more tolerant, and Poles as having closer connections to Western Europe and even the United States, than Soviet citizens. The Polish foreign traders travelled extensively, and they were well aware of the trading practices in different economic systems and countries. Due to the task of the Polish foreign traders to sell their products profitably, their interest focused on how things were carried out in practice, instead of how things would have been ideologically appropriate. In the internal documentation of the Polish foreign trade sector orders were reasoned by the economic consequences, while the socialist rhetoric was conspicuous by its absence. For example, when talking about the Soviet trade, friendly cooperation between the socialist countries was not mentioned. On the other hand, topics, such as the political dominance of the Soviet Union in Poland, the emotional baggage of the Soviet-Polish history, or the reservations of the Poles against the Soviet Union, hovering beneath the official perceptions even during the socialist period in Poland, were not referred to either (cf. EISLER 2009: 263–267, SUDZIŃSKI 2009: 74).

Due to a more visible competition in foreign trade, the foreign traders had to take consumers into consideration more than in the domestic trade. The Polish clothing exporters competed on the Soviet market with the other socialist countries, especially with the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Hungary and Bulgaria, and they observed carefully the changes on that market in order to be competitive. The foreign trade between the CMEA⁴ member countries was based on long term agreements, which were bound into each country's five-year plans. These agreements, however, were non-specific to the extent that they left room for negotiating in the lower levels of the economic hierarchy that was in charge of realizing the agreements. Because the CMEA barter trade was based on balanced trade quotas, the Soviet allies felt pressure to export high priced goods to the Soviet Union, in order to import cheap energy from there (STONE 1996: XI, 3–7). This caused competition between the CMEA member countries on the Soviet market. Consequently, although the domestic trade was to a large extent a sellers' market, in foreign trade competition between the producing countries prevailed (OIVA, 2014).

Preceding research has often considered mass consuming as a phenomenon characteristic solely of the Western market economy, which was developed as a consequence of the industrialization and development of the capitalist production model (SASSATELLI 2007: 13–14). Recently the consumer cultures of the socialist countries have been researched increasingly,

⁴ The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) was an economic union of the socialist countries which functioned in 1949–1991. The founding members of the CMEA were the Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania. Albania, GDR, Mongolia and Cuba joined the union later (JASIŃSKI 2011: 175, KANSIKAS 2014: 37–38).

and the question whether consumer cultures existed at all in socialist states is no longer topical. However, still relevant questions are for example what the socialist consumer cultures were like and how they functioned. It is necessary to look at the role of the consumers in forming the consumer cultures alongside the political leaders, in order to reach a wider understanding of the phenomenon. According to Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, the current research provides two kinds of explanations for the development of consumer cultures in the socialist countries. The first version describes increased consumption as a luxury reserved for selected elite, as a reward for being loyal for the leadership. Secondly, by allowing and enabling mass consumption, the leaders legitimized their authority and maintained stability in the socialist camp (CROWLEY & REID 2010: 12–13). Both explanations give the leaders a dominant position in forming a consumer culture, and the role of the consumers is marginal. The aim of this article is to shed light on the consumers' role, and the change of lifestyles in the development of the consumer culture in the Soviet Union. This approach is in line with the increasing body of literature that underlines the important role of the consumers in forming trade and the consumer cultures in the socialist countries (cf. NEUBURGER 2012: 99–100).

The political dependency of Poland on the Soviet Union influenced Polish economic functions and trade. After World War II the Soviet Union became the most important trading partner for Poland. From the mid-1950s, the Polish economic planners started to redirect the emphasis of the Polish export production from raw materials towards increasing export of industrially produced, ready-made commodities. By the 1970s, Poland had become the second biggest importer of industrially produced consumer goods to the Soviet Union, right after the GDR (JASIŃSKI 2011: 175, 267, SUDZIŃSKI 2009: 57, 61). This development was a consequence of changes in trading practices, alongside the redirection of the production. For example, the Polish ready-to-wear exporters launched their marketing activities in the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, and over the decade Poland increased its share in the Soviet clothing import from a minor player to a significant producer. The Soviet Union was the most important client of the Polish clothing industry, since over 80% of the exports were directed to the Soviet Union (cf. GUS 1959: 55, GUS 1966: 120). The major factor behind the success of Polish export of ready-to-wear to the Soviet Union was the understanding that the importance of consumers had increased since the late 1950s, and taking this into account in the trading activities. See picture 3.

Although the export to the Soviet Union was significant to the Polish clothing production, the share of the Polish-origin items of the total amount of clothes circulating in the Soviet market was minuscule. The clothing production of the Soviet Union was vast, but the access to the good-quality and fashionable ready-to-wear clothes was more difficult for the average consumers there, than in many other socialist countries. Home-sewing or modifying of clothes at home, and using services of tailors, were the most frequently used means for acquiring desired clothing in the Soviet Union. The imported clothes were in high demand, and in order to be able to purchase them, an average Soviet consumer needed to take extra efforts (GRONOW 2012: 127, BARTLETT 2010: 160, GUROVA 2009: 49-51, IVANOVA 2012: 78-80, 155-156, ZAKHAROVA 2013, 418–423).

Professionals as Representatives of Consumers

At the beginning of the 1960s, the main target groups for Polish exporters were the Soviet trade and fashion professionals. Organizational changes in foreign trade structures in both countries in the late 1950s created more dynamic contacts between the Soviet and Polish trade organizations. In 1961, the Polish ready-to-wear exporters launched the new sales practices by organizing a sales exhibition, accompanied with a fashion show tour, in the Soviet Union. Earlier, from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, the Polish ready-to-wear clothes had been exported to the Soviet Union in small amounts, and under the supervision of the Polish Ministry

for Foreign Trade. During that time, no sales exhibitions of the Polish clothes had been organized in the Soviet Union, and the Association of Clothing Industries (ZPO), or its predecessor, did not take part in the practical arrangements of the trade deals. In the late 1950s, the Polish economic administration was partly de-centralized and the Soviet import regulations of goods from socialist countries were changed (FOREWORD TO THE COLLECTION OF THE SOVIET MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN TRADE, JASIŃSKI 2011: 227). Following those reforms, the initiatives on how to arrange the Polish-Soviet trade could take place at the lower levels of the economic hierarchy. The ZPO and the Polish foreign trade companies were authorized to decide on more matters than earlier. Simultaneously trade became more dynamic, as the ZPO had a bigger interest to develop clothing export than the Ministry for Foreign Trade, which was responsible for the whole foreign trade.

As a consequence of the reforms, the ZPO and the foreign trade company CETEBE developed in 1961 new ways of selling clothes to the Soviet Union. The ZPO coordinated the design of the first Polish export collection, consisting of approximately 800 pieces of clothing, directed solely to the Soviet market in order to be able to pull the plan through. The ZPO set aside good quality fabrics and each clothing factory made designs based on the available fabrics. The ZPO and the clothing factories were pressured to design models that the Soviet purchasers would find attractive: the clothing models to be actually sold and the prices paid for them, were determined only in the negotiations between the Soviet wholesale purchasers and CETEBE in Moscow. The agreement finally reached in Moscow covered the majority of Polish clothing export sales for year 1962 (MEETING MINUTES NO. I/III/61).

The Production Department of the ZPO paid specific attention to the appearance and design of the export collection designated to the Soviet consumers, with the focus on colours and fashionability. In order to make the Polish collection as diverse as possible, it also took into consideration the varying climate conditions of the Soviet Union and different cultural preferences of people living in different regions. It stressed particularly that although the collection was composed of products made by different producers, it had to be exhibited so that it would give an impression of a uniform Polish collection (MEETING MINUTES NO. 3/VI/61, LETTERS OF ZPO, APRIL 1961). The Polish clothing designers were ordered to design colourful designs for the Soviet market (GROUP INTERVIEW OF POLISH FASHION DESIGNERS). Polish exporters thus viewed the preferences of the Soviet consumers to be different from the domestic ones. Presenting a colourful and varied collection in Moscow had to please the eyes of the Soviet trade representatives coming from different regions of the country. The Polish collection had to differ in a positive sense from the Soviet collections, which were generally perceived as dull and monotonous (GRONOW & ZHURAVLEV 2010: 28).

The Soviet wholesale purchasers were in a decisive position in relation to the Polish export attempts. Because the total export amount was in principle agreed beforehand at the bilateral high level annual negotiations (KORNAI 2000: 350–353), the prices paid for individual clothing models dictated how many pieces of clothing the Polish clothing industry had to produce in order to reach the agreed overall sum. Production of the clothes was challenging because of the shortage of fabrics and other raw materials. Therefore the Polish clothing factories and exporters aimed at gaining the highest price as possible for their products. Although the Soviet retail purchasers had to follow the directions of their superiors and the price rates, they could also determine for which items they could pay more and for which less in the price negotiations.

In addition to the sales exhibition organized in Moscow in 1961, the Polish exporters organized fashion shows in Leningrad, Riga and Kiev. These cities were clearly important from the point of view of the clothing sale, because already in 1959 Hungary, the competitor country for Poland, had organized fashion shows in these cities. Fashion shows were not an unknown phenomenon in the Soviet Union. They were, alongside with the catalogues and mag-

azines, an important means of disseminating the information on the newest models of the domestic Fashion Houses *doma modelej*. Especially in the 1950s and the 1960s fashion shows were popular entertainment. However, the fashion shows presenting foreign ready-to-wear clothing were still relatively rare in the early 1960s. The foreign ready-to-wear producers had been organizing fashion shows in the Soviet Union occasionally only since 1956 (GRONOW & ZHURAVLEV 2012: 119–120, 136, REPORT OF THE SOVIET CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 1963).

In order to disseminate the information on the Polish ready-to-wear clothes and to gain positive attention to them, the Polish clothing exporters directed their fashion shows to Soviet clothing professionals. The fact that Riga, the city with a relatively small population but acting as a trend setter in the Soviet fashion, was included in the fashion show tour demonstrates the importance of the clothing professionals for the Polish exporters. The committees formed by the clothing professionals determined the directions of the Soviet clothing production, and simultaneously the clothing professionals were an influential, albeit heterogeneous, discussant on fashion issues in the Soviet press. Still at the beginning of the 1960s, the clothing professionals considered that the task of the clothing production and the trade professionals was to educate the citizens to consume “correctly”, and to choose products with a good taste. This was a continuum of the socialist consuming ideals born in the 1930s Soviet Union, *kul'turnost'*, which was closely related to the ideals of civilization and sophistication (ZAKHAROVA 2011: 105–108, HESSLER 2004: 198–209, KRAVETS & SANDIKCI 2013: 465–466).

The Soviet clothing professionals depicted the consumers as a uniform group, all members of which were offered similar clothes, inspired by the European classical and discreet fashion. The only factors that could, according to the clothing professionals, cause a need for variation in clothing, were geographical. The city and countryside dwellers were acknowledged to need coats of different lengths for practical reasons, and the altering climate conditions of the country, and traditions of different nationalities, could influence to a certain extent what kinds of clothes the consumers needed. Still, in the turn of the 1950s–1960s, the stylistic differentiation from the customary dressing code, such as the *stiliaga* style, was interpreted as a sign of anti-social perceptions and behaviour (ZAKHAROVA 2011: 105–108, GRONOW & ZHURAVLEV 2012: 129, 134). Therefore, the ready-to-wear sector of the Soviet Union did not take into consideration different consumer groups, such as youth or followers of certain styles.

It was important for the Polish exporters to influence certain members of the nomenclature elite, who also could be treated as the clothing professionals, and their opinions were also influential when deciding what to purchase from foreign sellers. Already in the 1930s, the members of the elite, such as influential nomenclature wives, had been dictating what was considered to be stylish and the practice had continued also after the war. Starting from the late 1950s, an important feature of the cultural capital of the expanding Soviet middle-class was to know what was fashionable in the West (BARTLETT 2010: 72, 82–84, 242). A Soviet Russian import company of knitwear *Trikotazh* used to ask diplomat students to come along to the sales exhibitions to tell what was fashionable in their circles, and what should be bought from the offered foreign collection at the beginning of the 1960s (PRIANIKOV 2007).

In addition that only selected people could decide upon the acceptable clothing, the Soviet consumers had also an unequal access to consumer goods, which varied greatly in the different areas of the Soviet Union. In major cities the offer was richer and more varied than in smaller cities, and industrial centres were better supplied than non-industrial areas (IVANOVA 2012: 78, TIKHOMIROVA 2004, HESSLER 2004: 5, 12). Also unofficial channels and trading routes influenced the variety of the available goods: in small harbour cities, where the customs control of the sailors was less strict, it was easier to purchase fashionable foreign clothing than in bigger harbour cities (see MUKHINA in this volume, ZAKHAROVA 2013, 426, KOIVUNEN 2013: 269). In major cities contacts with the tourists were also a source of consumer items (KUUSI 2013). The consuming opportunities of an individual were not determined solely

by his or her wealth, but the personal networks and capability to use them were crucial. This practice was called *blat* in the Soviet Union and it was widely used (LEDENEVA 1998: 1–7).

Because of the hierarchical differences between the different regions of the Soviet Union, it was significant for the Polish exporters in which cities they presented their newest collection. The fashion shows of the Polish – and actually all the foreign clothing exporters – were concentrated in the 1950s and the early 1960s in the cities in the western part of the Soviet Union. Leningrad and Kiev were large European cities, and although Riga’s population was smaller, it was an important fashion city, alongside with Tallinn and Minsk. The Fashion Houses of the Baltic republics had a strong, though unofficial, status as disseminators of fashion trends and bellwethers of future fashion in the Soviet Union. For example, the new fashion of women’s trousers as elegant street wear became prevalent in Tallinn a couple of years earlier than in the other European cities of the Soviet Union, and in the Central Asian republics spreading the fashion took even longer (CHERNYSHOVA 2013: 143, GRONOW & ZHURAVLEV 2012: 128–130).

The Soviet clothing professionals and fashion-conscious citizens of different regions had different statuses and possibilities to determine what kinds of clothes were considered as acceptable and trendy in the Soviet Union. In the eyes of the foreign clothing sellers, the European cities of the Soviet Union were the centre of dictating the trends and the other regions were to follow their lead. When comparing the urbanized and wealthy regions of the Soviet Union to the cities where the majority of the foreign fashion shows were organized, the strong Western attraction of the Soviet fashion culture becomes evident. In 1959, alongside with Russian, Estonian and Latvian republics, the most urbanized republics of the Soviet Union were Armenia and Azerbaijan (NARODNOE HOZJAJSTVO SSSR ZA 70 LET 1987, 378) and for example Baku was an important city. Further, the citizens of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Russia had in average the biggest incomes in the Soviet Union in 1960 (POCKNEY 1991: 59). In spite of this, all the fashion shows organized by foreign clothing exporters in 1956–1962 were concentrated in major cities in the European part of the Soviet Union (REPORT OF THE SOVIET CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF FOREIGN EXHIBITIONS IN THE SOVIET UNION IN 1946–1963). This demonstrates how the certain kind of cultural capital and connections to the Western world had more weight than the distribution of the urban lifestyle and average incomes in the region, when it was decided who had the power to determine good taste, and the direction of the fashion trends in the Soviet Union.

The Polish ready-to-wear exporters were well aware of the culturally determined importance of the cities in the European part of the Soviet Union in shaping the fashion trends and opinions on them. The Polish clothing exporters considered organizing fashion shows for the Soviet clothing professionals and consumers as a prerequisite for reaching successful trade agreements. Other kinds of fashion shows were not considered as influencing the sales and expanding the success of export. For example, the annual Fashion Congresses of the socialist states’ were not mentioned in the documentation of the Polish exporters. In the Fashion Congresses the national collections competed, but only few models ended up to real mass production (BARTLETT 2010: 114–118, 158).

The importance of the opinion of the Soviet clothing professionals for the successful Soviet export was depicted also in the composition of the Polish export collection directed to the Soviet market. Because the Soviet clothing professionals did not consider offering youth fashion to the Soviet consumers as important, the Polish exporters did not include them to their collection in offer (LETTER OF THE PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT OF THE ZPO TO THE LABORATORY OF CLOTH INDUSTRIES). In Poland in the late 1950s the idea of a separate youth culture had been already spreading, and the Polish clothing industry had launched production of youth clothing. The Polish clothing industry was forced to take into consideration the wishes of the consumers more attentively: many Polish consumers purchased and preferred clothing im-

ported from the West through unofficial channels, called *ciuchy*, and the officials wanted to direct consuming towards the domestic production. *Warszawskie Zakłady Przemysłu Odzieżowego* launched production of the first youth collection in 1960, and the production of Polish jeans,⁵ branded *Rekord*, was launched in 1961 (PELKA 2007: 14, 52–53). Although the production of youth clothing was topical in Poland, the Polish clothing exporters did not regard it important to include them to the export collection directed to the Soviet Union. The Polish exporters thought that colourful, elegant and versatile in cuts collection would raise the interest of the Soviet customers and wholesale purchasers, but offering too modern or Western-style fashion was not considered as an asset in the Soviet market. The Polish exporters understood that as the Soviet trade and fashion professionals dictated what was imported to the country, they should be offered the kinds of clothing they considered as ideologically suitable for the Soviet consumers.

The new sales procedures and organizing fashion shows for the clothing professionals in the early 1960s paid dividends, and the amount of the exported ready-to-wear and the sums paid for them started to increase. By the end of the 1960s, Poland had reached a serious position among the importers to the Soviet market. Only the GDR exported more ready-to-wear clothes to the Soviet Union than Poland (cf. REPORT OF A COMMERCIAL DELEGATION CONCERNING TRADE NEGOTIATIONS IN THE SOVIET UNION). Until the mid-1960s clothing export was increasing without demanding further efforts from the Polish exporters, until the demands of the customer began to change in the late 1960s.

The Emergence of the Consumers

The changing demands of the Soviet consumers became visible in the foreign trade requirements in the late 1960s. In summer 1967, a Polish export delegation reported in detail the requirements of the Soviet purchasers to the ZPO. A Polish collection of 1,033 clothing models presented in Moscow had received approving evaluation, but the purchasers had given also negative remarks concerning certain models and had been reluctant to purchase some items. In addition, the Soviet purchasers had brought out new demands that had been raised by the consumers. One of the newly emerged demands caused by social changes was the increasing demand of bigger sizes. In the late 1960s, the increasing living conditions became gradually visible in the growing demand of larger clothing for the better nourished population. For the first time in 1967 the Polish clothing exporters included to the export collection clothing models for men covering sizes 56–58. However, agreement on the prices was not reached in the negotiations, and the Soviet Union did not purchase the offered models. In the bigger size clothes the problem was often that their production required more source materials, but the same sums were paid for them, as for the smaller sizes (cf. ZAKHAROVA 2013, 413). In addition to the growing physical dimensions, also the leisure and dressing habits had changed during the decade. Alongside the bigger clothes, also the demand of cheap and stylish sportswear had increased in the Soviet Union. The sportswear was not included in the Polish export collection in 1967, but the exporters delegation reported that they should be included in the future collections (cf. REPORT OF A COMMERCIAL DELEGATION CONCERNING TRADE NEGOTIATIONS IN THE SOVIET UNION).

⁵ Jeans were valued and difficult to access consumer goods in the socialist countries. The attitudes towards consumers' demand were different in Poland in comparison to the Soviet clothing industry, because jeans production was launched in Poland over ten years earlier, in 1961, than in the Soviet Union (in 1975) (PELKA 2007: 53, BARTLETT 2010: 269). In Poland the domestically produced jeans were generally not considered as attractive as the Western imports. For example, in the late 1970s the consumers were ready to pay for the imported jeans 15 times more than for the domestic jeans. Jeans of Polish origin were not called jeans in Polish, but according to the name of the producer, such as *odry*, *elpo*, *komesy*, *justy* and *rekordy*. Domestically produced denim fabric was called either *teksas* or *tekspol* (GMYZ 2007).

The wishes and tastes of the Soviet consumers could no longer be ignored, even regarding the more dubious products, such as jeans. When in the early 1960s the Polish exporters did not even offer jeans in the export collection to the Soviet Union, by the late 1960s jeans appeared in the list of the exported clothing. Until the mid-1980s, jeans were considered officially as a symbol of the American imperialism in the Soviet Union (GRONOW & ZHURAVLEV 2010: 28). However, in practice, the Soviet importers purchased the Polish jeans. The Polish clothing industry benefited when the Soviet Union could not purchase Western jeans in big amounts due to economic and ideological reasons. The Polish clothing industry managed to adapt their jeans production so that they could sell jeans for the price-conscious Soviet wholesale purchasers in low, but profitable prices (cf. REPORT OF A COMMERCIAL DELEGATION CONCERNING TRADE NEGOTIATIONS IN THE SOVIET UNION).

The increasing awareness on the consumers' needs and demands in foreign trade was connected to the growing diversification of the Soviet retail trade sector during the 1960s. The position of the consumers improved especially in the biggest cities, and the consumers' opportunities to purchase import goods developed. Until the mid-1950s, a restricted circle of the political elite had had better access to the consumer goods than the rest of the population (HESSLER 2004: 62–69). After the late 1950s a growing number of Soviet citizens could purchase foreign goods. The attitudes towards consumption became relaxed at the same time, and the goods that were considered exclusive, became increasingly visible in the streets. It was more possible than earlier to distinguish oneself from the others by consumer goods. Different ways of dressing were not considered anymore as a social threat. The other side of the coin was that the inequality of the consumers became more visible than earlier, when the consuming opportunities of the urban population and people working in exclusive professions or with good connections, increased more than of others. The retail trade of the shortage goods in foreign currency⁶ in special shops, usually called *Berezkas*, that had been launched in the late 1950s in the Soviet Union, spread both geographically and in volume along the 1960s. Foreign currency trade made the expensive Western goods accessible for increasing amount of better-off consumers (IVANOVA 2012: 5, 29, TIKHOMIROVA 2004). If earlier the majority of the consumers had more or less shared the hardships of accessing good-quality goods, now a fraction of the society had better accessibility than the others.

In addition, in the mid-1960s, the Soviet retail sector established special shops, that sold products from other socialist countries. The shops were named after foreign cities, such as *Belgrad*, *Praga*, *Budapest*, *Sofia* and *Leipzig* (BARTLETT 2010: 269, DOCUMENTS OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT STORE GUM). The retail shops specialized in the Polish goods, such as *Pol'skaja Moda*, 'Polish Fashion', and *Vanda*, 'Vanda', were established by the year 1979 (REPORT OF RAZNOEKSPORT CONCERNING IMPORT GOODS IN 1979). Unlike most of the West European imports, consumers could purchase imported socialist states' ready-to-wear also in normal shops. Although the imports from the socialist states were less valued in comparison to the Western brand clothes, they were anyway regarded as of higher quality than the Soviet production. The Soviet consumers connected different qualities with different products of socialist countries. For example, East German clothes were regarded as practical and of high quality, while Polish clothes were considered to be distinctive. Many Soviet consumers, who did not have access to the hard currency shops, aimed to purchase clothing produced in other socialist countries (IVANOVA 2012: 158, TIKHOMIROVA 2004).

⁶ The hard currency shop *Torgsin* had functioned in the Soviet Union already in the 1930s. Since the late 1950s the most well-known Soviet hard currency shop was *Berezka*, which was supervised by the Ministry for Foreign Trade. The shop chain functioned in several Soviet republics and under local names. Hard currency shops were established also in the other socialist countries. In Poland, established in the early 1970s, they were called *Pewex*, in Czechoslovakia *Tuzex*, and in Bulgaria *Corecom* (IVANOVA 2012: 5, CROWLEY & REID 2010: 19, JASIŃSKI 2011: 269).

The Soviet-produced ready-to-wear was less appreciated among Soviet consumers. They were perhaps the most dissatisfied with the clothing industry and trade of the whole domestic consumer goods production. Despite the improvement attempts, Soviet shops could not offer fashionable and high quality domestically produced ready-to-wear. The increasing expectations of Soviet consumers became evident even in the clothing sections of the flagship department stores, such as the Moscow State Department Store GUM. In the 1960s, the amount of visitors of the fashion exhibition hall of GUM decreased dramatically. It was said that this was caused by a radically increased competition between the fashion organizations at the Soviet market and that GUM had lost its monopolistic position in Moscow. Soviet consumers had become increasingly aware of the prevailing trends and more critical, and they compared the models offered by GUM to the models offered by other domestic and foreign producers. The availability of attractive ready-to-wear for the solvent urban consumers was increased yet more by establishment of boutiques selling exclusive domestic production for higher prices, alongside with the average clothing shops and department stores (GRONOW & ZHURAVLEV 2012: 127,136, GRONOW & ZHURAVLEV 2010: 28, 33).

The gradually increasing importance of consumers and consuming in the Soviet economy and everyday life, caused the diversification of the Soviet retail trade and the growing attention to the consumers in the import sector in the 1960s. Simultaneously the Polish exporters depicted this change as a tightening competition. The products, shops selling the products and consumers were divided more visibly than earlier into different categories of value in the Soviet market. Polish exporters competed in the 'second best' category alongside the other socialist countries. This category was accessible for a wider range of consumers than the Western imports were, but simultaneously the prices could not be too high. Soviet retail shops reported to the central trading organizations and through them to the wholesale purchasers, which products were sold quickly, and which remained in the shelves of the shops. Consumer surveys were conducted continuously from the 1950s through the 1970s (REPORTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF TRADE ON INDUSTRIALLY MADE GOODS IN 1954, 1955, 1966 AND 1971). Although a product remaining unsold was not as big problem for the shop keeper in the planned economy as it is in the market economy, having desired items in sale was benefit for the shop employers also in the socialist system. Alone the access to these clothes gave more power for the shop assistants both in the official and unofficial economic activities. In order to increase the demand for Polish clothes, the Polish clothing industry needed to confirm not only the wholesale purchasers, but also a vast amount of Soviet consumers.

Response to the Increasing Requirements

The appearance of the consumers' needs to the Soviet foreign trade purchasers' demands in the late 1960s forced the Polish clothing exporters to renew their portfolio and develop their marketing strategies. The attempts to respond to the Soviet consumers' demands were visible in the Polish export practices already in 1969. In that year the Polish Ministry for Foreign Trade organized in the premises of the Soviet Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy (VDNKh) in Moscow an exhibition entitled *Peoples' Republic of Poland 25 years*. The exhibition was a great endeavour of the whole Polish foreign trade sector, the major aim of which was to strengthen the position of the Polish made machines, equipment and industrially produced consumer goods in the Soviet market. The objective of the exhibition was to lose the reputation of Poland as solely an exporter of raw materials, coal and fabrics, and to emphasize the image of Poland as a technically developed producer country (REPORT ON PLANNING THE 'PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC POLAND 25 YEARS').

Although the exhibition was to present the whole variety of Polish industrial production, from heavy industry to the production of consumer goods, the ready-to-wear clothing had a special role in the exhibition. By presenting widely and in an attracting manner clothing mod-

els, which had been gaining reputation in the socialist world, the Polish Ministry for Foreign Trade aimed to create a modern image of the whole country. The clothes were exhibited under four themes: work and everyday life, school and college, sport and leisure, as well as play. In order to emphasize the modernity of the Polish production, new products were included in the exhibition, for instance youth clothing was presented in the exhibition. Demands of the young consumers could not be ignored anymore, therefore youth clothing was included in the export collection designed for the Soviet market in 1970. In addition sport clothing, which absence was noted in 1967, was widely presented in the exhibition. (REPORT ON PLANNING THE 'PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC POLAND 25 YEARS', FOREIGN TRADE COMPANY COOPEXIM'S REPORT ON A JOURNEY TO MOSCOW).

The tastes of Soviet consumers changed in a similar manner as the tastes also elsewhere in the modern world: youth fashion with jeans became widely distributed and the sportswear occupied the room of classical suits in the late 1960s. What was considered as a decent way of dressing, behaviour or gestures, relaxed in the Soviet Union during the 1960s. Similarly like in the West, a change towards individual and less formal behaviour and clothing was visible. In the Soviet Union, however, this development was slower and more moderate than in the West. It was also distinctive to the Soviet consumer culture that goods were not thrown away lightly and they were reused thoroughly, because their accessibility was at that time difficult (GRONOW 2012: 131, BULGAKOVA 2008, GUROVA 2009: 48–49).

The display of the products in the *Peoples' Republic of Poland 25 years* exhibition was directed above all to the consumers. This denotes that the consumers' desires were not taken into consideration only in the offered selection, but consumers were considered also as a decisive group influencing the sales. For instance, fashion shows presenting 300 outfits were organized in a daily basis at the exhibition. Alongside with the shows, the exhibition visitors were offered different service points, such as a fashion tips point, a tailor, a while-you-wait repair of shoes, a make-up studio, a hairdresser and a laundry (REPORT ON PLANNING THE 'PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC POLAND 25 YEARS'). It is thus evident that the exhibition was targeted above all to the consumers, and not so much for wholesale purchasers or clothing professionals. By giving fashion tips to the visitors, the exhibition served the consumers in a new way promoting Polish ready-to-wear.

In the late 1960s taking into consideration Soviet consumers was not only important for the Polish ready-to-wear exporters, but their importance had also grown in the whole Polish foreign trade sector. The growth of the Polish national economy had been slowing down during the 1960s, and the economic planners attempted to stimulate economic growth by investing in export production (JASIŃSKI 2011: 243–244). The importance of the industrially produced consumer goods had increased in the Polish foreign trade. Their share in Polish export had increased from the 9% share in 1957 to 16% in 1970, simultaneously with the increase in the total export (LANDAU & TOMASZEWSKI 1985: 275). The share of the ready-to-wear clothes and other textile products at the time was approximately half of the total volume of export of industrially produced consumer goods (GUS 1966: 18–19). The growing importance of consumer goods was illustrated by a shift in exhibition portfolios between the late 1950s and the late 1960s: a Polish exhibition organized in Moscow in 1959 had not presented ready-to-wear clothes at all (REPORT OF THE SOVIET CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 1963, ANNUAL REPORT OF THE POLISH CHAMBER OF FOREIGN TRADE 1959). Ten years later, in the exhibition organized in 1969, the ready-to-wear clothes and consumer goods had an important role in creating a positive and modern image of the development of Poland. This demonstrates that the Polish clothing industry had succeeded in increasing its role in the internal hierarchy of the Polish economy.

Analysing the internal reports, it is easy to note the increasing importance of Soviet consumers and the tightening competition on the Soviet market besides the developing exhibition

activities. The reports stated that the growing average incomes of the Soviet consumers led to the increasing demand of higher quality goods on the Soviet market. One of the reports warned that the Polish exporters could no longer think that they could continue exporting poor quality products to the Soviet Union. Arrogant attitude towards consumers was considered to harm the reputation of all the Polish export products, and above all, the future export prospects (REPORT ON POLISH-SOVIET TRADE OF THE POLISH MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN TRADE 1968, CLASSIFIED REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF THE COMMERCIAL ADVISER AT THE EMBASSY OF POLAND IN MOSCOW 1972).

Polish ready-to-wear exporters sought balance between the increasing demands of the Soviet consumers, the export quotas of the Polish Ministry for Foreign Trade and the production problems of the planned economy. The report of the Ministry for Foreign Trade demonstrates that some Polish foreign trade professionals considered that it was possible to export lower quality goods to the Soviet Union. The management of the Ministry for Foreign Trade regarded this attitude misleading and endangering Poland's competitiveness and reputation. However, the Polish clothing industry could not always provide the best possible quality to the Soviet market. The shortage of raw materials, the Soviet wholesale purchasers' strict price control, and the massive production quantities were factors that often lowered the quality of the end products (GROUP INTERVIEW OF POLISH FASHION DESIGNERS). In order to overcome the contradicting expectations, Polish exporters could use their professional knowledge of the unequal Soviet market: they could send the products of lower quality to the more remote locations of the Soviet Union without serious threat of receiving customers' complaints. Similarly, exporters could deliver the major Soviet cities only with the high quality goods, because consumers in the major centres would immediately complain about a lower quality (INTERVIEW OF A POLISH EXPORTER). In general, however, the clothing produced in Poland for the Soviet market was of better quality than the clothes produced for domestic sales. The ready-to-wear produced for export, but not sold for some reason, were greatly desired by the Polish consumers (PELKA 2007: 60, 149–151).

Consumers and the Social Change

Soviet consumers made their voices heard for Polish clothing exporters during the 1960s. This development took place because Soviet wholesale purchasers needed increasingly to take into consideration escalating consumers' demands. Simultaneously the role of clothing professionals in dictating what was desirable in the Soviet clothing culture seems to have decreased.

As the material conditions of the citizens of the socialist states improved and the awareness of the living standards outside the socialist world increased, their expectations and demands concerning their living conditions expanded (CROWLEY & REID 2010: 7). Although the consumers' expectations increased in all the socialist countries gradually after the mid-1950s, taking into consideration the Soviet consumers' needs and expectations became a necessity in ready-to-wear retail and wholesale trade only along the 1960s. This was also the conclusion reached by Crowley and Reid regarding that the East Central European countries: they became consumer cultures approximately ten years earlier than the Soviet Union (CROWLEY & REID 2010: 11). Because the Polish clothing industry had to take into consideration the desires of the consumers already since the late 1950s, they were better prepared than their Soviet colleagues to make changes in their production, and take into consideration the diversifying needs of the Soviet consumers. At the same time the priority position of foreign trade helped the Polish export in comparison to the Soviet domestic production. The more bureaucratic and fragmented Soviet clothing industry turned more slowly to meet the newly emerging expectations.

It is extremely interesting that the importance of consumers appeared in the 1960s. During the reign of Nikita Khrushchev (1953–1964) the living conditions of the population were

taken into account more than earlier and consuming became more tolerated. However, the reforms launched in the Khrushchev period became more visible in the trade sector during the succeeding era of Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982), although the Brezhnev period has been often called as a period of stagnation. Also Chernyshova comes to the same conclusion, as she writes that the changes made during the Khrushchev period were merely rhetoric, while during the Brezhnev period the consumers became visible for real (CHERNYSHOVA 2013: 2).

Summary

In this article I show how Soviet consumers became noteworthy for Polish exporters by the late 1960s. What was the reason for this change, then? I argue that it is one-sided to explain this development solely by the changing moods of the leaders and their willingness to allow consumerism to develop in order to gain legitimacy. The Polish foreign trade reports are a source that allows us to see that the Soviet consumers began to participate in determining the directions of the development of the Soviet consumer culture. Although certain administrative and legal changes acted as prerequisites, the changing force came from the consumers. The reasons for the increasing role of the consumers can be found in the global developments causing social changes during that time. Although in the planning economies the role of the state in regulating consuming was bigger than in the market economies (FEHÉRVÁRY 2009: 428), the general European factors influencing consuming habits were not unknown in the socialist countries either.

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Graphics

Export of Polish clothing and underwear to the Soviet Union (thousand złoty), 1958–1981. Source: GUS foreign trade statistics (see picture 3)

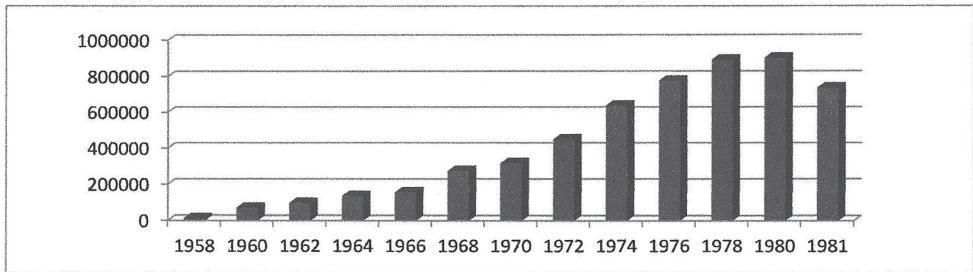


Abbildung 3:
 Export of Polish clothing and underwear to the Soviet Union (thousand zloty), 1958–1981.
 Source: GUS foreign trade statistics