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The Hungarian Agricultural Miracle? Sovietization and Americanization in a Communist Country. By Zsuzsanna Varga.

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Mária Hidvégi

Tungsram Operations Kft., 1044 Budapest, Váci út 77; ELTE BTK Research Centre for Business History, 1088 Budapest, Múzeum krt. 6–8; Maria.Hidvegi@tungsram.com

The present review focuses on how this book, analyzing "a unique case of how to pull success out of failure within the Soviet bloc" (p. ix), offers insights into topics relevant for an international audience of business, economic, and transnational history.

The book offers overview of the development of Hungarian agriculture during the Socialist era, laying equal weight on the periods of forced collectivization and that of the development of a successful 'Hungarian model' by combining multidimensional historical comparison with transfer studies. Six chronological chapters take the reader through the transfer and implementation of the Soviet kolkhoz model and of the American 'closed production system' embedded into the development of Hungarian agricultural policy in the framework of the Cold War, stressing the importance of local agency and the partial simultaneity of model transfers. Chapter 7 contextualizes the 'Hungarian agricultural miracle' and presents the circumstances, such as the decreasing prices of agricultural products on the world market and Hungary's growing indebtedness leading to a renewal of high extractions from agriculture, which meant that "Hungary's hybrid agriculture reached its developmental limits" (p. 283). The conclusion reflects on how comparative and transfer studies can be combined in the field of transnational history. The book is based on extensive archival research, on the contemporary Hungarian and foreign press, and on an impressive collection of oral sources, in part thanks to the author's decades-long research on the history of Hungarian agriculture in the Socialist era.

The first chapter clarifies the meaning of the Soviet kolkhoz model, describing it as part of the Stalinist economic system in which agriculture was assigned the role of an inner colony and functioned in the new hierarchical order made of the new operational units of state farms, machine and tractor stations, and kolkhozes (= communal farms). Following World War II, all key elements of the Stalinist

system of socialist agriculture were implemented by force in Eastern Europe, though allowances had to be made in the form of retaining to some degree peasants' formal land ownership and authorizing several types of collective farms.

The following three chapters analyze the Sovietization of Hungarian agriculture, that is the process of collectivization with varying degrees of coercion, linked to periods of de-collectivization. Chapter 5 presents the circumstances leading to the modification of the Soviet kolkhoz model in Hungary by partial rehabilitation of the market economy from 1956. Hungary has advantageous natural endowments for agricultural production. Therefore, agricultural products had for centuries made up the bulk of the country's export revenues. As in other Eastern European countries, forced collectivization led to a sharp decline of agricultural production in Hungary, resulting in shortages of food supply and even the necessity to import bread grain and meat up to the mid-1960s. The statistical material presented here displays the consequences of the inner colony status of agriculture, forced collectivization and the criminalization of large-scale farmers then of successful cooperatives' managers on rural communities' social structure, labor discipline, and families' survival strategies.

Because of the 1956 Revolution, the Soviet leadership granted its Hungarian counterparts more room to maneuver in certain issues in order to ensure the superiority and viability of the socialist system (p. 162). This resulted in allowing for deviations from the Soviet agricultural production model and in resuming the first attempts at opening to the West after Stalin's death. The term 'Americanization' in the subtitle of the book refers to the transfer of the results of Western agricultural science, especially of closed systems of production mostly from the USA and West Germany, which was gathering speed from the second half of the 1960s. Successful technology transfer required to reshape the organizational structure of Hungarian collective farms (producer cooperatives), to introduce new systems of management, quality assurance, and labor discipline. Fast growing export earnings in convertible currencies were crucial for continuing political support for such transfers. The introduction of closed production systems went hand in hand with reviving entrepreneurial initiative and competition, organizing networks of cooperatives on a voluntary basis, and establishing horizontal contacts for continuous knowledge transfer with universities and research and development institutions. Agricultural reforms predated, shaped, and subsequently capitalized on the opportunities of the New Economic Mechanism introduced in 1968.

As the book stresses, the transfer of American technology was a bottom-up process, with cooperatives or state farms initiating and implementing it themselves, and it did not end at faithful adaptation. A few leading cooperatives and state farms such as the Bábolna State Farm, which became knowledge and service centers of networks of cooperatives, developed the licensed technology in the sense of higher-yield

hybrids (chicken, cereal) and even independent production systems. Based on such achievements, Hungary excelled in per capita production of corn, wheat, chicken, chicken eggs, and pork, especially in the early 1980s. Agricultural export became a crucial source of the country's convertible export revenues. Hungary was even exporting closed agricultural production systems to the Near East. The 'Hungarian agricultural miracle' in the book's title refers to these achievements of the hybrid 'Hungarian model' of agricultural production, a term coined in the contemporary Western press. Its chief characteristics were (1) the coexistence of state, cooperative and private property, (2) the synthesis of large farms and small-scale production, (3) large farms' non-agricultural ancillary activities, and (4) the widespread implementation of closed production systems, practically, the successful Americanization of state farms, and Soviet-type, which had come into being through the transfer of the kolkhoz model.[1]

Varga draws particular attention to the agency of local actors. First, she lists various forms of peasants' active and passive resistance to forced collectivization and describes how members of co-operatives denied giving false or compromising testimony against managers of successful cooperatives during show-trial proceedings in the 1970s. These prosecutions have attracted little scholarly attention, compared to the ones after World War II. Second, due attention is given to the emergence of an agrarian lobby that managed to transform peasant initiatives for work organization, renumeration, and household plot farming into policies that gradually turned Hungarian cooperatives into independent farming enterprises. Prominent members of this lobby played an important role in establishing international contacts proliferating behind the 'Iron Curtain' and permitting knowledge and technology transfer. The power of the agrarian lobby is shown to have depended on the development of the Cold War including the competition of the superpowers in terms of consumer goods supply, the Soviet leadership's changing interests in prioritizing dogmatic questions, and on Hungarian political leaders' solid power and commitment to reforms. Third, the book prompts further comparative research on the role of agriculture in attempts at reforming the socialist economy in the 1960s and in the emergence of 'the second economy', entrepreneurship, and transnational private economic networks, especially in the 1980s with an outlook on the applicability of such entrepreneurial experiences, networks, and adjustment measures after 1989.

The book contains large sections of quotes from sources. This sometimes results in longer roads to coming to a point, but at the same time, it gives readers source material often seen for the first time in English translation and helps them

1 See also: Benet, Iván. "A magyar agrármodell hatékonysága [The Efficiency of the Hungarian Agrarian Model]." *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József nominatae: Acta Oeconomica* no. 1 (1996): 35–54.

understand the inner logic of the processes described. Charts and tables displaying certain characteristics of agricultural production over the entire period of investigation could have demonstrated more concisely the achievements and setbacks described in the various chapters. A few more charts of international comparison and more reference to Polish and Czechoslovak agriculture would have been equally instructive. Without doubt, however, the book is an excellent example of transnational history, which combines thorough micro and macro level analysis of 40 years of Hungarian agriculture with a concise story of transsystemic model transfers.