

## **Abstract**

Dissertation „The Origins of the Mass Consumption Society in Czechoslovakia 1945–1970. Trade, Consumption and Advertising“ deals with the process of establishing consumption as a new category of human life in the communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia. Through the analysis of the discourse the author shows how a network of specialized institutions and professionals producing thinking about consumption emerged in the milieu of the Ministry of Internal Trade. This network manifested itself in the planning of the trade infrastructure and in the adoption of a more subtle approach to the problem of consumption in an effort to maintain the legitimacy of the communist rule.

The commerce as a sphere of economy was in the communist discourse initially reduced to the transmission lever between production and the consumer. This perception was accompanied by the pursuit of the social justice through the transformation of the consumer's experience, underpinned by a strong moral appeal. The key tools used in this process were the democratization of the access to the goods, the attempts to adapt the services to broad sections of the society, the chance given to the consumers to raise their own demands and also the "new language" of the trade practices. Political thaw after Stalin's death led to the professionalization of the internal trade which was manifested by the foundation of specialized journals and by reversing the discourse toward the West. This transformation of ideas from communistic-utopian to technocratic found its expression in the planned redevelopment of the Czechoslovak retail network.

The political thaw and the rising standards of living prompted not only the increase in the importance of the consumption but also the need for improvement of tools for its monitoring. The initial response of the Communist party was to introduce the obligation to carry out research into consumer's demand in January 1956. Recognition of the need of structural

changes due to the economic crisis of the early 60s helped to develop more sophisticated tools for the consumption research. First texts on the psychological and motivational research were published and their testing soon followed. This change was accompanied by the abandoning of the communist ideas of education of the life style whose centerpiece was both the work and the rejection of bourgeois aesthetics. The first attempts to characterize the Czechoslovak consumers were part of this transformation. Initially, the advertising professionals attempted to preserve the status of the advertisement in the beginning of the communist rule. The main strategies they used were the efforts to adopt a new name, “nábor” (recruitment), for the advertising and the attempt to learn the language of the new power apparatus. Neither of these were successful and the advertising was, with the turn to “steel concept economy”, noticeably reduced. However, monetary reform of 1953 changed not only the landscape of the Czechoslovak consumption but also its imagination. The result of this change was the creation of the Advertising agency of State trade (Reklamní podnik státního obchodu) in April 1954 and resumption of the advertising discourse supported with the founding of specialized periodicals such as Socialist Advertising.

**Key words:** consumption – communist dictatorship – Czechoslovakia – advertising – trade – taste – self-service shop