

TRANSFORMATION OF A STRICTLY CONTROLLED BORDER AREA INTO A TOURIST DESTINATION MAKING HERITAGE IN COMMUNIST HUNGARY

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The Őrség National Reserve was founded on the borderland of Hungary in the communist period. The role of the region was reinterpreted in two different ways (modernization and environmental protection). The aim of the paper is analyzing the different concepts, and the process of heritage making.

Keywords: socialist modernization, nature conservation, heritage making under communism, Őrség Nature Reserve

Narodni park Őrség so na obmejnem območju Madžarske ustanovili v času komunizma. S tem so na dva različna načina, tj. modernizacije in varovanja okolja, reinterpretirali vlogo regije. Avtorica analizira različne koncepte in procese ustvarjanja dediščine.

Ključne besede: socialistična modernizacija, ohranjanje narave, ustvarjanje dediščine v komunizmu, naravni rezervat Őrség

INTRODUCTION

Őrség National Park was established in the area of two historical regions—Őrség and the Rába Valley (Hung. *Vendvidék*, Sln. *Porabje*)—comprising forty-four settlements in southwest Hungary. Eighteen settlements belong to the historical Őrség region (three of them are now part of Slovenia); the somewhat more broadly defined ethnographic Őrség is a nationally well-known region, and regional self-awareness is a key element of the identity of the local population. The identity of Őrség has been formed by the natural environment, the characteristics of settlement construction and farming methods (*szerek*, or clusters of buildings, were built in hilltop clearings; there are “rounded houses,” etc.), border guard duty, privileges and administrative autonomy until the seventeenth century, the communal consciousness of the population, good “marketing” of the region, research, and literary interest.¹ The historical Rába Valley region is located on the western border of historical Hungary, and it included the villages of Vas and Zala counties inhabited by Slovenians. Nine of them around Szentgotthárd remained within the borders of Hungary following the peace treaty after the First World War.²

In the twentieth century, fragmented settlement patterns and scattered groups of buildings made it difficult to improve the infrastructure and establish an institutional network.

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² As a consequence of consolidating villages, today the Rába Valley is made up of six villages. After the Second World War, the residents of these communities came to be known as the Rába Valley Slovenians (Sln. *Porabski Slovenci*, Hung. *Rábamente*; Kozár 1994: 333).

Life in this region bordering on Austria and the former Yugoslavia was made more difficult by atrocities committed by the authorities in the first half of the 1950s against South Slavs and the removal of these people, who were stigmatized as Titoist kulaks. Furthermore, a border zone was established during the communist dictatorship, which restricted free movement in a zone 15 km wide. After the gradual narrowing of the southern border zone, it was abolished in 1965, but the Iron Curtain and full border control remained in place until the collapse of communism. This left the area out of the urban development concepts of the communist era, which long preserved the unfavorable situation in the region, thus contributing to negative demographic trends (out-migration and ageing; Ispán et al. 2018).

Starting in the mid-1960s, the role of backward regions was reconsidered. Concepts took shape at various levels of control (national, county, and district) and aimed at quite different directions of development. According to the minutes of the sessions held by the county and district state and party authorities, which can be found in the Vas County Department of the Hungarian National Archives, the situation in the region and the development plans were regularly discussed, and decisions were made on carrying them out. The transcripts of comments voiced while discussing the plans are especially informative, forming the major sources for this study. In addition to describing various concepts, this article examines who created these plans, what conflicts accompanied them, and how the natural environment and the traditional local culture became a value worthy of protection in spite of the socialist modernization attempts affecting the entire country.

PARTIAL SOCIALIST MODERNIZATION

From the 1960s onward, the party and state apparatus of the county and the districts discussed the situation of the previously neglected Őrség region and Rába Valley and possible improvements several times.³ In both regions, the solution was thought to be industrial development concentrated in the district centers (such as Szentgotthárd and Körmend) and the extension of cooperatives and collective farming, following the concept of socialist modernization. Due to the unfavorable natural conditions, the so-called “socialist

³ The problems of the villages in Őrség and the Rába Valley were first discussed by the county council in 1963, working out a plan for their development in the Vend and Őrség Project. Then, in 1966, the economic situation of the Rába Valley villages in the Szentgotthárd District and the action plan for the villages in Őrség were discussed by the district council. The county council discussed the situation of the borderland villages and the living conditions of the ethnic minorities in the county in 1969, and the decisions made in connection with the latter case were discussed again by the county council in 1975. In 1971, the development of Őrség, the Rába Valley, and Hegyhát was discussed together, and the experiences gained when the agreed-upon measures were taken were reported by the Körmend District Office in 1974. Apart from this, in 1973, a 156-page analysis of the socio-economic conditions of Őrség and the Rába Valley and their development possibilities was conducted by experts of the University of Economics at the request of the Executive Committee of the Council of Vas County (Bernát et al. 1973).

reorganization of agriculture” took a different direction in this region. Alongside state and cooperative property, the percentage of private property was also high.⁴

Unlike in the Soviet model, in central and eastern Europe several types of cooperatives were allowed. In Hungary, two types represented a transition between private and collective farming, in which members only cooperated in certain work, whereas in the third type, which was a real cooperative, all work was done together and members shared the income in proportion to their contributions (Dankó 1982). As a result of successive waves of collectivization, by 1961 93.3% of the land in Hungary and 94% of agricultural workers belonged to the socialist sector (Romány 1998: 373). Those types of cooperatives that were considered lower level were mainly established in regions with unfavorable agricultural potential, such as in mountainous regions or in grape- and fruit-growing areas because they required more labor.

The non-functional cooperatives set up in this region in the 1950s could survive only due to state support, and during the 1956 revolution they ceased to exist. However, in the last wave of collectivization between 1958 and 1961, the county party committee decided to establish cooperatives in some villages in Őrség, where there were acceptable conditions for collective farming in Őriszentpéter and Bajánsenye, but they were unprofitable in areas with poor soil (Kovács-Mesterházy 2016a: 635–640).

In 1963, the situations in Őrség and the Rába Valley, affected by out-migration and unfavorable conditions, were dealt with at the county level rather than at the national level. After an on-the-spot session attended by the vice-minister of agriculture, some experts, and county and district leaders a project was worked out to develop these regions. To enhance collective farming and the productivity of the land, a complex melioration project was started in Őrség completely subsidized by the state and supervised by Sándor Belák, the chancellor of Keszthely College of Agrarian Sciences. As part of the large-scale project to transform the natural environment, which covered the regions of Hetés and Gőcsej in Zala County in addition to Őrség, water issues were dealt with, and then the soil was improved physically and chemically. Pipelines were laid down to drain groundwater, then the unfertile clay soil was covered with potash, brought there from 200 km away, and afterward the biological and mechanical stages of soil melioration could be started (Rab et al. 1967: 809–810; Moldova 1987: 18–21; Kovács-Mesterházy 2016b: 649–651). Because the main goal was to establish collective farming, melioration was first carried out on collective farms. Although the profitability of this costly intervention was doubted by some, the project was assessed positively by the county leadership and its results were considered progressive. By eliminating small access drives, the area of arable land increased by a third; new crops appeared in Őrség (e.g., alfalfa), the quantity of wheat and corn crops increased, and the opportunities to grow fodder improved. Work was started at five show plants

⁴ The state-owned property was managed by the state farm, established on the more fertile land of the Rába Valley, and the state forestry company managed approximately two-fifths of the region.

(in Felsőmarác, Egyházasrádóc, Bajánsenye, Kondorfa, and Óriszentpéter) and then was extended to land newly acquired by unifying the cooperatives, but there were also plans to carry out a complex melioration of five more cooperatives by 1975 and then the western borderlands of the county (Máthé 1972; MNL VAML 19 May 1969).

The success of the melioration project was somewhat diminished by the fact that since 1965 some opinions had been heard that the development of cooperatives should be based on livestock farming, mainly cattle. This required enhancing the melioration of fields and pastures, for which the farms regularly received non-repayable state subsidies, and new stables were to be built for automated dairy farms (MNL VAML 3 February 5 1965; MNL VAML 29 October 1965; MNL VAML 7 May 1969). The creation of non-agricultural “side branches” was considered to offer another possible solution. The economic reform introduced in 1968 made it possible for the cooperatives to engage in light industry and processing activities to address the gaps in the shortage economy, thus allowing members to be hired for the entire year. Taking this opportunity, several cooperatives and specialized cooperatives started lumbering, which had been hard to do earlier because the state forestry company had a license for purchasing timber from the forests of the cooperatives.⁵

Apart from the few cooperatives, in most villages cooperative production units were formed within the farmers’ cooperatives,⁶ which were considered to be the simplest form of cooperative farming, mainly involving growing raspberries. Nonetheless, growing raspberries was not without problems: the raspberries died on unfertilized, thin soil, and the attitude of the members was not considered satisfactory. According to a 1965 report, 5 to 20% of the members in the eleven cooperative production units in the Körmend District did not participate in the collective work and did not cultivate the land assigned to them. The reason was that several members were elderly or unfit for work. The method of remuneration also hindered work: in the cooperative production units in which workers were paid by the hour instead for the work performed (such as in Magyarszombatfa, Velemér, and Alsószölnök), the seasonal work was delayed, incurring considerable extra costs. There were few of the machines needed for agriculture, or they were in poor condition, and, in the case of the slightest technical malfunction, the work stopped because the untrained drivers could not repair them. Further problems were caused by the fact that agricultural cooperatives did not hire agricultural experts. However, at the session of the executive committee of the district council discussing the situation of the cooperative production units, they addressed the extension of collective activities and the development of cooperative production units

⁵ It caused a major problem that a large part of the forest that people had lived in was nationalized, and forestry in collective farming required less labor.

⁶ Farmers’ cooperatives mainly dealt with selling goods in villages. This took place, on the one hand, by purchasing agricultural produce, and, on the other hand, by selling consumer goods through catering units and a network of village shops mostly operated by this organization.

(MNL VAML 13 May 1965; MNL VAML 9 July 1965) into specialized cooperatives.⁷ This was done in March 1967, when the three agricultural specialized cooperatives based in Alsószőlnök, Apátistvánfalva, and Magyarszombatfa with 812 members were founded. Only 6.9% of the tilled land was cultivated collectively (MNL VAML 1 September 1967).

Village	Year founded	Mem-ber-ship	Number of families	Total area (ha)	Rasp-berry (ha)	Black currant (ha)	Fruit (ha)	Total raspberry crops, 1963 (q)	Total raspberry crops, 1964 (q)
Alsószőlnök	1960	65	65	30	30	0	0	196	128
Apátistvánfalva	1960	118	118	45	45	0	0	477	415
Farkasfa	1960	116	116	40	40	0	0	253	330
Felsőszőlnök	1960	221	221	50	50	0	0	344	335
Gödörháza	1960	48	38	15	15	0	0	32	14
Kétvölgy	1960	67	67	20	20	0	0	259	186
Magyarszombatfa	1960	78	58	35	20	5	10	219	236
Orfalu	1960	39	39	20	20	0	0	184	166
Rábatótfalu	1963	91	91	25	25	0	0	0	0
Szakonyfalu	1960	60	60	20	20	0	0	289	247
Velemér	1960	83	52	25	25	0	0	68	37
Total		986	925	325	310	5	10	2,521	2,094

Main data for cooperative production units (1965) (q = quintal).

Certainly, specialized cooperatives, which were also considered lower-level cooperative types, had the same difficulty growing raspberries as earlier, but they had the opportunity to introduce several new activities yielding extra income. These included raising small livestock (poultry and rabbits), growing legumes on land that was difficult to cultivate, planting willows and firs, and increasing the number of fruit trees (summer apples, plums, and Rosy Gage plums; MNL VAML 1 September 1967). The specialized cooperative in Magyarszombatfa produced pottery (flowerpots and milk jugs) as a side activity with eighteen to twenty people based on the pottery traditions of the village, and in Őriszentpéter the Őrség Cottage Industrial Cooperative, where the ninety members made brooms and wicker baskets, also produced other wickerwork products, sewed clothes, and made embroidery.

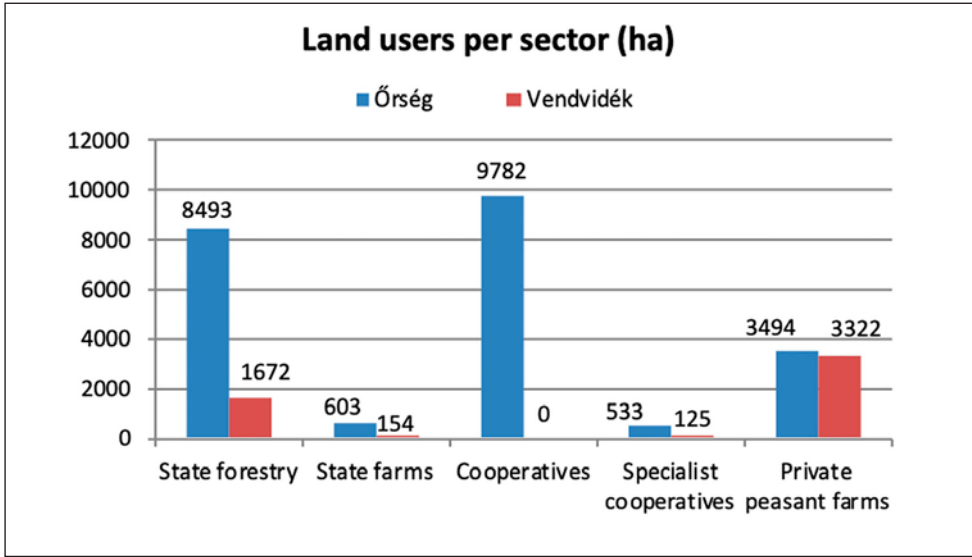
⁷ In specialized cooperatives, only part of the land was cultivated collectively, and the rest was cultivated by the members as private plots after paying the tax and property contribution. Livestock and tools did not have to be delivered to the cooperatives. The specialized cooperative helped its members by giving advice, by making available tools, fertilizers, seeds, and so on, and through collective selling. Therefore, with regard to land ownership and cultivation, it resembled more the conditions in communist Yugoslavia, where, alongside the priority of cooperatives, private farming was also allowed. For more details on this, see Hann (1980).

The leaders of the districts and the county preferred to establish collective farms, and therefore in the early 1970s cooperatives were set up with renewed momentum: more members joined (both individuals and members of specialized cooperatives), and, following the processes taking place across the entire country, cooperatives started to merge. This involved small cooperatives and specialized cooperatives joining the larger ones, which were still based in Óriszentpéter and Bajánsenye, as well as the merging of specialized cooperatives. Due to out-migration and the advanced age of the farmers who stayed behind, much of the land (arable fields and pastures) remained uncultivated, parts of which were taken over by specialized cooperatives for management or became state property. Their goal was to create optimal sized collective farms. To achieve this, they tried to create huge expanses of plots from the small ones through voluntary exchanges and partial settlement of property in order to make automation possible (Pósfai 1974).⁸ The cooperatives in Őrség in unfavorable conditions were continuously subsidized by the state; however, their production failed to prosper, which was an ever-recurring issue in the council meeting reports. At the same time, the leaders of the county gave up trying to establish cooperatives in the Rába Valley, and in 1971 at the meeting of the county council discussing the development of the region, several participants said that it could not be their aim to force this region to carry out agricultural production. The unprofitable specialized cooperatives received state subsidies due to their unfavorable conditions (MNL VAML 3 November 1971).

At that time, there were 1,822 private farms in approximately one quarter of the territory of the two small regions. One-third of the farms were very small, with less than three hectares of land, one-third had three to eight hectares of land, and one-third had more than eight hectares of land. About fifty farms covered more than twenty hectares. Their economic situation and their standard of farming were quite varied, which were mainly defined by the farmers' age and their ability to work. Most farms were not able to improve their tools and they were farming at a low self-sufficiency level. The elderly who were no longer able to work and had no income, and therefore could not fulfil their tax obligations and relied on social benefits, were in the most difficult situation (Bernát et al. 1973: 60–62). Therefore, the county council succeeded in having those in the agricultural sector granted more favorable taxes by the Ministry of Finance, and they sought to pay greater attention to the social circumstances of the elderly people who were too old to work in agriculture and were not taken care of (MNL VAML 7 June 1972; MNL VAML 2 August 1972).⁹ They

⁸ In forestry as well, large-scale monocultures were forcibly introduced (people were forced to grow firs even in areas not fit for these trees), and at the national level the percentage of private forests was among the highest here (Zagyva 1998).

⁹ There were 489 people over age sixty who cultivated agricultural plots, owned them, and lived on the income from these plots. Although they were entitled to regular social benefits due to their age and their low monthly income, this was made impossible due to their assumed income according to the regulation. A decision was needed to correct the differences between assumed and real incomes, but the council found that only forty-two people were entitled to social benefits.



Report on the development of Órség, the Rába Valley, and Hegyhát, 1971.



The Órség Nature Reserve (Az Országos ... 1978: 540).

planned to improve the situation in the region by developing Szentgotthárd, Körmend, and Óriszentpéter, and by creating industrial jobs, mainly for female labor.¹⁰

NATURE CONSERVATION UNDER COMMUNISM

The other concept, with quite different aims, was characterized by changes in ecological views, which spread all over the communist countries. It aimed to increase the areas of natural reserves and to promote environmental protection. The Órség Nature Reserve was established under the aegis of the National Office for Environmental Protection in the first half of the 1970s and opened in 1978. The area, constituting the core of today's national park, encompassed thirty-three villages together with the Rába Valley. The protection covered the geographical and hydrological values, natural plant associations, the fauna, and anything valuable from the aspect of village and cultural history (hamlets and scattered settlements supporting the preservation of folk traditions and customs), and it aimed to preserve the characteristic landscape. Approximately three thousand hectares of the entire forty thousand–hectare area were declared strictly protected, where it was prohibited to fertilize the fields and pastures or to use pesticides or to cut trees. The regulations, among other things, affected the method of land use (e.g., in some regions tilled plots were to be turned into fields or pastures to prevent erosion), the location of facilities, melioration, and the treatment of the territories of settlements.¹¹

The nature and environmental protection policies of the communist countries are usually considered by the public and research literature to have damaged nature and been environmentally harmful. Stalin's Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature in 1948 and the similar but smaller-scale plans of the eastern European communist countries played an important role in this. The construction of dams and barrages, introduction of water plants, construction of canals and sluices, planting forest strips, and attempts to acclimatize new plants were considered heroic projects of some sort (Josephson 2016; on the transformation in Hungary, see Borvendég and Palasik 2015; Balogh 2016). The transformation of nature announcing the victory of communist people over nature and the environmental problems connected to industrial activities characteristic of the entire era undoubtedly left behind a great deal of pollution for subsequent generations. On the other hand, this was the period when nature preservation and environmental protection became institutionalized: protected areas were established and there was an attempt to preserve natural resources. Environmentalist movements whose origins went back to before the Second World War

¹⁰ These two regions were among the least industrialized areas of the country. In 1973, only the ceramics factory in Magyarszombatfa, the shoe factory in Óriszentpéter, the clothes hanger factory in Pankasz, the brick factory in Bajánsenye, and some lumber yards existed in this region (Bernát et al. 1973: 67–72).

¹¹ Decision no. 4/1978. OKTH by the chairman of the National Office for Environmental Protection and Conservation on the establishment of the Órség Nature Reserve (Az Országos . . . 1978).

and amateur naturalists from various walks of life worked beside the scientists, and these organizations strongly contributed to the decomposition of the political system, especially from the 1980s onward (Josephson 2016: 7–8; Yakusheva 2017: 41–42). This ambivalent situation was the reason that, alongside badly contaminated areas, almost completely unspoiled environmental areas have been preserved throughout the former Eastern Bloc.

Environmental protection in the communist countries in central Europe was mainly based on protectionist conservation, which was started with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872. The goal of “fortress” or protectionist conservation was to protect the ancient landscape, ecologically valuable species, and biodiversity, in which the ecological system can thrive without the presence of man. The limits created around the natural world serve this purpose by keeping away those who want to use the natural resources through patrols, fines, and fences—especially the local people (Doolittle 2007: 704–705).¹² The practice of environmental protection in the central European communist countries was mostly based on the protectionist conservational approach. The spread of national parks and nature reserves from the 1950s to the 1970s in the communist countries is usually traced back to three factors in research: 1) the scientific community was successfully lobbying for their establishment; 2) hunting was a favorite pastime among the communist elite and they required government reservations inaccessible to ordinary citizens, which were mainly established in areas where there was a valuable animal population; and 3) the parks functioned as recreation and tourism sites, which became characteristic elements of communist welfare (Yakusheva 2017: 38).

In Hungary, organized environmental protection—after long decades of preparation—started with the passage of an environmental protection law in 1935, which defined the types of places under protection as nature reserves or landscape parks. Moreover, it also defined the objects of conservation. In addition to clearly natural elements—such as scientifically valuable or special land formations, beautiful landscapes or land, endangered and especially useful wild animals and plants, and the water of streams and springs—the act already extended the scope of protection to places and formations interesting from a cultural historical point of view, which were connected to a historical event or a tradition (a legend or tale), or to the natural environment of monuments.¹³ Although the 1961 decree on conservation¹⁴ mentions cultural values as well as scientific ones as reasons for protection in the definition of environmental protection, this category was neglected; but in practice, the environmental authority continued to pay attention to this.

¹² Nevertheless, this concept raises several questions concerning what state of nature can be considered ancient. In Europe, it is practically impossible to find any natural environment free of human presence or intervention; most of them are cultural landscapes where agriculture, stockbreeding, and forestry have been taking place for centuries. Therefore, human factors cannot be neglected in the preservation of European natural heritage (Catsadorakis 2007: 309–311).

¹³ Act 4 of 1935 on forests and conservation.

¹⁴ Decree 18 of 1961 of the Presidential Council of the People’s Republic on conservation.

The first protected area was established in 1939, and the first nature park was founded in the communist era in 1952. In most communist countries, the elimination of private property made it easier to designate areas because the most efficient conservation activities could be carried out in areas owned by the state and managed by state organizations (Rakonczay 2009: 242). At the same time, following the establishment of cooperatives, the large-scale intensive cultivation of the land—in huge plots, using machines and chemicals—was a priority, and in Hungary the cooperatives and state farms strongly resisted the establishment of nature reserves. Only land with low productivity was not owned by the state or cooperatives (e.g., middle-elevation mountain grazing areas used in the traditional way), and, in the central European communist countries, such unfertile land was designated a protected area, which explains the high percentage of mountain habitats among them. Land with restricted access for military or border patrol reasons also had significant natural values (Yakusheva 2017: 39).¹⁵

Compared to neighboring countries, the first national park in Hungary was established quite late, in 1973,¹⁶ and the pace at which protection was extended gained momentum from that time onward, which may be explained by the change of the head of the National Office for Environmental Protection, set up in 1961. National parks could be established according to a lenient regulation; the only threat was posed by the resistance of the local authorities (Rakonczay 2009: 242).

The obstacles experienced when the first national park—Hortobágy National Park—was established appeared again in connection with the scheduled Őrség National Park, and therefore it is worth briefly summarizing them. The decision on establishing Hortobágy National Park was made by the authorities concerned in the mid-1960s, following preparatory work by researchers (Rakonczay 2009: 108). The rise of international conservation and the encouragement and attention to Hungary from abroad played a large role in it. A frustrating but at the same time model example was set by the nature reserve established by Austria with the financial help of the World Wildlife Fund¹⁷ near Lake Neusiedl (Hung. *Fertő*)—“on the last spot of the saline areas of the Hungarian

¹⁵ The situation was a little different in Hungary: only 2% of protected land was private property, 58% was owned by the state, and 40% was owned by cooperatives. The main problem was that the environmental protection office had the right to manage only 3% of such land (Rakonczay 2009: 242).

¹⁶ The decree allowing the establishment of national parks was announced in 1971: Decree no. 12/1971 (4.1.) of the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government on the execution of Decree no. 18 of 1961 on environmental protection.

¹⁷ This organization, which was established in 1961, was the first to represent the cause of environmental protection in public, which had mainly been promoted by scientists and hunters earlier. It was helped by the changing mood of that age because, as television became widespread, the problems arising from the interaction of man and nature, which had grown more serious since the second half of the 1950s (industrial pollution, inadequate waste disposal, etc.) became well known, and the new, emotional approach of the WWF to raising funds (“help save wildlife”) proved to be successful as well (Hails 2007: 365–367).

grasslands.”¹⁸ The WWF entrusted the task to a biologist, Antal Festetics, who had emigrated in 1956. He initiated international cooperation to save the Hungarian grasslands, offering a certain sum to protect the natural habitat of the Hortobágy area. Due to pressure from the international and national scientific community,¹⁹ the National Office for Environmental Protection began to reveal the environmental values to be protected and to create the legal background. However, the Hortobágy State Farm, which was interested in the area and aided by the county authorities, continuously hindered the work. The National Office for Environmental Protection only managed the area but did not own it,²⁰ and so the scant staff of the national park could not take any measures against farmers who violated the prohibitions without any regulations (Aradi 2016: 232). Most problems arose in connection with hunting. Inside the national park it was prohibited to hunt wetland animals, but the county and national leaders—who were allowed to hunt in the national park as guests—refused to abandon this privilege.²¹ The other source of conflict was stockbreeding, which served export purposes (Aradi 2016: 232–236; Rakonczay 2009: 108). The ill-informed local residents were also hostile toward the national park because they disagreed with the ban on constructing modern buildings that did not fit the landscape, which they interpreted as regulations preventing them from creating better living conditions.²² Thus it can be seen that the greatest problems arose in connection with intensive agricultural cultivation of the land and local people’s attempts at modernization.

In accordance with its long-term plans, the National Office for Environmental Protection wished to establish Őrség National Park among the first five national parks (Rakonczay

¹⁸ “The “grassland campsite” set up near the nature reserve was visited by many tourists. Thirty shadoofs were built, and Austrians wearing lederhosen cracked long Hortobágy whips. Even the Hungarian flag was put out, although inverted. This “grassland campsite” subsidized the nature reserve with eight million shillings borrowed from the World Wildlife Fund” (MNL OL 27 July 1967).

¹⁹ The “Pro Natura” memorandum addressed to the government of the People’s Republic of Hungary and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was signed by twenty-two experts from Western Europe on 1 December, 1967 requesting the protection of the grassland. In February 1969, Hungarian academics voiced their deep concerns about the state of environmental protection in Hungary (Rakonczay 2009: 94–96, 130–131).

²⁰ Inside Hortobágy National Park, three state farms, eighteen cooperatives, seven grazing committees, and more than twenty other organizations owned land (Aradi 2016: 232).

²¹ The state farm explained the need for hunting based on the damage caused by birds feeding on fish fodder and fish, and therefore the National Office for Environmental Protection permitted ten “protocol hunts.” To make up for the profit loss by state farms and cooperatives, an extra conservation cost was introduced. The nomenklatura (the most senior party and government leaders)—continuing the traditions of the prewar elite—hunted within the framework of exclusive hunting associations, excluding the public, in the closed hunting grounds of the former aristocracy or the royal family. For further information, see Majtényi (2007, 2016) and Péteri (2010).

²² This issue was also addressed in the discussion that took place in 1974 and 1975 in the oldest Hungarian journal of natural sciences, *Természet Világa* (in an article presenting the discussion and comments) in connection with the establishment of the first national park.

1975). When the national parks were founded, the success of their establishment and the speed of this depended on the relationship between the main environmental authority and the first secretaries of the county party committees and/or the presidents of the county councils. According to a later appraisal report by the National Office for Environmental Protection, the president of the Vas County Council, György Gonda—who, ironically, was appointed the head of the reorganized office (the National Office for Environmental and Natural Protection) as a state secretary after being removed from his earlier position—prevented the establishment of Őrség National Park. During the preparations, in the summer of 1973, the environmental protection office appointed a main environmental inspector to the conservation area. In the first two to three years, the task of the forest engineer, who came from the Őrség region, was to take stock of the natural and cultural values of the region that deserved protection. All this should have preceded the official negotiations with the county authorities, but the delay and the lack of agreement with high-level leaders led to an antipathy toward the activities of the inspector, who was alleged to be independent and impolite toward the county leadership.

Because the agreements concerning the nature reserve were usually informal, the discussions about the establishment of the park can hardly be observed in the sources in the archives; but, in the contemporary press, both sides voiced their opinions. Moreover, according to the memoirs, the final break between the two sides was triggered by a newspaper article published in the daily paper with the highest circulation in Hungary, in which the chief inspector of conservation gave an account of his work, which had two suggestions: to reconstruct the landscape and to protect the landscape with the power of the authorities (Rakonczai 2009: 234–237). He highlighted that both the agriculture of the forestry cooperatives and outdoor or semi-outdoor stockbreeding could be in accordance with the goals of environmental protection, but agricultural buildings, water towers, and small claypits deface the landscape. Traditional folk values (architecture and pottery) and inevitable modernization, the conflict between them, and the fears of local people were all discussed in detail: “My friends and acquaintances told me: ‘Do you want us to live like our grandfathers?’ Of course not. It would be a nice achievement if we could build things that fit the landscape in the old characteristic style and using wood” (A védett ... 1974).²³

²³ An article in a similar spirit was published in *Búvár* (the discussion and environmental protection biological journal of the National Office for Environmental Protection) in the autumn of 1974 by the chief inspector of conservation. In his opinion, measures should be taken by the authorities to stop endangering natural values, and therefore a plan should be drawn up for the entire territory and the ownership rights were to be settled; the county architectural authority should have the plans for public and private buildings characteristic of the landscape of Őrség and fitting into it; and industrial development should mainly be based on local raw materials (e.g., producing construction ceramics, wooden products, and dairy products). Significant cattle breeding had already required the continuous maintenance of fields and pastures because forestry had paid attention to the esthetics of forests, and the careful siting of various agricultural and industrial constructions and their appropriate style were also important (Bulin 1974).

At last, in the spring of 1974, the environmental problems of the planned Órség National Park were discussed in Óriszentpéter, where the head of the office and the experts supporting the establishment of the park explained their ideas, and these were published in a detailed report in the weekly national literary and news magazine. According to this, if Órség was to become a national park, there could be no modern industrial factories, buildings, or new farming methods, the existing ones were to be eliminated gradually, and the characteristic features and traditions were to be reintroduced step by step. Increased tourism was to make up for the loss of income. The journalist did not agree with these concepts, coming up with numerous counter-arguments. Among other things, he doubted the statement according to which “Órség is an ethnographically still untouched area, a unique ethnic group.” He used various aspects of the lifestyle—including material widespread in the press since the 1950s depicting the communist change of lifestyle in contrast to the past and the present—to demonstrate that the isolation of Órség had ended in the previous decade. Among the leaders of the local collective farms participating in the discussion, the head of the Bajánsenye cooperative was the firmest opponent of the national park and critic of the state investments, which cost immense sums of money (for melioration, industrial development, industrial-scale cattle breeding, and growing corn), saying that these were enforced measures to stop out-migration. In his opinion, it was in vain that Órség was rich in natural beauty and folk traditions if “most people in Órség were as poor as church mice.” A proposition for compromise was also made aimed to create the national park only in those settlements where individuals farmed the land, excluding the meliorated areas cultivated by cooperatives. Nevertheless, in this way ethnographically interesting villages would have been excluded, which the ethnographers insisted on. The conclusion drawn by the author was that tourism based on the values of Órség would not have such a favorable effect on the future of the people as industrialization and melioration (Pósfai 1974). On another occasion, the head of the county council also stated that life should not be stopped, and that the national park was not the best method to protect the values of Órség. “The water tower over Óriszentpéter can be considered a symbol, although not everybody likes this concrete construction; I could also imagine a nicer one. Today there is a strong middle-level team connected to these villages. I don’t believe in examples like Gyűrűfű, the abandonment of villages. It’s not the end of the world” (Az Órség . . . 1974).²⁴



Cartoon (Radványi 1975).

²⁴ Gyűrűfű, a village in southern Hungary, started being abandoned in the 1960s as a result of the communist settlement policy, which declared it a village without any role; therefore it was deprived of any possibility for development. The last inhabitants abandoned the village in 1970 for good, but it was revived by urban intellectuals in the 1990s as an eco-village. For further details on the history of eco-villages (including Gyűrűfű) in Hungary, see Farkas (2017).

The water tower mentioned several times in the articles, gleaming in the sun, was alien to the landscape and symbolized modernization, whereas fear of the national park was depicted most aptly by a cartoon in the satirical weekly newspaper *Ludas Matyi*. The drawing reacted to a simile used in an article focusing on tourism deficiencies in Órség, intended to describe some locals protesting against the national park. “They don’t want to be thrust into an imaginary canning jar to be preserved in the conditions they lived under centuries ago. Órség does not want to become a reservation down under, in the southwestern corner of the country; they also want to live like other people, enjoying and using all the benefits of the modern age” (Radányi 1975: 10). In the end, the area was only classified as a landscape park in 1978, and, despite civil initiatives, it only became the tenth national park of the country in 2002.

PROTECTION OF REGIONAL HERITAGE: LOCAL POINTS OF VIEW

Although to date the protection of landscape heritage and related tourism has been regulated by environmental protection institutions, it has been created by several participants, which can be investigated as a heritage-making practice and an institutionalization process. The concept of heritage only caught on in the west from the 1960s and 1970s onward, including cultural and natural values (Hartog 2015: 149–191; Lowenthal 2005). In a heritage process, a legacy (which is a much larger cluster than a heritage) is selected, which is based on the principle that the cohesion and the self-consciousness of the community are strengthened (Wessely 2005: 19–20): “their current identity is institutionalized” (Sonkoly 2000: 48).

Although the communist concept of heritage has a slightly different meaning and its elements can be observed in the way the members of the local elite thought, I consider the concept of heritage as an analytical category for the age and region studied here. Although researchers paid much attention to the role of communist heritage in the post-communist societies, the number of studies discussing the interpretation of the notion of heritage in communist countries is insignificant. Moreover, among the communist writers, the only point of reference to this issue is the book by the Soviet philosopher Éleazar Baller, published in 1966, as referred to by Pablo Alonso González in studying this issue (González 2016; Baller 1966). The ideology of Marxism–Leninism based the legitimacy of the political system on breaking away from the past, and it was a basic requirement to control history and its materialization through inheritance. After the 1917 revolution, instead of creating a new proletarian culture and the systematic demolition of the monuments of earlier ages, Lenin tried to rely on the best traditions of the past and their development in building socialism (González 2016: 3–5). However, from the 1930s onward, the idea of cultural heritage included not just the monuments of the past but also those that were created during or after the 1917 revolution. This immediate inclusion into the circle of heritage—which was based on the new values connected to the monuments instead of their antiquity—can

be seen as a specifically Soviet phenomenon. (Deschepper 2018: 6–7). It reflects that communist sense of time, which—instead of the nationalist concept taking its root in the past—based its future-oriented narrative on the revolutionary present and a continuously shifting utopia.²⁵ According to Baller’s interpretation, communist society selects the heritage of the past, assimilates it, and uses it as raw material for the development of new values and meanings—the attitude of communist man—such as collectivity, internationalism, and communist humanism. In this respect, it differed from the capitalist idea of heritage, which plays a role in constructing individual and collective identity and memory. The way official cultural policy used the elements of folk culture on official occasions (mainly folk arts, folk songs, and folk dances), which lost ground with the disappearance of the peasantry, fits into this pattern (Kósa 2001: 206–207). It was considered important due to the propaganda effect that cultural events had on village residents (Standeisky 1976: 152–155).

The abundant ethnographic, historical, and geographic interest in Órség that emerged in the interwar period was followed by the attention of the National Office of Historical Monuments, which was supposed to protect folk monuments; the National Office for Environmental Protection, tasked with managing nature conservation values; the various concepts of county and district councils; and the participation of the Vas County Tourist Association, which has been quite active in the region since the mid-1960s. This institutionalization can be tracked down in the documents studied, and in the minutes of county and district councils. Below, I highlight some phenomena of this process.

The region’s beautiful landscape and fresh air have attracted vacationers since the interwar period. First they turned to the villages of the upper Rába Valley and later to Órség further south, primarily because of their bath culture (Key 2016: 837–844). This came to an end after the Second World War, and the just-evolving tourism of the area was shut down for twenty years by the border zone established under the communist regime. In 1963, Órség (and mainly Óriszentpéter within it) was identified as an important region of Vas County with considerable tourism potential (MNL OL 23 January 1963; MNL OL 1 March 1965), and after the border zone was abolished in 1965, the area, which had previously been closed, was repositioned. The 1967 plan of the recreational area in the western part of the Transdanubian region did not mention it among the important settlements that had any tourism role (Korm. 1967); however, the Tourist Office of Vas County tried to increase the popularity of this region through a tourism propaganda campaign.²⁶

²⁵ Communist ideology is described by researchers as having a double—basically anti-nostalgic—idea of time: in addition to the utopian future moving increasingly farther away (per Svetlana Boym), “late socialism”—following the ideas of Alexei Yurchak—is defined as a state of a continuously frozen present (Scarboro 2010: 46–47).

²⁶ Savaria Tourist launched a new vacation project in the spring of 1973 to the most beautiful hilly and mountainous regions of Vas County. The unspoiled natural beauty of the Kőszeg Hills (Hung. *Kőszeghegyalja*) and Órség were advertised with the slogan “a quiet vacation in the village” for those who wished to have a rest. Guests were put up in farmhouses, they were given homemade food, and the details were negotiated in village sessions by experts (*Magyar Nemzet*, 21 April 1973: 6).

However, some problems arose because the region was difficult to access due to poor road conditions, the accommodation capacity was low, and the catering and retail venues did not have an adequate product range. According to them, the main tourist attractions of Órség were its cheap vacation opportunities and the attraction of nature and monuments.

Initially, the district leadership intended to shape the profile of the region in a different manner. The changing concepts can be presented by studying the conceptions that have arisen in connection with an event called Órség Days (Hung. *Órségi Napok*), which has been held to represent the area since 1948. In 1965, on the twentieth anniversary of the “liberation,” the development of the region was in focus as part of the future-oriented narrative. According to the schedule, in the framework of the movement Expedition into the Future, teams were to collect and process data on the socioeconomic development of the village (such as the development of electricity distribution, the increase in the number of radios and televisions, machinery owned by cooperatives, and the number of people in higher education). The team sessions dealt with the future of their settlement and its development opportunities, and large settlements held exhibitions reflecting the last twenty years of development (MNL VAML 4 February 1965). The cultural show held in 1966 following nationwide patterns, in which dancing, singing, and acting teams competed, was replaced with regional days due to a decline in their standard and a decrease in the number of members, who had moved to other places or were commuting to distant workplaces. At that time, Rába Valley National Days (in Szakonyfalu) and Rába Regional Days (Hung. *Rábamenti Napok*) were included in the series of programs alongside Órség Days. The traditional performance of the independent art groups remained an important element of the events, this time without a competition. The program included stage plays, representative writer–reader meetings, informative meetings about local characteristics, showcases in club sessions, and exhibitions at clubs. The cultural day events, in contrast to their name, were intended to become an economic event as well, and so numerous lectures were given popularizing agriculture, a pesticide and machine exhibition was organized to support specialized cooperatives, and soil improvement techniques and various sports competitions and sports events were also held (MNL VAML 5 February 1966; MNL VAML 3 March 1967). In connection with individual settlements, traditions were also collected during the event.

The approach of representing the Órség region via its traditions was not yet favored unanimously by the district leaders. A plaque commemorating the cultural days of the Órség region depicted the storage building known as a *kástu* in Szalafő as the characteristic monument of the district. Among the members of the council, some commented that traditions were being forcefully pushed; instead the plaque should have presented development opportunities or the old should be contrasted with the modern. It was considered important to promote Órség and to achieve this, the district council came up with the following ideas: publishing an album with pictures, releasing a color slide show, or making a television film. An author was asked to write a play showing the progress that had been made and alluding

to the future prospects (MNL VAML 5 February 1966; MNL VAML 3 March 1967). In 1970, a book of interviews concentrating instead on problems and contradictions was written by György Moldova, which echoed across the whole country.

Compared to earlier years, it was noticed even by the police that “tourism has increased, ten to fifteen people come to the district every day” (MNL VAML 5 August 1966). In the fall of 1970, the Vas County Tourist Office estimated that there were a few hundred visitors annually. Their report said that it was a challenge for tourists to find accommodation because of the lack of hotels, which they attempted to mitigate by involving private properties. As an idea it was mentioned that abandoned or cheap folk monuments could be transformed into guest houses for tourists or they could be sold as galleries or vacation homes. At that time, cheap vacations in Órség were also advertised in newspapers. A tourism expert said that visitors had good opinions about the vacations they spent there. “Their only remark was that they were not free to walk because they bumped into checks by the border patrols every now and then” (MNL VAML 4 September 1970: Műemlékek . . .).

The district leaders defined as an important task that the development of monuments, museums, environmental protection, and tourism should involve the entire society. At that time, the village museum of Vas was established, and they started to purchase plots in Pityerszer in Szalafő for the museum, which bolstered the cause of local history museums. The district council wanted to change the working practice in the local museums, triggered by the individual initiatives of teaching experts, because it was unplanned and there was a shortage of space everywhere. They encouraged the collection of large agricultural tools (such as wooden ploughs, looms, etc.) for fear that this would not be possible later and not only because they would deteriorate. As they put it: “Smart people from Pest have ‘discovered’ Órség, and if we are not careful, they will loot it in no time. Then, based on memories, we will only be able to talk about Órség, but we will not be able to produce any object connected to the life of the people who used to live here” (MNL VAML 4 September 1970: Jelentés . . .).²⁷ It was proposed, among other things, that three significant regional ethnographic collections should be established (in Körmend, Szentgotthárd, and Óriszentpéter), whereas in other villages they thought that it was more prudent to create collections in school storerooms. One of the school days was declared a museum day to involve students, when items still existing with museum value could be explored. A comprehensive picture book was to be published about the monuments of the district, and there were plans to prepare slide shows (the slide shows were also intended to present new structures built after 1945) and to record folklore (folk songs, rhymes, traditions, sayings,

²⁷ According to a lecturer at the Museum Department of the Ministry of Culture, the purchase of folk objects and equipment is a nationwide problem, but because collection was not prohibited by any regulation, nothing could be done about it (MNL VAML 20 October 1970). The authorities also started collecting old everyday objects and tools in villages inhabited by ethnic minorities, but the collection process was not yet organized. Another problem was that some old items were taken away, for which Hungarian as well as Slovenian collectors were responsible (MNL VAML 2 July 1975).

tales, etc.) on a tape recorder, emphasizing in the propaganda that Órség is an independent ethnographic region (MNL VAML 4 September 1970).

Protected natural values were mostly unknown to the local residents and even to the village councils, and this was said to be why the protected “old poplars” were felled. As stated in one session, people could expect interest from others if such things are documented and available. For instance, areas and the ways to reach them should be indicated. It was deemed necessary to order picture postcards depicting local monuments and protected natural values, as well as to manufacture souvenirs, whereby the local ceramic factory, which had not yet manufactured any product characteristic of the region was to be given an important role. As it turned out, none of the two hundred different products judged by the jury made at the ceramic factory operating in Magyarszombatfa—a village with a long tradition of pottery, which also manufactured export goods—were characteristic of Órség. Among these goods, table lamps depicting a duck with a top hat, which were criticized as kitsch in numerous contemporary articles, were selling best. Therefore, the first artisans were entrusted with making characteristic Órség souvenirs and, after they were judged by the jury, they could be mass produced and distributed to catering and retail units (MNL VAML 22 January 1971).

The considerations of landscape and environmental protection emphasized preservation, which led to confrontations with farming cooperatives and trade cooperatives. The protection of architecture and the needs of local people wishing to modernize their houses also resulted in a clash of interests. Folk monuments were registered gradually from the 1950s onward and, because in most cases they could not be modernized in accordance with the requirements of the age, most of them were abandoned or consigned to demolition or transformation despite the protection. Therefore, the office for the protection of monuments was of the opinion that they could only be maintained on the spot if they served purposes of public culture or were taken care of or operated by museums. If this could not be carried out, the monuments were to be moved to open-air ethnographic museums or protected as groups of monuments (Bárdosi 1977: 354–355; Tóth 1966: 92). Due to a lack of funds, the hamlet-like settlement was preserved only in Szalafő. The process of laying out streets was not at an advanced stage and the landscape of the settlements was not so affected by the demolition of farm buildings and houses, whose percentage was lower than the average in the country, and the existence of modern buildings was not yet disturbing (Bárdosi 1977: 357). According to the National Office for the Protection of Monuments, it is not the layout of the buildings but the design and the construction of modern houses fitting into the landscape that requires the intervention of engineers and authorities in order to satisfy the expectations of the residents but not disturb the layout of the settlement and the harmony of the landscape (Bárdosi 1977: 357–358).²⁸

²⁸ For further details on the protection of monuments in Hungary and the history of folk monuments in the communist era, see Harlov-Csörtán (2018).

The National Office for the Protection of Monuments issued permits to demolish protected houses and outbuildings because there was no other authority in charge, and from the early 1960s onward, numerous modern apartment blocks were built in their place. However, in 1970, with the intention of shaping common taste, the district construction authority was requested to draw up the plan for a modern house fitting the Őrség landscape, which was to be recommended to builders of private homes (MNL VAML 23 December 1970).

The leadership of the district intended to help form modern villagescapes by creating general plans for the design of villages. According to a 1970 report by the Körmend District Council, only a few villages had these, but where these exist, the people obtained a clearer picture of the requirements of buildings. The design plan of Szalafő was drawn up in 1975 and the National Office for the Protection of Monuments was responsible for it. According to this, flat roofs and houses with several stories or surrounding walls were not allowed, and even stones, sand, and other materials could only be stored in designated places. After the landscape protection area was established, the National Office for Environmental Protection also exercised authority concerning the treatment of areas within settlements. It prescribed that settlements buildings should have architectural shapes in accordance with the characteristics of the region; that any building valuable as a monument or for the look of the village is to be preserved; that the traditional architecture in Apátistvánfalva, Őriszentpéter, and Szalafő is to be retained; and that a design plan should be created in agreement with the office (*Az Országos ... 1978*).

CONCLUSION

The settlements in Őrség National Park or its predecessor, the landscape park, were preserved and included due to their disadvantageous proximity to the border, poor agricultural capacity, and development difficulties caused by the settlement network. From the mid-1960s onward, the county and district power holders, following national patterns with some delay, tried to reproduce the processes they interpreted as socialist modernization, the main elements of which are the industrialization of central towns and the introduction of collective farming. Besides changing the distribution of ownership, collective farming aimed to establish industrial agriculture, closely linked to the wide-ranging soil-improvement program in the area and similar to the Stalinist nature transformation plans of the 1950s. It was this relatively untouched quality, which was about to change—the landscape and natural assets shaped by the characteristic method of individual private farming and special ethnological features—that brought the countryside to the fore of nature preservation efforts, which were gradually being implemented from the second half of the 1960s onward with institutional backing. The plans to establish national parks faced similar difficulties all over the country. The landscape and nature protection aspects placed an emphasis on preservation, which inevitably led to conflicts of interest with the agricultural cooperatives and the

specialized cooperatives—which had to observe the regulations—as well as with the local population wishing to modernize their homes. Although the Nature Conservation Office only managed to establish a landscape park instead of a national park, we can observe how the future-oriented narrative of the power elite was changing and how the local (natural and cultural) heritage was gaining ground in their thinking.

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TRANSFORMACIJA STROGO NADZOROVANEGA MEJNEGA OBMOČJA V
TURISTIČNI CILJ
OBLIKOVANJE DEDIŠČINE V KOMUNISTIČNI MADŽARSKI

Narodni rezervat Őrség je bil ustanovljen na meji jugozahodne Madžarske. V 20. stoletju so številna raztresena in razdrobljena naselja ob meji oteževala infrastrukturne izboljšave in postavitev institucionalne mreže. V obdobju komunizma pa vasi tega območja (pod strogim mejnim nadzorom so bile vse do poznih 60. let prejšnjega stoletja) niso vključili v koncept splošnega razvoja lokalnih skupnosti, kar je še poslabšalo neugodne razmere na območju. Politika je njegovo vlogo reinterpreterirala šele v 70. letih. V času socialistične modernizacije se je partijski in državni aparat v okrožju in občinah odločil, da je treba razmisliti o industrijskem razvoju in širitvi združnega kmetovanja. Za drugi koncept je bila značilna sprememba pogledov na človeka in okolje, ki se je v 70. letih razširila po komunističnih državah.

Naravni rezervat Őrség je bil ustanovljen pod okriljem madžarskega urada za varstvo okolja. Zaščita je zajemala avtohtono floro in favno, vodne vire, pokrajino in tradicijo. Ta proces je mogoče analizirati kot prakso ustvarjanja dediščine, v katero je vključenih več drugih akterjev. Zgodnjemu intenzivnemu zanimanju etnografov je v poznih 50. letih sledil Nacionalni urad za zgodovinske spomenike, katerega naloga naj bi bila ščititi spomenike ljudske kulture, različne koncepte okrajnih in mestnih uradov ter turizem. Avtorica analizira različne koncepte in predstavi, kateri konflikti so nastajali med glavnimi akterji lokalnega gospodarsko-političnega življenja.

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