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ROOTS

PLEASURE AND WEALTH IN A GLOBALIZING CONSUMER SOCIETY

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Introduction

Modernization, accession, catching up, keeping pace and Western standard of living are all keywords in today's prevailing discourse. Both everyday people and politicians consider something progressive if it leads to adopting the Western socio-economic model successfully. Fighting absolute poverty, that is the state which does not even provide for the most essential human needs, is morally unquestionable. However, relative poverty, which has been known since the work of Townsend and is interpreted in relation to the wealth of others, needs to be analyzed more thoroughly than it is nowadays.

The lifestyle of the richest is becoming increasingly well-known worldwide, making more and more people consider themselves poor and think they deserve a better life. Political efforts are made to improve the material standard of living of the increasing number of people considered poor and in need of help while other important issues are neglected. Though raising the material standard of living may be an acceptable aim, we also have to consider the possible disadvantages of the process and draw useful conclusions from the functioning of the wealthiest societies. Is it really against human dignity if one has to bear a summer heat of 30 degrees Celsius without air-conditioning or if there is not a top quality highway within a ten-minute drive? Moreover, nowadays it is no more a question of what national economic policy to adopt in order to approach the material standard of living of the West, generally considered to be developed, but to what extent it is advisable to adapt to an increasingly globalized consumer society.

Though scholarly works on the disadvantages of Western consumer society and its long-term unsustainability are increasingly available, opinions critical of identifying economic growth with development seem to be rare and half-hearted. Besides social problems, difficulties arising from the finitude of the natural environment are becoming more and more obvious. In connection with environmental problems, it is the control of the population of the Earth and the necessity of cleaner production which are often voiced, while consumption per capita seems to be taboo. However, in the formula defining the total impact of mankind on the biosphere the latter is at least as important as demography and technology. The unwillingness to reduce consumption may be due to several factors, of which one of the most important is personal involvement. Citizens of economically advanced countries can regard stopping the demographic growth and developing technology as tasks for others. On the other hand, consumption necessarily includes the individual's own responsibility as everybody is a consumer. (Princen 1999, pp. 360–1)

Apart from personal involvement there are of course political reasons for the aversion from reducing consumption. Personal as well as public decisionmaking systems normally try to solve the problems of distribution by enlarging the 'economic cake' (i.e. by economic growth), as 'reslicing the cake' tends to interfere with several interests. However, in the countries which are *over*developed from our point of view, reducing consumption would need exactly this kind of 'reslicing' during which the 'cake' can even shrink. This task seems to be impossible to solve in the traditional economic approach. Nevertheless, the question cannot be avoided as statistics in developed countries show that despite slower population growth and the spread of increasingly environment-friendly technologies the detrimental effect of society on the environment is increasing. This does not mean that the stabilization of the size of the population or the development of technologies are useless but these alone will not solve the problem.

Because of the importance of social and environmental problems, in this study I am going to examine the cult of material wealth present today. The culture of consumption or consumer society will be particularly emphasized, which—according to Kathleen M. Rassuli and Stanley C. Hollander's definition—exists when the following four conditions are fulfilled:

(1) the population (at least most of it) consume at a level substantially above survival level, (2) people obtain goods and services for consumption through exchange rather than self-production, (3) consumption is seen as an acceptable and appropriate activity by society and (4) people tend to judge others and themselves in terms of their consuming lifestyle (Rassuli and Hollander 1986, p. 5). Because of limits to the size of this essay I am not going to deal with the historical background of consumer society or any debates about it—a comprehensive review by Vörös can be read about the subject in the journal *Replika* (issue 21–22/1996). During the research I have only been interested in the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century present of the consumer society, though I sometimes refer to historical antecedents.

My research was based on the individual, as I believe mapping human needs and expectations is of high priority during a thorough analysis of consumer society. For this reason my main goal is to find out what role money, economy, wealth and various goods play in the happiness of people. I intend to lay a particular stress on materialism, which most strongly supports the necessity of consumer society. However, examining the individual scale is only the first step towards recognizing and interpreting problems of larger scale, which occur on the level of society and the natural environment, as well as drawing up a possible solution to them. The main aim of this study is to help to make this step, consequently it mainly explores the micro level (the level of the individual) though at the same time it also refers to the macro (social, environmental) level consequences of the findings.

To realize the drawbacks of the consumer society it is inevitable to go beyond the strictly economical approach and include the findings of other fields of science in the economic analysis. During my work I consider human ethological, ethnographic and sociological aspects. I am particularly relying on three disciplines: economic psychology, new consumer behavior and ecological economics. I am very much interested in the latest findings of *economic psychology*, as the tools, methodology and findings of psychology, which examines human desires and motives, can be adopted in economic analysis and in this way they can enrich the way of thinking about economy. There is a slow and gradual paradigm shift, which for the time being is limited to a few marketing departments of American universities, and which is also important from our point of view. This new school of thought, though still in its infancy, provides extremely useful findings to rely on. It has nothing to do with the marketing school prevalent at most universities and companies, hallmarked by the name of Philip Kotler, which spares no effort to turn the world into one huge prospering market and exploits the development of the consumer society. It is more of a scientific effort intending to loosen the strictly managerial attitude of marketing and paying attention to its greater-scale, macro level consequences.

The new school of marketing, named *new consumer behavior* by Russel W. Belk, rejects the traditional assumption of consumers being mere automatons who receive information imputs and produce brand choice outputs. It rather regards consumers as socially connected human beings in interacting cultures. According to the new school, social class is not just a category which helps to segment the market for clothing and other consumer goods but is rather a reality that involves wealth and poverty, haves and have-nots, hegemonic control, core and periphery cultures and subcultures, desires and frustrations. This school does not consider the family a simple decisionmaking consumption unit, but a fragile and symbolically rich group of humans relating to one another in ways that are increasingly mediated by consumption. *'As marketing and consumption become increasingly dominant parts of the human landscape, the new consumer behavior attempts to understand how consumption relates to the rest of human existence'.* (Belk 1995, p. 62) The views of the representatives of the approach are mainly published in the Journal of Consumer Research and the yearly Advances in Consumer Research. These journals provide a platform for the two sets of researchers to compete. How-

ever, the philosophy of the two groups are so profoundly different and irreconcilable that instead of approaching they are drifting even more apart. Belk is now only interested to see how long the business oriented majority tolerates the non-managerial, self-critical, macro-focused school on its forum (Belk 1995 p 61).

Economics has been going through a similar paradigm shift too. According to traditional neoclassical economics economy is the total system and nature—if it is considered at all—is nothing more than a sector of the economy. It does not see nature as an envelope containing, provisioning and sustaining economy but as one of the several sectors of economy. By contrast, according to *ecological economics* economy is part of a total ecosystem that is finite, non-growing and materially closed. (The throughput of solar energy is also finite and non-growing.) The objective of this approach is to find the optimal size of economy within the ecosystem (Daly 1999). Obviously, in the long run this approach is based on the assumption of a non-growing economy, therefore these aspects of the question lead back to the problem of consumption, consumer society and the interpretation of wealth and happiness. Thus the forming of a harmonic relationship between mankind and nature depends also on what we think of the globalization of the culture of consumption. Even if we—by any chance—come to the conclusion that the spread of the consumer society is desirable we will have to allow for the finitude of the sustaining capacity of the Earth.

My study aims to describe the macro-level problems of consumption and economic growth taking ecological aspects into consideration. Ecological economics—which I personally also believe in—does not yet play a significant role in education, in economic or political life. It does have however its own journal titled *Ecological Economics*, first published in 1989, which serves as a mine of ideas of ecological economists. One of the earliest advocates of the school in Hungary has been László Zsolnai and the journal titled *Kovász* (leaven, ferment) also publishes essays on the subject.

In my study the examination of material wealth is of great importance. It is closely related to consumption, which classical economic analysis is also interested in. This is why I consider it important to stress that the present study does not deal with consumption in the usual way. I do not intend to examine how consumption depends on income at disposal, permanent or life cycle income, property, tax rates, real interest rates, pension schemes or expectations about economic prospects (Samuelson–Nordhaus 1985, Chapter 7). I am not going to detail how to define total demand, analyze the flexibility of demand or write a critical description of the models of supply and demand (Samuelson–Nordhaus 1985, Chapter 18). Though the grounds for these analyses are beyond question, adapting this narrow economic approach would prevent me from looking at consumption from such a distance which makes the non-material needs of people also perceivable. While traditional economics concentrates on the benefit of the consumer in case of consuming certain goods as well as the utility of the goods consumed, this essay describes the complete person rather than the consumer and concentrates on the satisfaction of the person *in general* rather than the benefit of consuming *certain goods*. Of course, goods and services purchased on the market can considerably contribute to this satisfaction, yet the mere possession and use of them does not seem to be sufficient. This writing aims to draw attention to the importance of other, non-material factors of human needs as well as to what personal and social problems may arise when material aspects become overvalued in one's life.

Furthermore, my study can hopefully provide useful information for those who have already recognized the existence of environmental problems and are attempting to solve them. Quite often these experts suggest fast and in this way often too radical solutions to overconsumption and overpopulation as they mainly focus on urgent environmental problems. These 'solutions' are top-down from the viewpoint of society and usually they show the global intrusion of an enlightened élite into people's lives. Whereas some of the suggestions urge the

transformation of the functioning of the economy as well as the global trade of pollution quotas, the taxation of consumption and reducing the price of human labor (compared to energy and capital), others are not satisfied with market changes and demand radical control of consumption and birth.

This essay is not going to give an answer to the question of whether we really need the above-mentioned measures and what results we can expect from their implementation. It does shed light on a possibility however, which is inherent in our human integrity and in the recognition of the essence of our humanity. Consumption is not the goal of life, it is only its device. The dissemination of this realization can—by stabilizing or reducing material consumption—help to avoid forced measures and promote the effective functioning of economic incentives in case they are introduced. It also draws attention to the fact that environmental problems cannot be dealt with separately from social problems and that it is crucial to examine the nature of human existence. Consequently, I do not intend to create a magic formula for environmental policy but I would like to contribute to the elaboration of carefully prepared environmental strategies by exploring the relationship between human integrity and material consumption.

The main presumption of my study is that *the emergence and spread of consumer society is basically disadvantageous to mankind and nature*. For this reason in the first part of the study I am not going to survey arguments supporting the consumer society but collect ideas denying its problems, that is, to examine the ways of how it deals with criticism. The chapter will reveal that the main argument in favor of the culture of consumption is that human beings are fundamentally materialistic and the other arguments are—explicitly or implicitly—based on this one.

The second part will neglect the former notion of 'man does live by bread alone' and will describe findings that contradict the unconditional desirability of the consumer society. Hopefully, the dissemination of these findings can contribute to the abatement of ecological problems caused by mankind. The detrimental effect of the culture of consumption on society is usually said to be related to the spread of individualism and materialism. Of the two interrelated notions we are going to focus on materialism as it is in closer connection with consumption, economy and the harmful impact of society on nature.

The third part will put the debate about the desirability of consumer society into an everyday context. It will describe the movement of voluntary simplicity, which is mainly spreading in the USA, the biggest consumer society in the world. The existence of the movement alone signals the possibility of getting disappointed in the culture of consumption and calls attention to the feasibility and necessity of frugal life.

The fourth part will be the last in the series of chapters reviewing the relevant literature. It will describe the partial failure of the attempt of voluntary simplicity to break away from consumer society. After having spread widely, the movement seems to sink back into the morass of consumer culture and the market-oriented approach seems to predominate again. The end of this chapter contains the author's experiences about voluntary simplicity in the USA.

The process from the enthusiasm about consumer society to the failure of breaking away from it is called the vicious circle of materialism, which also serves as a frame for the first four chapters (see Figure). It is important to stress that by using the notion of the vicious circle of materialism I do not intend to criticize the market mechanism, which is more or less an effective tool of distributing material resources (economic aspect) but attempt to draw attention to the problem of cost-benefit analysis (indispensable in business) intruding into other, non-market spheres of life (human aspect).

The Vicious Circle of Materialism

	Market-oriented Mentality	*Beyond-the-market Mentality*
Present	Chapter 1 There is no problem with consumer society.	Chapter 2 Consumer society has a lot of problems.
Future	Chapter 4 Voluntary simplicity has a lot of problems.	Chapter 3 Voluntary simplicity is the right alternative.

The fifth part of the study summarizes the conclusions drawn from the first four chapters and describes the concept of the individual who is based on completeness. I believe that the firm rotation of the vicious circle of materialism is due to forgetting or being deprived of roots. The chapter finishes with describing the theoretical foundation of my research. During the research, conducted in the Hungarian linguistic area, I explored social, cultural, natural and religious roots needed for human completeness and how they are related to the state of economic development and to the dependency on consumer society.

The sixth part of the study is about the research itself as well as its findings. It has turned out that the strength of the roots needed for human completeness is inversely proportional to the dependence on consumer society on both personal and communal level.

In the seventh, closing, part I put the conclusions drawn from the research in a broader context and call attention to further problems.

When reviewing the relevant literature and describing my findings, I intend to detail the empirical research, i.e. I will describe the survey method, the conditions of sampling, the size of the sample as well as the significance level of the findings. I do it for four reasons. Firstly, for the Hungarian professional reader the studies presented—except for the ones in the first part—are mostly about new and unknown fields. Secondly, as these studies have been conducted by using scientifically accepted methods and published in internationally acknowledged scholarly journals, their findings are more difficult to neglect than those of spectacular but unsupported theories. Thirdly, readers who are at home in statistics can easily asses the strength and reliability of the connections revealed. Fourthly, I hope that the survey methods will encourage other professionals to carry out research of similar inwardness in Hungary. Each chapter can be read as a separate study and contains a list of relevant bibliography but hopefully they convey more if read together. The first and the third chapters for example can make some readers optimistic but the second and the fourth chapters will reveal the drawbacks of the seemingly favorable picture.

It would not have been possible to produce this study without the aid and support of several people. I am extremely grateful to dr. Sándor Kerekes, the head of the Department of Environmental Economics and Technology at the Budapest University of Economic Sciences and Public Administration. My personal development has largely been influenced by him and I have been able to experience his benevolence several times. I have been encouraged by the sincere and open atmosphere of the department headed by him and it was that community that made a home for the journal *Kovász* and the group *Altern-csoport*, whose spirituality is also characteristic of this study. I should like to thank professor József Kindler, my consultant, who is also the intellectual leader of the group *Altern-csoport*. Two other members of the group, Árpád Baranyi and dr. Kálmán Dabóczi have given invaluable personal and professional assistance. The first version of my study had been greatly improved by the comments of dr. Károly Kiss and dr. István Magyari Beck before it got its final shape. I have also relied on the useful advice of László Füstös concerning statistical methodology and on the suggestions of Virág Koncz concerning style and phrasing. My stay in the USA was greatly sup-

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Chapter 1

Arguments Denying the Problems of Consumer Society

This chapter includes the arguments with which the advocates of consumer society use to defend against criticism. First I am going to deal with arguments according to which consumer society (and the influence of the West) does not present a danger to the cultural diversity of the world. These will be followed by arguments describing the social usefulness and necessity of consumer culture, and finally the answers to the problems of natural environment will be listed.

From a global perspective consumer culture does not pose a problem

According to Francis *Fukuyama* there are two great, interrelating forces which influence the history of mankind: one is the desire for wealth, the other is the struggle for recognition (Fukuyama 1996, p. 358; based on Fukuyama 1992). As he states "*our motivation in working and earning money is much more closely related to the recognition that such activity afford us, where money becomes a symbol not for material goods but for social status or recognition*" (Fukuyama 1996, p. 359). It all implies that the only force that shapes history, is money, which symbolizes both material goods that can be obtained and social recognition, which accompanies the former. According to this theory the desire for creating economic prosperity is not culturally determined but almost universally shared. The economic success of a culture affects the happiness of the members of it, and the relative strengths and weaknesses of different societies are also often judged by it (Fukuyama 1996, p. 354). Therefore the culture of consumption is considered to be the most advanced—and in this way the last—stage of history (Fukuyama 1992; cf. Miller 1995, p. 41; Twitchell 1999, pp. 284–5).

Samuel Huntington considers a culture attractive for outsiders if it is based on material success and power. "*Wealth, like power, is assumed to be proof of virtue, a demonstration of moral and cultural superiority*", he states in his essay on the clash of civilizations (1996, p. 104). From this aspect he shares Fukuyama's view, though Huntington predicts the decline of the West, due to the economic success of Eastern-Asia. Consumption itself is described as a sign of decay in Huntington's book, as in this case the surpluses are distributed to consumption without providing more effective methods of production (Quigley 1961, quoted by Huntington 1996, p. 303).[1] The decline of the West could be avoided by the emergence of a global, Western-type civilization, which is not too likely to happen. He thinks that though it has often happened in history that different cultures adopted aggressive or exotic technological inventions or whims from one another, these did not have a lasting effect on them. He thinks the argument that the spread of Western pop and consumer culture represents the triumph of Western civilization trivializes Western culture,[2] since the "*essence of Western civilization is the Magna Carta not the Magna Mac. The fact that non-Westerners may bite into the latter has no implications for their accepting the former*" (Huntington 1996, p. 58). Consequently, some of the young men in the Middle East could well be dressed in jeans and drinking Coke, while bowing to Mecca at the right time or putting together a bomb to blow up an American airliner (Huntington 1996, p. 58).

Whereas he does not deny the possibility that after a while the same products will be consumed everywhere, he thinks, culture, which consumption will be embedded in, can remain diverse. Huntington clearly differentiates between culture and consumption. According to him, if we focus on mass entertainment instead of material goods, then the almost complete American dominance of film, television and video industries does not give cause for alarm

[1] This view seems to be somewhat paradoxical as the author analyses wealth only from materialist aspect but he does not explain how wealth can be achieved at a low level of consumption. Also, he considers the expansion of consumer society a problem only as far as it can be conquered by another, even more materialistic, civilization.

[2] "*What, indeed, does it tell the world about the West when Westerners identify their civilization with fizzy liquids, faded pants, and fatty foods?*" (Huntington 1996, p. 58)

either. This hegemony only reflects "*the universality of human interest in love, sex, violence, mystery, heroism, and wealth, and the ability of profit-motivated companies, primarily American, to exploit those interests to their own advantage*" (Huntington 1996, p. 58). Consequently, Hollywood is well-meaning entertainment and not a form of cultural conversion (Huntington 1996, p. 59). On the whole, according to Huntington the spread of consumer culture does not pose a danger to the cultural diversity of the world.

In the lengthy introduction of a book, written by several authors, examining consumption from the viewpoints of several disciplines, Daniel Miller says consumption is the vanguard of history. He believes, as the pattern of purchases in major supermarket chains is relayed to manufacturing on a daily basis, most of the power is concentrated in the hands of mass-consumers of developed countries. It means, that as a consequence of global pursuit of the cheapest possible prices, the profit is also mainly theirs (Miller 1995, pp. 4–6). The profit of capitalists, on the other hand, who are directly involved in production is minor compared to what mass-consumers extract by way of low prices (Miller 1995, p. 11).

It is characteristic of Miller that he differentiates between the genders in terms of consumption. As the typical customer of big supermarkets is a woman, the changes of world economy largely depend on the decisions of the First World housewife, who prefers the cheapest and best products. In this way, housewives become 'aggregate global dictators', and the life-chances of the peasantries of the developing world are increasingly dependent upon their aggregate daily decisions (Miller 1995, pp. 8–9). He regards it as desirable since the major economic events do not depend on the decisions of privileged élites any more. Third World housewives also favor the cheapest possible prices, in this way making the political efforts of their husbands to save the economic and political power and independence of their country pointless. As a result national governments lose their autonomy to organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank, since these take action in the name of providing the cheapest goods to consumers (Miller 1995, p. 9), which coincides with the demand of the profit-oriented consumers.

Miller describes some popular assertions connected to consumption as myths. He thinks consumption itself does not make the world homogeneous, since global brands like Coca-Cola or Levi jeans account for only a small proportion of all branded goods. The notion of Americanization is also mistaken as the vast transnational corporations are as likely to be based in Europe, as in Japan or one of the developing countries. He thinks it is untrue that the culture of consumption involves cultural erosion and as a result the term consumer culture is a misnomer. According to him this erroneous notion has its roots in a centuries long tradition that each generation blames the next one for the assumed decline in true values (Miller 1995, pp. 21–2).[3]

Consumer culture dose not pose a danger to society

Daniel Miller believes that the assertion that the personality of people is diminished by the spread of consumer culture and sinks to the level of objects produced by capitalism is no more than a myth. Referring to Marcel Mauss, an outstanding figure of anthropology, he claims that in earlier societies the exchange of an object between two people also established reciprocal obligation between them, and through the obligation the object came to carry person-like properties.[4] Even more significant is the case when some people (in the case described, children) regarded themselves as gifts so as to create solidarity within a larger kindred, in this

[3] The theory of moral panics, which will be described later, asserts the same, saying: "Since the beginning of the industrial revolution every age has described itself as an age of radical social changes. Disastrous future always starts in the present, breaking with traditions is always in present tense." (Kitzinger 2000, p. 31)

[4] If we get an ornament from someone, the object will remind us of that person and in this way it will come to carry person-like properties.

way it was people who acquired thing-like properties.[5] Referring to Mauss, Miller says that in non-capitalist societies the relationship of people and objects was so close that the distinction was often blurred (Miller 1995, pp. 23–4).

Miller's own research, conducted in London seems to prove that those people who were best able to express their personal relationships through their manipulation of their material world, formed the closest social networks. Those, on the other hand, who felt worthless in their social relations also felt impotent with respect to any manipulation of their material culture. (Miller 1995, p. 24 quoting Miller 1988). According to Miller more often it is narcissism which destroys social relations, rather than materialism, which is often an expression of social relationships.[6]

Miller disagrees with what he sees as a bizarre cliché, according to which shopping and mass consumption is associated with unprecedented irrationalism and is accompanied by unusual desires. According to him this assertion contrasts today's consumer culture with some previous culture which used to have a strictly functionalist relation to material culture, and gives the impression that the blandishment of capitalism has nothing to do with basic needs and true values. He thinks whether we consider the precise shape of everyday earthenware of impoverished peasant villages in South Asia or seventeenth-century Netherlanders' concern with tulips, it is obvious that the theory of cultures preferring the utility of objects and basic needs is more of an abstraction than the reality of either the present or the past. (Miller 1995, p. 26)

Finally, Miller also deals with the accusations which see the main social characteristics of consumers as competition and pursuit of status, while regard consumer societies as more individualistic and hedonistic than other societies. According to Miller this idea results from the fact that it is usually the American consumer society that is set as a typical example when defining the characteristics of consumer societies in general. He thinks we would have a completely different picture if, say, Norway would be considered as the primary image of consumer culture, since they have as high a standard of living and seem just as devoted to mass consumption as North Americans. Referring to research by Marianne *Gullestad* (1984, 1992), Miller points out that in Norway status competition and conspicuous consumption is clearly avoided in for example the interior decoration of homes. Consumption in this way becomes an instrument of relatively rigid egalitarian morality and though it cannot be called 'dour', he says, it has few hedonistic features. According to Miller in order to argue against the assumption about Norway, one has to assume either that Norway is not a 'proper' consumer society or that it is inevitably going to become similar to the US, which Miller regards as nonsense. We cannot escape the conclusion that the British author does not consider it justified to refute the charges of competition and hedonism in the case of the USA.

Michael *Novak* on the other hand, who lives in the USA, does not think that labels such as 'the member of consumer society', 'greedy' or 'materialistic' are characteristic of American families. He believes that their generosity is unparalleled in history, though it is more of volunteer activities than financial giving. When faced with a problem, Americans instinctively form a committee (Novak 1982, pp. 140–1). According to Novak money is almost a taboo subject among Americans. One rarely knows how much his colleagues earn, which is rude to

[5] A good example of a person acquiring thing-like properties is when others form an opinion of him/her based on material goods owned by him/her.

[6] According to Waterman altruism and egoism are not antithetical, as some apparently altruistic behaviors are really egoistically motivated. This view has its roots in sociobiology, which contends that one helps others only in order to increase the likelihood that they will help him when he is in need (cf. Trivers 1971). Daun (1983) thinks that consumption is one of the few goals which unite a family and give it a purpose. And Boorstin (1973) argues that consuming the same brands and products gives a sense of community for society. These arguments do not deny the egoistic nature of materialism present in consumption but they assert that it is useful for society (the examples are from Belk 1985, p. 266).

discuss. He intends to disprove the assumption that competitiveness, 'rat race' and 'dog-eat-dog' are only characteristic of capitalism by saying that athletes from socialist countries are just as competitive as those from capitalist nations. "*Still, most persons in America do not seem to want to rise to the top. Many compete mostly with themselves. They set goals for themselves and try to realize them in their own way and at their own pace. Taking it easy, playing it as it comes, easy does it—these attributes seem to be at least as widely celebrated and realized as the competitive drive.*" (Novak 1982, pp. 141–2) He does not mention what goals these are or how their content may change. Novak thinks criticism of American democratic capitalism and in this way of consumption society is overrepresented in public life and he misses "*works celebrating the middle class as heroes, saints, adventurers, the salt of human race*". He says, the current middle class is the first class in history that enjoys self-ridicule and self-criticism, while success seems to have become a taboo, as there are more militant and desperate black males in the U.S. media than successful ones (Novak 1982, p. 154).

Neither does he agree with the assumption that the modern advertising industry distorts the critical faculty of people and in this way makes their market decisions irrational. He thinks one also has to consider the failures of the advertising industry, such as the many highly advertised books falling flat, or the failure of American motorcar companies in the winter of 1979–80 to bring consumer demand to prior levels despite lavish advertising. Advertisements and advertising agencies compete with one another and they only wish they had the power ascribed to them, since customers have their own experience to check upon the millions of advertisements they are exposed to, and they are not the least passive victims. The decisions of intellectuals are also far more distorted by their own conventional taboos as well as their occupational remove from several rough areas of life (detachment from the world) than by advertising (Novak 1982, p. 108).

James B. *Twitchell* approaches the issue as an advertising professional, and devotes a whole book to it titled *Lead Us Into Temptation—The Triumph of the American Materialism.* The prerequisite of the author is that people are by nature materialist. We use tools because we like the products produced by them. He thinks materialism does not crowd out spiritualism, on the contrary, it is the emergence of spiritualism that shows that objects are scarce, that is, spiritualism is a kind of substitute in difficult conditions.[7] "*When we have few things, we make the next world holy. When we have plenty, we enchant the objects around us. The hereafter becomes the here and now.*" (Twitchell 1999, p. 22)

According to Twitchell consumers are rational and often aware that they are more interested in meanings than objects. This is what makes sizzle more important than meat, packaging than product etc. He thinks consumers are not the least fooled by advertising, packaging, branding and fashion. They—especially young people—actively seek and enjoy the meaning surrounding objects. He says we have to question the statement that consumption always leads to buyer's remorse. Though he sees the cycle of desire—purchase—disappointment—renewed desire as neverending, he suggests preferring this to the other route, a downward spiral from melancholy to angst. Consequently, in a world emptied of meaning, consuming overpriced kitsch is still better than consuming nothing (Twitchell 1999, p. 22).

According to Twitchell consumerism is not forced on us, it is the realization of our better judgement. It is not accidental that products are called goods not bads. It is not that we are too materialistic, on the contrary, we are not materialistic enough, otherwise we would be aware of the meaning of objects without advertising, packaging, fashion or branding. What sets the American culture of the late twentieth century apart is not greed but a surfeit of machine made

[7] Materialism is a philosophical school claiming the primacy of matter. By contrast, spiritualism suggests the primordial principle of spirit in the world. In this study these concepts are important on an individual level, that is, to what extent is materialism dominant in somebody's life.

products. These objects probably do not carry enough significance, and that is why we use powerful marketing techniques to add meaning to them (Twitchell 1999, pp. 12–3). "*Consumption of things and their meanings is how most Western young people cope in a world that science pretty much bled of traditional religious meanings.*" (Twitchell 1999, p. 13)

He thinks all needs are real, there are no false needs. Once we are fed, clothed and sexually functioning, our needs are culturally determined (Twitchell 1999, p. 11). Furthermore, social differences are much smaller than they have ever been in history, as just obeying to a few simple rules we can live better than Louis XIV, the Sun King. And according to him it solely depends on us. You only have to avoid dropping out of school, spending some time in jail, staying unemployed in the city center, taking a drug stronger than marijuana for longer than a week or attempting to raise a child by yourself, otherwise you will have the life of a peasant and even the basics of life will become luxuries. He thinks this is how the invisible hand of the market operates (Twitchell 1999, p. 14).

Twitchell claims that any group of teenagers would define democracy as the right to buy anything you want, and freedom is only a synonym for this. Being able to buy what you want when and where you want it made 1989 a watershed year in Eastern Europe (Twitchell 1999, p. 23) and this is why people line up, push and shove in malls regardless of culture. Woe to the government or religion that says no to it (Twitchell 1999, p. 286). You may not like what and how products are advertised, packaged, branded and broadcast but it is still closer to what most people dream of than in any other period of history.

Among the movements arguing in favor of consumer society there is one whose representatives speak of moral panic when describing the spread of opinions critical of consumerism. Though their case is more of arguing tactics than using significant arguments, it is still useful to examine them, as their theory is one of those implying that change is unnecessary. The notion of moral panic was first defined by Stanley *Cohen* in modern sociology (Cohen 1972), who is one of the researchers believing that the condition of the outbreak of moral panic is that the members of society connect a danger threatening the idealized order (traditional way of life, basic values) of the society to a certain group or notion associated with that group. The outcry is of moral nature and if panic spreads throughout the society, it will lead to witch-hunt and the unity of the society will become stronger again by finding a scapegoat (Kitzinger 2000, p. 24).

According to Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda a society has become dominated by moral panic if the following five criteria are fulfilled: (1) there is a heightened level of concern over the behavior of a particular group and the possible consequences of that behavior; (2) there is an increased level of hostility towards the group, as the behavior of the group is thought to fundamentally threaten the existence of the society; (3) there is at least minimum consensus in the society that the danger is real and serious and it is caused by the group concerned; (4) the significance of the phenomenon and the extent of the danger is exaggerated by the ones worrying; (5) generally moral panics are volatile, erupting suddenly and disappearing quickly, although some panics (like drug panic) raise their heads again and again, exploiting the previous ones (Goodie–Ben-Yehuda 1994, pp. 33–41)

Experts think that in the history of moral panics the early 1980s marks the beginning of an era when the press started to expand to an unprecedented extent. Tabloids became market leaders of daily papers and some neo-conservative views emerged with the purpose of "back to basics". According to the representatives of the theory it was the emergence of this inflammatory matter that led to the series of moral panics starting from the mid 80s, which have become a real industry (Kitzinger 2000, p. 33)[8]

[8] According to researchers nowadays we do not have to panic about the number of panics any more. "*The scapegoats of the 80s who had different class backgrounds—AIDS-infected people, gays, the ones following traditionally unaccepted practices, single mothers, the media industry, ravers, left-wing and liberal intellectuals are now*

The Hungarian advocates of the theory depict the National Union of Large Families (Nagycsaládosok Országos Egyesülete, NOE) as the initiator and propagator of moral panics in Hungarian public life. According to their analysis the members of this organization "*often consider the spread of American lifestyle and cultural patterns to be the symptoms of decline. The activists regularly organize campaigns against phenomena threatening the values of family life. The aims of these campaigns are to purge the media from violence and sexuality, to criticize and limit consumer culture as well as to prepare the youth for family life. However, speaking up for values often coincides with practical safeguarding of interests. The fast spread of consumerism does not only evoke irritation towards materialistic values but also leads to worrying everyday financial problems for large families*"[9] (Kitzinger–László 2000, p. 83).

Obviously, the theory exiles all direct or indirect public criticism against consumer culture into the irrational world of panics. According to it, it is not worth paying attention to either the content or the effects of opinions critical of consumer society, they could at most be of interest as subjects of sociological research.

Consumer society does not present a danger to the environment

In this subchapter there are arguments which react to the conflict of consumer society and natural environment. There are relatively few opinions of this kind, Fukuyama or Huntington for example does not deal with this question at all.

Miller expresses his views on green movements. He thinks Western European green movements, which intend to reassess the relationship between consumption and market, have been on the decline politically since the 80s, however their ideas are increasingly represented in consumer votes in shopping centers. Households, by their votes, can influence the image of transnational brands as well as national recycling policies. In this sense the generally accepted view of green movements having anti-consumer attitudes is not true, they are more like the vanguard of new forms of consumption. According to Miller the spread of green ideas makes statements mystifying natural environment less significant, and it is more rational concerns that come into prominence. Green brands for example are not launched because of some abstract "planetar health" but because of concerns about the health of consumers (Miller 1995, pp. 46–7).

Novak—along with many other intellectuals—denies the existence of serious environmental problems. According to him, it is no more than trying to work up a scare, they "overlook the lengthening lifespan of human beings, the fact that many rivers, like the Thames are now cleaner than in Shakespeare's time" (Novak 1982, pp. 268–9). In the epilogue of the latest issue of his book, he states that green movements are to be associated with antimodernism and primitivism, prevalent mainly at the birthplaces of totalitarism. "*No doubt*—says Novak—*the passions of National Socialism are as dead as the passions of communism. But the underlying sensibility is still very much alive. Capable of assuming a great many shapes, perhaps the cult of nature will be put to creative use in the environmental movement. That movement, however, has already shown many signs of hatred for business corporations, industry, property, and even—on a different plane of reality—the idea of 'progress.' Its tendency to turn to the power of the state to enforce its own passions is also manifest. One can predict with some certainty that environmentalism is likely to replace Marxism as the main carrier of gnosticism (and anti-capitalism) in the near future.*" (Novak 1991, p. 435)

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less exposed to moral panics than deprived groups and their predecessors." (Kitzinger 2000, p. 38) The causes are: (1) the stigmatized groups have learned the language of the media, (2) the media have diversified, (3) today's scapegoats, having the necessary funds, can form communities of interest (ib.).

[9] The latter idea could imply that if the large families of the organization had enough money, they wouldn't—or at least not so intensively—criticize consumer society.

He believes that it is mainly the free and inventive economy that can promote the cause of environmental protection and prudent investors may help the development of the necessary new technologies and products.[10] Environmentalists also have to accept "*the fact that no other system is as likely to produce the wealth necessary for environmental protections as democratic capitalist systems.*" (Novak 1991, p. 436)

Twitchell, on the other hand, aims at analyzing the issue of waste. He thinks garbage is a sign signifying mankind's love affair with matter. Today it is not an angry God that we are warned of but mounds of garbage. Garbage has become mythic, which can be detected in how we speak about it. We call it solid waste instead of trash and we do not take it to the damp any more but to the landfill. It also shows the change of values that nowadays it is more acceptable to have children out of wedlock than to use plastic forks (Twitchell 1999, pp. 3–5). However, separation and recycling are America's most wasteful activities and are of no value other than making money and improving PR (Twitchell 1999, p. 5 based on Tierney 1996). We want objects and if the price is the sacred ritual of separation, then we are ready to pay it, he writes (1999, p. 6).

And finally, the theory of moral panics claims that the aim of panic-raising is to divert attention from real problems "*finding a scapegoat is much more obvious than the exposure to the environment, which is out of control of society… Instead of economically as well as politically costly control of environmental and technological risks ruling forces tend to concentrate on dealing with threats of much more conspicuous deviant behavior, which is also less costly to solve*" (Kitzinger 2000, p. 24).

It implies that one of the aims of criticism of consumer society is to divert attention from environmental problems, which are more difficult to solve. However, the theory of moral panics fails to consider that these critical opinions often point out that the spread of consumer culture results in serious environmental problems. To sum up the chapter, the most important arguments claiming that consumer society is without problems, are grouped according to their characteristics[11]:

- people are by nature materialistic
- the universal wish of mankind is to create a prospering economy
- freedom and democracy mean we can buy what we want
- the lack of spiritualism refers to material wealth
- materialists have closer social relationships
- the boundary between people and objects has always been blurred
- the alternative of compulsive buying is gloominess and depression

- competitiveness and selfishness are not solely characteristic of consumer societies
- there are consumer societies which are neither competitive nor hedonistic
- Americans are generous and self-motivated
- other cultures are also not exclusively based on practicability and basic needs
- every culturally determined need is real
- Western culture is broader than consumer culture
- global consumption of the same brands does not imply the homogenization of cultures

[10] This type of arguments are often called technological optimism, according to which the bigger the consumption is the more incentive there is for efficiency. This theory suggests that certain technologies, such as genetic engineering, will reconcile growing consumption with sustainability. According to the theory *factor 4* (and *factor 10*) material wealth can double (or increase to fivefold) while the consumption of energy and materials can be reduced to half (or one-fifth) (see Weizsäcker–Lovins–Lovins 1995).

[11] If we are to term the different groups, we can call them philosophical, cultural, material, technical, environmental and tactical types of arguments. The main text refers to them in the same order.

- global brands are exceptions rather than rule
- transnational companies are not exclusively based in the USA

- most of the economic power is concentrated in the hands of average consumers
- consumers benefit from most of the extra profit in the form of low prices
- it depends solely on us if we live like a king

- meaning is often more important for consumers than the product itself
- marketing provides internal meaning for products emptied by mass production
- the history of advertising industry also includes failures
- consumers effectively check up on advertisements

- there are no serious environmental problems
- the garbage issue is nothing more than a myth
- the development of technology will solve any potential difficulties
- only consumption can produce the wealth needed for environmental protection
- green mass movements are not anti-consumption either
- recycling is wasteful and it is only for building corporate image

- the current middle class enjoys self-criticism
- every era considers its present as a worrying decline of traditional values
- critics are overwhelmed by moral panic.

The above arguments against the problems of consumer society will be examined in detail at the beginning of chapter 5 (p. 79). The next chapter will present a different interpretation of consumer culture, implying the need for change. It will also give definitions for several notions (e.g. materialism, need, demand) which are not examined thoroughly by the advocates of consumer society.

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Chapter 2

The Problems of Consumer Society

In this chapter I am going to deal with materialism first, which is used as a prerequisite for arguments denying the problems of consumer society. I am going to present methods developed for measuring materialism as well as scientific findings obtained by these methods. Then I am going to merge social aspects with environmental ones and observe the question of consumption from this integrated point of view. I am going to describe the difference between needs and wants and then analyze the relationship between happiness and consumption. At the end of the chapter I am also going to briefly examine the subject from the viewpoint of the Third World.

Materialism and attempts to measure it

From the broad sphere of concepts of materialism I am only going to deal with aspects which are directly related to consumption. Materialism—as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary—is a "*devotion to material needs and desires, the neglect of spiritual matters; a way of life, opinion or tendency based entirely upon material interests*". According to Russel W. Belk, the best-known researcher of the subject, materialism is "*the importance a consumer attaches to wordly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction*" (Belk 1984, p. 291).

On the level of society the definition of Chandra *Mukerji* seems to be the most useful, according to which materialism is a cultural system in which material interests are not subordinated to other social goals and material self-interest is outstanding (Mukerji 1983, p. 8). Several authors note that acquisitive desires have not only emerged in the last few hundred years (see McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb 1982). However, it is without doubt that it has only been in the last centuries that the chance to seek psychological well-being through discretionary consumption has become available for the masses (Belk 1985, p. 265 relying on Mason 1981). This also emphasizes the importance of contemporary research on materialism.[12]

To examine the role of materialism in consumer societies attempts to quantify materialism, the researches, which are still at an early stage but are increasingly intensive, serve as a strong basis. It is Belk's mid-80s attempts that can be considered the first stage of systematic research of materialism (Richins 1999, p. 374; Richins–Rudmin 1994, p. 220), though there are some earlier analyses which have alluded to the subject.[13] Belk (1985) used three dimensions to describe materialism—possessiveness, nongenerosity and envy—and five-point Likert (agree/disagree) scales to measure the intensity of the dimensions. The items are listed below in detail, as they are more suggestive than any theoretical description. (An asterisk indicates reverse scored items, that is, the more an individual agrees with it, the less he can be considered as materialistic from that aspect.)

Possessiveness subscale:

1. Renting or leasing a car is more appealing to me than owning one*
2. I tend to hang on to things I should probably throw out
3. I get very upset if something is stolen from me even if it has little monetary value
4. I don't get particularly upset when I lose things*
5. I am less likely than most people to lock things up*
6. I would rather buy something I need than borrow it from someone else
7. I worry about people taking my possessions
8. When I travel I like to take a lot of photographs

[12] Fournier and Richins (1991) describes the relationship between theory and public opinion about materialism.
[13] For a brief review of them see Belk (1985, p. 267) and Richins–Dawson (1992, pp. 305–7).

9. I never discard old pictures or snapshots[14]

Nongenerosity subscale:

1. I enjoy having guests stay in my home*
2. I enjoy sharing what I have*
3. I don't like to lend things even to good friends
4. It makes sense to buy a lawnmower with a neighbor and share it*
5. I don't mind giving rides to those who don't have a car*
6. I don't like to have anyone in my home when I'm not there
7. I enjoy donating things to charities*[15]

Envy subscale:

1. I am bothered when I see people who can buy anything they want
2. I don't know anyone whose spouse or steady date I would like to have as my own*
3. When friends do better than me in competition it usually makes me happy for them*
4. People who are very wealthy often feel they are too good to talk to average people
5. There are certain people I would like to trade places with
6. When friends have things I cannot afford it bothers me
7. I don't seem to get what is coming to me
8. When Hollywood stars or prominent politicians have things stolen from them I really feel sorry for them* (Belk 1985, p. 270)[16]

The materialism scale developed by Marsha L. *Richins* and Scott *Dawson* includes different questions and focuses on different aspects but—just like Belk's—it clearly describes the nature of materialism. When analyzing separately the five data sets obtained from five locations of the USA with five different sample sizes,[17] three dimensions (factors) emerged indicating different aspects of materialism. The authors named them success, centrality and happiness. The items of the three dimensions are listed below, the ones marked with an asterisk being reverse scored items. In the survey the above-mentioned five-point Likert scale response format was used.

Success:

1. I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes
2. Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions
3. I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success*

[14] A revised materialism scale has been published for international comparative studies (see e.g. Ger–Belk 1996, p. 65). In this the possessiveness subscale includes only items 3, 4, 5 as well as item 6 of the nongenerosity subscale (after factor analysis).

[15] The nongenerosity subscale of the international materialism scale does not include items 4 and 6 but includes item 7 of the possessiveness subscale as well as items 3 and 6 of the envy subscale. It also includes a new item: "*I do not enjoy donating things to the needy.*" (Ger–Belk 1996, p. 65)

[16] The envy subscale of the international materialism scale retained only 1, 4, 5 and 7 of the original items and it also has a new item: "*If I have to choose between buying something for myself versus for someone I love, I would prefer buying for myself.*" The international materialism scale includes a new subscale besides the original three described in the main text. It refers to preservation and includes item 2 of the possessiveness subscale as well as two new items: "*I like to collect things*";" *I have a lot of souvenirs.*" (Ger–Belk 1996, p. 65)

[17] Data was obtained from a medium-sized north-eastern city (144 subjects), two large western city (250 and 235 subjects), a north-eastern college town (86 subjects) and a north-eastern rural area (119 subjects) (Richins–Dawson 1992, p. 309).

4. The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life
5. I like to own things that impress people
6. I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own*

Centrality:

1. I usually buy only the things I need*
2. I try to keep my life simple as far as possessions are concerned*
3. The things I own aren't all that important to me*
4. I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical
5. Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure
6. I like a lot of luxury in my life
7. I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know*

Happiness:

1. I have all the things I really need to enjoy life*
2. My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have
3. I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things*
4. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things
5. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like. (Richins–Dawson 1992, p. 310)[18]

Both materialism scales are used in practice. The one developed by Richins and Dawson approaches the issue more directly, based on values considered important by people, while Belk's primarily examines relationships between people, which also correlates with materialism, though some experts do not consider them an integral part of materialism (Williams–Bryce 1992, p. 150). The Richins–Dawson scale has proved to be more reliable statistically than Belk's scale (see Ellis 1992). Despite these unquestionable achievements, the research of materialism is rather divided and characterized by the lack of a generally accepted, unified theoretical framework, although there have already been attempts to create one (see Graham 1999).

Phenomena accompanying materialism

Richins and Dawson (1992) carried out a test on a sample of 250 subjects in a large western city of the USA in order to find out whether respondents scoring high in the materialism scale of the authors are less willing to share what they have and rate their personal goals as more important than those of the community. In the survey people were asked what they would do if they were unexpectedly given $20,000. They were given seven ways in which money could be spent: (1) Buy things I want or need; (2) Give to church organization or charity, (3) Give or lend to friends or relatives; (4) Travel; (5) Pay off debts; (6) Savings or investments; (7) Other.

The whole sample was divided into terciles based on their materialism scores and the top (most materialist) and bottom (least materialist) terciles were compared. It was revealed that the most materialist tercile would spend three times as much on things for themselves as would the least materialist one, would contribute less than half of what the least materialists would to charitable or church organizations[19] and would give less than half as much to friends

[18] The happiness dimension of the Richins–Dawson materialism scale is very similar to the one called consumer saturation in sociology. That asks respondents to define themselves as: "*I have (almost) everything I need.*" "*I have (almost) everything but I would like to replace a lot of them with new ones.*" "*There are things which I would need and do not have.*" (Sik 2000, p. 339)

[19] $p<0.001$

and family.[20] The measure of nongenerosity developed by Belk—described in the previous subchapter—was also administered in the survey on the same sample and compared to the scale of Richins and Dawson. The correlation between the two scales was 0.25,[21] implying that nongenerous people are more likely to be found among materialists.

James A. *Muncy* and Jacqueline K. *Eastman* intended to find out if materialistic consumers have different ethical standards than others. Materialism was measured using the Richins–Dawson scale, while the lack of consumer ethics was examined based on four dimensions. The first two dimensions are concerned with situations where the buyer benefits at the expense of the seller, e.g. drinking a can of soft drink in a supermarket without paying for it (proactively benefiting), or not saying anything when the seller miscalculates the total in your favor (passively benefiting). The third dimension includes situations where the buyer is deceiving the seller, e.g. returning a product to a shop claiming that it was a gift when it was not (deceptive practices). The fourth dimension refers to situations where the consumer is not thoughtful enough to perceive harm caused to the seller, e.g. copying an album instead of buying it ("no harm, no foul" attitude).[22]

The survey was conducted in two large American universities and the subjects were 214 students enrolled in various introductory marketing classes.[23] To find out specific relationships between materialism and consumer ethics, simple bivariate correlational analysis was carried out. Based on this sample, the correlation between materialism and actively benefiting was (–0.35), passively benefiting (–0.28), deceptive practices (–0.35) and no harm-no foul (–0.46).[24] This shows a relatively strong relationship, the negative correlation implying that higher levels of materialism are associated with a lower propensity to see non-ethical behavior as being wrong (Muncy–Eastman 1998, pp. 141–2). As this is simple correlation, the direction of causality between the phenomena examined cannot be defined. Maybe it is materialists who make ethical compromises when acquiring things they deeply desire, however it could just as well be true that people with lower ethical standards tend to be more materialistic. Both cases raise some interesting questions for marketing. If marketing encourages materialism, which then leads to lower ethical standards, it can well be accused with being socially irresponsible, the authors say. In the other case marketing would not lead to lower ethical standards but one might also question the prudence of advertising tactics targeting consumers with lower ethical standards (Muncy–Eastman 1998, pp. 142–3).

Richins (1987) in another survey intended to discover the relationship between materialism and the influence of media. Before developing her materialism scale, she used a more simple five-point scale for measuring materialistic attitude, during which she separated a general and a personal materialism variable.[25] Another variable examined to what extent people perceived characters in advertisements to be real persons (perceived realism of advertising) and also measured to what extent respondents are exposed to the impact of media (how many

[20] $p<0.01$
[21] $p<0.001$
[22] For more details about measuring consumer ethics see e.g. Vitell–Muncy (1992).
[23] The sample proved to be more materialistic (with about 5-7 points higher average materialism values on the max. 90-point scale) than the ones surveyed by Richins and Dawson. The authors say they had expected it as the respondents were business students (Muncy–Eastman 1998, p. 140). Williams and Bryce (1992) found a similar, almost 8-point, difference when surveying 151 seniors in New-Zealand, some studying commerce, some arts (the latter were less materialistic) (Williams–Bryce 1992, p. 153). The international version of Belk's materialism scale gave similar findings in Turkey (Ger–Belk 1996, pp. 68–9).
[24] Even the lowest value was significant at the $p<0.0001$ level.
[25] Items of the *personal* variable are (measured by a five-point Likert scale): (1) It is important to me to have really nice things. (2) I would like to be rich enough to buy anything I want. (3) I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things. (4) It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I would like. Items of the *general* variable are: (1) People place too much emphasis on material things. (reverse scored) (2) It's really true that money can buy happiness. (Richins 1987, p. 354)

hours a week they watch television and how often they pay attention to television commercials). The sample included 252 respondents from a medium-size Sunbelt city of the USA, and was collected to meet quotas of 50% male/female, 50% over age 40 and 50% under (Richins 1987, p. 353). The correlation between media exposure and general material values was not significant, between media exposure and personal material values it was very weak. However, when splitting the sample into two groups using the median[26] of the realism variable, in the group perceiving character portrayals in commercials to be more accurate (high realism subgroup) there was a significant relationship between media exposure and both forms of materialism.[27] It implies that among those who tend to believe in the reality of advertising, the ones who spend more time watching television are more materialistic (Richins 1987, p. 354). The direction of the causality cannot be determined in this case either, nevertheless the relationship is remarkable.

Belk and Pollay (1985) conducted a study on newspaper advertisements from the USA of the first 80 years of the 20th century. They concluded that materialistic temptation of luxury goods and pleasures increased in the period examined. Moschis and Moore (1982) analyzed the impact of media on schoolchildren with a longitudinal study, that is, data were collected about the same children in several times in their lives. They found a significant relationship between the effect of television advertisements and materialistic values. The difference was especially great within the group of children who were initially low in materialism. Those who watched more television were significantly higher in materialism 14 months later then those who watched less TV[28] (quoted by Richins 1999, p. 378).

Following the appearance of reliable materialism scales, an increasing number of studies was published in the 1990s about the relationship between family structure and materialism. Rindfleish, Burroughs and Denton (1997) for example used the Richins–Dawson scale to analyze a sample of adults aged 20-32 in a medium-size city in the American Mid-West, some of whose (165 subjects) grew up in intact families (two parents), others (96 subjects) in disrupted families (parents divorced or separated). According to the survey the ones from disrupted families demonstrated significantly higher levels of material values and were more prone to compulsive buying (Rindfleish et al. 1997, p. 318).[29] The biggest difference between the two groups was in the dimension of centrality of the materialism scale (that is, the importance of acquisition and possession in general—see previous subchapter for details). Therefore the authors concluded that people from single-parent families tend to use material objects for substituting absent parents and material values and/or compulsive buying for coping with the stress and insecurity accompanying family disruption (Rindfleish et al. 1997, pp. 320, 323).

Flouri's study (1999) of 246 university students in a medium-size Southern England city could not prove a relationship between materialism measured by the Richins–Dawson scale and family structure. However, students high in materialism talked more to their peers about consumption issues, were more susceptible to interpersonal influence, less often attended reli-

[26] The median of a variable is the value at which the variable has the same amount of lower values as higher values.

[27] The author used multiple regression analyses in which the predictor was the television exposure (number of hours spent watching television), while the dependent variables were the material values scales. For general material values the beta for television exposure was 0.19 ($p<0.05$) and for personal material values it was 0.29 ($p<0.01$). The relationship between attention to advertising (how often the respondents pay attention to television commercials) and the two forms of materialism was not significant (Richins 1987, p. 354). It suggests that how much the respondent watches TV is more important than how much attention he thinks he pays to commercials.

[28] In this case the direction of causality can be determined, that is, it is more time spent watching TV that probably results in higher materialism of children not the other way round.

[29] Based on analysis of the average values of the groups. The correlation with materialism was significant at the $p<0.001$ level, the correlation with compulsive buying at the $p<0.0001$ level. For further details on compulsive buying see Faber and O'Guinn (1992).

gious service, received less parental teaching about how to manage money and were less satisfied with their mother (Flouri 1999, p. 714).[30] The author claims that though his research did not reveal a relationship between materialism and poor socio-economic background, it did prove that financial and *personal* insecurity directly or indirectly relate to materialism.[31] Family background can directly encourage the materialism of children if the mother is also materialist and indirectly if their spiritual and intrinsic needs are ignored in order to lead a secular way of life. "*On the other hand*—says Flouri—*parents who encourage conformity and are cold and unsupportive may lead adolescents to turn to their peers, the interactions with whom contribute to the child's learning of the 'expressive' elements of consumption. But also 'broad' personality factors, such as neuroticism, which was also related to dissatisfaction with interpersonal relationships and financial insecurity may lead to turning to possessions to compensate for feelings of unhappiness and low self-esteem.*" (Flouri 1999, pp. 721–2)

After examining the notion of materialism and analyzing its social implications, the notion of consumption is going to be dealt with including relevant environmental issues.

Overconsumption and misconsumption

In an ecological sense the consumption of every living being—including humans—is natural. In order to survive all organisms must consume and in this way degrade resources. This interpretation of consumption is nonethical, according to it all consumption patterns and their consequences are natural, including population crashes as well as expansion of a species at the expense of another. If, however, the interpretation includes human concern for extinction of species, permanent diminution of ecosystem functioning, diminished reproductive and developmental potential of individuals and other irreversibilities, then consumption acquires an ethical aspect and can be evaluated as "good" or "bad". In order to be able to analyze the problem more thoroughly, I introduce the concepts of overconsumption and misconsumption.

According to Thomas Princen overconsumption is the level or quality of consumption (1) which undermines a species' own life-support system and (2) for which individuals or collectivities of the species have other choices in their consuming patterns. Overconsumption is an aggregate level concept. It entails that the species overburdens the regenerative capacity of natural resources and the waste assimilative capacity of its ecosystem. For humans it becomes an ethical problem as well since they are the only species that can reflect on its collective existence.

Misconsumption, on the other hand, is interpreted on an individual level. During it the individual consumes in a way that undermines his own well-being even if there are no aggregate effects on the level of population. Consequently, in case of misconsumption the individual uses resources in a way that results in net loss to him. It has several types. On physiological level there is bulimia or drug addiction, psychologically one can fall into the trap of "perpetual dissatisfaction" owing to advertisements, for example, ecologically the construction of a badly founded house or the use of leaded paint harms the resource (the house) itself or the users (developmental problems of one's children) (cf. Princen 1999, pp. 356–7).

Obviously, the overexploitation of the ecosystem is caused by overconsumption, while misconsumption is a social problem. However, when analyzing chances to decrease overconsumtion, one has to consider whether it is accompanied by misconsumption or not. The relationship of the two phenomena is shown in Figure 2.1.

[30] The author used a regression analysis in which the dependent variable was materialism. The first three correlation in the main text were significant at the $p<0.001$ level, the last two were significant at the $p<0.05$ level.

[31] Flouri (1999) as well as several of her earlier studies revealed positive correlation between materialism and compulsive consumption, susceptibility to neurosis and impulsive (i.e. unplanned) buying, however, there was negative correlation between materialism and self-esteem or self expression. For further details on the measuring of these phenomena and its findings see Mick (1996).

Figure 2.1
Possible Combinations of Overconsumption and Misconsumption

	There is Over-consumption	There is No Over-consumption
There is Misconsumption	*A*	*B*
There is No Misconsumption	*C*	*D*

Note: Devised graph by using the description of Princen (1999, p. 357)

As Figure 2.1 shows the ideal situation is cell *D*, where there is neither aggregate over-consumption, nor individual misconsumption. From environmental point of view it is cell *A* and *C* which need careful attention. If overconsumption is accompanied by misconsumption (cell *A*), there is a possibility of following a win-win strategy, that is, increasing the well-being[32] of people while reducing the risks to the ecosystem. When, however, overconsumption does not entail misconsumption (cell *C*), sacrifices has to be made, which is to say, an ethical as well as political problem occurs. Subsequently, signs are going to be examined which indicate that in developed countries decrease in consumption *may* be accompanied with an increase in well-being, and that is there is overconsumption as well as misconsumption.

Needs and wants

In this subchapter the *theoretical* possibility of the emergence of misconsumption is dealt with. For this first I am going to examine one of the most widespread psychological theory about basic human needs, which was developed by Abraham *Maslow*. According to the theory six types of basic needs can be differentiated: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, self-actualization needs as well as transcendental needs (Figure 2.2)[33]. It is important to note that they occur in the above order, each of them appearing after the previous one has been satisfied (Maslow 1954, pp. 15–31, in Hungarian e.g. Magyari Beck 2000, pp. 137–9). This nature of human needs is considered universal, regardless of cultural background of any individual.

In the above structure of needs economic goods and services are important only at the bottom (physiological) level—and sometimes at the safety level—so humans have to rely on their natural environment as a resource only at this level. Satisfying the needs for love, esteem, self-actualization and transcendental knowledge depends on social conditions, their fulfillment rarely includes materialistic elements, therefore they have low impact on the environment.[34] In an ideal case individuals can easily satisfy their needs of different levels and in

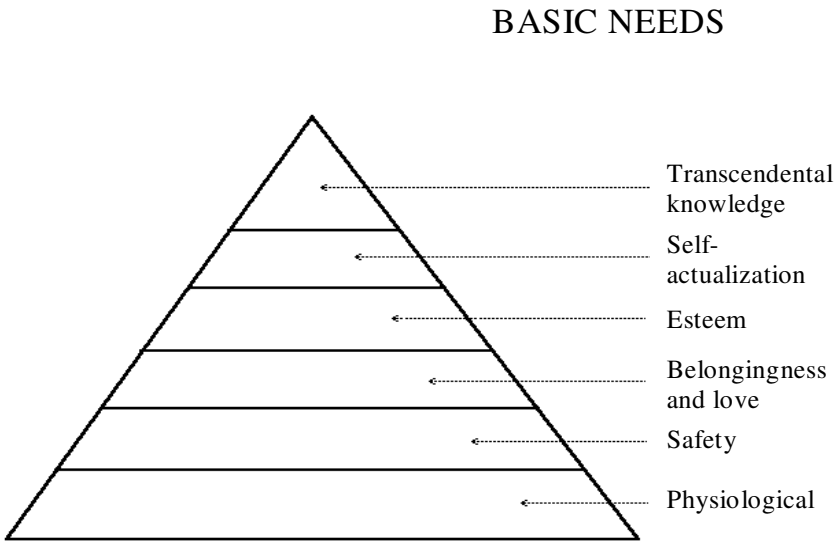
[32] Well-being is differentiated from welfare. The latter means the possession of material goods, while the former has a much broader meaning.

[33] It has to be noted Maslow's work does not include this type of representation and it is often criticized, as it implies that personal development has an end-point (see e.g. Rowan 1998, pp. 88–90). Therefore I would like to note that I also regard opportunities for personal development as infinite.

[34] Note that we did not even use all elements of Maslow's model for our argument. For example, it is enough to accept that between the bottom and top levels there is a qualitative difference and that fulfilling (to some extent) the bottom (material) levels is a precondition of reaching the top (immaterial) levels. In this way within the two layers (top and bottom) the order of basic needs and the way of reaching a higher level is insignificant. This will substantially strengthen our arguments against criticism. The distinction between material and immaterial basic needs can also be observed in humanist economics (see e.g. Lutz–Lux 1988, pp. 9–15).

this way achieve their full human potential. In this case they usually do not overconsume either on individual or community level, which means they probably are in the ideal cell *D* of Figure 2.1.[35]

Figure 2.2
Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Human Needs



The emergence of culturally dependent wants can often cause divergence from the ideal state described above.[36] Individuals may get stuck on the bottom level, concentrating and spending all energy on pursuing the acquisition of material goods. As a result, top levels temporarily or permanently become unattainable for them. Another form of the same process is when individuals think their needs of the top levels can be fulfilled by possessing material goods. The messages of companies of growth-centered economies often promise to fulfil some of one's security, love, esteem or self-actualization needs by the goods or services offered by them. However, satisfaction achieved in this way is no more than a fleeting illusion, and disappointment is followed by a pursuit of the next material object. Getting stuck on the bottom level and seemingly satisfying top level needs with material objects are clearly two aspects of the same thing, reflecting a difference only in attitudes.

In the above-mentioned process goods consumed do not serve to fulfil basic needs any more, they even hinder that, while human efforts are influenced by distorted cultural wants. Supposing that Maslow's theory is correct—and though some of its details are questionable, in general it is not—one can easily realize that the well-being of an individual depends on which level of needs he reached. It follows from this, that modern consumer society can be

[35] In case of overpopulation the community may be in cell *C* but it is not subject matter of the present study.
[36] Needs are considered objective while wants are of subjective nature. It is conceptually possible to need what you do not want or do not know about (e.g. heart surgery). It is also possible to want what you do not need but it is impossible to want something without knowing that you want it (e.g. metallic paint for your car). Wants depend on your subjective state of mind while needs are sometimes defined by somebody else (e.g. a professionally qualified doctor) (Berry 1999, p. 401). The difference between needs and luxury is also related to this subject. Livingstone and Lunt (1992) describes it by using opinions of everyday people.

described by cell *A* of Figure 2.1, overconsumption being accompanied by misconsumption.[37] Obviously, in this case a possible reduction of consumption could result in an increase in well-being (cf. Jackson–Marks 1999, pp. 439–440).

The nature of possessiveness

Either we look at accumulation occurring at the bottom, physiological level or at the attempt to satisfy higher level needs with material objects, possessiveness (materialism) is a key element of both. It is possible to group interpretations of possessiveness according to value judgement and origin (Figure 2.3).

Selfishness and hedonism connected to material objects are dominant attitudes of contemporary capitalistic cultures, suggesting that possessiveness is innate and desirable (see *Chapter 1* of this study). Possessiveness is considered to encourage competition and striving, benefiting both the individual and society. Furthermore, it is innate, part of our genetic heritage, as territoriality is a natural tendency in both man and animals. However, as critics point out, such extreme individualism may distort cooperation between individuals. Also there is an ever expanding need for bigger and bigger pleasures, as one easily becomes adapted to any "level of pleasures".

Figure 2.3
Relationship to Possessiveness According to Value Judgement and Origin

	Innate	*Acquired*
Good	Hedonism	Actualization
Bad	Restraint	Reform

Source: Belk 1983, p. 517

In the second view, in which possessiveness is judged to be a good, acquired trait, acquiring this trait is recommended and seen as realizing a greater portion of human potential. McClelland (1961) regards possessiveness as one of the most important human drives, which develops in the middle of childhood and is a fixated feature of adult personality. The more ambitious people there are in a society, the bigger economic growth it can achieve. This assumption became especially popular after World War II, when the economy of Western Europe and the United States started to develop fast. The advocates of the idea even tried to make the adult population of less developed regions more ambitious, e.g. by holding training courses for would-be entrepreneurs of India (Belk 1983, p. 518, cf. Gilleard 1999, Székelyi–Tardos 1994).

The third view holds that possessiveness is innate but bad, suggesting that we learn to curb our natural impulses. This is the traditional opinion of most organized religions. Besides religious concerns three things suggest that people may be socialized to reduce their undesirable materialistic impulses. First, children show an increasing ability to delay consumption as they get older. Second, the ability to share material goods also increases with children's age. Third, their wishes shift from material goods and become more abstract.[38]

[37] In countries where consumer society has not emerged yet (and only the consumption of a narrow elite is similar to the Western patterns) the community may be in cell *B*.
[38] Studies about materialism from childhood to old age are reviewed by Belk (1985, pp. 268–70).

According to the fourth view possessiveness is acquired and bad. It suggests that rather than passively acquiring and then curbing these impulses, causes leading to their forming should be eliminated. This could be achieved in two ways, either by converting society into a less competitive one or by enabling people to value intangibles too.

Obviously, if we aim at reducing the impact of society on the natural environment, we have to regard man's excessive possessiveness as undesirable regardless of it being either innate or acquired. Those who are worried about the integrity of natural (and social) environment therefore have to fight the ideological views of hedonism and actualization, shown in Figure 2.3. I believe that possessiveness is partly innate, partly acquired, that is why I am first going to consider personal characteristics which play an important role in one's happiness then the influence of one's social environment.

Who is happy?—The role of personal traits

In the first century of its history, psychology was concerned with human suffering and dissatisfaction. In the last few decades, however, positive emotions like happiness and satisfaction have also become subjects of research. They are usually measured by a scale of *subjective well-being*[39] and their value is determined by questions referring to people's happiness and their satisfaction with life.

The relationship between wealth and happiness can be examined on three levels (see e.g. Myers–Diener 1995, pp. 12–4). First, *are people in wealthy countries happier then those in not-so rich countries?* A survey including 24 countries discovered a relatively strong, +0.67 correlation between the gross national product (GNP) per capita of a country and the satisfaction of its population. Still, one cannot draw considerable conclusions based on the results, as for example the number of continuous years of democracy showed a +0.85 correlation with average life satisfaction (Inglehart 1990).

Second, *within any country are rich individuals happier than poorer ones?* Obviously, having food, shelter and safety is essential for well-being. Therefore, in poor countries, such as Bangladesh and India, satisfaction with ones financial situation is a moderate predictor of subjective well-being (cf. Diener–Diener 1995). But once one is able to fulfil life's necessities, the increase in wealth plays surprisingly little role in subjective well-being. It has to be acknowledged though that in the same country the wealthier tend to be happier on average than the less well-to-do.[40] Wealth is rather like health: its lack can result in misery, though having it is no guarantee of happiness. This seems to support Maslow's theory of all other needs being based on the physiological ones.

Third, *over time, do people become happier, as society becomes more affluent?* By the 1990s American's per capita income had doubled compared to 1957 (from less than $8,000 to

[39] For further details about the scale of subjective well-being and different theories of happiness see Diener (1984) and (in Hungarian) Urbán (1995).

[40] One of the best known studies examining the richest people in the world was conducted by Ed *Diener*, Jeff *Horwitz* and Robert A. *Emmons* (1985). They carried out the research using the 1983 *Forbes* magazine list containing the 400 wealthiest Americans. The sample of 49 subjects was compared to a comparison group of 62 subjects who were selected based on matching by geographical location. The wealthy said they were happy in 77% of their time, for the non-wealthy the rate was 62%. The average of life satisfaction in the wealthy group was 4.77 (on a six-point scale), in the non-wealthy group it was 3.70. This could suggest that money brings happiness. However, in case of the question "How do you feel about how happy you are?" 37% of the wealthy got a lower score than the average of the non-wealthy, while 45% of the non-wealthy reported a higher level of happiness than the mean of the wealthy group ($p<0.001$). To open-ended questions inquiring the reasons of happiness respondents rarely mentioned money, most often the reason was good family relations, friends, achievements, relationship with God and health (in both groups) although 84% of the wealthy group and 39% of the non-wealthy group emphasized positive aspects of having money. The survey also tested and did not contradict the theory of Maslow (Diener–Horwitz–Emmons 1985).

more than $16,000 expressed in the dollar of the 90s[41]), moreover, they had twice as many cars per person, plus microwave ovens, color TVs, VCRs, air-conditioners and $12 billion worth of new brand-name athletic shoes a year. Nevertheless, in 1957 35% of them said they were "very happy", while in 1993 only 32% said the same.[42] A 1992 survey analyzing other social phenomena resulted in the following findings: since 1960 the number of divorces had doubled, there had been a slight decline in marital happiness of married couples and the teen suicide rate had tripled. It leads us to conclude that Americans became richer but not happier. Research conducted in Europe and Japan has given similar results (cf. Easterlin 1995, pp. 38–40).

Research about the quality of life in countries with annual per capita income of tens of thousands dollars revealed that in spite of more or less continuous increase in GDP/GNP the increase of complex indices of quality of life usually stops after a time or it can even fall. (These indices include, besides material situation, several factors, such as environmental degradation, inequalities of incomes.) Presumably, there is a threshold of wealth above which the quality of people's life declines (Max-Neef 1995, cf. Daly 1999).

If, however, possessing material goods does not guarantee happiness, then what makes it more likely? According to research happy people tend to have positive self-esteem, feel they have control over their lives, are usually optimistic and extrovert, have several intimate friends, are happily married, have job-satisfaction and are religious (Myers–Diener 1995, pp. 14–7, cf. Kopp–Skrabski–Szedmák 1998). This list does not entail that all these conditions have to be fulfilled for happiness but that people showing these traits more probably believe themselves to be happy. These characteristics are basically immaterial, so psychological studies examining personal happiness seem to prove our prediction that a potential decrease or stagnation in consumption does not necessarily lead to a fall in personal happiness or social well-being in Western countries. It is usually social conditions that determine the influence of change in material goods on personal happiness.

Who is happy?—The role of social factors

In this subchapter the relationship between material goods and personal happiness is examined from the viewpoint of general social conditions. The subchapter also intends to reveal the reasons of the phenomena described in the previous subchapter (i.e. the constant well-being of a nation despite economic growth). First let us carry out a simple thought experiment. Imagine that a person's income increases substantially while everyone else's stay the same. Would (s)he feel better? Most people would. Then suppose that his/her income stays the same while everyone else's goes up substantially. How would (s)he feel in this case? Most people would feel less well off, though their objective financial situation would not change. It is empirically proved that one's subjective well-being varies directly with one's own income and inversely with the incomes of others (Easterlin 1995, pp. 35–6, cf. Mishan 1993, pp. 73–4).

The amount considered as minimum comfort budget in a society is also relevant from environmental point of view. Several studies have shown that this amount increases at the

[41] For comparison: per capita GDP in the United States expressed in 1996 dollars was $12,725 in 1957, $27,786 in 1993 and $33,110 in 2000 (see www.EconoMagic.com).

[42] Andrew J. *Oswald* thinks the proportion of happy people in the US still grew in the period examined if you take the decreasing number of "*not too happy*" people into consideration. (The questionnaire included the following question: "*Taken all together, how would you say things are these days—would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?*") The increase in happiness is so small, however, that according to the author the rise in incomes in America is not contributing substantially to the quality of people's lives (Oswald 1997, pp. 1817–8).

same rate as actual per capita income, that is, the higher the average income of a country is, the bigger amount people perceive as necessary to get along (Easterlin 1995, p. 41).[43]

The rise in average income therefore does not increase the happiness of the society as the influence of increased (personal) income on well-being is offset by the increase in material norms of the society. When the increase in personal income is accompanied by the increase of the standard of living considered decent by society, one's "rise in the world" can only occur when the others fall behind compared to him. As the number of the members of high society (defined as the richest 10,000) is limited, this way of achieving happiness can be interpreted as a strategy to acquire positional goods whose supply is limited under any circumstances.[44] Some will acquire positional goods but a whole community cannot, since the supply of these goods is by nature limited and cannot be increased by economic growth. Consequently, increasing the supply of existing material goods in a relatively rich society is a wrong strategy.

Who is happy?—the role of materialist attitudes

According to adaptation theory (Brickman–Campbell 1971, quoted by Richins 1987, p. 353) the relationship between material values and happiness is reversed, because people adapt to the level of satisfaction or comfort they have achieved. When a desired goal is obtained, expectations also increase resulting in a gap between actual state and expectations. This gap is a source of dissatisfaction (French–Rodgers–Cobb 1974, quoted by Richins 1987, p. 353). Juliet *Schor* calls the difference between desires and reality *aspirational gap*. She thinks, this gap has widened because previously people used to rely on their neighbors—who usually have similar incomes—as a standard and reference group, nowadays they compare themselves to their workplace superiors and the upper middle class of the United States, seen on television all over the world (Schor 1999, pp. 43–6).[45] In this way people expecting happiness from possessing material goods may be satisfied for a while but partly due to adaptation partly due to their rising references, dissatisfaction will emerge again and again.

Studies described at the beginning of the chapter, examining materialism, supplied empirical data which support the adaptation theory (e.g. Belk 1985, p. 271, Richins 1987, pp. 354–5). One of the most comprehensive studies was conducted by Richins and Dawson (1992) in a university town of the north-east of the USA (with 86 subjects) and in a north-eastern rural area (119 subjects). The researchers examined five aspects of satisfaction with life: satisfaction with life as a whole, amount of fun, family life, income or standard of living and relationship with friends using a seven-point delighted-terrible response scale described by Andrews and Withey (1976). The correlation between the Richins–Dawson materialism scale (see, p. 28) and the indices of satisfaction was the following: –0.39 for satisfaction with income and –0.34, –0.32, –0.31 and –0.17 for satisfaction with fun, life as a whole, friends

[43] The same question was examined on a Hungarian sample by Szabó and Szabó (1994) in the early 1990s as well as Sági (2000) in the late 1990s and their findings do not contradict the above results. Relationship between satisfaction and materialism will be discussed in the following subchapter.

[44] For further details on positional goods see Hirsch (1976). Some economists even speak about the negative external cost of higher consumption. The increased consumption of a person will reduce the satisfaction of others living around him (see e.g. Frank 1991).

[45] In a study on the same subject, Sági Matild analyzed data from a Hungarian sample of 3,800 subjects collected by TÁRKI in 1999. She concluded the following: "*Dissatisfaction with the standard of living* (in the 1990s) *was not only a result of objective factors, but it was also due to the fact that the reference point of the Hungarians changed after the political-economic changes. They do not compare their standard of living to the financial-material position of the population of other Eastern European countries any more. Instead, the standard of living in Western European countries has become the main reference point, especially for those on the top of the Hungarian income hierarchy. The fact that when their income increases, people tend to change their reference groups and compare themselves to the ones with higher standard of living largely contributes to the general dissatisfaction*." (Sági 2000, p. 285)

and family life respectively (Richins–Dawson 1992, p. 313).[46] This finding shows a moderately strong, negative relationship between materialism and satisfaction, that is, the more materialistic the respondent was, the more probably (s)he said (s)he was dissatisfied with several aspects of life.

The same authors conducted a survey on a sample of 235 subjects from the western part of the United States and asked respondents to indicate the level of annual household income required to fulfil their needs. Respondents were divided into terciles based on their materialism scores and the desired income level of the top and bottom terciles were compared. Respondents in the top tercile (the highest in materialism) said they needed an annual income of $65,974 on average (in the early 1990s), while the bottom tercile needed only $44,761 yearly (Richins–Dawson 1992, p. 311).[47] As the surveys revealed, materialists will probably try to reach a higher level of consumption (and in this way make a bigger impact on the natural environment) but at the same time they will be less satisfied with material aspects (income) as well as immaterial aspects (friends, family life) of life than less materialist people.

The role of values

The spread of the phenomenon previously defined as materialism or possessiveness on a national level may considerably depend on the proportion of people in the society believing in materialistic or nonmaterialistic values. Ronald *Inglehart*, who is a key figure in international research on personal values as well as changes occurring in them, has been studying the subject since 1970. From our point of view it is important to define factors which can help one to exchange his/her material scale of values to a nonmaterial (termed postmaterial by Inglehart) one.

Inglehart has two theories connected to the question. One of them is called *scarcity theory*, according to which people tend to set a higher value on things which are scarce. The other is called *socialization theory*, which suggests that the basic values of a person mainly depend on the financial situation he or she has been brought up in. The two theories can be integrated based on the state of western civilization following World War Two. Young people brought up in exceptional wealth and lasting peace after 1945 set a much lower value on economic and physical security than older generations, who experienced bigger economic insecurity. On the other hand, people born after the war appreciate immaterial values, such as community life and the quality of life more, as these could become rather scarce in a society focused on economy and wealth.

Several studies following the proposal of the theory supported Inglehart's assertions and today we can analyze substantially long time series (Inglehart 1990, Abramson–Inglehart 1995). From the viewpoint of this study it is especially important that Inglehart's theories suggest that peace and prosperity can naturally contribute to the change of values from material to postmaterial, decreasing the impact on the environment as well as acknowledging the unnecessity of ever-increasing economic growth. On the level of society it can be considered as some kind of a negative feedback. However, it is also probable that overdominant economic interests exploit this change in values for their own benefit (and at the expense of other considerations) by promoting sales with the image of products being able to fulfil nonmaterial needs. The success of this attempt may offset the benevolent environmental and social effects

[46] All values are significant at the level of $p<0.01$.

[47] The difference between the two groups is significant at the level of $p<0.001$ ($t=3.65$, $df=120.1$). Another survey also revealed a similar relationship between materialism (assessed by Belk's scale, see p. 27) and the money needed for comfortable living (101 subjects, $r=0.23$, $p<0.01$) (Wachtel–Blatt 1990, p. 411).

of welfare states becoming postmaterial and may eliminate the natural feedback reinforcing sustainability.[48]

Outside consumer society's birthplace

Research in the 1980s revealed some unusual ethnographic/anthropological facts, which made researchers consider several questions. E.g. why do Peruvian Indians carry rocks painted to look like transistor radios? Why do some Chinese wear sunglasses with the brand tags still attached? Why have cheap quartz watches become part of the traditional ceremonial wedding outfit in Niger? Why do natives of Papua New Guinea add ties to their collarless necks and substitute brand-name pens for traditional nosebones? Why do Ethiopian tribesmen pay to watch the film "Pluto Tries to Become a Circus Dog" and why does the native band play 'The Sound of Music' when a Swazi princess marries a Zulu king?[49]

The worldwide spread of Western goods has several detrimental effects on traditional cultures. There is often a tendency that demand for cheaper and similar (or higher) quality local products decreases when prominent Western goods appear on the market. In Brazil, with the appearance of Western luxuries and aggressive marketing, household indebtedness increased and people reduced their consumption of necessities, particularly food.[50] Furthermore, the bad health consequences of certain goods (like cigarettes or medicines) are not so well-known in developing countries.[51] Development priorities also change, e.g. building an expensive network of roads for the benefit of a narrow elite subgroup owning automobiles instead of investing in basic welfare. The interpersonal safety net of being able to rely on others is deteriorating and is being replaced by a reliance on things and money (Belk 1988, pp. 117–9). Money increasingly substitutes for people and some governments are urged by the West to offer consumer goods to consumers willing to be sterilized (Freedman 1976, quoted by Belk 1988, p. 120).[52]

The excessive spread of consumer society does not seem to be the answer to environmental problems. Even if we disregard these problems and concentrate on society, there are still several other questions about the development of the Third World to answer. Surveys described in the subchapter about the relationship between materialism and happiness revealed that the correlation between these two phenomena is not positive: materialistic attitudes are usually accompanied by higher level of dissatisfaction. The fact that these results are

[48] There is an apparent contradiction between the findings Inglehart, interested mainly in social and intercultural issues and the findings of research examining the individuals of a certain culture (Belk, Richins), as the former suggests decreasing the latter ones suggest increasing materialism in industrial countries. The contradiction can be resolved theoretically by referring to the distorting effect of the media and advertising on personal values (cf. Richins 1999, pp. 376–7) as discussed in the main text. Jackson and Marks (1999) supplied empirical evidence by analyzing consumption data from Great Britain between 1954 and 1994, that people spend increasingly more money on their immaterial needs but these still remain unfulfilled. This could answer criticism of Maslow's theory (e.g. Belk 1988, p. 116) saying that it mistakenly predicts the decrease in material values of developed Western countries based on the fulfillment of physiological needs.

[49] The examples are quoted from Arnould and Wilk (1984), Curry (1981), Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) and Sherry (1987) by Belk (1988, p. 117).

[50] Belk (1988) mentions several examples which prove that hedonic consumption of Western products is even characteristic of the poorest social groups of Third World countries. They often choose Western goods at the expense of satisfying basic needs.

[51] Silverman (1976) examined how 40 prescription drugs sold by 23 transnational companies were described to doctors. It turned out that in Latin American countries the same drugs were recommended for far more diseases than in the United States, while the contraindications, warnings and potential adverse reactions were not given in as much detail as in the US (quoted by Jenkins 1988, p. 1366).

[52] According to popular slogan economic growth is the best contraceptive. However, some questions remain unasked, says Herman Daly, e.g. is it necessary for per capita consumption to rise to the Swedish level in a developing country for fertility to fall to the Swedish level, and if so what happens to the ecosystem of this country as a result of that level of total consumption? (Daly 1999, pp. 20–1).

obtained from wealthy, developed countries should not be considered as reassuring since the gap between material dreams and reality in a poor country is even wider, resulting in bigger dissatisfaction (Belk 1988, p. 121). In this case just the spread of consumer society in the Third World poses a problem apart from difficulties described above. Though it does not answer the reason of spread, it is still remarkable to note that the rapid expansion of major advertising agencies happened in the decade between 1961 and 1971. During this time they established almost five times as many foreign subsidiaries as in the preceding 45 years (UNCTC 1979) and in the Third World more than two-thirds of all advertising agency revenue was controlled by foreign advertising agencies (Chudnovsky 1979, quoted by Jenkins 1988, p. 1366). It seems, it is not only their branded products that Western countries export to the Third World but also their time-honored advertising techniques to create desire for these products.

A series of surveys for comparing the materialism of different cultures based on the international version of Belk's materialism scale (see p. 27) yielded important findings. The respondents were business and MBA students from 13 countries (1729 subjects altogether) (Ger–Belk 1996, pp. 59–60).[53]

The reliability of the materialism scale (based on the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient) was higher in Western countries, which made the researchers conclude that the materialism inherent in consumer culture arose in the West and has diffused from the West to other parts of the world. The absolute value of materialism, however, was not so obvious. The Romanian, US, New Zealander and Ukrainian samples proved to be the most materialist, the German, Turkish, Israeli and Thai subjects were moderately materialistic, while the Indian and non-Germanic Western European students scored low in materialism (Ger–Belk 1996, p. 70).[54] The authors suggest that the relatively low materialism of India and non-Germanic Western Europe is explained by the stability of these societies, while the high materialism of subjects in post-communist countries may be due to a sudden release from former systematic consumer deprivation. The relatively high level of materialism in Germany and Turkey may also be the result of drastic social changes. "S*ocial change and accompanying mobility and confusion in norms coupled with the spread of Western influence and globalization seem to impel materialism*", the authors conclude (Ger–Belk 1996, p. 74).

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[53] Though the sample makes it possible to compare the findings, it does not indicate precisely the materialism of the whole nations involved.

[54] The statement that, for example, the materialism of Norwegian students is low according to the sample does make sense only in comparison with the other students of the other countries in the sample. The level of materialism that can be regarded as normal in a certain country remains unanswered. From this aspect it is possible that the Norwegian level, which was lower than the American or the Romanian one, in itself is still too high from a social point of view.

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Chapter 3

Voluntary Simplicity

This chapter describes the difference between the philosophy of voluntary simplicity and consumer society, lists the values central to voluntary simplicity and examines the essence of voluntary simplicity in view of non-voluntary and complex ways of life. It also describes voluntary simplifiers as well as their way of life, and finally it will present a new phenomenon: the spread of self-help books on voluntarily simplified life.

Voluntary simplicity and consumer society

The concept of voluntary simplicity as well as the movement associated with it[55] is considered to be an institutionalized form of resistance to consumer society. The essence of voluntary simplicity is a way of life which is outwardly simple and inwardly (spiritually) rich. It has its roots in the legendary frugality and self-reliance of the Puritans, Thoreau's naturalistic vision at Walden Pond, Emerson's practical and spiritual espousal of simple living and high thinking as well as the teachings and social philosophy of spiritual leaders—with different authority—such as Jesus and Gandhi. According to the advocates of voluntary simplicity the current social and environmental crisis puts special emphasis on these ideas, urging people to have a socially and environmentally responsible way of life.

It is easier to understand the current implications of voluntary simplicity if we compare its values to those of the material worldview (Table 3.1). In this way it also turns out what the theoreticians and conscious followers of the voluntary simplicity movement do not accept in the prevalent social-economic system (Elgin 1993 originally terms it industrial-era view) and how they define themselves as opposed to it (in the source text termed as ecological-era view). In this aspect it is irrelevant whether the industrial era is really characterized by these features all over the world or whether the ecological era exists as a distinct category.

Voluntary simplifiers strongly criticize consumer society, which is based on materialism. The material nature of consumer society is proved by the fact that according to it the goal of life is material progress and one's identity is defined by the material goods possessed by him/her as well as the social position achieved based on these goods. In this view man is nothing more than a group of molecules which exists alone and separately, other human beings are considered to be rivals, while the other living or inorganic environment is regarded as a resource to exploit. Voluntary simplifiers do not deny the importance of material goods but—as opposed to materialists—they also emphasize the importance of spiritual aspects. They think the goal of life is to co-evolve both the material and spiritual aspects. One is an inseparable part of the universe around him/her and this view results in the co-operation with other human beings and other living beings as well as showing respect for them. The mass media have an especially important role in forming values. Voluntary simplifiers think they are dominated by commercial interests and they promote material values, though they should emphasize a balanced diet of values and the importance of ecological approach to living. Voluntary simplifiers stress personal responsibility considering global problems (the importance of the aggregate effect of a lot of minor acts) and reject the idea of shifting the responsibility upon the free market or government bureaucracies (that is, extreme libertarian capitalism and communism[56]).

[55] We speak of a movement only in the United States.

[56] There are of course significant exceptions, such as Scott *Nearing*, whose book written together with Helen *Nearing*, titled *Living the Good Life* was great success in the 70s (in its second edition) and many think it is an essential work on the subject of voluntary simplicity. He is well-known in the US for his simple and authentic way of life but few know that he was a devotee of Stalin and communism and supported the repression of the Hungarian revolt in 1956 (Shi 1985, pp. 255–7).

Table 3.1
The Difference between Consumer Society and Voluntary Simplicity

Materialist Consumer Society (industrial-era view)	Voluntary Simplicity (ecological-era view)
The goal of life is material progress.	The goal of life is to co-evolve both the material and spiritual aspects with harmony and balance.
Emphasis on conspicuous consumption—the "good life" is dependent upon having enough money to acquire life's pleasures and to avoid life's discomforts.	Emphasis on conservation and frugality—using only as much as is needed, a satisfying life emerges with balanced development in co-operation with others.
Identity is defined by material possessions and social position.	Identity is revealed through our loving and creative participation in life.
The individual is defined by his or her body and is ultimately separate and alone.	The individual is both unique and an inseparable part of the larger universe, identity is not limited to our physical existence.
The universe is viewed as material and largely lifeless, it is natural that we who are living exploit the lifeless universe for our ends.	The universe is a living organism that is infused with a subtle life-force, it is important to act in ways that honor the preciousness and dignity of all life.
Emphasis on self-serving behavior (get as much for myself as I can while giving no more than is required in return).	Emphasis on life-serving behavior (give as much of myself to life as I am able and ask in return no more than I require).
Cutthroat competition, competing against others and striving to make a killing.	Fair competition, co-operation with others and working to make a living.
The mass media are dominated by commercial interests and are used aggressively to promote a high-consumption culture.	The mass media are used to supply a balanced diet of information and messages, including the importance of ecological approaches to living.
Nations adopt a "lifeboat ethic" in global relations.	Nations adopt a "spaceship Earth ethic" in global relations.
The welfare of the world is left to the workings of the free market and/or government bureaucracies.	Each person takes responsibility for the well-being of the world.
Emphasis on personal autonomy and mobility.	Emphasis on connectedness and community.

Source: Elgin 1993, pp. 38–9

Values central to voluntary simplicity

There are five values which lie at the heart of voluntary simplicity: material simplicity, human scale, self-determination, ecological awareness and personal growth.[57]

The extent of one's *material simplicity* can be examined by the following questions (after The American Friends Committee):

- Does what I own or buy promote activity, self-reliance and involvement or does it induce passivity and dependence?

[57] Values are from the article of Elgin–Mitchell (1977, pp. 5–8). The subsequent descriptions in literature usually rely on this article.

- Are my consumption patterns basically satisfying or do I buy a lot of things which serve no real needs?
- How much is my present job and life style influenced by installment payments, maintenance and repair costs and the expectations of others?
- Do I consider the impact of my consumption patterns on others and on the Earth?

Answering these questions helps to establish a life of creative simplicity and to free one from excessive attachment to material goods, aids the nation to share wealth with those who cannot fulfil their basic needs (the poor), helps individuals to become less dependent on large and complex public or private institutions and restores the balance between the material and non-material aspects of living.[58]

Adherents to voluntary simplicity regard *human-scale* living and working conditions as important because they think gigantic scales result in anonymity, incomprehensibility and artificiality. As stated by Ernst F. Schumacher in his book titled *Small is Beautiful*, living and working environments as well as supportive institutions should be decentralized as much as possible in order to get more comprehensible and manageable entities. Each person should be aware of what he or she contributes to the whole, how much his or her responsibility as well portion of reward is.

The notion of *self-determination* in voluntary simplicity means a form of consumption which results in greater control over one's desires and frees one from "*installment payments, maintenance costs and the expectations of others*". The key motives of this process are "grow your own", "make your own" and "do without", which help to reduce (both psychological and physical) dependency on consumption. It is also against excessive division of labor. The aim of human labor will be again to produce the whole of a product, not only a small part of it, in this way making the sense of contribution more evident. Self-determination also includes aversion to unnecessary intrusions of distant bureaucracies and a wish for greater local self-determination and grass roots political action.[59]

Ecological awareness is a recognition of the mutual connections and interdependence of people and natural resources. It acknowledges that the resources of the Earth are limited, which should encourage us to conserve physical resources, reduce environmental pollution as well as to maintain the beauty and integrity of the natural environment. Ecological awareness often extends beyond the issue of scarce resources and includes social responsibility: it makes us aware of those who are less fortunate than us. This philosophy—espoused by Gandhi—means not wanting what the least fortunate inhabitant of the Earth cannot afford. In this way the philosophy of voluntary simplicity extends beyond the boundaries of a nation, making it less isolated and self-centered than it otherwise could be.

For a lot of people taking up a materially simple way of life means *personal growth*, it helps to clear up external chaos and to explore one's "inner life". The above-mentioned basic values of voluntary simplicity encourage one to grow both psychologically and spiritually. If all you do is maintain yourself physically and forget about personal growth, then life becomes merely "not dying". Several advocates of voluntary simplicity think American society (in the 1970s) became occupied with sustenance and forgot about non-material aspects of life (cf. Scitovsky 1976). Though personal growth often includes spiritual aspects, it should not be associated with any particular philosophy or religion—it could embrace views ranging from humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology, Eastern meditative traditions, feminism as well as fundamental Christianity.

[58] The authors note that simple living is not necessarily cheaper, as home-made, aesthetically enduring products usually cost more than mass-produced ones. (See subchapter on frugality, p. 57)

[59] This effort, termed subsidiarity, has been part of the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church since the 1930s.

In reality voluntary simplicity is manifested in various forms and the values described above have different roles and significance in each individual's view and life. It is owing to its personal nature: the appearance of voluntary simplicity depends on the personal development, personal responsibility and the environment of each follower. Empirical research also suggests that the group of voluntary simplifiers is diverse (see p. 54). The nature, type and extent of simplification may depend on climate, culture, local customs as well as the personality of the individual (Gregg 1936, Elgin 1993).

Personal commitment to the values of voluntary simplicity is measured by a six-item scale (see e.g. Shama–Wisenblit 1984). Some of the statements reveal how the researchers try to infer commitment to abstract values from practical phenomena. Respondents have to evaluate the following statements:[60]

1. I believe in material simplicity, i.e., buying and consuming only what I need.
2. I believe in "small is beautiful", e.g., I prefer smaller cars over large cars.
3. I believe that product function is usually more important than its style.
4. I am interested in personal growth more than economic growth.
5. I am determined to have more control over my life as a consumer, e.g., stay away from installment buying.
6. I consider myself ecologically responsible. (Shama–Wisenblit 1984, p. 233)

Voluntary—involuntary, simple—complex

As the term voluntary simplicity is made up of two terms, the phenomenon can be examined in view of these two elements. There are four possibilities: (1) voluntary simplicity (+v+s), (2) involuntary simplicity (–v+s), (3) involuntary complexity (–v–s) and (4) voluntary complexity (+v–s) (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 169). Examining them helps to grasp the essence of voluntary simplicity.

Involuntary simplicity or poverty is distinctly differentiated from voluntary simplicity in the relevant literature. In case of poverty there are always externally imposed conditions which result in simple life and in this way simplicity is not consciously chosen. There are significant differences between poverty and voluntary simplicity. Poverty is repressive while voluntary simplicity is liberating. Poverty generates helplessness, passivity and despair while voluntary simplicity encourages personal development, creativity and never ceases to offer opportunities. Poverty is degrading to the human spirit while voluntary simplicity has a functional integrity that elevates our lives (Elgin 1993, p. 27).

Obviously, poverty is not a form of voluntary simplicity but can it turn into a conscious and voluntary state? It may happen that when economic difficulties arise and wealthier social groups become poorer, a lot of people have to adopt a simple way of life. From environmental point of view it is irrelevant how one comes to adopt goals and makes decisions resulting in voluntary simplicity. If, for example, because of deteriorating economic conditions someone switches from eating beef to ecologically less demanding chicken, which is also based more on local markets, it is not clear whether it is voluntary or involuntary simplicity. In case the individual returns to beef as soon as economic conditions improve, obviously the simplicity cannot be regarded as voluntary. However, if consuming chicken becomes permanent due to the recognition of its above-mentioned environment-friendly nature, it is clearly voluntary simplicity, whose starting point originally was an involuntary state in this case.[61]

[60] The items are rated on a scale ranging from 6 to 1 (choosing from strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree and strongly disagree).

[61] The free choice of simplified lifestyle is a key element of voluntary simplicity. The need to avoid global ecological crisis, however, raises a paradox about freedom: all free and moral people *must* choose a simplified lifestyle when faced with global ecological crisis.

Involuntary complexity is a more complex and less voluntary way of life in today's developed countries, preceding voluntary simplicity, which is a conscious choice of a simplified lifestyle. Involuntary complexity turns life into a "rat race" in which mindless, indistinguishable, unimportant, nasty little animals driven by their instincts and by psychological manipulation continuously collect, store, protect and consume whatever is put before them (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, pp. 172–3).

It is important to note that "involuntariness" is rather internal than external, although it is based on the impact of external forces. According to Herbert *Marcuse* the most effective and enduring way of blocking the progress toward freedom is to implant material and intellectual wants that maintain obsolete forms of the struggle for existence. The intensity, satisfaction and character of human needs, beyond biological survival, have always been preconditioned. Doing or leaving, enjoying or destroying, possessing or rejecting something are all perceived as a need whose importance depends on the interests of the prevailing societal institutions (Marcuse 1964, p. 4, quoted by Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 174).

The involuntary nature of the phenomenon can also be proved indirectly. According to the traditional model goods are acquired, possessed and used for their utility in satisfying needs and producing pleasure. This means that when consumers are satisfied, economic motivations should decrease and in this way economies with a stable population should reach an equilibrium oscillating around a steady state of "enough". As this does not happen Schumacher (1980) thinks the system must be economically irrational. He argues that greed and envy creates wants that are perceived as needs. Consequently, involuntary complexity involves the confusion of wants and needs.[62]

Finally, *voluntary complexity* is examined, a case when complexity is seemingly voluntary. Considering all the negative qualities of involuntary complexity, how can a state of voluntary complexity exist? The term "voluntary" supposes freedom, the opportunity, ability and will to make decisions. But trapped in contemporary competitive consumption, one's time, attention, psychological and physical resources are tied up in the pursuit of wealth and the display of it. There is little energy left, if any, for factors outside the market. This state is just as contradictory as the one when someone willingly decides to become a slave, although slavery precludes freedom.

The fact that voluntary complexity is incompatible with freedom does not mean that it does not exist, as one has to allow for ideological manipulation. It is possible that the illusion of freedom underlies and sustains voluntary complexity. However, the freedom to chose from consumer goods is not the same as the freedom to choose to be a member of consumer society (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 180, cf. Princen 1999, p. 354).

A dynamic examination of voluntary simplicity

The above-mentioned variations of lifestyles (voluntary or involuntary, simple or complex) define the state of an individual at a certain point in time. A dynamic examination, which takes time changes into consideration, reveals several typical ways of progress. Two of them are described below.

The progression from an original state of involuntary simplicity (poverty) to involuntary complexity and then to voluntary simplicity raises hope for the ones wishing the spread of voluntary simplicity:

(involuntary simplicity)	→	(involuntary complexity)	→	(voluntary simplicity)
(–v+s)		(–v–s)		(+v+s)

[62] For details on the difference between wants and needs see footnote 36 on p. 34.

According to this model at first material needs drive us to pursue material affluence. Once achieved, it causes disappointment, sets dangerous demands and traps the individual into complexity. But this very affluence is what allows us the luxury of voluntarily and deliberately denying materialism. An example of this is the hippie movement of the 60s in the United States as most of the members were from decent, middle-class background. They saw all their parents' possessions, which they could have acquired later in their lives. Getting disappointed in consumer culture might change into its opposite, asceticism, as seen in the case of Gautama Buddha, John Winthrop and Ram Dass.[63]

The other possibility is less hopeful for those who would like to see a shift to ecological attitudes. It is called the Calvinist model and it could be described as follows:

(involuntary simplicity) → (voluntary simplicity) → (involuntary complexity)
(–v+s) (+v+s) (–v–s)

Also starting from a state of involuntary simplicity (poverty), which turns into virtuous restriction of consumption in conjunction with God-fearing hard work. Due to the capitalist economic system and capital accumulation it leads to involuntary affluence (cf. Weber 1930). This is a kind of trap for the rich, which was just as typical of Calvinist Holland as most protestant communities settled in North America. Matters are at such a point that some "Christian" movements have emerged, defining themselves as Calvinist, that preach growing rich and unlimited enjoyment of material goods of life (cf. Volf 1995, pp. 181–3).[64] The moral is, flirting with the wherewithal will sooner or later (in ones own or his offsprings' lives) distort the highest motives and one's thoughts as well as actions will become dominated by the accumulated wealth.

Who are the voluntary simplifiers?

One of the most comprehensive pieces of research on the conscious followers of voluntary simplicity was carried out by Duane *Elgin* and Arnold *Mitchell*, who attached a questionnaire to their article, titled *Voluntary Simplicity*, published in 1977. Elgin reported the conclusions drawn from the replies in his book of the same title published in 1981 and also included the data in a later edition in 1993 (Elgin 1993, pp. 57–110). In the 18 months after the article was published more than 420 questionnaires were returned with more than 200 letters attached, each of which provided a detailed inside view of the lives of an individual or a family devoted to the topic. Respondents were from several different walks of life (from lawyers to students, from government bureaucrats to old age pensioners), from 42 states of the United States, Canada, Australia and several European countries, they were between the ages of 17 and 67 with an average age of about thirty but 75% were under the age of 35. Nearly all of them were white, their overall income levels were somewhat lower than the American average, most of them were highly educated, 56% lived in cities, 13% in small towns and 32% in rural areas. The majority grew up in relatively wealthy families (71% in middle-class, 22% in upper-class families) and the average had chosen a simplified way of life six years before (Elgin 1993, pp. 61–2).[65]

After analyzing the questionnaires and letters amounting to more than 1000 pages, Elgin came to the following conclusions. First, a simplified way of life is not a kind of utopia but an

[63] Ram Dass in 1968, having returned from his first journey to India, moved into a cabin in the woods behind his father's house in the US and refused every convenience such as electricity, hot water, television or regular hot meals (Dass in. Elgin 1993, p. 16).
[64] Critical analysis of the phenomenon in Kocsis (1998).
[65] Similar socio-economic features of voluntary simplifiers were discovered by Leonard–Barton (1981), Shama (1981) and Shama–Wisenblit (1984).

existing phenomenon, which has taken root in several developed countries. Second, the example of the pioneers of simplified living demonstrates that we can take control of our lives and do not have to wait passively for an ecological breakdown. Third, an ecological approach to living involves more than material frugality, it influences all aspects of life. Fourth, the movement is still in its infancy and a lot of work and learning has to be done to achieve the potentials of this way of living. Fifth, the approach cannot be defined by a set of norms but rather depends on discovering your life circumstances. Sixth, the philosophy of "small is beautiful" is attained, a lot of small, seemingly insignificant changes accumulate and have a revolutionary impact. Seventh, the traditional polarity of liberal and conservative is shifting toward another polarity with individuals on one end capable of determining their fate relative to the enormous power of over-dominant government or corporations. Eighth, voluntary simplicity is not withdrawal from the world but a process from conscious involvement through clarity, love, mutual help to a flourishing world civilization (Elgin 1993, pp. 108–10).

Among the conclusions drawn by Elgin feminism carries especially positive values in so far as it gives practical example of how to move beyond traditional roles and expectations as well as how to explore alternative ways of living and working. As he states: "*The liberation of women from sexual stereotypes has relevance far beyond women and sexual roles—it is a significant example of cultural liberation that applies to many other limiting stereotypes of traditional Western industrial societies.*" (Elgin 1993, p. 97) If men are liberated from the pressure of proving their masculinity by high earnings and high consumption, our whole culture will become less aggressive, contain less competition, be more receptive and open, pay more attention to others (present and future generations) and become more aware of the intimate interrelatedness of life. Therefore if one is to become a complete person in a cohesive culture, he or she has to integrate more feminine qualities into his or her life (Elgin 1993, pp. 97–8).

The survey also provided useful information about inner growth, which plays an important role in voluntary simplicity. Of the most devoted followers of simple life, the ones who took the trouble to fill in and send back the questionnaire, 55% were engaged in different meditation methods (e.g. Zen, transcendental meditation), 46% did yoga or jogging, 10% were studying Freudian or Jungian psychoanalysis to achieve inner growth. 12% were not engaged in anything and only 20% had a traditional religion (e.g. Catholicism or Judaism) (Elgin 1993, p. 79). Unfortunately, the data published do not reveal how big percentage of this 20% marked other possibilities in the questionnaire too (that is, e.g. doing yoga besides attending religious service). Elgin concluded that just as there is no single right way to have a simplified way of life outwardly, there is no right way of interior growth: Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Sufism, Zen and other traditions are all compatible with voluntary simplicity. Simplicity is a more conscious and direct encounter with the world, which is why it is naturally connected to all the world's great spiritual traditions (Elgin 1993, p. 83).[66]

The features and motives of voluntary simplicity behavior

Dorothy Leonard-Barton compiled an 18-item index to measure commitment to a voluntarily simplified way of life. According to the type of statement, respondents had to answer yes or no or choose from four or five frequency adverbs (e.g. never–occasionally–frequently–usually–always). The statements reveal a lot about the nature of the movement. Statements

[66] A survey conducted in the USA at the end of 1994 identified people thinking in a similar way to voluntary simplifiers as cultural creatives, who claimed 24% of the adult population. They fall into two subgroups: core cultural creatives (11%) and greens (13%). 60% of them are women, most of them have above average incomes and college degree. Their values are centered on ecological sustainability, cosmopolitanism (they like foreign places and the exotic), pro-feminism at work, altruism, self-actualization, spiritualism, social activism and optimism while they tend to reject traditional relationships and conventional religious beliefs (Ray 1997).

about the life of the respondent were formulated so that positive or high frequency answers given to them suggested voluntary simplicity behavior.[67] According to the scale *people having a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity:*

- make gifts instead of buying
- ride a bicycle for exercise, recreation or transportation
- recycle newspapers used at home
- recycle glass jars and bottles used at home or take it to a bottle bank
- recycle cans used at home
- family member or friend changes the oil in their family car
- learn skills to increase self-reliance (e.g. in carpentry, car tune-up and repair, plumbing)
- intentionally eat meatless main meals
- buy clothing at second-hand stores
- buy major items of furniture or clothing at garage sales (over $15)
- make furniture or clothing for the family
- exchange goods or services with others in lieu of payment with money
- have a compost pile
- contribute to ecologically oriented organizations
- belong to a co-operative
- grow the vegetables the family consumes during the summer
- go to work by bicycle
- ride a bicycle on errands within two miles of home

(Leonard–Barton 1981, pp. 250–1).[68]

A later study, described below, also asked respondents about their motivation for different behaviors if the answer for the question was other than "never" or "no". This motivation could be of economic nature (e.g. lack of necessary resources) or based on personal conviction (voluntary simplicity). Respondents could also name other motives. The method successfully identifies people having an involuntarily simplified way of life.

The survey conducted by Avraham Shama and Joseph Wisenblit in Denver (Colorado) and New York City examined the correlation between personal commitment to the values of voluntary simplicity (see p. 52) and simplicity behaviors (see above). A total of 307 respondents in the two cities were selected in two stages. First, the ones who had a small car and either solar energy or a conservation energy system were asked to take part in the study. (Those who did not own a car were excluded from the sample.) Second, a neighbor, living on the same block, not exhibiting these characteristics was interviewed. This method ensured that an adequate proportion of respondents exhibiting a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity would be included in the sample (Shama–Wisenblit 1984, pp. 232–3).

The study revealed that there is a positive and significant though not very strong relationship between the values and behaviors of voluntary simplicity.[69] The authors regard it as an important finding. Analyzing the motivations of those exhibiting the 18 simplicity behaviors listed above showed that the percentage of those having personal commitment to one of the

[67] The scale was developed using data from research in California (Leonard–Barton 1981, pp. 244–5). California is one of the wealthiest region of the USA and the world.

[68] Since the 1980s two more items may be added to the list: people having a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity *buy fruit and vegetables from local organic farmers* and *do not consume genetically modified foodstuff*. Note that this scale measures only three of the five values central to voluntary simplicity (see p. 50), that is, material simplicity, self-determination and ecological awareness (Leonard-Barton 1981, pp. 244–5).

[69] The biggest correlation coefficients of the Pearsonian 18x6 matrix (between 18 lines of behaviors of voluntary simplicity and 6 columns of voluntary simplicity values) ranged from 0.11 to 0.29 and they were statistically significant ($p<0.05$) (Shama–Wisenblit 1984, p. 235).

behaviors (i.e. voluntary simplifiers) ranged from 38.5% to 82.6%, while those reporting economic motivation (involuntary simplicity) were 2.5% to 58.2%. The percentage of those reporting economic motivations was higher in case of recycling cans, changing oil in the family car and buying second-hand clothes, that is, in these cases poverty was the main motive. The percentage of voluntary simplifiers was less than 10% higher in shopping at garage sales and exchanging goods and services. However, the percentage of voluntary simplifiers was higher than 70% in making gifts instead of buying, biking for exercise or on errands, eating vegetarian main meals and growing vegetables for home consumption (Shama–Wisenblit 1984, p. 238).[70] Consequently, the role of poverty in case of the latter four activities is relatively low in the United States.

Marsha L. Richins and Scott Dawson (1992) studied the relationship between voluntary simplicity and materialism in a north-eastern university city (86 subjects) and a rural area (119 subjects) in the United States. To measure materialism they used their own scale (see, p. 28) and to measure voluntary simplicity they used a shorter (13-item) version of the scale described by Leonard-Barton, for which they used a three-factor structure proposed by Cowles and Crosby (1986). The factors are labeled material simplicity, self-determination and ecological awareness and are used together to assess voluntary simplicity. Resulting partial correlation was –0.18, –0.15 and –0.24 for the three respective factors. The partial correlation when all 13 items are summed was –0.28 (Richins–Dawson 1992, pp. 312–3).[71] It suggests that in the sample the ones having voluntary simplicity lifestyle are less materialist than those who have a complex (or less simple) lifestyle. The relationship is not especially strong but meets rational expectations.

A survey of frugality and its findings

Material simplicity as a value central to voluntary simplicity seems to be in close relationship with frugality in consumption. To assess the correlation between the two John L. *Lastovicka* and his co-authors conducted six independent surveys in the United States in the late 1990s on a sample of 879 subjects altogether and they described a reliable scale of frugality. They obtained a one-dimensional, 8-item scale, where the items are rated on a scale ranging from 1 to 6 (completely agree—completely disagree respectively). The respondents had to evaluate the following statements:

1. If you take good care of your possessions, you will definitely save money in the long run
2. There are many things that are normally thrown away that are still quite useful
3. Making better use of my resources make me feel good
4. If you can re-use an item you already have, there's no sense in buying something new
5. I believe in being careful in how I spend my money
6. I discipline myself to get the most of my money
7. I am willing to wait on a purchase I want so that I can save money
8. There are things I resist buying today so that I can save for tomorrow

(Lastovicka et al. 1999, p. 89)

When testing the frugality scale, several other phenomena were examined to assess their relationship to frugality. Ecological awareness, another value central to voluntary simplicity, for example, proved to have no correlation with frugality, that is, American consumers de-

[70] When examining the proportions one has to allow for the category "others" as this was usually chosen by the respondents when they were doing the activity for *both* economic reasons and personal preference.

[71] To avoid the distorting effect of involuntary simplicity in the sample the authors used partial correlation controlling for income when assessing the relationship between materialism and voluntary simplicity. Our main text includes these partial correlation ($p<0.01$ for all partial correlation).

fined as frugal by this scale do not behave so because of ecological considerations. For example, changing your own car's oil results in saving money but also leads to serious ecological problems. In the same way, buying organically grown fruit and vegetables costs more than buying the ones grown with the aid of harmful chemicals, so it is against frugality (Lastovicka et al. 1999, p. 89). It implies that material simplicity should not be identified with saving money as the frugality scale described above does, otherwise voluntary simplicity is a contradictory concept.[72]

The study also examined—by using regression models—to what extent the frugality scale, ecological awareness and materialism predict the actual frugal behavior of an individual. For example reuse of plastic bags, eating leftovers, using low-flow shower heads, turning off unused lights, using old clothing as cleaning rags, writing letters instead of phoning, cutting a family member's hair, maintaining your own air conditioning and setting air-conditioning thermostats at 85 degrees (about 29 Celsius) or higher were considered as frugal behaviors. All surveys revealed that only the frugality scale is significantly correlated with these frugal behaviors ($p<0.05$) and neither materialism nor ecological awareness play a significant role in these behavioral patterns (Lastovicka 1999, p. 91). Consequently, according to the surveys, even frugal American consumers do not restrict their consumption because of ecological considerations and an individual's materialism has nothing to do with frugality measured in the above-described way.

Misconceptions about voluntary simplicity

To avoid misinterpretation of the movement, the theoreticians of voluntary simplicity term several notions which are not parts of voluntary simplicity though outsiders could think so. Its opponents also often use misleading stereotypes to describe its achievements as regress instead of progress. Moreover, ruining the reputation of the movement in today's critical global situation may even make individuals feel powerless (Elgin 1993, p. 31). Below the phenomena are listed which the theoreticians of the movement clearly state have nothing to do with voluntary simplicity.

The advocates of simple life never fail to emphasize that it cannot be identified with poverty. Simple life is rather a golden mean, a creative balance between poverty and excess (Elgin 1993, p. 28). There are calculations which imply that if mankind is to achieve the nearly same sustainable level of standard of living for everyone, then it would be about the average level in Europe in 1990 (Meadows–Meadows–Randers 1992, p. 196, quoted by Elgin 1993, p. 28).

The simple life is not world-denying asceticism and it is not the triumph of the spirit over the flesh, advocates of the movement claim. It is not the self-mortification and material denigration of saints to reach spiritual purification,[73] nor the elitist means of some Puritans for proving their divine election. These distorted misconceptions do not express the communitarian and matter-related nature of the phenomenon (Nash 2000, p. 35).

The simple life (or ecological living) is not against growth and progress but it seeks to discover technologies which help to move toward a sustainable future. It is not a way without growth but a possibility of a new type of growth, which includes both material and spiritual dimensions of life. According to this view the growth of civilizations in history was not due to fight for land but the ability of a society to transfer increasing amount of energy and attention to the nonmaterial side of life (Toynbee 1947, p. 196, quoted by Elgin 1993, pp. 28–9).

[72] The correlation between frugality and the materialism scale of Richins–Dawson (see, p. 28) was also examined and a weak negative correlation was revealed (Lastovicka et al. 1999, p. 92). According to this survey consumers who are more frugal tend to be less materialistic.

[73] Mark A. Burch refers to the example of two Franciscan friars who argue about which of them can wear shabbier shoes (Burch 1995, p. 5).

The simple life cannot be equated with isolated, rural living either. The romanticized image of rural living does not fit the modern reality as people choosing a life of voluntary simplicity do not usually live in the wood or on remote farms but in cities and suburbs. Respecting nature does not necessarily entail moving to a rural setting. Instead of a "back to the land" movement voluntary simplicity is more of a "make the most of wherever you are" movement (Elgin 1993, p. 196, cf. Nash 2000, pp. 37–8).

The simple life is not the denial of beauty and aesthetics, it is not some kind of a barren plainness. Most of its advocates would surely disagree with the Puritans' suspicion of the arts and would agree with Pablo *Picasso* who thought that art is the elimination of the unnecessary. Simplicity does not deny beauty but liberates it from artificial encumbrances and reveals the spirit that infuses all things (Elgin 1993, pp. 30–1).

The techniques of voluntary simplicity

In the 1990s there was a shift in voluntary simplicity from stressing its individual nature and the lack of general rules to the recent publication of books and manuals that systematically teach the technique of voluntary simplicity. The most popular, most widespread and most often quoted book was written by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin, titled *Your Money or Your Life*, which was first published in 1992 with the sub-title *Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence*.[74] It implies that in achieving voluntary simplicity money and economy play key roles. Obviously, the veterans of voluntary simplicity do not disagree with this shift, as the praising lines are written by Duane Elgin, Donella Meadows, Lester Brown, Paul Wachtel and Ernest Callenbach. And why should they have any objection if the success of the book indicates the increasing popularity and spread of the movement?

Dominguez and Robin suggests "nine magical steps" with a warning before the table of contents reminding readers not to mistake their books with those that promise millions of dollars without having to do anything. They assert: "Well, the program contained in this book DARES TO BE DIFFERENT!! It asks you to DO something. It asks you to actually **apply** the 9 steps it describes. YES. You need to **put** them into effect REALLY. You have to do them, every one. As directed. **ONLY BY ACTUALLY, REALLY, HONESTLY DOING THE STEPS WILL THE PROGRAM WORK**. Then, and only then, will the results described in the personal stories begin to make sense. So don't **WASTE** your precious energy saying to yourself, 'That's impossible' or 'Nobody can do that in **this** economy' or 'No way could **I** save money like that' or… Instead **SAVE** your energy—DO THE STEPS YOURSELF." (Dominguez–Robin 1999, p. xii)

The magic recipe containing the nine steps is based on the epilogue of the book. It is, of course, a brief summary of the 300-page text, so if interested in technical details, you should refer to the book.

Step 1: Making peace with the past

1A: How much have you earned in your life? Find out your total lifetime earnings from the first penny to your most recent paycheque.

1B: What have you got to show for it? Find out your net worth by creating a personal balance sheet of assets and liabilities—everything you own and owe

Step 2: Being in the present—tracking your life energy

2A: How much are you trading your life energy for? Establish the actual costs in time and money required to maintain your job and compute your real hourly wage.

2B: Keep track of every cent that comes into or goes out of your life

[74] A proof of the success of the book is that it has been translated into Spanish, French, Dutch, German and Korean between 1992 and 1999.

Step 3: Where is it all going? (The monthly tabulation)

– Every month create a table of all income and all expenses within categories generated by your own unique spending patterns.
– Balance your monthly income and outgo totals.
– Convert "dollars" spent in each category to "hours of life energy" using your real hourly wage as computed in Step 2.

Step 4: Three questions that will transform your life

On your monthly tabulation, ask these three questions of each of your category totals expressed as hours of life energy and record your responses:

1. Did I receive fulfillment, satisfaction and value in proportion to life energy spent?
2. Is this expenditure of life energy in alignment with my values and life purposes?
3. How might this expenditure change if I didn't have to work for a living?

(It is the state of Financial Independence—T.K.)

Mark each category :

– with a minus sign if you didn't receive fulfillment proportional to the hours of life energy spent, or if that expenditure was not in full alignment with your values and purpose or if you could see expenses in that category diminishing after Financial Independence
– with a plus sign if upping this expenditure would increase fulfillment, would demonstrate greater personal alignment or would increase after Financial Independence
– with zero if that category is just fine on all counts

Step 5: Making life energy visible

Create a wall chart plotting the total monthly income and total monthly expenses from your monthly tabulation. Put it where you will see it every day.

Step 6: Valuing your life energy—minimizing spending

Learn and practice intelligent use of your life energy (money), which will result in lowering your expenses and increasing your savings. This will create greater fulfillment, integrity and alignment in your life.

Step 7: Valuing your life energy—maximizing income

Respect the life energy you are putting into your job. Money is simply something you are trading your life energy for. Trade it with purpose and integrity for increased earnings.

Step 8: Capital and the crossover point

Each month apply the following equation to your total accumulated capital and post as the monthly independence income as a separate line on your wall chart:

*(capital * current long-term interest rate) / 12 months = monthly investment income*

When your monthly investment income crosses over the total monthly expenses line, you are free.

Step 9: Managing your finances

The final step to financial independence: become knowledgeable and sophisticated about long-term income-producing investments. Invest your capital in such a way as to provide an absolutely safe income, sufficient to meet your basic needs for the rest of your life.

These are the nine steps suggested by Dominguez and Robin to achieve voluntary simplicity. They also advise to obtain several additional resources (reference books, cassettes, videos, periodicals, accounts of others' experiences etc.) in the last chapter of the 1999 publication of their book. There are mailing lists on the topic on the Internet and conferences are held annually on both the Western and Eastern coast of the United States. Simplicity circles have sprung up (e.g. Andrews 1997) and one can find out on the Net when, where and how someone starts a new one. There are detailed handbooks on the agenda of the meetings of simplicity circles, tailor-made for Christians and the laity (see e.g. New Road Map Foundation 1996),

which describe what to speak about, in what order and how for each occasion in order to reach voluntary simplicity together.

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Chapter 4

The Problems of Voluntary Simplicity

This chapter deals with practical difficulties of voluntary simplicity, including the accusation of hypocrisy, the difficulty in breaking with the prevalent socio-economic system as well as opinions implying that voluntary simplicity tends to be selfish and prefers individual convenience. Signs of sinking back to consumer society are also discussed and finally the author's own experiences about voluntary simplicity are described.

The hypocrisy of the advocates of simplicity

Advocating voluntary simplicity has always been criticized as being hypocritical. The critics of the movement consider Socrates and Emerson to be hypocrites, having secure annuity incomes, Augustine and Aquinas, having family status and ecclesiastical positions, Marcus Aurelius and Teddy Roosevelt, having political power, Erich Fromm, having respected professional position or the whole mass of upper-middle-class kids who became 1960s dropouts. It is also suspicious if the advocates of voluntary simplicity do not live in surroundings which suit their ideology, as not burning their boats enables them to recant in word and deed, which many of them do (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 200).[75] Also, there has always been a tendency throughout history for the materially and politically privileged to play at poverty (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, pp. 200–201).

Worldwatch Institute is criticized by Stephanie *Moussalli* because it attempts to persuade Americans to voluntarily reduce their consumption. One of the criticized authors, Christopher *Flavin*, for instance, holds up Bhutan, the small totalitarian kingdom in the Himalayas, as an example of sustainability (Flavin 1990). But, as Moussalli puts it, if Flavin really thought that the life of the Bhutanese peasant—ameliorated by two efficient mini-fluorescent light bulbs and a little more health care—is ideal, then he would live such a life himself and join the Bhutanese peasant behind his oxen. He would not even have to go as far as Bhutan, as in the belly of capitalism, in the US there are plenty of scarcely populated and isolated areas too (Moussalli 1994).

The naiveté of voluntary simplicity

Critics also blame voluntary simplicity for cutting the ground from under the followers' feet. The essence of simplicity is the minimization of possessions and property in order to escape the burdens and obligations they impose on the owner. In this sense voluntary simplicity may be conceived as an exchange of the material for the immaterial. It provides inner immaterial satisfaction and freedom to compensate for the loss of outer material and political success and freedom. Rudmin and Kilbourne quote from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount[76] and then note that it seems excellent when one sits on the Mount at the feet of Jesus but it is rather a questionable attitude in the context of political economy (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 202). In Western societies property has always been crucial to citizenship and political participation. While affluent Athens, for example, had citizens, Sparta, holding up material simplicity as a virtue, had subjects (Stone 1988, quoted by Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 202).

Simplicity may either be the cause or consequence of subjugation. Rudmin and Kilbourne claim that the flourishing of the movement in the 1960s and 70s could be due to the

[75] One can answer these criticisms by arguing that as almost anybody proposing social change can be accused of hypocrisy, it is not unique to voluntary simplicity. Therefore, these accusations do not affect the fundamental moral value of voluntary simplicity (Shama 1995, p. 223). Only a voluntarily homeless person may be free of these accusations, who keeps his opinions and advice to himself in order to avoid becoming a moral authority.

[76] "*Do not store up for yourselves treasure on the earth, where it grows rusty and moth-eaten, and thieves break in to steal it. Store up treasure in Heaven, where there is no moth and no rust to spoil it, no thieves to break in and steal*" (Mt 6,19–20).

decrease in political participation and effectiveness but it is just as well possible that it was the movement which led to abatement of critical opinions which could have posed the greatest threat to the political establishment. According to this the first Earth Day in 1970 might well have been organized by Richard *Nixon* or the *Pentagon* to weaken their potential opponents, the authors assert (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, pp. 202–3). Furthermore, anybody who is displeased with the prevailing norms of Western societies and wish to go beyond them (e.g. the ideal voluntary simplifier, who strives to achieve optimal well-being) are labeled as ill, are medicated rather than nurtured and facilitated (Fahlberg–Fahlberg 1997, p. 13).

According to several, property does have an effect on people's self-definition and psychological well-being (Furby 1981, Csikszentmihalyi–Rochberg-Halton 1981, Belk 1988) and several research have revealed the importance of the wealthy appearance in today's modern society. Helga *Dittmar* and Lucy *Pepper*, for example, carried out a survey among British adolescents (168 subjects). They had to evaluate the description of an affluent and a less well-off person.[77] The affluent character was seen as more intelligent, successful and hardworking[78] by both middle-class and working-class adolescents but at the same time s/he was considered to be less caring, less happy, having fewer friends and less attractive as a potential friend than the less well-off character[79] (Dittmar–Pepper 1994, p. 243, cf. Dittmar 1992).

The survey of Andrew N. Christopher and Barry R. Schlenker, conducted at the University of Florida in the US, including 150 students, resulted in similar findings. It also revealed that though the respondents saw the wealthy person as less attractive, they thought his/her lifestyle was worthy of imitation,[80] obviously hoping that they will be amiable rich people. The respondents regarded the more affluent character as having better personal abilities (e.g. being more intelligent, hard-working, organized and self-disciplined),[81] which made the authors conclude that "at least in American culture, the appearance of affluence is perhaps such a powerful social testament to a person's abilities that other considerations, such as the perceiver's personality, do not have a pronounced moderating influence" (Christopher–Schlenker 2000, pp. 13–4).[82] In this social surroundings voluntary simplifiers, who have rather poor appearance, have to face a lot of difficulties.

The propensity of voluntary simplicity to be selfish

According to Rudmin and Kilbourne (1995) voluntary simplicity, even as a mass movement, seems to be individualistic. It turns its back on the existing social structure and rejects the existing economic norms. This withdrawal is not necessarily intentional, the authors say, but it is often the essence of the simplicity which is characteristic of so many of the revolutionary ascetics—such as Cromwell, Robespierre, Lenin, Mao and even perhaps Ghandi—whose goals were to overthrow the social order (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 162). Friedrich August *von Hayek*, the well-known advocate of free market does not question the individual's right to

[77] The descriptions were different only in the material condition of the characters, e.g. (the less affluent condition is given in parentheses): "*X.Y. left home when she was 18 and now owns a large flat (small rented flat), which is well furnished (adequately furnished) with comfortable furniture (secondhand furniture). She passed her driving test when she was 20 and now drives a BMW convertible (an old, but reliable Fiesta).*" (the complete description is in. Dittmar–Pepper 1994, pp. 248–9).

[78] $p<0.0001$

[79] $p<0.0005$

[80] According to regression analysis, $\beta=0.47$, $p<0.001$. No other feature (the personality of the responders) were significant to specify the desired target's lifestyle.

[81] According to regression analysis, $\beta=0.27$, $p<0.01$.

[82] One examined personal characteristic in the British survey proved to be significant (as opposed to the American survey). It was materialism, measured by the Richins and Dawson scale (see p. 28) in both survey. Less materialistic subjects of the British sample of Dittmar and Pepper (1994) did not think the affluence of a person was due to his or her personal abilities (though they also considered the less well-off character as having smaller abilities (p. 245–246.).

voluntarily withdraw from civilization either but he believes that after withdrawal the hermit does not have any entitlement. "*Are we to subsidize their hermitages? There cannot be any entitlement exempted from the rules on which civilization rests. We may be able to assist the weak and the disabled, the very young and the old, but only if the sane and adult submit to the impersonal discipline which gives us means to do so.*" (Hayek 1988, p. 153) Hayek regards the ones abandoning free market capitalism as parasites who exploit the achievements of a process they refuse to contribute to.

Contributing is of course important not only from political but economic point of view as well. Voluntary simplification of consumption by one person may lead to involuntary simplification for a producer, even if the connection is not so obvious. When a voluntary simplifier in an industrial country gives up his or her morning coffee, it results in a deficit for a family producing coffee somewhere in Latin America, Rudmin and Kilbourne claim (1995). According to this it is a mistake to always see producers as "oppressors". The same holds for the Indian selling baskets, who might starve if you do not buy his or her merchandise though voluntary simplicity promulgates the refusal to buy unwanted and unneeded wares. For this reason in some collectivist societies, such as Japan and the Philippines it is a social obligation to consume (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, pp. 204–5).

In connection with the flourishing of voluntary simplicity in the US Patrick McCormick calls attention to the fact that while numerous popular publications about how to save money and relieve stress came out in the 1990s, the topic of social and ecological justice was neglected.[83] McCormick thinks, the advice to simplify may sound strange to a growing number of Americans who have been made redundant in the increasing number of mergers and layoffs or to the millions of Americans who are working harder and longer just to keep up. It is important not to spiritualize the growing gap between the rich and poor by encouraging those without high-power jobs to take some time to smell roses, the author asserts (McCormick 1997, p. 49, cf. Nash 2000, p. 37).

Jesus' call to discipleship is not about leaving some distractions behind and coming away with him to a quiet place but living compassionately and in solidarity with those who suffer, McCormick states in the *U.S. Catholic*. And this can often complicate our lives and raise our stress levels. One should think of what happened to *Saint Francis* of Assissi, Dorothy *Day*, Oscar *Romero* or Cesar *Chavez* after they decided to become a disciple. Just as Jesus is not a soothing cup of coffee in front of a seaside sunset, spirituality is not always a calm oasis far from the maddening crowd (McCormick 1997, p. 49).

The double-faced relationship of voluntary simplicity and economic growth

The success of mass production, which developed during the industrial revolution, is thought to be the result of the fulfillment of three conditions: regimentation of the workforce dictated by the needs of the system, not the needs of the individual; never-ending economic growth and mass consumption. It is indisputable that these conditions were fulfilled within a short period in the Western world. The individual, on the other hand, lost control over work, social life and consciousness as all were absorbed into the commodified form of existence (cf. Polanyi 1944). The relationship between voluntary simplicity and the conditions of mass production is unusual and complex. On the one hand, voluntary simplicity is opposed to each of the above mentioned conditions and wishes to eliminate them: voluntary simplification of a whole nation would lead to the collapse of the current growth-centred economic system. On the other hand, as a result of the individualistic ethic of voluntary simplicity its followers are

[83] McCormick thinks this is not true for example in case of Duane *Elgin*, whose works were discussed in the third chapter as an authentic source of the theory of voluntary simplicity.

prone to the seduction of the very system they should overthrow and transcend (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, pp. 195–6).

Voluntary simplicity as economic confusion

The wide spread of voluntary simplicity (which seems to be more of a theoretical than a real possibility, considering the present situation) might cause severe economic dysfunctions, market depression as in this socio-economic system the economy is stimulated by encouraging consumption. Voluntary simplicity would not stimulate the economy so much and would result in less production, fewer goods, smaller investments, lower profits, lower wages, decreased philanthropy, and higher unemployment. This process would entail serious social and psychological consequences for the poor and unemployed. Equitable distribution would become an enhanced imperative but not an easier task to accomplish. Internationally, the spread of voluntary simplicity in western countries would also have serious consequences, especially for poor countries dependent on affluent countries for export markets and economic assistance (Nash 2000, pp. 184–5). According to some critics, the followers of voluntary simplicity are not only indifferent to poverty and suffering present in the world but they may involuntarily cause crisis and economic problems.

Neva R. *Goodwin* raises the question of what proportion of voluntary simplifiers can be present in a consumer society without creating macroeconomic disturbances. Is there any way that individual, voluntary reductions in income and expenditure could affect GDP without causing difficulties for those who do not wish to simplify their lives? And finally, in the market economy of voluntary simplifiers what should be the relationship between jobs and profits as well as the appropriate connection between society's values and the money values? (Goodwin 1997, pp. 341–2)

Voluntary simplicity as the engine of economy: past experience

Voluntary simplicity being the engine of economy is bad news for the ones hoping for change but good news for the ones content with the status quo. The story of the movement in the United States in the last third of the 20th century suggests that it rather supports the growth-centred economy than interferes with it. This highlights the weaknesses and defects of voluntary simplicity and at the same time reveals the incredible power of the prevalent economic system, which aggressively assimilates any effort questioning its operation. This phenomenon may seem surprising so it needs further explanation.

The dominant mode of existence under the 19th century new industrial regime was commodified. Though social unrest during the late 19th and early 20th century mainly focused on industrial production, production itself was offered as the solution. Facts (the industrial process is the cause) were successfully fictionalized and fiction (the cause is within the individual) was factualized and in this way the problem became its own solution. Through therapeutic *consumption* individuals could live the "good life" in the world of mass production. The ideal of plain living has sunk into the morass of mass consumption, from which escape seems impossible. An increasing number of culturally dependent wants are redefined as true needs and people's capacity and willingness to consume spirals ever higher. Though some of them manage to break free from the vicious circle of consumption, the consumption ethic, for the first time in history, is dominant. Wordsworth's original call for "plain living and high thinking" now might be restated as "high living and plain thinking" (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 196).

In the modern industrial era voluntary simplicity had its first run at the beginning of the 20th century, which offers important lessons to understand the revival of simplicity in the 1970s. According to David E. Shi (1985) the turn of the century included social and political reform, the mass management of stress, escape from the relentlessness of "conspicuous consumption", an anti-urban re-romanticization of Nature (outdoor recreation, back-to-the-land

homesteading, and the increase in the number of national parks) the revival of arts and crafts, a reaffirmation of traditional marital roles and—in contrast to voluntary simplicity of today—a health and hygiene hysteria. However, this antimodernist movement was—in its effect—neither escapist nor antieconomic, its quest for authenticity made it easier to adapt to the culture of consumption (Lears 1981, p. xvi, quoted by Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 197).

Who would have thought that those aspects of modern consumption that voluntary simplicity now most passionately rejects were originally developed and promoted as voluntary simplicity? *Ladies Home Journal*, for example, now the epitome of a marketing magazine, was the most prominent and persistent voice of simple living. Its dynamic editor, Edward *Bok*, was the Andrew *Carnegie* of publishing. It was an incredible commercial success, becoming the world's largest mass-circulation magazine and reaching almost two million subscribers by 1910. Today's well-known magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, also promoted voluntary simplicity (Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 198). As Shi states it "*suburban garden homes and country clubs, restored farmhouses, cottages at the mountains or the shore, summer camps, scouting, boarding schools for the children, and Arts and Crafts furnishings—all rather quickly became standard aspects of affluent cosmopolitan life. Simple living in the American experience had always displayed cruel ironies… A movement ostensibly dedicated to pristine aesthetic and normative ideals thus ran the risk of being itself exploited and made to serve the status quo*" (Shi 1985, p. 213).

Voluntary simplicity as the engine of economy: present experience

The revival of voluntary simplicity in the 1970s has been accompanied by numerous books, articles, newsletters, study groups and seminars giving not-so-free advice on how to reduce the stress, clutter and complexity in our lives. Simplicity seems to have become the rage and now it can be purchased at the local bookshop (McCormick 1997, p. 46). James B. *Twitchell* does not think it advisable to confuse the voluntary simplicity movement with the back to nature movement, whose followers tear up their social security cards, stop paying taxes and pull the plug. Simplicity is rather a passionate belief that we can live well for less if we buy and use the right things. To cure the increasingly bigger expectations, shopping fever, chronic stress and broken-down families the movement suggests buying a how-to-stop-buying book, attending some meetings, practicing meditation and buying other stuff (Twitchell 1999, pp. 6–7).

Commercial success did not fail to come about. The first edition of the book *Your Money or Your Life* (Dominguez–Robin 1992), which has become the sacred book of voluntary simplifiers, sold almost half a million copies in six years—despite the authors' advice to borrow it from the library—and stayed on the hit list of *Business Week* for more than a year. Amy Dacyczyn, the author of the *Tightwad Gazette* (a popular newsletter) and three other books gives practical advice on how to save, which helped her to cut the annual budget of her family of six to an incredible $17,580 while saving enough money to buy and furnish a $125,000 Victorian home (well, she earned more than $1 million counseling others) (McCormick 1997, p. 47). Sarah Ban *Breathnach* started her business with publishing a book titled Simple Abundance, which includes daily meditations for women and has become a profit center. *Simple Abundance* is now a corporation, a registered trademark and a non-profit foundation. It is also an imprint of Warner Books—Simple Abundance Press—publishing four books a year on the importance of frugal living.[84] Books on voluntary simplicity are now the profit centers of the flagging self-help industry (Twitchell 1999, pp. 7–9).

[84] Twichell offers a peculiar explanation for the high proportion of women in the present simplicity market. The male form of voluntary simplicity from Marcus Aurelius and St. Francis to the Puritans, Thoreau and Ghandi may have hectored their neighbours about consuming too much but never offered to sell them advice, hold seminars, produce videos and merchandise their views. However, nowadays it is a female form of voluntary simplic-

Elgin and Mitchell were cautiously estimating back in 1977 what effect it would have on incomes if a third of the adult population of the United States halved their consumption by 2000. They came to the conclusion that it would reduce the GDP only by 15%. However, they expected that the industry relying on voluntary simplicity would grow dramatically from $35 billion in 1977 to an expected $300 billion in 2000 (in 1975 dollars). Products for the "simplicity market" are of course different from the traditional ones: they are functional, healthy, non-polluting, durable, repairable, recyclable or made from renewable materials, energy-cheap, reliable, aesthetically pleasing and made through simple technology (Elgin–Mitchell 1977, pp. 16–7).

This prediction has partly come true as the survey of the San Francisco public-opinion research institute LIVES revealed in 1994 that 24% of the adult American population could be defined as cultural creatives. The characteristics of this group are extremely similar to those of voluntary simplifiers. As it is stated in the introduction of their report "*people who believe in environmentalism, feminism, global issues, and spiritual searching are scattered across the country and found in all social groups. These 'Cultural Creatives' tend to be affluent, well-educated, and on the cutting edge of social change. By catering to the new values, businesses can serve the leading edge of many consumer markets*" (Ray 1997, p. 29). According to Shama (1995) the consumption values characteristic only of voluntary simplifiers have diffused to the whole society. While Shama (1981) described voluntary simplicity as a market segment of niche marketing, now everybody is interested in functional, efficient, valuable and recyclable products (Shama 1995, p. 223).

As theoretically it is not strange for a voluntary simplifier to abandon materialism, the comment of Seth R. *Ellis* on the research of materialism is quite expressive: "*measures for materialism may also be useful marketing tools in the quest for profitable segmentation strategies. Response* functions *for segments based on ranges within the materialism dimension may differ for various product types, product quality, and service quality*" (Ellis 1992, p. 688). Ellen *Graham* in the *Wall Street Journal* even speaks clearer, writing about *How to Sell More to Those Who Think It's Cool to be Frugal?* (Graham 1996). Anyhow, marketing does not let the ones trying to escape from the market go easily and similarly to the beginning of the 1900s it makes business from the trend (cf. Rudmin–Kilbourne 1995, p. 199).

From conspicuous consumption to conspicuous non-consumption

Researchers studying the spread of voluntary simplicity usually differentiate between several levels of simplicity. There are the *downshifters*, economically well off people who voluntarily give up some luxury goods they could afford. Their behavior is generally connected to some fashion or fad[85] and they do not change their consumption-oriented lifestyle. They simplify their life only to such extent that they can still make it clear to outsiders that they are rolling in dough and that it is not personal failure that makes them simplify (Etzioni 1998, pp. 622–3).

Strong simplifiers, on the other hand, make real steps, such as giving up well-paid jobs or take early retirement. As mentioned before, it is only voluntary if the decision is not coerced by external economic factors. Giving up or changing jobs usually results in less income available and reduced consumption.[86]

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ity, according to Twitchell. "*When a woman feels overwhelmed by a flood of things, she really can't head out to the woods. But she can buy a guide to help her stop consuming and join a group.*" (Twitchell 1999, p. 8)

[85] A good example is the torn denim outfit of Bruce Springsteen or when somebody drives an old rattletrap to the harbor to his yacht.

[86] This cannot be taken for sure because—as suggested by the book of Dominguez–Robin, see p. 59—the individual usually gives up his job when he feels that his savings will yield enough income for the rest of his life. This not necessarily implies the decrease of the level of consumption, though makes it seem probable.

Finally, there are the *devoted members of the simple living movement*, who are motivated by a coherent philosophy and adjust their whole life to it. They often move from their former place of residence if it prevents them from acting up to their convictions (Etzioni 1998, pp. 623–6).

It is believed that the spread of voluntary simplicity depends whether it demands sacrifice from its followers or this new, more simple lifestyle is itself satisfying. According to some researchers consumerism sustains itself because it helps to signal one's achievements or "value" in a way that is readily visible to others (conspicuous consumption—see Veblen 1918, Chapter IV) and in this way to satisfy the esteem needs of Maslow's hierarchy. The future of the movement then depends on how its followers can demonstrate that their lifestyle is voluntary, i.e. to what extent they can persuade others that they were able to live "better" if they wanted (conspicuous non-consumption—Etzioni 1998, p. 633).[87]

That leads us to conclude that this is not more than a new form of consumer culture as the material and achievement-centered criteria of success are not rejected and the followers still consider it important to demonstrate that they could also meet these criteria if they wanted. The apparent paradox present in the relationship of voluntary simplicity and the dominant economic system is likely to be resolved by the idea above. As mentioned before, statistics made in the 1990s about the new social trend of voluntary simplicity found that 25% of the adult population are cultural creatives in the United States. However, most of this 25% are probably downshifters, who are still attached to the values of consumer society and are ready only for conspicuous non-consumption at most. This group is an excellent target group for marketing, which serves the interests of business and only has to tailor the former message to the "new needs", e.g. Buy this great, most reliable and durable, environment-friendly product![88] No wonder that the 15% decrease in GDP predicted by Elgin and Mitchell (1977) by 2000 did not happen. The real "danger" of social upheaval (and the real contribution to solving social and environmental problems) could come from the group actually putting the philosophy of voluntary simplicity into practice but the significance of this group in the United States still seems negligible.[89]

The author's experiences

As I stayed in the United States between September 1999 and January 2000, I took the opportunity to meet some of the active members of the voluntary simplicity movement and gather some information about their way of living. I had tried to find my contact persons through e-mail by using a database which includes brief descriptions of the organizers of simplicity circles in each state. These descriptions included the method adopted or to be adopted (which handbook they were using) the circumstances of the person (e.g. level of organization, geographic location, religion etc.). The people contacted in this way were certain (1) to be so

[87] Twitchell describes the tendency of voluntary simplicity to be careful with reputation as a kind of modern potlatch (Twitchell 1999, p. 11). It is characteristic for example of the Indians of north-western coast of the US, who give a lot of various presents to their guests. The guests have to accept the presents and later return the favor by possibly giving an even more valuable present, otherwise they will lose their reputation. In the race for social status some possessions can even be destroyed during the ceremonies (Besnard 1993, for details see Mauss 1966).

[88] It is possible that it is more than rhetoric and the qualities of the product have really changed. It may be proved by a survey mentioned earlier (p. 55, footnote 66), that revealed that the cultural creatives tend to be the most conscious consumers, the less inclined to do impulsive shopping, they read labels on products and test magazines before purchasing consumer durables (Ray 1997, p. 32). Of course, labels and magazines are not necessarily trustworthy all the time.

[89] On the other hand, Juliet Schor refers to data which could make one conclude that materialism in the States was decreasing in the late 1990s. The median of answers to the question "*how much annual income would you need to fulfil all your personal and family dreams?*" was $50.000 in 1987, $102.000 in 1994 and $90.000 in 1996 in the US (Schor 1998, p. 15; based on data from the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut).

committed and active as to undertake the organization of a simplicity circle and (2) not to have reached the stage of giving up Internet access in the process of simplification (or they did not even plan to do so). In the first e-mail message I introduced myself and stated that I was doing scientific research on voluntary simplicity and that is why I intended to meet them and some other members of the circle being organized.

My itinerary was to visit the south of the United States (to the south of the latitude of 38, approximately) so I only got in touch with people living in this region. I sent 13 messages altogether and I received six replies, all of them positive about the meeting. (As the other seven persons did not answer, the response rate was 46%)[90] I am going to describe my impressions of the movement below, with the restriction that they cannot be regarded as general and are of course subjective.

The first thing I noticed, there seemed to be some shyness coming through the replies, probably because of the phrase "scientific research", I used in my first message. Some of the respondents were playing down their achievements, saying that they were only in the phase of learning, saving money and frugality and did not have enough means to grow their own vegetables or have their own source of energy. During the personal interviews respondents also often complained about shortage of money, which, they thought, prevented them living a voluntarily simplified way of life (e.g. purchasing some land or a house in the country). Others were ashamed of their wealth and admitted that they even had health insurance, which is considered a luxury in the United States. 'We simply don't buy too many things and get along with what we have', they wrote. In spite of not owning a vegetable garden, all of the voluntary simplifiers interviewed considered it important to buy vegetables and fruit from local organic farmers if possible.

I managed to meet five of the six respondents in their homes and in this way to get an overall picture of how they lived.[91] Two of them lived in a two-storey flat, small by American standards, in a block of flats but three of them invited me to their huge homes, where a whole room was used for storing junk piled up in years. One of these houses was situated in the most elegant garden suburb of a city and the owner confessed: 'What you see here has nothing to do with voluntary simplicity'. But he was by far the most familiar with the subject (I could not mention a book that he had not read and he often even knew the authors personally) and admittedly he had lived without property earlier in his life. He said his present affluent lifestyle was due to the wants of his wife and children. It should be noted that I did not find any voluntarily simply households without at least one car (though usually not the newest, most fashionable make).

During the interviews I asked the respondents about their motivations. The motivations did not include worrying about the state of the environment and the world (as the most important motivation),[92] though they all were aware that this way of life could be a possible solution to that also. Most often the main motives were too much work, constant stress (health problems), lack of savings and excess junk. For my question about the strikingly high proportion of women in the movement I got the explanation that their choice may not be completely vol-

[90] In my first letter I cautiously enquired about cheap accommodation nearby, hoping that the respondent offers to put me up in his probably frugal home. The answers could then be compared to Belk's non-generosity scale and the information is more reliable as it does not come from self-assessment but based on actual behavior. Two of the six respondents offered accommodation in their home (which I accepted), while on two more occasions, when they learned that we would stay in our car with my travelling companion—an exemplary act of simplicity—the respondents insisted on staying in their home for the night. Though I do not have comparative data, I feel the American voluntary simplifiers "performed well" from this respect.

[91] The meetings took place on the following days and places (the number of interviewees are included in brackets). 2 December 1999: Washington DC (1), 11 December: Knoxville TN (4), 19 December: Amarillo TX (2), 27 December: Salt Lake City UT (1), 9 January 2000: Los Angeles CA (7), 13 January: San Antonio TX (1)

[92] cf. the subchapter on frugality on p. 57.

untary (at least at the beginning) as most of them are divorced. The analysis of the course of life of the respondents confirmed this hypotheses.[93] They usually were happy to find a philosophy for their declining financial situation and it helped them display a change considered a failure by the dominant attitude (a lower standard of living) as a success (living a voluntarily simplified way of life). Two—men—of the interviewees had already taken early retirement because of teachings of the movement and relied on their incomes from their savings. (This is the final goal of the nine steps suggested by Dominguez and Robin in their book—see, p. 60)[94]

In general, my opinion—based on my impressions—about the situation of voluntary simplicity in the United States is that the members make a lot of sincere effort to break with consumer society. However, these people still live affluently and very comfortably, compared to the average Hungarian, which is probably owing to extreme structural pressure of the American way of life. That may be the reason of the contradiction that several of them considered shortage of money as the main hindrance in reaching the completely simplified way of life (e.g. lack of savings supplying a lifelong steady income, plots of ground being too expensive in the country). On the other hand, in some cases it was an involuntarily simplified lifestyle, the decrease in their standard of living (e.g. because of disrupted families) that preceded the "voluntary" acceptance of the situation. Though the conclusions above come from a very small sample, which cannot even be regarded as representative, they do not contradict the assumptions of previous parts of this chapter about the ambiguity of voluntary simplicity in abandoning consumer society.

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[93] 10 of the 16 interviewees were women. 6 of them turned out to have divorced at least once in their lives and some of the other four may have divorced too. During my nearly 5-month long visit to the States I actually met only three (!) families where it was the first marriage for the husband and wife and they still lived together.

[94] The voluntary simplifiers I visited had varied religions. Perhaps most belonged to the Episcopal Church (3 or 4 of them), which is the American version of the Church of England. Just one interesting experience about this church: in California musicians from India played sitar music during meditation in a church while an Indian woman was dancing around the altar. The bookshop of the parish mainly sold Eastern meditation handbooks.

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Chapter 5

From the Vicious Circle of Materialism to the Person Rooted in Completeness

First, the chapter confronts arguments about consumer society and voluntary simplicity. Then, as a conclusion, a description will be provided of the vicious circle of materialism and the individual rooted in completeness, who is able to abandon the vicious circle. Finally, the plan of a research is going to be outlined, which examines the roots needed for human completeness and the extent of assimilation into consumer society in the Hungarian linguistic area.

The debate about consumer society

Arguments against the problems of consumer society were discussed in Chapter 1. These views can be evaluated according to their spiritual, cultural, material, technical, environmental and tactical nature.

The most important *philosophical* argument for consumer society (which also serves as a basis for all of the other arguments) is that man is basically materialistic. This implies that the universal aim of mankind is to create a prospering economy and that the lack of spiritualism is a sign of wealth. This argument is defendable to the same extent as social ideas supporting consumer society. Empirical research on the source of human well-being and happiness however does not support the assumption above. The significance material wealth plays in life satisfaction in general decreases substantially after fulfilling basic physical needs (e.g. food, housing) and in economically advanced countries it stabilizes at a relatively low level. As opposed to the decreasing significance of wealth, the role of non-material factors such as proper self-esteem, intimate friendship, happy marriage and mature worldview (religion) in well-being increases. Of course every society has materialist and less materialist individuals but related studies show that the more materialist ones are more likely to be discontented, that is, unhappy than the less material ones. On the one hand this can be explained by one's quickly getting used to the standard of living achieved, on the other hand, by the phenomenon of comparing oneself to others, as materialist people do not tend to view their financial situation in itself but compared to others'. Any financial situation which is good in comparison with others' is limited on the level of society (positional goods) and success of this kind can disappear at any time. This is the reason why material resources can endlessly hold the attention of material people. In this respect the ones proclaiming the fundamentally material attitude of man might as well be right, though materialism is not inevitable and does not lead to the happiness promised by consumer society. Real freedom does not lie in the opportunity to choose from a wide range of material goods but in realizing the importance of spiritual—as well as material—goods and in the ability to choose them.

From a *cultural* point of view the homogenization of the world is denied by the ones arguing for the harmlessness of consumer society in such a way that they consider consumer culture to be a narrower category than culture in general. This suggests that there is a part of Western and other cultures that is valuable in itself and free of modern consumption, economy and materialism. The part of cultures devoid of economic utilitarianism contradicts the fundamentally material attitude of mankind but it remains to be seen whether there is hope for the survival of cultures and subcultures in case of the world-wide spread of consumer culture, which is based on materialism. To put in another way, will there be people who are interested in preserving them, taking part in them and handing them down, and if yes, then does it make any sense to behave this way in a society basically of consuming nature. In this respect there is a difference between cultural curiosity (village museum) and culture effectively influencing the life of a society. Research on the spread of consumer society in Third World countries does not give reason for optimism about the survival of original cultures free of Western consumption patterns. A typical way of defending consumer society is to refer to the diversity of brand names (to prove that there are few really global brand names). From our point of view,

however, it does not matter where a company is based, which company's product people long for or whether they decorate the outside or the inside of their homes to extremes (American vs. Norwegian consumer society) as our main consideration is to examine and preserve the balance between material and non-material motivations.[95] In this respect former communist countries, aspiring to enter the earthly paradise in a communist way, did not present a real alternative to consumer society. Moreover, after the unexpected collapse of these regimes the extent of materialism in these countries turned out to be a match for that of the leading United States.

Arguments made from a *material* point of view usually emphasize the superiority of consumer society compared to previous societies. According to them the main economic power has now been transferred from a restricted elite to the average mass consumer, who exercises his/her power by making decisions at shopping centers. Most of the extra profit, which used to be the capitalist's, also remains his/her in as much as (s)he makes the most profitable decision when shopping (i.e. chooses the relatively cheapest product). According to the arguments consumer society is the most democratic society ever as our social status does not depend on our birth but observing some simple rules (e.g. not bringing up a child alone, not becoming addicted to a strong drug, not being imprisoned etc.). Though the material success of modern Western societies is indisputable, it is questionable whether it is inevitable to transform society into consumer society and in case it is so, the price of material comfort—forgetting several non-material aspects—is not higher than necessary.[96]

The role of marketing and advertisements is discussed mainly as a *technical* question in essays defending consumer society. They claim that advertisements add the necessary meaning to products emptied of meaning by mass production, provide information about available goods and that ads are not omnipotent as they are effectively controlled by consumers.[97] However, related studies seem to contradict the views denying the impact of advertisements on viewers' consciousness, as they reported higher materialism of people more exposed to advertisements. The fact that higher materialism is due to advertisements can be proved by recent longitudinal studies of children. The problem of products emptied of meaning by mass production may not only be solved by artificial added meaning (product image) but also by decentralized and smaller scale production, which would restore the value of human labor and creativity present in a product.

The damage to the *environment* caused by consumer society is denied by some of the views or regarded as a myth by others. Despite their irresponsibility these arguments—at least indirectly—acknowledge that the existence of these problems would undermine the philosophy of consumer society. Arguments referring to the failure of recycling and reuse of waste could be right but this does not entail that there are not any environmental problems, all that it implies is that superficial treatment of some of the problems (e. g. recycling) have failed. According to another argument environmental protection is a luxury afforded only by the rich, that is, only an economy based on capitalist competition can produce the wealth necessary for it. Consequently, it is quite a sensible strategy to destroy the environment only to remedy its

[95] Vilmos *Csányi*, who is a Hungarian expert of human ethology, a discipline examining human behavior, describes some of the difficulties of modern societies as a phenomenon of "overshooting". Concerning status symbols, it is without doubt that they have existed in every culture. According to Csányi a problem arises only when they are not part of the culture and not the result of work done for the community but easily purchasable (material) consumer goods. Status rooted in the natural processes of the culture is more valuable than purchasable status. It can be an achievement, a prize, respect or a function held in a community and it probably will not lose its value just because somebody has bought a bigger, nicer or newer one (Csányi 1999, p. 286).

[96] Even in material respect there is a problem that most of the population of the Earth—lacking the necessary resources—is not a beneficiary but a victim of shopping-center democracy. This, I think, does not imply that the whole world should be transformed into shopping-center democracy but that it is a deficient concept.

[97] The effective control of advertisements by customers is disproved by Pratkanis and Aronson (1992).

damage at a great expense later. It remains to be seen whether there is real solution to environmental problems in purely technical terms or—considering the finitude of the natural environment and the rules of biophysics—these solutions are only able to convert one problem into another (e.g. air pollution → using an air filter → creating hazardous waste). The same applies to technological optimism, which hopes that the impact of industrial production on the environment will decrease at the same pace as (or faster than) consumers' demand in the world increases. So far even consumers' demand in the most industrialized countries have been increasing faster than the savings, resulting from the development of technology (thus increasing the total impact on the environment), not to mention the impact of the huge population of Third World countries on the environment in case they are becoming consumer societies.

Finally, there are *tactical* arguments, that associate the criticism of consumer society with the outbreak of moral panic. According to this theory the majority of society usually panic because of a minority. This would imply, in this case, that people living according to the ideals of consumer society are outnumbered in industrial countries (including Hungary) and the scaremongers such as the Union of Large Families (Nagycsaládosok Országos Egyesülete, NOE) constitute the majority. Besides this obvious fallacy, the other assertion of the theory claiming that moral panic about consumer society are raised by commercial media expanding since the 1980s and tabloids, which have become dominant on the market of daily papers, seems to reveal astonishing ignorance if not misinformation. These papers are based solely on business praising consumption (and materialism) and ridiculing every value which is in opposition with this attitude. According to a witty assertion of the theory of moral panic every era defines itself as a period of moral decline and regards previous eras as ideal. This—ideologically biased—assertion, besides being only partly true, reinforces the status quo and intentionally discourages critical thinking.

In general, arguments against the problems of consumer society are not fortified by empirical research. These ideas, which encourage unrestrained consumption contain half-truths about the materialist nature of human desires and try to solve social problems by relying on this distorted image of humanity, in this way constantly generating new problems. Inclination to materialism, however, can actually be increased in people. The success of this process may justify efforts to increase and fulfill consumers' demand in order to give an impetus to the economy. But if materialism is a requirement of the existence of consumer society, then—according to research—it also entails increase in non-generosity, erosion of consumer ethics, neglect of spiritual needs as well as dissatisfaction with life on the whole. The disruption of families and friendships also results in the increase of materialism, while the emergence of materialism in the guise of religion (pseudo-spiritualism) destroys thousands of years of religious experience. The media are an effective channel of increasing materialism as they make people continuously focus on material resources. Globalization takes competition to a global scale, where the reference groups for each "competitor" are no longer their neighbors (who tend to belong to the same social class) but the richest people of the world. This may be good news for the "enlightened" supporters of modernization and social progress but achieving happiness through material resources is an illusion in both social (positional goods) and environmental (the finitude of natural resources) terms and can only be achieved by a narrow circle.

The debate about voluntary simplicity

The philosophy of voluntary simplicity is in direct opposition with consumer society and millions of people are attempting to live a voluntarily simplified life in Western consumer societies. The values central to voluntary simplicity—material simplicity, human scale, self-determination, ecological awareness and personal growth—make up a consistent system sup-

porting one another and their consistent application in practice enables one to oppose consumer society. However, when putting the philosophy of voluntary simplicity into practice, one may have to face difficulties, which result partly from structural, partly from theoretical problems.

Not surprisingly, some of the criticisms of voluntary simplicity are based on the ideology of consumer society because voluntary simplicity confronts the very concept of humanity and economic ideology these criticisms have not abandoned yet. For example, to regard voluntary simplifiers as dupes of Western society makes sense only until we have surpassed the prevalent values of this society. These critical remarks shed light on the difficulties voluntary simplifiers have to face, e.g. the fact that they are considered fools, which is something difficult to cope with. The same is true for remarks about the economically disruptive effect of voluntary simplicity. Even though this disruption is not always intentional, without this disruptive nature the movement would be aimless as global problems can only be solved if the aggregate effect of individual acts appears on socio-economic level. If we managed to break with the criteria of success measured in material terms and GDP, would we regard the potential fall of GDP as a problem?

The real weakness of the voluntary simplicity movement in my opinion lies in the shift to the techniques of simplification, that happened in the 1990s. The main problem is not that it reduces success to mechanically carrying out a series of ritual steps (stock-taking, drawing diagrams etc.) but that it focuses the attention of voluntary simplifiers on material resources. By the time consumers realize the hopelessness of consuming craze and the senseless waste of life energy, they have been flooded with various handbooks and supplementary materials teaching them how to spare money, where to shop, how to increase their savings and how to invest it safely and profitably—in order to get rid of financial problems sometime in the distant future.

Though managing money is an important element of simplified life, it is far from being the most important one. Success should be defined in a completely different way from today's mainstream thinking, and people trying to break away from a materialist culture should not be flooded with financial tricks and advice. Another important aspect is that this socially and environmentally conscious way of life is not necessarily more comfortable either physically or mentally. It is generally neglected by the American self-help industry, raising vain hopes in those disillusioned from extreme materialism. In this respect US statistics claiming the quarter of the total population to sympathize with voluntary simplicity have to be referred to with reservations, as some of these people might simply be trying to escape from inconveniences such as stress, overwork, paying debts and installments.[98] Though the movement is spreading, it is no more the movement of the founding fathers or an alternative to consumer society.[99]

Magdolna *Adorjánné Farkas*, a Hungarian author, considers the movement from a Hungarian point of view in a well-written book review[100] about a typical American book[101] on voluntary simplicity. "*Most Hungarian readers cannot find useful advice in the book on how to lead an environmentally conscious way of life. It rather provides an interesting description of the American standard of living, lifestyle and attitude towards life. It also describes the most widespread notion of environmental protection in the US, according to which the slightest voluntary reduction of luxury is regarded as a huge achievement. In fact this kind of envi-*

[98] Of course this feature also belongs to simplification, as the decrease in misconsumption results in increased wellbeing (see p. 32). However, the aspect of sacrifice, which also seems to be important, is not revealed.
[99] In this respect criticisms of the hypocrisy of the advocates of voluntary simplicity could be right.
[100] http://kia.hu/konyvtar/szemle/425.htm (in Hungarian)
[101] The title of the book reviewed is *Getting a Life: Real Lives Transformed by Your Money or Your Life* (Blix–Heitmiller 1999). The book *Your Money or Your Life* is one of the most important books on the techniques of voluntary simplicity discussed in detail on p. 59.

ronmental protection serves for no more than silencing people's conscience and giving a boost to their self-esteem (or maybe complacency?), which is so important in the United States. One of the charts for example specifies the monthly expenses of the authors, which totals USD 3704.25 (the equivalent of HUF 1.1 million, twelve-fold of the Hungarian minimal gross monthly income in 2001—T.K.). *Nonetheless even the average Hungarian can learn his lessons from the book: to define his/her goal of life, to watch what (s)he spends his/her money on and to check whether (s)he is aiming at goals which are really important for him/her. Our society is also becoming a consumer society. We are also flooded with advertisements trying to persuade us to buy unnecessary or unnecessarily expensive goods.*"

The complete rejection of traditions and "dogmatic thinking" probably plays an important role in the failure of voluntary simplicity. It seems as if the philosophers of voluntary simplicity were afraid of becoming isolated in a consumer society because of their views. For example, they often ridicule the saints and monks who could be held up as examples on how to overcome our extreme desires for material resources. Their praise of feminism is also contradictory. On the one hand it is useful in helping to defy the concept of masculinity being identified with high salary and consumption, and in this way it makes our culture less aggressive, less competitive, more receptive and more open, more caring and more sensitive to intimate relationships. On the other hand, the unfavorable effects of feminism—women becoming masculine and adopting a managerial attitude, disruption of families, children growing up in one-parent families and by this means the increasing materialism of society—are rarely emphasised.[102]

The New Age style syncretism of the movement is a similarly serious mistake. The core values of voluntary simplicity include personal growth, the actual realization of which, however, is not dealt thoroughly enough in the theory (and practice) of the movement. Moreover, traditional religious views are even regarded with hostility.[103] In voluntary simplicity humanism, psychoanalysis, feminism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism, Zen, meditation, yoga and Christianity are all the same, and Elgin and Mitchell even included the mind-expanding drugs in their 1977 questionnaire. No wonder that this spiritualism, selected by the followers at will, serves a lot of purposes except providing a strong worldview opposing consumer society in every aspect of life and giving real support in difficulties. There is a possibility for *pseudo-spiritualism* (reinforcing materialism) and *insufficient spiritualism* (unable to confront materialism) to emerge. A further problem is the lack—or neglect—of encouraging loyalty to one's place of residence and local culture (as opposed to the praise of mobility by consumer society)[104] as well as maintaining the relationship with the natural environment and developing appreciation of it (e.g. by excursions for townspeople).[105]

[102] On the negative aspects of this branch of feminism see Csányi (1999, pp. 159–60, 206–7). The unfavorable phenomena mentioned in the main text are of course not exclusively due to feminism, moreover, this defective type of feminism is probably only a part and symptom of a bigger problem.

[103] It is mainly revealed by surveys conducted in the 1990s on the values professed by voluntary simplifiers (e.g. Ray 1997).

[104] According to human ethology effective institutions, which are really useful for people, tend to be grassroots organizations, connecting in several ways to the culture of the region and local society. Nowadays, on the other hand, many complex institutes are created in a short time, whose members do not even know one another (Csányi 1999, p. 290). The philosophy of voluntary simplicity is based on a similar attitude but the significance of local culture and local roots are not adequately emphasized in the self-help plans of action.

[105] The attitude of emphasizing local roots could be challenged by the fact that in an earlier phase of humanity nomadic way of life was usual, while settled lifestyle became typical only later in history. However, the movement of a tribe was usually restricted to quite a small region, within which the natural environment was very similar and the speed of movement was rather slow. In contrast, today's economic system encourages frequent, fast, individual (and not group) often transcontinental mobility. Greater scale mass mobility sometimes occurred in earlier stages of human history but they happened only once in a lifetime, were exceptional so they have come to be termed as great migrations by historians.

Finally, there is a definitional problem of identifying voluntary simplifiers. Without doubt, poverty, which has a destructive and debilitating effect on the individual, cannot be regarded as an ideal state and is adequately described as involuntary simplicity. The question is, however, what can be defined as poverty with destructive effect and whether the completeness promised by voluntary simplicity is a luxury exclusive to the rich. Is it necessary for humanity to go over the process accomplished by Western countries, that is, to obtain enormous wealth only to be rejected with a bit pull faces by voluntary simplifiers? I am convinced that this Western model is not only unfavorable in social respect but also improbable to be realized on a global scale from an environmental point of view. Defining "voluntariness" by subjective satisfaction of individuals with their material situation is just as difficult as defining it by an objective scale. It is because—as critics of consumer society point out—the level of aspiration of individuals, that is, the standard of living they would be satisfied with can easily be distorted by advertisements and the media. A person may be satisfied with his/her financial situation until (s)he learns about the way of life of the rich from television. At that point his simplicity—so far voluntary—suddenly becomes involuntary as (s)he also would like to live like the richest people. In this case (s)he becomes poor (involuntarily simplified), though only his/her way of thinking has changed—often due to the Western media. It is also questionable whether the life of a voluntary simplifier in the United States can really be regarded as simple. In terms of the US average it definitely is but considering the global average it is far less obviously so.

The vicious circle of materialism

I term the process from materialism to materialism described in Chapters 1–4 the vicious circle of materialism. Its main stages are the following: (1) a life focused on the material culture of consumption, (2) realizing the social and environmental problems of this material attitude, (3) developing the philosophy and practice of voluntary simplicity and (4) sinking back into consumer culture (see diagram on p. 11). Considering the history of voluntary simplicity in the States and the present and past experience gained from attempts to break away from consumer society, it seems that the vicious circle is difficult to stop.[106] It remains to be seen whether this circular process includes any progress like an apparently circular movement, which turns out to be an upward spiral when viewed from aside.

Without doubt the market segment of voluntary simplifiers—just like any other market segments—has to be targeted with special products and messages. The basic values of voluntary simplicity may in this way find their way to producers as they have to satisfy demands in this segment too in order to make profits. Some of the values of voluntary simplicity may gain popularity throughout the society (see the example of green products, green marketing and Miller's opinion on p. 20) and they may have a benevolent effect on the relationship of production and consumption. In this respect the vicious circle of materialism looks like an upward spiral. Despite this favorable picture one should not forget that the main problem with consumer society is not the quality of products but that people concentrate too much on material resources, which makes an integral life almost impossible to achieve and creates environmentally unsustainable economic structures. From this aspect the vicious circle of materialism does not include any progress, it is no more than the realignment of market- and profit-oriented strategies. In this case it is only the level of consumption that takes the form of an upward spiral.

[106] The vicious circle of materialism can be interpreted on either an individual level or in terms of generations. Sometimes a person goes over the stages during his life, other times it happens only during several generations (e.g. it is the children or grandchildren who return to consumer society). The vicious circle can be treated as independent of human beings, the first four chapters of this study for example presented the phenomenon on a theoretical level.

The apparently endless movement of the vicious circle of materialism may be the result of people losing their social roots, that is, the extreme increase of individualism. This phenomenon—together with materialism—is usually termed by critics as a harmful consequence of the spread of consumer society. As we have seen before, inclination to selfishness is closely related to consumer society and even the voluntary simplicity movement have not been able to avoid this negative feature. In human ethological terms the size of groups in modern consumer society has been reduced to one person and society has become a network of these one-person "groups". Young people are not taught to be loyal to their groups and families, sacrifice their lives for them, believe what older people say and organize their life according to the interests of their groups but to fulfill their own dreams and plans and realize themselves, negotiate and reach an agreement with their partners and if he or she breaks it, go on their own way. The importance of loyalty, self-sacrifice, moral support and community activities has decreased in groups and families and give way to compromise, continuous self-defense and rational maneuvering (Csányi 1999, pp. 290–1). The role of human relationships—that have been destroyed—is overtaken by consumer goods.

The individual rooted in completeness

It is generally accepted that the spread of a simplified, more environmentally sustainable way of life will largely depend on whether people perceive this change as self-sacrifice. Consequently, this is more a question of change in one's scale of values than to what extent the "voluntariness" of a simplified lifestyle can be demonstrated to the outside world (conspicuous non-consumption). The external change has to be accompanied by an internal change of values. A person having this new scale of values expects appreciation of others—which is a basic human need—from those who have already abandoned the materialist attitude of consumer culture rather than from those who are still dependent on it. In this case it becomes unimportant what the consumer society thinks of the individual who has chosen a simplified lifestyle and there is no need to demonstrate the voluntary nature of simplicity to those who still believe in materialist values.

It should be emphasized here that the individual who has reached the level of self-actualization in Maslow's hierarchy, and is interested in transcendental knowledge, is qualitatively different from the one who, say, is just moving from safety needs (second level) to love and belongingness needs (third level). The person who has reached the top of the hierarchy, and in this way has become complete, is more autonomous, more able to perceive reality and discriminate between ends and means than another person who has not reached the highest levels yet. The person who has achieved completeness is free of social and cultural influences that prevent wholeness and in this way he is independent of materialist consumer society (c.f. Kilbourne 1987, pp. 222, 230–1, Csikszentmihalyi 1991, Brown–Cameron 2000, p. 28).

Lessons from the largest consumer society in the world, presented above, lead to the conclusion that the personality described above is not rootless. There is a tendency that the complete personality:

– and his smallest community (his family) demonstrates integrity

– is loyal to, knows, and appreciates his close environment around his/her home

– has a close relationship with the community of his place of residence and he takes part in local community activities

– knows and fosters the native culture of the community of his dwelling place

– has a close and stable relationship with the natural environment

– does not question thousands of years of moral principles of humanity

– has a stable religious background, not one selected at will

Therefore, the individual who has achieved completeness has social, cultural, natural and religious roots. It is advisable to maintain and nourish these roots if one is to confront the materialism of consumer society. Of course, this opposition is not a goal in itself but part of the process to completeness. If one has already—partially or completely—lost his or her roots, then it is a priority to re-create them because when having lost these roots, the individual becomes increasingly controlled by money, material resources and consumer attitude. Attempts to escape from the vicious circle of materialism in that case are more likely to fail.

Though these roots can take the role of one another they can rarely completely substitute one another. I think that substituting another root is more of an exception than a general rule. Consumer societies have most often emerged in the area of Judeo-Christian culture and they are still typical, though not exclusive, of this area. Consequently, in this geographical region the traditional religious root is a Christian one that has not been modernized economically.[107] There are examples of people with exceptional personality who have been able to abandon consumer society without religious conviction (e.g. Erich Fromm) but this approach does not seem to be suitable for the masses. A real breakthrough could more probably be the result of re-discovering the message of Christianity opposing materialism (see for example Kavanaugh 1991, Etzioni 1998, Nash 2000). In existing consumer societies the main question is in what way the proportion of complete personalities—as defined above—can reach a critical level which can transform social and economic tendencies.

The research itself

Studies about the roots characteristic of complete personalities can be carried out in any place in the world. However, when planning the first research, it is important to keep in mind that it should take place in a region where roots have not yet disappeared completely but the effects of consumer society can already be felt. The research should be conducted in two regions which are preferably different only in economic development in order to reveal a possible relationship between roots and consumer society (i.e. economic development). In this case the different extent of disappearance of roots is probably due to the difference in economic development. When planning the research it is presupposed to find more evident signs of consumer society in the economically more developed community, that has higher per capita income, than in the materially less developed community. The research itself will prove whether the presumption is true *for the communities examined*.

The examination of the integrity of roots includes the following factors. *Social root*: the number of regular conversations of the respondent in his dwelling place (except relationships at work), differentiating between conversations with relatives and not relatives. A conversation exceeding greeting and taking place at least once a week will be regarded as a regular one. Marital status is also examined here (whether the respondent is divorced or how many marriages /s/he has had). *Cultural root*: the number of folksongs the respondent knows, as they are part of the traditional culture of villages. *Natural root*: the number of plants the respondent can recognize. The number of domestic animals kept is similarly important as this is also a kind of connection with nature though not with the untouched one. *Religious root*: how often the respondents goes to church, whether (s)he believes in God or not, how well (s)he knows the ten commandments and which commandments (s)he regards as socially outdated. *Geographic mobility*: the respondent is asked whether (s)he lives in his birthplace, what is the farthest place (s)he has traveled to, whether (s)he would leave his/her birthplace (or dwelling

[107] The term "not modernized economically" is not against historic Protestant Churches but for excluding the 20th century theology of prosperity originating from the US from the category of favorable religions. This school of thought is no more than consumer hedonism in the guise of Christianity. For details on this phenomenon see Kocsis (1998).

place) for a considerable sum of money and where (s)he would travel if (s)he could go anywhere in the world free of charge.

Besides examining the integrity of roots it is important to check to what extent the respondent has become exposed to consumer society, which is deduced from the number of Western brand names (s)he knows. Local brand names are not included here as they could be more associated with local roots. It is also necessary to examine whether money takes an important part in an aspect of the life of the respondent which is not usually connected to business. For example we can ask whether (s)he would give a few years from his/her life in exchange for money (a vicious deal) or whether (s)he would leave his/her birthplace (or place of residence) for ever, for a considerable amount of money. The materialism and selfishness of the respondent is also relevant here. It is suggestive how (s)he would spend a windfall of HUF 100 million (about 333 000 dollars). This is an open-ended question and the answers are analyzed according to what portion (s)he would spend on himself/herself, on his family and on others outside the family (e.g. on charity). Whether a material or a non-material goal the respondent regards as the most important one in his/her life and how many children (s)he thinks is ideal in an average Hungarian family are also important factors. The exposure of the respondent to the media can explain some phenomena, therefore we will collect quite detailed data about it. We are to find out how important the television is in the respondent's life by asking questions, such as how much time (s)he spends watching it, what programs (s)he watches, how long (s)he has been able to watch it and whether (s)he would be able to give it up for ever (not in exchange for money).

In addition to the basic factors above, it is advisable to collect several other data about the respondent's actual financial circumstances and infrastructure, his/her job and harmful habits (e.g. alcohol, smoking). The interviews are conducted by the same interviewer, who should also focus on circumstances of the interviews which cannot be quantified but could be telling signs of the quality of the social life of the respondent. Our preliminary hypothesis is to find correlation among the dimensions above revealing that *the integrity of roots needed for human completeness is inversely proportional to the dependence on consumer society.*

The questionnaire

Considering the factors described above, the following questionnaire is used during the research. The order of the questions is based on tactical and psychological considerations, for example the questions we expect to be embarrassing (about financial situation or religion) are put more to the end of the list, while requests to list items, such as names—they are expected to be psychologically tiring—are put in the middle of the questionnaire. Before starting the interview the interviewer introduces himself and explains the aim of the research (i.e. to compare a region in Western Transdanubia and one in the Sekler Land, in Eastern Transylvania). He also informs the potential respondent about the main topics and questions of the interview, e.g. his/her habits of watching television, his/her previous and present occupation and how content (s)he is with it, what (s)he would do if (s)he suddenly came by a lot of money. (S)he is also told that the interview will probably take about 45 minutes. In case the respondent is hesitant or unwilling, the interviewer also tells him/her that (s)he does not have to answer all the questions if (s)he does not want to. During the interview the interviewer records (without asking) the sex of the respondent, the quality of the road in front of the house (on a scale ranging from 1–5) the quality of the residential building (on a scale ranging from 1–5) and the number of people present during the interview, who may have acted as influencing or disturbing factors.

Questions:
TELEVISION:
1) How many television sets are there in the household and how many of them are color?
2) When did you get the first TV set in your family?
3) Since when have you been able to receive satellite channels?
4) What programs can you receive?
5) Which of them do you regularly watch? (given in percentages)
6) How many hours a day do you watch television on average? (If it is different in winter and in summer, then give it separately)
7) What did you use to do in the evenings when you did not have a TV set?
8) Would you be able to give up watching TV for ever?
OCCUPATION
9) What was your previous occupation?
10) What is your present occupation?
11) Is there a job you have always wanted to have? (e.g. a dream job when young)
RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY
12) What would you do if you suddenly came by a considerable sum of money? (the lottery prize in Kovászna, Transylvania, Romania and HUF 100 million in Vas, Transdanubia, Hungary)
13) How many years of your life would you give in exchange for this amount?
14) Would you leave your birthplace (or dwelling place) in exchange for this money?
MOBILITY
15) What's the farthest place you have ever traveled to in your life, when and for what purpose?
16) Where would you go if you could travel anywhere in the world for a week free of charge?
RELIGIOUS ROOTS
17A) List the Ten Commandments (as many as he can remember, the order is optional but should be recorded by the interviewer)
17B) (After throwing light on the missing commandments) Which of them is socially outdated? (outdated in a sense that it does not matter if people break it and not in a sense that a lot of people break it)
18) If you had to cast an account of your life, what would be your most important achievement? (The respondent has to mention one positive thing that he has achieved. The question for young people: If you had to cast an account of your life at the end of it….?)
DETAILED LISTS
19) How many people do you regularly talk to in your place of residence, not including relatives and people at work? (He has to list the people. *Regular conversation*: at least once a week)
20) How many people are there in your household? Apart from them how many relatives do you keep in touch with regularly? (He has to list them. *Regular contact:* at least once a week, may be on the phone or by mail)
21) How many folksongs can you sing from the beginning to the end? (/S/he has to list titles or the first lines of the songs)
22) How many plants can you surely recognize? (in gardens, fields, orchards, woods, meadows, among weeds, herbs, fungi and garden flowers)
23) How many Western brand names do you know? (In Transylvania Hungarian brand names also count as Western brands.)
OTHER PERSONAL DATA
24) When and where were you born?
25) What is your highest education?

26) What is your marital status? (in detail: how many marriages, widow/er/hood)
27) How many children do you think is ideal today in a family?
28) How many children do you have?
29) Do you believe in God?
30) How do you practice your religion? (how often /s/he goes to church or prays)
31) How many cigarettes do you smoke a day?
32) How much alcohol do you drink a day (regularly)?
FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, INFRASTRUCTURE
33) Is there running water, gas and electricity in the home?
34) Is there a telephone? (maybe mobile phones? How many?)
35) How many refrigerators (including freezers), washing machines (traditional and automatic) and microwaves are there in the household?
36) How many rooms are there?
37) Is there a bathroom?
38) What kind of cars are there in the household, how many and how old?
39) What kind of and how many farm animals do you have?
40) How large arable land (hayfield, pasture, woods) does the household own?
41) What is the monthly net total income of the family? (only in Vas, Hungary)

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Chapter 6

Our Roots in Kézdiszék and in the Őrség

This descriptive chapter focuses on presenting the empirical results of the research examining the roots of the complete person. First, the examined regions are going to be described with the help of official statistical data, which shall be followed by the presentation of my own findings. I am going to compare Kézdiszék and the Őrség on the basis of group averages, and in the next step I shall proceed by splitting the sample into seven smaller groups. Finally, the analysis shall be closed by outlining the general correlation existing between roots and consumer attitude, and I shall also describe some non-quantifiable experiences gathered during the research.

Researches studying the roots which define the complete person may be carried out in any part of the world, but because of the knowledge of the language and the location I have comparative advantage in respect of the Hungarian linguistic area. It is worth conducting such researches in regions where the studied phenomenon exists, i.e. the roots have not disappeared yet, and the influence of the consumer society is already palpable. From this point of view the Hungarian linguistic area of the Carpathian Basin seems to suit my aims. I made investigation in villages where I supposed that authentic communities still existed, and as such, they were more closely linked to nature than communities in cities.

The research was conducted in two regions. I strove to select these regions so that they possibly differ from each other only from the economical point of view, thus enabling me to demonstrate a potential link between consumer society and the roots necessary for human completeness. I assume that the Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDP/capita) and the available material infrastructure are appropriate indices for determining to what extent consumer society has gained a footing in the chosen regions. In the Hungarian linguistic area economic development is directly related to geographical position, that is, going from the East to the West a more advanced economy is found, people live in better material conditions. It was therefore in line with my purpose to choose regions which reveal the most significant differences. That is why my choice fell on Székelyföld [The Sekler Land] (the region called Kézdiszék, Kovászna county) and the Western Transdanubia (the region called Őrség [meaning the Guardsmen's Land], Vas county) (Figure 6.1). The criteria I adopted when selecting the villages for the research was that they should be similar in size, level of isolation and religion, as well as the man/woman ratio and the break down according to age groups should be the same in both samples. Provided this objective is achieved successfully, the potential differences between the extent of disintegration of the roots in the two regions may be ascribed to economic factors.

To the best of my knowledge, hitherto neither in the above mentioned region, nor elsewhere has any full-scale research been made into the link existing between consumer society and the dimensions of human completeness. However, detailed researches have been published on smaller parts of my subject enriching it with some useful empirical experience.[1]

[1] Belk and Paun (1995) for example examined to what extent the identity of the major ethnic groups living in Romania (Romanian, Hungarian, Gypsy) is expressed through consumption. Balázs *Balogh* records observations about the change of attitude towards material goods in the society of Kalotaszeg, another region in Transylvania (Balogh 1998; Fülemile–Balogh 1998). The survey by Valér *Veres* (2000) studying local roots examines the traits characterizing the identity of community of Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania on the basis of the position occupied in social structure (see also Gereben 1999). The collections of surveys published by KAM—Centre for Regional and Anthropological Researches provides information about pauperization in the Sekler Land in the 1990s (Bodó–Oláh 1997). An interesting comparative study was published by Pethő (1994), who compared a village in Kalotaszeg (Transylvania), another one in the Jászság (Hungary) and a village in Austria from the point of view of the functioning of civil society. The findings of a representative survey conducted in Hungary by Mária *Kopp* et al. (1998) allow us to draw conclusions about the importance and the state of the

Description of the research fields

Today, the Sekler Land is situated in the central part of Romania, in the East of Transylvania. The Sekler have always considered themselves Hungarians, they speak Hungarian, and they live in the Eastern periphery of the Hungarian linguistic area. The memory of the one-time frontier life style is still fresh for these people, most of them are still able to tell where the border of Hungary ran at one time (before the Trianon Peace Treaty and at the time of Second World War.) The Sekler Land seems to be an excellent field of research for studying the roots of the complete person and sustainable social structure, given the fact that "*every Sekler village is a separate world in itself, with its specific traditions in production, customs and memories. The people of the village were self-sufficient, they made their clothing and furniture by themselves, all this with their own tools. The community of the Sekler village bequeathed its thousand-year-old wisdom, traditions to the descendants in the form of peculiar values. (…) Their specific symbols, traditional costumes, folksongs, legends, and ballads define the identity of the Sekler as much as their own inner administration, moral laws, unwritten law, their autonomy, their awareness of their ancient wealth and freedom*" (Vofkori 1998, pp. 85–6). The inscriptions on the old and today Sekler gates (for example 'One may find a house anywhere, but one can find his mother country only at home.') give an eloquent proof of the affection of the Sekler for their homeland: a Sekler can have only one chosen and inherited homeland, which is the Sekler Land (Vofkori 1998, p. 48).

My actual research field, the historical Kézdiszék, is situated in the East within the Sekler Land, being one of the three county seats of Háromszék [literally meaning *Three Benches*], it belongs to Kovászna county. From the East Kézdiszék is bordered directly by the Eastern lobe of the Carpathians (the so-called Háromszéki Snow-Covered Mountains), the regions lying beyond these mountains have always been inhabited by a population of Romanian majority (Moldva). The examined region lies 340 miles straight to the East, South-East of Budapest. The centre of Kézdiszék county is Kézdivásárhely (Târgu Secuiesc) with 21,306 inhabitants, surrounded by mostly Roman Catholic villages, just like the three villages I visited. Kézdioroszfalu (hereafter Oroszfalu) with its approximately 500 inhabitants was joined administratively to Kézdivásárhely in 1956, and it lies to the East of the town. Kézdiszentlélek (Sânzieni, hereafter Szentlélek), having a population of 2,862, lies 3 miles to the North of Kézdivásárhely, whereas going further 2 miles to the North we reach Kézdiszárazpatak with a population of 687 (Valea Seacă, hereafter Szárazpatak). The population of the three villages, apart from 3 or 4 persons, is entirely Hungarian (cf. Sepsiszéki 1998).

The level of isolation of the villages is not the same. Compared to the general road conditions in Transylvania, Oroszfalu lies next to a good quality road, which provides the simplest way of connection between Transylvania and Moldva (the road E577 or 11) through the Ojtoz mountain pass (Vofkori 1998, p. 39); the two other villages are not accessible from this road. Road 11B leads through Szentlélek and Szárazpatak, connecting Kézdiszék (Háromszék) to Kászon, the latter also being part of the Sekler Land (Csík—Ciuc), (though the connection is merely of local importance). A long stretch of road 11B, with solid pavement at most of its length, passes through Szentlélek, whereas it only passes by the edge of Szárazpatak. Having left Szárazpatak, the road winds for about 10 miles in an uninhabited, woody, mountainous

social root. Examining births out of wedlock might prove to be important in respect of the integrity of the family (S. Molnár–Pongrácz 1998). Miklós *Tomka*'s publications provide insight into the situation and the changes of religiousness (for an updated comparison of Transylvania and Hungary see for example Tomka 1999), an excellent summary of the subject is provided by Hegedűs (1997). Suicide may be a telling sign of the perishing of the roots, the backgrounds of which are presented in Hungarian sample by Kopp and Szedmák (1997), while Moksony (1995) examines expressly the correlation between suicides committed in rural Hungary and the advancement of modernizations. A series of research going on from 1977 has particular importance for my subject as it examines the value preferences and the changes coming about in Hungary with the help of Milton *Rokeach*'s methodology (1973) (Füstös–Szakolczai 1999).

region, in the valley of the Kászon creek, and at the time of the research it was extremely neglected and pot-holed with very little road traffic on it. In this respect Szárazpatak can be considered an almost dead-end village, as there are not any roads leading beyond the village. Branching off the road 11B, the road 114 in Szentlélek leading to Kézdiszentkereszt has solid pavement, but apart from this road the three villages have bad quality dirt roads in the streets, with the exception of the main roads of Oroszfalu and Szentlélek. These two villages are on the way of the railway line between Sepsiszentgyörgy and Bereck [Sfântu Gheorghe—Brețcu], which is only a side line, and since 1990 it has become so neglected that the trains can run at a maximum speed of 20 miles/hour (Sepsiszéki 1998, p. 27).

The other research field is located in the Western Transdanubia, 125 miles to the West, South-west of Budapest, not even 20 miles from the farthest point to the West of the country. It is 450 miles as the crow flies from the Sekler Land research area. The villages where the research was conducted lie in the immediate vicinity to the North of the actual Őrség (the inner Őrség). This area belongs to the region of the Sub-Alps, it forms an organic part of the Vas-Zala hills, though from a geographical point of view it does not really stand out from its surroundings. Its specific character can be grasped rather in its ethnographical and cultural aspects. According to the tradition the Őrség [The Guardsmen's Land] is a thousand-year-old conglomeration of settlements, and it is the only region in the country where the Hungarians have not moved since they settled down. The historical mission of the people of the Őrség (they protected themselves at their own expense against the intruding enemies), their status (they obtained privileges and became free people in exchange for this function), and the fact that they have lived close to the border makes them so similar to the Sekler that some even think that the people in the Őrség have Sekler origins. According to Károly *Csiszár* the people in the Őrség "*love their land, they entertain a stubborn affection for it, despite the fact that they work in harsh conditions*" (Csiszár 1999, p. 3).

The distance between Viszák belonging to the inner Őrség (cf. Csiszár 1999, p. 18) and Ivánc, which I included in the research, is not more than 4 miles. As my objective was to choose areas in the Sekler Land and in the Őrség which resemble from the point of the religion of their people, I was obliged to leave out the inner Őrség, so my choice fell on the villages in its immediate vicinity. Whereas the inhabitants of the inner Őrség are Reformed, the people of the villages in the environs are of Roman Catholic faith, similarly to Kézdiszék. Ivánc and Felsőmarác, both lying to the South of the Rába river, by the right hand side bank of it, are the gates of the Őrség, but they are more attached to Csákánydoroszló, which is situated to the North of the Rába river, by the left bank, and as such, it is not considered being part of the Őrség. Nevertheless, I am going to present the results and the experience I gained there as being typical of the whole Őrség, given the fact that Ivánc and Felsőmarác, part of the outer Őrség, belong to the Őrség Nature Reserve. Moreover, according to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office these two villages are part of the Őriszentpéter sub-region (Őriszentpéter is the centre of the Őrség). The third village, Csákánydoroszló, belongs to the Körmend sub-region (KSH 2000a).

The closest town to the area is Körmend, lying 4 miles to the North-East of Csákánydoroszló, by the main road 8. The Hungarian-Austrian border stretches not a mile to the North of Csákánydoroszló, though the nearest frontier crossing is situated 10 miles to the West of the town, at Rábafüzes. Approximately at the same distance, to the South-West lies Bajánsenye, which is a frontier crossing to Slovenia. The busy E66 (main road 8) touches only the Northern part of Csákánydoroszló, a village with a population of 1770, though the entire village lies to the South of the main road. Ivánc, with a population of 717, can be reached on the road 8, turning off the road at Csákánydoroszló and going 2.5 miles further. This road leads on into the heart of the Őrség. Felsőmarác with 334 inhabitants is situated a mile to the East of Ivánc, and one can reach the village after turning off the above mentioned road to Ivánc. There are

two exits to Felsőmarác: one is to the North, the other is to the South of Ivánc, thus the road passing through the village forms a loop on the road leading from Csákánydoroszló through Ivánc to the Őrség. Every street in all the three villages are paved, and apart from a few exceptions the quality of the pavement was excellent at the time of the research. The Szombathely–Körmend–Szentgotthárd–Austria railway line reaches the Northern limit of Csákánydoroszló. This means that in Csákánydoroszló the transit traffic is quite heavy, it is much less in Ivánc, whereas in Felsőmarác practically only the local inhabitants travel around.

It is of course appropriate to consider the two regions also from the larger perspective of the Carpathian Basin. We can read the following in the textbook by Béla *Bulla* and Tibor *Mendöl* published in 1947, which by now has become a classic: "*The direct consequence of the Eastern position of* [Transylvania] *is that the cultural waves reached it usually somewhat later, the result of which was that the memories of more ancient conditions were and have been preserved for a longer time. The people living in the Carpathian Basin, who have been oriented rather to the West and nurtured cultural relation with the West, have been able to impart more of the recent technical equipment to the very regions which link them to the West, that is, the Transdanubia, the region of the Little Plain, and Western Upper Hungary. Thanks to its more peaceful past, the invisible traditions and the visible memories of material culture abound in Transylvania, unlike in the Hungarian Great Plain* [which mostly corresponds to the Eastern part of today Hungary—T.K.]. *From an economical and technical perspective the relation is just reversed between these two region: development is backward in Transylvania compared to even that of the Hungarian Great Plain.*" (Bulla–Mendöl 1999, p. 291)

The research fields as represented in the official statistics

The available and comparable official statistical data of the two regions provide a numerical proof of the differences in the level of economic development. Table 6.1 presents some of the most important indices of economy, health and infrastructure in Romania and Hungary in 1999, the countries comprising the two regions. In order to make the analysis of the data easier, as a base of comparison, I also included the relevant indices of the United States of America, the largest consumer society in the world.

Significant differences can be observed between the three countries in respect of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Calculated at exchange rate, the index in Hungary is three times as high as in Romania, though if we compare Hungary to the USA, the Romania's 'backwardness' is even more important. The relative difference between Hungary and Romania shrinks, if we calculate the GDP per head at purchasing power parity, but it increases the absolute difference (the difference of slightly more than three thousand dollars soars to almost five thousand dollars). The monthly average net earnings of employees provide valuable information about the revenues. According to the official data of Romania and Hungary, in 2000 employees in Romania earned a net salary equivalent of 136 USD per month, whereas in Hungary the same index is 201 USD, almost 50% higher.[2]

Regarding life expectancy, another index of the quality of the life, Hungary has a slight advantage over Romania, which is especially striking in the case of women. But compared to the United States, even Hungary has got a considerable lag. Infant mortality in Romania is outstandingly high in comparison with the Hungarian rate, the latter being close to the value in the US. The value of daily nutritive substance consumption per head is the lowest again in

[2] The net monthly average salary in Romania was nationally 2,911,570 lei in 2000 (CNS 2001). In Hungary the same index was 55,785 HUF (KSH 2001b). The research was conducted in the second quarter of 2000. The exchange rates in that period were as follows: 1 USD 21,360 lei (KSH 2001b, p. 52), and 1 USD 277.35 HUF (MNB—The National Bank of Hungary 2001, p. 107).

Romania, and it is the highest in the United States,[3] but in respect of the number of people per one doctor Hungary heads the list, followed by the USA.

Table 6.1
The Most Important Economic, Health and Infrastructure Indices
of Romania, Hungary and the United States of America, 1999

Index	Romania	Hungary	USA
GDP/capita (at USD exchange rate)	1,507	4,787	33,278
GDP/capita (USD, at purchasing power parity)	5,955	10,870	33,861
Men's life expectancy (year)	66.1	66.3	73.6
Women's life expectancy (year)	73.1	75.1	79.4
Infant mortality (number of deaths under 1 year per thousand live-born)	18.6	8.4	6.3
Daily nutritive substance consumption per capita (kcal)	2,943*	3,402*	3,642*
Number of inhabitants per one doctor (person)	543‡	252‡	370†
National road per thousand km² (miles)	192	203	431‡
Number of cars per thousand inhabitants (piece)	133	225	488
Telephone main line per thousand inhabitants (piece)	162‡	336‡	661‡
Mobile telephone per thousand inhabitants (piece)	29‡	105‡	256‡
Television set per thousand inhabitants (piece)	233†	435†	806†
Computer with Internet access per ten thousand inhabitants (piece)	9	103	1,509

Source: based on KSH—Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2001a)

* in 1996
† in 1997
‡ in 1998

The indices of the density of the public road system do not provide us information about the quality of the road, otherwise the advantage of Hungary over Romania would be probably even more obvious. The number of welfare goods (car, telephone, cellular mobile phone, television) compared to the size of the population varies more or less according to the same rates: Hungary has twice as many of these goods as Romania, whereas the number of welfare goods in the United States is the double of what people possess in Hungary. The only exception is the number of mobile phone per one thousand: in 1998 the gap between Romania and Hungary was even more important. Another striking index is the number of cars people possess in the United States: almost every second person has this means of transport with massive environmental impact, whereas the ratio in Romania is one car per every seven or eight persons, and I have not even taken into consideration the number of miles covered a year. As for the

[3] For the sake of an objective evaluation the daily nutritive substance consumption per capita has to be conferred with the daily energy-needs of a healthy person. The energy-needs of an adult man having a comfortable life style and those of women are about 2,388 Kcal (10 MJ), those having a moderately active life style need 2,700 kcal (11,3 MJ), while those engaged in regular physical activity should take in 3,105 kcal (13 MJ). When considering the average value relevant to the total population it has to be taken into account that between 45–64 years 7.5% by each decade, after 65 years 10% by each decade has to be deducted from the above data (Kertai 1999, p. 155). In the light of the above the average value of the nutritive consumption in Romania can be considered sufficient, whereas the Hungarian and American consumption is excessive from a quantitative point of view.

latest means of communication, computers with Internet access, the differences are of the order of one hundred: the United States is the best supplied with this service (the available Internet access is better in kind than the car supply in Romania), in Romania there are only 9 such computers per ten thousand inhabitants. Regarding these so called 'welfare' indices, Romania and Hungary rank somewhere in the middle of the list of the developed and developing (third world) countries. But the difference in material welfare is also palpable between Hungary and Romania, that-is-to-say, Hungary is obviously ahead of Romania on its way to consumer society.

The study has been narrowed down on two regions: Kovászna county and Vas county.[4] Kovászna county, as part of Transylvania, belongs to the relatively developed regions of Romania, although it is far from being the most developed one (OECD 1998); as opposed to this, at the end of the 1990s Vas county was an outstandingly developed region of Hungary. On the basis of the GDP per capita for example, excluding Budapest, Vas county was the second or the third most developed county in Hungary (KSH 2000a). In Table 6.2 I presented some of the easily available and comparable indices of the two counties.

Table 6.2
Some of the Major Indices of Kovászna County (Romania), and Vas County (Hungary), 1999

Index	Kovászna County	Vas County
Number of hospital beds per ten thousand inhabitants	100	75
Water pipes per thousand persons (miles)	0.9	4.4
Water pipes per ten km² (miles)	0.6	3.5
Sewer per thousand persons (miles)	0.4	1.6
Sewer per ten km² (miles)	0.3	1.3
National road per thousand km² (asphalt or bitumen, miles)	39	279
Number of inhabitants per hundred dwellings (persons)	276	258
Main telephone lines (number of telephone subscribers in Kovászna) per thousand inhabitants (piece)	143	340
Number of known crimes cases in which prosecution was started per ten thousand inhabitants (piece)	213	381

Source: CNS (2000), KSH (2000a)

The advantage of Vas county over Kovászna county regarding the level of economy and infrastructure is obvious, with the exception of the number of hospital beds per ten thousand inhabitants. But this index, similarly to other indices, gives only quantitative information, not allowing to grasp the undoubtedly much higher quality of health care in Vas county. I presented the indices regarding water pipes and sewers adjusted according to both the number of the population, and the surface of the area, but in all of the cases Vas county enjoys a four or five times more advantageous situation. In case of paved public roads the difference is sevenfold, but it should not be forgotten that even the quality of the paved roads in Vas county is much better than in Kovászna county. The number of telephone lines is the double in Vas county compared to Kovászna county, and as the data from Kovászna refer to telephone sub-

[4] I would like to draw the attention to the fact that towns are also included among the county data, although my research is focused on villages. By the way, all the studied villages are situated in the area of some town (Kézdivásárhely and Körmend), moreover, Oroszfalu administratively is a suburb.

scribers, it is possible that several subscribers share one main line. There is not any important quantitative difference between the two counties as far as the housing situation is concerned, though these data do not enable us to draw conclusions about quality of the houses. The number of known crime cases in which prosecution was engaged is almost 80% higher in Vas county than the corresponding figure in Kovászna. But this factor no way contributes to increase well-being, on the contrary, it should be rather considered as the price of being more developed and wealthy, a topic which shall be discussed later.

When comparing the indices of the vital statistics of the population in the two regions between 1997 and 1999 (Table 6.3) the emerging conclusion might strike us as surprising. Despite of greater wealth and material welfare Vas county appears as an area unable to reproduce itself, as opposed to Kovászna county where, at least on a county level, the number of deaths are counterbalanced by the number of live-births.[5] This may also be interpreted so that the richer the region is, the weaker the zest for life becomes, or at least the zest for begetting children. Concerning the integrity of the families we can draw conclusion from the number of marriages and divorces. Since these data refer to a certain period, it is not possible to determine the figure showing at a given time the percentage of the people who have had a divorce in their life.

Table 6.3
The Most Important Rates of Vital Statistics
in Kovászna County (Romania) and in Vas County (Hungary), 1997–1999
(per thousand inhabitants)

County	Live-birth	Death	Natural Increase	Marriage	Divorce
Kovászna	11.2	11.2	0	5.6	1.7
Vas	8.7	14.1	–5.4	4.4	1.9

Source: based on CNS (2000) and KSH (2000b) by averaging data of three years

Data collection

The data collection took place between 6–22 April, 2000 in Kézdiszék (Kovászna county) and between 4–15 June, 2000 in the Őrség (in Vas county) using my own financial resources. In both places I chose three neighboring villages which mainly differ from each other in size. In each region I defined the number of the respondents in the sample in proportion with the population of the village, that is, in larger villages I interviewed more people, choosing them so that (1) the samples from the two regions, the Sekler Land and the Őrség, contain altogether the same number of subjects (2) the sample collected in the smallest village should contain at least 15 people. I established the methodology of data collection on the basis of the size of the sample I needed in a specific village, namely, I determined which houses I had to knock at in every street. Apart from this, I also applied the principle of sampling according to quotas, which means that in each region I defined the ideal proportion of women and men in 50–50%, and I tried to obtain a 25–25% distribution of the respondents into age groups by regions (establishing age groups of 18–30, 31–45, 46–60, over 61—see Table 6.4). The reason for this was that the population of these villages has grown old, but the research required from us to take an equal interest in the situation of all the age groups.

[5] The table does not contain the migration balance, because of this reason for example the zero natural increase rate of Kovászna county do not enable us to form the conclusion that the total population of the county is constant.

Table 6.4
The Sample Characterized by Data of Dwelling, Total Population, Gender and Age (person)

Village	*Population*	*Respondent*	*Respondent (%)*	*Man*	*Woman*	*18–30*	*31–45*	*46–60*	*61+*
Kézdioroszfalu	500	16	3.2	8	8	5	3	3	5
Kézdiszárazpatak	687	22	3.2	10	12	4	7	4	7
Kézdiszentlélek	2,862	28	1.0	13	15	7	6	8	7
ΣKÉZDISZÉK	4,049	66	1.6	31	35	16	16	15	19
Felsőmarác	334	16	4.8	6	10	4	4	3	5
Iváncc	717	22	3.1	12	10	4	5	6	7
Csákánydoroszló	1,770	28	1.6	15	13	8	7	8	5
ΣŐRSÉG	2,821	66	2.3	33	33	16	16	17	17
TOTAL	6,870	132	1.9	64	68	32	32	32	36

The sampling according to quotas influenced the work only on the last two or three days, as in the households I tried to find respondents who belonged to the under-represented genders and age groups.

The next part will be dedicated to presenting the findings. First, the results will be presented according to the most obvious breakdown of the whole sample. Both in the case of the Kézdiszék and the Őrség samples the variable average (as well as the standard error and extreme values) are given separately for comparison. In the first place, I am going to evaluate the indices characteristic of the living conditions of the respondents with the help of this methodology, then I shall move on to present my findings about the roots of the complete person and I am also going to try to determine to what extent (s)he is embedded into consumer society. In a following step, the data are going to be processed with multivariable statistical methods, that-is-to-say, within the whole sample I am going to differentiate seven subgroups via cluster analysis, and the characteristic traits of each should be presented in detail. The results of the cluster analysis are going to be illustrated in a diagram obtained by multidimensional scaling. Finally, the whole sample is going to be treated as one unit, and I am going to present and interpret the two diagrams established via multidimensional scaling. These diagrams will allow us to grasp the relationship between material welfare and the roots of the complete person.

The living conditions of the respondents in Kézdiszék and in the Őrség

The findings about the living conditions coincide with the official statistical data. It is a fact that the inhabitants of the Őrség living in Western Hungary have a considerably better and more comfortable life than those from Kézdiszék, lying in the Eastern periphery of the more or less continuous Hungarian linguistic area. For the relevant data see Table 1 in Appendix. It is however important to note that my conclusions were formed on the basis of the data of the households I included into the sample, therefore, their validity is limited.

Administering the questionnaire also provided a good occasion to assess, though in a subjective way, the quality of the road in front of the house[6] of the respondent and the state of the building itself[7], which I represented on a five-point scale. Kézdiszék was at a marked disadvantage in both assessments compared to the Őrség: its road quality disadvantage being

[6] 1 = not passable by automobile, 2 = bad quality dirt road, 3 = good quality dirt road, 4 = solid pavement with flaws, 5 = excellent quality, solid pavement

[7] 1 = decrepit building, 2 = building badly needing renovation, 3 = medium quality building, 4 = building in good state, with smaller flaws, 5 = new, finished building.

almost one and a half points, whereas that of housing quality nearing one point. Regarding the size of the households, the number of the rooms, the number of people in one room the two samples were basically identical. However, in respect of other services enhancing comfort and household conveniences the assessment revealed considerable differences to the detriment of Kézdiszék, where only the electricity supply and the number of washing machines reach the level of the Őrség. Not more than 18% of the households in Kézdiszék have water pipe installed, while in the Őrség all the households are provided with this service. The average number of bathrooms in Kézdiszék is 0.62 (in most of which the water is taken from the outside well and is heated on a woodburning stove); as opposed to this, in the Őrség there are more than one bathrooms on average in every household. Apart from a few households in Oroszfalu the gas is not piped into the houses (3% supplies), whereas thanks to the large-scale developments which have been undertaken recently in order to explore natural gas reserves 68% of the households in the Őrség had this service at the time of the research, and this rate has probably improved since then. The landline telephone supply is almost full (94%) in the Őrség, in Kézdiszék only 27% of the households reported the availability of this service.[8] This disadvantage might be overcome with the help of mobile phones, nevertheless, in the Őrség there are twice as many cellular phones in the households as in Kézdiszék (0.3 units compared to 0.14 units).

Despite of the fact that the population of Kézdiszék is far more engaged in livestock farming than those living in the Őrség, in respect of the number of fridges (including deep freezers, too) the disadvantage of Kézdiszék is huge: there are 1.3 fridges in every household (there were not any in 6 of them!) compared to 2.4 in the Őrség. In Kézdiszék the microwave oven is a curiosity for the time being, only four of the interviewed households possessed this equipment (6%), while in the Őrség it is becoming a common kitchen appliance, being used in two thirds of the households (65%). The level of motorization is better in the Őrség if we take as base of comparison the number of cars in one household, although, taking into consideration whether the car is an Eastern (former socialist) or a Western make, we can reach even more nuanced considerations, let alone if we also include the age of the cars (reducing a 100% value standing for a brand new car to zero within a twenty-year period). On the basis of the index we obtained this way it can be stated that the households in Kézdiszék tend to rely on Eastern cars, whereas in the Őrség the Western makes are dominant, the latter region being ahead of the former one even in this respect. The fact that an increasing number of Western European citizens (especially Austrians) buy week-end houses in the Őrség region is an undeniable proof of the attractiveness and the euro-conformity of these villages. Another telling fact is that the number of years spent learning was nearly two years higher in the case of the respondents from the Őrség.

The number of television sets in one household is more than one in both places: it is 1.2 in Kézdiszék, and 1.9 in the Őrség. Further differences emerge if we take into consideration the quality of the TV sets: nearly one third of the TV sets functioning in Kézdiszék is black-and-white (29%), while in the Őrség only every seventh is like that (14%). In Kézdiszék in 11 households there was only a black-and-white TV set (17%), in the Őrség I found only two such households (3%). This difference on technical level is not a recent one: if we examine since when the family has had a television according to those who remember the time when the first TV set was bought in the household, we will find that Kézdiszék has a nine-year time-lag. (The average TV set appeared in Kézdiszék in 1977, and in 1968 in the Őrség.)

Unlike the Őrség, with the sole exception of some parts of Csákánydoroszló, both Oroszfalu and Szentlélek are connected to the local cable television network (having its center in Kézdivásárhely), it is therefore fairly understandable why the number of people with access

[8] At the time of the research the only telephone in Szárazpatak was a public one, out of order most of the times. Since then even in this village the telephone has been installed in households able to pay for the service.

to cable television programs in the Kézdiszék households is nearly three times as high as the number assessed in the Őrség. In most parts of Transylvania the Hungarian language television programs of terrestrial broadcast are not available, that is the reason why satellite receivers became so widespread in the 1990s, with the help of which the inhabitants could receive the programs of the Duna Television (the Danube Channel) and channel 2 of the Hungarian public service television (m2).[9] Although the satellite television is almost a basic need in the life of those living in Kézdiszék, the number of households having their own satellite receiver does not exceed the number in the Őrség, and this in spite of the fact that the programs of the Hungarian channels of terrestrial broadcast are easily available in the latter region. The average range of programs (16-17 different channels) is basically the same in both of the regions from a quantitative point of view, with the difference that in the Őrség several Hungarian language channels are received (Hungarian public service channel 'm1', commercial TV2 and the commercial RTL Klub) which are not available in the Sekler Land.[10]

The roots of the respondents, their embeddedness into consumer society, and television viewing habits in Kézdiszék and in the Őrség

What relationship manifests itself between the roots and the attitude towards material goods of the relatively poor people of Kézdiszék and the inhabitants of the Őrség living in comparatively comfortable conditions and welfare? Once again, I would like to underline that when defining the samples of the research my objective was to establish two samples alike in all respect (such as isolation, age, religion etc.) with the exception of economic differences, since this way other eventual dissimilarities may account the different economic level. For concrete figures see Table 2 in Appendix.

Social roots. When assessing personal contacts surpassing a simple greeting, which occur at least once a week and, in respect of the number of the relatives there is no significant difference between the people in Kézdiszék and those in the Őrség, though people from the Őrség reported more relations with people who are not their relatives. (7.5 persons compared to 5.3 persons on average). When interpreting these figures it has to be noted that I did not accept any figure on the respondent's say so, he or she had to give the first name of the relatives and the friends. In Kézdiszék I did not always succeed in obtaining names, and in some cases in the Őrség, too I was told to '*mark at least twenty*.' (This was what I did in fact, but afterwards I eliminated these unreliable figures.) As a consequence of this, the relevant figure is missing precisely in the case of those who cultivate a large number of relationships. If I do not leave out these data, we find that in Kézdiszék relationships that people have with their relatives are somewhat more extensive than in the Őrség (7.5 persons compared to 6.1 persons), and there is not a significant difference between the two regions in respect of relationships with other people than relatives (7.5 persons in Kézdiszék and 8 persons in the Őrség). By the way, I found 7 respondents in both places who were not in a regular contact with any of their relatives not belonging to their household, whereas 7 persons from Kézdiszék and 14 persons from the Őrség did not have any regular contact with people apart from their relatives. (Two respondents in Kézdiszék and three in the Őrség do not maintain relations on a regular basis with anybody, be it or not a relative.) Whether a respondent got divorced in

[9] Even the Hungarian ATV, replacing TV3, another Hungarian language channel which had ceased earlier, could be received by cable television. (Both were commercial channels.) In the larger network of Oroszfalu (22 channels) Minimax, the Hungarian language cartoon channel could be received at the time of the research. (A few weeks after the research ended this network with a larger offer was established in Szentlélek to replace the previous 9-channel system.

[10] The local cable channel in Kézdivásárhely broadcast regularly some of the most popular programs of the commercial TV2, such as for example 'Dáridó' [Revelry], from videocassette with a delay of a couple of months.

his/her life or not provided a basis for drawing conclusions about the integrity of one's family. In Kézdiszék I found that only one respondent was divorced, whereas in the Őrség I found ten such people.

Cultural roots. The superiority of Kézdiszék is obvious as for the number of the folksongs the respondents claimed to know from the beginning to the end, of which they were able to tell the title or the first line. The respondents from Kézdiszék managed to enumerate 6.2 folksongs on average, whereas this number was 3.4 in the case of the respondents from the Őrség.[11] 23 people from the Kézdiszék sample and 31 respondents in the Őrség were not able to mention one single folksong, or they said, they could only recall songs when they were drunken in a company.

Natural roots. The number of plants that the respondents were able to name was the criterion I chose to form conclusions about the relationship that respondents had with nature. Unfortunately, the results I obtained in Kézdiszék and in the Őrség are not comparable, given the fact that I gave more help to the respondents from the Őrség. In practice this meant that in the Őrség I asked the respondents to make an imaginary trip to the various places where plants occur, that is, in the garden, in the plough-lands, in the woods, in the fields, observing each mushroom, garden flower etc. In Kézdiszék I resorted to some of the aids in a few occasions. A more reliable indicator of one's attachment to nature and one's implication into the cycle of nature is how one relates to agriculture and livestock farming. The inhabitants of Kézdiszék possess more than 2.8 times more land than the people from the Őrség. In Kézdiszék people cultivate their lands by themselves, either as a main occupation or as a part-time job, and the products deriving from this activity represent an important means of livelihood for the households in this region.

Concerning animal farming the following data have been collected. The people in Kézdiszék keep one cow and one goat on average, there are 3.7 ewes and 0.4 goose and horse in each household. It should not been forgotten that in Transylvania horses are still often used as draught horses. In the villages of the Őrség the breeding of the above animals has practically ceased. However, the number of poultry is about the same in both regions (17–18 pieces per household), and pig breeding is also quite widespread (in Kézdiszék 2, in the Őrség 1.6 pigs in each household on average). Among important domestic animals, it is in respect of rabbit breeding that the Őrség outperforms Kézdiszék: in the Őrség there are 8.3 rabbits in each household on average, whereas this activity is not characteristic in Kézdiszék. The number of households where there were not any animals kept was 5 in Kézdiszék (8%) and 16 in the Őrség (24%). On the basis of all these it is fairly obvious that the inhabitants of the villages in Kézdiszék leading a more traditional farming life are closer to the cycle of nature than the inhabitants of the Őrség.[12]

Religious roots. I represented the frequency of religious service attendance in a six-point scale.[13] 33 people in Kézdiszék (50%) never go to church or only at feasts while in the Őrség I found 45 such persons (68%). I even tried to assess to frequency of praying, supposing that there are people who try to cultivate a relationship with God outside the church (although,

[11] The difference is however not significant if I examine the knowledge of folksongs classified into four categories (does not know any—knows very few—knows some—knows many). The Őrség average was somewhat improved by the fact that in Felsőmarác there were even three women included in the sample who were the member of the newly organized folksong circle and they were learning folk songs from Vas county at that time. Without these women the Őrség average in respect of the knowledge of folk songs would have been only 2.9 folk songs.

[12] Also the substantial difference between the amount of viewing television in summer and in winter in the case of the Kézdiszék people could be ascribed to this fact, whereas in the Őrség no such difference was perceived. (See later.)

[13] 0 = never goes to church, 1 = goes to church only on feast days/funerals/baptism, 2=goes to church once in a month, 3=goes to church twice a month, 4=goes to church three times a month, 5=goes to church every Sunday.

theoretically all the villages included in the survey were Catholic.) For this assessment I established a four-point scale.[14] 30 people in Kézdiszék (45%) never pray or at most on an irregular basis, in the Őrség, however, I found 53 such persons (80%). I also attempted to assess the respondents' faith in God, picking out the uncertain, those who said they 'perhaps' believed in God. In Kézdiszék I found altogether 3 uncertain people (5%), and nobody said they did not believe in God. In the Őrség 18 persons said they were uncertain (27%), and 9 respondents (14%) claimed that they did not believe in God at all. As for the listing of the Ten Commandments[15] the inhabitants of Kézdiszék outdid again those in the Őrség, the former managed to list 5.2 commandments, whereas the latter remembered only 3.6. Finally, the inquiry about how many of the commandments have become outdated from a social point of view according to the respondents (i.e. breaking the commandment is not a sin any more) was concluded by the result that in Kézdiszék on average one such commandment was selected, while for the people in the Őrség two seemed outdated.[16] 29 respondents in Kézdiszék (44%) claimed that the complete Ten Commandments are valid on a social level even today, whereas in the Őrség I found 13 persons sharing this opinion (20%).[17] Given the above facts, we have the right to claim that the religious roots of the inhabitants in Kézdiszék are considerably stronger than those of the respondents from the Őrség.

The condition of being soil-bound (or geographical mobility). In Kézdiszék I found four respondents (6%) who were not born in his/her permanent residence, in the Őrség there were eleven of them (17%). Most of these persons left their native land because of starting a family.[18] I created a rather occasional index for assessing the actual mobility characterizing one's life: how far the respondent has traveled in his/her life. (The respondent was asked to name the farthest destination /s/he reached, which I converted later into miles.) I also noted the date and the purpose of the journey, but it did not allow me to draw conclusions about the frequency of smaller journeys. In any case, the biggest journeys both the respondents from the Őrség and Kézdiszék have undertake in their lives were about the same distance (on average 440 miles). The average distance of an imaginary, free-of-charge journey (this question conjures up already the world of desires) is 560 miles longer in the case of the respondents from the Őrség. 8 persons (12%) from the Kézdiszék sample would not leave Romania even if they could come by such a generous offer, and 27 other respondents (41%) would travel to Hungary. (Altogether 53% of the respondents would stay within the Hungarian linguistic area.) Among the respondents from the Őrség only 14 people would stay in the Hungarian linguistic area (21%). The offer was about a one-week journey, but I also put the question whether the respondent would leave his/her mother land for good in exchange for a larger amount of

[14] 0=never prays, 1=prays sometimes, irregularly, 2=prays in the morning or in the evening, 3=prays in the morning and in the evening.

[15] The Ten Commandments of God according to the Roman Catholic teaching: (1) I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me. (2) You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. (3) Remember to keep holy the Lord's day. (4) Honour your father and your mother (5) You shall not kill. (6) You shall not commit adultery. (7) You shall not steal. (8) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. (9) You shall not covet your neighbour's wife. (10) You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

[16] If we consider only the Commandments on the second Table of the Law (Commandments 4–10), which dispose of social coexistence and therefore can be observed without any particular faith in God, then from these seven Commandments according to the Kézdiszék people 0.7 is outdated, whereas according to the Őrség people 1 is so.

[17] It is important that we should not believe that those adhering to the complete Ten Commandments would never break the commandments, but we should regard them as people who can tell the good from the bad concerning certain acts.

[18] It is important that from a local point of view we should not regard people who left their mother land as rootless, as they have all the possibility to 'take roots' in their new dwelling place (and they may also cultivate the roots that bound them to the mother land.) Throughout this study, nevertheless, we used the expression 'mother land', which emphasizes better one's attachment to a place, rather than the neutral 'dwelling'.

money[19] (/s/he may come back rarely to see the acquaintances). Only 20% of the people from Kézdiszék would be inclined to accept this offer, whereas 55% of the respondent in the Őrség answered yes to the question.

The embeddedness into consumer society. I tried to quantify this dimension with the help of the number of Western brand names the respondents managed to list. The answer is supposed to show to what extent the messages of consumer society reached the respondents and how much these messages 'have dug themselves in' in the consciousness of the respondents. By way of help I named some groups of products in both places (for example entertainment electronics, foods, cars, beauty products etc.) In Kézdiszék I accepted Hungarian brand names as they are considered Western brands, moreover, from younger people I also accepted names of Western bands and singers. Despite making the answers easier the backwardness of Kézdiszék compared to the Őrség is huge: respondents from Kézdiszék managed to name 9 brand names on average compared to 26 in the Őrség. Thirteen respondents in Kézdiszék were not able to name even one brand name, and six other could mention only one (altogether 29%), as opposed to this, in the Őrség I came across only four people who could name only one brand name (6%).

Attitude towards material goods. The question presented at the dimension of being soil-bound, that is, whether one is inclined to leave one's mother land for money, may also be included here. Another important question in this respect is whether the respondent is willing to sacrifice a few years from his/her life for a large amount of money (the vicious deal).[20] The answers given to this question do not differ considerably, in fact, in both regions about one fifth of the respondents would be ready to strike such a deal, and the proportion of those who consider that the meaning of life is connected to some material aim[21] does not differ much either (22% in Kézdiszék and 32% in the Őrség). The trade-off between exchanging material difficulties arising from bringing up children for the vaster possibilities which open up for individuals without children (or having fewer children) can be interpreted as an important index of one's inclination to materialism, that is why the number of children that the respondent considers ideal in a typical Hungarian family provides some important information. People in Kézdiszék regard that 2.8 children are ideal in a family, whereas the respondents from the Őrség living in much better material conditions think that the ideal number is only 2.2.

The answers given to the open question prying into the uses the respondent would make of an imaginary large amount of money if (s)he came by it unexpectedly may strike us as surprising. People in Kézdiszék would spend 62% of the offered amount mainly on themselves,

[19] The larger amount of money was one hundred million HUF in the Őrség, and in Kézdiszék an amount equivalent to the lottery/bingo prize. (Later we are going to write more about the amount of this latter.)

[20] In the imaginary deal, as presented in the interview, the respondent would receive the amount of money immediately, while his/her life would be shortened by the years (s)he offered in exchange. (In fact, such a deal can also be made in reality: it is about overworking in order to accumulate material goods, and the direct consequence of it is the diminishing of life chances.) As 'altogether' 31 respondents were willing to strike such a deal, I did not examine the number of the offered years, all I registered was the willingness to make the deal. In four cases I altered the data obtained at the time survey so that they represent better the lucrative aim, which is important for us. Thus there was a sick woman in Kézdiszék who did not cling to her life because of the pains she was suffering from, two respondents from the Őrség would have spend the money they could have come by this way on charity outside the family, so in these cases striking the deal would have rather meant an act of self-sacrifice. Therefore, these three respondents were not included in the system as persons inclined to make the deal for lucrative purposes. In the case of mostly elderly respondents who 'would have sacrificed themselves' for the sake of their family I kept the code 'willingness to make the deal'. One of my respondents from the Őrség found that the offered one hundred million forints were too little, but for one billion he would have renounced two years from his life. Him too was registered in the system as a person inclined to make the deal.

[21] I regarded materialistic all the answers given to the open question in which career, successfully completed studies, food, creating future material security for children etc. appeared. To these were opposed answers emphasizing harmonious family, children, honor, honesty, being contended with one's destiny etc., which I qualified non-materialistic.

while in the Őrség this percentage is only 44%. In Kézdiszék 34%, in the Őrség 43% of the amount would be shared within the family, among relatives. 4% of the amount would be used for charity, that-is-to-say, it would be used for the benefit of strangers in Kézdiszék, in the Őrség this percentage would be 13%. These results may create the impression that the people from Kézdiszék are more selfish, more materialistic than the people from the Őrség. The comparison is somehow rendered uneasy by the fact that in the Őrség people were asked to think about the use they would make of one hundred million Hungarian Forints whereas in Kézdiszék the suggested amount was a lottery/bingo prize—although it would have been more expedient to speak about a specific amount of money in this case, too. While the lottery prize in Romania is of similar size, the prize that could be won at the bingo which was popular in the Sekler Land at that time was only about 30–35 million forints. From lesser money lesser may remain to be shared within the family, or to be offered on charitable purposes. Further explanations of the above differences will be supplied when we split the sample into subgroups via cluster analysis (see p. 107).

Television. I tried to develop a notion about television viewing habits on the basis of the subjective estimations provided by the respondent.[22] According to this data the respondents in Kézdiszék watch commercial channels 48 minutes a day on average, and public service television 169 minutes, in the Őrség the respondents watch programs on commercial channels 160 minutes, and public service channels 33 minutes. In Kézdiszék people watch mainly Hungarian language programs, among which mostly the public service television programs were available at the time of the survey. As a result of this, in Kézdiszék people watch completely different programs than in the Őrség. In Kézdiszék in 46% of the total time spent on television viewing people watch the Duna TV channel, in 21% of this time they watch the Hungarian public service television 2 (m2); in the Őrség people watch the commercial TV2 in 53% of the time spent watching television, in 21% the commercial RTL Klub, and in 13% the Hungarian public service television 1 (m1). On the basis of the respondents' estimates in Kézdiszék they spend on average 217 minutes with watching television, in the Őrség the estimated time is 193 minutes. The difference can be explained by the fact that people in Kézdiszék watch television more in the winter—as the summer average values are almost the same. It is important to examine the question to what extent people think that television is indispensable in their lives. I represented on a three-point scale whether the respondent was willing to do without television for ever.[23] According to the data people stick to television more in Kézdiszék, only eight respondents (12%) claimed to be able to do without television easily, whereas in the Őrség there were twenty people who asserted to be able to imagine their lives without television (30%).

Harmful habits. The sample shows that the people in the Őrség smoke 35 cigarettes a week on average, compared to 31 cigarettes smoked by the people from Kézdiszék. Exactly the same number of people (44) do not smoke at all in Kézdiszék and in the Őrség (67%). Calculated in 1dl of wine, as unit of measure, in Kézdiszék people drink 17 dl of alcohol per capita weekly, the same index in the Őrség is 12 dl 37 persons (56%) in Kézdiszék do not

[22] It means that I did not obtain the data via the usual methods used in time use studies, i.e. by registering in detail every daily activity in a diary all through the day. Because of this, these data should not necessarily be considered reliable. People probably overestimate the time spent with television viewing, although this cannot be asserted due to the difficulty arising from the comparison of the available data. For example, on the basis of the official time-balance data on an average autumn day in 1999, in Western Transdanubia the population aged 15-74 spent 148 minutes with watching television (KSH 2000c, p. 139). In the sample recorded in June 2000 in the three villages in the Őrség, according to their own estimation, the population over 18 spent 193 minutes on average with watching television. (This is a yearly average figure which I obtained by averaging the winter and summer television viewing amounts.)

[23] 0=no, 1=perhaps, 2=easily

drink alcohol at all, or only on festive occasions in a symbolic quantity, whereas in the Őrség I found 39 persons who claimed to never drink alcohol (59%).

Reliability of the differences between the group averages

It is important to respond to the question to what extent the differences between the averages can be considered as real differences, and to what extent they have to be accounted for the randomness of the sampling. This issue can be decided with the help of various significance tests. As most of the major variables are not of normal distribution, moreover, some of them are of exponential distribution (for example the lists of folksongs and brand names), the simple t-test procedures cannot be applied. Among these variables those which were continuous were transformed into class interval variables in order to analyze the reliability of the differences between the distribution of the variables of Kézdiszék and those of the Őrség by crosstabs based on the expected frequency. In the following I summarized the levels of reliability of some of the most important variables on the basis of the result obtained in Pearson's χ^2-test.

On the basis of the above method it can be stated with *99.9% certainty* that the discrepancy between the Kézdiszék and Őrség averages is real in the cases of the following variables, i.e. it cannot be ascribed to sampling mistakes (the number in parenthesis indicates the number of the classes of the variable as it has an influence on the result): the number of the listed Western brand names (4); Would you leave your mother land for good? (2); Do you believe in God? (3); Would you travel to a close place—to Hungary or Romania? (2); How much would you spend on yourself from the amount you came by? (6); watching commercial and other than commercial television channels in summer and in winter (separately each) (9).

It can be stated with *99% certainty* that the discrepancy is real: the number of the commandments listed from the Ten Commandments (11); Are you divorced? (2); the ideal number of children (5); alcohol consumption (4) /If we converge those who do not drink alcohol at all and those who drink alcohol occasionally, the difference will not be significant./

It can be stated with *95% certainty* that the difference is real: How many strangers are you in contact with /excluding answers based on somebody's say so/ (5); the number of outdated commandments (7); Would you do without television? (3); How much would you spend on your family from the amount? (6); How much would you spend on other people from the amount? (5); total time of watching television in winter (9).

The difference is *not significant*: How many of your relatives do you keep in touch with regularly? (6); total time of television viewing in summer (9); smoking (3); the number of listed folksongs (4).

Examining the sample via cluster analysis

Up to this point I have split the sample into two subgroups according to the dwelling of the respondents, and the subgroups were characterized on the basis of the group averages. In what follows I am going to try to differentiate further, smaller groups within the whole sample in a way that the sharpest possible differences should emerge between the groups, whereas respondents with similar characteristics should fall into the same group. The result of the cluster defining procedure depends to a great extent on which characteristics (variables) the procedure was based on. The number of cluster defining criteria is limited by the fact that the sample contains merely 132 persons, and in order to obtain reliable results the number of cluster defining criteria has to be smaller by one order of magnitude. On the basis of this consideration I picked out 19 variables as cluster defining criteria which supply information about the

roots of the complete person and the level of dependency on consumer society.[24] For cluster defining criteria and the group averages obtained on the basis of these criteria see Table 3 in Appendix. In relation with the established groups, group averages based on criteria which were not included in the cluster defining procedure will also be presented, as they probably supply an apt description of the particular clusters. (Appendix Table 4.)

If the above cluster analysis is completed with a multidimensional scaling[25] in which the examined units are not variables but respondents, the relative position of the presented clusters can be represented in a diagram.[26] Figure 6.2 was produced by examining the two-dimensional output of the multidimensional scaling in which the points (the respondents) were identified with the help of the previous cluster analysis. For the sake of a better understanding, I kept only the outlines of the clusters taking shape. In the diagram clusters lying closer to each other resemble more to each other regarding their characteristics, and at cluster limits sometimes mixing occurs.

Because respondents from Kézdiszék and the Őrség were completely separated in the procedure, the limit between the respondents of the two regions was marked with a thick line. To the North–North-East of this line are all respondents from Kézdiszék who form the society labeled traditional by me, while to the South–South-West of the line are the respondents from the Őrség who are, in my notion, the members of the wealthy society. Figure 6.2 gives an appropriate representation of the segmentation of both societies, the prevailing 'power relations' in respect of the strength of the roots and the integration into consumer society.[27] A part of the society in Kézdiszék has strong roots, although a transitional group, which is already loosing its roots, seems to emerge besides a group of young people who shape their desires and consciousness in conformity with the 'expectations' of consumer society. The wealthy society in the Őrség does also have a group of people with relatively strong roots, although these roots are strong within the Őrség, but not in a Transylvanian context. As a counterpole of this, the analysis revealed the emergence of a group which is the most integrated into consumer society, corresponding the best to the economic rationality of the dominant neo-classic economic

[24] Before the analysis, the variables included in the examination were standardized, as they represented very different measure scales (number of listed brand names, daily amount of time spent with viewing commercial channels etc.). During the cluster analysis I applied a simple, iterative method with fixed cluster centers. I realized the appropriateness of splitting the sample into seven groups via trials: in that phase all the important groups had already been separated without developing one-or-two-item clusters, which were useless from the point of view of the analysis.

[25] First, I created a matrix for the multidimensional scaling, which represent the similarities (the differences) of the variables, then I prepared a diagram in which each variable appears as a point. The difference between the points is a monotonous function of the differences between the data. This method helps us discover the inner structure and the system of correlation of the data (Füstös et al. 1997, p. 61). In further diagrams (Figure 6.3 and 6.4) the very similar variables will be placed close to each other, whereas variables exhibiting very different behaviors will be placed far from each other. The procedure can be applied to the respondents as well, in fact, I used this method to prepare Figure 6.2 in the main text. The analysis itself was done by the ALSCAL algorithm of the SPSS program package. The axes of the diagrams cannot be interpreted in all cases. In *Figures 2–4* the horizontal axe from the right to the left represents an increasing level of embeddedness into consumer society, the vertical axe, however, cannot be interpreted.

[26] At the same time this procedure checks the validity of the cluster analysis: if the respondents who fell into the same group in the cluster analysis are now placed close to each other, and they are clearly separated from the members of other groups, my result can be considered reliable. And in fact, this is the case.

[27] In Figure 6.2 groups were characterized by group averages. The following names were given to the different variables: *brand*—the number of listed Western brand names, *fsong*—the number of listed folk songs, *leave*—leave the mother land for ever for a large amount of money, *TCm*—the number of commandments listed from the Ten Commandments, *outdtd*—the number of socially obsolete commandments out of the Ten Commandments, *deal*—give years in exchange for money, *ideal no. childr.*–socially ideal number of children in a family, *me/us/them*—spend this part of a large amount of money received unexpectedly on him/herself/ family/ others, *comm./public*—daily average amount of viewing commercial/public service television programs, *dvrce*—(s)he has already had a divorce.

theory (homo oeconomicus—the economic man). Between these two groups another specific group appears, not existing in traditional society. The life of the people falling into this group brought them grief temporarily or for good (it means mainly divorce which can be regarded as the damaging of one's social roots.) Women tend to react to this by stronger religiousness and intense altruism, whereas men often lose their footing, and become addicted and thoroughly disillusioned. In what follows, I am going to describe each group in detail (in parenthesis I marked the traits of the group which were not induced from the cluster defining criteria.)

Group 1—rooted in being: an elderly social stratum from Kézdiszék, not consumer (knowing hardly any brand names), knowing folksongs, strongly bound to the mother land, religious, knowing and acknowledging the Ten Commandments, family centered, not materialistic, considering many children as ideal, watching public service television a lot, sticking to television, having an intact family (the least educated, living in reduced circumstances and poorly supplied with consumer goods, having more contacts with their relatives than the average, having fewer contacts with strangers than the average, knowing plants well, in their lives having traveled to close places and wishing to travel to close places).[28]

Group 2—loosing their roots: a stratum of mixed age from Kézdiszék, not consumer (knowing hardly any brands), knowing folksongs, strongly bound to the mother land, believer, knowing the Ten Commandments at an average level and casting the most doubt on it in Kézdiszék, not willing to exchange years from his/her life for money but often expressing materialistic aims, considering many children ideal, rather self-centered, watching public service television not more than the average, watching commercial television less than the average, on the whole sticking to TV, having an intact family (less educated than the average, living in reduced circumstances, insufficiently supplied with infrastructure and consumer goods, having less social contacts than the average, smoking a bit more and drinking a bit more alcohol than the average, having traveled in his/her life farther and wishing to travel not far).

Group 3—the Sekler yuppie: a stratum of young people from Kézdiszék, but including also some people from the Őrség, knowing the brands the best in Kézdiszék, on the whole believer with the exception of the people from the Őrség included in this group, knowing the Ten Commandments and casting little doubt on it, considering less children ideal than the average, inclined to make the vicious deal, enormously self-centered, watching commercial television a lot and public service television quite little compared to the Transylvanian average, clinging to television not too much, having an intact family (more educated than the average, better supplied with infrastructure and material goods than the Transylvanian average, cultivating the most social relationships, average smoker and consumer of alcohol, having traveled to close places in his/her life and wishing to travel the farthest).

Group 4—the homo oeconomicus: a stratum from the Őrség, on the basis of the knowledge of brands the most embedded into consumer society, knowing hardly any folksongs, not bound to the mother land hardly at all, uncertain about the existence of God, knowing the Ten Commandments hardly at all and casting a doubt on it, the most inclined to make the vicious deal, considering few children ideal, the most self-centered, watching television the least and giving it up the most easily (having the highest income and the highest education, outstandingly well supplied with infrastructure and consumer goods, cultivating an average number of social relationships, free of harmful habits, having traveled the farthest in his/her life and wishing to travel the farthest).

Group 5—wealth and roots: a stratum of elderly people (but containing persons in their 40s and 50s) from the Őrség, having listed the least brands, not knowing folksongs at all, rather bound to the mother land compared to the average in the Őrség, having a knowledge of

[28] In the group of people rooted in existence there were four persons (20%) who would have accepted to renounce some of their lifetime, but out of these four persons three would have done this clearly for the benefit of their families.

various levels of the Ten Commandments and tending to question it, in the Őrség considering the most children ideal, mostly family centered, watching commercial television a bit more than the average in the Őrség, giving up television with difficulty, having an intact family (compared to the whole of the Őrség sample having lower income and schooling than the average, well supplied with infrastructure and consumer goods, keeping an average number of relationships, in respect of harmful habits the group does not differ from the average, travelling as much as the average, but wishing to travel the least far in comparison with the Őrség sample average).[29]

Group 6—the rootless man: middle aged respondents from the Őrség, knowing few brands, not knowing folksongs at all, not bound to the mother land, not a believer, not knowing the Ten Commandments and questioning it, inclined to accept the vicious deal, mentioning materialistic life goals, considering few children as optimal, watching commercial television the most and sticking to television, living in disrupted families (mostly men, having low incomes in comparison with the Őrség average, of average schooling, poorly supplied with infrastructure and consumer goods in the Őrség context, but well supplied compared to Kézdiszék, cultivating the fewest social relationships, listing the least plants, smoking the most and drinking the most alcohol, having traveled rarely at all in his/her life, wishing to travel not farther than the average).

Group 7—the generous woman: a stratum of people of different ages, with a thorough knowledge of brands, with some knowledge of folksongs, not too much bound to the mother land, believer, with a varying knowledge of the Ten Commandments but not casting a doubt on it, refusing the vicious deal, not having materialistic life goals, but considering few children ideal, outstandingly unselfish, watching commercial television less and public service television more than the average in the Őrség, giving up television easily, living in an unstable family situation (this group comprises mainly women with high incomes, having higher education, the best supplied with infrastructure and consumer goods, cultivating numerous social relations, free of harmful habits, having traveled a bit farther than the average in her life, but wishing to travel a bit less far than the average).

In Table 6.5 I summarized the most pertinent traits of each group in respect of roots, consumer society and their attitude towards material goods. It can be stated that one of the groups from Kézdiszék, the one which is the least embedded into consumer society has the strongest roots (group 1), whereas the roots of a group from the Őrség, the one which is the most embedded into consumer society, have considerably weakened roots (group 4).[30] Between these two extremes we can find groups placed at different levels of the scale, offering vast possibilities of analysis.

Examining the sample via multidimensional scaling

In the previous subchapter I have examined different subgroups of the sample and drawn conclusions by comparing the averages. This method provides an appropriate description of the two regions, as well as the differences and the similarities between the groups, but it is not apt to disclose correlation growing into tendencies between the variables: e.g. how the value of a variable changes when the value of another variable increases or decreases, and does the high or low value of a variable depend on the high or low value of another variable?

[29] In the group 'wealth and roots' there were four persons (15%) who would have accepted to renounce some of their life time, but one person out of these four would have done this clearly for the benefit of his/her family.

[30] It is important to note that the qualifications in the table have sense only in comparison with each other, they are not categories of absolute character. Thus for example, we qualified the religious roots of the Kézdiszék group 'rooted in being' strong, although the average group member does not turn up in the church more than once a month. Yet, within the whole sample religious service attendance is still the most frequent in this group.

Table 6.5
Embeddedness into Consumer Society, Relation to Material Goods and the Strength of the Roots of the Kézdiszék and Őrség Groups

GROUP	KÉZDI-SZÉK %	EMBEDDED-NESS INTO CONSUMER SOCIETY	MAKING VICIOUS DEAL	ADDICTION	SOIL BOUND	RELI-GIOUS ROOTS	PERSON FALLING INTO GROUP
1	100	WEAK			STRONG	STRONG	20
2	96	WEAK	HARDLY ANY		STRONG		24
3	82						28
4	0	VERY STRONG	CHARACTER-ISTIC		WEAK	WEAK	15
5	0						27
6	0			CHARAC-TERISTIC		WEAK	6
7	0	STRONG	HARDLY ANY	NONE	WEAK	STRONG	12

GROUP	KÉZDI-SZÉK %	LOCAL CULTURE	SOCIAL ROOTS	FAMILY INTEGRITY	FAMILY CENTRED NESS	ALTRUISM	PERSON FALLING INTO GROUP
1	100	STRONG		YES	STRONG		20
2	96		WEAK	YES			24
3	82		STRONG	YES	WEAK	WEAK	28
4	0			YES			15
5	0			YES	STRONG		27
6	0	WEAK	WEAK	NONE			6
7	0		STRONG	NONE		STRONG	12

Source: Tables 3 and 4 of the Appendix

In the following I am going to present the correlation between some of the most important variables with the help of multidimensional scaling. I treated the complete sample as a whole, i.e. I did not differentiate a Kézdiszék and an Őrség sub-sample. First I transformed the continuous variables into class interval variables, and from variables obtained this way I produced so many binary variables as much class intervals there are in each source variable.[31] For variables included in the analysis see Table 6.6.

The map of welfare

Firstly, I am going to examine the variables describing respondents' conditions of welfare, and I am also going to look into the movements of some variables referring to roots (Figure 6.3). Variables of material poverty and variables of wealth are unequivocally separated. Variables in the North-western part of the figure refer to good quality roads and buildings, the water, the gas, and the telephone are installed, there is a micro-wave oven, two sets of television on average in each household. This is the situation characterizing the Őrség. In the South-western part of the figure we can find a group of variables referring to an exceptionally

[31] The limits of class intervals were defined in a way that each of them contain a sufficient number of observations. The differences between the binary variables showing which class interval the observation falls into were calculated via binary Lance-and-Williams Non-metric Measure (also known as Bray-Curtis' non metric coefficient).

Table 6.6
Variables and their Contents Used in Multidimensional Scaling

Variable	Explanation
ani0	No animals are kept in the household.
ani_lit	Value of animals kept in the household does not exceed 49 thousand HUF.
ani_med	Value of animals kept in the household is between 49–120 thousand HUF.
ani_lot	Value of animals kept in the household exceeds 120 thousand HUF.
brand0	(S)he mentioned not more than three western brand names.
brand_lit	(S)he mentioned 4–11 western brand names.
brand_med	(S)he mentioned 12–23 western brand names.
brand_lot	(S)he mentioned more than 23 brand names.
bldgp	The dwelling of the respondent is maximum of medium quality.
bldgm	The dwelling of the respondent is of good quality with smaller defaults.
bldgg	The dwelling of the respondent is new, or in good state of repair.
car_w0	There is no western make car in the household.
car_w1	There is one western make car in the household.
car_w2	There are two western make cars in the household.
deal—deal0	Are you ready to give years from your life for lucrative purposes? (Yes/No)
fsong0	(S)he does not know any folksongs.
fsong_med	(S)he listed 1–8 folksongs.
fsong_9pl	(S)he listed at least 9 folksongs.
gas—gas0	Are gas pipes installed in the house? (Yes/No)
iso—iso0	Does the village lie in an isolated place? (Szárazpatak and Felsőmarác are isolated)
Kézdi	The respondent is from Kézdiszék.
leav—leav0	Would you leave your mother land for a large amount of money? (Yes/No)
mat—immat	Has the respondent mentioned a materialistic life goal? (Yes/No)
mbil—mbil0	Is there a mobile phone in the household? (Yes/No)
me0	(S)he would spend nothing of an unexpectedly received amount of money on him/herself.
me_med	(S)he would spend 1–60% of the unexpectedly received money on him/herself.
me_lot	(S)he would spend more than 60% of the unexpectedly received money on him/herself.
mikro–mikro0	Is there a micro-wave oven in the household? (Yes/No)
obso0	The respondents thinks that the complete Ten Commandments are socially valid even today.
obso1	The respondents thinks that today one commandment has become socially outdated out of the Ten Commandments.
obso2	The respondents thinks that two commandments are socially outdated out of the Ten Commandments.
obso3p	The respondents thinks that three or more than three commandments are socially outdated out of the Ten Commandments.
Őrség	The respondent is from the Őrség.
pray0	(S)he never prays.
pray_oc	(S)he prays occasionally.
pray_yes	(S)he prays at least once a day.
rdp	There is a dirt road in front of the dwelling of the respondent.
rdm	There is a road with solid pavement with defaults in front of the dwelling of the respondent.
rdg	There is an excellent quality road with solid pavement in front of the dwelling of the respondent.
tel—tel0	Is there a fixed telephone line in the household? (Yes/No)
tv1	There is one television set in the household.
tv2	There are two television sets in the household.
tv3pl	There are at least three television sets in the household.
us0	(S)he would spend nothing of an unexpectedly received amount of money on the family.
us_med	(S)he would spend 1–60% of an unexpectedly received amount of money on the family.
us_lot	(S)he would spend +60% of an unexpectedly received amount of money on the family.
wat—wat0	Are the water pipes installed in the household? (Yes/No)

Note: The table serves as a legend to Figures 3 and 4

high level of material welfare, i.e. such material goods as cars of Western make, a mobile phone, or three or more TV sets in a household. Such a high level of welfare exists in both regions, but because it is more typical in the Őrség, the group of variables is closer to the Őrség. As opposed to this, in the Eastern part of the figure the dominant trait is relative material poverty: the buildings and the roads are of poor quality, the water, the gas and the telephone are not installed, in the households there is no micro-wave oven, mobile phone or Western make car and there is only one TV set on average. This situation is clearly typical of Kézdiszék.

Animal husbandry referring to strong natural roots increases in significance clockwise, from the West to the East: animal husbandry is not typical in the proximity of variables characterizing material welfare, whereas where variables of material poverty are pertinent, animal husbandry is significant.[32] The number of commandments the respondents consider socially outdated alludes to the strength of the religious roots (and social integrity). The number of commandments considered outdated increases clockwise, from the East to the West: in the midst of material poverty people observe the complete Ten Commandments, whereas the more advanced material welfare is, the more commandments are questioned (or to put it in a different way by questioning the commandments material welfare increases—see next chapter.) Conclusions about the level of embeddedness into consumer society were formed on the basis of the knowledge of brand names: the same tendency, an increase from the East to the West can be observed. The consciousness of those living in relatively poor material conditions seems to be free of Western brand names representing consumer society: they were able to mention not even one brand name or only a few, whereas increasing welfare corresponds to an expanding list of brand names. Finally, the item whether the respondent would leave his/her mother land for good in exchange for a large amount of money refers to geographical mobility. While those living in reduced material conditions clung to their mother land, those enjoying material welfare valued money more than the mother land, their local roots (and perhaps it is exactly why they are better-off—see the next chapter).

The map of the roots of the complete person

In what follows, I am going to eliminate variables referring to material welfare, infrastructure, and by introducing some new variables I am going to look into the correlation between the roots of a man I consider complete. This correlation is represented in Figure 6.4.

In the western part of the figure variables characterizing those who have lost their roots can be separated unequivocally, while in the North-eastern part variables alluding to the existence of roots are assembled. The typical traits of those who have lost their roots is that they do not know folksongs, they have a materialistic life goal, they are inclined to strike a deal, that is, to leave their home land and give years from their life for money, if they came by a lot of money unexpectedly, they would spend it mostly on themselves and not on their family, they question the Ten Commandments; they never pray and are able to list a lot of brand names. As opposed to this, those who have their roots know a lot of folksongs, their life goal is not materialistic, they are not willing to make a deal to exchange things which cannot be bought for money (homeland, life), they would spend the unexpectedly received money mostly on their family, and nothing on themselves, the Ten Commandments are imperative for them, they pray regularly and their brand name knowledge is poor.[33] Consequently, the above do not refute my hypothesis according to which there is a reverse correlation between

[32] A lot of animals in a household may of course represent material wealth outside consumer society. In any case, one should not think of tremendous wealth: in the sample the household having the most valuable livestock was from Kézdiszék with 4 cows, 9 calves, 30 hens, 1 hog, 8 piglets and 1 horse.

[33] Concerning the correlation between religious roots and local roots researches carried out in Transylvania by Ferenc *Gereben* brought about similar results (Gereben 1999, pp. 87–92).

social, cultural, religious roots and roots binding one to one's native soil *and* the level of integration into consumer society and money-minded thinking.

I would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the figures refer merely to tendencies, which took shape from the sample, and as such, they are far to be elevated onto the level of the laws of natural science, like for example the law of gravitation. They are not appropriate either to establish cause and effect relations, all that can be asserted on the basis of them is that certain traits usually co-exist, and it is possible that the correlation itself is due to a factor which was not even presented in the figure. At the same time they did not stem from some arbitrary drawing exercise, this is what the objective outputs of the multidimensional scaling performed on the data seem to prove.

Experiences which do not appear in the questionnaires

As the research was both planned and conducted by the author of the present study, he disposes substantial data concerning the circumstances of the survey. In this chapter I intend to share these experiences with the reader. A part of these experiences can be quantified in an objective way (for example the refusal rate), a part of them is however not quantifiable, they have to be regarded rather as subjective impressions. As the research was progressing, I became increasingly aware of the fact that even without administering the questionnaire I could collect reliable data about the confidence and helpfulness of the people. As a matter of fact, in every case I turned up as a stranger at people's houses, I introduced myself as a simple researcher and asked for help to fulfil the task successfully. I asked the potential respondent about three quarters of an hour, which (s)he did not have to devote me immediately, because if it was needed I was ready to come back several days later, at an exact hour, at any time of the day. It is therefore important at how many places they doubted my word, namely, whether they did not believe that I was really what I pretended to be, and I did not have other aims than those I told them; and also, at how many place they agreed to spend three quarters of an hour helping a stranger.

In Kézdiszék I got rejected at twenty places, so altogether 86 tries were needed to make the 66 successful interviews (refusal rate 23%), in the Őrség I got rejected at 46 places, which means that I had knock at 112 houses (refusal rate 41%). By examining this difference via the χ^2-test it can be asserted with 99% certainty that the refusal rate in the Őrség is higher, so the difference cannot be ascribed to randomness. Another sign of distrust is at how many places I was obliged to prove my identity. In the Őrség this happened on four occasions (and in one of the cases even after I proved my identity, the potential respondent refused to answer), whereas in Kézdiszék I came across only one such case (as it turned out later I bumped into the policeman in civilian clothes from the neighboring village—so in this case it was rather some occupational hazard than distrust.) Moreover, in the Őrség some of the interviews came to almost naught as the husband, the mother-in-law etc. who arrived later told me clearly that they would have sent me away immediately if they had answered the door, and for the remaining time they assured me of their unaltered distrust. Nothing of this kind happened in Kézdiszék.

It is not unimportant either how a guest, a stranger is received in the two regions. In Kézdiszék I did not find a doorbell at any of the houses, the visitor should enter and the door was open in the daytime (very often even when there was nobody at home) and the dogs were tied. In the Őrség I also found some households like this, but in most of the cases the entrance door is closed, and if one rings the bell (or simply approaches the house) (s)he is received by unleashed, foaming mouthed dogs barking in rage, which, by the admission of their master, would attack the entering visitor.

From the point of view of sustainability (and the survival of each village) it is highly significant how a village community would manage to survive a crisis (for example a snow-

drift). Fortunately, I did not gather any direct experience in this respect, it is however certain that in Kézdiszék people know how to bake bread not only from theory, and even today in several families they bake the necessary quantity in advance for a week. This capacity decreases the dependence from external systems to a great extent, and perhaps it is useless to mention that in the Őrség the equipment for baking bread does not exist any more in the household, let alone the necessary know-how. Likewise, it is important that by breeding cow and other domestic animals fresh milk and meat are produced mostly locally in Kézdiszék, whereas this is something totally untypical of the villages in the Őrség.

In both regions I had to face a specific difficulty to include men between 18–60 into the sample to the appropriate rate. In Kézdiszék the major reason was that period chosen for making the interviews coincided with the time of potato planting, so all the men able to work were working in the fields from dusk to dawn. In many cases it was not the willingness to respond that was wanting, but after having turned up several times to see the potential subject, I could not do anything but admit that the person in question simply did not have an empty three quarters of an hour. In the Őrség I encountered similar difficulties, but this time the reason was completely different: the European Soccer Championship had just started at the time of conducting the interviews, and matches were broadcast on television in the afternoon and in the evening.

The interviews were conducted in family surroundings, in the garden or in the house, which allowed me to have an insight into the everyday life of the family. In the Őrség I discovered with astonishment that in some places family members did not cease their disputes even for the time of the interview, the presence of a stranger not being enough to make them at least try to keep up the pretence. Husband and wife, mother and son were scolding at each other in an abominable tone, and I was increasingly overcome by the fear that I might unintentionally find myself in the midst of a dispute degenerating into violence. In Kézdiszék I did not encounter anything of this kind. In the Őrség it also happened several times that after having fixed an appointment with someone, when I turned up unsuspectingly at the set time, I got sent away by the shouting subject without getting any explanation. Did they hear something bad of me from someone else? Or did they change their mind? All in all, nothing of this kind happened in Kézdiszék.

Another experience from the Őrség is that the questions related to the Ten Commandments (and religion) brought about real aggression from some middle-aged men. The respondent would castigate the church and the priests in a raised voice, and he refused categorically to answer the related questions. There were also cases when the interview conducted with the wife was interrupted by the husband who had been calm up to that point, but on hearing the Ten Commandments he started to vociferate, and it was the wife's resolute attitude that saved the day and finally, the interview could be completed. In Kézdiszék questions concerning religion did not raise any problem—despite the fact that not so long before the interviews took place sectarians traveled through the village; whereas in the villages of the Őrség such people turned up only several years earlier.

A sign of the functioning of local communities and tight human relationships is that in the villages in Kézdiszék by the end of the period of interview making, refusals out of distrust became less, as the news spread among people that I was knocking at people's doors and they saw that they did not have anything to fear. They often told me, they had already heard that I had turned up at one of their acquaintances' place, so I did not have to explain long why I came. What is more, several of them even remarked on why I left them out, and then I had to start depicting the mysteries of representative sampling. I can give no account of spreading the news like this in the Őrség, even the last day I managed to find a place where the interview turned into a scandal when we came to the Ten Commandments, and I had to virtually run away as the woman threatened me by calling home her husband. What would be the im-

age like that we would get from my statistics about the villages in the Őrség if I included the data of those who refused to respond so aggressively?

Given the above considerations, it might not be surprising that in Kézdiszék the interviews were conducted within normal, human circumstances, and even today when I recall those villages and their inhabitants, I have good feelings, which cannot be said about the Őrség. Especially Iványc, a village so spruce from the outside gave me some difficult moments, but Csákánydoroszló was not too much backward in this respect. (I gained a relatively favorable picture about the outlying Felsőmarác.) In the evening, when I returned to my accommodation, my stomach was trembling with nervousness: it was hard to see the tension within the families and bear the distrust awoken by my person, the valuelessness of the spoken word. I was looking forward to collecting the sixty-six interviews set in my objective and ending this stressful phase of the research. Of course, the above does not mean that I did not meet wonderful people in the Őrség or I did not undergo some pleasant experiences there, and it does not mean either that Kézdiszék was free of all human problems. Nevertheless, the present account conveys well the basic impressions of the researcher, and I do not believe that my sense of reality would have been duped by my own pre-conception. For those who doubt these experiences I suggest to undertake a similar enterprise, as I do not think that anyone could gather fundamentally different experiences these days. In my opinion, the above non-quantifiable impressions are at least as important as the numerical correlation taking shape from the questionnaires, because they draw attention to phenomena which remain hidden in numerical statistics.

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Chapter 7

Our Perishing Roots

In this chapter first I am going to summarize the results of the research, then, concerning these results I am going to express some methodological comments. After this, I shall touch upon the problem of cause and effect, the lure of consumer society, the characteristics of the altruistic respondents, the image of man in economics, the importance of the choice of values, the author's choice of values, and questions related to the protection of the environment.

My preliminary hypotheses have not been refuted by the research examining the roots indispensable for human completeness and the embeddedness into consumer society. It has been confirmed that in the lives of the rural respondents there is basically a *reverse correlation between the intactness of the roots indispensable for human completeness and the embeddedness into consumer society.* Kézdiszék, which is relatively underdeveloped economically, with its poor infrastructure, little material goods, and poor knowledge of brands is far from being entitled to be labelled a consumer society, whereas the economically developed village communities of the Őrség, supplied with excellent infrastructure and a lot of material goods, having a huge knowledge of brands bear an increasing number of signs of the consumer society. But the indispensable roots for human completeness are stronger in Kézdiszék than in the Őrség.

When examining the social roots I could not discover significant differences in respect of regular social contacts between people in the two regions, however, on the basis of the impressions not registered in the questionnaires, regarding the 'humanness' and the helpfulness of the villages, I formed an unequivocally more favourable image of Kézdiszék. Concerning the integrity of families the advantage of Kézdiszék is again unquestionable: in the villages of this region, at the time of the research, divorce was not 'fashionable' at all, as opposed to the villages in the Őrség where several families have already disrupted (divorce, second marriage, common-law marriage, widowhood on account of suicide etc.). If I form conclusions about the *local culture* on the basis of the knowledge of folksongs, and if I take the spread of domestic livestock farming and agriculture as the indicator of the relationship with nature, these roots seem to be stronger in Kézdiszék than in the Őrség, the latter bearing the marks of consumer society. *Religious roots* are also stronger in the economically relatively underdeveloped region. In Kézdiszék the faith in God, religious service attendance, the frequency of praying, and the knowledge of the Ten Commandments support the conclusion that these roots are stronger. If we consider the attitude towards the Ten Commandments, which have fixed the norms of living together in society for several thousands of years, we find that the inhabitants of the villages in the Őrség, living in better conditions, are more inclined to question these norms than the inhabitants of Kézdiszék. In respect of the respondents' attachment to the motherland, to one's dwelling place (geographical mobility) the respondents from Kézdiszék, living in reduced material conditions, gave evidence of a much stronger attachment. In comparison to the respondents in the Őrség, in Kézdiszék there are more persons who would not leave their mother land at any price, and even in the case of a shorter, free of charge journey more of them would prefer to stay within the Hungarian linguistic area than the respondents from the Őrség.

When comparing the two regions, I found that the number of those mentioning a materialistic life goal and willing to give years from their life in exchange for money (i.e. those inclined to make the vicious deal) is about the same in both regions, just like the average level of alcohol consumption and smoking. But if I ask the respondent to imagine to have come by a large amount of money, the people from Kézdiszék living in straitened conditions appear to be more selfish than the respondent from the Őrség: from the amount of money the former would spend on themselves mostly, they would share less among family members, and they would also give less to outsiders. In Kézdiszék people watch television more in winter and

cling to the television set more, that is, they would find it more difficult to imagine their life without television. At the same time, respondents view completely different programmes in the two regions. In Kézdiszék people watch mostly the public service television programmes (as in most of the cases these are the programmes available in Hungarian language), whereas in the Őrség, in the biggest part of the time spent viewing television the population is entertained by the programmes of the commercial channels.

Splitting the complete sample into subgroups via cluster analysis allowed us to discover some further important correlation. For example, in Kézdiszék there is a group mainly consisting of elderly people, which has the strongest roots and which is removed the most from consumer society; there is an intermediate group of respondents of mixed age, which is already losing its roots, but has not integrated into consumer society yet; finally, there is a group mainly comprising young people, in which desires and the way of thinking (not the actual way of life!) increasingly resemble those characterising the people living in consumer society.[1] The higher level of selfishness observed in Kézdiszék compared to the Őrség is mainly due to this latter group (and also to those losing their roots), the gap between desires and reality is the widest in this group (as far as the realised and desired journey distances are concerned), and the same group should be held responsible for worsening the result of Kézdiszék in respect of the vicious deal and the willingness to leave one's mother land.

In the Őrség there is also a group of elderly people preserving more traditions, but it appears to have strong roots only within the wealthy society of the Őrség, and its members resemble more those 'losing their roots' in Kézdiszék than the group of respondents having strong roots. The group which would probably get an excellent grading by Western-European standards for their life style and way of thinking in line with consumer society is also from the Őrség (homo oeconomicus). This group comprising mainly young people lives in excellent material conditions, its members know a countless number of Western brand names, they are ready to leave their mother land without further ado, and willing to strike the vicious deal quite easily and use the money in a rather selfish way.

The society in the Őrség, living in material welfare, produces special groups of people having a disrupted family background. These groups can be sundered from each other according to the man—woman breakdown, as the destiny and the view of life of men and women who have been through a family crisis seem to be completely different. Men with a disrupted family background provide the most piteous example of rootless existence. Their religious and local roots have completely been destroyed, their materialism is outstandingly high, they are addicted to alcohol and smoking, and they spend their time watching television all through the day, viewing commercial programmes. As opposed to this, women with damaged family ties gave, in most of the cases, a different answer to this kind of affliction: their local roots have become stronger compared to the Őrség average, their religious roots have become outstandingly strong, they are not inclined to make the vicious deal on their own benefit, they became more altruistic, and they turn to the problems of the others markedly, that is, if they came by a large amount of money they would spend an important part of it on charitable purposes. Thanks especially to the latter group, the respondents from the Őrség proved to be more charitable than the respondents from Kézdiszék.

Finally, we have also examined the correlation between the most important characteristics, and this independently from the Kézdiszék—Őrség division. With the help of the multidimensional scaling some important correlation emerged: thus for example material poverty is in fact in correlation with a poor knowledge of brand names, widespread animal husbandry (natural roots), the acceptance of the Ten Commandments, whereas the increase of material welfare corresponds to a better knowledge of brand names, less important animal husbandry,

[1] This result is worth being compared with the international research carried out into the materialism of business students (see p. 42).

and scepticism concerning the Ten Commandments. If we include variables related to other sort of roots in the analysis and we leave out those describing material welfare, we find out that there is a tendency in that variables referring to weak roots appear together with variables signifying consumer society and materialistic thinking, that-is-to-say, the characteristic traits are poor knowledge of folksongs, lack of praying and attachment to the mother land, very often a serious doubt is cast on the Ten Commandments, there is a marked selfishness and a materialistic view of life, the willingness to make the vicious deal is remarkable, and there is a wide knowledge of Western brand names. Naturally, the same variables are gathered together, but with the opposite sign, in the case of the people removed from consumer society, who have relatively strong roots.

Methodological comments

Obviously, findings depend largely on the indices used for examining the dependence on consumer society and the strength of roots. Therefore, I will remark on some of the important variables.

Judging the strength of local, cultural roots by the knowledge of folksongs is an obvious simplification but I am convinced that by examining the knowledge of folktales or folkdances, which is more difficult to carry out, we would have come to the same conclusion. Maybe some respondents who are better at folktales than at folksongs would have fallen into the group "rooted in completeness" of Kézdiszék instead of the group "losing their roots" and vice versa without having a significant effect on the proportions. No doubt that nowadays folklore as a genre is losing significance in general due to the spread of written literature, however, despite this fact it seems advantageous to survey the knowledge of folksongs of a community. Folksongs are effective indicators of community ties. According to Katona, a Hungarian expert "*this work of art is already based on the traditions of the community when it is created and later it depends on the judgement and influence of the community concerned. Almost every piece of folk-poetry is created and passed down in the presence and with the participation of the community… Folk-poetry is dominated not by individual but community features, it presents the way of life as well as typical characters of the society concerned and it describes its taste, needs, life and desires*" (Katona 1998, p. 28). Similarly, the present study aims at finding out to what extent the population of a village can be regarded as a community and how much its people are attached to their own history. In case of townspeople the knowledge of local monuments and prominent personalities (who is worth remembering centuries later and why) should be examined as a local root.

Measuring consumer mode of existence by knowledge of brand names raises several questions. It is most likely that deficient knowledge of brand names implies one's distance from consumer society. However, it is probably not true the other way round. A person knowing a lot of brand names has not necessarily "sunk" in consumer society, in spite of the knowledge of brand names (s)he may keep aloof from messages promoting consumption. Nevertheless this problem probably does not affect the findings of this study as, in my opinion, aloofness in this respect is—for the time being (?)—rather rare in the population. It also has to be considered that the knowledge of brands is characteristic of the environment of the respondent and that ideas (both positive and negative ones) connected to consumption and Western brand names put a burden on one's consciousness and displace other contents of consciousness. The research also revealed that television advertisements may be ineffective if the life of a society does not center round Western type consumption. (Good examples are the Kézdiszék respondents who watch several hours of television every day but do not know any brand names and the Őrség respondents who spend little time watching TV but know countless brand names.)

Measuring the strength of religious roots by the frequency of religious service attendance and praying seems to be appropriate. It should be noted though that if using the questionnaire in Western Europe or the United States, the teachings of the denomination of the respondent on wealth and poverty should also be considered as materialism associated with consumer society might be disguised as religion. In that case the simple examination of religious service attendance (or religious meetings) as well as praying could be misleading. The devoted follower of "the church of Mammon" has most probably sunk deeply in consumer society and his/her religious roots cannot be considered intact. Regarding the survey of attitudes towards the Ten Commandments it should be noted that during the collection of the data I did not discuss what it means to break the commandments. In this way the commandment "You shall not kill", for example, was not regarded as outdated by anybody, though if respondents had been informed that abortion and euthanasia also belong here, I would have arrived at different results.

In case of listing items (folksongs, brands, plants, relatives and acquaintances) the mental state of the respondent as well as his/her attitude to the survey (how seriously /s/he takes it) may affect the number of the items mentioned. Supposing that mental abilities decline basically with age, the comparison of the two samples is still not questioned as the proportion of age groups in the two samples was the same. Moreover, the knowledge of folksongs seem to contradict the theory of old age mental decline: the older generations were better at remembering folksongs than the younger ones. In case respondents did not take the listings seriously, the note "no data available" was entered in the database, which increases the reliability of group averages.

Given the knowledge of the findings, the choice of the regions examined may also give rise to criticism. One can argue that if the aim is to prove a negative correlation between religion and economic development, then this research is just ideal for it since it is predictable that comparing an economically underdeveloped but traditionally religious region with an economically developed but more secularized one will result in the desired findings. However, this opinion does not answer the question of why it is the economically more developed region that has become more secular (or why the more secular region has become economically more developed—as discussed in the next subchapter), which is just the problem this study intends to point out. In addition, several connections which could not be foreseen were revealed. For example in the wealthier region people are less attached to their birthplace (or dwelling place), people knowing more brand names are more inclined to enter into a vicious deal and regard more of the Ten Commandments as outdated etc.

The relevant ethnographic literature refers to Háromszék as the most secularized and least tradition-bound region of the Sekler Land (though Kézdiszék, which is a Catholic region of Háromszék, is the most conservative part of it—Sepsiszéki, 1998, p. 26) therefore, choosing another region of the Sekler Land probably would have yielded even bigger differences—just like choosing a less tradition-bound, presumably more rootless, economically developed region of Transdanubia. As a relatively secularized region of the Sekler Land was compared with a region of Transdanubia considered to be the one of the most tradition-bound ones, the differences revealed in spite of this should be considered even more meaningful.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the findings were affected by (and if yes, to what extent) the fact that the Hungarian population of the Sekler Land is forced to live as a minority in a country whose culture is different. Similar methods should be used to examine economically more developed and less developed regions within the Sekler Land as well as in Hungary to compare regions of the same country. I think that the problem of national boundaries do not have an effect on the basic correlation revealed but it could explain why the population of the Sekler Land had been able to preserve a more traditional form of Hungarian identity by the year 2000 (in this way providing an opportunity for this comparative research).

Roots–Wealth–Media: the problem of cause and effect

The correlation between roots, wealth and exposure to media may be in different directions, and the direction of the relationships can influence the way the problems should be solved. It does matter whether it is the decay of roots that leads to increased wealth or the other way round, i.e. the roots of people becoming richer decay more easily. Similarly, it would be beneficial to know whether it is the greater exposure to (commercial) media that results in the decay of roots or people who have already lost their roots enjoy watching (commercial) TV more. The other possibility is that not a direct cause and effect relationship but a third factor, not included in the research, causes the correlation of the variables. There are even cases when mere chance can cause surprising correlation (e.g. a potential relationship between the number of storks and the frequency of births in a region). Unfortunately, this research does not answer the questions above so we have to make do with presumptions about the nature of these relationships.

As the fight against poverty aims at improving the welfare of the poor, it is important to find out whether it is enrichment that inevitably leads to the decay of roots and if there is a relationship of this kind, then can it be influenced by any reasonable policy? If the financial circumstances of the Sekler Land are considered unacceptable, how can we improve it without destroying its roots? It is also true for the opposite direction: is it possible to treat the lack of roots in the Őrség, which causes numerous social problems, while maintaining or maybe even increasing the level of wealth achieved so far? At this point the problem of absolute poverty is impossible to avoid: which is the material standard of living that is considered to be against human dignity and unacceptable? Should the life of Kézdiszék villages be considered as against human dignity? Can we say that the average standard of living of the population of Őrség is acceptable in terms of human dignity or should it be increased? These questions must be answered at least in great lines.

Some possibilities of cause and effect relationships can of course be disregarded. For example it does not seem likely to strengthen the decayed roots of the population of Őrség by destroying the present infrastructure (e.g. cutting up roads or removing telephone lines and pipelines). It is equally improbable to induce dramatic decay of roots in Kézdiszék by surfacing some roads or installing running water. However, it *is* possible that by striving to achieve aims to improve infrastructure—which, though not necessarily unsuccessful in the long run, requires huge material sacrifice—both the population and the local government elected by them would focus too much on material resources and non-material, communal values may be neglected. It is especially so if the performance of the members of the local government is judged exclusively by the improvement of material infrastructure, which immediately sets the only way of development and the only goal of communal efforts: increasing wealth. In this sense the surfacing of a street can be the symptom of a process, during which non-material roots, needed for human integrity are neglected and as consequence they start to decay. This is not only true for a Kézdiszék–Őrség comparison but also when comparing Transylvania and Hungary.

Examining the process of becoming rich on an individual level another question arises: what is the nature of relationship between ignoring moral considerations and quick accumulation of wealth? Is Mandeville (and the neo-classical economics based on his views) right in saying that getting rid of the fetters of morals leads to a quick increase in the wealth of both individuals and communities or is it that the person getting rich quickly, becomes conceited and starts to think of himself as being above moral laws? Obviously, capitalism encourages geographical mobility (losing local roots), opportunism (accepting a vicious deal or regarding the commandment "You shall not steal" as outdated) perpetual drudgery (regarding the commandment "Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day" as outdated) as well as spending a windfall on yourself, while those opposing the above attitudes are considered unpractical and will

fall behind in the race for financial resources. It seems that Mandeville is right in this respect (i.e. the one ignoring traditional ethics will become rich) but if there is a relationship in the opposite direction (i.e. rich people are more inclined to ignore ethics), it can function as positive feedback in this way accelerating the spread of losing roots and focusing on finances.

As seen before, television in itself is not enough to make somebody dependent on consumer society. Advertisements broadcast on TV, however, start to become effective, making people remember more brand names and in case there is enough money to buy the products advertised and they are available in shops, one cannot escape the messages of advertisements even when the television is off (there are leaflets, huge billboards, neon signs etc.) and—as the definition of consumer society in the introduction (see p. 7) implies—people start to evaluate one another based on the prestige value of objects owned. It seems unlikely that the messages of commercial TV channels praising rootless lifestyle and the process of people becoming rootless have no more relationship than the number of births and the migration of storks.

The lure of consumer society

The present study would give a false impression if we failed to mention that the financial situation and the consciousness of the population of Kézdiszék is basically *not voluntary*. In this way we cannot associate them with voluntary simplicity in either theoretical or practical sense, though their way of life could be exemplary for any voluntary simplifier in the West. There is no trace of conscious resistance to consumer society but there are signs of yearning for it. It seems "natural" and unavoidable that it is Kézdiszék that will become similar to the present Őrség and not conversely.

It is important to note that the study presents the state of the two societies at one time, therefore it is difficult to predict temporal changes based on the data obtained. The financial circumstances, way of thinking and values of the young may be used to make predictions about the future as in time older generations will give place to the younger ones, and it is them who will bring up the following generation. For the young in Kézdiszék it is clearly the Western consumer culture that provides a model, adopting it as fast and as successfully as possible is regarded as "progress". Their most important form of entertainment at weekends is the disco, which adopts the Western model without change in both its appearance and its music, there are no local characteristics in this respect. Their average knowledge of brands is better than half of the Őrség sample (the older respondents and the rootless males of Őrség together) and almost as many of them watch the receivable Romanian language commercial channels as the public service Hungarian channels. Their preference of television channels of this kind (i.e. it does not matter that the program is in Romanian but it must be commercial) is characteristic only of them in the Kézdiszék sample.

Compared to the young "homo oeconomicus" of Őrség the "Sekler yuppie" is still more tradition-bound, though they are unlikely to be aware of it or to be proud of it. They know a little more folksongs, have a better knowledge of the Ten Commandments, are less likely to question them, they are less willing to leave their birthplace and are more cautious to enter into a vicious deal. Considering potential trends, however, it can be interpreted as the *backwardness* of the young people of Kézdiszék, rather than a hopeful difference. Nevertheless, there is no cause for "moral panic" or generalizing a conclusion about the whole future society from the characteristics of today's young people as individuals tend to take roots gradually and become more conservative (though it won't counterbalance a larger scale social tendency of losing roots). Several older respondents for example noted that "nowadays" they would not leave their birthplace for a large sum of money, which they would have done when they were younger.

Concerning the temptation of consumer society one phenomenon has to be mentioned, which is characteristic of the whole society of Kézdiszék and not only of the young. In the region examined it had been possible—mainly for those having cable television—to receive a Hungarian commercial channel, called TV3, for a while. At that time this channel even "surpassed" other commercial channels (TV2, RTL Klub), which were easy to receive in Hungary, in terms of its "values". Its programs were dominated by violence, sex, the propagation of American lifestyle and attitudes, the sensational presentation of news as well as the consistent ridiculing of traditional values. No doubt that uncritical watching of these programs may lead to the complete decay of roots needed for integral human existence as well as to assimilation in consumer society.

This television channel had gone bankrupt a few months before the interviews were conducted (partly because it had not obtained a frequency for terrestrial broadcasting in Hungary) and ceased broadcasting. However, families that had been able to receive its programs clearly remembered the experience of watching it and when asked about their television watching habits—with one exception—they sang the praise of TV3. They admitted that nowadays they are only watching the public service Duna Tv and m2 because they have no other choice. These channels—though commercialized to some extent due to competition—still provide quite a lot of programs suitable for strengthening roots and preserving traditions. Consequently, the high amount of viewing Hungarian public service channels in Kézdiszék is not a result of free choice of values and a potential broadcast of a Hungarian commercial channel would probably put an end to the high amount of viewing public service channels. It is also important to note that Brazilian soap operas broadcast on public service Tv2 in the afternoon were especially popular with the population of Kézdiszék and most of the time television viewing meant watching these soap operas. I would also like to call attention to the fact that the people of Kézdiszék are less willing to give up television, which is probably due to the lack of other alternatives of entertainment.

All these findings show a peculiar attraction of consumer society.[2] Around the time of the 1990 democratic transformation in Hungary, Hungarians came to experience a (seemingly) wonderful world by crossing the Hungarian–Austrian border and this "wonder" has been influencing the economic and political efforts of the country since that. The majority of the population still has not become aware of the price paid for it, that is, the decay of certain human values. Around the year 2000 the person travelling from Debrecen, in Hungary to Nagyvárad (Oradea), in Romania had just the opposite experience: the journey of about 44 miles takes one back in time by 15–20 years. Why would not the people living in Romania long for the same things we longed for at that time (and are still longing for now)? Should we agree with the ones saying that the essence of man is the—Western type—consumption or are we "hallucinating", to which people's attention should be called as soon as possible?

The flowers of abundance?—The generous women of the Őrség

The society of the Őrség, which can be considered a wealthy society, created two special groups: the rootless males and the generous females. The depressing state of rootless men is not described here, though it is important to note that their proportion in the Őrség is probably higher than the 9% revealed by the research as, I assume, the ones rudely refusing to answer the questionnaire would also fall into this category. The group of generous women, on the other hand, requires more attention since their roots have become stronger, while they have quite a high standard of living and they are the best equipped in terms of infrastructure. Is

[2] Here I would like to refer to tendencies in the Third World mentioned at the end of the second chapter (see p. 40).

their case exemplary on how to live a rooted, integral life in affluent circumstances? In order to get an answer the members of the group are described in detail as follows.

The group includes all the people from the Őrség who would spend at least 30% but rather half or more of HUF 100 million received unexpectedly on charity. Strikingly, 11 of the 12 people are women.[3] The only man is 31, single and lives with his parents, he is officially unemployed but cultivates more than 8 acres of arable land, he is the only one in the Őrség to keep cows, he is interested in organic farming and motivated by protecting the environment, and he would spend most of the money received for this purpose. There are two single women in the group, one of whose answer for the question of dividing the amount cannot be interpreted so her being in the group is accidental. The other single woman would spend half of the money on charity and her future marital success is uncertain yet. The age of all the other nine women ranges from 27 to 75 (so age is not characteristic of the group) but only one of them has an intact family background : she is 35 and lives in her first marriage. At the time of the survey she was a social-worker at the local government and she would have spent half of the money received on treating ill children. There are three women in the group who live in their second marriage (both the previous and the present husband of one of them have become alcoholics) and three widows. Two of the widows (28 and 44) were bringing up their children on their own and the husband of one of them turned out to have committed suicide (the reason why the other had become a widow is unknown). The widowhood of the third is maybe not so surprising, being 75 years old, but she had become a widow twice in her life. Finally, two divorced women also belongs to the group (46 and 58) who did not marry again and one of them is still bringing up her child alone.

Considering the above description it is questionable whether this group should be held up as a model of accomplishing an integral life in good financial circumstances. Most of these respondents have suffered a lot in their lives even if some of them may live happily in their—say second—marriage. Maybe it was just their failure in life that made them pay more attention to the problems of others, strengthened their local and religious roots—compared to others' in the Őrség—money has become less important for them and they are not willing to enter a vicious deal in their own interest.[4] Most of them have probably suffered a lot before acquiring these positive features and maybe their sad experiences made them realize the spurious glitter of consumer society and the importance of other dimensions of life, which are more valuable than financial resources. However, they are no more than a drop in the bucket of rootless people dominating the society of the Őrség and there is not another group which would support them in strengthening their roots and which they could join.

This explanation for the attitude of this special group may be incorrect or insufficient. But then why was it them who remembered that we are surrounded with countless unsolved social (and environmental) problems and that they could spend a significant proportion of the windfall on solving these problems instead of spending it on increasing the standard of living and the level of consumption of themselves and their family?

In Kézdiszék there was not a similarly generous group that would donate a large sum of money. Besides imagining a somewhat smaller amount of money in the questionnaire it is important to note that until the 1990s the internal social security network of these villages was

[3] This result is especially interesting as the group-forming dimensions did not include the variable of the gender of the respondent. The cluster-forming algorithm grouped respondents irrespective of their gender according to the integrity of their roots, their dependence on consumer society and their generosity. After grouping it turned out that the group described in the main text includes women almost exclusively.

[4] Of course there are also exceptions. One of the divorced mothers, who is bringing up her adolescent daughters on her own and work extremely hard to support them was placed among the "rootless males" because similarities to them. At this point I would like to call attention to the similarity between the generous women of Őrség and the core of the voluntary simplicity movement in the US, American women with disrupted family backgrounds (see p. 73).

quite effective (though a bit differently working in the communist era) in the Sekler Land. If somebody had problems, (s)he was supported by his family or occasionally by his/her neighbors or friends. Symbolic capital is accumulated in this way in a society where *solidarity is a basic social norm.* Given these circumstances, there is not a separate layer of strikingly poor people, consequently, there is no need for the help of external charitable institutions and aid-programs. But nowadays the independent self-helping Sekler village is disintegrating, the first victims of the process being lonely old people, and charitable organizations intervening from outside have also appeared (cf. Biró–Biró 1997). Not surprisingly, the society of villages have not become aware of the new forms of help and the impersonal donation of a sum is not part of the common knowledge yet. Of course the internal social network of communities—unfortunately disintegrating in Székely land—is an incomparably more advantageous solution than the external help in the form of financial aid.[5]

The engine of consumer society: the homo oeconomicus

It is especially important to analyze the relatively young group of the Őrség which was labeled as homo oeconomicus.[6] They have the highest income, excellent infrastructure, their knowledge of brand names is outstanding even in the Őrség relation. They would spend most of the windfall on themselves, they know few folksongs, they hardly know the ten commandments but question them, they would often give some years from their life in exchange for money and would not hesitate to leave their birthplace for a considerable sum. In one hand, they have money and they are successful in the emerging consumer society of the Őrség, on the other hand their attitude is characterized by the desire to acquire even more wealth and they are inclined to enter into bargains considered unacceptable by many people.

The members of this group would organize their free travel somewhere to the other side of the world, as it is rational, and they seriously consider an offer of HUF 100 million, whether it is large enough to leave their birthplace for it or give some years from their life in exchange. Once considered the costs and benefits of accepting it, they usually accept the bargain. By contrast, members of the other groups, who turned down the offer, gave a negative answer without thinking and without considering the amount of the money offered, they were often even surprised at the question itself if not protested against it. A good example of loyalty to one's principles is the fact that for the question about leaving your birthplace in Kézdiszék people often answered by saying 'Not even if I were shot dead'. These people have an economically irrational way of thinking. Moreover, they do not consider the offer at all if money is to cross a forbidden borderline in their lives, however tempting the offer would seem economically. They instinctively feel the natural limits of economy and bargaining and irrespective of their material poverty they are unwilling to make a compromise in this respect.

The economic person, the homo oeconomicus on the other hand maximizes his/her profit by rationally comparing alternatives. It remains to be seen, to what extent the theoretical concept that neo-classical economics is based on exists in reality. Due to Herbert *Simon,* Nobel Prize winner we are aware that rationality has its bounds too. But it does not question the other aspect of this concept of human beings, according to which the aim of individuals is to maximize their financial profits. But are there any moral limits to the maximization of financial profits? For the homo oeconomicus there are not any (or at least they perceive much fewer limits than other people) but for this attitude to develop, the roots of the person we consider integral have to be cut off (or left to decay). The economic system based on growth encourages exactly this attitude, while this attitude helps the economy grow, that is, the two

[5] On the disintegration of the internal social security network of the Third World see p. 40.

[6] On the concept of homo oeconomicus of mainstream neo-classical economics and its comparison to human nature see Tomer (2001).

elements of the mechanism mutually reinforce each other and the homo oeconomicus is completely compatible with consumer society.

What else would be greater success for a growth-centered economic policy than the spread of the homo economicus? Presumably there are some people who are by nature *more inclined* to have this way of thinking than others. However, the social environment can have an effect on what extent the inclination develops, as it is seen in the different structure of Kézdiszék and Őrség societies. A society can regard prosperity as success or it can consider other aspects to be important *too*. By suggesting this I do not intend to deny that prosperity usually has an important role in societies but it is important whether there are other factors to counterbalance this tendency.

The actual population of Hungarian villages also includes specimens of homo oeconomicus though only 11% of the sample of the present research can be considered as such. In case the group of "Sekler yuppies" are included in the category (though they are far from the typical homo oeconomicus as they are still hindered in the rush for financial resources by some eroding roots) the figure is still only 33%. Consequently, the behavior of the population of the villages examined cannot be described by the prevalent economic models. Let us suppose that the same is true for larger parts of society (villages of other regions, cities), that is, it is generally not true that society is made up of specimens of homo oeconomicus. It is likely, however, that consumer society dominated by homo oeconomicus can become prevalent in the Hungarian linguistic area. In a geographical respect it would spread from West to East, while considering the composition of society due to younger generations later the older ones may also become rather rootless homo oeconomicus than individuals rooted in completeness.

Just as material wealth is relative, rootless existence also has different stages. Owing to the villages included in the research a certain part of the respondents in the Őrség became identified as homo oeconomicus, though probably more typical specimens can be found, for example in big cities. After all these people still know three folksongs and 3.6 of the Ten Commandments on average, 53% of them would refuse to bargain with the devil and they would spend 27% of the money offered on their family. Not to mention that they undertook to take part in the interview, devoting some of their time to a cause that did not yield any profit for them. Without doubt the most typical specimens of homo oeconomicus were not included in the sample, such as some young people in their twenties who I approached when they were repairing a motorbike in a yard of a house in Csákánydoroszló. Obviously, I did not have a chance to interview them at that moment so I asked if I could go back anytime during the following week. They explained their refusal with astonishing conciseness to the point saying, 'We don't have time for anything like this! Money must be kept working!'

The problem of values

Is it possible to evaluate any of the phenomena revealed as "good" or "bad" and if yes on what grounds can we do it? Is it appropriate to do it in a scientific essay? In my opinion it is not only appropriate but also necessary (I am going to justify it below) and I am also going to reveal my own convictions. Authors rarely expose themselves like this in essays considered scientific though *it is impossible to have a neutral attitude in questions of the nature of human existence.*

The problem of values can also be approached by asking if there are *appropriate* answers to the questions of the questionnaire. During the interviews I often stated that there were no appropriate answers to the questions in order to get the respondent express his/her real opinion instead of trying to meet some preliminary expectation. In spite of this there are *ideal* respondents if the problem is approached from the viewpoint of a certain scale of values.

Considering the *type of existence I consider integral*, the ideal respondent rarely watches television and prefers public service channels, (s)he could easily give up watching TV, (s)he would spend a big windfall mainly on his/her family and charity and would not even give a minute from his/her life in exchange for this amount, (s)he is loyal to his/her birthplace, (s)he has not traveled very far and does not really wish to (until /s/he knows his/her own region very well), (s)he can list the Ten Commandments and does not question them, (s)he believes in God and regularly practices his/her religion, (s)he has a non-material goal of life, (s)he keeps in touch with a lot of relatives and acquaintances, can recognize numerous plants, (s)he keeps animals if (s)he lives in a village, (s)he knows lots of folksongs, (s)he remembers few Western brand names, (s)he does not smoke and does not regularly consume alcohol, (s)he thinks it is ideal to have several children in a family, (s)he has not divorced, the daily bread of his/her family is provided but they do not live in extreme affluence. Of course, I did not meet anybody whom this description fits (and I am not like this either) but this is not the point. What is important is that by taking a stand the correlation revealed can be *evaluated* and it can be decided whether to oppose a social tendency or support it.

My arguments for the above values are of social and environmental nature and they were detailed in chapters 2–5 of this study. Those who do not or just partially share my scale of values can draw their own conclusions from the findings as Chapter 6 includes the detailed and objective description of them and I am ready to provide the database for further research to anybody. If I had finished my essay with chapter 6, the reader would have a feeling of want. The essence would be missing: the answer to the question of what to do with the correlation revealed. However, the findings cannot be evaluated neutrally, just in a different way. But the ones who evaluate them in a different way should not disguise themselves in neutrality, they should justify their choice of values.

I am going to summarize the findings and emphasize the importance of a scale of values as follows. I call attention to the analysis of Elemér *Hankiss* about the traditional and the new civilization. The two 'systems' are in flat opposition. Their goals, values and behaviors are summarized in Table 7.1 below. Both attitudes are consistent in themselves in a sense that nobody can have a functioning scale of values which partly belongs to the traditional, partly to the new attitude. This is one of the main conclusions of my research. The society of villages in Kézdiszék shows signs of the traditional world, though signs of disintegration are becoming apparent, while the villages of the Őrség are more similar to the social system considered new.

The question of choosing between the systems could be considered as a question of taste and tastes are usually not to be argued about. Why would not somebody praise alternative models of family (I regard them as the decay of social roots), why not welcome alcoholism and drug abuse as the success of self-realizing people (I would term them addictions and losing one's footing), why not consider religion as the fetters of human activity (for me it is the religious root needed for integrity) and why not regard the increasing level of consumption and attention to brand names as "proletarian renaissance" (which I call *sinking* into consumer society)?

Who would like a life based on duties, work, asceticism, and poverty when the world of rights, entertainment, hedonism and affluence is much more attractive? Obviously, this is a sufficient explanation of the temptation of consumer society discussed earlier. However, that which may work on a small scale, on the level of individuals, does not necessarily work on a larger scale, on the level of society or mankind. In Chapters 2–5 the social and environmental problems of today—associated with consumption—were reviewed in an integrated way. If we are to alleviate them, then we ought to rediscover the "solutions" termed traditional by Hankiss and adapt them to a new situation. Hankiss himself acknowledges the integrity of the traditional system as well as its ability to function and points out the vagueness and deficiency of

the "new system" which are presented as question marks in the table and make the new philosophy incomplete.

Table 7.1
The Great Transformation: Goals, Values, and Behaviors

Traditional	New
Sustenance.	Self-realization.
Self-denial.	Self-admiration, self-praising.
Love thy neighbor as thyself.	Love yourself.
The goal of life is salvation.	The goal of life is to bring it to perfection.
Duties.	Rights.
Work.	Leisure, entertainment.
Asceticism.	Hedonism.
Poverty.	Affluence.
Accepting human suffering and death.	Rejecting human suffering and death as the object of scandal and protest.
Self-restraint.	Immediate fulfillment of desires.
Controlling aspirations.	Explosion of aspirations.
Culture based on remorse.	The myth of innocence.
Transcendence.	Immanence, human existence after the death of God.
Eternity.	Transience.
Moral values are obvious.	Moral values are questioned.
The basis of moral values is provided.	The basis of moral values is missing.
Financial insecurity and metaphysical security.	Financial security and metaphysical insecurity.
Hierarchy.	Anarchy.
Obedience.	Autonomy.
Accept the status and fate imposed on you.	Rebel. Conquer the world, compete and win.
Patience.	Impatience, dynamism.
Stability and continuity.	Change, change shock.
Tradition is a real value.	Novelty is a real value.
Man is the center of universe, universe is for the human being.	???
We live in a moral universe.	???
We live in a rational universe.	???
Human life has a goal and sense.	???

Source: Hankiss (1998), p. 263

Some say that the culture of consumer society and the illusionary world of advertisements effectively fill the holes of the new system. But as the mechanism is not realistic, "more real" answers should be developed to the existing problems (Hankiss 1998). On the one hand this attitude regards the extinction of the traditional world as a fact and in this respect it—seemingly?—is on the firm ground of reality, on the other hand it does not have anything to say about a new, socially and environmentally acceptable world order.

If, however, the traditional system is more advantageous for both mankind and the natural environment, then choosing between them is no more a question of taste but is based on rationality. This rationality is (should be) a characteristic of responsible scientific thinking and responsible political decision-making. In this case our task is not to abandon the traditional approach but to reconcile it with the challenges of modern world.

Small is beautiful—environmental considerations

It would be nice to report that the socially more promising Kézdiszék region also surpasses the Őrség in environmental respect. But is it so?

Balázs Sepsiszéki Nagy, a researcher of the Sekler Land, describes Háromszék, the region including Kézdiszék, in 1998 as follows. "*Villagers are in direct relationship with nature. From spring to autumn they work on the fields and in winter they cut wood in the forests. Mother earth secures their food and their future.*" This suggests the direct interdependence of man and nature as well as their potential harmony. However, the quotation follows like this: "*The relationship between landscape and man cannot even be regarded as harmonic when considering villages since the notion of environmental protection is unknown to the population. One can often see dung water flow from the yard of farmers into streets and then into streams. There is no waste collection so people dispose of household waste where they like to, which is often watercourses, ditches and roadsides. If there is a dump in the fields of a village or town, it is usually not fenced and the wind can easily blow away the light garbage. The women wash carpets in the streams using washing powder. After harvest the valleys closed by mountains are often filled with dense smoke because of stubble-burning*" (Sepsiszéki, 1998, p. 28).

I can confirm the description above as I saw similar problems during the research. Though the sheer explanation of the worrying facts does not improve the situation, understanding the reasons can bring us closer to solutions. This is why first I would like to call attention to the nature of traditional village housekeeping that provided for the needs of people in a closed circulation between the land and the household, practically without producing garbage. Agricultural produce grown on the fields was used as foodstuff or folder during which only organic "garbage" was produced at most. However, this was not considered as waste but was made into compost and taken back to the fields to replace the nutriment and trace elements "taken away" at harvest. Manure, the waste product of animal husbandry, now sometimes regarded as unpleasant garbage, was always taken back to the fields. Fertilizing is also part of the sustainable farming based on local circulation of matter. This farming is sustainable as it does not need the input of external matter and energy (except for solar energy) and provides the population with enough foodstuff. No doubt, one cannot produce a surplus resulting in considerable increase in wealth.[8]

By contrast, nowadays—becoming increasingly typical of the Sekler Land as well—mechanization, the use of artificial fertilizers and plant protection chemicals as well as the use of antibiotics in animal husbandry have appeared, which is an input of external matter and energy. In this case manure becomes an environmental problem to be solved, stubble-burning also appears as artificial fertilizers can also be used for soil-conservation. Excessive use of chemicals (pesticides, artificial fertilizers etc.) leads to water pollution, while more and more inorganic, non-degradable or slowly degradable waste is produced in households due to decreasing subsistence farming and packaged goods. The closed circulation free of waste is broken up. What can a village household do in this situation? Having no other choice, it disposes of its garbage as it can, so the spectacular landscapes of Transylvania which are near public

[8] It has to be noted that the villages of Sekler Land used to have an exemplary economical system in the 17–18th centuries which can be remarkable for the whole world. Documents of Sekler village laws is still interesting to read (see e.g. Imreh 1973) and can be considered as compulsory literature for those interested in the forms of sustainable economy. "*Norms requiring rooms, yards and the street in front of the house to be kept clean were included in village laws, customs and even in folksongs and they were observed carefully. The waters and watercourses of villages were protected from every pollution…*" (Imreh 1993, p. 260) This system was weakened by the increasing state intervention in the 19th century and then completely destroyed by the communist regime and the temptation of consumer society. Instead of the art of maintaining commons more and more often the tragedy of commons can be studied in Sekler Land.

roads are marred by rusty tins, plastic bottles and other garbage. Surprisingly, the spread of piped gas also breaks a closed energy circulation.

No doubt that a centralized, mechanized and chemically supported agriculture is able to produce bigger crop, nicely packaged goods as well as using gas instead of collecting firewood are all signs of the increase in material standard of living. Obviously, we are witnessing the gradual spread of the convenience services of consumer society in the traditional society of Transylvania. The villages of the Őrség have already completely undergone the change that has just started in Kézdiszék. This is also to call attention to the fact that in spite of the dramatic environmental pollution of the population in the Sekler Land the economy and way of life present there is still more sustainable than in the Őrség or the almost sterile villages of Western Europe. The scattered garbage, the leaking dung water and the clothes washed in streams by using chemicals will disappear with the spread of waste disposal infrastructure compatible with consumer society, which are of material nature only on the one hand (waste collection, drainage) but are of mental nature on the other hand (the appearance of environmental consciousness). However, by opening up the closed systems the economy and way of life becomes fundamentally unsustainable, in spite of all environmental policies, which touch only the surface of the problems and do not change consumption structures.

I do not intend to praise "medieval" farming methods, the use of draught animals, drudgery for sustenance or to reject modern advances of humanity. Nevertheless, given the new environmental challenges of today, one has to realize the environmental (and social) disadvantages of large-scale, industrial economy and we should make a more sensible progress by preserving the advantages some of the older forms of economic activity, as Ernst F. *Schumacher* put it in his work *Small is Beautiful* decades ago.

Finally, I intend to discuss a different but similarly important problem. The attitude regarding few children in a family as ideal is labeled as materialist and dependent on consumer society in the present study.[9] This attitude is telling as it means exchanging children for consumer goods and increased comfort,[10] otherwise the more affluent population of the Őrség would regard more children as ideal than the financially poor people of Kézdiszék. However, it seems equally true that it is this attitude that stopped the increase of population in developed Western societies. Supposing that overpopulation is unsustainable and harmful to the environment, materialism—from this aspect—also has an environmentally friendly effect. This problem needs careful consideration and extremely cautious treatment.

In the developed Western states of consumer societies materialism has reached such extent that the population—not including immigration from the Third World—is decreasing. The number of Hungarians, though there is no consumer society in the Western European sense—is also declining both in Hungary and in the Sekler Land. This might be good news for radical environmentalists who are concerned only with environmental problems but I intend to approach problems by also considering social aspects, that is, in an integrated way, and thus have a different opinion. On the one hand people rooted in completeness do not consider high material consumption as a life goal, in this way they have a smaller impact on the natural environment than people dependent on consumer society. In the life of an integral person material consumption does not have a more important role than in the life of any animal species, consequently a given area of land can nurture more of this kind of people. On the other hand in the families of a nation with decreasing population it seems that—at least temporarily—

[9] This kind of materialism is characteristic of consumer society but the relationship does not exist in the other direction: it is not only consumer society that encourages focusing on material aspects when bringing up children. A good example is some regions of the Hungarian linguistic area where it has been customary for a long time to have one child in the family.

[10] Institutional economics even regards children as consumer goods, who (which?) by being or not being born compete with other consumer goods (cf. Becker 1981).

three children are more ideal than two or one if it does not intend to sacrifice itself on the altar of a misunderstood environmental protection. The world makes sense only as far as humanity exist. Consequently, a nation that perceives problems correctly should not set an example to the world by committing mass suicide (it is just escaping from difficulties and not a solution to problems) but by pointing out the way leading to completeness.

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Epilogue

In the present essay I reviewed the environmental and social aspects of consumer society spreading all over the world and supported my theoretical analysis by the numerical findings of a research carried out in the Hungarian linguistic area. First I presented and grouped the most important arguments denying the problems of consumer society and later confronted them with the findings of other fields of science not included in economics. This analysis highlighted the problems of consumer society: the spread of over-consumption and misconsumption, the negative social and environmental consequences of the materialist attitude, the characteristics of the relationship between happiness and the amount of material goods consumed, the long-term irrationality and futility of the social competition for financial resources as well as the spread of Western consumer attitudes in the Third World.

It was followed by the description of the philosophy and practice of voluntary simplicity—spreading mainly in the United States, the biggest and most advanced consumer society of the world—which is trying to oppose the ideals and practice of consumer society. The basic values of the movement, material simplicity, human scale, self-determination, ecological awareness and personal growth were examined. It was confirmed that the followers of the movement are differentiated from involuntarily simplified people (the poor) on the basis of 'voluntariness' and the behaviors typical of them were presented.

When describing voluntary simplicity one has to admit its failures too. These failures are mainly due to the strong influence of the money-centered social environment surrounding the movement. In a society racing for financial resources voluntary simplifiers look naive or they may turn out to focus on material savings. I also presented the movement's inclination to selfishness and the fact that earlier waves of voluntary simplicity were exploited by the growth-centered economic mechanism, and pinpointed the signs showing that the same could happen to the newest wave of the movement too.

By examining the failure of voluntary simplicity as a movement—however respectable and progressive—I could define the vicious circle of materialism, which prevents individuals and communities from abandoning materialism, the basis of consumer society, even if they realize its drawbacks. The main reason of this failure in my opinion is that the individuals concerned do not pay enough attention to all dimensions of the personality I consider *complete*. I termed these dimensions roots for easier understanding. They include the especially important *social* roots (which prevent isolation and atomization and provide a stable family background), *cultural* roots (which help one connect to his/her close community and draw on its past experience), *natural* roots (which provide the recognition and respect of the natural environment needed for the survival of mankind) and *religious* roots (which help one discover the meaning of human existence and provide a stable background against the temptations threatening completeness).

The relationship between roots and consumer society was examined by comparing two regions, one of them being relatively underdeveloped economically and removed from consumer society, the other economically more developed and showing signs of consumer society. The research revealed that the integrity of roots needed for completeness is inversely proportional to assimilation into consumer society. In the seventh chapter conclusions of regional scale were drawn, while at this point I intend to call attention to some larger scale relations.

It is important to note that the happiness and satisfaction of respondents were not examined by the subjective scales discussed in the second chapter. Without doubt it would be advantageous to know how satisfied people are with their circumstances in Kézdiszék and in the Őrség as it would probably reveal important information. However, these findings, being subjective, would have to be examined cautiously. The satisfaction of people is largely influenced by the reference groups, that is, if the population of the Őrség compared their circumstances to those of the people of Kézdiszék, they would report high levels of satisfaction, while if they compared them to the lifestyle suggested by advertisements and the Western commercial me-

dia, they would be rather unsatisfied. On the other hand, for a person from Kézdiszék a village of the Őrség is a real earthly paradise.

A factor, which is more important than subjective well-being, could be pleasure, which, in my interpretation, arises from the existence rooted in completeness. It does not imply the complete lack of pain, sorrows or failures as these are the natural characteristics of human life and without them health, joy and success would not be appreciated. Focusing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs can lead to completeness (though a simple person instinctively feels the direction without studying psychological essays), and this completeness, which is never a finished process, could be defined by the integrity of roots examined here.

Of course everybody aims at avoiding pain and sadness but it impossible to accomplish this aim totally. Moreover, the state of total physical and emotional comfort without any stimuli is not advantageous at all. Completeness provides meaning to suffering and pain, avoidable for nobody, and people become able to exploit these difficulties in order to develop spiritually. Consequently, the research of the integrity of roots examines the *possibility* of happiness, which I consider more important than the subjective scales of satisfaction, which is largely affected by the actual mood and reference point of the respondent. The value of *completeness* is often not obvious for a lot of people until they have experienced the difficulties of a *fragmented* existence. The way back to completeness is often "bumpy" (see the fate of the rootless men of the Őrség) but it is never impossible.

The way back to completeness has to be examined in connection with material wealth as well as the integrity of roots. Research has revealed that in spite of an exceptional economic growth—started in 1957 in the United States for example, when the GDP per capita was about USD 12,700—the average of subjective well-being did not increase. Consequently, the correlation between material wealth and subjective well-being (referring to life as a whole) significantly decreased above a given welfare threshold. This implies the existence of a welfare threshold, which could be examined in other countries too. In terms of purchasing power parity Hungary has almost achieved the 1957 level of GDP per capita of the US (in 1999 this figure was USD 10,870) in terms of exchange rate we still have to catch up. In Romania it seems more possible to increase subjective well-being by economic growth if we accept the above correlation. I do not wish to deny this aspect but I am more interested to see signs of satisfaction with financial circumstances, which are missing in both the relatively affluent Hungary and in countries having an annual per capita GDP of USD 30–40,000. It looks as if economy and politics would ignore the decrease in the correlation between subjective well-being and affluence, which inevitably happens over a certain extent of material wealth.

The annual per capita GDP of USD 10–12,000 seems to be acceptable in terms of the sustaining capacity of the natural environment and long-term sustainability. It is worrying and at the same time worth paying attention to the fact that the decay of roots needed for completeness starts (or even is accomplished) on this level. No doubt, that the construction of an intended motorway in Transylvania will result in economic growth in the region concerned but at the same time the affected villages will have the same fate as the villages of the Őrség: communities, which have already started to disintegrate, will be completely disrupted and people will lose their roots—unless we do something against it.

When increasing the economy and material wealth, it should be taken into consideration that people will not easily give up the level of convenience and feeling of comfort they have once got accustomed to. Is it reasonable to increase our own level of material wealth or that of the society to such a high level that it is unsustainable in the long run and sooner or later we will have to give it up? It is less painful to consider it before acquiring the service of convenience whether it is impossible to imagine our lives without it and may be it is better not to get used to it at all. Considering all this, the situation of Western societies, accustomed to an unsustainable level of material comfort, seems to be especially difficult.

But is not it just creating an ideology for poverty and are we sensitive enough to the problems of the poor? It must be clearly stated that the existence of absolute poverty is unacceptable, policies and support is needed to help these people get out of their terrible situation and lead an adequate, independent life. Absolute poverty is defined as a state which *does not even provide the minimum fulfillment of physical needs*, that is, it is not to be interpreted in relation to the wealth of the neighbors or people seen on television. People living in absolute poverty can still be found in the United States, in Western Europe, in Hungary, in Transylvania and in the Third World and they pose a challenge for other people's solidarity. One of the preconditions of this solidarity is that we, as relatively wealthy individuals, voluntarily reduce our consumption to allow the ones in absolute poverty to get an adequate share of the renewable and non-renewable forms of energy.

I did not try to define the exact limit of absolute poverty in this study though I would like to call attention to its necessity. I intend to point out that considering the average standard of living of the population, *Transylvania cannot be regarded as characterized by absolute poverty* and if the author had to give up his roots in Budapest, he would not hesitate about where to find a new place of residence. The notion of absolute poverty can not only be interpreted in material terms but should also be considered in terms of the fulfillment of one's *non-material* needs. In that case the rootless communities of consumer societies, including the villages of the Őrség, should be regarded as seriously deprived areas, while the lifestyle of people in the Sekler Land—allowing for their decaying social state—would be exemplary for the world. Life here would be especially worth paying attention to if the population of the Sekler Land kept a certain distance from messages coming from outside and in this way their lifestyle became more voluntary and if the missing ecological awareness were improved by education.

What I really regard as a value is not the form of poverty *relative* to others' but human *completeness*, which seems to be increasingly difficult to experience in material wealth and comfort. In the life of a complete person or a society made up mainly of such people, the role of money, market and business is limited to the adequate fulfillment of material needs and material aspects have nothing to do with the non-material dimensions of human existence. The most dangerous tendency threatening completeness is the extreme spread of money-centered attitude in the decisions and life of a rootless individual.

It also has to be mentioned what conclusions can be drawn for economics from this research. I already stressed the deficiency of the concept of homo oeconomicus, economic man, the basis for neo-classical models as society is not exclusively made up of this kind of people and the findings of other disciplines examining human beings also contradict this concept. The main subject of my study has always been economy, wealth and financial resources which were supplemented by the findings of other fields of science. In other words, I did not simply consider man and welfare (and well-being) as an economist but also e.g. as a psychologist, a sociologist, an anthropologist, an ethnographer, and environmentalist to integrate the relevant findings of these fields of sciences. This is a return to an earlier, less specialized and more holistic stage of scientific thinking. This should encourage any logically thinking person to abandon neo-classical economics and build up a more prudential economic policy as well as an economics which is more compatible with the challenges of today.

The present study may raise more questions than it answers. These important questions, however, have had little influence on today's prevailing discourse so far and if the subject happened to crop up, most of those shaping public opinion dismissed it as moral panic. It would be necessary to carry out the research presented in as many regions as possible, using a more developed form of the questionnaire, in order to reveal more detailed correlation between the roots needed for completeness and the relationship of people to financial resources. I can imagine regions which are materially poor—like Transylvania—but the population has already lost its roots, while it is possible to find regions where roots are strong in spite of a

relative affluence. In this case it should be examined how the community concerned found the balance and this success could be held up as an example to other communities.

Finally, I wish to highlight the personal message intended for the reader and what it is that would be misinterpretation of my study. The roots needed for human completeness are used for emphasizing the role of local attachment, e.g. a stable relationship with personalities associated with one's dwelling place, the local culture, the natural environment and religion. Strong attachment is on the one hand good for the person, on the other hand, it is favorable in terms of environmental sustainability. However, this does not imply exclusiveness, neither does it suggest that one should not know and appreciate something that is strange to or different from the local culture. It only means that a person having strong roots can relate to a frame of reference that has a fixed point and a positive direction and (s)he can also value the new and unfamiliar phenomena by the help of it.

Strong roots obviously enable someone to differentiate between good and bad, valuable and valueless (in relation to completeness) and it is the lack of this ability that leads to one seriously losing ground and failing in life. In Hungary, for example, it is possible to know and appreciate Asian cultures and religions, like a Western pop group or trend, enjoy a superficial comedy or film without the decline of our humanity if we have a clear judgement based on strong roots and we can decide the value of the thing seen or heard in relation to a higher reference point. In this case we will not be persuaded by advertisements, huge billboards or tricky packaging to buy something which has no sense or value according to this higher reference point and we will know exactly what can be bought for money and what cannot.

It has to be recognized that I did not intend to call upon anybody to overthrow capitalism, to eliminate private ownership, to smash the shop windows of transnational companies or to prevent waste disposal with our own body. I called attention to the fact that we should maintain and develop our roots and this can be done at will irrespective of the prevalent socio-economic structure. There are of course structures that hinder (but never completely prevent) one's progress toward completeness and there are ones that encourage it. However, reformers striving to transform unfavorable structures should start with themselves, after having reviewed the integrity of their own roots. On the one hand, it is necessary for authenticity, on the other, for finding the right direction for their efforts. It is disputable whether increasingly worrying environmental problems give us enough time for a grassroots and fundamental change but—considering history—it seems inevitable that the top-down measures of an elite considering itself enlightened but ignoring the needs of people to achieve completeness are doomed to fail.

APPENDIX

Tables containing the detailed findings of the research
conducted in Kézdiszék and in the Őrség

Table 1
Living Conditions of the Respondents Included in the Sample in Kézdiszék and in the Őrség

	EXAMINED REGION									
	KÉZDISZÉK					ŐRSÉG				
	Mean	Valid N	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.	Mean	Valid N	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
The quality of the road in front of the house (1=very bad, 5=excellent)	**2.94**	N=66	1.12	1.00	5.00	**4.38**	N=65	0.78	2.00	5.00
The state of the dwelling place of the respondent (1=very bad, 5=excellent)	**3.44**	N=66	0.88	1.00	5.00	**4.28**	N=64	0.77	2.00	5.00
How many black&white TV sets do function in the household?	**0.36**	N=66	0.52	0.00	2.00	**0.26**	N=66	0.47	0.00	2.00
How many color TV sets do function in the household?	**0.88**	N=66	0.54	0.00	3.00	**1.65**	N=66	0.69	0.00	3.00
How long have you had a TV on your own?	**23.15**	N=48	9.58	0.00	39.00	**32.10**	N=40	4.79	20.00	45.00
Do you have cable TV at present?	**0.59**	N=66	0.50	0.00	1.00	**0.21**	N=66	0.41	0.00	1.00
Do you have a satellite receiver on your own?	**0.42**	N=66	0.50	0.00	1.00	**0.44**	N=66	0.50	0.00	1.00
How many channels can you receive altogether?	**16.97**	N=66	10.74	0.00	50.00	**15.95**	N=66	13.01	5.00	85.00
How many people are there in the household?	**3.44**	N=62	1.58	1.00	9.00	**3.58**	N=66	1.28	1.00	7.00
How many rooms are there in the household?	**2.88**	N=65	1.33	1.00	8.00	**2.95**	N=66	0.98	1.00	6.00
How many bathrooms are there in the household?	**0.62**	N=66	0.63	0.00	2.00	**1.09**	N=66	0.34	0.00	2.00
Is running water installed? (1=yes)	**0.18**	N=66	0.39	0.00	1.00	**1.00**	N=66	0.00	1.00	1.00
Is gas installed? (0=no, 1=yes)	**0.03**	N=66	0.17	0.00	1.00	**0.68**	N=66	0.47	0.00	1.00
Is electricity installed? (0=no, 1=yes)	**0.98**	N=66	0.12	0.00	1.00	**1.00**	N=66	0.00	1.00	1.00
Is there a fixed telephone line? (0=no; 1=yes)	**0.27**	N=66	0.45	0.00	1.00	**0.94**	N=66	0.24	0.00	1.00
How many mobile phones are there in the household?	**0.14**	N=66	0.49	0.00	3.00	**0.30**	N=66	0.61	0.00	3.00
How many fridge are there in the household?	**1.29**	N=66	0.63	0.00	2.00	**2.37**	N=65	0.74	1.00	4.00
How many washing machines are there in the household?	**1.00**	N=66	0.46	0.00	3.00	**1.31**	N=65	0.58	0.00	3.00
How many microwave ovens are there in the household?	**0.06**	N=66	0.24	0.00	1.00	**0.65**	N=65	0.48	0.00	1.00
Eastern make cars (pc.).	**0.50**	N=66	0.66	0.00	2.00	**0.56**	N=66	0.61	0.00	2.00
Western make cars (pc.).	**0.08**	N=66	0.27	0.00	1.00	**0.42**	N=66	0.58	0.00	2.00
Total number of vehicle (including tractors etc.).	**0.77**	N=66	1.05	0.00	5.00	**1.00**	N=66	0.74	0.00	3.00
The value of the Eastern vehicle fleet, the original value given in %, reduced to 0 within 20 yrs.	**0.25**	N=66	0.37	0.00	1.45	**0.15**	N=66	0.24	0.00	1.00
The value of the Western vehicle fleet, the original value given in %, redu-ced to 0 within 20 yrs.	**0.05**	N=66	0.17	0.00	0.90	**0.23**	N=66	0.42	0.00	1.70
The number of years the respondent attended school.	**10.23**	N=66	3.28	2.00	21.00	**12.05**	N=66	3.12	7.00	20.00

Table 2
Roots, Embedment into Consumer Society, and Television Viewing Habits of the Respondents Included in the Sample in Kézdiszék and in the Őrség

	EXAMINED REGION									
	KÉZDISZÉK					ŐRSÉG				
	Mean	Valid N	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.	Mean	Valid N	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Number of relatives with who (s)he is in a regular contact.	**6.77**	N=56	5.54	0.00	23.00	**6.00**	N=64	5.48	0.00	27.00
Number of non-relatives with who (s)he is in a regular contact.	**5.26**	N=46	4.43	0.00	19.00	**7.50**	N=60	7.84	0.00	30.00
Are you divorced? (0=no, 1=yes)	**0.02**	N=66	0.12	0.00	1.00	**0.15**	N=66	0.36	0.00	1.00
The number of listed folksongs.	**6.23**	N=62	9.30	0.00	42.00	**3.45**	N=65	5.68	0.00	29.00
The number of plants (s)he would recognize.	**33.25**	N=65	15.31	8.00	75.00	**53.70**	N=64	23.04	21.00	144.00
Possessed land by the household (acre)	**9.56**	N=64	25.04	0.00	199.44	**3.42**	N=63	5.20	0.00	23.39
Frequency of religious service attendance (0= does not, 5=regularly)	**2.00**	N=66	1.60	0.00	5.00	**1.50**	N=66	1.68	0.00	5.00
Do you believe in God? (0=no, 1=perhaps,2=yes)	**1.95**	N=66	0.21	1.00	2.00	**1.45**	N=66	0.73	0.00	2.00
How often do you pray? (0=never, 3= in the mor-ning and in the evening)	**1.39**	N=64	1.08	0.00	3.00	**0.59**	N=66	1.10	0.00	3.00
The number of com-mandments listed out of the Ten Commandments.	**5.19**	N=62	2.32	0.00	10.00	**3.62**	N=66	2.69	0.00	10.00
The number of outdated command-ments.	**0.95**	N=61	1.19	0.00	4.00	**2.05**	N=61	1.78	0.00	8.00
How far have you trave-led in your life? (miles)	**441**	N=66	734	31.25	5,563	**444**	N=66	833	31.25	5,000
How far would you travel if you could go free-of-charge? (miles)	**2,046**	N=65	2,900	0.00	10,000	**2,581**	N=64	2,780	0.00	9,750
Would you leave your mother land forever in exchange for a large sum of money? (0=no, 1=yes)	**0.20**	N=65	0.40	0.00	1.00	**0.55**	N=64	0.50	0.00	1.00
The number of listed Western brand names.	**9.06**	N=66	10.78	0.00	52.00	**25.84**	N=63	23.20	0.00	129.00
Are you willing to give years from your life for money? (0=no, 1=yes)	**0.20**	N=65	0.40	0.00	1.00	**0.23**	N=66	0.42	0.00	1.00
Money spent on oneself (1=100%).	**0.62**	N=65	0.38	0.00	1.00	**0.44**	N=65	0.35	0.00	1.00
Money spent on family (1=100%).	**0.34**	N=65	0.39	0.00	1.00	**0.43**	N=65	0.34	0.00	1.00
Money spent on others (1=100%).	**0.04**	N=65	0.11	0.00	0.50	**0.13**	N=65	0.23	0.00	0.90
Is respondent's life goal is materialis-tic? (0=no, 1=yes)	**0.22**	N=60	0.42	0.00	1.00	**0.32**	N=59	0.47	0.00	1.00
The ideal number of children in a family.	**2.80**	N=66	1.34	1.50	10.00	**2.18**	N=66	0.69	0.00	3.50
Daily amount of viewing commercial television in winter (minute).	**57.29**	N=62	95.58	0.00	480.00	**193.03**	N=64	113.94	3.00	540.00
Daily amount of viewing public ser-vice television in winter (minute).	**220.45**	N=62	135.63	0.00	648.00	**39.95**	N=64	39.12	0.00	150.00
Daily amount of viewing commercial television in summer (minute).	**39.27**	N=62	79.18	0.00	480.00	**127.77**	N=64	97.24	3.00	540.00
Daily amount of viewing public ser-vice television in summer (minute).	**116.78**	N=62	72.43	0.00	336.00	**26.23**	N=64	28.01	0.00	144.00
Would you give up television forever? (0=no, 1=maybe, 2=yes)	**0.29**	N=66	0.65	0.00	2.00	**0.65**	N=66	0.90	0.00	2.00
The number of cigarettes smoked in a week.	**31.17**	N=66	55.53	0.00	210.00	**34.91**	N=66	63.91	0.00	280.00
The quantity of alcohol consumed in a week (converted in wine dl).	**17.47**	N=66	27.98	0.00	110.00	**11.88**	N=66	25.78	0.00	126.00

Table 3
Clusters and Regions Characterized by Group Averages

	KÉZDI-SZÉK %	BRAND pc.	FOLK SONG pc.	LEAVE FOR MONEY %	TRAVEL CLOSE %	GOD 0=no 1=maybe 2=yes	10 COMM-AND MENTS pc.	OUT-DATED COMM. pc.	YEARS FOR MONEY %	MAT. LIFE GOAL %	IDEAL N. OF CHILDR. person	TOTAL RESPON DENTS person	KÉZDI-SZÉK %
	100	9.06	6.226	20.00	55.38	1.955	5.194	0.951	20.00	22	2.795	66	100
	0	25.84	3.446	54.69	26.56	1.455	3.621	2.049	21.21	32	2.182	66	0
Mean	50	17.26	4.803	37.21	41.09	1.705	4.383	1.500	20.61	27	2.489	(132)	50

GROUP	KÉZDI-SZÉK %	BRAND pc.	FOLK SONG pc.	LEAVE FOR MONEY %	TRAVEL CLOSE %	GOD 0=no 1=maybe 2=yes	10 COMM-AND-MENTS pc.	OUT-DATED COMM. pc.	YEARS FOR MONEY %	MAT. LIFE GOAL %	IDEAL N. OF CHILDR. person	INCLUDED INTO GROUP person	GROUP
1	100	**4.65**	**12.050**	**5.26**	**68.42**	**1.950**	**5.526**	**0.556**	20.00	**5**	**3.175**	20	1
2	96	**4.50**	2.182	**4.17**	**70.83**	**2.000**	4.364	1.409	**4.35**	41	2.958	24	2
3	82	18.64	3.962	50.00	25.00	1.821	5.222	1.037	32.14	17	2.250	28	3
4	0	**56.13**	3.067	**92.86**	13.33	1.000	3.600	**2.867**	**46.67**	27	2.067	15	6
5	0	11.48	4.630	30.77	42.31	1.852	4.037	2.000	11.11	38	2.389	27	5
6	0	12.00	**0.200**	83.33	60.00	**0.167**	**1.000**	**3.000**	33.33	**80**	**1.833**	6	4
7	0	27.55	3.833	50.00	**0**	1.750	4.167	0.750	8.33	17	2.042	12	7
Mean	50	17.26	4.803	37.21	41.09	1.705	4.383	1.500	20.61	27	2.489	(132)	Mean

	KÉZDISZÉK %	SPEND ON ONESELF %	SPEND ON FAMILY %	SPEND ON OTHERS %	GIVE UP TV? 0=no, 1=may-be, 2=yes	COMM.TV SUMMER min/day	PUBLIC TV SUMMER min/day	DIVOR-CED %	AGE year	TOTAL RESP. person	KÉZDISZÉK %
	100	62	34	4	0.288	39	117	1.52	47.32	66	100
	0	44	43	13	0.652	128	26	15.15	46.48	66	0
Mean	50	53	39	8	0.470	84	71	8.33	46.90	(132)	50

GROUP	KÉZDISZÉK %	SPEND ON ONESELF %	SPEND ON FAMILY %	SPEND ON OTHERS %	GIVE UP TV? 0=no, 1=may-be, 2=yes	COMM.TV SUMMER min/day	PUBLIC TV SUMMER min/day	DIVOR-CED %	AGE year	INCLUDED INTO GRP. person	GROUP
1	100	**16**	**83**	**1**	0.150	34	**154**	0	**62.80**	20	1
2	96	79	16	5	0.250	**12**	116	4.17	51.42	24	2
3	82	**89**	**8**	3	0.429	88	77	0	**30.68**	28	3
4	0	70	27	3	**1.267**	78	**15**	0	31.27	15	6
5	0	24	71	5	0.370	144	24	0	60.15	27	5
6	0	58	36	6	**0**	**197**	43	**83.33**	47.33	6	4
7	0	19	24	**57**	1.000	117	31	41.67	38.75	12	7
Mean	50	53	39	8	0.470	84	71	8.33	46.90	(132)	Mean

Note: the listed variables are cluster defining criteria

Table 4
Supplementary Data for Characterizing Clusters with Group Averages

GROUP	KÉZDI-SZÉK %	NET EARNINGS thousand HUF/month/ household	NET EARNINGS thousand HUF/month/ capita	PRAYER 0=never, 1=some-times, 2=morning or evening, 3=morning & evening	CHURCH 0=never, 1=feast, 2=once a month, 5=four times a month	MALE %	EDU-CATION no. of completed years	INCLUDED INTO GROUP person
1	100	NA	NA	**1.44**	**2.20**	40	**8.85**	20
2	96	NA	NA	**1.42**	1.92	58	9.21	24
3	82	NA	NA	1.14	1.82	46	12.39	28
4	0	**150.07**	**38.76**	**0**	0.93	53	**13.80**	15
5	0	97.97	29.19	0.78	1.96	56	10.52	27
6	0	**80.20**	**22.97**	**0**	**0**	**83**	12.00	6
7	0	117.20	33.78	1.25	1.92	**8**	13.50	12
Mean	50	114.19	32.10	0.98	1.75	48	11.14	(132)

GROUP	KÉZDI-SZÉK %	WATER %	GAS %	TELE-PHONE %	MOBILE PHONE pc.	FRIDGE pc.	WASH. MACH-INE pc.	MICRO WAVE OVEN %	BATH-ROOM pc.	EASTERN CAR % (100%= a new one)	WESTERN CAR % (100%= a new one)	BLACK & WHITE TV pc.	COLOR TV pc.	INCLUDED INTO GROUP person
1	100	20	10	35	0.05	1.30	0.95	0	0.55	26	0	0.50	0.75	20
2	96	21	0	29	0	1.29	1.04	8	0.58	18	3	0.17	0.87	24
3	82	32	18	36	0.36	1.54	1.04	25	0.79	26	13	0.39	1.11	28
4	0	100	60	93	0.27	2.27	1.13	60	1.20	18	30	0.13	1.73	15
5	0	100	63	93	0.19	2.35	1.42	58	1.00	16	18	0.26	1.67	27
6	0	100	50	83	0	2.67	1.17	50	1.00	8	13	0.33	1.17	6
7	0	100	92	100	0.75	2.33	1.42	83	1.25	16	33	0.42	1.83	12
Mean	50	59	36	61	0.22	1.82	1.15	35	0.86	20	14	0.31	1.27	(132)

GROUP	KÉZDI-SZÉK %	ROAD QUALITY 1=unpass. 5=excellent	BUILDING QUALITY 1=decrepit 5=excellent	CONTACT WITH STRANGERS person	CONTACT WITH RELATIVES person	LISTED PLANTS pc.	SMOKING cig./week	ALCOHOL CONSUM. dl wine/ week	TRAVEL FARTHEST miles	FREE-OF-CHARGE TRAVEL miles	INCLUDED INTO GROUP person
1	100	2.90	3.30	**3.71**	**7.50**	61.77	**19**	12	308	**1,043**	20
2	96	3.04	3.42	4.44	5.19	46.73	41	28	619	1,468	24
3	82	3.21	3.86	**8.59**	**8.08**	53.06	33	9	319	**3,586**	28
4	0	4.29	4.36	7.33	6.73	**63.73**	**18**	2	**837**	**3,449**	15
5	0	4.41	4.12	6.08	5.50	48.52	29	12	393	1,979	27
6	0	4.17	3.83	5.75	**3.33**	**41.00**	**137**	**65**	**256**	2,093	6
7	0	4.50	4.50	**9.18**	6.18	60.00	**18**	**1**	316	2,419	12
Mean	50	3.66	3.85	6.53	6.36	53.70	33	15	443	2,311	(132)

Note: the listed variables are *not* cluster defining criteria