

Welfare statistics. Analysing the quality of life in the 1950s Romania¹

Mara Mărginean

Academia Română, Institutul de Istorie "George Barițiu", Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: *This article unveils how a project that refined social sciences research methodologies to envision the general well-being was articulated by the Romanian state during the early 1950s. It uses as a case study the research conducted in the 1950s on family budgets. The central element of this investigation consists of contextualizing social policies based on the reconstruction of postwar Europe. It pays a particular attention, therefore, to identify differences between East and West by comparing the social welfare approaches suggested by the propagandist rhetoric, policy makers and professional authority. It aims to establish to what extent approaches to well-being during the 1950s Romania reflected ideological and professional tensions across the Iron Curtain and, on another level, if they were articulated by utopian or pragmatic goals. Equally important, it also aims to open up a discussion on the accuracy and relevance of official statistics, which is central to understanding if and how the national prestige of a state may be articulated by standardization.*

Keywords: *Romania, family budgets, quantitative research, Cold War, living standards*

By well-being we usually mean a good material situation, prosperity and abundance. Yet, the defining landmarks of the concept are the outcomes of ideological and cultural constructs, which greatly differ from one socio-political or economic context to another.² The fact

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² Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 28; Arjun Appadurai, „Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 4; Liviu Chelcea, “The Culture of

that what illustrates a high standard of living in certain areas or historical moments may resemble poverty or backwardness in other contexts unveils the fluidity of the concept and questions the political and social implications of materiality. Who are the actors involved in conceptualizing these discursive constructions about well-being? How influential is the political authority in this process? Which are the levers through which the meanings of standard of living are instrumented?

Such questions are important not only because they reveal social dynamics as a result of material changes, but also because they unveil how decision-making factors altered the professional autonomy of those responsible with handling issues related to the quality of life. For example, one of the central feature of modern states consisted of developing programs of social disciplining and control. Statistics, censuses or surveys fleshed out the bones of individual practices and values, provided useful information about economic and social dynamics and served the state's endeavors to assemble bureaucratic structures, develop welfare systems and create programs of mass mobilization. As scholars have recently pointed out tying the police over people to institutional construction would further enhance the political legitimacy at home and would raise the state's national prestige and visibility abroad.³ However, the extensive use of statistics and other quantitative methodologies of social research in the making of modern states were far from making an infallible strategy. On the contrary, the universal claim that scientific approaches - that is mathematical informed research methodologies - could record objectively the myriad facets of social transformation was shortly questioned. It became increasingly evident that information collected as a result of such investigations was, in fact, highly subjective. The biased dimension of quantitative approach would arise from the methodology itself; selecting subjects, reading collected data, calibrating research results or making

Shortage during Socialism: Goods, Strategies and Consumption Practices in a Romanian Village," *Cultural Studies* 16 (2002), pp. 16-43.

³ Michael Foucault, "Space, Knowledge and Power," in James D. Faubion (eds.), *Michel Foucault. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Power*, vol. III. (London: Penguin Books, 2002), pp. 349-364; David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values. The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 7; Martin Kohlrausch, Helmuth Trischler, "Introduction," in Martin Kohlrausch, Helmuth Trischler (eds.), *Building Europe on Expertise: Innovators, Organizers, Networkers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1-4.

additional development strategies carried a significant amount of arbitrariness and became subject to state's political and economic interests and dominant ideologies.⁴ In this respect, it becomes interesting to analyze how a program of making modern states had been materialized by the Socialist Bloc authorities. Such approach would contribute to the growing body of scholarship that situates the economic and social changes occurred in the East-European countries in the postwar period and Western developments of the time not as conflicting categories, but as processes that mutually reinforced one another within broader frameworks of postwar modernization. Thus, the technologies of constructing the everyday are not understood in opposition with global/non-socialist paths, but as shaped under regional, national and transnational sources of power and agency.⁵

This article builds on the idea of tying the state's modernization to welfare programming and aims to unveil how such a project that refined social sciences research methodologies to envision the general well-being was articulated by the Romanian state during the early 1950s. I use as a case study the research conducted in the 1950s on family budgets. I premise on the assumption that the Romanian state actions to

⁴ Susan Leigh Star, Martha Lampland, "Reckoning with Standards," in Martha Lampland, Susan Leigh Star (eds.), *Standards and Their Stories. How Quantifying, Classifying, and Formalizing Practices Shape Everyday Life* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 11-15. For additional perspectives on the connection between the modern states and the production of knowledge see: Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," in Aradhana Sharma, Akhil Gupta (eds.), *Anthropology of the State. A Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); John V. Pickstone, *Ways of Knowing: A New History of Science, Technology, and Medicine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Tom Crook, Glen O'Hara, "The Torrent of Numbers: Statistics and the Public Sphere in Britain, 1800-2000," in Tom Crook, Glen O'Hara (eds.), *Statistics and the Public Sphere. Numbers and the People in Britain, 1800-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Richard Coopey, Alan McKinlay, "Power without Knowledge? Foucault and Fordism, 1900-50," *Labor History* 1 (2000), pp. 107-25.

⁵ August Carbonella and Sharryn Kasmir, Introduction. Toward a Global Anthropology of Labor, in Sharryn Kasmir and August Carbonella (eds.), *Blood and Fire. Toward a Global Anthropology of Labor* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), p. 3; Johanna Bockman, *Markets in the Name of Socialism: The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Sharad Chari, Katherine Vrderly, "Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 51., No. 1 (2009), p. 6-34.

collect information about people's daily experiences was partially informed by the methodologies of "empirical sociology" widely applied throughout the Socialist Bloc in the 1950s after the banishment of sociology as an academic discipline.⁶ However, unlike recent scholars who stated that empirical sociology researched Romanian everyday transformations without any concrete follow-ups,⁷ I argue that the authorities were concerned not only with assessing population's experiences but also made use of such information to adjust ongoing social programs. My investigation builds on archival materials.

Studying family budgets in the 1950s Romania in this key is fertile because it can unveil the management of everyday lives as an outcome of entangled influences of political programs and population's responses. In fact, quality of life was not only a central concept of the official propaganda, but part in the process of constructing domestic political legitimacy for the Romanian Communist Party's leaders. Thus, article 15 of the 1948 Romanian Constitution held that "the state directs the national economy and plans the economic development to ensure the people's well-being and guarantee the national independence."⁸ Furthermore, article 10 of the 1952 Romanian Constitution stated that "the people's democratic state would support peasants owning small and medium farms and artisans so that they would be protected against the capitalist exploitation, which would increase productivity and raise their well-being." Three other articles of the same act - 6, 13 and 17 - stated that the economic program endorsed by the communist regime would ensure the growth of "material and cultural conditions of the working people."⁹ Both 1948 and 1952 acts echoed the political leaders' endeavors to shape a democratic appearance of the regime; it also targeted an attempt to consolidating their power. However, the concern for quality of life was equally illustrative of a complicated socio-

⁶ For empirical sociology see Gennady S. Batygin, Inna Deviatko, „The Metamorphoses of Russian Sociology,” in Mike Forrest Keen, Janusz L. Mucha (eds.), *Eastern Europe in Transformation: The Impact on Sociology* (Westpoint: Greenwood Press, 1994), pp. 15-16.

⁷ Cătălin Zamfir, Iancu Filipescu (eds.), *Sociologia românească: 1900-2010. O istorie socială* (Cluj Napoca: Eikon, 2015).

⁸ <http://legislatie.resurse-pentru-democratie.org/constitutie/constitutia-republicii-populare-romane-1948.php> (accessed 27 April 2015).

⁹ <http://legislatie.resurse-pentru-democratie.org/constitutie/constitutia-republicii-populare-romane-1952.php> (accessed 27 April 2015).

economic context that became increasingly visible by 1952. On one hand, the conflicts consumed at the top of the communist party surfaced around that time, and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej saved no effort to explain the difficulties to supply population with basic goods as a result of "anti-democratic" actions of the so-called Muscovit group.¹⁰ On the other hand, the steady worsening of the quality of life forced the political decision-making factors to identify solutions to better the everyday experience. Thus, specific measures adopted after August 1953 Party Plenary Meeting targeted the improvement in the distribution of goods towards the population and an increasing support for agricultural modernization.¹¹ In this respect, the family budgets in the 1950s Romania showed a paradoxical situation. Firstly, conducting research on family budgets proved beneficial for the state's institutions, which could reconfigure economic programs and assess the real impact of state interventionism based on individual everyday experiences. Secondly, such investigations unveiled numerous instances of marginal behavior like illegal networks of circulation of supplies, bargaining, theft, or the crystallization of alternative social hierarchies based on access to material goods and public visibility of those who enjoyed access to goods.

Furthermore, such an approach can integrate the national policies within the broader frameworks of international dynamics. By doing so, my goal is to situate the methods of social research within the fluid dynamics of the Cold War. During the 1950s, both in the Socialist Bloc and the Western countries, social modernization projects employed specific quantitative analysis methodologies. However, as tensions on the international stage increased, the instrumentation of social policies highlighted surprising dialogues and abrupt splits between East and West.¹² The central element of this investigation consists of

¹⁰ Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale [Romanian National Archives] (hereafter ANIC), Fond CC al PCR, Secția Economică, file 223/1952, p. 41. For an overview of the conflict consumed at the top of the Romanian Communist Party in 1952 see: Robert Levy, *Gloria și decăderea Anei Pauker* (Iassy: Polirom, 2002).

¹¹ Ghiță Ionescu, *Communism in Romania, 1944-1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 285-287 and 305-309.

¹² Mark Solovey, Hamilton Cravens (eds.), *Cold War Social Science. Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 7 and 22; Pieter Spierenburg, "Social Control and History. An Introduction," in Herman Roodenburg, Pieter Spierenburg (eds.), *Social Control in Europe. Volume 1, 1500-1800*

contextualizing social policies based on the reconstruction of postwar Europe. I am concerned, therefore, to identify differences between East and West by comparing the social welfare approaches suggested by the propagandist rhetoric, policy makers and professional authority. I aim to establish to what extent approaches to well-being during the 1950s Romania reflected ideological and professional tensions across the Iron Curtain and, on another level, if they were articulated by utopian or pragmatic goals. Equally important, I also aim to open up a discussion on the accuracy and relevance of official statistics, which is central to understanding if and how the national prestige of a state may be articulated by standardization.¹³

Welfare approaches behind the Iron Curtain.

The onset of the Cold War faced both Western and Eastern states with new challenges. Although the tension between former allies augmented, it soon became apparent that military force was not sufficed to articulate power centers. Rather, it was crucial to develop alternative mechanisms to fragment the impenetrability of the Iron Curtain. In this respect, approaches to quality of life on both sides of the Curtain opened up numerous opportunities to blend scientific endeavors with propagandistic rhetoric, which best illustrated the ideological and political valences of statistical research in the postwar years. Or, as one scholar has recently pointed out, in the 1950s the social sciences were perceived to have the potential to reshape the postwar world in the same way that atomic physics had previously changed the course of the Second World War.¹⁴ This is particularly important since the research methodologies and questions applied by Western and Eastern specialists alike were informed by interwar models. Social research revolved around models developed by behavioral sciences and an investigative agenda fully altered by the profound socio-economic implications of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

(Columbus: Ohio State University, 2004), pp. 1-21; Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," in Aradhana Sharma, Akhil Gupta (eds.), *Anthropology of the state. A Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 115.

¹³ Susan Leigh Star, Martha Lampland, "Reckoning with Standards," pp. 11-15.

¹⁴ David C. Engerman, "The Rise and Fall of Wartime Social Sciences. Harvard's Refugee Interview Project, 1950-1954," in Mark Solovey, Hamilton Cravens (eds.), *Cold War Social Science. Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 28.

In fact, researchers embarked themselves on extensive interrogations on how the development of industries – particularly the heavy industry – could serve the needs of modern society and could prevent another economic collapse. They also problematized about the possible role that the state could play in this context.¹⁵ Accordingly, some themes dominated the research agenda on both sides of the Iron Curtain; as Johnna Bookman has recently pointed out, these approaches echoed the influence of neoclassical economics,¹⁶ and aimed to identify a method to quantify people's decisions.¹⁷ The study of everyday life afforded social scientists a good opportunity to unveil if and how the state adjusted its policies under population's actions, but also provided empirical data that could shed some light on issues that were crucial for both researchers and political decision-making factors: facets of the planned economy in relation to the market; price adjustments mechanisms; increase of labor productivity and efficiency and its impact upon rising the quality of living standards; social implications of industrialization, including various aspects of social mobility.¹⁸

Beyond these similarities, the political tensions surfaced some stringent concerns as well, which often took discursive forms. From the Westerner's point of view, research on quality of life was carried out with the promise that social programs would ensure the safety of people against the growing pressure of the Soviet Union, and would also provide some hands-on solutions for postwar economic recovery and modernization in other less developed parts of the world.¹⁹ From the Easterners' point of view, collecting information on the living standards of the population aimed to impose new benchmarks of socialist morality as well as new social hierarchies.²⁰ Furthermore, unlike the Western

¹⁵ David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 103.

¹⁶ J. Bookman, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Jeffery Alexander, *Twenty lectures. Sociological theory since World War II* (New York: Columbia, 1987).

¹⁸ For a comprehensive overview on Abram Bergson, *The Structure of Soviet Wages. A Study in Socialist Economics* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1944); James Millar, "Bergson's Structure of Soviet Wages," *Comparative Economic Studies* 47 (2005), pp. 289–295.

¹⁹ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995.

²⁰ Gail Kligman, Katherine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949-1962* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

countries, where statistical data were corroborated with information obtained through complex interdisciplinary methodologies, quantitative analysis dominated the social investigation programs in the Socialist bloc. The Easterners claimed that using mathematical models to study social processes would draw a fully objective image of social and economic realities and would ascertain a solid understanding of the everyday transformations. Discursively, this approach augmented the apparent discrepancies between the actors located on the two sides of the Iron Curtain, claiming that discrepancies were irreconcilable. On a conceptual level, however, these aspects led to numerous developments, including the emergence of the so-called new humanism, which informed eastern bloc architectural design practice in terms of utility and functionalism.

In this respect, statistics shortly became one of the most ideologized academic fields.²¹ The confidence in the infallibility of quantitative analysis was fueled by the ideas of V. I. Lenin, who once argued that statistics belonged to "the working people in factories and plants, on the fields or in institutions. Statistical data are used practically every day for tracking the provisions of the state plan, they serve to illustrate the successes of the working people in building socialism in our homeland, they help the party and the government to guide and control the steady effort of the working people in building the new socialist society."²² In other words, statistics should emphasize the class structure of society. Issues related to labor productivity, efficiency, cultural processes, housing and sports facilities would be translated into figures, which would stress the transformation of economic relations and the increasing visibility of both urban and rural workers. The discipline was granted a special status, one that would emphasize the democratic features of socialist statistics over capitalist social research. In the West, the Easterners claimed, statistics were used to "pursue war budgets."²³ Contrary to that, the socialist statistics would unveil "the practical work" of the working class.

²¹ See „Decret nr. 246 pentru reorganizarea statisticii în RPR din 30 octombrie 1950,” *Buletinul Oficial al Republicii Populare Române*, part I, year II, no. 100 (31 October 1950), pp. 1109-1110; „Decizia nr. 2009 din 13 octombrie 1950 a Ministerului Construcțiilor privitoare la fazele de proiectare în construcție,” *Buletinul Oficial al Republicii Populare Române*, part I, year II, no. 93, (18 October 1950), p. 1019.

²² M. Biji, I. Stoichiță, *Ce este statistica* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură Economică și Juridică, 1956), p. 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Conceptualizing the postwar world in "binary" terms, respectively the capitalist West and the socialist East, favored the crystallization of what Yurkov has coined as "the predictability of authoritarian language."²⁴ Thus, as the tensions on the international arena developed the East-European ideologues stressed the superiority of the East over the West by employing an official discourse consisting of a limited number of concepts. Such rhetoric turned into a *metadiscourse* - that is a "hyper-normalization of discourses and representations," which used the technological language to depict daily life in socialist countries as a sum of rituals performed in the public space as a sequence of automatic actions, inspired by industrial activity.²⁵ The prevalence of scientific rhetoric in studying social processes was closely linked to the authorities' preoccupation to assess the social impact of industrialization and collectivization. In this respect, building on many Taylorist inspired themes about labor models, statistics served as an excellent means to reveal the planned activity. For example, in an article published in *Lupta de clasă* in March 1958 entitled "Anti-scientific theories about classes and class struggle in contemporary bourgeois sociology," V. Semenov summarized the main arguments that placed statistical research practiced in the Socialist bloc on a position of superiority in relation to the social analysis conducted in the Western countries. Semenov claimed that Western researchers' main purpose was to serve the interests of "imperialist" politicians by describing the social and economic realities of Western countries in "rosy colors." Accordingly, the Western social sciences would have explained the social nature, including the social stratification, as a result of the people's behavior and different lifestyles. Semenov asserted that that was a subjective representation of daily realities by blatant falsification of research data.²⁶ Easterners identified in the Western remuneration system and pricing mechanisms of goods and services the main cause of differences in living standards and social status of various socio-professional categories in capitalist countries. As a result, concluded Semenov, the structure of socialist society could not be the expression of revenue, level of education, daily practices or

²⁴ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²⁵ Ion Bălănescu, „Însușiri asemănătoare și deosebiri esențiale între mașinile automate și creierul uman,” *Cercetări filozofice* 4 (1956), pp. 45-64.

²⁶ O. Snak, „Indicele costului vieții în statistica burgheză,” *Revista de statistică* 1 (1956), p. 133.

accessibility of consumer goods, but of the production realities transposed into unquestionable statistical figures.²⁷

In such a context, investigating the quality of life by statistical data resumed older discussions on the accuracy of data collected in the West and their interpretation. A particular attention was given to the terminology used by academics on both sides of the Iron Curtain, an issue of paramount importance given the ongoing international debate between Western economic historians on the impact of industrialization upon the workers' standard of living as well as the part that quantitative investigations could play in it.²⁸ While in the West, the debate between *pessimists* (Marxists) and *optimists* led to the crystallization of a sophisticated economic analysis of household economics - that is material well-being,²⁹ in the East the issue made way for additional ideological claims. For example, the concept of "standard of living," frequently used by socialist statisticians, would have represented "a concrete historical concept"³⁰ that delineated the collective values of society and "all material and cultural goods that working people have managed to conquer from the exploiting classes."³¹ The notion "way of life," on the other hand, frequently used by the Western specialists - and developed based on Max Weber's theorizations - represented merely proof that diversity and individual choice were inconsistent with socialist aspirations. In other words, the socialist economy defined the concept of "standard of living" as "the material and cultural welfare of the working people."³² More problematic were the Westerners'

²⁷ V. Semenov, „Teoriile antiștiințifice despre clase și lupta de clasă în sociologia burgheză contemporană,” *Lupta de clasă, Organ teoretic și politic al Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român* (March 1958), pp. 40-50.

²⁸ Carole Shammas, "Standard of living, consumption, and political economy over the past 500 years," in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 211-2.

²⁹ Richard Easterlin, "The Worldwide Standard of Living since 1800," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14/1 (2000), p. 215-9.

³⁰ E. Barat, M. Vasilescu, M. Capătă, *Cercetarea bugetelor de familie în RPR. Metodologia și organizarea* (Bucharest: Direcția Generală de Statistică de pe lângă Consiliul de Miniștri al RPR, 1959), p. 4.

³¹ I. Pisarev, „Cu privire la metodele de studiere a nivelului de trai al oamenilor muncii din URSS,” *Probleme de Statistică Economică și Socială, Extrase din literatura de specialitate* 8 (1958), p. 37. See also M. Biji, M. Trebici, „Calculul indicelui costului vieții și al salariului real,” *Probleme economice* 5 (1957), pp. 17-34.

³² E. Barat, M. Vasilescu, M. Capătă, *Cercetarea bugetelor de familie în RPR. Metodologia și organizarea*, p. 4. See Mara Mărginean, „Minimal, necesar, discreționar.

increasingly concern to understanding individual aspirations and needs.³³ As such, Eastern European theorists read terminology changes occurred in North American practice from "index of living cost" to "index of consumer goods" as evidence of political attempts to cover up the degradation of living standards.

Articles like the one authored by V. Semenov were frequently reprinted in Romanian reviews and books. One of the many specificities of the knowledge production within the Socialist Bloc was a sort of transnational circulation of research articles, which consisted of reviews and collective volumes entitled "From the Experience of ... colleagues." In Romania, for instance, a collection of programmatic texts were published by each ministerial structure. The content was rarely made available to the wider public audience, but it was distributed through institutional channels to every local institution in the country, including statistics departments, local party structures, urban and regional administration. Yet, translations from Eastern bloc literature were meant to serve as guidelines in practicing various professions in the "Soviet style." Surprisingly, however, behind the rhetoric imbued with official language, such articles discussing the faulty practices of the Western specialists described in quite detail the Western social science research methodologies. Texts authored by Soviet, Hungarian, Polish and Czechoslovakian specialists unveiled in great details Western calculations of life standards, family sampling, or household economic projections. This is illustrative not only of the subversive strategies that often made use of the press to transmit various information by eluding an open engagement with sensible topics, but of the immediate developments occurred within the society that required the reconfiguration of research methodologies beyond the strict idealized functioning of socialist planning.

Ideologizarea nevoilor ca proiect de integrare a marginalității sociale, 1945 – 1960," in Luciana M. Jinga, Ștefan Bosomitu (eds.), *Marginalități, periferii și frontiere simbolice. Societatea comunistă și dilemele sale identitare. Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului și Memoria Exilului Românesc*. Volume IX (2014). (Iassy: Editura Polirom, 2015), pp. 87-109.

³³ I. Pisarev, „Cu privire la metodele de studiere a nivelului de trai al oamenilor muncii din URSS,” p. 41.

The family budget - a "real" image of the new socialist world.

Given the ideological tensions between East and West, it becomes interesting to assess what was the communist authorities' understanding of "true reality"? Or, to put it in other words: To what extent were the Eastern European regimes truly interested to collect information about real changes occurred in society as a result of collectivization and industrialization and how willing were the states to use such information to adjust social programs?

To answer these questions I use the case of family budgets, a type of social research conducted in both Western and Eastern Bloc to investigate welfare. Family budgets represented the ratio between a family's monthly income and expenses corroborated with the availability of consumer goods and services. Such surveys took into account various aspects: number of hours worked by each family member, household's structure, level of prices, availability of services, level of education and training, the availability of alternatives in the supply of goods such as agricultural activities or unpaid work.³⁴ The methodology used in such research was quite straightforward. Each family selected to participate in the research had to keep a sort of daily journal where all expenses would be mentioned. The questionnaire was usually quite detailed. For instance, the authorities required each family to provide as much information as possible about the type and quantities of food consumed by each household member, as well the source and quality of these products. Usually, this information was collected based on standardized forms approved by the state's authorities. Every month, the questionnaires were gathered and the data was synthesized into a single document that represented a kind of "average" value of the quality of life. In this respect, statistics was very important because it provided the means to convert individual practices and options into figures. Theoretically, the questionnaires used to investigate the family budgets could provide the authorities with an "objective" perspective upon household consumption in different countries. Furthermore, it could be useful in constructing comparative narratives about quality of life in various states. However, such strategy was doomed to failure from the very start because these surveys involved numerous limitations; often the differences in consumption recorded from country to country, both

³⁴ R. Cresin, L. Apolzan, „Cercetarea selectivă a bugetelor de familie,” *Revista de statistică* 2 (1958), pp. 28-38.

in the East and in the West, did not count national or regional gastronomic traditions.³⁵

According to the official definition of the concept proposed by the socialist authorities, family budgets represented the index of quality of life based on researching the daily life of "a certain number of typical families."³⁶ Yet, the selection of typical subjects became in itself another source of ideological tension between East and West. Thus, the Western statisticians would have practiced an arbitrary selection of subjects since, the Easterners claimed, such investigations included a high number of members of the so-called "labor aristocracy" and not enough workers.³⁷ Easterners have argued that such distortion of social reality sought to mask the obvious trends of impoverishment of the working class, the increasing inflation, sluggish consumption and rising share of using "forged products."

Problematic was not only the selection of families included into the investigation, but the analysis of the structure of monthly spending as well. Some Romanian theorists claimed that prices of some commodities, which formed the basis of daily consumption of Western workers, depreciated at a faster pace than the average rate of inflation. This was illustrative of the fact that the quality of life worsened to a greater extent than the official figures had claimed. For example, housing or medical expenses were not included in the official Western data, while statistics from Western countries included in a significantly higher share products that, from the Easterners' perspective, were not basic necessities. While diversity would generally testify the improvement in the quality of life, Easterners have argued that this was an additional evidence that the Western states falsified official data.

As a counterweight to the claimed mystified results provided by the Western investigations on the family budgets, the Romanian state officials have conducted their own research on family budgets. The idea was not new. In 1947, Miron Constantinescu said in a letter addressed to the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti that the Romanian state would employ the social sciences' skills to study how industrialization impacted upon the

³⁵ J. Walter, „Câteva probleme privind statistica consumului populației,” *Probleme de Statistică Economică și Socială, Extrase din literatura de specialitate* 7 (1958), p. 10.

³⁶ M. Biji (ed.), *Dicționar statistic-economic* (Bucharest: Direcția Centrală de Statistică, 1962), p. 434.

³⁷ O. Snak, „Indicele costului vieții în statistica burgheză,” *Revista de statistică* 1 (1956), p. 134.

family budgets.³⁸ However, by the early 1950s the authorities aimed to unveil the particular experience of several socio-professional categories: industrial workers, technicians, engineers, small and middle peasants, and kulaks. Thus, in the same logic of a class-structured society, it was argued that it was necessary to achieve clear differentiation between various social categories in order to articulate an accurate image on the people's everyday experiences.³⁹

Research on quality of life in postwar Romania aimed primarily to provide an accurate image upon the circulation of products in a system dominated mainly by ration cards. While the first ration cards were imposed in 1941 in order to ascertain that every single person would have access to basic products in spite of war's difficulties, the system of rationalized products was maintained until December 1954. According to regulations adopted by the Romanian authorities after 1948, there were five types of cards: "A" for workers who performed the hardest work; "B" for steelworkers and miners; "C" for functionaries and other employees; "D1" for pensioners; "D2" for children under seven years. Daily food allowance varied from one category to another. For the employees included into the first two categories, food intake was much higher, while people who did not work received coupons to purchase bread only.⁴⁰ Ration cards did not exclude free commerce, yet products included on the coupons were commercialized at lower prices than those available on regular market. In this context, the study of family budgets within the Romanian economic system unveils consistent methodological differences from that applied in the Western world. In other words, the communist authorities were not interested to capture the standard of living of a typical household - family of four formed of husband, wife and two children aged up to 10 years old, where the only head of the household was employed - but they sought to capture the standard of living of various "social classes."

³⁸ Letter of Miron Constantinescu addressed to his former professor, in Dimitrie Gusti, *Opere*, vol. V (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1971), pp. 418-419, reprinted in Sanda Golopenția (ed.), „Școala Sociologică de la București. Publicații, expoziții și proiecte internaționale,” *Revista Transilvania* 1 (2014), p. 83.

³⁹ The same methodology was applied in the Soviet Union as well. See for instance: Stephen Shenfield, "A Note on Data Quality in the Soviet Family Budget Survey," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Oct., 1983), pp. 561-568.

⁴⁰ ANIC, Fond CC al PCR, Secția Economică, file 339/1952, ff. 4-8.

Family budgets were collected based on national guidelines developed by the National Direction of Statistics and approved by the Council of Ministers.⁴¹ A representative number of households from each region were selected to be included in the survey. Regional officials had to take into account several aspects. First, it was mandatory to select families with a diversified structure in terms of number of members, age and gender. Then, instructors had to be particularly concerned with the wealthy of each family selected. Last, but not least, the authorities had to select as many representatives of the industrial working class as possible.

Questionnaires applied until the mid-1950s were extremely complex. The information collected would facilitate the reconstitution of social realities in various communities from various perspectives. The questionnaires contained several forms. First, the forms provided detailed information about the structure of household investigated, the age, occupation, salary level and permanent residence of each member. Then, revenues and expenditures were compared in two columns. The income section detailed all cash sources including grants, loans, welfare or maternity allowances. The expenditure category pointed out how the money were spent: the purchase of food and non-food, furniture, fuel, medicines, cigarettes and alcohol. Another category of expenditure referred to rent and housing maintenance, as well as fixing up basic products like clothing and household appliances. The last category detailed payment of current loans and other financial restrictions. The third form provided information about the types and origin of non-food products purchased: socialist trade, private traders or alternative exchanges. Each type of merchandise has been included: various categories of fabrics, including cotton, wool, leather, ready-made clothes and shoes, books, newspapers, magazines etc. Last form provided one of the most complex information about the inputs and consumption of food: wheat flour, cornmeal, bread, rice, various types of fruit and vegetables, meat, oil, cheese, eggs, sugar and other sweets. Family budget surveys differentiated between the origins of products used by the household members: items received from various people in exchange of unpaid work, "gifts" received from acquaintances, or acquired through socialist

⁴¹ „HCM nr. 860, privind cercetarea bugetelor de familie a oamenilor muncii din RPR, din 29 august 1952” and „ HCM nr. 3009, privind măsurile pentru extinderea cercetării bugetelor de familie din 7 septembrie 1953,” in E. Barat, M. Vasilescu, M. Capătă, *Cercetarea bugetelor de familie în RPR. Metodologia și organizarea*, p. 80. ANIC, Fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, file 129/1956, pp. 1-8.

trade or consumption cooperatives.⁴² The questionnaires that investigated the quality of life in rural areas contained additional information on the size and type of land owned, number of animals and tools available.

These studies have shown, however, the limitations of the methodology applied. In 1956, the Council of Ministers requested that the structure of the family sample be re-evaluated. From that moment on, a particular attention would be granted to working-class families from the most dynamic and large industrial enterprises. For the first time since the end of the war, other socio-professional categories – like teachers or health employees – started to be investigated.⁴³

But beyond the clear provisions of these legislative regulations, difficulties to collecting information were quick to emerge, and arbitrariness of methodological norms required speedy drafting of additional guidelines. The first difficulty was the selection of subjects. To obtain accurate data, the questionnaires had to be completed over a period of time, usually several years.⁴⁴ But many of those who initially agreed to be included in the surveys refused to provide any information; the situation did not improve over time in spite of the authorities' willingness to increase the cash compensation for those who agreed to provide the necessary information. Furthermore, although the guidelines indicated that the surveys should include households located throughout the town or village researched, in the Livada or Baita villages in the Cluj region most of the households investigated were located on the main street, in the proximity of the church or the People's Council.⁴⁵

Another problem consisted of reading the research data. In fact, it was the basic methodology that rose problems, and the degree to which the data collected through family surveys captured the economic changes of the Romanian society. Several dispositions of the Council of Ministers established the caloric value of various foods, but did not allow adjustments of such values based on quality or origin of those products. This became evident shortly, as the population filled in

⁴² Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale, Cluj [Cluj County Department of the National Archives] (hereafter SJAN Cluj), Fond Direcția Regională de Statistică, file 21/1953 and 22/1953.

⁴³ SJAN Cluj, Fond Direcția Regională de Statistică, file 23/1957, f. 214.

⁴⁴ This represented a departure from the Western practice where the surveys were applied for a couple of weeks on several months.

⁴⁵ SJAN Cluj, Fond Direcția Regională de Statistică, file 24/1957, ff. 125-152.

numerous complaints about cases of forged products by diluting fluids with water or by including foreign bodies into products. Furthermore, the reorganization of research centers in 1956-7 and changes in the structure of questionnaires put the authorities in an unexpected situation: changing the type of investigation made it impossible to compare data before and after the reorganization.⁴⁶

Searching a socialist way of life?

The data collected by researching family budgets became relevant only through a comprehensive comparative analysis of nutrition scientific norms adopted by the State Committee of Supply of the Council of Ministers. Following the regulations in effect in the Soviet Union in the early 1950s, the Romanian government established a detailed structure of daily food allowance based on age, gender and type of work performed by each person. Official regulations about the optimal daily quantities of food were converted into caloric intake. They ranged from 5,500 calories a day for those who performed extremely hard work, up to 1,600 calories for children younger than 7 years old. Between the minimum and maximum values there were included other six categories: 3,000 calories for state functionaries, security employees, tailors; 3200 calories for upholsterers, painters, printers; 3,500 calories for roofers and machinists; 4000 calories for blacksmiths and bricklayers; 4500 calories for farm workers; 5000 calories for rock cutters and lumberjacks. The distinction between different socio-professional categories took into account both the type of work performed and the policy of the communist regime in terms of classes. At least theoretically, daily consumption structure would have to find a counterpart in welfare projections contained in the card supply system and salary regulations for each socio-professional category.

Such caloric intake may seem, however, exaggerated. According to official statistics about rationalized nutrition habits in Britain during the interwar period and immediately after World War II, regular citizens consumed an average of 2,500 calories a day. Usually, their meals consisted of potatoes and other kind of vegetables, while meat was available only from time to time.⁴⁷ In Romania, the estimations made in 1952 showed that labor force's meals were mostly based on bread; in

⁴⁶ SJAN Cluj, Fond Direcția Regională de Statistică, file 24/1957, f. 66.

⁴⁷ David Kynaston, *Austerity in Britain, 1945-51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 45.

caloric terms, the meals consisted largely of vegetable protein. For example, in a ratio of 5500 calories, there were allocated approximately 2610 calories from bakery products (1 kilogram per day) and corn meal, while only 222 calories would come from meat (approximately 150 grams per day). Other products such as fats, eggs and dairy would be consumed in small quantities and their cumulative energetic intake would not exceed 600 calories a day. Other sources of energy were fruits and vegetables, which would be consumed in small quantities.⁴⁸

The nutritional structure of the Romanian workers' daily meals problematize about the impact of food on physiological functioning of the human body. It also questions how quality of food impacted upon labor efficiency in industrial activities. The terminology applied throughout Europe by the end of the Second World War divided food into three distinct categories: body building foods such as cheese, eggs, meat and fish; energy foods like bacon, ham, butter or margarine, cheese, dried fruits, honey, oatmeal, potatoes, rice and sugar; and protective foods such as milk, butter or margarine, cheese, eggs, liver, herrings (canned or fresh), green vegetables or salads, tomatoes, whole meal bread.⁴⁹ From this perspective, the nutritive structure proposed by the Romanian authorities in the context of intensified industrialization program unveiled an emphasis on food energy, especially on the consumption of fats, potatoes and sugar. These cumulated about 1,000 calories a day. The consumption of protective foods like milk, butter and vegetable was estimated to a maximum of 600 calories a day, while body builders - crucial to increase the muscular mass of the human body - like cheese, meat or fish barely cumulated 400 calories.⁵⁰ In the case of rations lower than 3000 calories, the authorities diminished significantly the ratio of bread and of the so-called energy food.

Furthermore, the regulation of workers' caloric intake in these terms questions the politico-ideological implications of such a policy and also unveils the regime's attempts to address critical issues pragmatically. The high quantities of bread to feed those benefiting of increased rations

⁴⁸ ANIC, Fond Comitetul de Stat al Aprovizionării, Direcția Agro-Alimentară, file 2/1951, pp. 13-24.

⁴⁹ M. E. Barker & J. D. Burridge, "Nutrition claims in British women's magazines from 1940 to 1955," *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* 27 (Suppl. 2), p. 119.

⁵⁰ ANIC, Fond Comitetul de Stat al Aprovizionării, Direcția Agro-Alimentară, file 2/1951, pp. 13-21; SJAN Cluj, Fond Sfatul Popular Regional, Secția Comercială, file 13/1954, pp. 44-233.

was illustrative of the Romanian authorities' strategies to substitute protein requirements with products cheaper and easier to obtain. The official statistics confirm this hypothesis. While in the interwar period the average annual bread consumption was of approximately 138 kilograms, in 1951 "the scientific eating regime of urban population was of 158 kilograms annually."⁵¹ The "C" ration cards guaranteed a yearly consumption of 127 kilograms of bread, respectively 350 grams daily. For other socio-professional categories, such as workers in the heavy industry and miners, the government supplemented the daily allowance of bread to up to 750 grams. Moreover, according to official data, during the interwar period, the average meat consumption of the urban population was about 50 kilograms annually. In 1951, the average yearly meat consumption was approximately 17 kilograms for urban workers, and 22 kilograms for functionaries. Successive governmental regulations attempted to increase the meat consumption over the next period.⁵² Also, several decisions of the Political Bureau of the CC of PMR and of the Council of Ministers adopted several measures to increase the ration of bread for certain socio-professional categories. Such decision was taken as a result of severe difficulties to supply the population with food and collect meat from collective farms.⁵³

Discrepancies between the scientific nutritional projections, institutional inability of the authorities to distribute food towards the population and real needs of each socio-professional category have shaped the context in which the surveys on family budgets was conducted in the region of Cluj.

By December 1954 when ration card system was abandoned, authorities used family budget surveys to capture the extent to which formal nutrition provisions made their way into the workers' daily meals. Workers selected from several industrial establishment in the city of Cluj, for example, testified a broadly similar structure of monthly expenses. From about 150 lei, which represented the average monthly income per each member of a worker's family, two thirds were used to

⁵¹ ANIC, Fond Comitetul de Stat al Aprovizionării, Direcția Agro-Alimentară, file 88/1953, p. 1.

⁵² ANIC, Fond Comitetul de Stat al Aprovizionării, Direcția Agro-Alimentară, file 10/1951, p. 16; Fond CC al PCR, Sectia Cancelarie, file 142/1951, pp. 59-79 and file 111/1952, pp. 47-52.

⁵³ ANIC, Fond Comitetul de Stat al Aprovizionării, Direcția Secretariat, file 16/1951, p. 41 and 255.

purchase food. Half of the amount spent on food was used for purchasing fruits and vegetables, and another 25% went to the purchase of bread and other bakery products such as black flour, pasta and cornmeal. Less than 10% of monthly expenditure for food were directed to purchase meat, while eggs, milk or cheese were almost insignificant in Cluj workers' daily expenses.⁵⁴ Such distribution of monthly expenses is less relevant unless corroborated with the prices of the basic products. Thus, until December 1954, the average price of black bread on ration coupons was of 0,7 lei per kilogram, while in free commerce the price varied around 2 and 2,5 lei per kilogram. The pork meat could be bought with no less than 15 lei per kilogram. Prices to basic vegetables and fruits varied depending on the season. In this respect, the data collected through family budgets unveil significant deviations from the official nutrition standards. Thus, in addition to significant quantities of bread bought monthly, the very low level of spending on meat – around 500 grams a month – unveils the precarious standard of living of the industrial employees.

However, this structure of daily expenditure of Cluj workers is only partially relevant for their nutritional practices. Very often, industrial workers used to sell the textile and footwear vouchers (distributed according to socio-professional status of the employee) in the villages around industrial centers in exchange for food that was unavailable in socialist trade network. While such information is not clearly stated in the official documents, numerous questionnaires applied in the rural area in the Cluj region mention that occasionally the members of the household had received shoes or textiles from acquaintances.⁵⁵ To get a complete picture of the workers' eating habits, such data should be compared to the dynamics of spending in the peasants' households. For families selected in Cluj, for instance, whether peasants were classified as small, medium or kulaks, the main source of income were agricultural activities; rarely, there were persons included in these surveys who had a waged job. Although peasants obtained the majority of their food in their household, most of the revenues were directed towards the purchase of goods available in state stores: sugar, bread, salt or alcohol.⁵⁶

In this context, the data collected from the family budgets' research unveiled the circulation of food and goods from urban areas to

⁵⁴ SJAN Cluj, Fond Direcția Regională de Statistică, file 21/1953 and 22/1953.

⁵⁵ SJAN Cluj, Fond Direcția Regională de Statistică, file 20/1953, p. 52.

⁵⁶ SJAN Cluj, Fond Direcția Regională de Statistică, file 20/1953, 25/1953, 24/1954.

the rural communities and vice versa. In the case of small and medium farms, the most important source of income was the commercialization of goods obtained within the household, as well as items received in exchange for services to the third parties. "The Gift" held a significant share in articulating the rural populations' interactions with the urban labor force. Both workers' and peasants' households traded apparently without money small and medium quantities of goods. Products contained in this category were meat, eggs, dairy, wheat or flour, potatoes and other vegetables or fruits. The fact that such exchanges played a significant part within the circulation of products is testified by the practice of collecting information about the "gift" through family budgets applied in rural areas in the Cluj region.

While in the case of industrial workers, the value of total goods received as gift were rarely higher than 1-2% of the food entries declared, the questionnaires applied in rural households unveiled underground circulation of products as well as the practice of selling rationalized products on the black market. For instance, one household in the Cluj region declared that it had purchased one kilogram of sugar at the price of 25 lei, which represented almost triple the official price of 9 lei per kilogram or to the price of rationalized sugar that was estimated at approximately 2,8 lei a kilogram.⁵⁷

Conclusion

This article aimed to unveil to what extent the social research in Romania was altered under the influence of the Cold War. This is particularly important since social sciences presented a high degree of mercantilism; in fact, they experienced a significant development precisely because of the applicability of scientific results, including in articulating a "national interest."⁵⁸ In this respect, addressing the quality of life during the first years after WWII is paradoxical. On one hand, despite the tensions between East and West, the disputes over scientific terminology opened up new interrogations on the transnational circulation of concepts and ideas. It questioned the postwar programs of social analysis in terms of continuity and rupture from the interwar

⁵⁷ SJAN Cluj, Fond Direcția Regională de Statistică, file 24/1954, p. 8. See also HU OSA, 300-60-1, box 542, 545 and 549.

⁵⁸ David C. Engerman, "Social Science in the Cold War," *Isis*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (June 2010), p. 393.

practices. Furthermore, it problematized about the degree to which propaganda could shape the scientific agenda. On the other hand, the social impact of rationalization was particularly deep across Europe, even though on the long term the implications of nutrition regulations differed from one country to another. An element of state modernization, nutrition conceptualization in terms of body builders, energizers and health protection allowed states to implement mass educational programs and improve the visibility of professional technocrats. As one scholar has pointed out, all over Europe „income differences in protein and fat consumption were effectively eroded and the gap in vitamin and mineral intake also disappeared. Hence, rationing and food control ‘revolutionised the social class distribution of the diet by redressing the imbalances which had been highlighted just prior to the war. Throughout the war and after, the income-group differences in diet were never as great as they had been before it.’”⁵⁹ Accordingly, a the research campaigns conducted in the 1950s Romania opened up further possibilities to developing mass social programs, which became increasingly visible in the 1960s simultaneously with the communist authorities’ new economic policies.

⁵⁹ Catherine Geissler, Derek J. Oddy (eds.), *Food, Diet and Economic Change: Past and Present* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1993), p. 116.