

# XI. GRASTYÁN KONFERENCIA

országos interdiszciplináris konferencia előadásai

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# **11. Országos Interdiszciplináris Grastyán konferencia előadásai**

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## The American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction and Hungarian press coverage*

This paper will discuss the American National Exhibition in Moscow (ANEM) and the American and Hungarian press coverage of this event. In Hungarian historiography a complex analysis and introduction of this subject does not exist, except for a brief mention in several theses and books.<sup>2</sup> In journals there are papers and a PhD dissertation about the some aspects of the exhibition, but none of them based on the newspaper articles.<sup>3</sup> Some aspects of the exhibition appear in journal articles and a PhD dissertation, but none are based on newspaper articles. Peter Carlson wrote the book *K Blows Top* (2009) utilizing American newspapers, but this is not a scholarly book as it lacks notes and bibliography.<sup>4</sup>

I have used articles as my primary source not only because they reveal the opinions of those who wrote about the events, but also because they could influence the opinions of thousands of readers, while the quantity of the articles demonstrates the importance of the exhibition in the media. I used the *New York Times* and *Newsweek* from the American Democratic periodical press; and *National Review* from the Republican and *New Republic* from the liberal. From Hungary I chose *Népszabadság* as a daily central newspaper, and *Dunántúli Napló* as a regional one. I did not use the files of the Hungarian News Agency (MTI) as it does not have an online catalog and a complete collection of articles from this period. Unique among researchers in Hungary, I have also used the Hungarian-American immigrant press (*Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapija*). In an online database of daily U.S. newspapers I found 60 articles from *Népszabadság* 50, from *Dunántúli Napló* 38, and from the Hungarian immigrant newspapers 38 (28 + 10) articles from 1959 connected with the Soviet-American exchange exhibitions and with the associated visits of Vice-President Richard Nixon to the USSR and First Deputy Frol Kozlov to the United States. After 1956 Hungarian foreign policy journalism generally relied on news agencies and not individual reporters or sources of information, so the fact that *Népszabadság* sent a reporter to the exhibition showed its significance to the newspaper.<sup>5</sup>

### Significance of the event in Soviet-American relations

The summer of 1959 represents an important milestone in East-West relations this time the cooperative relations achieved in 1955 with the Austrian State treaty vanished in the wake of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the launch of Sputnik and Nikita S. Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum of 1958.<sup>6</sup> It was the last two items prompted the United States to desire a better relationship with the Soviet Union this was the reason why the U.S.-Soviet Cultural Exchange Agreement was signed.

The model of Sputnik was not only one of the most popular items in the Soviet orbit, but it also symbolized a shift in the geopolitical balance between the two superpowers, a negation of the "ocean shield" protecting the United States from the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup> The model of the icebreaker Lenin could be seen as a reaction to the submarine U. S. S. Nautilus, which sailed under the North Pole.<sup>9</sup> This is one reason why the sought closer relations with the East-Block.

The second thing was Khrushchev's Berlin Ultimatum.<sup>10</sup> He wanted to expand the geopolitical heartland by creating a neutral zone around his state. The first toward this end was the Austrian State Treaty, which resulted in the two superpowers withdrawing from their occupation zones.<sup>11</sup> In the same year, however, the Federal Republic of Germany joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Khrushchev approved the remilitarization of West Germany and attempted to demilitarize West Berlin. He also sought a peace treaty with Germany as the allies did not sign one after the Second World War. Khrushchev's ultimatum expired in May 1959, so it was necessary that the individuals opening the exhibitions be diplomats too, in order to help this problem of international relations. The high point of this period of better relations was Khrushchev's 1959 trip to the United States, including his meeting with President Eisenhower at Camp David. However, this better relationship ended with the shooting down of the U2 reconnaissance aircraft in May 1960.

### The preparations

Both sides agree in principle on the usefulness of exhibits as an effective means for developing mutual understanding between the peoples of the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>12</sup> This quote is from the Lacy-Zaroubin Agreement and the reason for sending the exhibitions. Exhibitions and publications were an important point in the document, and the Russian and American exhibitions were the biggest and most significant result of the agreement.

The ANEM was organized by the United States Information Agency (USIA). From 1954, USIA organized a large number of exhibitions, operated the Fulbright Program and attempted to create a favorable view of the U.S. in the eyes of the world.

<sup>1</sup> The paper is an edited, translated, longer version of *A moszkvai Amerikai Kiállítás cseppei 1959. június 29. MATÉ ZSOLT* 16–22.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see: *Grastyán Konferencia* 1959, 171–172.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see: *Grastyán Konferencia* 1959, 171–172.

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The exhibition could be viewed as a public relations tool of American cultural diplomacy that attempted to influence the opinion of the Russian public about the United States<sup>14</sup> (Ellen Mickiewicz wrote about more goals, but I think these were secondary).<sup>14</sup> The USA organized exhibitions before 1959 too, but not in the East-Block. As Radio Liberty could not be heard in Moscow, the exhibit represented a good chance to reach the Russian people. Six years after Stalin's death the hope was to change the opinions of the Soviet people about America, as East-Block journalists always jumped at the chance to show something bad (i.e. the 1959 steel strike in Pittsburgh) happening in the "imperialist world." At the same time, for the East Block the exhibit and Khrushchev's visit represented a partnership with the West, the attainment of equality.

The United States built a dome 200 feet in diameter and other infrastructure developments in Sokolniki Park in Moscow. The dome cost \$750,000 to build, but after the exhibition the Soviet Union purchased it for half that amount.<sup>16</sup> Both Khrushchev and U. S. Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson visited the construction site several months before the exhibition opening, thus focusing public attention on the soon-to-be-opened exhibition. Some 800 companies applied to have their products taken to Moscow for display, as they recognized that photographs taken by photojournalists would provide free advertising for them.<sup>17</sup>

## The showpieces

The exhibit's theme was daily life in the U.S.A. One saw cars, Pepsi-Cola, fast food, movies, color televisions, and a model house. Some items were outside of this theme, such as the RAMAC 305 computer, the "dream kitchen," new statues and paintings, but these were there because the agreement permitted technological showpieces at the American exhibit in Moscow exhibit than at the Soviet exhibit in the United States),<sup>18</sup> was the reason for the model of Sputnik too, but there was less technology at the American exhibit in Moscow exhibit than at the Soviet exhibit in the United States). The American lifestyle theme was a propagandistic step, because the organizers could reflect for Khrushchev's success in the increasing of the Soviet peoples' lifestyle. Khrushchev's opinion reflected to this: "We think the now opening exhibition is the exhibition of our future achievements."<sup>20</sup>

In both exhibitions there was a contention over what was "average" so this was the in Moscow with the model house. Because of the Pittsburgh steel workers' strike, the Soviet journalist thought that the "average" American was the steel worker and the connected the price of the house with the strike for higher salary. The Hungarian migrant press, on the other hand, defended the "average" designation of the house correlating the loans for \$13,000 with typical weekly salaries.<sup>21</sup> A quote from the news agency well illustrates official Soviet opinion: "There is no more truth in showing

this as the typical home of the American worker than, say, in showing the Taj Mahal as the typical home of a Bombay textile worker."<sup>22</sup> This quote turns up often in the comment books often.<sup>23</sup>

In Moscow, visitors viewed a dream kitchen. This was not an average kitchen in America; the organizers filled the room with the latest technology, including a color television, implying this was what an American woman could acquire. Soviet hecklers attempted to play on the skepticism of the visitors, while, and the Hungarian journalists tried to set the dream kitchen as the "average" house's kitchen.<sup>24</sup>

The organizers displayed the latest information technology too with IBM's RAMAC 305 computer. Normally used to help solve mathematical problems, in Moscow it was used to host a database. The computer's memory contained questions and answers about daily life in America. This item would have been popular in the United States too, as computers could not be found in every house, and in the Soviet Union they were owned primarily by the military.<sup>25</sup> The Hungarian reporter at the Sokolniki Park had a very unique opinion about this thing: "...they set up the electrical 'brain' of the Ramac company which gives an answer for 4000 questions. It could lead for long if I wanted to know what kind of questions the organizers collected and what kind of answers were - it is enough if we reconstruct the United States by the base of these questions then it would not be such a country, where everything is for the people, only for the people happens (even for the people of the world)..."<sup>26</sup> Among the technological items could also be found a voting machine, symbolic of democracy in the United States.

In both exhibitions there were cars on display, but in Moscow they wanted to see more technology. In the American and Hungarian reports the Russians nearly always had the same reaction: "Where is your plan?" "I see no plan in all this. The whole exhibition appeals only to bourgeois interests. Our exhibition in New York speaks of the future, of sputnik and exploring the cosmos. You speak of today. We speak of tomorrow. Your whole emphasis is on color, shape, comfort. We are more interested in the spirit behind things."<sup>27</sup> The visitors wanted to test drive the cars, but that was impossible at the Soviet exhibition too.<sup>28</sup>

The most popular and memorable item of the exhibition was Pepsi-Cola.<sup>29</sup> The most popular and memorable item of the exhibition was Pepsi-Cola.<sup>30</sup> When the ice ran out they could not serve it and thus some could not get a taste.<sup>31</sup> Khrushchev did get to taste the Pepsi, and the photograph of this event represented free advertising for the company of infinite value.<sup>32</sup>

Food forms an important part of daily life, and the Russians got to watch and taste American dishes. There was a supermarket where the visitors were able to experience

14. HAYT 1959a, 13.

15. WHITE 1959, 465.

16. HAYT 1959a, 4; WHITE 1959, 462.

17. HAYT 1959, 184.

18. HAYT 1959b, 6; "...Alltörték fel a Ramac-célg elektronikus 'agyát', amely négyezer kérdésre válaszol. Mennyezet vezérlő pereszé, ha ismeretlen alkatrészű kérdéseket állítottak össze a kábelháló és a villamosok - elég az hozzá, hogy ha e kérdések alapján rekonstruálnánk az USA-t akkor nemcsak a világ lenne, ahol minden a népet van, csakis a népet történelem (elő), a világ összes népeit)..."

19. HAYT 1959, 18.

20. HAYT 1959b.

21. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 142.

22. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

23. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

24. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

25. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

26. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

27. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

28. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

29. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

30. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

31. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

32. MICKIEWICZ 2011, 144.

what a market with full shelves looks like (but they could not buy anything there). In a kitchen a hostess demonstrated how to cook frozen foods, but the skepticism was high about this too.<sup>33</sup>

In the big dome the visitors encountered the audiovisual arts with the cinema room, fine art, and The Family of Man photo collection. The cinema was a "Circarama," which ran a movie projected in on screens encircling the viewers. Khrushchev and Nixon visited it on the opening day.<sup>34</sup> The Hungarian reporter liked it, but reported negatively about the traditional cinema of the dome.<sup>35</sup> The Family of Man was a collection of photos based on daily life around the world. This was one of the most popular items of the exhibition.<sup>36</sup> The journalist mentioned above had a very good opinion about it, because it showed similarities among the nations of the world and also contained several pictures from socialist countries.<sup>37</sup> The modern abstract art was not very popular at the exhibition.<sup>38</sup>

### Which exhibition won?

Before I discuss the different sources to reconstruct the success of the Exhibition, I would like to mention the anti-propagandistic steps. I already mentioned the hecklers, who tried to take advantage of the skepticism of the visitors about the items displayed and attempted to label the guides as liars.<sup>39</sup> In the Soviet newspapers there were numerous negative articles about the Exhibition. *The New York Times* quoted some of them<sup>40</sup>, but in the Hungarian newspapers quoted even more, as they republished items from Pravda or from the Soviet News Agency (TASS).<sup>41</sup> The third and most expensive measure was the organizing of a Soviet "counter-exhibition" in Moscow at the same time as the ANEM, where the visitors could see the latest achievements and products of Soviet industry, with some reference to daily life also.<sup>42</sup>

To show the success of the exhibition we need to check more factors. I found it useful to compare the American- with the Soviet Exhibition in New York.

The first and, in my opinion, the most important, factor was the number of visitors. The Soviet Exhibition was opened for 42 days and 1 million people visited it, the American for 54 days and visited by 2.7 million.<sup>43</sup> The American exhibit ran 12 more days (28% more), but the increase in the number of visitors was even greater (270% more). The second is the comparison of the number of articles of the exhibition in the Hungarian newspapers examined. Before the opening more articles were written about the American exhibition (5) than the Soviet (4). When the exhibitions were open 30% more articles mentioned the American exhibition somehow (12 were about the Soviet).

The third factor was one examined shortly after the end of the event. Ralph K. White publicized a study using the votes of the voting machine and counted the positive and

negative writings in the comment book. The writer used the Soviet exhibition's comment book too and he found the American Exhibition to be more popular—the voting machine had an 85% positive vote.<sup>44</sup>

### Conclusion

The ANEM was a genuinely popular and successful exhibition. The East-Bloomsday newspapers wrote about it, so its fame was not limited just to the citizens of Moscow. Daily life as the main theme was a practical choice and perhaps that was the reason why more than 2 million people wanted to see Cadillacs, drink Pepsi, or were just curious about how the "imperialist world" lived.

I mentioned above that I surveyed the newspapers of the Hungarian immigrants in the United States also. They did not write about the American Exhibition, because Nixon's trip to the USSR was more popular, more important for their readers. They publish many articles about the Soviet Exhibition, but that is a topic for another paper. I hope that the quotes and statistical use of Hungarian newspapers helps with constructing international opinion about the Exhibition. I would like to continue the research by collecting Soviet articles about it and, by comparing them with American articles, turn up new and interesting information.

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