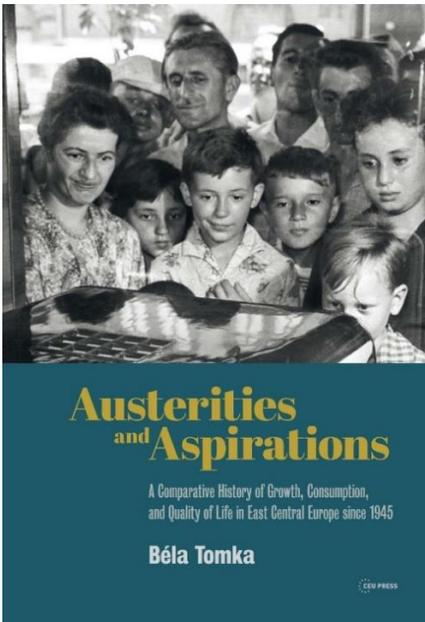


AUSTERITIES AND ASPIRATIONS

A Comparative History of Growth, Consumption, and Quality of Life in East Central Europe since 1945



This monograph provides an analysis of the economic performance and living standard in Czechoslovakia and its successor states, Hungary, and Poland since 1945. The novelty of the book lies in its broad comparative perspective: it places East Central Europe in a wider European framework that underlines the themes of regional disparities and European commonalities. Going beyond the traditional growth paradigm, the author systematically studies the historical patterns of consumption, leisure, and quality of life—aspects that Tomka argues can best be considered in relation to one other. By adopting this “triple approach,” he undertakes a truly interdisciplinary research drawing from history, economics, sociology, and demography.

As a result of Tomka’s three-pillar comparative analysis, the book makes a major contribution to the debates on the dynamics of economic growth in communist and postcommunist East Central Europe, on the socialist consumer culture along with its transformation after 1990, and on how the accounts on East Central Europe can be integrated into the emerging field of historical quality of life research.

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“For economists, economic growth is about models, tables, and charts; for an average citizen, it is primarily the thickness of the wallet which translates into the contents of a refrigerator and the quality of a place to live, a car, or a holiday. Béla Tomka combines both perspectives with extraordinary competence, showing the complex and ambiguous economic space of Central and Eastern Europe from the end of WWII to the first decade of the twenty-first century. His book, based on huge and varied material, explains why dreams prevailed over needs in this region, and why the driving force of the economy was (and still is) the pursuit of the escaping West. It allows for a better understanding of both the current fears and aspirations in the former socialist countries, and the still clear longing for the world before 1989.”

Professor Jerzy Kochanowski, Warsaw University

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Béla Tomka is a professor at the Department of History, University of Szeged, Hungary. His main research area is twentieth-century social and economic history with a special emphasis on international comparisons. His various publications include *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

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