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COMMISSION SHOPS AS PROVIDERS OF BASIC HOUSEHOLD GOODS

The Case Studies of Slovenia and Czechoslovakia

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Mostly through the case studies of the Slovenian *Komisija* and Czechoslovak *Chronor*, *Klenoty* and *Bazar* stores, this article presents socialist commission shops as providers of basic household goods. It therefore contributes insights into the complexity of commission shops as a specific type of second-hand retail as well as insights into the complexity of types of retail and socialist consumerism in general. It briefly compares commission shops with some other socio-historically known forms of second-hand retail, while pointing to the differences and similarities among them.

Keywords: commission shops, second-hand shops, socialist consumerism, Slovenia, Czechoslovakia

The Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion explains that in the period 1950–1959 (and later), the inhabitants of socialist Serbia (among others) obtained fashionable clothes from so-called *commission shops*. Supported by the state, they sold mainly smuggled Western goods, receiving commission (Studen Petrović 2010: 529) and according to Bartlett they were called *Komisiona*:

> In Yugoslavia, a series of state-managed shops called *Komisiona* sold mainly smuggled foreign goods, from jeans to Italian shoes. The seller would offer his or her items to the shop, which would keep a percentage of the selling price with the tacit approval of the state. (Bartlett 2010: 266)

At the same time, *Komisioni*, where many individuals bought their first jeans, Allstar sneakers, nylon tights etc., also purchased antiques, paintings and valuables from the once wealthier members of the bourgeois, thus helping them to survive in a new economically and ideologically adverse post-war situation.[1] Since the 1950s, 25 such "shops with seized and smuggled goods from abroad" existed in Belgrade and another 25 in Zagreb, where they were called *Posrednik*, remaining widespread even

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[1] http://www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net/komision/ (accessed 10. 6. 2019).

in the 1980s (Panić 2014: 64–65). They also offered garments from the developing Yugoslav fashion industry, which copied its Western counterpart.[2]

As concerns Ljubljana, and more generally Slovenia, no similar evidence of such shops exists in the literature. Yet to the contrary, as Tomažič stated a long time ago, after the Second World War in Ljubljana old clothes were also bought and sold in the "commission" shops:

> [At first] there was retail only with worn-out and used clothing; afterwards garments from American packages were sold there, while Trieste dresses came last to the shelves. (Tomažič 1983: 14)

When researching second-hand clothes retail in the past as well as in the contemporary period (cf. Habinc 2016, 2017, 2018) I came across several entries all mentioning commission shops during the post-Second World War period. They made me assume it was possible that such shops served at least a dual role: they traded in second-hand garments while (at the same time?) they also sold new, imported (or smuggled) and desirable goods. I have thoroughly discussed the functioning of Slovenia's commission shops managed by the Association of Military War Invalids elsewhere (Habinc 2017), and I have already presented commission shops as a specific type of second-hand retail (Habinc 2019). In this article I therefore focus solely on one, to date less explored, and less exposed role of such shops – their role as providers of basic household goods (e.g. clothing, shoes, furniture). The literature I mentioned at the beginning of the article perceives such shops as especially characteristic of a developed Yugoslav socialism and its economy of shortage.[3] The commission shops are interpreted as suppliers of desired and surplus goods, and therefore as having an important role in society's modernizing process (cf. Habinc 2019). In acknowledging the example of Slovenian commission shops from the first two decades after the Second World War, and by comparing them with Czechoslovak commission shops while also taking into account some entries on commission shops in certain other Eastern European socialist countries, in this article I mostly present commission shops as providers of ordinary goods; a topic yet to be distinctly elaborated. The research addresses the topic of socialist economies of shortage, which supported both formal and informal economies, and consumption. The latter, according to both Western as well as native researchers, was the cause of (specific) modernization processes in the socialist societies. As Bren and Neuberger (2012: 5) have already pointed out, more complex types of socialist retail as well as consumerism existed in these societies – and in my observations at least, commission shops were an exemplary case.[4] By presenting their role in the provision of the ordi-

[2] http://www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net/komision/ (accessed 10. 6. 2019).

[3] Shortage is a relative, culturally and historically dependent phenomenon. However, when associated with socialist societies, it is commonly perceived as either a social anomaly, or as a crucial social glue connecting people, while at the same time confronting them with the state (Crowley and Reid 2010: 15, 22).

[4] Nevertheless, perceiving socialist consumption in the context of economies of shortage, remains – for some – one of a few dead ends in the anthropology of (post)socialism (see, for example Thelen 2011).

nary and necessary – rather than in the provision of the extraordinary and luxury, in this article I therefore underline their manifold character and their fluidity.[5] While acknowledging their socio-historical diversity and changeability, I also briefly compare them with some other types of (socialist or capitalist, past or contemporary) second-hand retail. Namely, I try to follow Thelen's suggestions (2011) of focusing on transitions and adaptations, on blurred categories (for example of purchase channels) and therefore point out similarities rather than differences (between capitalism and socialism), therein presenting a less (self-)exoticized (cf. Habinc 2015) image of socialist societies as (Europe's, capitalism's, the present moment's) Other.

In searching for material on Slovenian commission shops I read through post-Second World War address books, several collections from the Historical Archives Ljubljana, while in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia I inspected the material of the Main Board of the Slovenian Association of Military War Invalids (1945–1962). I also examined all the issues of the *Invalidski vestnik* (*Gazette of the War Invalids*) published between 1946 and 1954, as well as issues published in 1962. In the National Museum of Contemporary History in Ljubljana I searched through photographic material and also discussed the functioning of the post-Second World War commission shops with the former president of the Association of Military War Invalids of Ljubljana and with the former president of the Association of Galleries and Antique Shops of Slovenia. The majority of the material on Czechoslovak commission shops used in this article is preserved in Bratislava's Museum of Trade, while commission shops from certain other socialist states are presented merely through fragments found in the literature.

Slovenian commission shops of the first post-Second World War decade as providers of basic household goods

Although it was difficult to obtain basic household goods in Slovenia at least until the 1950s, this period was ideologically unsympathetic to trading in second-hand goods. On the one hand, antiques especially were perceived as bourgeois, while on the other hand, individual merchants and traffickers were regarded as exploitative (cf. Glavan 2003: 314). Private antique or commission shops already in existence before the Second World War were thus mostly nationalized and since 1947 – at least in Ljubljana – much of their merchandise was handed over to the newly established enterprises of the Association of Military War Invalids (*Zveza vojaških vojnih invalidov*, ZVVI) (see SI ZAL, LJU/0477 [2]; SI ZAL, LJU/0477 [3]; SI ZAL, LJU/0477 [4]). The association managed many activities; for example it had a mo-

[5] Luxury is also a transitional notion; however, in socialist societies it is often associated with foreign- or hard-currency shops (see more on them in the continuation of this article). However, when luxury turns into the ordinary and available, this is often perceived as a sign of any society's modernisation (Crowley and Reid 2010: 23; cf. Merkel 2010: 55).

nopoly over sales of lottery tickets, matches and tobacco, which even in the administrative planned economy provided the possibility of decent and quick earnings. Nevertheless, they were not in line with the ruling ideology, but were difficult to resist (Repe 2005: 186–187, 207–208), while at the same time they were necessary since the association was supposed to take care of its members' disability allowances itself. Consequently, the association also took over the trade in used goods:

> The accumulation of all the companies managed by the Association of Military War Invalids, thus also of the company "Komisija" in Ljubljana, is primarily intended for the paying out of disability allowances to the disabled of the Peoples' Republic of Slovenia. (SI ZAL, LJU/0477 [1])

In a time when the state obligated itself to provide a guaranteed supply (cf. Himmelreich 2008: 136), the association's commission shops were therefore one of a small number of profitable businesses also contributing to the consolidation of the social status of one of the groups recognized as receiving credit for the gained liberation, the new state and its socio-political order. As an analysis of the Main Board of the ZVVI of Slovenia showed, in 1951 there were 61 companies managed by the Association of Military War Invalids. Eight of them were shops; five were commission shops, yet none were located in the Primorska region, where the political border with Italy had still not been set. However, there were shops in Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje, Murska Sobota as well as in Trbovlje (SI AS, AS 539 [1]). As Anton Orožim, the former president of the Association of Military War Invalids of Ljubljana, recalled in an interview, due to a poor supply of basic consumer goods, commission shops trading in second-hand garments (at least in Ljubljana) existed even throughout the 1950s.

In Ljubljana a commission shop managed by the town's ZVVI was founded on 10 August 1948. At least up until 1959, when the company name *Posrednik* appeared in the sources as well (Gospodarski adresar 1953: 88; cf. SI ZAL, LJU 402/6; Veliki adresar 1959: 269, 273), a company named *Komisija* located in the old town sold various goods: in 1952 it bought and sold "technical ware and accessories" as well as clothing, while in another store "furniture and musical instruments" were bought and sold, and a third shop specialized in "various garments and confectionery" (see SI AS, AS 539 [2]; SI ZAL, LJU/0477 [5]; SI ZAL, LJU/0477 [6]; SI ZAL, LJU/0477 [7]). The stores obtained garments from individuals, while the aforementioned interlocutor Anton Orožim, who is also a former manager of one Slovenian company, remembered the following:

> Whether the merchandise was damaged or broken, if there was any reason why it could not be on regular sale, it was sent to a commission shop [...] In fact, I would say: we sent it to the commission shop where our employees bought it since they knew it would be available there.

Figure 1. Commission store on Stari trg, Ljubljana. Photographed by Marjan Ciglič, 15 December 1959. Kept at: National Museum of Contemporary History, Ljubljana.

In Maribor, the second largest Slovenian town, the commission shop managed by the Association of Military War Invalids existed between 1949 and 1955, if not for longer (see SI AS, AS 539 [3]; SI AS, AS 539 [4]; SI AS, AS 539 [5]; Teply 1955: 250). Just as in Ljubljana it was located in the old town and up until at least 1952 – when its second branch opened – it had departments for: "men's suits, costumes, coats, bicycles, accordions, carpets, radios, etc.; for women's suits, women's, children's and men's underwear, shoes, etc.; for porcelain, watches, gold, various instruments, cookers, services, cutlery, etc." (SI AS, AS 539 [6]). Due to the "higher demands for commission garments", two years later the management of the company thought about opening another store for "valuables, jewellery, clocks, radios, cameras, typewriters and musical instruments" (SI AS, AS 539 [5]). In another Styrian town named Celje, the (only) *Starinarna* (antique store)[6] began operating in 1947 and only a year later it could not cover all the demand: "especially laundry and footwear are in high demand – nevertheless you can get almost anything in *Starinarna*: various clothes, coats, shoes, hats, caps, cameras, watches, various musical instruments, skis, skates, ornaments etc." (Uspehi enoletne 1948). Further in the east of the Republic of Slovenia, in Murska Sobota, in 1950, perhaps even earlier, a commission shop was selling second-hand and new "consumer goods, products of local crafts", while in 1951 a similar shop was closed in the industrial town of Trbovlje (Zasavje region) (Advertisement 1950a).[7] Of all the companies that were managed

[6] In 1950 and in 1952 a company called *Promet z rabljenimi predmeti* (Trade in Second-hand Garments) managed by the Association of Military War Invalids existed in Celje (Advertisment 1950b; cf. SI AS, AS 539 [7]).

[7] According to sources, in 1949 at least two commission shops were also located in Kamnik near Ljubljana (SI AS, AS 539 [8]), and in 1951 the proposal to open a commission shop in another nearby town named Domžale was rejected: "Since the town is too small for such a trade the proposal is rejected" (SI AS, AS 539 [9]).

by the Association of Military War Invalids, commission shops had, at least from 1949 if not earlier, the best financial results: *Komisija* in Ljubljana and Maribor made a lot of money, "almost too many for one company [...] the commission shops today make the highest earnings" (SI AS, AS 539 [10]). But already at the beginning of the 1950s, employees in the commission shops were nevertheless encouraged to be more selective in redeeming goods and to be more concerned with the stores' appearance.[8] Professional education and the "absolute honesty" of employees were also desired while a lot of material also proves they participated in smuggling, trafficking or not obtaining merchandise "according to a special list" (SI AS, AS 539 [6]; cf. SI AS, AS 539 [11]). Due to the scarcity of goods, as the interlocutor Anton Orožim also remembered, even information was of value to trade in at that time, which is why the employees of the commission shops were sometimes enmeshed in various criminal acts (cf. SI AS, AS 539 [12]).[9]

Czechoslovak commission shops as providers of basic household goods

The state-managed economic organization *Klenoty* was established by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Trade on 24 March 1969. It succeeded the company *Chronor*, which was established in 1949 and had 64 stores throughout the whole of Slovakia (SOC 074-73-81 [1]).[10] It mediated, for a commission, the sale of (junk) jewellery, watches, antiques, used goods (as well as used machines, devices and their parts, motor vehicles and their parts), artistic items, souvenirs, household goods, exotic/oriental goods, handicrafts and carpets, pieces of gold, precious materials and diamonds, as well as parts of goods. It also took on tasks such as the repair of watches, clocks and jewellery, making copies of antiques, and mediating a (package) sale (SOC 074-73-81, 074-73/1 B47/84: 4; cf. SOC 074-73-81, 0-216-74-81/20: 1). It bought garments from individuals, as well as from Czechoslovak and foreign (whether socialist or not) companies. *Klenoty* also received supplies of obsolete merchandise from Czechoslovak retail organizations, with garments bought at auc-

[8] For example, in 1952, when goods were "already generally available" (SI AS, AS 539 [12]), *Komisija* in Maribor had "many old items". After a period of either three or six months of their remaining unsold, they may be returned to their owners. Some extra money could be charged for their storage, while the prices of merchandise for buying off at a higher and a lower price were supposed to be set (SI AS, AS 539 [13]; cf. SI AS, AS 539 [11]).

[9] In 1954 the Office of Public Security for example reported on illegal trade in computational devices and typewriters. They were mostly smuggled by foreigners and resold by citizens or in two commission shops, which supplied business companies: "The employees of the commission shops and of the companies that bought items were highly bribed in those transactions. Sellers earned from 300,000 to 400,000 din per item only while more than 300 perpetrators were involved in such trafficking" (Trobič 2007: 168).

[10] Just two years after its founding, the number of *Chronor* shops (including the number of repair and combined shops too) grew – in 1951 there were 113 units of *Chronor*. Of these, 68 percent were shops offering repairs too (SOC 074-73-81 [3]). In 1953 the company was renamed to *Obchod klenotami, hodinami a starožitnostami, národni podnik* (Trade in Jewellery, Watches and Antiques) and (at least in the Bratislava area) it was oriented towards the sale of antiques and merchandise gained at auctions (SOC 074-73-81 [4]; cf. SOC 074-73-81 [1]).

tions, from dry cleaners, and from insolvent or liquidated companies (SOC 074-73-81, 074-73/1 B47/84: 32–33).

In 1989, when the 40th anniversary of *Klenoty* was celebrated, there were 318 shops "offering not only classical goods and jewellery but also, in the *Starožitnosti* [Antique] shops, attractive goods, and in the *Orient* shops the romantic scent of foreign countries" (SOC 074-73-81 [1]). At the same time, as a part of *Klenoty* there were 17 *Autobazar* shops in Slovakia, selling 5000 vehicles. "By mediating in a commission sale, *Klenoty* offers interesting audio, video or computer products" while "generally the *Bazar* shops selling used or cheaper goods are very well visited" (SOC 074-73-81 [1]).[11] *Bazar* shops were not supposed to sell goods that could be bought elsewhere, while for a lower price they could also sell defected or outdated merchandise, merchandise of a worst quality or made from leftovers or waste, objects acquired at auctions, from prisons or from the shop *Obchod klenoty, hodinami a starožitnostmi*[12] (SOC 074-73-81 [2]: 383–384). The price of goods sold to *Bazar* shops was not supposed to be higher than 75 percent of the price of similar merchandise in other shops. On the other hand, the highest price of an object for sale in a *Bazar* shop could not be higher than 90 percent of the (new) object's (market) price (SOC 074-73-81 [2]: 375, 385). The conditions of a commission sale had to be publicly presented in each *Bazar* shop in order to avoid possible violations: "Ask for an invoice when making a purchase"; "We don't accept complaints"; "Preferential sale, reserving merchandise and making a deposit is forbidden";[13] "We only accept cleaned, washed, chemically treated and repaired items" (SOC 074-73-81 [2]: 378).

Figure 2. Bazar shop in Michalovce, Slovakia, 1984. Photo from: Muzeum obchodu Bratislava, folder no.: SOC 074-73-81, photograph no. 10-903.

[11] According to a decree by the Ministry of Finance, the state shop *Bazar* had existed at least since the 22 December 1955. Since at least 1957 they were able to operate in towns and have at least two employees, while elsewhere they could be a part of mixed sales shops where their merchandise should have been separated from other merchandise (SOC 074-73-81 [2]: 372, 380).

[12] Merchandise that was repaired or cleaned by the *Obchod klenoty, hodinami a starožitnostmi* but not taken over on time (SOC 074-73-81 [2]: 383).

[13] Nevertheless, while not directly to its owner but to *Bazar's* salesman, one could pay a deposit for merchandise, which had to be "at least 100 KČS but no more than 200 KČS". However, this kind of product reservation was only allowed for objects of "a higher price (pianos, furniture, refrigerators)" (SOC 074-73-81 [2]: 375).

Drawing a comparison: the commission shops of various socialist countries as providers of basic household goods

As the sources imply, in both post-Second World War Slovenia and Czechoslovakia, trading in used merchandise became state governed and controlled. In both countries, commission shops existed as a part of mass consumption, consisting of buying and selling various merchandise from citizens and companies as well as from foreigners and foreign firms or organizations. The variety of goods that commission shops in both countries sold (at least in the early post-War decades) was astonishing, while during periods of the most severe economic shortages, information about the shops was highly valued.

In Slovakia, the scope of second-hand, everyday merchandise broadened over time (from mostly jewellery, watches, and clocks to antiques and other used items) and the shops came to specialize according to the merchandise they were selling (and/or repairing). Similarly to the Slovenian commission shops managed by the Association of Military War Invalids, they included the (legal) possibility of (selling as well as) buying various merchandise and therefore were part of a general, mass supply. Since they provided basic household goods, they were relevant and important for the masses, which was obvious in Slovenia at least, as also acknowledged by their location in the city centres – symbolically as well as spatially, commission shops were therefore perceived as a socially central category (Strasser 1999: 6).

As the entries already referred to at the beginning of the article further imply, commission shops in the late, more developed period of Yugoslav socialism however offered (mostly) new, desired and smuggled luxury goods (cf. Studen Petrović 2010; Panić 2014).[14] From the middle of the 1960s, when the Yugoslav economic situation improved, when its fashion and confectionery industries developed, and when shopping tourism as well as socialist consumerism emerged (cf. Duda 2005, 2010; Panić 2014), used clothing came to be seen as pre-modern and as a sign of obsolescence and poverty.[15] When, as part of the modernizing process, choice was no longer only led by necessity, and the necessity of choice regained its value, *Komisioni* and *Posredniki* offering mostly old or damaged garments therefore probably needed to transform themselves. How this happened and how both roles of the commission shops – as suppliers of basic and luxury goods – were possibly intertwined, remains to be investigated. But despite that and as proved by the material presented, the Yugoslav commission shops of the post-Second World War period obviously had (at

[14] They mostly sold similar goods to the goods that hard-currency shops sold in some other socialist countries. Nevertheless, the literature does not mention that the Yugoslav commission shops of late socialism sold goods (only) for hard currency or even special coupons. What I therefore previously claimed (Habinc 2018) – that over time Yugoslav commission shops transformed from being providers of basic household goods to hard currency shops – seems to need some further elaboration.

[15] Expressing individuality and competitiveness through fashion and novel garments too, which bourgeois society had highly valued since the first half of the 19th century, became possible due to the changed socio-economic situation: "Only fashionable novelties have preserved the ability to act as symbolic value while old products, nevertheless how functional they were, lost it" (Žagar 2011: 122).

least) a dual role, which is why common understandings of their presence are too narrow. On the other hand, Czechoslovak commission shops existed much more as suppliers of ordinary, basic household goods, and thus preserved their role up to 1989. Over time they have nevertheless specialized according to the merchandise each store primarily sold, while they often took care of repairing used goods too.

Several brief texts on commission shops in various other socialist countries further attracted my attention. Bartlett (2010), for example, mentions that Western luxury goods were acquired on Eastern markets in various ways – either on illegal black markets or in outlets of various state-run chain stores, supported by the regime. Commission shops and hard-currency shops were two kinds of such shops. In Bartlett's opinion, as well as Bryson's (2015), the existence of such shops proves that socialist states were afraid of the black market; they therefore tried to regulate it and control the inflow of Western goods as well as earn through the sale of such items (Bartlett 2010: 267). If hard-currency shops mostly sold desired, luxury and Western goods (Bren and Neuberger 2012: 6),[16] commission shops on the other hand also sold ordinary used goods that people no longer needed, simply did not like or were not satisfied with (Bryson 2015). Nevertheless, their selection of goods could not satisfy the demand; in Moscow for example a chain of stores named *Komok* sold used as well as new items, and Western goods were also present.[17] *Komok* acquired goods through various means, including from foreigners or Soviet diplomats, who bought them abroad and then sold them to the store for a profit (Bartlett 2010: 267). According to Bryson (2015), Soviet commission shops took a commission of 7% and mostly sold clothing, furniture and books.[18] When defining various types of Polish socialist markets (legal, semi-legal, illegal) Kochanowsky (2017) also writes about a net of state-managed *komis* shops. For a price no higher than in regular shops, they sold second-hand goods such as clothing, books, furniture etc. obtained from individuals: mostly from Polish tourists. According to him, such shops were one of a few traces of market behaviour – for example in the *komis* shops it was still possible to negotiate prices, and unsold garments were put on sale. However, *komis* shops mostly selling (legally) imported products and luxury goods (for example clothing, video tapes, cars etc.) were very rare and their effect on the whole market was negligible (Kochanowsky 2017: 17–18). Customers of such shops also had to present official identification there, which is why more discrete and less formal channels of

[16] Usually they are defined as the internal, state-run black markets of the Eastern Bloc or state governed methods of their monopolization (see, for example Bren and Neuberger 2012: 6). At first only foreigners and citizens working abroad or their relatives were allowed to spend their foreign currency (or special coupons) there. Ideologically but not also economically, such resale was in conflict with socialism, but if the state wanted to participate in foreign trade, it somehow had to (legally) obtain foreign currency (see Bren 2012: 34; Guentcheva 2009; Ivanova 2013; Kerr 1977; Zatlin 2007a, 2007b).

[17] The names of such stores (*Komis*, *Komisiona*, *Komok*) show their connection to a historically and nowadays well-known type of second-hand retail, consignment shops which also sell goods for a provision (Bartlett 2010: 299). The relationship among commission and consignment shops is to be further elaborated along the following lines.

[18] Another type of commission shop paid off the seller immediately but sold the goods for a much higher commission. Taxed flea markets providing immediate earnings existed as well (cf. Bryson 2015).

distribution soon appeared, such as private and illegal *komis* shops, mostly selling the merchandise of Westerners visiting Poland (ibid.: 176).[19]

Figure 3. The preserved signboard of a komis shop probably from the 1960s in Gliwice/Gleiwitz, Upper Silesia, Poland. Photographed by Jerzy Kochanowski, April 2019.

Bartlett further mentioned that Hungary also had a *BAV* company, the Company of Commission Stores, which also sold smuggled and desired Western goods (Bartlett 2010: 266). In the German Democratic Republic, as early as in 1948 when a system of fixed prices still existed, a chain of *HO* shops was established, providing citizens with a limited amount of imported Western goods, mostly high fashion. For a very inflated price, goods could be bought there for GDR marks, but in 1961 a chain named *Equisit* replaced such *HO* shops, while in 1966 the chain *Delikat*, which sold luxury food, was also established (Merkel 2010: 55, 61, 63–64).

All these examples prove and illustrate that commission shops were a specific type of well-known shop in various socialist countries during the second half of the twentieth century (cf. Habinc 2019). They sold various kinds of merchandise, among which imported (smuggled), luxury and desired garments were most commonly mentioned in the literature. Nevertheless, to a large extent they also sold (and

[19] A scornful insight into the situation in Polish *komis* shops asserts that merchants were employed there for two years on average while criminality was supposedly the highest among individuals supplying shops with (foreign) goods (Kozicki 1960).

in the case of Czechoslovakia repaired) ordinary, basic household goods.[20] However, as Kochanowsky for example estimated, the effect of the (Polish) *komis* shops on the whole market was negligible (Kochanowsky 2017: 17–18). They played their role in providing citizens with basic household goods as well, but I can only speculate on their scope compared with the relative scope of imported, new and desired goods. As the brief mentions in the literature and the archival material already imply, the situation likely differed from country to country and due to various (socio-economic) situations and developments it perhaps even changed within each socialist country itself.

Conclusion: (extra)ordinary and (un)common, needed and desired

Compared with other second-hand retail channels, socialist commission shops can only conditionally, therefore, be considered to have been an alternative consumption channel. Their sales in that time and place were marginal, but this was what made them an alternative consumption channel (cf. Cervellon, Carey and Harms 2012; Crewe and Gregson 2003; Han 2013; Le Zotte 2013; Marzella 2015; Olris Hansen and Due Jensen 2014). For example, the commission shops of late Yugoslav socialism, which also sold mostly modern or higher-class clothing for an affordable price, can be compared with historically known antique or pawn shops from the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These shops also sold well preserved yet affordable clothing, which had a higher social status (cf. Habinc 2016: 69). However, in the early post-Second World War decades, at least in Slovenia in commission shops managed by the Association of Military War Invalids, they mostly sold used and ordinary goods. The Czechoslovak *Chronor* and *Klenoty* were similar, as were other commission shops from socialist Eastern Europe selling ordinary garments as well. At least during the early post-War decades when it was hard to obtain almost anything, this fact rendered commission shops far from being an alternative consumption channel and rather as an important part of mainstream, mass consumption. This is also why nowadays they can hardly be compared with the (contemporary or historically known) consignment stores. The latter were – and still are – mostly selling well-maintained clothes used for a year or two. Their retailers have to sustain very good relationships with clients who have been asked to only bring in quality merchandise, ensuring it will be sold (Han 2013: 6).

What these brief insights into the role of socialist commission shops as providers of basic household goods therefore hopefully illustrate is that "the differences within and the differences between" (cf. Moore 1993) are still of key importance. There were various types of commission shops well-known in various countries as well as probably during various periods of each socio-political setting. As the Slovene

[20] However, contrary to hard-currency shops, commission shops sold goods solely for domestic currency.

and Czechoslovak material proved, they were a transitional, blurred retail category marked by many adaptive features, which call for even more spatial, social and historical comparisons. However, besides thinking about the differences (within and/or between) and also considering the similarities (for example between capitalism and socialism), a further question emerges: if commission shops were a complex socialist retail channel, how specific was this complexity to a socialist past alone? As some authors stress, besides being at least (some) customers' "first option, but only a second choice" (Bardhi and Arnould 2005: 230), the fluctuating nature of second-hand markets is one of its own strong specificities (cf. Appelgren 2019; Tranberg Hansen and Le Zotte 2019).[21]

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Komisioni kao mjesta nabave osnovnih kućanskih potrepština. Studije slučaja iz Slovenije i Čehoslovačke

Na temelju studija slučaja slovenskih trgovina *Komisija* i čehoslovačkih trgovina *Chronor*, *Klenoty* i *Bazar* u radu se predstavljaju socijalistički komisioni kao mjesta nabave osnovnih kućanskih potrepština. Na taj se način doprinosi boljem razumijevanju kompleksnosti takvih trgovina kao specifične vrste maloprodaje rabljene robe te kompleksnosti oblika maloprodaje i konzumerizma u socijalizmu općenito. Rad ukratko uspoređuje komisione s drugim poznatim društveno-povijesnim oblicima maloprodaje rabljene robe, ukazujući na njihove međusobne razlike i sličnosti.

Ključne riječi: komisioni, trgovine rabljene robe, konzumerizam u socijalizmu, Slovenija, Čehoslovačka