

ABSTRACTS

Regina Gradwohl: Interpretations of Aging in Hungarian Sociological Thought during the Socialist Era

Aging is a long-standing area of scholarly inquiry; after World War II, however, the aging of industrial societies and its implications have rendered it an increasingly pressing issue in the social sciences. The concept itself is far from self-evident, and most disciplines, sociology included, lack consistent or comprehensive theoretical frameworks for understanding it. As all human sciences contribute to the understanding of aging, the interdisciplinary nature of inquiries further complicates the interpretation. Research questions in this field do not arise in free-floating discursive spaces, they are shaped by various actors and influences. Understanding the institutionalization of sociology in Hungary during the 1960s, as well as the political and economic context affecting it, sheds light on how aging became a subject of study during the Kádár era. The present study explores how the modes of knowledge production, research methods, and the political-economic environment shaped sociological perspectives on aging in Hungary. The analysis is based on the longitudinal survey of academic publications from 1959 to 1989.

Keywords: aging, sociological thought, knowledge production, Kádár era, Hungarian sociology

Réka Gyimesi: The Status of the Elderly in Late Nineteenth-Century Bonyhád

Based on the 1869 census records of Bonyhád, this study investigates census forms and the quantifiable indicators that determined the household position of elderly individuals. In the name-based records, some elderly individuals were listed first as heads of household, while others were recorded at the end, occasionally accompanied by remarks indicating that they relied on charity. Due to their nature, the census records do not provide explanations for household structure or dynamics, which can only be inferred from secondary literature and other sources. The present study uses the case of Bonyhád, a town of 6,000 inhabitants, to test the interpretations found in the latter. The settlement is also a suitable field for examining cultural influences, as both German and Hungarian communities lived there.

Keywords: census, genealogy, database, elderly, households, 19th century

Dániel László Kovács: József Boronkay's "Wretched Days": A County Judge's Last Will through the History of Mentalities

This study examines the last will of Somogy county judge József Boronkay, tracing his "wretched days" to provide an insight into the experiences of aging within his social milieu. A successful estate manager, public figure, lawyer, and family head, Boronkay was the victim of a robbery in 1806, which abruptly ended his active life and left him largely immobilized in his final years. While trying to secure the future of his estate and family, the elderly landowner experienced intense internal conflict. Boronkay's instructions and admonitions bring into focus not only into his personal struggles, but also into the nobility's mentality and changing time perception around the turn of the eighteenth century. His story sheds light on the protracted dissolution of feudal society and raises questions regarding contemporary notions of aging and inheritance.

Keywords: inheritance, control, mortality, family, Festetics, Somogy county

Boglárlka Kőrösi: "Teenage Pensioners": Challenges of Rehabilitating Young People with Disabilities and the Fight Against Disability Pension Incentives in Late Socialist Hungary, 1970–1989

In late Kádár-era Hungary, public debates in the media increasingly touched upon issues in social and health policy, including the social status of the elderly and people with disabilities. By the 1970s and 1980s, those who had become permanently disabled due to the polio epidemic of the 1950s had reached adulthood. Both the affected individuals and the state apparatus struggled to support the autonomy of the so-called "teenage pensioners," young people who, lacking meaningful employment opportunities, were forced into disability retirement before ever starting a career. Similar to other Eastern Bloc countries, the state's interest was to adapt in practice the principle of "medical productivity," as described in academic literature. In Teodor Mladenov's definition, this concept refers to turning people into an economic resource or productive forces through rehabilitation, a "correction" of disability as interpreted within the ideological framework of state socialism. But can this concept be universally applied across all Eastern Bloc states, time periods, types of disability, and age groups? This paper explores the contradictions between "medical productivity" and employer discrimination against young people with physical disabilities in late state-socialist Hungary by analyzing the discourses of both the state propaganda and the disability advocacy movement emerging at the time. It also highlights the broader social and economic transformations in the final years of the regime,

which significantly influenced public perceptions of rehabilitation, disability pensions, and increasingly individualized paths to well-being.

Keywords: state socialism, Kádár era, disability, advocacy, rehabilitation

Péter Óri: In the Minority... The Elderly in Hungary Before and During the Demographic Transition

This study examines the situation of elderly people and various aspects of demographic aging before and during the demographic transition. The analysis is based on the macro-level data of mortality figures calculated from nineteenth- and twentieth-century censuses and vital statistics, as well as on a representative sample (the Mosaic database) of individual-level data from the 1869 Hungarian census.

Following the disambiguation of the concepts of individual and demographic aging, the study examines the concept of the latter. In Hungary, the onset of this process can be traced to the late nineteenth century, although the elderly did not constitute a major demographic group until the mid-twentieth century. The elderly population in 1869 was predominantly male and skewed toward the younger age groups. Marital status showed sharp gender differences: more men were married, while widowhood was more typical among women. Few elderly people lived alone or shared a household with more than one married child. Men, especially landowners, often held onto their role as heads of household, and typically passed it on around age of 70, as their health declined. Widowed women usually became and remained heads of household, but more of them cohabited with relatives or even in unrelated households. As major epidemics subsided, mortality among the elderly began improving in the nineteenth century, with another wave of improvement between the two World Wars. While life expectancy increased only modestly, survival rates improved significantly, suggesting a major shift in the prospects of the elderly.

Keywords: historical demography, Hungary, 19th–20th centuries, demographic aging, 1869 census, mortality, old-age mortality, elderly marital and household status

Judit Pál: The Lord-Lieutenant Retires: Retirement Eligibility and Administrative Practice in the Age of Dualism

This study explores the retirement practices of lord-lieutenants (*főispán*) at the helm of counties during the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, and the changes brought about by the acknowledgment of their retirement eligibility. Although it gradually turned into a state administration position, the status of lord-lieutenants remained ambiguous for nearly two decades after the Compromise of 1867, during which former officeholders were not entitled to state pensions. Recognizing

their pension eligibility marked an important step in transforming the dignitary role into an administrative office. Pensions were regulated by the 1885 Pension Act (Act XI of 1885) and Act XXI of 1886. These laws provided important support for preserving the living standards (at least partially) of those with modest means or no wealth. However, due to vague legal definitions, the ministry often played a decisive role in its interpretation. In disputed cases, decisions followed cabinet precedents or cabinet council statements, which could vary from one administration or minister to another. While these resolutions were influenced by both objective and subjective factors, they adhered to the legal framework. Other considerations were cited only in discretionary cases, and within strict limits. Such *ex gratia* decisions were typically granted to individuals with distinguished careers, those who had demonstrated “merit” in other positions, or those whose prior entitlements were officially acknowledged at the time of appointment. Connections or proven financial hardship improved the applicant’s chances. However, financial constraints often took precedence over considerations of equity.

Keywords: lord-lieutenant, pension, (retirement eligibility), administrative practice, dualism

Tamás Pintér: The Pressure of Deferring Retirement: “Pension” and Officeholding among the Elderly in the Senior Administration of Baranya County, 1790–1850

Landless or impoverished county nobles had limited options for maintaining their social status and securing their family’s livelihood. Besides military and ecclesiastical careers, serving as an official for landed estates or for the county offered opportunities to improve their situation while preserving their prestige. However, such offices were liable to become a source of strain: the prospect of loss of power—and even more so, that of a regular income and financial stability—caused considerable anxiety for aging administrators. It is hardly surprising that officeholders held on to their hard-earned positions as long as possible, leading to a county administration staffed by civil servants over sixty—and in some cases seventy or eighty—whose capacity to fulfill their duties was progressively diminishing.

By analyzing individual trajectories in office, the study presents an overview of patterns of the political elite’s end-of-career strategies in Baranya County between 1790 and 1850. The inquiry extends to elderly officeholding as well as the county’s proposed solution, the Baranya County Pension Fund for Former Officials, Widows, and Orphans, and its institutional history. The research highlights that, in many cases, late-life officeholding was not a matter of personal choice but a generational economic necessity.

Keywords: nobility, county administration, pension, Baranya County, 18th century

János Ugrai: “I have served for thirty years; I have nothing”: Caring for Elderly Ministers in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century in the Tiszáninnen Church District

The study explores the care of elderly church officials changed in Reformed Church District of Tiszáninnen (Cistibiscana) in the first half of the nineteenth century. What began as a situation of incapacity and hardship quickly gave way to the institutionalization of stable and broad social support for elderly members of the reformed clergy relatively fast. Although poverty among the ministers could not be eliminated entirely, the establishment of Hungary’s first relatively secure pension fund and a corresponding system of benefits for ministers took place in this region. These measures played a key role in advancing both the ecclesiastical and, not least, the teaching professions.

Keywords: ministers, pensions, Reformed Church, early 19th century, professionalization