Selling Fashion to the Soviets

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Routledge
2014-08-15


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performance, but the reality was quite different. As it sought to gain an economic profit employing capitalist means, the Kirov kolkhoz often operated at the edges of what was legally permitted financially in the Soviet economic system, and often did so in blatant disregard for the ideals of socialist economic activity.

A substantial part of the Kirov kolkhoz’s auxiliary production was specifically targeted towards shadow production. In the ‘shadow economy’ of the Soviet Union, enterprises negotiated with each other to buy and sell surplus materials, or old and obsolete machinery. Enterprises did not compete on the open market, as they did in capitalist economies, but they were nevertheless in competition with each other for resources, primarily raw materials or semi-manufactured goods, and the services required in the production process. Almost everything was in short supply, but there was always somebody who required or could acquire goods and raw materials. The Kirov kolkhoz’s auxiliary production was in its own way a part of this shadow economy; it perfectly transparently offered services and produced goods for other enterprises to help them to resolve bottlenecks in their production.

An example of this is the manufacture of shipping crates by the Kirov kolkhoz. The crate factory grew in size, and some of the spare planks were processed in the joinery section. The Kirov kolkhoz began to produce its own workbenches and clothing lockers. In addition, pieces of furniture, including high-quality sofas, were prepared, and this furniture in turn was used in commercial bartering. The scarcity of good quality furniture meant that a quota of sofas could be offered to a tin plate manufacturer, for example. The tin plate manufacturing staff then had a personal incentive to supply a given batch of plate at the designated time and in the correct quantity to the Kirov kolkhoz rather than to one of its competitors. By securing this type of trade, the Kirov kolkhoz made money and was able to secure its supply chain.

Operating according to capitalist principles in the socialist economy of the Soviet Union was not always easy. It was always important to maintain a good relationship with the decision-makers. For the Kirov kolkhoz leadership, it was a consistent and effective policy to maintain good relationships using hospitality rather than bribery. An enterprise operating in the food supply chain was subject to numerous inspections. Hygiene alone was under the control of seven independent inspectors. The Kirov kolkhoz had so many auxiliary lines of production that in practice there was always some sort of inspection in process. These inspections became so numerous that, in the end, the Kirov kolkhoz built a private hotel in the centre of Tallinn. In the basement of the hotel, there was a fish restaurant open to the public, on the ground floor a florist’s shop and on the first floor a spa. The top floor housed the high standard hotel rooms. Being tactful was also important. The inspectors who arrived for their very first visit to the Kirov kolkhoz were never accommodated in the private hotel; this could have been interpreted as corruption. Only on subsequent trips was full hospitality shown towards the guests.
Market behaviour with social sensitivity

One of the secrets of Kirov kolkhoz's success was its market-oriented attitude. Of the new policies initiated by Kuul, the most important was perhaps the introduction of internal billing and the evaluation of overall productivity. A standard kolkhoz vehicle servicing department received a bonus based on its level of efficiency and how many vehicles it serviced during each accounting period. At the Kirov kolkhoz, however, the vehicle servicing department received a bonus as soon as a vehicle was back on the road. It was in its own interests, therefore, to have the vehicle maintained in time and kept in working order. The collective farm's system of internal accounting and the audit of actual costs required additional personnel as each subdivision had its own accounts department. However, the cost of wages for these accountants and the account managers was more than covered by the practical benefits of the kolkhoz's financial structures.

Market economy efficiency was also evident in the pay structure. Wages were relatively high at the Kirov kolkhoz, in addition to which, at the end of each year, all its 7000 members received a share of the profits. The Kirov kolkhoz always hired skilled professionals and paid them ten to fifteen percent more than they would receive in state-run enterprises. When the technical director and the main engineer moved to the Kirov kolkhoz from the Tallinn fish processing plant, they had to work harder, but they also now received higher wages.

As far as was possible, each task undertaken at the kolkhoz was set at a fixed price. For example, the fish smokeries required a large staff to put the fish on to the smoking racks. The normal practice was that, when each shift's output was calculated altogether, bonuses were paid for exceeding the targets. At the Kirov kolkhoz, after a certain number of smoking racks had been filled during the shift, each additional rack prepared received a certain amount of extra money. This allowed individual workers to earn more pay for each additional rack they filled. The most efficient workers were able to earn more, whereas others found jobs in different parts of the kolkhoz or left the enterprise altogether.

The profitability of every production branch at the kolkhoz was constantly monitored and, if profits were not high enough, production was stopped. In many cases, the Kirov kolkhoz was the first enterprise to put goods on to the market. As competition grew, leading to a diminished profit margin, it was also the first to withdraw its products.60 This was sometimes the result of changes in the structure of state prices. The only output that the Kirov kolkhoz discontinued for political reasons was the production of berry wine. During Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaigns in the mid-1980s, the Estonian Communist Party leader, Karl Vaino, personally suggested this to Kuul, who humbly followed the suggestion.

The peculiar feature of the collective farm's leadership was its down-to-earth attitude towards wealth. Even the highest ranking managers in the
enterprise lived within the *kolkhoz*, although perhaps in slightly better and bigger houses and with access to slightly better cars. Their standard of living was not essentially different from that of the rest of the employees. Simply the fact that the management worked for the common good of the whole *kolkhoz*, and not in their own interests, was a major reason behind its successful and unhindered operation.

Another very significant factor in the *kolkhoz*'s success was the fact that part of its overall profit was delivered in the form of social benefits. The social sector of the Kirov *kolkhoz* was exemplary given the conditions in Soviet Estonia. The enterprise operated its own health centre that provided prompt medical assistance, its own children's hospital, kindergarten, sports fields and halls, even an old people's home. In the *kolkhoz*'s own network of shops, in addition to fish products, there were agricultural products from the enterprise's own agricultural unit. The *kolkhoz* bakery made fresh bread and confectionery for the enterprise canteens. All these products were also sold outside the *kolkhoz*. At the beginning of each year, employees received bonus points, which could be used to order a tailor-made suit or pay for a haircut, a car service and a range of other *kolkhoz* facilities. Private house building was subsidised, and the enterprise's own blocks of flats were built to a high quality and design. Recreational activities ranged from scuba diving to motocross, and from carpet weaving to folk dancing. The workers had access to several holiday resorts around Soviet Estonia, some for summer vacations and others suitable for skiing and winter activities.

**Successful Soviet economic competition?**

Enterprises will always compete with one another; it is simply the case that the rules of competition vary according to different economic models. As this case study has demonstrated, competition between enterprises was present even in the Soviet socialist system. Some companies were successful, whereas others were not. One of the most successful companies in the Soviet Union was the Kirov fishery *kolkhoz* in Estonia. Before the collapse of the Soviet regime, the Kirov *kolkhoz* operated successfully for forty-one years and, during this time, it developed from a rural fishing collective that carried out just net fishing into a major multibranch corporation that produced consumer goods and products ranging from shampoo to furniture and from tinned fish to fish processing plant equipment.

The Kirov *kolkhoz* presented a ‘display window into socialism’ in Soviet Estonia, where every important visitor to the region would routinely pay a visit. By its very existence, the Kirov *kolkhoz* in its own way illustrated the fact that the Soviet socialist economic model could work effectively and profitably. The Kirov *kolkhoz* was an example of how to be successful in socialism without being strictly socialist. The *kolkhoz* balanced its bookkeeping and production plans and was successful in the area of socialist competition. It operated successfully in the realms of the Soviet shadow
The Kirov fishing kolkhoz

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17 In Soviet Estonia, the most ‘politically reliable’ people were considered to be those Estonians who had been born and raised in the Soviet Union. For example, both the long-term Secretaries of the Estonian Communist Party, Johannes Käbin (1950–1978) and Karl Vaino (1978–1988), were the Russian Estonians.
18 See, for example, Mootor-kalapügijaama ja kalurikoolihoosi tüüpleping (Standard Contract between a Motorised Fishing Station and a Fishing Kolkhoz), 1953.
19 This is indicated in the Kirov kolkhoz internal phonebook, 25 June 1977.
20 Special materials, such as cables and electricity maintenance equipment, were also door-openers for the Estonia kolkhoz construction unit (EKE) and, through these connections, EKE was able to access almost every type of construction materials it needed. See Kuuutma, Wabarilgists, Wabarigini, p. 266.
21 Eesti Riigi Arhiv (Estonian State Archive; hereafter LVMA), 5 August 1965, minutes of a board meeting. In one example, one of the fishermen asked for his overtime payments but, because his ship had had an unprofitable year, the money was not forthcoming; instead, he was given some days off work.
22 Alaküla, Kirovist, p. 29.
23 Randlane, 14 October 1976. The garden products earned 620,000 roubles out of a total income of 28.3 million roubles.
24 Alaküla, Kirovist, p. 197.
25 LVMA, 7 June 1965, minutes of a board meeting.
26 Alaküla, Kirovist, p. 72.
27 Alaküla, Kirovist, p. 99.
28 Alaküla, Kirovist, p. 32.
29 See, for example, Randlane, 27 January 1977: Kirov kolkhoz figures for 1976.
30 Alaküla, Kirovist, p. 39.
5 Selling fashion to the Soviets
Competitive practices in Polish clothes export in the early 1960s

Mila Oiva

Introduction
In April 1961, Mrs Zajaczkowska was very busy. As head of the production department of the Polish Association of Clothing Industries (ZPO), her task was to organise a competitive and attractive export collection of Polish ready-to-wear clothes consisting of 800 designs within just a few months. The major function of the state organisation ZPO was to control and coordinate the Polish clothing industry as part of the planned economic structure. Consequently, Zajaczkowska wrote to clothing factory directors that it was of the utmost importance that the Polish collection looked consistent ‘taking into account the serious competition of other countries currently presenting their collections in Moscow’. Thus, in order to be competitive in the Soviet market, Polish clothing export professionals considered it important to pay attention to the product’s image. They used competitive practices that are understood to be part of marketing in the contemporary Western context.

Generally, the exchange of commodities within the member states of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), which oversaw economic cooperation between the socialist countries, has been described as lacking competition. Intra-CMEA trade has been regarded as an extension of Soviet dominance over its satellites. How, then, should we understand Zajaczkowska’s letter, in which she urges directors to pay attention to the competitive setting in the Soviet market? This chapter explores how Polish professionals developed a marketing strategy to address competition in the export of ready-to-wear clothes to the Soviet Union in the early 1960s. The network of Polish organisations that participated in foreign trade is divided in this chapter into high, intermediate and micro levels. The chapter focuses not on the high level of the Central Committee Economic Department, but on the emergence of marketing practices within the intermediate level (ZPO controlling the clothing production sector) and micro level (factories and foreign trade companies). The reinvention of competitive practices that took place in the early 1960s spurred further development of Polish clothing export strategies aimed at increasing competitiveness later in the 1960s and 1970s. Although this
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chapter focuses on Poland, it seems that the other CMEA member states also
had diverse competitive strategies for the Soviet market.

This study challenges the view that denies the existence of competition in
foreign trade within the planned economies and contributes to the discussion
on lower level actors’ competitiveness.\textsuperscript{5} It shows that the smaller countries
were able to challenge Soviet economic structures. In addition, it calls for a
wider reading of the functions of an economy that has been viewed pre-
dominantly through shortages.\textsuperscript{6} Indeed, in some definitions, shortage is
accentuated as a significant element in creating competition. Here, competition in the economic sphere is understood as a set of practices employed in
order to access goods in short supply or for some reason difficult to reach.
Marketing is understood as a competitive practice of attracting new cus-
tomers by promising superior value, and keeping and growing current customers by delivering satisfaction. In the Soviet bloc context of the early 1960s,
competition was officially defined to be inherently part of a capitalist econ-
omy, but the situation was more complex on a practical level.\textsuperscript{7}

The change in cultural atmosphere in one sector of intra-CMEA trade and
the emergence of new opportunities for Polish traders are studied in this
chapter through the diversification of export practices and the changing understanding of the concept of competition. Human practices – the ways of
operating or doing things – are linked to cultural meanings.\textsuperscript{8} Through prac-
tices, people display cultural meanings; thus, changes in practices signify
changing thought.\textsuperscript{9} Studying practices expands the picture of state socialism
because the focus is on everyday working mechanisms instead of official
statements and hierarchies. The main sources for this chapter are documents
produced by the foreign trade company CETEBE and the state organisations
that coordinated the activities of the clothing industry, the Central Board of
the Clothing Industry, CZPO, which was restructured and renamed in 1958–
59 as ZPO.\textsuperscript{10} In addition, interviews with people active in the Polish foreign
trade sector from 1956 are used. These sources have not been utilised pre-
viously in historical research and, in general, it is rare for Soviet bloc foreign
trade history to be researched in such detail.

**Formation of a new trading environment in the late 1950s**

In order to understand why Polish exporters re-introduced competitive prac-
tices in the early 1960s, we should look at the political and economic changes
of the late 1950s. There is a prevailing narrative in Polish historiography
which states that the structural transformations in the economic administra-
tion of the late 1950s did not have substantive effects in practice.\textsuperscript{11} One of the
aims of the Polish reform was decentralisation, and it was carried out by
decreasing the number of administrative organisations and transferring some
decision-making responsibilities to lower levels of the administration in
1958.\textsuperscript{12} As part of the re-organisation, the Central Boards of industrial bran-
ches were dismantled, and Industrial Associations, with wider responsibilities,
were founded to replace them. In contrast to the prevailing narrative, this research demonstrates that there appeared to be a significant turn towards a more active participation of micro and intermediate level actors and an alteration in practices following these administrative reforms. The foreign trade structure became less hierarchical and centralised. It began to resemble a network. Whereas CZPO had not participated actively in export coordination, ZPO had an active role in clothing export. From 1960 to 1976, ZPO had a whole department concentrating on export.

These changes in the economic administration were connected to wider shifts in the political sphere. The temporary political thaw in Poland had been initiated by workers’ demonstrations and their violent suppression in the city of Poznań in 1956. Polish historiography characterises the mid-1950s as a short period of liberalisation, after which the authorities soon re-introduced controls over society. Despite the suspension of most of the reforms, there was no return to strict Stalinism thereafter. The year 1956, when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev criticised Stalin and his methods, was also an important turning point in Soviet economic policy towards its allies. Changes in the political atmosphere and the restlessness in Eastern Europe urged Khrushchev to revisit the alliance structure of the Eastern bloc. According to this new Soviet thinking, the East European allies would remain stable as long as they were economically prosperous. In exchange for low price raw materials, the Soviet Union began to receive in return higher price industrially manufactured products in order to support socialism in the allied countries.

Consequently, structural changes also became evident in the economy by the end of the 1950s. The production of consumer goods in Poland increased by sixty-three per cent between the years 1955 and 1960. The great change from exporting raw materials to industrially manufactured goods, such as machinery and ready-made clothes, became evident from 1957 onwards. This change in export structure was most apparent in Poland’s trade with other socialist countries. Many of them applied similar economic reforms in the 1950s and 1960s.

The political and wider economic changes had not yet emerged in the practices of the foreign trade company CETEBE and the central board CZPO in the mid-1950s. Their marketing activities were almost non-existent. Despite the unreliability of statistics from Soviet bloc states, it is possible to draw certain conclusions. In 1958, the major export direction of Polish ready-to-wear clothes was to the Soviet Union, which constituted roughly ninety per cent of the trade. Yet, in Soviet statistics, Poland is not even listed among the major importers, which were China (forty-four per cent), Bulgaria (twenty-four per cent) and the GDR (fourteen per cent).

There were many reasons for the inactive participation of lower level actors in Soviet trade. Soviet policy towards its allies ensured a hierarchical structure of economic administration, and Soviet advisers were placed in important organisations to ensure unofficial but direct Soviet control during the Stalin era. Changing these practices took a longer time than taking a new
direction in politics in 1956. However, when the practices changed in 1961, they seem to have been permanent.

Re-invention of competitive practices in Soviet trade

In the early 1960s, Polish clothing export practices changed dramatically. The increased export demands of the Polish economic planners and the new opportunities in the Soviet market opened up a new level of activities for micro and intermediate level actors. The push and pull factors of the market led to a new approach towards the customer: marketing, which could not be practised on the highest level of hierarchy in the planned economy, but emerged at lower levels. The lower level actors created a special production line explicitly for the Soviet market and introduced new export procedures that included marketing. After the launch of the new trading practices in 1961, Polish export professionals continuously developed them further, based on the experiences they gained. All these changes provide a new way to understand intra-CMEA trade in general, and allow for a re-evaluation of Polish opportunities in the Soviet market in particular.

The emerging novel practices in 1961 were initiated by a new joint body founded to ease horizontal cooperation between ZPO and CETEBE. The new body, the Export Council, focused on stimulating clothes export to the Soviet Union. In its first meeting, the Council stated that, in order to reach the annual export plan for 1962, certain changes in coordination and planning had to be made. In contrast to the late 1950s, when there was practically no discussion about the problems faced in the Soviet market, the Export Council now indicated that there were challenges in exporting to the Soviet Union. What is even more noteworthy is that an intermediate level actor, such as ZPO, could do something to improve the export figures.

The Export Council listed fresh ways to improve the professionalisation of the export sector. Some of these proposals were connected to marketing. In the suggested procedure, the major target was to create a good reputation for Polish products at fashion exhibitions and shows. The new practices were to be tested in the summer of 1961 in the Soviet market. The correspondence between ZPO, the Ministry for Foreign Trade and CETEBE provide a detailed picture of the heated fashion exhibition preparations prior to the Moscow price negotiations and a fashion show tour to Riga, Leningrad and Kiev. Not only the letters sent by the aforementioned Mrs Zajączkowska but also other documents demonstrate the importance of the planned trade negotiations in Moscow in the summer of 1961 (Figure 5.1).

In contrast to the 1950s, in 1961, the micro and intermediate actors in Polish foreign trade formed an efficient network and could thus influence the success of sales in the Soviet market. ZPO and factories worked to create an impressive collection that would sell, while specific designs and the prices paid for them were negotiated by the foreign trade company CETEBE. As became evident, the state-level bilateral annual commodity exchange negotiations
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Figure 5.1 Working on the new design of a dress with a model: Fashion House Telima in Łódź, 1960 (Poland)

carried out by the central planning organs only set a framework for the price scale, giving directions but leaving room for bargaining. Zajączkowska wrote to the producers that the designs were to be prepared in two samples: one would go to Moscow and the other would remain in the factory as a template, in the event that a contract was drawn up. This suggests that not all the presented designs were sold successfully.

Although price negotiations were the most difficult part of the trade process, it is notable that even the opportunity to negotiate prices was included in the Polish clothes exporters' toolbox by 1961. Until 1956, the Soviet Union had essentially dictated the price level of Polish products, at least in part. According to former trade professionals, negotiating prices was always very difficult. Soviet wholesale purchasers were very price conscious and, moreover, they often referred to the fact that the Soviet Union was selling energy to Poland for lower prices than on the world market when they demanded
lower prices for clothes that the Poles were selling. Thus, the Polish negotiators had to have good grounds to ask for higher prices.²⁸ Hence, it was important to make a good impression for the collection in difficult price negotiations.

Mrs Zajączkowska stated in her letter that there was already competition between the countries exporting clothes to the Soviet Union. Despite the official CMEA doctrine of cooperation, in practice, bilateral country-based barter trade led to more or less hidden price competition between exporting countries.

The sales shares of countries exporting clothes to the Soviet Union changed during the period under review here. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, China dominated the clothing market. By the mid-1960s, China’s share had diminished, and Soviet imports had diversified more evenly between other socialist countries, and their number increased.²⁹ The decrease in Chinese trade can be explained by the Sino-Soviet split that started in 1957, but heightened in the early 1960s. As Soviet relations with China deteriorated, Soviet leaders sought to avoid the weakening of the socialist bloc by strengthening their alliance with East European states.³⁰

In the early 1960s, the East European clothing exporter countries began to compete over the Soviet market share that had earlier belonged to China. Bulgaria (lost its position by the 1960s), the GDR (strengthened its position and became the leading exporter by 1966), Czechoslovakia (increased) and Hungary competed over who would be number one in Moscow.³¹ The competition for shares in Soviet trade was unconcealed: the competitors could refuse to make trade agreements with each other before they had negotiated in Moscow.³²

Socialist traders competed mainly over the prices to be paid by their Soviet counterparts. It is probable that Polish clothes producers were reluctant to increase the amount of exported goods because the industry suffered from underinvestment and raw material shortages.³³ Increasing production would cause problems for the factories battling with shortages. What was crucial, for both producers and foreign trade officials, was the price paid, and the success of foreign trade companies was calculated in relation to that.

Later in the 1960s, the Soviet market was characterised very clearly by rivalry over prices. A 1967 report complains that the Soviet client was very interested in specified products, but would not pay the sum asked. The reason for this was that they could purchase similar products from the Hungarians, who sold it for a lower price. Also Czechoslovakia, Belgium and Yugoslavia were reported to have been competing in the Soviet market with lower prices.³⁴ Thus, the main competition was not over the export amounts but for the prices paid.

As the political environment and economic structures changed in the late 1950s, Polish clothing trade professionals gradually came to understand the real power of lower level actors in Soviet trade negotiations. The lower level organisations were, on the one hand, tied to the higher level organisations that made the framework decisions. On the other hand, they were able to use ideologically suspicious practices, such as marketing, which the higher level organisations could not use to the same extent. The satellite states effectively used the weaknesses of the organisational structures of the Soviet system at
the lower organisational levels. Although Polish CETEBE and ZPO were relatively independent and competed actively in the Soviet market, in the end, they acted in accordance with the recommendations and framework regulations of the Ministry for Foreign Trade. All decisions and journeys abroad had to be reported to the Ministry. Therefore, it seems that the active role of the micro and intermediate levels of the foreign trade network were intentionally used by the Polish high level economic administrators.

Previous research has shown that the East European lower level organisations had more negotiating power than their Soviet counterparts because of the fragmented nature of the Soviet foreign trade system. At the highest level of the central planning organs, the Soviet Union could dictate issues considered to be top priority, and the East European negotiators usually agreed. However, as the negotiations moved down to the more detailed consultations, East European negotiators had an opportunity to influence important nuances in the trade transactions. When exactly this new way of trading arose in different sectors of trade has not, however, been identified by earlier scholarship. Based on the source material used here, in the Polish–Soviet clothing business, this new way of trading was established in the early 1960s.

The conceptual turn

In addition to practices, the terminology – the way those practices were described and understood – also changed in the early years of the 1960s. This signifies a wider transformation in thinking and running the ideology in practice. The Polish word for ‘competition’, konkurencja, was rarely used in Poland’s foreign trade documentation in the 1950s. At that time, the concept of competition was understood in Poland as economic competition characteristic of a capitalist economy. The positively characterised (socialist) ‘rivalry’, współzawodnictwo, was directed to increasing the quantity and quality of production through work-based competitions following the Stakhanovite work ethos. By the early 1960s, the role of this worker-hero cult had declined dramatically.

In Poland, the way the concept of competition was understood had changed by the mid-1960s. The Great General Encyclopedia PWN (1965) noted that a certain kind of economic competition, earlier understood only as a feature of a capitalist economy, could also be beneficial in the planned economies, as it promoted technical development and better adjustment of production to the needs of the consumers. However, it was noted that price regulation had to be conducted in a centralised manner. Thus, we can assume that the way Zając-Skowronska used the term ‘competition’ in her letter referred to competition that was no longer a negative feature but, if correctly used, might lead to outcomes desired by the planners of the centralised economy.

The change in the understanding of competition was related to other changes in terminology. The term ‘marketing’ also became part of the vocabulary in the early 1960s. The word ‘advertisement’ (reklama) was used even
earlier. Probably the first Polish handbook on advertising in the domestic market after the Second World War was published in 1956.38 From the autumn of 1956, the Higher School of Planning and Statistics in Warsaw provided courses on Western economics and marketing in foreign trade.39 Starting that same year, companies acting in the domestic market began to advertise. Sometimes products were advertised in order to direct consumption towards products that were not in short supply in the planned economy.40 Promotion of Polish goods in foreign trade was concentrated in the hands of the Polish Chamber of Foreign Trade in 1949–55.41 From 1956, foreign trade companies could organise promotional activities by themselves. To support this, the Ministry for Foreign Trade established a special Advertisement Council in the early 1960s.42 Handbooks on marketing in the export sector were already being published by the mid-1960s.43

In the Soviet Union, Kosygin’s economic reforms of the mid-1960s also demonstrated new ways of thinking. Although the reformers never used the word ‘marketing’, the reform denoted a change in thinking as it suggested that some market elements and practices could usefully be implemented in the planned economy.44 The Chamber of Commerce of the Soviet Union published the first studies on marketing in foreign trade in the mid-1970s, ten years later than in Poland.45 Among the published articles, the only one by a foreign author was written by Polish economist Klemens Białecki.46 This suggests that the emerging Soviet marketing sector wanted to learn from Polish experience.

Selling images of luxury

Polish clothing exporters began to apply new marketing practices in the Soviet market in 1961. In order to have more negotiating power in Moscow, they extensively spread word of the attractiveness of Polish clothes around the Soviet Union. In addition to the trade negotiations in Moscow, the Polish collection was exhibited in fashion shows in Riga, Leningrad and Kiev. It seems that the target audience was composed of Soviet opinion leaders in the field, such as fashion designers and the media. The average end customers had little impact on what was available in the shops and in what amounts, so they did not fall within the scope of interest of the exporters.47 It was common in the Soviet Union to organise fashion shows and to present new designs in magazines in order to cultivate good taste, but the designs presented were not available to the customers.48 Polish exporters wanted to convince Soviet opinion leaders of the extraordinary character of their collection and to build a good reputation for Polish products widely in the Soviet Union. This good reputation would later be of use in price negotiations (Figure 5.2).

The importance of the fashion shows was emphasised in an interesting manner. Image construction of the Polish clothing was conducted by representing luxury clothing that was not intended to be sold in large amounts to
the Soviet market at all. The potential purchasers of Polish clothes were shown clothes that, to a large extent, were out of their reach. On the list of 800 different designs sent to the Soviet Union for trade negotiations, sixty were prepared by the fashion house Telimena. All other designs were listed according to the types of clothes, such as women’s or men’s overcoats, girls’ clothing. The names of the companies producing the clothes were not indicated on the list. The only exception was the designs produced by Telimena, and here only the name of the company was mentioned, rather than the type of clothes. It is probable that the designs prepared by Telimena were evening dresses or women’s suits, as the fashion house concentrated on producing high fashion in small numbers. In 1961, Telimena products were presented in the Soviet Union for the first time. The clothes designs were to be represented in a special way, ‘not at exhibitions but in shows’. This accentuates the importance of exhibiting Telimena’s clothes in a festive way in order to enhance the
good impression of the Polish collection. As Telimena’s clothes were to be sold only in small numbers, the actual reason for the fashion house’s participation in Polish export was to enhance the image of the whole collection.

Telimena differed from the other producers of ready-to-wear clothes. Several interviewees specifically mentioned the Telimena fashion house while discussing Polish fashion. Clothes sold in its boutiques were often worn by important figures and celebrities. A noteworthy detail is also that the name refers to Polish national poetry: Telimena was a well-known figure in Adam Mickiewicz’s Pan Tadeusz. This national poem was first published in 1834 and is important for national self-understanding. Women holding the title of Miss Poland in 1957–58 and again from 1983 onwards were Telimena models. This demonstrates that the fashion house was a high-ranking producer of clothes. It seems that Telimena acted as a display window for explicitly Polish fashion.

The participation of Telimena’s representative in the delegation sent to Moscow in 1961 was important for exporters. To cover the travel costs of this participant, the director of the Industrial Association of Clothing Industries (ZPO) wrote a letter to the deputy Minister of Light Industries asking for money to be allocated. The rationale for extra resources was that the Telimena collection served as a crucial advertisement for the Polish collection in the Soviet market. To give the Telimena collection such importance, when there were no intentions to sell it in mass production, demonstrates that the exporters put great emphasis on the way Polish fashion was shown to the Soviet audience.

The country of origin – or even the country brand using present-day terminology – mattered. The Export Council stressed that the collection of different producers should be exhibited in a way that gave an impression of a unified Polish collection. It seems to have been useful for the Polish export network to build up a positive image of explicitly Polish products. Since Khrushchev’s Secret Speech in 1956, it had become permissible to build ‘socialism with national characteristics’ in the Soviet bloc states. As it became possible to create a Polish way of managing the planned economy, it also became possible to demonstrate differences in national production. From the late 1950s, Polish design enjoyed a good reputation, and Polish products were considered to be ‘almost Western’ in the Soviet Union. Polish exporters aimed to strengthen and use the image of Western modernity for commercial purposes, and even to show cultural superiority over the Soviets.

Changing consumer environment

The introduction of new production and exporting procedures by Polish clothes exporters was a reaction to emerging consumption possibilities. In the late 1950s, official attitudes towards consumption relaxed in Poland. The period of ‘small stabilisation’ between 1956 and 1970 brought improvements in living standards and greater access to consumer goods. Despite the
cancellation of several reforms in the early 1960s, Poland was still a relatively liberal and 'open' society. Foreign arts and Western cultural trends were more widely available in Poland than in many other countries in the region. Moderate consumerism and individualism became accepted elements of Polish culture.\textsuperscript{57} It became possible for women publicly to admit an interest in fashion and leisure.\textsuperscript{58} The Polish clothing sector began to compete with Western clothes sent by Poles living abroad, called ciuchy, 'duds', which were also available at semi-official markets. In order to turn customers towards state production, fashion designers started to follow Western trends more closely and even conduct market research among customers.\textsuperscript{59}

In the Soviet Union, ordinary people also wanted and were able to dress better and with more variety. Soviet citizens had gradually turned into more fashion conscious and critical customers who actively compared Soviet designs with both other domestic and international clothing.\textsuperscript{60} Despite major investments, Soviet clothes production in the early 1960s was unable to meet the increasing demands of Soviet customers. Soviet citizens were very dissatisfied with the domestic supply of clothes. It is possible that Polish exporters tried to fill this gap by selling ready-made clothes with an image of modern Western quality. Fashion shows were not a new phenomenon in the Soviet clothing market.\textsuperscript{61} In addition to regular fashion shows, as early as the mid-1950s, the atelier of the major state department store GUM in Moscow had display windows showing Soviet fashion.\textsuperscript{62} The goal of these activities was to cultivate the taste of Soviet citizens.\textsuperscript{63} Polish exporters, on the other hand, had clear commercial aims in organising their fashion shows.

Polish exporters participated actively in international fairs many times a year during the 1960s. It seems that the information on both new production methods and fashion trends spread in Poland more effectively than in the Soviet Union. The Polish Chamber of Fashion, which provided information on the newest trends to designers, was located in the city of Łódź, near the ZPO and foreign trade companies.\textsuperscript{64} Despite the fact that, in the early 1960s, the designers could not travel as extensively as in the 1970s, they were well informed about Western trends. In addition to the official channels, they read Western magazines.\textsuperscript{65} Contemporary fashion designers said in interview that new trends were monitored and information was passed among colleagues in various informal ways.\textsuperscript{66} Generally, Soviet clothes were considered by Polish traders, and possibly also by Polish consumers, as not as fashionable or high quality as Polish products.\textsuperscript{67} No Soviet-produced clothes were exported to Poland, whereas the Polish clothing industry produced mainly for the Soviet market. The greater amount of Western influence in the Polish clothing sector gave the Polish exporters a significant advantage in the Soviet market.

Outcomes of the new procedure

After the great marketing tour to the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1961, Polish traders evaluated the outcomes. An Export Council meeting held in
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January 1962 stated that there were no serious problems in sales to socialist markets. Export to the Soviet Union was estimated to be very profitable and, in order to make it even more so, a new collection of clothes was to be prepared. It was emphasised that traders should not concentrate simply on the highest profits, but they should simultaneously take care of the comprehensiveness and attractiveness of the entire collection. Concentrating too much on details and concern to maximise profitability could cause customers to turn away from the whole collection. Keeping in mind the interests of the purchasers was important and the suppliers paid serious attention to the attractiveness of the collection. All this signifies that the image of Polish clothes was important because the exporters now had real prospects to influence prices (Figure 5.3).

Did, then, the newly established marketing practices influence the outcomes of the Polish–Soviet clothing trade? In a way, they did. The level of Polish exports to the Soviet Union increased between 1958 and 1963. However,
this trade was conducted between two planned economies. There could be several reasons, therefore, for the increase in Soviet purchases from Poland. From Polish and Soviet statistics, we can see that, from 1958 to 1963, the volume of the exchange of commodities in monetary terms increased between Poland and the Soviet Union. This increase was connected to the general increase in the foreign trade turnover of these countries. Poland’s share in Soviet imports remained the same, around eight to nine per cent during the early 1960s. The increase in the volume of Polish clothes exports to the Soviet Union was also connected to the general increase in Soviet foreign trade. The volume of clothes exported from Poland to the Soviet Union more than doubled during the first half of the 1960s, simultaneously with the total Soviet import of ready-to-wear clothes more than doubling in the period from 1958 to 1966.3

Despite the principle of bilateral barter trade, which required equal amounts of exports and imports, Polish exports were repeatedly smaller in monetary terms than Soviet imports to Poland between 1958 and 1963.4 Thus, in order to balance the trade, there was pressure on the Polish side to increase their exports in monetary terms.

Conclusion

In the early 1960s, Polish clothes export professionals re-invented themselves as competitors, and simultaneously re-invented marketing practices as a competitive instrument. Both Polish economic thinking and the clothing sector had become more open to Western influences, and Polish clothes exporters could modify their experience to suit the Soviet market. Polish exporters began to use competitive capitalist methods in the socialist market in their own way. Whereas in capitalist competition, traders have to attract the end customers, in socialist foreign trade competition, the traders’ main targets were the wholesale purchasers. Competition in the Soviet clothing market among the different importing countries focused on the prices paid for individual designs. Therefore, the major marketing activity used by Polish export professionals in the early 1960s was to create a luxurious image for the clothes produced in Poland. Exceptional brand names, such as Telimen, were used to enhance the image of the whole Polish collection. Competition became gradually more visible and open. By the end of the 1960s, the marketing elements of Polish export procedures had become further institutionalised.

In intra-CMEA competition, the smaller Soviet bloc states and their lower level organisations could be more effective than the larger organisations of the Soviet Union. The year 1961 can be seen as the initial phase in the establishment of new procedures in Polish clothes exports to the Soviet Union. Poland’s market share increased steadily during the 1960s and, towards the 1970s, Poland became a major clothes importer in the Soviet market. Thus, Polish exporters were able to compete successfully in the intra-CMEA trade context. As the environment changed in the late 1980s, they could not, however, survive the opening up of markets to global competition.
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Usually in Cold War historiography, the early 1960s are depicted by
demonstrations of the mightiness of the Soviet bloc with the Cuban missile
crisis, the construction of the Berlin Wall and Gagarin’s space flight. It is
worth noting, therefore, that, simultaneously, in the margins of international
history, the everyday practices of intra-CMEA trade were full of competition.
Concurrently, a Western kind of conceptualisation of competition was
increasingly taking place inside the Soviet bloc. Thus, competition should not
be seen only as a feature of a capitalist economy. There were also elements of
competition in the official structures of socialist trade, not to mention the
unofficial ones. Just as capitalist economic activities are combinations of
individualistic competition, cooperation and state intervention, the planned
economies also linked competition to cooperation in practice. In what propor-
tions competition and cooperation are mixed in a society depends not
only on the chosen political system, but also on the actual everyday practices
that are connected to the cultural atmosphere and its modifications.

Notes

1 ZPO: Zjednoczenie Przemysłu Odzieżowego (Association of Clothing Industries)
functioned from 1959 to 1982. ZPO was located in the city of Łódź, one of the
traditional textile industry centres in Poland.

2 Letter from ZPO’s Department of Production to the Krakow clothing industry
companies, 28 April 1961, Archiwum Państwowe (hereafter APL) (State Archive),

3 I.T. Berend, From the Soviet Bloc to the European Union: the Economic and Social
Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe since 1975, Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2009, pp. 26, 32; Н.В. Фадеев (N.V. Fadeev), Совет Эконо-


5 S. Autio-Sarasmo and K. Miklóssy, ‘Introduction’, in Reassessing Cold War
iii, 2–9; Р.У. Stone, Satellites and Commissars: Strategy and Conflict in the Politics

6 See, for example, K. Fehérváry, ‘Goods and States: the Political Logic of State-

7 See, for example, P.H. Patterson, ‘Truth Half Told: Finding the Perfect Pitch for
Advertising and Marketing in Socialist Yugoslavia, 1950–91’, Enterprise and

8 M. de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, Berkeley, CA: University of Cali-
fornia Press, 1988, p. xi; H. Kinkinen, ‘Talous, käytännä ja kvantitaatiivinen ana-
lyysi kulttuurihistoriallisesti suuntautuneessa tutkimukseessa’, in H. Rantala and S.
Ollitervo (eds), Kulttuurihistoriallinen katse, Tampere: Juvenes Print-Tampereen

9 W.H. Sewell Jr, ‘The Concept(s) of Culture’, in V.E. Bonnell and L. Hunt (eds),
Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture,
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10 Przedsiębiorstwo Handlu Zagranicznego, CETEBE, held the monopoly for the Polish export of ready-to-wear clothes from 1949 to 1962. Centralny Zarząd Przemyślu Odzieżowego, CZPO, functioned from 1948 to 1958. See the archival materials of CZPO and ZPO, APL, Zespół no. 873 and Zespół no. 874.


24 APL 39/8740/1925, 2.


28 Interview with foreign trade expert of Textilimpex (b. 1950), Łódź, Poland, 3 December 2011; group interview with former foreign traders (b. 1930, 1931 and 1933), Łódź, Poland, 5 December 2011.

36 Taking into account censorship, the way the concepts are explained in encyclopedias represents the official perception. Thus, the absence or presence of certain concepts can also have political meaning, and the ‘correct’ interpretation of certain difficult concepts can be hinted at by using positive or negative adjectives. See Władysław Kępaliński, *Słownik wydarzeń, pojęć i legend XX wieku*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1999, p. 472; Zdzisław Zbierski, *Leksykon PRL-u*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2001, see współzawodnictwo pracy, p. 180.
46 K.F.A. Fox, I. Skorobogatyk and O.V. Saginova, ‘Soviet Evolution of Marketing Thought 1961–91: From Marx to Marketing’, *Marketing Theory*, pp. 284, 294–95; and K. Białecki, *Polityka reklamowa w eksporcie*. Marketing was also practised to some extent in Soviet tourism from the early 1960s. In the West, one of the first analyses on marketing in the socialist states was published in 1961, and further studies and guidebooks were published from the mid-1970s. See, for example, S. Salmon, *Marketing Socialism: Inturist in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s*, in A.E. Gorsuch and D.P. Koener (eds), *Turism: the Russian and East European Tourist*
Selling fashion to the Soviets


47 Interview with a director of a Finnish cloth producing and exporting company (b. 1950), Lahti, Finland, 5 April 2012.


49 Telimena was founded in 1957 for the production of special luxury clothing. APL 39/873/0:20: Decision of director of CZPO concerning founding luxury clothing producer in Łódź, 29 January 1957.

50 APL 39/874/0:1936, 116: Letter from ZPO to the Central Laboratory of the Cloth Industries, 4 May 1961.

51 Group interview with fashion designers (b. 1943, 1947 and 1949), Łódź, Poland, 30 June 2011.


54 APL 39/874/0:1936, 149–50: Letter from ZPO to the deputy Minister of Light Industries concerning the participation of the representative of Telimena in the export delegation, 30 May 1961. The Polish word reklama (advertisement) is used in the letter.

55 APL 39/874/0:1925, 8: Minutes No. 3/VI/61 of meeting of Ready-to-wear Clothes Group of the ZPO Export Council, 6 June 1961. This has been noted with red pen in the margin, indicating the importance of the point.


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64 Group interviews with former foreign traders (b. 1930, 1931 and 1933), 5 December 2011, and with fashion designers (b. 1943, 1947 and 1949), 30 June 2011; interview with foreign trade expert of Textilimpex (b. 1950), 3 December 2011, Łódź, Poland.


67 Group interview with former foreign traders (b. 1930, 1931 and 1933), 5 December 2011; interview with foreign trade expert of Textilimpex (b. 1950), 3 December 2011, Łódź, Poland.


69 APL 39/874/0/1925, 29.


71 GUS 1959, pp. 60, 63; GUS 1965, 74, 77.


74 See, for example, GUS 1959, pp. 60, 63; GUS 1965, pp. 74, 77.