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“to work only precisely, nicely...”¹

The brigade logs, as sources of the research of the working class of the Hungarian large-scale industry in the second half of 20th century

ANDRÁS KISS²

ABSTRACT

Brigade logs have got rather little attention in the economic- and social history researches of the decades since the regime change. However, by appropriate source critique and by joint use of other type of sources we can gain very useful information from them. And we could say, that neither they had been used as quasi-sources for the history of the socialist enterprises in the course of pre-1989 researches in the field of the history of factories and enterprises. The obvious reason for this was that during the active period of the socialist brigades the logs in better cases were being administered in a systematic way, and provided with different notes. In the present study I try to explore the possibilities for interpretation and analysis of this type of source, and then I attempt to discuss – through the analysis of the examples of two enterprises of the vehicle industry – the possible ways of their use. I think that the brigade logs, alike as the registers, which could provide aid for the elaboration of the social history of the Hungarian large scale industry, may contribute to the better understanding of the movement, to the research of working-class life, and to the reconstruction of roles within the different social groups.

KEYWORDS: *brigade logs, Hungarian large-scale industrial workers, emulation, socialist collective, social relationships, community life, local societies, state socialism, competition movement*

ABSZTRAKT

„dolgozni csak pontosan, szépen...”

A brigádnaplók mint a magyar nagyüzemi munkásság kutatásának forrásai

A rendszerváltás óta eltelt évtizedek gazdaság- és társadalomtörténeti kutatásaiban igen kevés figyelmet fordítottak a brigádnaplókra, pedig megfelelő forráskritikával és más forrástípu-

¹ In Hungarian: “Dolgozni csak pontosan, szépen...” A line of a poem „Ne légy szeles” (Don’t be perky...) of Attila József (1935–1937). In: *József Attila összes versei*. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2003, 475. p. Some lines of this sort poem became one of the slogan of the socialist brigade movement. The slogan was taken up by the „Vérmező Szabad Május 1. Szocialista Brigád”, who worked in horticulture. (Kósa N. Judith 1995: VIII.).

² Historian-chief archivist.



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sok együttes alkalmazásával igen hasznos információk nyerhetők ki belőlük. Az is elmondható, hogy a rendszerváltást megelőzően az üzem- és vállalat történeti kutatások során sem igen használták a brigádnaplókat, mint kvázi vállalat történeti forrásokat. Ennek nyilvánvaló oka abban kereshető, hogy ameddig a szocialista vállalatok brigádjai működtek, a naplókat jobb esetben rendszeresen vezették és különböző bejegyzésekkel látták el. Jelen tanulmányban megpróbálom körüljárni ennek a forrástípusnak az értelmezési és elemzési lehetőségeit, majd két járműipari vállalat példán keresztül azok felhasználásának lehetséges módjait. Hasonlóan az anyakönyvekhez, amelyek segítséget nyújthatnak a magyar nagyüzemi munkásság társadalomtörténetének feldolgozásához (Valuch 2017: 603–612), úgy gondolom, hogy a brigádnaplók is hozzájárulhatnak a mozgalom jobb megértéséhez, a munkáséletmód kutatásához és a különböző csoportokon belüli szerepek rekonstrukciójához.

KULCSSZAVAK: brigádnapló, magyar nagyüzemi munkásság, munkaverseny, szocialista kollektíva, társas kapcsolatok, közösségi élet, lokális társadalmak

Approaches

The roots of the socialist brigade movement reach back to the stakhanovite movement of the 1950s, which – with regard to its character as a movement and its economic purposes, significantly differed from the brigade movement. To such an extent, that while the stakhanovite movement rewarded the achievements of the individuals, and worked as an individual incentive, the socialist brigade movement focused on the accomplishment of the working community. There were published many books and studies on the stakhanovite movement, both in Hungary and abroad. We must emphasize among them the value of the work of Mark D. Pittaway, who explored in his works thoroughly the origin of the movement, and the role of the workers in it (Pittaway 1998, 2003, 2012). It is important to mention the work of Lewis H. Siegelbaum, who made his central task the presenting of the quantitative-productivity aspect of the work-policy if the stakhanovite movement originated in the Soviet Union. The movement's significance as a symbol of a shift in official Soviet priorities, from construction of the means of production to intensive use of capital and labor, is emphasized in this analysis (Siegelbaum 1988).

The first summary book about the socialist brigade movement was published rather early, this book laid down that the socialist brigades were fundamentally a social movement, and it had originated in the work emulation. The number of brigades partaking in the movement was 54 thousand in 1962, and the workers participating in them was approximately 570 thousand (Szocialista brigádmozgalom [The socialist brigade movement] 1965). According to Tibor Valuch the brigade movement of the Kádár-period can be interpreted as a "mild" form of the Stakhanovite movements of the fifties (Valuch 2002). The brigade movement, as almost all social initiatives, also had its own slogan. The slogan: "*szocialista módon dolgozni, tanulni és élni*" (working, learning and living in a socialist way) expressed the view and way



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of life, offered by the Party for the working class, as an ideal to be followed. The central element of this way of life was the work. In that sense this movement didn't make a distinction between the manual, physical work and the administrative or mental work. Thus a great number of the socialist brigades was formed of people employed in the administrative sphere, although in the beginning the movement was primarily a movement of industrial production and then one of the everyday factory life. The authoritative, official socialist literature deals separately with the forms of brigade meetings and the requirements of the administering of the brigade log too (Szocialista brigádmozgalom 1965). But the importance of the brigade log as a historical source was emphasized for the first time perhaps by Miklos Ince, during his historiographic and methodological researches, when the factory history of socialist "type" still was in its heyday (Ince 1978). Ince expounds in that work, that the brigade log was an important achievement of factory historiography. A log – as he himself didn't declare, but referred to it – could be made by the factory workers, or by anybody, who was a member of some brigade, furthermore it could be written by the "chronicler" of the enterprise.³ According to him the brigade log is a source for "scientific historiography" and a genre of factory history, by which he wished to hint to the fact, that the brigade logs could be used as sources by the "amateurish" "factory historians" of the socialist enterprises, who focused primarily into the micro-historical research.

The factory history-writing of the Kádár regime produced – obviously for firmly ideological reasons – a whole lot of articles and studies about the topic of the socialist work-competition and brigade movement. But the subject of these works was merely the description of the history and achievement of this or that allegedly "exemplary" socialist brigade, and the emphasizing of the *raison d'être* and productive role of the socialist brigade movement. Beyond the general requirement, that the brigade members should live in a "socialist way" and make regular reports about the journeys and work-competition commitments, they did not formulate – apart from a few exceptions – concrete answers about the possible use of brigades and brigade logs. Thus we could regard as fresh spots those studies and articles about socialist brigade movement, in which some sociological methods were flashed. The research related to the Ganz-Mávag Mozdony-, Vagon- és Gépgyár, which was done at the enterprise in 1967–68 (Hajdu 1968), or the longer study of László Hoffman about the cultural work of the workers' brigades of the Finomkerámiaipari Művek (FIM), should belong to this category (Hofmann 1979).

The presenting of the historiography of the topic were far from complete, if we wouldn't mention the researches of the 1970' and 1980's, although in the historical

³ If we turning some brigade logs, their decoration is striking, the work of their makers are on almost the level of an artist.



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literature of these decades we could find only a few work containing significant information. This is obviously due to the fact, that the historical works of the age had to draw the picture of the “self-conscious” worker, totally committed to the communist ideology. Contrary to the historical research we could gain a more realistic picture about the workers on the basis of those sociological researchs, which deal with the social situation and conflicts of the working class. István Kemény for instance touched upon many of his works the question of the life- and work-strategy of the working class, which perhaps is the topic nearest to the brigade movement. (Kemény – Kozák 1972, Kemény 1990). But we could list to this category the book of Miklos Haraszti, with the title *Darabbér* which flashed some snapshots about the life problems of the working class (Haraszti 1978).

When we turn to the contemporary sociological research works and try to ponder their relative values, we must highlight the works of Eszter Zsófia Tóth. She sought answers – applying the methods of oral history and microhistory for the question: what sort of effect had had their State Award (Állami Díj) as a socialist brigade for the individual life of the members of the “Felszabadulás” (Liberation) brigade of the Budapesti Harisnyagyár (Stocking Factory of Budapest). Eszter Zsófia Tóth also had a further question: how did the honoured members represent themselves in the post-socialist social environment, after the regime change (Tóth 2003, 2007). I think that her study and book is the only and one detailed analysis of the everyday life of a workers’ brigade. The comparative works of Eszter Bartha, deploying examples of socialist brigades of East Germany also fit into the series of these sort of researches. Eszter Bartha analyses in these works the formation of institutional, social and personal relation inside the socialist enterprises, the spaces and purposes of the various brigade events and communal life, building her work on her interviews with the one-time workers of the Carl Zeiss, and Rába of Győr, and brigade logs (Bartha 2008, 2013). Csaba Csóti, in his source publication also called the attention to the value of logs as historical sources, analysing the entries of a brigade log (Csóti, 2003). We could see from the above lines, that there are only a few historical works, which consciously apply the brigade log as a historical source. According to my opinion it would be a mistake, if we use the brigade logs primarily as sources for the history of production. Thus I think that the brigade logs should be used as auxiliary sources for the exploration and documentation of this or that career.

The brigade log as a historical source for the history of production and for social history

What sort of tale do the brigade logs tell? How can they be used for the exploration of the production- and social history of not only the workers of the large-scale factories, but even that of the working class employed in small-scale industry? We



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should give a composite answer to that question. On the one hand the log is a basic source for the history of the given factory, but it also had an important role in the reconstruction of the life story on the individual persons, as in the exploration of the informal social connections. The brigade logs also betray the working mechanisms, customs and habits, private life and friendships of “societies” of the enterprises. However, when we research these documents, and interpret their data, we also must consider, that the members of the group – without regard whether the entries are about their private life or about the brigade – always were connected by their shared workplace. The workplace and membership in the socialist brigade meant for many not only the source of their living, but a company of friends too. This was highlighted by the leader of the brigade “Egyetértés” (“Unity”), who were the “heroes” of the socialist feature film titled “Második otthonunk – a munkahely” (“Our second home – our workplace), made in 1978.⁴ We could speak generally that the members of the brigade knew much more about each other, than their colleagues outside the brigade, the obvious cause of which was, that the members had spent much more time together than with the other workers of the enterprise.

If we analyse the data of the brigade logs about the history of production, we should note, that already the handbook about socialist brigades published in 1965 mentioned with regard the brigade logs the danger of schematic description, and also the problem that many workers regarded the writing of the brigade log as a superfluous administrative activity. The handbook gave some guiding examples for how and what should be introduced into the log. The list and the important data, including their professional skills and educational degree belonged primarily to these, the resolutions of the brigade meetings, and all events related to the life of the brigade. (Szocialista brigádmozgalom 1965). For example, in the logs we could find extended descriptions about the competitive commitments of the members. These information, depending on the education qualification and scope of activity of the members, were not necessarily related to production. Thus for example in the wage department of the Ikarus Karosszéria és Járműgyár (Ikarus car-body and vehicle factory) there was only one log administered, in which competitive commitments of all the brigades occurred.⁵ Its specificity was, that the brigades had been competed with each other since 1965, and their scoring had been based on a predefined

⁴ Imre Antal (1935–2008), who was a reporter and presenter gave in this film, mustering a guard of famous actors, a satirical panorama on a working day of a Hungarian plant, on the issues occupying the workers and on the manifestations of the hierarchy within the enterprise. In the feature film the brigade „Egyetértés” also got a role, who couldn’t agree in just that question, how to share between each other the profit produced by them. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4VquqLGOK8> (The time of the last download: 5th, September 2018).

⁵ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (further on: MNL OL). XXIX-F-187-r, Ikarus Karosszéria és Járműgyár, unarranged papers, Box 79. There worked four brigades in the department, their names were Dobó Katica, Béke, Szabáság and Kató Hámán.



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evaluation schedule. Because the workplace in question was a wage department, most of the competition commitments were related to the wage accounting, the reducing of the percent of accountancy errors (for example at the computation of the bonus of the workers). Among the commitments there were such ones as the meeting of the deadlines for closing or the reduction of the number of delays, these were tasks belonging not only to the obligations of the administrative employees, but to that of all sort of the workers. If we read today these documents, we perhaps may find curious the proposals whose purpose was the fulfilment of the factory-plan, while the fulfilment of the plan was the original task of the enterprise – without any sort of specific commitment. The fact of plan-fulfilment also was recorded in the brigade logs; from which we could get a picture about the results of a given period of time.

The case of one of the brigades of the Csepel Autógyár (“Csepel Automobile Factory”), another enterprise of the vehicle industry, closely cooperating with the Ikarus in the manufacturing of car-floor-frameworks is also worth of examination. The brigade movement of the car factory had been making an important numerical progress from the end of the fifties. In 1959 3, in 1969 139, and in 1975 already 490 brigades were active in the enterprise. The number of their members was 24 in 1959, 1500 in 1969, and 5387 in 1975 (A szocialista munkaverseny évkönyve [Yearbook of Socialist work competition] 1975). The “Fürst Sándor⁶ Komplex Szocialista Brigád” had been formed in 1975, with 15 people, in the “B” plant of the car factory, manufacturing auto buses, and it acquired the title of Socialist Brigade in 1973, and in 1978 the title of Vállalat Kiváló Brigádja (“Excellent Brigade of the Enterprise”).⁷ In their brigade log in 1982 we could find their concrete commitments, specified in numbers of work pieces to be done, the number of “produced” work hours, allocated to the labour, the degree of fulfilment (in percent) of the plan for the first half year, and the number of the complete Ikarus car floor framework made in the plan (detailed according to their different types).⁸ The data series entries in the log – if we compare the data of commitments and the data of fulfilments – make possible a comparative analysis of the production data of the brigade. But we should add, that the examples of the two different brigades of the two factories are excellent

⁶ Sándor Fürst (1903–1932) was a Communist activist. The authorities, despite of his innocence, accused him by the perpetration of the Biatorbagy attentat, and he was executed on 29th July, 1932 together with Imre Sallay.

⁷ The brigade assembled between 1975 and 1985 61 300 mobile autobus floor framework for the Ikarus. They reduced by their inventions the time of assembly from 72 labourhours to 36 labour hours during these ten years, by which they achieved a saving of 8,7 million forints. The brigade and its five oldest member got in 1985 a State Award (Állami Díj). *Népszava*, 3 April, 1985. p. 4., and 6 April, 1985. p. 5.

⁸ The brigade log of the „Fürst Sándor Komplex Szocialista Brigád”, 1981–82, the property of D. F. I thank in that way to Attila Jósza, that made available for me the data of his research and the interview made with D. F.



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means to illustrate the very differential way of the recording of the data. We could gain valuable results from these data – without regard of which of the brigades we wish to analyse – if the types of quarterly commitments were the same.⁹ Such sort of analysis may be possible, because each of the brigades generally made the same sort of tasks in the plant for a long time. Thus the data content of the brigade logs may be regarded as relatively static. Thus the task of the “Fürst Sándor Complex Socialist Brigade” was to manufacture the Ikarus car floor frameworks, and in the wage department of the Ikarus the wage accounting was a permanent task. It is important to note that there is some sort of identity between the commitments of these two brigades. To see this identity, or similarity we should only to examine the commitments with regard to the reduction of the number of delays, to the patronizing of the schools and kindergartens, to the renovation of playgrounds and other similar commitments. But it is important to acknowledge, that these proposals of the enterprise were not specific, individual ones. They were generally defined on the basis of the directives of the workplace organization of the Party, and then the members of each of the brigades turn them into concrete tasks, on the basis of the assessment of the local needs.

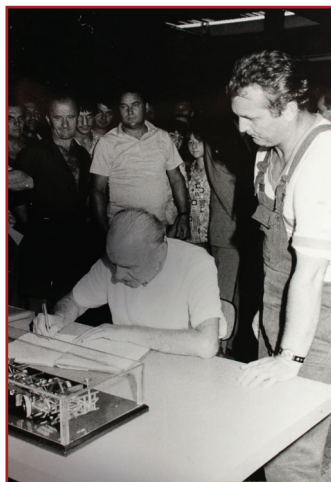
We get a more differentiated picture about the “support” of the superior organs, on the basis of the opinion of the brigade “Beloianis”, working on the vehicle manufacturing and assembling technology department of the Csepel Autógyár. The leader of the brigade, in his interview touches upon the administration of the brigade log, but it is much more essential his way of thinking about their work and its control “from above”: *“The brigade log is almost an unmatched one. Its cultivated writing, the entries full of significant content tell all more important events of the collective formed eight years ago. Did you see the notes of the controlling organs of the enterprise? They give only their names. This is precious little. They wrote neither their opinion, nor criticism or proposal? Thus how can we know, whether we made a good work or not?”*¹⁰ The leader resented just that the supreme organs of the enterprise dealt very little (if at all) with them, and they didn’t get feedback on their work, and commitments. Generally, the use of the brigade log makes possible to measure the performance of the group(s), but it should be lay down, that essential information about the production of the enterprise as the whole couldn’t be gained from the logs. Thus the data should be examined at the level of the brigade in question, or – as we saw in the case of Ikarus factory – on the level of a department or a group.¹¹

⁹ The brigades made their commitments quarterly and they formulated new commitments when they evaluated their performance.

¹⁰ *Fényszóró*, 11 June, 1975. p. 3.

¹¹ The enterprises in their accounts made for their superior organs touched proudly upon the quantified commitments of their brigades and their performances and they summed up all the data.

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János Kádár writes a note in the log of the Fürst Sándor Komplex Szocialista Brigád on his visit at the Csepel Automobile Factory.¹² Source: the property of D. F. 22 July, 1982

When we analyse the data we should take in account that the brigades made their commitments in many cases for a bonus, or monetary reward. The handbook of the brigade movement observed in 1965, that some brigades expect rewards not only for their good production results, but for their learning, or cultural activity, or for their social work too. They express rather harshly their opinion about this: *“How an improper practice would be, what a distorting picture would be formed about the socialist brigade movement such a method, when the brigade member, after finishing the eighth grade of the elementary school, introducing his certificate, would demand monetary demand for his good exam results.”* (Szocialista brigádmozgalom, 1965: 73). However, in the brigade logs we obviously wouldn't find any reference to all of this, we see only the recognition of the degree of collective and infidel competitive commitments, the honoured performance, esteemed by the community.

This recognition resounds in the articles of the *Fényszóró*, where their performances were evaluated, or just the manager of the enterprise wrote a letter to the brigades, thanking their social work.¹³ Thus the data series of the brigade logs and other information are completed by the interviews with their one-time members. According to the account of D. F., the members of the “Csepel Autógyár

¹² Kádár János a Csepel autógyári látogatása során bejegyzést ír a „Fürst Sándor Komplex Szocialista Brigád” naplójába.

¹³ *Fényszóró*, 1 January, 1975. p. 1.



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Fürst Sándor Komplex Szocialista Brigád” were not led by profit motive, or if so, this was only a secondary consideration.¹⁴ It should be noted, that the oral history source could be support by a written one too. Z. L., the leader of this brigade, expressed sincerely their intentions in his letter responding to G. I., a disabled miner of Komló, who did ask for a wheelchair with electric motor. *“We took the initiative to help other of our own decision, to help those people, who are standing in need of that. We did this until now, and we will do in the future too. But we wouldn’t do this, if were compelled to do by someone. True human help cannot be substituted neither by a directive of the general manager, nor by the intervention of the TV.”*¹⁵

It is important to emphasize, that we could treat with the appropriate source criticism the interviews made *after* the system-change. For the participating in the brigade movement hadn’t meant the same thing in any case in the state socialism, or immediately after that what it did in the time when the interviewee recalled their memories about it. The analysis of their interviews and the drawing of the conclusions demanded circumspection. For the interviewees (the former members of the socialist brigades) are inclined to re-evaluate in the mirror of the experience of the system-change their former life and their part in the socialist brigade movement.

Fundamental points for sociohistorical analyses

Eszter Bartha in her study describes that the socialist brigade movement served much more community purposes, than the interests of production, and we could rely in the research of communal life in the brigades primarily on the interviews (Bartha 2008). She got to the conclusion in the course of analysis of the brigade logs found in the archive of Carl Zeiss factory, that the movement served primarily the building of communities, and not so much the production.¹⁶ Obviously this was true, but in the beginning – at least in Hungary – supposedly it was not the purported goal of the movement. The handbook about brigade movement calls the socialist brigades “as the most active promoters of the economic development”, which, through the increasing of economic performance, improve its quality too, and made commitments for savings too. Beyond this they add, that the immediate purpose of the brigades was the training of the members, and of the workers who were still not members, for

¹⁴ Interview with deputy brigade leader D. F. from the Csepel Autógyár, 3 November, 2016. Made by Attila Józszai. D. F. got into the factory as a carpenter skilled worker, but he didn’t take up a position in his own profession, but found his first job in the Hajtóműgyár within the car factory.

¹⁵ A letter of Z. F. brigade leader to G. I., without date. (The property of D. F.).

¹⁶ He founds his statement only on the logs of the „Salvador Allende” brigade, which was the only one which survived in the factory archive. But in the case of the Rába enterprise the examination of the brigade logs lacked. and it was substituted by the sources of the MSZMP Magyar Vagon és Gépgyári Bizottsága related to the brigade movement.



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work, work discipline. This supports my claim, that in the beginning the production was the first priority of the movement.

For the socialist state power all of these objectives meant the pledge of surplus production. János Kádár,¹⁷ the first secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (MSZMP) at the first national conference of the leaders of socialist brigades drew his opinion with the following words: [...] *“I see the true future in that sort of socialist brigade, in which the worker made his mark on the product, and it may go to the consumer, or to the foreign buyer, whether sell it to a friendly socialist country, or to the capitalist market, it is a guaranteed commodity of good quality.”* (*Szocialista brigádmozgalom 1965: 103.*). When and why the main emphasis in the movement was taken over by the building of communal, social life – this is not a question which may be answered by this study. Nevertheless, we could say, that the brigade logs, on which we based our research make witness about an effervescent communal life, which – at least in a part of the cases – lacked the “socialist” character, lacked any political content.

On the question that what do the brigade logs betray, those who have an interest in social history may formulate more than one answer. Given that the brigade movement served primarily the strengthening of the factory communities, let's have a look at the possibilities for using the logs as social history sources. When we approach the sources, it is worth to be examine, what sort of fundamental commitments, concerning the different dimensions of community life are contained in these logs. Starting from this we could get a much clearer picture about the use of this many-faced source, and we can even regroup the materials according to our purposes. We can have met in the brigade logs for example commitments with a cultural character, among them there are the further education of the members, visits to movies, cinema and museums, participation in excursions and the holding of the “brigade evenings”. When we examine the brigade logs of both of the examined vehicle enterprise it is striking the activity of the members. Eszter Bartha in her researches got to the conclusion that the communal life of the brigades was not purely nominal, but the members actually took part in the events organized by the brigade (Bartha 2008). Obviously we may not claim, that the brigade program was complete free of politics, but this much depended on the character of the event. It should be noted, that more of the above mentioned cultural commitments were permeated by political content, especially if they concerned the political education of the members. As for the commitments with a cultural/leisure time character, we can extend our examinations to the postcards found often in a big quantity in the logs. In the brigade log of the Ikarus wage department quite a few postcards tell

¹⁷ János Kádár (1912–1989), Communist politician, minister of state in 1958–1961, president of the government in 1961–65, the first secretary of the MSZMP between 1957–1985, high secretary of the Party in 1985–1988, and the president of the party in 1988–89.



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about the domestic and foreign journeys of the workers. The visual sources found in the logs can lead us to the system of the holidays organized by the enterprises and the trade unions, as Tímea Bata also hinted to this (Bata 2008). However, we should add to this, that the reception of the foreign journeys of the workers among their colleagues – their possible envy and other emotional reactions – are not reflected in the logs. In that case we should turn to the method of the oral history.

Eszter Bartha established in her work, that we could get a real picture about the communal life in the brigades primarily from the interviews (Bartha 2008). But we could only partially agree with her statement, despite that in the above mentioned special case we really had to resort to the material of the interviews. Although the oral resources are indispensable source for controlling the information of the brigade logs, when we explore the communal life of each of the brigades, we should devote attention to the factory journals of the enterprises too. We should use them all the more, because the factory journals have a predilection for articles about the socialist brigades, and set their results as examples for all workers of the enterprise.¹⁸

Furthermore, we may gain some insight through the brigade logs into the attitudes and way of life which was described (and expected) by the state power as “socialist humanity” and “socialist habits”. Thus, according to my opinion, we have arrived to the allegedly most successful role of the socialist brigades, to the examination of the different dimensions of the communal and social relationships. Eszter Bartha, who examined the East-German socialist brigades, establishes, that her interviewees following the regime change remembered much more gladly to the life in the one-time socialist brigades in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), as the power of Honecker, which they didn’t wish back. Bartha’s conclusion was that the socialist community building worked expressly successfully, her interviewees told her, that the communal spirit and the solidarity between the colleagues had been much stronger in the age of the GDR than in the period following of the reunification (Bartha 2008). Bartha of course gives the appropriate answer to the question, how and why could the brigade movement be so successful. She believes, that despite of the institutional support provided by the power to the brigades, the workers could take part in the community life, that they “*didn’t identify themselves neither with the Party, nor with its politics.*” (Bartha 2008: 248). Moreover, Bartha draws the conclusion from the interviews that the local and workplace collectives was regarded by the workers as stages of the communal life free of state control.

The state power didn’t conceal its standpoint concerning the members of the brigades, when there was a discourse about providing individual and communal

¹⁸ From another point of view the possibilities given by the lifepath-interviews, among them the reconstruction of the life of the community, are more and more narrowing because of the death of the former members of the brigades.



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help: *“They sacrifice their leisure time in the interest of their fellow-men and not sparing any effort, making many times even financial sacrifices, manage the everyday affairs and troubles of the people. They are people of a new type, people of a higher order, they are the standard bearers of human progress, of socialist humanism”* – penned the author of the handbook (Szocialista brigádmozgalom 1965: 153.).

In the brigade logs of the Csepel Autógyár “Fürst Sándor Komplex Szocialista Brigád” there also could be found the offerings of the brigades for communal purposes, among which there belonged the patronizing of kindergartens, schools, regular participation in blood donation, visiting the sick, attendants on class trips, family journeys, organizing programs for children’s day within the enterprise, or the cleaning of the public premises.¹⁹ We could find in the brigade logs many references to the close, friendly relationships among the members of the brigade in the car factory. One of the prominent stages of this was the participation in the family house constructions of the members. The brigade logs generally report that the construction materials, the worktools and the means of transportation necessary for the private construction were “claimed” legally by the brigade members from the car factory. However, as Tamás Bezsényi also hinted to this in his explorations about the Csepel Automobile Factory – the workers often impaired their own enterprises by “appropriating” various construction materials, getting in such a way to the necessary materials (Bezsényi 2013). The brigade logs of course laid the emphasis on the alleged fact, that the work and the help provided for each other was based on the mutuality and friendly relationships in the Kádár-regime. They were led by this philanthropic mentality, when they made cars for disabled workers. The issue of 6-th April 1985 of the *Népszava* stressed, that between 1975 and 1985 the brigades of the car factory helped the disabled persons, the people living in community homes and the envioning schools and kindergartens by 2400 hours of social work and 75 thousand forints of monetary support.²⁰

The brigade logs thus are excellently useful for the mapping of the friendly, informal relationships inside the socialist enterprises. However, it should be added that they can be applied for the mapping of a specific, narrow group, the network of relationships inside the workshop. The extent of this qualification is illustrated by the interview with D. F., in which he told, that in the course of his work he builded a very good relationship with the director of his factory unit. In the absence of this dialogue with him important connections would have remained in obscurity. The case of D. F. was partly an example of how the social capital was turned by the brigade for its own benefit, and on the other hand how they managed to became well-known within the

¹⁹ We could describe nowadays the social, community-building work of the socialist brigades by the concept of voluntariness.

²⁰ *Népszava*, 6 April, 1985. p. 5.

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The members of the “Fürst Sándor Komplex Szocialista Brigád” with a three-wheeled vehicle made for a disabled miner²¹ Source: Property of D. F., 1980’s

enterprise. He put it in the following way: *“I made through the wives – because they socialized regularly – such a good friendship with Fekete,²² that was almost unbelievable. When we knew each other – well, I had been using the “maga” with Miklos for a long time – then, you know, there was such a great work, the motor was lacked from the frames, and they had been got from the band in such a way, that they had to be rolled back, and our task was to do this. And the other members didn’t want to do this. But I, because I was in a good friendship with Miklos, said to the guys: “look, lads, this will be the greatest gambit of our life. Firstly we will be paid well, and the other hand we will get merits by this.”²³* D. F. emphasized with regard the “merits” that at the factory hall of 22 000, where they worked, almost all the foreign delegations appeared, because this building was placed along an important factory pathway within the factory premises. According to him this fact contributed to their publicity and merits. In his case we can understand in a detailed way the motivations and the successes of the brigade from the personal interview made with him. But it is a fact, that in the brigade too had greater possibilities to enforce their interests, and if they fulfilled well their plans and over the planned level, they could easily get into the spotlight.

²¹ A „Fürst Sándor Komplex Szocialista Brigád” tagjai egy mozgássérült bányász részére készített háromkerekű járművel.

²² Reference to Miklos Fekete, a leader of one of the factory units of the Csepel Autógyár.

²³ An interview with the deputy leader D. F. from the Csepel Autógyár. 3 November, 2016. The interview was made by Attila Józsi.



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Nevertheless in the brigade logs were published the poems of the members written for each other, by which they greeted each other on their name-days and birthdays, but the members of the group speak honestly about the problems within the enterprise, which hindered their work. Besides this we can find in the brigade logs humorous, witticizing or even sarcastic remarks, illustrated by drawing taken from the *Ludas Matyi*,²⁴ about each other and the various situations of the factory life. These betray that the friendships in the group were often confidential, and the members thought that these situations and events deserve to be shared with the other members. Thus in the brigade log of the “Radnóti Miklós Brigád” in the Ikarus factory they depicted the job change (inside the enterprise) of a member, F. J. by a graphic of a weeping woman sitting on a chair, and they wrote the following text beside it: *“Our little sweet Juditka went away from our department²⁵ with such tears, because such a misfortune befallen on her, that his payment was raised by 400 forints.”*²⁶

However, the log entry adds to this that their “Juditka” returned to the workteam of the department, and thus into the brigade too, supposedly this happened because of some inner displacement and the activity of the lobby made of their immediate co-workers. The entry continued with the following words: *“This misfortune didn’t last for a long time, because we smuggled her back with formal elopement into the staff of the Education department, and she returned there with such a wide smile, which we couldn’t draw here. Thus the happiness is perfect now.”*²⁷ – closed his lines the writer of the log. We don’t know from the diary, what could be the reason of the “smuggling back” of Judith, we may only suppose, that the cohesive force of the community, and the settlement of the payment issue. What is interesting in the story is, that after a year, in May 1969, F. J. yet left the brigade, and she continued her work on another post.

In the brigade log there appeared the close and distant relatives of the members too, thus we can follow from the brigade log the everyday life of a family (the birth of their children, title celebration birthdays, enrollment, disease, wedding etc.) In the following entry the writer expressed his worry, that the whole brigade would have got the cold through one of their fellows: *“The children of W. became sick and he had to remain at home for some days, during which he got the cold too, we hope we won’t get from him.”*²⁸

²⁴ The *Ludas Matyi* was the only legal satirical weekly of the socialist Hungary, which appeared from 1945 to 1992.

²⁵ The department in question was the Education department of the Ikarus Karosszéria és Járműgyár.

²⁶ MNL OL, XXIX-F-187-r, Ikarus Karosszéria- és Járműgyár disordered papers Box 80. May 1989.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

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Summary

In that study of mine I attempted to sum up the issues related to the use of the brigade logs as a peculiar kind of source of the economic and social history. On the basis of the above facts we should say, that sociologists and social historians should use the brigade logs as fundamental sources for explorations about the history of the way of life of the factory workers. However, it is important, that we check the data found in them with the help of other sources, the most important of which are the interviews and the factory journals of the enterprises. Nevertheless the brigade logs are sources for the enterprise-history and microhistory too, which could help in the examination concerning workplace communities, groups and individuals. I think that beyond the flash of the instances published in the study, there are necessary further Hungarian and international comparative investigations, centred around the brigades and their logs.

Brigade log versions



The brigade log of the Wage-department of the Ikarus Karosszéria és Járműgyár²⁹
Source: MNL OL, XXIX-F-187-r, Box. 79.

²⁹ Napló-változatok. Az Ikarus Karosszéria- és Járműgyár Bér osztályának brigádnaplója, 1965.



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1986. febr. 24.
A D.D. kormányzati váratlan meglátogatása miatt a brigád 4 tagja munkaidő után ezek ellátásával foglalkozott.

1986. febr. 28.
Brigádgyűlés: a brigád tagjai megbeszéltek, hogy a raktárban lévő elhasznált import gépeket fokozatosan felhagyják ill. megjavítják, ami bizonyos mértékű megújítást jelent vállalatunkban.

1986. márc. 05.
A vészhelyzetben lévő férfi fűtőhelyregezés ruhanyiroktelepeinek javítását br. tagjaink elvégezték.

1986. márc. 11.
Stábel József okos ember szülője ill. munkavédője dr. érteztette az Erdőművelésügyi és szőlő- és szőlőtermelés helyes hozatalát.

The brigade log of the "Alkotmány Brigád" of the Csepel Automobile Factory Power Plant Works³⁰

Source: Csepel Automobile Factory – Museum of Factory History. Collection of György Békés

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³⁰ A Csepel Autógyár Erőmű üzem „Alkotmány Brigád” naplója.



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