

## EATING HEALTHY, EATING MODERN. THE “URBANIZATION” OF FOOD TASTES IN COMMUNIST POLAND (1945–1989)<sup>1</sup>

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The paper analyses the changes of food behaviours in post-1945 Poland in the context of socialist modernization. It is focused on both discourses and everyday practices. After 1945 Poland was a nearly mono-ethnic rural society which experienced fast modernization, industrialization and urbanization. The communist authorities who promised social justice and universal prosperity faced a problem of painful food shortages. This resulted from the aftermaths of war, and later was a by-product of the socialist economy. Thus, dietary education became an important strategy in the effort to feed the new socialist Poland. Special institutions and agendas were established to modernize eating habits according to the “rational”, “scientific” bases of the communist project of modernization. Up until the late 1970s, expert dietary advice promoted pre-prepared food, canned and frozen products, vegetables and meat consumption. Food columns in women’s magazines, advice books and adverts presented the model of a modern cuisine, which was in the first place healthy, but also *urban*.

Official food policies affected everyday practices and, by the end of the 1970s, experts identified a process of the *denaturalization* of food in rural areas. This changed during the crisis of the 1980s, when “traditional” recipes came to be appreciated as simple and “natural”. The analysis of expert and popular discourses (women’s magazines, medical literature), as well as of personal narratives (personal diaries, memoirs, letters to the editor) shows the changing meanings of food, and their connections to processes of urbanization and social advancement which were elements of a socialist modernization which was not too different from the western modernity of the time.

KEYWORDS: socialist modernization, communist Poland, eating habits, taste.

“Nutrition is no longer a question of the private decisions of individual consumers, but has become an issue of great social significance,”<sup>2</sup> declared Aleksander Szczygieł (Szczygieł 1974, 198), the founder of the Institute of Food and Nutrition (Instytut Żywności i Żywienia) in the mid-1970s. He then went on to describe the great

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2 All quotations of documents etc. are author’s translations, unless stated otherwise.

achievements of the 30 years of the Polish People's Republic, but at the same time identified new problems and new challenges. It was no longer malnutrition and starvation that the nation had to face, but unhealthy eating habits, in particular the excessive consumption of sugar and meat products, identified as a side effect of rapid modernization.

This article aims to explore the changes of food practices in post-1945 Poland in the context of socialist modernization. It analyzes both discourses and everyday practices. Recognizing the dichotomy between thoughts, ideas and reality, it attempts to show how experts' diagnoses and instructions affected everyday eating habits.

Food practices in socialist Poland are rather poorly researched in Polish historiography. Apart from the popular monograph *PRL na widelcu* (*PRL on the fork*, Brzostek 2010), no comprehensive studies have been published on this topic. Only recently have some analyses of collective catering and of consumption practices during the crisis in the 1980s been published (Czekalski 2011; Stańczak-Wiślicz 2014a; 2014b). Specific topics, such as food panics, meat consumption and the *black market*, the rationing system and eating habits of rural societies, have been taken up by social historians (Kochanowski 2010; Szpak 2013; Zawistowski 2016). The development of nutritional sciences has been researched by medical historians (Ćwiek-Ludwicka and Gromulska 2018), and cookbooks analyzed by cultural and literary scholars (Żarski 2008; Jaroszuk 2012; Keating 2018). In general, current historiographical research mainly concerns the issues of food shortages and state control of consumption. Meanwhile, eating practices in the USSR, Yugoslavia and the GDR have been considered also in terms of modernization, ethnicity and even luxury consumption (Bracewell 2012; Jacobs 2015; Massino 2012; Penn 2012; Weinreb 2011; Freedman 2013; Lakhtikova et al. 2019).

My aim therefore is to expand the scope of research on food practices in communist Poland and to use *modernization* as a framework for interpretation. Recent studies emphasize that socialist modernity should be considered as “modernity in its own right” (Calic, Neutatz and Obertreis 2011, 12). *Modernization* was a crucial element of the communist project implemented in Poland after 1945. During the Stalinist period (1949–1955) it was associated with urbanization and rapid industrialization, whereas from the post-Stalinist Thaw “moderate consumption” and rising living standards became the key concern of the party-state authorities. The *kitchen debate* that took place at the American National Exhibition held during the Moscow fair in 1959 symbolized a new stage of rivalry, identified by Susan Reid as a confrontation and, to some extent, negotiation between the socialist and capitalist images of modernity. The exhibition's main attractions included a fully automated “miracle kitchen”, which symbolized American modernity in contrast to Soviet backwardness. It was in the kitchen, that Khrushchev and Nixon jostled over the relative capacity of the socialist and capitalist systems to satisfy the needs of their citizens (Reid 2002, 212). The *kitchen*

*debate* initiated new economic plans aimed at improving living standards in socialist countries.

The new policies towards consumption in Poland gained momentum in the 1970s. Increasing living standards, leisure and consumption became more important than ideological involvement. Gierek's team welcomed cooperation with scientific milieus and the *expert turn*, identified by Barbara Klich Kluczevska, also impacted on the meaning of “socialist modernity” in this period (Klich-Kluczevska 2017, 154). A growing interest in public health and the development of nutritional sciences was a part of the knowledge-based social policy of the 1970s. However, the first scientific institutions devoted to food and nutrition had been established in interwar Poland (1918–1939). At the National Institute of Hygiene (Państwowy Zakład Higieny, PZH established in 1918) operated a Department of Biochemistry and Hygiene of Nutrition (Oddział Biochemii i Higieny Odżywiania) and the State Department of Food and Consumer Goods (Państwowy Zakład Badania Żywności i Przedmiotów Użytku), which worked on food safety issues. After 1945, the Department of Nutrition at the Institute of Rural Medicine in Lublin (Instytut Medycyny Wsi, founded in 1951) was established. In 1963, the newly founded Institute of Food and Nutrition (Instytut Żywności i Żywienia, IŻiŻ) in Warsaw took over all issues related to nutrition (Ćwiek-Ludwicka and Gromulska 2018, 544). Their aim was to modernize eating habits according to the “rational” bases of the communist project of modernization. Besides scientific institutions, women's organizations – the League of Women and Rural Housewives Circles<sup>3</sup> – and the mass media produced discourses about the modernization of the Polish kitchen.

The argument I make in this article is that urbanization and social mobility, official food policies and the growth of an “ideology of advice” in the mass media (McCracken 1993, 57) were followed by visible changes in everyday practices in Polish families. To show these changes, I analyse official documents produced by state agencies – the Ministry of Provisioning and Trade, the Ministry of Domestic Trade and the Ministry

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3 The League of Women (Liga Kobiet) – formerly the Social-Civic League of Women (SOLK), created in 1949 as a result of the unification process under Stalinism. It was the only mass women's organization in communist Poland. In the mid-1980s, it had approximately 600 000 members. Within a framework of limited agency, the League developed programs and activities dedicated to women. The organization developed a variety of sections and committees, for example The Section of Lawyers and a Home Economics Committee. From 1981, it operates under the name: the League of Polish Women.

Rural Housewives' Circles – officially established in 1918, and preceded by the Society of Housewives (1866) and Rural Housewives Circle founded by Filipina Plaskowicka in 1877. During the inter-war period (1918–1939), the Circles developed various courses and activities for rural women. After 1945, they continued educational campaigns, ran home economics centres, clubs, kindergartens and rental offices with household appliances.

of Health and Welfare – and by women’s organizations, as well as expert writings and popular journalism. Women’s and lifestyle magazines, “Kobieta” (“Woman”), “Przyjaciółka” (“Girlfriend”), “Kobieta i Życie” (“Woman and Life”), “Gospodyni” (“Housewife”), as well as the expert magazines “Żywnie Zbiorowe” (“Collective Catering”), “Żywnie Człowieka” (Human Nutrition), “Przegląd Gastronomiczny” (“Gastronomy Review”) and “Gospodarstwo Domowe” (“Household”) are particularly useful sources for a study of this sort. I also examine personal narratives, such as diaries and memoirs. Most of these were prepared for various competitions announced in the press in the 1960s and 1970s.

#### TO FEED THE NATION

“We live in difficult times. [...] It happens that workers, professionals or even military families suffer from undernourishment,” stated the newsletter of the Polish Army Propaganda Department in November 1945.<sup>4</sup> During the first years of post-war reconstruction (1944–1948), the fear of starvation constituted one of the most important collective emotions; so the main concern was to save the country from hunger (Zaremba 2012, 550). Experts from the PZH diagnosed the Polish post-war population as suffering from exhaustion, vitamin deficiencies and malnutrition-related diseases. To combat this, they advocated social campaigns focused on feeding schoolchildren and organizing milk kitchens for infants (Szczygieł 1974, 185).

The aftermaths of the war – the devastation of industry, agriculture and transport infrastructure – resulted in the rupture of food chains and consequently in painful food shortages. Newspapers described whole villages on the verge of starvation and, on the other hand, petty profiteers and looters who enjoyed delicious food and alcohol. It was therefore incumbent on the new communist authorities, who promised social justice and common prosperity, to develop an efficient and egalitarian system of food distribution. This included the introduction of a rationing system (1944–1945), officially incorporated as an element of the national welfare system. This was supplemented by foreign aid, provided by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), and by the free market.<sup>5</sup> Despite these attempts to stabilize food provisioning, particular products, in particular meat, animal fats and dairy, were scarce.

4 *Jak się żywi kraj? Wojsko Polskie Główny Zarząd Polityczno-Wychowawczy, Oddział Propagandy*, listopad 1945, 1.

5 The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) – an international relief agency, largely dominated by the United States, operating during the years 1945–1947. It provided medical services, food products, fuel, clothing and other basic necessities. Poland was among the largest recipients of UNRRA commodity aid.

Thus, dietary education became an important strategy in the effort to fulfil the promises of food abundance and to provide people with sufficient nutrients. Firstly, experts from the PZH and from the Institute of Medical Chemistry in Kraków identified the main challenges and then developed recommendations for state food policy.

Meanwhile, the new communist authorities followed the Soviet model of social policies and strongly recommended the development of collective catering: factory canteens and cheap eateries. This was an element of the household modernization project which was based on the idea of women’s emancipation. Also, it was easier to manage limited food supplies within a system of collective catering, and to change eating habits and food tastes according to official food policy and dietary knowledge. “Today, due to collective feeding it is easier than before the war to have impact on the quality of alimentation,” in 1946 declared Stanisław Knauff, an expert journalist specializing in nutrition issues. In order to implement dietary requirements, the Ministry of Provisioning and Trade produced feeding manuals dedicated for canteen managers (Knauff 1946, 2). An expert magazine “Żywnie Zbiorowe” published recipes for dishes based on available products, like cereals, soy beans and canned meat from military supplies (Witkowska 1946, 6–7).

Since the development of collective catering was limited only to urban workers in key industrial sectors and employees of state institutions, food experts were concerned about individual consumption. This was particularly important, because most schools did not run canteens and there were very few nurseries and kindergartens. Hence, the Polish Food Committee (Polski Komitet Żywnościowy, PKŻ established in November, 1947) organized special training sessions for housekeeping instructors and, in cooperation with the Social-Civic League of Women (SOLK)<sup>6</sup> and Rural Housewives Circles, courses and public demonstrations specially aimed at working women (Sprawozdanie 1950, 27). Women were encouraged to economize and to use leftovers for preparing meals. The SOLK, together with the Ministry of Provisioning, ran several social campaigns, such as “meatless days” or “cakeless days”. The idea was both to introduce an egalitarian model of consumption and, more prosaically, to manage the limited food supply. Economising on products used for baking cakes was presented as an act of social solidarity: giving up luxury for the common good. Frugality and thriftiness were strongly appreciated and presented as a “contribution to post-war

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During the period 1944–1947, small manufacturing and trade companies operated legally. The so-called “battle over trade” (bitwa o handel) declared in 1947 began the effort towards state control over production and consumption (see: Kochanowski 2010).

- 6 The Social-Civic League of Women (SOLK) – founded in 1945, at the initiation of some members of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), was tied directly to the new political system in Poland. In 1949, due to a process of unification SOLK (together with a few smaller organizations) was transformed into the League of Women.

reconstruction” (Wróblewska 1947, 16). At the same time, physicians and dieticians were concerned about the nutritional value of meals. In search for a meat substitute, they campaigned to increase fish consumption. Since Poland had obtained access to Baltic fisheries but fish consumption was not popular, they promoted cod as a foodstuff that was cheap, healthy and available. “Our households have to get accustomed to the new food policy,” persuaded the magazine “Żywnie Zbiorowe”, and presented fish consumption as a “civic duty” resulting from post-war territorial changes (Biernatowska 1946, 3). Nutrition claims went hand in hand with political propaganda.

Following expert discourses, women’s magazines published recipes for simple but nutritious dishes. They explained how to use canned food, powdered milk and nutrients provided by UNRRA. “Kobieta” edited by the SOLK, “Przyjaciółka”, the country’s largest circulation women’s magazine,<sup>7</sup> and “Kobieta Wiejska” addressed to rural women, published proposals for weekly menus that were based on nutrition standards and experts’ suggestions. In the column *We cook*, “Przyjaciółka” recommended potato chops with chive sauce, beans in grey sauce, groats with liver and curdled milk with potatoes (“Przyjaciółka” 1948, 9). Weekly menus published in “Kobieta Wiejska” were based on the culinary traditions of the Polish countryside. For example, in January 1949 the magazine’s suggestions for weekday dinners were: sauerkraut soup with potatoes and noodles with tomato sauce; barley soup (*krupnik*) and cabbage cutlets with mushroom sauce; borscht with potatoes and buckwheat baked with cheese; potato soup and dumplings with lungs; baked potatoes with herring and noodles with plum jam. Only for Sunday did the magazine suggest a luxury dinner: chicken soup with noodles, boiled meat with onion sauce and cocoa jelly for dessert. The suggestions for suppers were simple: fried potatoes, cabbage and pickle salad, potato soup, egg noodles with cracklings or millet with butter and sugar (“Kobieta Dzisiejsza” 1949, 17). Analysis of the weekly menus demonstrates a very limited amount of meat in the meals, a dominance of potato and flour dishes, and a strong attachment to the tradition of a warm milk-based breakfast. This was a result both of insufficient food supplies and the traditions of rural Polish cuisine.

These new recommendations and practical suggestions for cooking did not differ much from those published before the war. The modernization efforts aimed at increasing vegetable consumption can be seen as a continuation of the educational campaigns arranged by the Institute for Home Economics (Instytut Gospodarstwa Domowego) and the Rural Housewives’ Circles.

7 “Kobieta” (1947–1949) – edited by the Social-Civic League of Women, earlier “Kobieta Dzisiejsza” (1946–1947). Its approach was to show support for the new communist authorities. The magazine was closed after the unification of women’s organizations in 1949.

“Przyjaciółka” – a weekly edited by the “Czytelnik” Publishing House from 1948, was the most popular women’s magazine in Poland, with a mass circulation of about 3 million copies in the 1960s. It was devoted to life stories, practical advice, gossip, fashion and beauty.

In summation, during the first years of post-war reconstruction the main concern was to provide people with a sufficient amount of nutritious enough food. Rational and modern cooking identified with thriftiness was presented as a moral obligation to the country. The main concepts of the official food policy were food safety and the development of an egalitarian model of food provisioning. The biggest challenge, as in all post-war Europe and in the United States, was to replace lacking meat products.<sup>8</sup>

#### TO IMPROVE, TO MODERNIZE, TO PLAN RATIONALLY

“When talking about the issue of national nutrition, we should look very carefully at the guidelines of the Six-year Plan,”<sup>9</sup> declared the expert magazine “*Żywnie Człowieka*” at the beginning of the Stalinist era (1948–1955) in Poland (Iwazkiewicz 1949, 2). Like other areas of the economy and social life, nutrition became covered by central planning rules and subordinated to the superior objectives of rapid urbanization and industrialization. Therefore, experts were expected to develop an effective dietary system adjusted to the limited food supply and to the needs of the new consumers: young industrial workers. This was especially important since food abundance and a modernization of common food tastes became substantial elements of the prevailing propaganda discourse.

Brian Porter-Szűcs has argued that the provision of consumer goods was a crucial marker of socialist success, and even for the Stalinist era the distinction between a capitalist model of consumption and ascetic socialism is too simplistic. The focus on industrial expansion at the expense of consumer production was justified by dint of the challenges of rapid industrialisation, but growth in consumption was also perceived as a fundamental goal of the socialist system (Porter-Szűcs 2020, 83–86). Actually, food shortages were by-products of the socialist economy. They were silenced or presented as “temporary difficulties”, while journalists affirmed that after 1945 food supply was gradually improving. The promise of food abundance was contrasted with harsh pre-war living conditions: the malnutrition and even starvation of working classes and overconsumption of the privileged. Publicists praised the fact that after 1945 the consumption of meat increased, and workers and peasants could afford to have a pork chop for dinner (Knauff 1949, 1; Łoś 1950, 7). The availability of meat signified social justice.

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8 The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for his/her comments about the similarities in food policies and practical suggestions for cooking in the West and in the Soviet Bloc.

9 The Six-Year Plan (1950–1955) was the second – after the Three-Year Plan (1947–1949) – centralized plan in communist Poland. It concentrated on heavy industrialization, with such projects as Nowa Huta.

However, contrary to this optimistic propaganda, people were queuing in front of butcher's shops, and sequential meat panics resulted in strikes and protests (Kochanowski 2010, 172). Due to the requisitioning of food to cities, rural families could hardly afford to consume meat. Women diarists described a poor home diet consisting of potatoes, low fat milk and a small amount of meat served once a month (*Czyste wody* 1975, 47). Food policy makers faced massive challenges: how to fulfil the promise of food safety despite the shortages resulting from the aftermath of the war and the inefficiency of the central planning system. In order to increase meat production, the government announced a so-called "H campaign" which subsidized public and private farms. The next step was state control of the market, and of food production and distribution. Consequently, private restaurants, bars and cafes, as well as groceries and butchers disappeared from Polish cities and villages. Instead, collective feeding was promoted. All issues related to canteens and public eateries were transferred to state agencies affiliated to the Ministry of Domestic Trade (AAN, 2/1354/0/1.17, 120). According to Tadeusz Czekalski, the popularization of mass catering became the most important manifestation of changes in culinary culture in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Poland. Cafeterias and canteens in workplaces were supposed to provide workers with a rational food supply, to popularize scientifically developed food patterns, to increase productivity and to provide new job opportunities for women. Moreover, dining in the workplace was presented as an opportunity to integrate the worker into the workplace (Czekalski 2011, 78). During the years of the Six-Year Plan (1950–1955), the number of canteens and cafeterias in workplaces increased from 668 to 9206. This was officially presented as a shift towards an egalitarian model of food provisioning despite supply difficulties (Niedziątek and Żelazna 1974, 228), and as an element of the Stalinist project of women's emancipation based on the idea of the collectivization of housework.

Actually, people decided to use canteens due to an ineffective supply system. The Workers' Supply Departments (Oddziały Zaopatrzenia Robotniczego) established in 1951 provided canteens and cafeterias with food products not available on the free market. Needless to say, young single workers living in workers' hotels with no access to well-equipped kitchens were determined to use canteens. Canteens provided customers with solid, calorific meals, often one-pot dishes served with bread. The recommended menu for factory canteens in 1949 consisted of two versions of dinner: a more expensive two courses and a cheaper, one course. The second version proposed, for example, tomato and pork soup with potatoes or oatmeal served with bread spread with cheese, canned meat stew with potatoes and groats or pea soup with canned meat and potatoes served with bread (Witkowska 1949a, 6). Even though experts demanded increased vegetable consumption, real menus were based on potatoes, bread and canned meat. For this reason, canteens were criticized for menus that were too monotonous, and not suitable for children, the elderly and those suffering from



metabolic diseases. Therefore, dieticians developed a standard family nutrition model. It consisted of breakfasts and suppers served at home, and dinners served in canteens or cheap public eateries (Witkowska 1949, 17). The milk bars introduced in 1949, mostly in big cities, were promoted as “democratic” places where all working people could have simple and cheap, but healthy meals prepared according to up-to-date experts’ suggestions (Dłużniewski 1950, 11). They were supposed to replace home cooking for single workers. The bars served dairy products that were cheaper and more available than meat. Their offer did not make revolutionary changes to common eating habits. Breakfasts based on milk and dairy products were already popular, especially among people of rural background.

Canteens, milk bars and public eateries gained relative popularity in big cities. In rural areas, there were unsuccessful attempts to organize canteens in collective farms (Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne, PGR)<sup>10</sup>, since the workers preferred to dine at home (Czajka 1956, 1). Only the *junaks* sent to work by the Powszechna Organizacja “Służba Polsce” (SP) were provided with mass catering. However, they used canteens only temporarily during their stays in SP brigades.<sup>11</sup> Since eating at home was still much more common and women played a key role in the preparation of food, experts developed recommendations for individual households. The dietary norms of the time were common to both sides of the Iron Curtain. First of all, experts advocated the idea of a rational planning of weekly and daily menus. In order to maintain a “nutrient balance”, they suggested combining meals from different products: meat, vegetables and dairy (Czerny 1949, 15). A total daily nutritional value of 3000 calories for adults should be divided into three meals, with breakfast consisting of high-protein products: dairy, eggs and cured meat. Experts warned that eating more than three meals a day was a dietary error, resulting from inadequate planning (Plewniak 1950, 13). In search of substitutes for meat, they supported social campaigns organized by the Ministry of Domestic Trade, like “fish days” or “cod actions”. This encouraged the serving of cod dishes on a weekly basis (“Żywienie Zbiorowe” 1950, 21).

Experts’ recommendations were popularized by the League of Women (Liga Kobiet) founded in 1949, the only mass women’s organization in communist Poland. In 1950, its’ Household Department declared a strong commitment to the implementation of the 6-Year Plan in the field of nutrition: the League of Woman stated an intention to have an influence on market supply and on the promotion of certain food products which were necessary for health and important for the state economy. Therefore, the League organized courses and demonstrations of modern cooking

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10 State Agricultural Farms (Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne, PGR) – a form of collective farming, similar to the Soviet sovkhoz. They were created in 1949 and liquidated in 1991.

11 The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for his/her suggestion to consider “junaks”. For more about “junaks”, see: Jarosz 1998 and Lesiakowski 2008.

technologies and developed practical suggestions for cooking dedicated for working women (Adamusowa 1950, 29; Czarnecka 1950, 58). Since the idea of the collectivization of housework turned out to be unsuccessful, it was individual households that became the targets of the modernization project. In the official discourse of the time, the upgrading of the household should enable women to reconcile the role of housewife with a professional career and social activity (Stańczak-Wiślicz 2017, 127). Moreover, feeding the family was perceived in terms of production: as a way to prepare the body and mind for work. Therefore, recipes and weekly menus published in popular women's magazines were to show readers how to cook well-balanced, nutritious meals. Taste was less important.

The only difference with regard to recipes from the early post-war years was the higher proportion of meat and animal fat in the dishes. Meat consumption was slowly increasing. However, as shown by Brzostek (2010, 106), this was principally accounted for by second-rate meat products, like cheap sausage, giblets, or brown or black pudding. For example, in 1950 "Przyjaciółka" recommended four main course meat dishes in the weekly menu: stewed pork, pork chops, kidney stew served with groats and mash with pork rinds ("Przyjaciółka" 1950, 14). Simultaneously with the social campaigns for fish and vegetable consumption, women's magazines advised on how to make tasty fish dishes and encouraged their readers to serve more vegetables, mainly basic ones like carrots or cabbage.

Stalinist modernization in the kitchen can be perceived in terms of rational planning, efficiency, simplicity and relative abundance. Therefore, good eating was commonly identified with a meat- and fat-based diet, high calories.

#### MANAGING EATING HABITS

After the Stalinist era, the official attitude towards consumption changed. First of all, criticism appeared of an "overfulfilled" Six-Year Plan which prioritized investment over consumption. Regarding food-related issues, a strong dissatisfaction was expressed with the idea of collective catering. Experts criticized the poor quality of the food served in canteens, poor service and a lack of cheap, healthy dishes in the menus. They complained that in the countryside cheap eateries had become similar to shops selling foodstuffs (Hebdzyńska 1956, 3). From 1954, the number of factory canteens began to decrease dramatically, primarily because of the withdrawal of the Workers' Supply Departments (Czekalski 2011, 80). On the other hand, home cooking had remained popular all the time. "I had to learn cooking and baking, because my husband did not want to use canteens or to eat at my mother's place," noted a young woman diarist in the mid-1950s (AAN, pamiętnik 89, 3). This trend was reinforced due to the "post-Stalinist backlash" identified by Dobrochna Kałwa as a return to traditionally

defined gender roles (Kałwa 2015, 173). In the mid-1960s, experts argued that eating out had a negative impact on family life. They therefore promoted the use of catering services (buying half-finished products or ready dishes) and eating at home (Bitter 1965, 5). Although due to the project to improve working conditions the number of factory canteens increased in the 1970s (Czekalski 2011, 81), this did not significantly affect eating habits.

At the same time, expectations towards food were changing. Jerzy Kochanowski argued that mass migrations from rural to urban areas and adapting to the new urban lifestyle resulted in a growing demand for meat products. Moreover, since basic alimentary needs had been fulfilled, people now required better quality products and became more attached to taste (Kochanowski 2010, 161). One rural diarist complained that her husband, after serving a mandatory 2-year military service, had got used to an urban way of eating and demanded sandwiches with cured meat for breakfast, instead of milk with noodles (*Czyste wody* 1975, 324).

The post-Stalinist shift towards "moderate consumption" led to a growing interest in a modernization of eating habits. Efforts to intervene in people's everyday practices were nothing new, but unlike during Stalinism, it was now consumers' satisfaction and taste, not only food's nutritional values, that mattered. The good health condition of the entire population, a food abundance and even luxury "within rational norms" signified a socialist good life, which in turn was supposed to contribute to the legitimacy of the communist authorities. Thus, expert magazines proudly informed about new projects, like introducing "bar-buses" [*barobusy*] in touristic areas, launching "hot chops, the so-called hamburger" and various types of coffee drinks in Warsaw (*Przeгляд Gastronomiczny* 165, 6; 1966, 19; 1966, 6). This aspect was especially emphasized in the 1970s, when increasing living standards and Western-like modernization became the main slogans in the official discourse legitimizing Edward Gierek's team.

Official food policy, still subject to central planning but now associated with the idea of raising living standards, was supported by the authority of scientists. Researchers from the Institute of Food and Nutrition and PZH acted as experts for the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture and other state agencies, and cooperated with the FAO/WHO, the European Commission and the Food and Feed Safety Authority (EFSA). The Institute of Rural Medicine in Lublin was focused on the eating habits of the rural population. Experts from the IŻIŻ developed suggestions for a series of plans in the field of nutrition. On the one hand, they were expected to support party-state policies, and on the other, they believed in their strategic role in the transformation of society (Kennedy 1991). In 1969, the authors of the action plan for the Institute argued that their research should be integrated into "the economic life of the country" for the benefit of society (*Perspektywiczne...* 1969, 2). The "expert turn" of the 1970s resulted in a growing role of scientists and consequently in the development of a structured institutional system to implement their ideas (Klich-Kluczevska

2017, 157). Physicians and dieticians claimed a need for greater influence on the food policies. In expert publications, they insisted that due to processes of modernization “people have lost the instinct for what to eat”, so they needed professional advice (Rusiecki 1974, 3). They also spoke at official forums. During a meeting of the Committee on the Population’s Nutrition (Komisja Żywienia Ludności) affiliated to the Ministry of Health, Aleksander Szczygieł presented a draft Report on Food and Nutrition in Poland. He argued that, since poor eating habits affected society as a whole, scientists were obliged to help the government to develop a long-term food policy aimed at eliminating common dietary mistakes resulting both from modernization and tradition. Szczygieł insisted that the main challenge was to improve the dietary standards of the rural population (AAN, Komisja Żywienia Ludności 1976, 25).

Until the early 1970s, the rural population was still diagnosed as having poor eating habits: an extensive consumption of potatoes, accompanied by insufficient meat and vegetables. The model of “natural consumption”, based on local products and strong attachment to traditional recipes was criticized for being inefficient. Physicians warned that this resulted in malnutrition and poor health of rural children and teenagers (Dłużniewska 1973, 81). Moreover, due to rapid urbanization and the communist project of modernization, the rural lifestyle was perceived in terms of conservatism and backwardness. This was not the only challenge. Dieticians were also concerned about the too monotonous diet of urban working class families, based on potatoes and low quality meat, and about a general trend towards an excessive consumption of sugar. They complained that during the 1960s and early 1970s vegetable production had grown more slowly than meat production and that raising living standards did not result in a better diet.

After identifying the main challenges, experts from the IŻIŻ developed practical recommendations. First and foremost, they emphasized the role of protein in food. On the basis of current research, they identified a category of first-class proteins of animal origin, as being the most nutritious and essential for human health. Therefore, it was highly recommended to serve good quality meat every day, though in a small amount. Dairy products and fresh eggs were also approved as sufficiently nutritious. Plant proteins were classified as second-class: healthy, but not sufficiently nutritious. Experts suggested adding them to meat dishes in order to get a fully nutritious meal (Wysokińska 1966, 11). They still promoted vegetable consumption and emphasized that a well-balanced, modern diet should consist of various products. They thus recommended that by 1990 the consumption of vegetables per capita should increase by 60%, and that of fruit by 100%.

Experts’ recommendations evolved in line with current research. Although the urban diet based on high protein products, primarily meat and animal fats, was appreciated as a manifestation of abundance and modernity in the kitchen, from the late 1960s physicians and dieticians started to warn about the possible health risks of

a "too nutritious diet". There was no longer any threat of hunger. Instead, they referred to Western research on nutrition-related civilization diseases and warned that extensive animal fat consumption might result in cardiovascular diseases (J.K. 1966, 16). They blamed rapid modernization for developing unhealthy eating habits (Szczygieł 1974, 21). There was also growing awareness of the negative effects of industrialization and the deterioration of the natural environment, which resulted in a low quality of drinking water and the "chemicalization" of food (Szczygieł 1974b, 98). This latest research resulted in a changing attitude towards traditional rural cuisine. Experts argued that rural eating habits did not necessarily have to result in nutritional errors. Through minor changes (for example increasing vegetable consumption) they might be the basis for a healthy diet (Narojek and Szczygłowa 1974, 119). During the crisis of the 1980s, traditional rural dishes were presented as healthy, nutritious and possible to prepare despite supply shortages.

In order to prevent health risks, food experts asserted a need for a reform of the diet. From the early 1970s, they began to argue that changes in lifestyle should result in changing eating patterns (Szostak 1974, 319). They therefore proposed that the total daily nutritional value of 3000 calories for adults which was accepted in the early 1950s should be lowered. They also recommended eating four or five meals a day instead of the earlier recommendation of three (Starzyńska and Zawistowska 1973).

In so far as detailed suggestions were concerned, dieticians recommended the consumption of low-fat milk and of poultry instead of pork. Poultry was presented as easily digestible, low-calorie and corresponding to a modern urban lifestyle ("Przeгляд Gastronomiczny" 1965, 19). Polish consumers were at first dissatisfied with these suggestions, and only in the 1980s did poultry consumption increase and become normalized. Similarly, dieticians promoted the consumption of vegetable oils and margarine instead of lard and butter in order to prevent metabolic, heart and cardiovascular diseases. Although they did not recommend a vegetarian diet, they advocated a reduction of meat consumption and kept encouraging people to eat more fruit and vegetables. They therefore promoted the use of frozen and canned vegetables, and of ready-made preserves and concentrates. During the official meeting in the Ministry of Health, Aleksander Szczygieł advocated the idea of state subsidies for the production of canned and frozen goods (AAN, Komisja Żywienia Ludności 1976, 18).

Dieticians and physicians continued their mission to improve common eating habits up until the late 1980s. During the crisis of the 1980s, in contrast to public opinion, they appreciated the decline in meat consumption and focused on nutrition-related diseases. In order to maintain proper protein intake, they recommended milk, dairy, fish and vegetable consumption (Sekuła, Niedziałek, Szostek 1984, 93). In line with current Western research they made attempts to promote a Healthy Eating Pyramid. They criticized what they saw as a widespread tendency to overeating and once again advocated for essential changes in Polish eating habits (Szostak 1982, 17).

## IMPLEMENTATION, POPULARIZATION

Physicians and dieticians were not the only agents of modernization. The League of Women and Rural Housewives' Circles undertook various actions to transfer expert knowledge to the general public. Moreover, the mass media also made attempts to popularize modern dietary guidelines. Educational activities and the popularization of eating habits were mostly aimed at individual households. Due to the post-Thaw shift, the League of Women called for a new focus on "practical activism" (Nowak 2004, 116). In 1957, the Home Economics Committee (Komitet do Spraw Gospodarstwa Domowego, KGD), the League's most popular national committee was founded. In general, the Committee was to contribute to the modernization of everyday life by preparing working women to be effective housekeepers. Up until the late 1980s, it provided courses, lectures and demonstrations, tested new household appliances, published brochures and collaborated with research institutions. To promote a modern healthy diet, it used social advertisement campaigns. Posters and leaflets showing the nutritional value of particular products or promoting food and vegetable consumption were distributed in home economic centres, health centres and even in schools in both urban and rural areas.

Outside the Committee, the 1960s saw the emergence of the "Praktyczna Pani" [Practical Lady] network managed by the PSS "Społem" consumer cooperative,<sup>12</sup> while Modern Housewife Centres [Ośrodki Nowoczesnej Gospodyni] founded by the Communal "Peasant Self-Help" Cooperatives (Gminna Spółdzielnia "Samopomoc Chłopska") functioned in the countryside. The KGD collaborated with both institutions, supplying them with pamphlets and study aids, and providing additional training to staff (Biernacka 1964, 65).

Since the kitchen chores involved in providing and cooking food were perceived as particularly oppressive for working women, the KGD, as well as Modern Housewives Circles, put the modernization of eating habits and of kitchen technologies at the forefront of their agenda. The expert magazine "Gospodarstwo Domowe" edited by the Committee published articles dedicated to home economics' teachers who were supposed to transmit expert knowledge to women. In order to do so, from 1958 the Committee began to organize home economics centres (*poradnie gospodarstwa domowego*). The consumer cooperative "Społem" founded its own household centres in cities, and correspondingly the Circles of Rural Housewives did the same in rural areas.

According to their activity plans, these centres, which were to be equipped with exemplary modern kitchens, organized courses, lectures and public demonstrations to promote new dietary recommendations and new kitchen technologies. Home

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12 PSS Społem – a Polish consumers' co-operative of local grocery stores founded in 1868. During the PRL period, PSS Społem built and ran numerous stores and service centres.

economics teachers explained the principles of the modern healthy diet and provided women with knowledge about the proper composition of daily and weekly menus. They encouraged women to use cooking techniques recommended by experts, for example baking or stewing instead of frying. In the rural household centres were organized courses of making fruit and vegetable preserves, as well as homemade cured and canned meat. Since rural children were still diagnosed as being at risk of malnutrition in the 1970s, Rural Housewives' Circles collaborated with physicians and dieticians from the IŻiŻ in providing courses on producing and storing food. Moreover, in some areas (for example in the Lublin voivodeship) schoolchildren were provided with cheap, healthy lunches prepared according to dieticians' recommendations (Konieczna 1978, 10).

From the mid-1970s, these household centres became more engaged in presenting modern cuisine, which included even luxurious dishes such as chicken rolls and chicken roasted with raisins. This changed in the 1980s during which the KGD Institute organized demonstrations of the "crisis kitchen" and encouraged women to economize. For example, the local branch in Mława organized a presentation on how to make sandwiches with cheese and fish spread (*Sprawozdania 1975–1989*, 140). In order to modernize kitchen technologies, home economics teachers persuaded women to use modern kitchen appliances presented not only as time and labour saving, but also as essential for healthy cooking. For example, juicers and mixers were supposed to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables (Rutkowska 1964, 45). Apart from courses and demonstrations, the local centres ran rental offices for household appliances. In their memoirs, rural diarists often mentioned that they could use modern appliances thanks to these rental offices. On the other hand, they also complained about insufficient office offers.

Cooking courses and demonstrations attracted attention. For example, in 1976 the home economics centre in Kutno (in the former Płock voivodeship) organized 3 courses for 75 participants and 250 presentations for an audience of 2500 persons (AAN, The League of Women, Home Economics Committee). Rural diarists appreciated cooking courses. Some of them were really proud of their new cooking skills and perceived themselves as agents of modernization in the family. "I baked a delicious lemon cake with icing and raisins for Sunday", noted a diarist from the Koszalin voivodeship in 1975 and she added that it was appreciated by all her family as very modern, unlike a traditional torte (AAN Kęćcik, 2). Another author persuaded her mother-in-law to prepare homemade canned meat and to buy bread instead of baking it at home. She also declared collecting the new recipes that she had learnt at the course for her daughter (*Czyste wody 1975*, 139–142). The diarists tried to share their new skills with mothers and mothers-in-law, and often complained about their backwardness and unhealthy eating habits. By contrast, they appreciated their new identity of modern housewives (AAN Bober, 139).

On the other hand, home economics' teachers kept complaining about the backwardness of rural women. "We are aware that older housewives as well as young girls are not ready to give up traditional eating habits inherited from their mothers and grandmothers," noted one of the teachers. She argued that it was very difficult to develop complex healthy menus, because paradoxically fruits and vegetables were scarcely available in the countryside. However, she appreciated that rural women were interested in cooking and hoped that intensive courses would improve common eating behaviours (Ciemniewska 1959, 16).

The idea to modernize Polish cuisine was supported by the mass media. Women's and lifestyle magazines, which from the very beginning were supposed to constitute "engineers of female identity" (Attwood 1999, 12) acted as a "transmission belt" between scholars, home economics' experts and a wider audience. From the mid-1940s, they ran special columns dedicated to cooking and kitchen technologies. They published recipes for single dishes, as well as daily and weekly menus. According to the latest experts' recommendations, they propagated consumption of particular foodstuffs, for example margarine and plant oils, fish, fruits and vegetables.

The increasing role of women's magazines resulted in the emergence of "popular experts", such as Irena Gumowska, an engineer by education who authored numerous how-to-do books and ran an advice column in "Przyjaciółka". Kazimiera Pyszkowska (alias Felicja Zalewska) published recipes and practical suggestions for cooking in "Przyjaciółka", Zofia Zawistowska ran a special column in the monthly magazine "Zwierciadło". From the mid-1960s, they tried to accustom readers to modern healthy recipes based on vegetables and small amounts of meat. However, it was not only a healthy diet that mattered. The magazines displayed the imagined modern cuisine, focused both on taste and nutritional values. Thus, they presented, for example, French fries accompanied with canned green peas and beef as a full-value dish ("Przyjaciółka" 1965).

Culinary experts who contributed to popular women's magazines advocated the idea of modernization of eating habits for various reasons. First and foremost, it was public health that mattered. Next, they were attached to the idea of women's emancipation in the family. Thus, they were concerned with simplifying home cooking and promoted the use of food concentrates and half-finished products. They encouraged women to use instant soups on a daily basis and argued that the cooking of broth at home was a manifestation of backwardness. They complained that regarding the use of food concentrates Poland was far behind the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Austria and France (*Błyskawiczne zupy* 1974, 11). The popularization of frozen and canned food was supposed to support a more egalitarian division of work within the family. For example, frozen fries were recommended as a modern, Western-style side dish easy to prepare even for men ("Przyjaciółka" 1979, 14). Instant mashed potatoes were so easy to prepare that children could manage it ("Zwierciadło" 1980, 16).





*Przyjaciółka 1965 no 8*

The magazines also promoted luxurious foreign recipes. In 1965, “Przyjaciółka” published a series of articles: “Dishes from all over the world”.

Actually, these constituted recipes from the cuisine of socialist countries, such as Bulgaria.



*Przyjaciółka 1965, no 36*

Foreign recipes, as well as recipes for sophisticated dishes like sausages in red wine or San Remo salad (F.Z. 1978, 12) to be served at home parties symbolized Western-style modernization in the 1970s.

In the 1980s, magazine experts tried to help women deal with supply shortages by advising about how to find substitutes for lacking products. They no longer wrote about modernization, but instead promoted “survival strategies” for times of crisis (see: Stańczak-Wiślicz 2014b).

Although the centrally planned economic system was defined rather in terms of a “culture of frugality” than one of abundance (Fehérváry 2013, 114), Polish popular magazines published adverts for foodstuffs and kitchen appliances. Considering the limited role of advertising in the socialist economy (Reid 2002, 218), I believe that these may be perceived as a part of the advice discourse. They were meant to educate people, to get them accustomed to new ways of life and to affect their consumption behaviours. Therefore, in the late 1940s magazines advertised fish consumption, and in the 1970s frozen food and concentrates. From the 1960s, the role of advertising grew in importance and, as Patric Patterson (2011, 57) has argued, “something very

closely resembling Western-style advertising” could function in countries where the political order was not based on the values of the market. The adverts of luxury products: like coffee, orange juice, foreign seasonings and preserves displayed a vision of how modern cuisine was imagined. They referred to ideas of taste, comfort and Western-style luxury. Adverts for foodstuffs disappeared during the crisis of the 1980s, and could be seen again only after 1985.

## CONCLUSIONS

The social processes characteristic for post-war Poland – rapid industrialization, urbanization and social mobility – were followed by visible changes in everyday consumer practices in Polish families. The most spectacular change lay in a process of the uniformization and “urbanization” of tastes. Up to the early 1970s, rural families were criticized for their backwardness and diagnosed as having unhealthy eating habits. By the mid-1980s, experts identified a process of the *denaturalization* of food in rural areas, which resulted in a decline in the consumption of milk, potatoes and cereal products in favour of meat, eggs and animal fats (Gulbicka 1987, 8). In this sense, rural cuisine had become similar to urban standards.

Up until the 1980s when the project of socialist modernity failed, the eating habits of the Polish population became more uniform. Not only dieticians and physicians, but also sociologists and ethnologists described changing consumption behaviour in terms of standardization and made attempts to conceptualize the Polish kitchen that included some elements of local tradition (Szromba-Rysowa 1973, 50). The imagined Polish kitchen was a political project, associated with communist historical policy, which was focused on the idea of building a mono-ethnic society. Certainly, the book *Polish Cuisine* by Stanisław Berger and Helena Kulzowa-Hawliczkowa released in 1954 can be seen as a manifestation of this overall project (Jaroszuk 2012, 229).

The centrally planned economy in communist Poland affected food policies and, consequently, the food practices of the population. However, it is an oversimplification to claim that people were completely deprived of agency and that it was the communist authorities who decided how much and what to eat (Józwiak 2004, 229). The practice of controlling food supplies and food behaviours was common to both sides of the Iron Curtain (Burnett and Oddy 1996). Despite the authoritarian political system, various agents shaped official food policies and the idea to modernize the eating habits of the Polish population was linked to a general belief that under communism living standards should improve. This was founded on a scientific basis. Food shortages, experienced from the first post-war years until the late 1980s, were by-products of the centrally planned economy. Therefore, the changes in food taste and food practices under state socialism should be perceived rather in terms of modernization than totalitarian control. They were largely similar to the changes that took place in Western

countries. From the late 1960s, Polish experts also described the side-effects of modernization: excessive consumption of sugar, meat and animal fats, and made claims for change according to the latest research. Summing up, regardless of the political and economic system, *modernity* was the main factor that shaped official policies towards consumption and, thus, towards everyday life (Brown 2001).

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