



Inglorious Heroes of Labor: Transcarpathian Seasonal Workers during Late Socialism

Kateryna Burkush

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

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European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

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Department of History and Civilization - Doctoral Programme

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kateryna Burkush', is written on a light blue rectangular background.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study of seasonal labor migration during the late Soviet period and it is specifically focused on Transcarpathia, a region with a long tradition of seasonal labor migration. While tracing the Soviet authorities' reactions to seasonal migration during the period of 1950–1980s, I observed that despite the state's attempts to limit and control seasonal migration by administrative means, seasonal workers found ways to bypass all constraints and managed to establish durable work contacts with employers in other Ukrainian regions, as well as, for instance, in Latvia, Siberia and Kazakhstan. How this persistence, in view of the authorities' explicit disapproval, can be explained?

Bringing together scattered archival sources, Soviet publications and oral histories of veteran seasonal workers from Transcarpathia, I claim that the persistence of seasonal labor migration from this region was informed by complex relationships between the late Soviet economic condition and the cultural dispositions of seasonal workers. I trace these relationships on different levels of social interactions: state regulations, community culture, individual agency, and mediating agents – such as procurement agents and collective farms chairmen, who became important actors in the networks of the informal distribution during the late Soviet period. I contend that while providing the Soviet formal economy, prone to labor shortages, with flexible and relatively more productive labor, the workers engaged in informal practices that undermined the Soviet ideas of distributive justice. In the context of the late Soviet “informal liberalization”, individual economic initiatives (within the boundaries of the planned economy) were glossed over or even encouraged, though they were still politically and morally condemned, since they were said to go against the prescriptions of communist values. These moral conundrums were discussed in the Soviet media, where seasonal workers, known as *shabashniki* were often portrayed as “dishonest”. The workers themselves, however, resisted or ignored these marginalizing accounts, as their self-esteem was rooted in their result-oriented work ethic, coordinated productivity and the appreciation of their earning capacity in the local communities of Transcarpathia. With their earnings from seasonal labor, they obtained an opportunity to significantly upgrade their houses, which became the main symbol of relations of ownership and social distinction after collectivization in the Transcarpathian countryside.

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Five and a half years ago, when I started this project, I did not have the slightest idea that it would become what it has become. I arrived at the European University Institute with the intention to study gender in connection with seasonal migration, but the stories and histories that soon unfolded before me in the archives and in communication with my narrators pushed me in directions that were simultaneously exciting, unexpected, challenging, and intimidating; they eventually took me far from my initial plans and made me change directions more than once. When I look back, I often think that there were more than enough reasons for this thesis not to happen, at least not in the shape that it did. What made it possible is my meeting people whose encouragement and advice constantly inspired me to move forward.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon that one's interest in particular topics has profoundly personal roots. Political beliefs, sense of identity, experiences of injustice and oppression, love of poetry or the fine arts, collective trauma, or fascination with popular culture can all open avenues for one's choice of intellectual inquiry. Many colleagues that I met in various humanities disciplines partly orient themselves towards the topics with which they can personally connect. In this regard, my own research is no exception. To some extent, my collecting of "materials" for this dissertation started during the long months of my summer school vacations in the 1990s and the early 2000s, when I was sent from Kyiv, where I lived with my parents, to the Transcarpathian village where my father was born and had his large extended family. The air was fresher there. The village was situated in the picturesque valley between the soft forested slopes of the Carpathian Mountains and time passed slower than in the hectic capital.

This pastoral picture of Transcarpathia is probably the one that a tourist from a city, an outsider, would remember after a short visit. However, after repeated and prolonged stays in the village, this was not how I remembered it and it was certainly not how local people perceived their environment — there was no romantic awe or laid-back attitude. The rhythms of rural life were excruciating. In winter, with its short days and cold weather, long evenings were passed in front of the TV. In summer there was no rest. Late spring and summer was the time of enduring agricultural work — planting, weeding, fertilizing and hay harvesting were followed by potato picking and a second hay harvest. Nowadays most of these works are mechanized and require less time and effort than before, but in the 1990s a mowing machine or a haulm remover were rarities for rural households, and all these tasks were performed manually and involved collective family collaboration. The most burdensome was the period of hay harvesting, as our hayfield was far away from home, in the mountains. It usually started in the beginning of July. By around six o'clock in the morning, the whole family was already in the body of an old DIY tractor assembled by my grandfather. Together, we slowly crawled up the dangerously broken clay mountain roads, which were in desperate need of repair. It took us over an hour to arrive at the field, which we had to reach early so that the mowers — my father, grandfather and uncle — could start mowing while the grass was still wet with dew. The night's sleep was short, especially for the women who had to cook for a crowd of six to ten people before departing. My grandmother woke at three to bake bread and make other

necessary preparations, and after we came back from our daily toil she immediately went to tend to the cattle, eventually falling into bed around nine. This was our schedule for at least four weeks with Sundays and religious holidays as our only short and much-needed breaks. If young children were older than three or four years old and there were no elderly members of a family to take care of them, they were also taken to the field, so that an able-bodied person, usually the mother, did not have to stay behind and could also tend to the harvest.

When we turned from our side street into the main village street, other tractors full with people would be heading in the same direction. It seemed like the whole village was mobilized to storm the “green sea” with scythes, pitchforks and rakes. The “Green sea” was a euphemism, a local joke that mocked the idea of summer vacations for local people. Spending one’s yearly holiday at a sea resort was unimaginable to most people in rural Transcarpathia, who instead spent their summers mowing grass and tending to the hay. Every year without exception my uncle, a local vet, and my father, a medical doctor in Kyiv, spent their vacation contributing physical labor to the needs of the family household. This dedication always surprised me — out of forty-five days of vacation, not a day was spent on pleasure or travel beyond their home village in Transcarpathia, and most of these days were filled with arduous physical work of some kind.

I was both an insider and an outsider in the community. As a blood relative I experienced a deeper sense of inclusion than, for instance, my mother, who was a complete stranger without “roots” in the local community. Having “roots” in kin, land and place was crucial, existential. It gave identity and value to a person, made them “one of us” instead “one of them.” The belonging to a certain “clan” reached deep into history and memory, and personalized the space as clans settled in particular streets. For the locals, my family (and I) had a “street” clan name that was different from my official surname, as did other families. This dual naming system — traditional and official — seemed to have worked for everyone. The official name was for official purposes and the clan name had a profoundly richer symbolism and meaning. The clan name was the container of locally valuable information: reputation, marriages, kinship, and “roots.” It was a source of knowledge about a person and a proof of their belonging.

This lineage granted the privileges of acceptance and trust in the community. However, the status of an “insider” came with heavy responsibilities. Labor was certainly one of the main requirements. Labor and belonging were intertwined through the idea of care for the common household, from which everyone benefited and to which everyone had to contribute.

Anthropologists Florian Znaniecki and William I. Thomas made similar observation about Eastern European rural communities in the late 19th and early 20th century, suggesting that the contribution of individual labor was an obligation that linked a peasant to the farm and the household. It was subsequently elevated to the status of being a virtue and any failure to contribute sufficiently resulted in condemnation and public shaming. It was odd to find signs of continuity of the psychological implications of these rural relations in the post-Soviet Ukrainian countryside that went through processes of political, economic and social “modernization” after its inclusion into the USSR in the aftermath of the World War II.

And yet the traces of these familial relations of labor and their psychological effects were still in place in the early twenty-first century. As a partial outsider — “a guest from the city” — I was not explicitly required to perform my duty of work, like other younger members of the family were. There was a silent message that I could always refuse to join the group in their collective effort if I felt like it. But my own internalized sense of inclusion rendered such refusal impossible, triggering feelings of guilt, selfishness and even betrayal. In the end it seemed more comforting to adopt the local ways, to suppress my dissatisfaction that my summer holidays seemed reminiscent of forced labor, and to accept that “pitching-in” was a familial prerequisite. The experience of these psychological effects helped me to understand the ways in which a sense of belonging is shaped in these communities and how it works. This sense of duty and belonging summoned back not only my father, who now had equally strong “roots” in the city with his job and family, but thousands of seasonal workers whose only “true” home was in Transcarpathia. As they arrived from last jobs — in Russia, the Czech Republic, or on the construction sites in Kyiv — they enjoyed little rest before they themselves joined the caravan to the “green sea.”

It does not seem contradictory to start the discussion of seasonal labor migration with the issue of belonging. The return is as important in seasonal migration as the departure. Arguably, it is even more important, since seasonal work is intended to be short-term, and is not directed towards geographical relocation, but to obtaining resources that can be brought back home. Seasonal migration from Transcarpathia used to be and still is a widescale movement, the history of which spans for at least one and a half centuries. Even though there are suggestions that the emergence of labor migration from the region was a result of post-Soviet

unemployment,¹ I claim that this rural tradition of subsidiary support of the households did not stop during the Soviet period. On the contrary, it flourished under the conditions of labor shortages and the “informal liberalization” that harbored the potential for financial gain.

In my dissertation I focus on Transcarpathia as a region of departure of seasonal workers in the period of Transcarpathia’s “sovietisation,” which I suggest to approach as a period of the region’s inclusion into administrative and political body of the USSR and its integration into state-centralized economic activities. I conceptualize this region as a space of interactions between pre-communist values, practices and social structures, and Soviet techniques of central governance and, more broadly, Soviet culture. I am interested in seasonal migration as not only a sign of cultural continuity in the region, but also as a practice that transformed during the second half of the twentieth century while adapting to Soviet economic realities, serving itself as an adaptation strategy of the post-war Transcarpathian communities to the changing political and economic regimes.

*

In recent decades, the scholarly view of internal migration in the Soviet Union has undergone significant changes. Few would nowadays advocate that the Soviet “passport society”² succeeded in controlling and structuring geographical movements of its citizens throughout its seventy-year history. This totalizing perspective was challenged by the close examination of labor relations and actual practices of human mobility. The arguments against the effectiveness of the Soviet passport/*propiska* (registration permit) system involved emphasizing managerial hiring tactics, driven by labor shortages and high turnover on the shop-floor, which pushed managers to ignore instructions regarding the rejection of applicants without proper documents. The post-Stalinist decriminalization of job-changing and absenteeism in 1956 further enabled workers to exercise their right to change jobs freely.³ Indeed, the passport system limited movement to the biggest cities and attempted to constrain migration opportunities for unpassportized rural dwellers, but these measures largely failed to determine human mobility in the USSR, as is demonstrated by ample statistical and archival materials

¹ See, for example, Oksana Kychak, *Trudova migratsiia ukraïntsiiv Zakarpattia na pochatku XXI stolittia ta ii kul’turno-pobutovi naslidky* (Uzhhorod: Hrazhda, 2012).

² Mervyn Matthews, *The Passport Society: Controlling Movement in Russia and the USSR* (Westview Press, 1993).

³ Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and de-Stalinization: The Consolidation of the Modern System of Soviet Production Relations, 1953-1964* (Cambridge ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 35.

illustrating that people “migrate[d] from area to area in total disregard of the planners’ intentions.”⁴

A more nuanced and conceptually sophisticated vision of the Soviet internal migration was recently suggested by Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch. They propose to approach migration as an interplay between governmental “migration regimes,” conceptualized as top-to-bottom “policies, practices, and infrastructure designed to both foster and limit human movement,”⁵ and less predictable “migration repertoires,” which stem “from below” and “could coincide with but also be in opposition to migration regimes even when they partook in the technologies (postal system, railroads, telegraph, telephone [...]) on which the regimes depended.”⁶ In my dissertation, I will rely on the conceptual framework of intertwined state-supported regimes and autonomously pursued repertoires of migration as I explore one type of internal migration in the USSR, namely seasonal labor migration, which emerged thanks to economic configurations, local initiatives and the activities of state labor distribution agencies.

Seasonal migration as a practice of delivering subsidiary income to the rural economy has its history in both the Hungarian kingdom, of which Transcarpathia was a part, and the Russian Empire. In the Russian Empire, *otkhodnichestvo*, or literally “going out” [from the village], was a widespread practice that significantly increased after the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and the development of railroad networks. The primary aim of the enterprise was to obtain additional earnings that were needed to maintain a household. As Gijs Kessler underlined: “All varieties of labor migration extended the economic base of the peasant household during the off-season of the agriculture cycle, thereby guaranteeing the peasant household’s existence as an economic unit.”⁷ *Otkhodniki* were employed as seasonal agricultural workers (for plowing, seeding, mowing, harvesting) by the affluent landowners, or they were hired as resin or tar makers, lumbermen, fishermen, hunters, etc. Local crafts (*mestnyie promysly*) were spread across the Russian territories and attracted particular numbers of rural seasonal migrants every year.⁸

⁴ Alec Nove, *Soviet Economic System* (London; Boston: George Allen & Unwin Publishers Ltd, 1980), 205; On migration in the Soviet Union see also: Robert A. Lewis, Richard H. Rowland, *Population Redistribution in the USSR: Its Impact on Society, 1897-1977* (Praeger Publishers, 1979); Peter J. Grandstaff, *Interregional Migration in the U.S.S.R.: Economic Aspects, 1959-1970* (Duke University Press; Durham, North Carolina, 1980); Ann Hegelson, “Geographical Mobility - Its Implications for Employment,” in *Labour & Employment in the USSR*, David Lane, ed. (New York University Press, 1986), 145-176.

⁵ Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia’s Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 3.

⁶ Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land*, 5.

⁷ Khais [Gijs] Kessler, “Krest’ianskaia migratsiia v Rossiiskoi Imperii i Sovetskom Soiuze: Otkhodnichestvo i vykhod iz sela,” in *Sotsial’naia istoriia: Ezhegodnik 1998/99* (Moscow, 1999), 309-10.

⁸ Nikolai Shakhovskii, *Sel’skokhoziaystvennyye otkhozhiye promysly* (Moscow, 1896).

Entire regions were known for specific specializations of *otkhodniki*.⁹ Thus, as Danilov suggests, Yakhnobolsk region was famous for its painters, carpenters and joiners.¹⁰ N. Vladimirskii similarly observed that most of the *otkhodniki* from the Kostroma region were construction workers.¹¹

These professional specializations were consolidated over time and did not cease to exist after the Revolution. As Danilov claims in his study of the rural *otkhod* in the Soviet Union in 1920s, they revealed “the long historical development of trades as one generation passed on skills to another.”¹² While analyzing pre-communist *otkhod* in Russia, Siegelbaum and Moch suggest that “seasonal labor had integrated itself into the Soviet economy as an adaptive compensatory practice, compensating industry for what was fast becoming a congenital shortage of labor, and compensating rural dwellers for inadequate income from farm activity.”¹³ This statement supports Sheila Fitzpatrick’s observations that in the USSR, seasonal migration outside of *kolkhoz*, whilst maintaining membership in the collective farm, constituted the strategy of “maximization of advantages.”¹⁴ The seasonal workers’ wages supplemented the rural household income in cash, while the membership in *kolkhoz* provided the family a number with a number of privileges, such as a private plot.

While economic factors were of high importance for the peasants whose incomes from their allotments did not support their household needs, the decision to migrate was not purely economic. Jeffrey Burds, author of a comprehensive work on the cultural history of *otkhodnichestvo* in Imperial Russia, suggests viewing these peasant activities as stretching beyond sheer economic necessity, emphasizing “the varying roles of politics, culture, kinship and religion to their rightful place alongside economic factors.”¹⁵ The interplay between the

⁹ Compare to regional specialisation of seasonal construction workers in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France: Manuela Martini, *Bâtiment en famille: migrations et petite entreprise en banlieue parisienne au XXe siècle* (Paris: CNRS, 2016), 71-2.

¹⁰ V. P. Danilov, “Krest’ianskii *otkhod* na promysly v 1920-kh godakh.” *Istoricheskie zapiski* 94 (1974): 102.

¹¹ N. Vladimirskii, *Kostromskaia oblast’. Istoriko-ekonomicheskii ocherk* (Kostroma, 1959), 190.

¹² Danilov, “Krest’ianskii *otkhod* na promysly v 1920-kh godakh,” 90.

¹³ Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land*, 81.

¹⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 165.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Burds, *Peasant Dreams & Market Politics: Labor Migration and the Russian Village, 1861-1905* (Pittsburgh, Pa: Univ of Pittsburgh Pr, 1998), 6. On seasonal migration in the Russian Empire see also Joseph Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia* (University of California Press, 1985); Barbara Alpern Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work, and Family in Russia, 1861-1914* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Gijs Kessler, “Krest’ianskaia migratsiia v Rossiiskoi Imperii i Sovetskom Soiuze: Otkhodnichestvo i vykhod iz sela,” in *Sotsial’naia istoriia: Ezhegodnik 1998/99* (Moscow, 1999); Olga Smurova, *Nezemledelcheskii otkhod krest’yan v stolitsy i iego vliianiye na evoliutsiyu obraza zhizni goroda i derevni v 1861-1914 gg. (Na materialakh Sankt-Peterburga, Moskvy, Kostromskoi, Tverskoi i Yaroslavskoi guberniy)*, [Dissertation manuscript], 2005; Timur Valetov, “Migration and the Household: Urban Living Arrangements in Late 19th- to Early 20th-Century Russia,” *The History of the Family*

economy and culture also contributed to shaping seasonal migration under the Soviet regime. I intend to reconstruct this double context in my thesis, grounding my focus in rural Transcarpathia as one of the regions with the highest rates of otkhod in the USSR. Transcarpathia also had a history of seasonal migration that dated back to at least the post-emancipation period in nineteenth-century Austria-Hungary. Local otkhodniki carried out seasonal agricultural works and tree felling, and these traditions played a significant role in the local rural populations' adaptation to the processes of sovietization of the region after 1945. Under the Soviet regime, the repertoires of seasonal labor migration in Transcarpathia underwent certain structural and symbolic modifications, but they also harbored cultural continuities and were instrumental in reproducing economic traditions of the local rural communities, as well as their identity.

It is difficult to impose strict chronological boundaries on the ongoing social processes, such as patterns of migration, which resisted the imposed changes of economic life and spatial mobility, but at the same time adjusted, mutated, and changed their meaning under the new policies and regulations of movement. In an attempt to follow the historical development of the migration practices in question, which reproduced themselves through the decades of Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's leadership and beyond, the broad chronology that I cover does not strictly adhere to the established periodization of the Soviet history. I approach seasonal migration from Transcarpathia as a post-war *longue durée* phenomenon that, although affected by the changes in the state policies, was a consistent occurrence throughout, at least, the final three decades of Soviet history. For terminological purposes I will use the term "late socialism," which Alexei Yurchak defines as "the period that spanned approximately thirty years, between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s, before the changes of perestroika began."¹⁶ This chronological framework suits my purposes due to several reasons. Firstly, it allows me to retrace the establishment of the patterns of seasonal labor migration from rural Transcarpathia to eastwards directions from almost around the time of their inception, presumably in the early to

13, no. 2 (August 1, 2008): 163–77; Gijs Kessler, "Migration and Family Systems in Russia and the Soviet Union, Nineteenth to Twentieth Century," in Dirk Hoerder and Amarjit Kaur, *Proletarian and Gendered Mass Migrations: A Global Perspective on Continuities and Discontinuities from the 19th to the 21st Centuries*, Studies in Global Social History 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2013). For more on seasonal migration in the early Soviet Union see Douglas R. Weiner, "Razmychka? Urban Unemployment and Peasant Migration as Sources of Social Conflict," in *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*, eds. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinovitch, and Richard Stites, 144–155 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Gijs Kessler, *The Peasant and the Town: Rural-Urban Migration in the Soviet Union, 1929–1940* (European University Institute, 2001).

¹⁶ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 20.

mid-1950s. The archival evidence of seasonal mobility is still very scarce for that decade, but oral histories help to partly restore the gap. The narratives provide a subjective view on the process, but they confirm that the movement existed even before it was documented. Secondly, a broad chronology is essential in order to follow the transformations in the state's attitudes and policies regarding seasonal migration and the effects thereof, and to capture its dynamics throughout this extended period.

In the Soviet scholarly tradition, post-war seasonal migration has not received substantial attention. As an activity commonly deemed by officials as spontaneous, unregulated and even disruptive with regards to centralized governance, seasonal migration was perceived, politically and academically, as a minor irregularity that hardly deserved serious research. It was repeatedly stated that seasonal migration would cease to exist once the Soviet economy overcame its inefficiencies. Since seasonal migration lacked political legitimacy in the eyes of the Soviet rulers, it also lacked justification on the academic research agenda. So, while migration as a general topic was revived in the Soviet academia in the 1960s, seasonal migration, as well as forced migration, failed to enter the discourse. The first attempts to break this academic silence occurred in the 1980s, when a number of sociological journals accepted some, mostly polemical papers on the topic, for publication. This discussion culminated in the work of Maria Shabanova who devoted her dissertation in sociology to seasonal migration, followed by several articles and a book in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union interrupted the momentum in researching seasonal migration and it took some time before the topic was taken up by historians.¹⁷

Western sovietologists of various disciplines started addressing seasonal migration in the 1980s, above all through studying articles from Soviet periodicals, such as *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*. Seasonal workers made episodic appearances in the pieces devoted to the topic of "second economy" as a shadow labor force that operated on the margins of the official Soviet economy. However, these articles did not address the issue specifically and, even when they did,¹⁸ the analysis lacked contextualization and focus due to the scarcity of available sources. Once again, after the fall of the Soviet Union, scholarly interest in seasonal migration in the now non-existent country faded away for over two decades. Lewis Siegelbaum's and Leslie Page Moch's pioneering book

¹⁷ See T. Ya. Valetov, "Samoorganizovannyye sezonnyie brigady (shabashniki) v SSSR v 1960-1980-kh gg.: ekonomicheskiye i sotsial'nyie aspekty," *Ekonomicheskaya istoria. Obozrenie*, no. 14 (2008).

¹⁸ See Patrick Murphy, "Soviet Shabashniki: Material Incentives at Work," *Problems of Communism* 34, no. 6 (1984): 48-57.

on migration processes in the USSR, *Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century*, contains what I believe is the first entry on the history of seasonal migration in the late Soviet Union published in English.

Thus, seasonal migration in the late Soviet Union is still an uncharted territory. As a consequence, it is not my intention to fill all the gaps regarding this social phenomenon. The localized angle that I have chosen requires geographic and thematic boundaries. These borders enable me to produce a more nuanced conceptualization of the social practice that was both included in the functioning of the Soviet economy and served as an economic adaptation practice of individuals and communities. In my dissertation I try to follow the individuals as social actors who were making their choices within the opportunities and constraints of the late socialism. Their lives, experiences and cultural memories of the pre-communist past, as well as the new realities of the Soviet present created the context for the re-evaluation of old traditions and the selection and reproduction of viable social scripts.

In taking a specific geographic point of departure, I intend to clarify the meanings that seasonal labor migration had for a group of people that seems rather small on a national scale. The advantage of such an approach is that it helps to diversify the possible meanings and practices of seasonal migration in the USSR, and contributes to the historical de-homogenization of the Soviet lives. Urban *shabashniki* and seasonal workers from Transcarpathia did not have similar motivations, experiences and explanations for their temporary work. In Ukraine, only a few rural districts engaged in consistent seasonal migration, which makes them culturally and socially distinct. I should note, however, that this thesis is not a clear-cut contribution to microhistory or regional history, since I turn to broad processes within the Soviet economy and select industries. Nonetheless, I do intend to interpret seasonal migration from the point of view of personal connections, collaborations, and exchanges as informal social spaces that facilitated and supported the arrangements of seasonal labor in the late Soviet Union.

My analysis draws on two contrasting kinds of sources: archival records of labor recruitment from Transcarpathia in the late 1950s through 1970s and oral histories of the direct participants of the migration process, that is migrant workers in agriculture, forestry and rural construction, whose labor experiences started in the decade after the post-war annexation of Transcarpathia by the Soviet Union and, in many cases, ended with the demise of the Soviet Bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The records on labor recruitment and seasonal mobility which I discovered in the Central State Archives of Higher Authorities and Governance of Ukraine

(TSDAVOU) and the regional State Archive of Zakarpats'ka oblast' (DAZO) are still largely untapped by both Ukrainian¹⁹ and Western historians.

The official records suggest that there were attempts to centrally regulate migration and distribute labor power between the areas with labor reserves and the areas with high labor demand. However, oral accounts challenge the perceived impact of the labor recruitment campaigns on the migration process. Besides confirming the general scholarly view concerning the inefficiency of these state initiatives and their inability to provide significant manpower for the understaffed industries, the oral stories revealed the spaces of workers' agency, their deep mistrust to the organizations of centralized recruitment, and their profound reliance on privately established manager-worker connections, developed in circumvention of the official inter-regional employment schemes. Analysis of both official and personal narratives consequently provides a much more complex picture of seasonal migration.

For my research, I focused on the group of seasonal workers that I prefer to call "the first generation of seasonal workers." It should immediately be stressed that for the mountainous region of Transcarpathia this type of labor migration was not limited to the Soviet regime. People from Transcarpathia also participated in migration flows from Eastern Europe to the Americas, both North and South, in the late 19th and the early 20th century.²⁰ Day labor and seasonal manorial labor was a Transcarpathian peasants' reality up until World War II. Thus, in pre-communist Transcarpathia various migration tactics were rather common. I thus attach the name "first generation of seasonal workers" to the cohort of workers who participated in the creation of new patterns of labor migration from Transcarpathia to other Soviet regions. These were developed in the framework of Soviet regulations and practices of movement, and the legal and economic possibilities of the new Transcarpathian state-socialist condition. The subsequent generations of seasonal workers, who were often drawn into the trades of their fathers and grandfathers, found these channels of migration already in place and consequently experienced the pressure of participation. Focusing on the "first generation," thus, allows me to reconstruct this specific repertoire of migration in its creation, with special attention on the

¹⁹ On agrarian resettlement from Ukraine see Kateryna Zhbanova, "Organizovani pereselennia v pivdenni oblasti Ukraini's'koi RSR u 1955-1967 rr.," *Sivrians'kyi litopys*, no. 2 (2015): 163-170; Kateryna Zhbanova, "Organizovani pereselennia za mezhi Ukraini's'koi RSR u drugii polovyni 1950-kh – seredyni 1980-kh rr.," *Sivrians'kyi litopys*, no. 3 (2015): 130-139. On labour recruitment from Ukraine see K. Yu. Luk'yanets', *Organizovani nabory robotnykiv v URSR ta yikh pereselennia (druga polovyna 1940-kh – seredyna 1980-kh rr.)*, [Dissertation manuscript] (Kyiv, 2018).

²⁰ See, for example, Vadim Koukouchkine, *From Peasants to Labourers: Ukrainian and Belarusian Immigration from the Russian Empire to Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

independent initiatives of workers and those official state measures which attempted to control their movement and labor.

The majority of those interviewed for this thesis were born between 1933 and 1941, the eldest being born in 1924 and the youngest in 1949. In total, I interviewed twenty-two men and ten women in two Transcarpathian villages — Keretski in Svaliava district and Krychovo in Tiachiv district.²¹ All the men had been seasonal workers. Some of the women had also performed seasonal work, while others were the wives of seasonal migrants. The interviews were open-ended. I invited the narrators to tell the stories of their childhood, their work and home experiences, their attitudes to the changing political realities, and their perception of the choices they had made. In the spring of 2014, when I started my research, over twenty years had passed since most of these people ended their migratory way of life. They had silently retired without a mark in their work record books that would reflect the decades of their labor travels. Twenty years is a long time for human memory. Beyond mere forgetting, the way people remember can itself change under the layers of changing impressions and agendas, as well as the challenges and problems of the present. Oral history is an intricate source that can be deceptive and even dangerous if perceived naively, but if it is carefully contrasted with other sources and “voices” of the past, neither of which can claim historical objectivity, it can affect the grand narrative to the point of its subversion. In the case of seasonal migration in the USSR, the “voices” of the migrants themselves were completely repressed by the state and the media, who mobilized their rhetorical resources to stigmatize labor migrants by dressing them into a particular ideological attire. In the archival records, seasonal labor migrants existed as statistics under the rubric of “disruptive elements”: no one collected their impressions, letters or diaries, or asked them about their experiences of migration. Due to their semi-legal status, migrant workers rarely applied to the courts in matters of labor disputes, as they were anxious to incriminate themselves in the process. They were not members of trade unions. The legal and economic shadow that surrounded them was protected with silence. Oral history in this case ensures the personalized presence of the subjects in question. Their “voices,” however disconnected from the immediate realities of the Soviet past and distorted by the views they acquired while living in the post-Soviet Ukrainian present, is the only way to access their part of the story. Moreover, given the scope of the personalized, informal, and therefore unrecorded,

²¹ The names of the narrators have been changes.

interactions, which penetrated the enterprise of seasonal migration in the late USSR, it is the only way to access the story at all.

However, the reconstruction of the internal travels of the workers constitutes only part of my task. The terms “internal migration” or even “seasonal migration” are hardly sufficient to reflect the meaning of the practices in question.²² They place emphasis on movement and lead away from the actual labor practices performed by migrants. Meanwhile, the category of labor was central for building trust and longstanding relationships with employers, and for the construction of the migrants’ self-image and, indeed, their very identity. Therefore, I will methodologically ground my research in discussions regarding the social category of labor relations characteristic of the Soviet Union and show that migrant workers’ labor practices represented an alternative to the general model of the labor process in the USSR. The complex web of the official techniques of the Soviet organization of labor, notoriously porous, inconsistent, and haphazard,²³ fostered the capacities for their potential subversion and realization of the workers’ self-interests. These practices allowed the migrants to turn their labor into a marketable asset, which transformed the precarious enterprise of seasonal labor migration into a profitable endeavor for several generations in a select region.

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This dissertation consists of three parts. Each part explores a broad topic regarding seasonal migration. Part I commences with a chapter which traces the practice of seasonal labor migration in Transcarpathia from the pre-communist period. I then proceed to discuss the Soviet regimes of migration and their implementation in Transcarpathia after World War II, and follow the process of the Soviet government’s shaping of thinking about seasonal labor migration as a social problem that requires restriction and regulation. Against the background of the official doctrines, I discern the repertoires of seasonal mobility from Transcarpathia, which developed under the influence of the growing economic demand for seasonal labor in such economic sectors as agriculture, rural construction, and to a lesser extent forestry, but unwounded contrary to the political aspirations of the state. As a result, inter-regional

²² See Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, “Transnationalism in one country? Seeing and not seeing cross-border migration in the Soviet Union,” *Slavic Review* 75, no. 4 (2016): 970-986.

²³ On labour process in the USSR see, for example, Alec Nove, *Soviet Economic System* (London, Boston: George Allen & Unwin Publishers, 1980); David Lane, *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.* (Brighton, Sussex; Boulder, CO: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987); Bob Arnot, *Controlling Soviet Labour: Experimental Change from Brezhnev to Gorbachev* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988); Bruno Grancelli, *Soviet Management and Labor Relations* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988); Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and de-Stalinization: The Consolidation of the Modern System of Soviet Production Relations, 1953-1964* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

connections of labor distribution were established without the participation of the centralized bodies of power. I claim that the active response to these economic demands, demonstrated by the Transcarpathian rural dwellers, resulted in the cultural acceptance of seasonal migration as a part of the local communities' way of life in the pre-communist period. I suggest that seasonal labor migration served local populations as an adaptation practice to the new economic and institutional realities brought about by sovietisation.

Part II is broadly dedicated to the theme of “work”. It contains two chapters in which I explore two industries that welcomed male seasonal labor — forestry and construction. I decided to discuss each of these industries separately in order to compare the development of labor shortages in their specific contexts and to reconstruct the juridical frameworks which defined seasonal workers' legal rights and conditions of employment during late socialism. It is important to clarify seasonal workers' status with regards to law in order to understand the nature of their employment, and in order to grasp their position in Soviet society in its complexity and inconsistency. Hiring seasonal workers was not illegal, but the details of the contracts, including the wages, were negotiated informally, and the reached agreements often overstepped legal regulations. I suggest that the informality of the labor relations between the workers and their direct employers was crucial with regards to the production of financial and material incentives. Together with the necessity of maintaining a work-home balance, these incentives triggered the development of the labor organization within the migrant brigades that presented an alternative to the common Soviet labor practices, as well as a violation of the official labor regulations.

Part III consists of two chapters and is designed to explore the theme of “culture”. Chapter five reconstructs the discursive (and occasionally visual) representations of seasonal migrants in the official Soviet press. I claim that the rhetorical fashioning of seasonal migrants as social deviants was anchored in the official doctrine of socialist morality. The stigmatization of seasonal migrants served the political function of scapegoating: shifting the blame for problems in the Soviet economy to particular individuals who presumably did not play by the rules and thus disrupted the work of the otherwise well-calibrated economy. I then contrast these projected images with the migrant workers' own understanding of their work and productive contribution. I claim that their redefinition of the category of “socially useful labor” allowed them to negotiate their perceived identity as workers.

With the last chapter I bring seasonal migrants back home to their local communities. I consider these communities as spaces where the motivations for migration were shaped by specific local values and consumption demands. By addressing these issues, I challenge the assumption that seasonal labor migration was predominantly influenced by the economic necessity and suggest that what was perceived as economic necessity was, in fact, culturally conditioned. The desire to own an individual house remained the motivational engine behind seasonal labor migration even when more employment opportunities opened in rural Transcarpathia. The dialectical effect of seasonal migration was the perpetuation of pre-communist value systems, as well as traditional gender order.

PART I. MOVEMENT

2. MIGRATION AS PART OF SOCIAL LIFE IN TRANSCARPATHIA BEFORE INCLUSION INTO THE USSR

As this dissertation's main geographical point of reference is Transcarpathia, it is worthwhile to commence with the introduction of this region. Such introduction will not only serve for familiarization with the region — a necessary first step to start the discussion about the nuances of local seasonal migration — more importantly, it will argue in favor of choosing Transcarpathia as a case study of seasonal migration in the late Soviet Union. The full understanding of the circumstances of seasonal outmigration from Transcarpathia during Soviet times requires taking a look back and tracing local patterns of migration before the establishment of the Soviet rule. In this chapter, therefore, I will give a short sketch of the state of the Transcarpathian economy before its integration into the USSR and explore this region's pre-communist traditions of migration.

TRANSCARPATHIA IN THE LATE 19TH and EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Contemporary Transcarpathia, or Zakarpattia in Ukrainian, is the westernmost region of Ukraine, with an official administrative name Zakarpats'ka oblast'. Occupying 12,800 square kilometers, it serves as a borderland with four European countries: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. It lies on the south-western slopes of the Carpathians where they descend into the Pannonian plain. According to some calculations, the geometric center of Europe can be located in Transcarpathia.²⁴

Historically, Transcarpathia was not a clearly defined administrative territory until the end of the First World War. Before that time, it was divided between four counties of Hungary: Ung, Bereg, Ugosca, and Máramoros. It was a multiethnic and multireligious region with the majority of Slavic origin population — Rusyns (also Ruthenes) — who observed Eastern Rite (Orthodox) Christianity.²⁵ In 1918, the Treaty of Saint Germain forced Hungary to cede Transcarpathia to the new state of Czechoslovakia.

²⁴ Peter Jordan, Mladen Klemenčić (eds.), *Transcarpathia – Bridgehead or Periphery: Geopolitical and Economic Aspects and Perspectives of a Ukrainian Region* (2004), 19.

²⁵ Jordan, Klemenčić, *Transcarpathia – Bridgehead or Periphery*, 23.

It is hard not to agree with Peter Jordan and Mladen Klemenčić who claim that “Transcarpathia ... has been a politically and economically peripheral land, in fact continually a borderland, a relatively poor region that has never surpassed a quite modest level of economic development.”²⁶ Roughly 80 percent of Transcarpathia is covered with mountains and this fact has largely influenced the territorial distribution of the population and the structure of employment. Agriculture has always been economically paramount for the region. With only modestly developed industry, the region was largely oriented towards local trade and subsistence. Peasants remained the largest strata of the population until the end of World War II, which was little changed during the Soviet economic reforms.

While the aim of this chapter is to outline the role of seasonal migration in the history of Transcarpathian rural communities, it hardly can be done without placing it in broader economic and social contexts — both before and after the establishment of the Soviet regime. For this reason, I will suggest the overview of economic conditions in the pre-communist Transcarpathia and link them to locally developed migration practices. This overwhelmingly rural region relied on the land as a source of material existence, therefore agrarian reforms and changes in land use are going to be a recurring point of discussion in this chapter. With agricultural transformations as the main point of contextualization, I will also refer to the industrial development of Transcarpathia to complement the economic profile of the region, especially in the nineteenth century.

During Hungarian rule, the Rusyn majority that made up to two thirds of local population was rural, undereducated, and poor. By contrast, most of the property, industries and administrative positions were occupied by privileged Hungarian and German businessmen and landowners. At the beginning of the twentieth century, over 80 percent of the local working population — 227,900 people — were engaged in farming, while only 12.6 percent worked in industries.²⁷ The abolition of serfdom in 1848 did not result in the rapid development of Transcarpathian agriculture, nor did it make room for the peasants to significantly change their economic standing, as had happened, for instance, in Bohemia.²⁸ Instead, some forms of feudalism continued in Transcarpathia.

²⁶ Jordan, Klemenčić, 97.

²⁷ V. P. Kopchak, S. I. Kopchak, *Naselenie Zakarpat'ya za 100 let: Statistiko-demograficheskoe issledovaniie* (L'vov: Vushcha shkola, 1970), 16.

²⁸ Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire. A New History* (Cambridge Massachusetts: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 422.



Figure 1. Transcarpathia as part of the Hungarian Kingdom before 1918. On the map the region is called Subcarpathian Rus', the name it received while being a part of Czechoslovakia

The laws that came with the abolition of serfdom did not favor the peasants. Land reform was not carried out immediately and the new regulations of land use were adopted only gradually during the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁹ According to the new law, the peasants were expected to pay their landlords to be liberated from their feudal duties, by contributing an additional tax to the state treasury.³⁰ The landlords managed to establish almost full ownership over previously common lands, which complicated the peasants' access to forests and pastures, and frequently pulled them back into the relationship of feudal duties in exchange for the use of these resources. As a result of so-called "commissions" (consolidation of small scattered plots), the landlords tended to increase their land property by means of seizing peasants' holdings. The peasants were subsequently allotted land of the lowest quality.³¹ The landless peasants who rented arable plots from the lords paid either in kind or in cash, but were also often requested to fulfill labor obligations. Thus, the inconclusiveness of the land reforms contributed to the persistence of feudal relations in the Hungarian countryside, including Transcarpathia, which lasted until the beginning of the twentieth century. It was accompanied by an increase of land

²⁹ V. I. Il'ko, "Z istorii obezzemelennia selian Zakarpattia v drugii polovyni XIX st.," *Naukovi zapysky Uzhgorod'skogo derzhavnogo universytetu* XXIX (1957): 63–91.

³⁰ Jordan, Klemenčić, *Transcarpathia – Bridgehead or Periphery*, 102; Il'ko, "Z istorii obezzemelennia selian Zakarpattia," 65.

³¹ V. I. Il'ko, "Z istorii selians'kykh rukhiv na Zakarpatti v drugii polovyni XIX st.," *Naukovi zapysky Uzhgorod'skogo derzhavnogo universytetu* XXXVI (1957): 19.

scarcity among the peasants due to the population growth and further fragmentation of the land allotments among family members.³²

Consequently, by the end of the 1890s, the majority of arable land still belonged to large landowners,³³ who owned over 45 percent of all land in Transcarpathia. By contrast, peasants owned only 1.5 percent of the region's land,³⁴ with over half of all peasant households comprising less than 2 hectares. Peasants did not have a chance to substantially increase their land holdings and the productivity of small farms was lower than that of the large landowners due to their primitive tools and extensive farming techniques.³⁵ Many travelers, and even Hungarian officials, remarked on the striking poverty of rural Transcarpathia. Recurrently hit by natural disasters, such as floods, and plagued by famines (as in 1805, 1829, 1844-47, 1853-54 and 1900-02) and epidemics, the region was known as the poorest in Austria-Hungary.³⁶

In 1919, the Czechoslovakian government initiated land reform that declared all large land holdings exceeding a certain size to be the property of the state.³⁷ This land, confiscated from Hungarian and German landowners in Transcarpathia, was distributed rather slowly and was often given to Czech and Slovak peasants rather than to indigenous Rusyn peoples.³⁸ By 1928, over fifteen thousand Rusyn peasants requested land from the state and were refused on the basis of their lack of agricultural tools.³⁹ Instead, the government sold confiscated estates to private buyers. For instance, the former domain of the Austrian Count Schönborn-Buchheim, the largest landlord in Transcarpathia who owned 132,000 hectares of agricultural and forest lands, was sold to the "Latorica" corporation that belonged to Czech, French and Belgian businessmen.⁴⁰ This only perpetuated the rental relationship between land owners and peasants.⁴¹

In the second half of the nineteenth century industry gained a certain momentum. Sawmills that existed already from the late eighteenth century expanded as local and foreign businessmen from Austria, Germany, France and America began renting or buying forests from landowners

³² Il'ko, "Z istorii obezzemelennia selian Zakarpattia," 82.

³³ Il'ko, 82.

³⁴ Kopchak, Kopchak, *Naselenie Zakarpatt'ya za 100 let*, 17.

³⁵ Jordan, Klemenčić, *Transcarpathia – Bridgehead or Periphery*, 102.

³⁶ Jordan, Klemenčić, 102.

³⁷ Jordan, Klemenčić, 105; G. V. Bozhuk "Orendni vidnosyny v sil'skomu gospodarstvi Zakarpattia 1919 – 1939," in *Sotsialistychni peretvorennia na Zakarpatti za 25 rokiv radianskoi vlady*, Uzhhorod, 1970, 178.

³⁸ Jordan, Klemenčić, *Transcarpathia – Bridgehead or Periphery*, 105.

³⁹ Bozhuk, "Orendni vidnosyny v sil'skomu gospodarstvi Zakarpattia," 179.

⁴⁰ Jordan, Klemenčić, *Transcarpathia – Bridgehead or Periphery*, 105.

⁴¹ Bozhuk, "Orendni vidnosyny v sil'skomu gospodarstvi Zakarpattia," 179-181.

and the Church.⁴² Transcarpathian wood was rafted and sold in the Hungarian lowlands. Additionally, several chemical factories were built that used local wood as raw material. There were salt, kaolin and touchstone mines, but metallurgy developed rather slowly. There were also glass producing and iron processing factories. Despite the region's richness in wood, the wood processing industry did not receive much investment in Transcarpathia, leaving the region predominantly as a source of raw materials. In total, there were 180 enterprises in Transcarpathia in the beginning of the twentieth century. They were mostly concentrated in the cities and were rather small. Only three of them had over 1,000 workers, and 53 had over 20 workers.⁴³ At the same time, small scale artisanal production flourished in the Carpathians. The rural population tended to produce its own clothing and basic utensils from wood, but there were also traditions of carpet weaving, wood carving, ceramics and leather manufacturing.⁴⁴

After World War I, despite the improvement in infrastructure, industry experienced significant decline. The post-war political settlements rearranged territorial borders of the former Austria-Hungary and disturbed economic connections. The Czechoslovakian government set tariff thresholds and re-shaped previous trade exchanges with Hungary.⁴⁵ Consequently, Transcarpathian sawmill firms found themselves cut off from the Hungarian cities that traditionally bought their produce and were forced to look for new markets for their output. The sawmill industry reached its pre-war output only in the late 1920s. Chemical industry was similarly in decline, as were glass producing and iron processing firms, which faced competition from enterprises in Bohemia and Moravia.⁴⁶ The industries in Transcarpathia took another blow during the Great Depression of the 1930s, which resulted in unemployment in the cities and brought malnutrition and hunger.⁴⁷

In general, the hierarchical divisions between peasants and landowners, as well as between workers and owners of the scarce pre-war industrial enterprises in Transcarpathia were continuously reproduced along ethnic lines. Social and economic privileges were granted to Hungarian and, later, Czech land owners and entrepreneurs, while the local Rusyn population was, on the whole, deprived of institutional and economic resources that would ensure its

⁴² *Ukrainskii Karpaty: Istoria*, ed. Iu. Iu. Slivka (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1989), 97.

⁴³ V. I. Netochaiev, "Kolonial'na polityka uhors'kogo burzhuaznogo uriadu na Zakarpatti v kintsi XIX i na pochatku XX st." *Naukovi zapysky Uzhgorod's'kogo derzhavnogo unversytetu* XXXVI (1957): 41.

⁴⁴ Jordan, Klemenčić, *Transcarpathia – Bridgehead or Periphery*, 103.

⁴⁵ Jordan, Klemenčić, 103.

⁴⁶ Jordan, Klemenčić, 106.

⁴⁷ Jordan, Klemenčić, 106.

material well-being and social mobility. The industrial working class constituted a small minority. In the beginning of the twentieth century only 14.5 percent of the indigenous population was involved in the industrial and transport sectors.⁴⁸ Although workers were mostly recruited from among the peasants, rapid proletarianization did not happen in Transcarpathia. Agrarian production maintained the dominant status in the region, occupying roughly 70 percent of its population.⁴⁹ Provided the desperations of land scarcity and land loss, Transcarpathia's growing population⁵⁰ made up for cheap labor. Left with little choice, workers had to settle for salaries that were 1.5–2 times lower than in central regions of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania, and which frequently failed to meet living costs.⁵¹ Taking into account the extremely poor working conditions and eleven hour working day,⁵² industrial employment was the last resort for peasants who had either lost their land or lacked sufficient agricultural equipment.



Figure 2. Transcarpathia as a part of Czechoslovakia, 1918–1939. On the map represented as Subcarpathian Ruthenia

⁴⁸ Netochaiev, “Kolonial’na polityka ugor’skogo burzhuaznogo uriadu na Zakarpatti,” 41.

⁴⁹ Netochaiev, 41.

⁵⁰ The natural population increase in 1881-1890 superseded the corresponding index of the previous decade by more than four times. The total amount of population did not fall despite massive emigration, but instead increased by 85,7 thousand people. In Kopchak, *Kopchak Naselenie Zakarpat’ya*, 157.

⁵¹ *Ukrainskii Karpaty: Istoriia*, 117.

⁵² *Ukrainskii Karpaty: Istoriia*, 99-100.

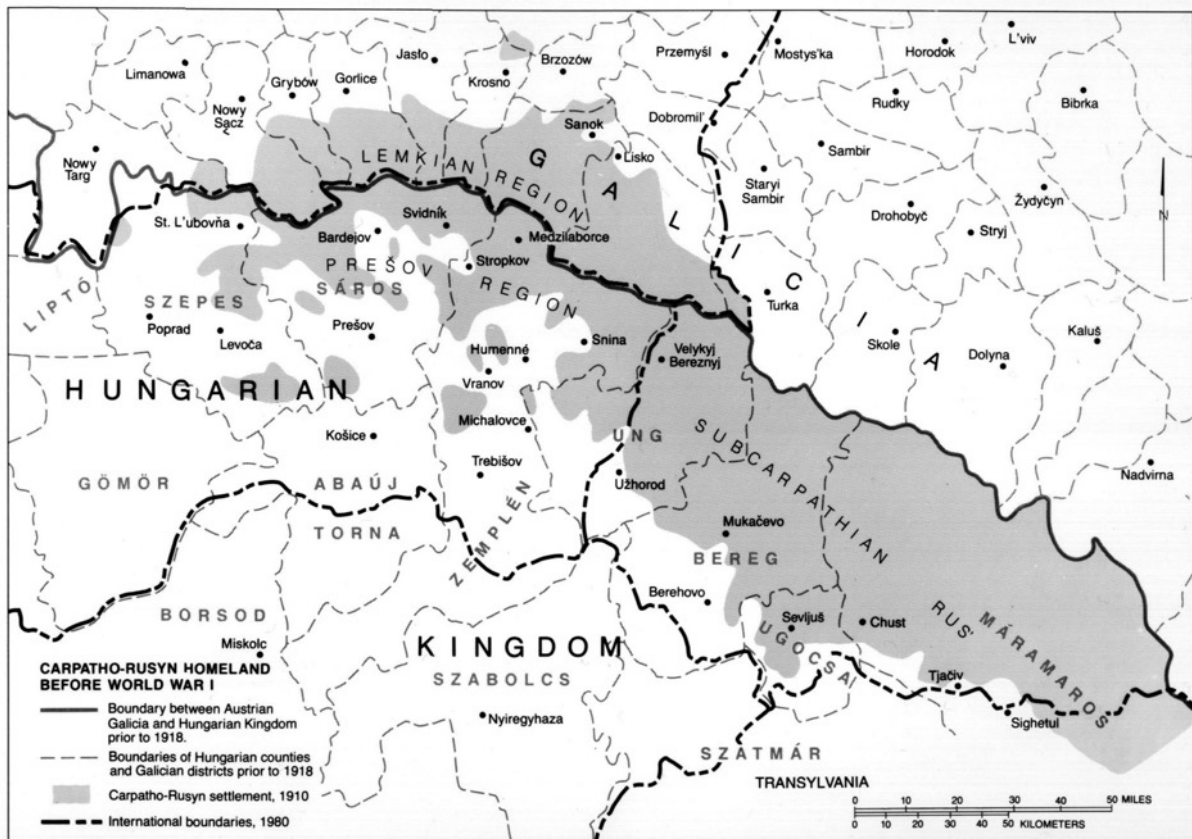


Figure 3. Rusyn population distribution across the European borders before World War I

Another factor that kept Transcarpathian cohorts of industrial workers from growing was the peasants' cultural attachment to the land. Ownership of the land, besides being a source of subsistence, was linked to ideas about status and psychological and material security. Until the seventeenth century, it was common for extended families to own and work land collectively in order to avoid and division of the plot, meaning that the land was woven into familial obligations and dependencies, tying individuals to their local farmsteads and communities. This cultural disposition in itself could have been an obstacle to full-time employment in industry. Assuming these values were shared by both more well-off, successful farmers and those who found themselves in an increasingly vulnerable situation, keeping a land plot, as small as it was, was the core desire of a peasant. This would explain the fact that many Transcarpathian industrial workers did not break their ties with their homes in the countryside.⁵³ Furthermore, the various types of local and even transatlantic migration in the late nineteenth century, were shaped by conflicting needs: on the one hand, to keep (or buy) land and, on the other hand, to accept the fact that this can only be achieved by obtaining additional resources elsewhere. This

⁵³ *Ukrainskii Karpaty: Istoriia*, 98.

brings us to the next step of the discussion: the migration processes that took over Transcarpathia in the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

MIGRATION

In the late nineteenth century, the whole of East-Central Europe became a place of accelerated migration and emigration. This movement predominantly engulfed the masses of recently emancipated peasants who found themselves in a new net of economic dependencies. The division of land between the landlords and the peasants, which followed the abolition of serfdom, left the latter with small land holdings which the majority had no possibility to enlarge. In 1895, 71.6 percent of land plots in Transcarpathia were smaller than 5,7 hectares.⁵⁴ The abolition of serfdom triggered a social diversification of the peasants, but the number of middle-size households (up to 57 hectares) only reached 27.6 percent, while most of the land in the region — over 45 percent of the total size — belonged to the large landlords (less than 1 percent of land holders).⁵⁵ Two-thirds of the dwarf-holdings (less than 3 hectares) in Hungary before 1914 belonged to the non-Magyars,⁵⁶ and Transcarpathia suffered the most acute land hunger in the empire.⁵⁷ The inheritance patterns that presumed the division of the land between heirs led to both the further fragmentation of dwarf-holdings and the strengthening of peasants' attachments to the land. All things considered, the land itself was not a sufficient means of subsistence for the majority of the peasants. The combination of these circumstances, on the one hand, land hunger, landlessness and demographic growth, and on the other hand, the newly obtained personal freedom, pushed peasants out of their villages to look for additional income elsewhere.

The growing need for a supplementary income incentivized peasants to search for waged agricultural or industrial work. The numbers of rural proletariat and semi-proletariat (peasants who owned small plots of land but still needed additional income in order to survive) increased each year.⁵⁸ In Transcarpathia, 42 percent of rural dwellers supported their small farms with

⁵⁴ Kopchak, Kopchak, *Naselenie Zakarpat'ya za 100 let*, 17.

⁵⁵ Kopchak, Kopchak, 17.

⁵⁶ Ivan Berend and Györgi Ránki, *Underdevelopment and Economic Growth: Studies in Hungarian Social and Economic History* (Budapest, 1979), 91.

⁵⁷ *Ukrainskie Karpaty: Istoriia*, 99.

⁵⁸ Ewa T. Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: The Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 25.

the resources earned elsewhere.⁵⁹ The predominantly low-scale, dispersed industries failed to absorb the growing population in the towns and villages, so that an overwhelming numbers of the Transcarpathian peasants chose to explore the other employment options.

One of them was transatlantic migration. For almost one hundred years, emigration to the Americas became the most frequent response to the pressures of economic and social insecurity in Europe.⁶⁰ In the period between 1846 and 1940, about 55–58 million passengers from this region left European ports to cross the Atlantic ocean.⁶¹ Transcarpathian peasants, enticed by the letters from neighbors and relatives who were already earning precious dollars, set out on the road to the German ports to board a ship to American shores.⁶² Alternatively, they were recruited by the representatives of the American factories or shipping staff who sometimes worked as middlemen between the potential European workforce and American industries, circulating placards and brochures about improved work and life prospects in America.⁶³ Peasants in Transcarpathia saw their neighbors returning back from America in expensive clothing,⁶⁴ with money in their pockets, or sending remittances to pay their loans and acquire more property, and swiftly made plans to follow suit. Local officials reported that many peasants left to search for work abroad in hope “to earn enough money to buy out the mortgaged land from the lender” or to “avoid starvation and despair.”⁶⁵ As the Hungarian Minister of Finance at the time noticed, overburdened by taxes and haunted by frequent crop failure, rural overpopulation, and unemployment, the Transcarpathian peasants eagerly responded to the call of the foreign recruiters.⁶⁶

The estimation of the total number of émigrés from Transcarpathia is problematic considering

⁵⁹ Morawska, *For Bread with Butter*, 26.

⁶⁰ For the estimates of migration – both seasonal and transatlantic – see Ewa T. Morawska, “Labour Migration of Poles in the Atlantic World Economy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (1989): 237-272; Vadim Koukouchkine, *From Peasants to Laborers: Ukrainian and Belarusian Immigration from the Russian Empire to Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); Jon Aluas, “Industrialization and Migration of the Transylvanian Peasantry at the End of the Nineteenth and the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *East European Quarterly* 4 (1975); Ladislav Tajtak, “Slovak Emigration and Migration in the Years 1910-1914,” *Studia Historica Slovaca* X (1978); Julianna Puskas, “Emigration from Hungary to the United States Before 1914,” *Studia Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* (1975); Ivan Berend and Györgi Ranki, *Hungary: A Century of Economic Development* (New York, 1974).

⁶¹ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration to Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 7.

⁶² Peter Paul Magocsi, *Our People: Carpatho-Rusyns and Their Descendants in North America* (1993), 14; A. M. Shlepakov, *Ukrains'ka trudova emigratsia v SSHA i Kanadi (kinets' XIX – pochatok XX st.)* (1960), 32-33.

⁶³ V. I. Il'ko, *Zakarpats'ke selo na pochatku XX stolittia (1900-1919)* (L'viv: Vydavnytstvo un-tu, 1973), 130.

⁶⁴ Il'ko, *Zakarpats'ke selo*, 131.

⁶⁵ Il'ko, *Zakarpats'ke selo*, 129.

⁶⁶ Il'ko, 129.

the partiality and inconclusiveness of the available data.⁶⁷ Calculations suggest that at least 225,000 people left Transcarpathia for the USA between the late 1860s and 1914.⁶⁸ For a region as small as Transcarpathia, it was a dramatic exodus, prompting one early twentieth century commentator to lament that the emigration of 1869-80 threatened to depopulate Transcarpathia since “half of the peasantry” left for the USA.⁶⁹

These concerns were fuelled by economic and military agendas, since emigration was predominantly undertaken by young men. Indeed, the majority of those who left were men of 20–30 years old.⁷⁰ Only 13 percent of the self-identified Ruthenians who came from Austria-Hungary in the years 1900 to 1914 were women and children.⁷¹ This aspect of gender selection was a defining characteristic for the early stage of labor migration to North America from all East-Central Europe and also in those parts of the present day Ukraine and Belarus that belonged to the Russian Empire.⁷² The men who arrived in North America in search for work were either single or recently married. Vadim Kukushkin has remarked on the predominance of married emigrants (57 percent), who arrived in Canada in the late nineteenth century without their families, suggesting that they had no intention for permanent emigration.⁷³ Many of them expected their stay to be temporary, until they earned and saved enough money to either establish an independent household or to ensure the subsistence of their young families by acquiring land back home. Nevertheless, the data on return migration shows that regardless of their initial intentions, the majority settled, with only 17 percent finding their way back. Furthermore, many of those who returned emigrated again in later years.

During World War I the outflow of migrants to North America stopped, resuming only after the stabilization of the political situation on the continent. Initially, the post-war emigration differed in social composition from the “first wave”, since it was mostly women and children who were joining their husbands and fathers overseas.⁷⁴ However, the total emigration figures never reached those of the pre-war years. Among the limiting factors were the ethnic

⁶⁷ Kopchak, Kopchak, *Naselenie Zakarpattia za 100 let*, 149, 151; *Ukrainskie Karpaty: Istoriia*, 101; “Nauka,” March 15, 1912; Magocsi, *Our People*, 17.

⁶⁸ Magocsi, *Our People*, 17. On Rusyn emigration from Transcarpathia see: Kopchak, Kopchak, *Naselenie Zakarpattia za 100 let*, 149-161; L. G. Kozlovsk'a, *Rozvytok narodnogo gospodarstva Zakarpats'koi oblasti za roky radianskoi vlady* (1959); G. Maier, “Zakarpats'ki ukraiintsi na perelomi stolit,” *Zhovten' i ukraiinska kul'tura. Zbirnyk materialiv z mizhnarodnogo symposium* (1968); A. M. Shlepakov, *Ukraiinska trudova emigratsia v SSHA i Kanadi (kinets XIX – pochatok XX st.)* (1960).

⁶⁹ O. Badan, *Zakarpatska Ukraina. Sotsial'no-ekonomichniy narys* (1929), 117.

⁷⁰ Kopchak, Kopchak, *Naselenie Zakarpattia za 100 let*, 153.

⁷¹ Magocsi, *Our People*, 16.

⁷² Koukouchkine, *From Peasants to Labourers*, 41.

⁷³ Koukouchkine, 41.

⁷⁴ Magocsi, *Our People*, 16.

immigration quotas implemented by the USA in 1924, and the period of economic depression in the 1930s. Considering these obstacles, some migrants changed their countries of destination and during 1920–30, migrated to Canada, Argentina and Uruguay in larger numbers than before the war.⁷⁵

While emigration to North America attracted hundreds of thousands of East-Central European persons during the fifty years before World War I, migration inside and between the provinces of Austria-Hungary chronologically preceded the transatlantic migration. In Transcarpathia, short and long-distance agricultural migration was a traditional means of supporting the rural economy even before 1848.⁷⁶ After the abolition of serfdom, the army of rural proletariat grew each year, fuelled by land hunger, increasing social differentiation among the peasants and further fragmentation of land plots. Those who chose not to embark upon long distance emigration, very often considered less remote options of employment. They found work in nearby villages and counties or travelled further into the Hungarian plains, where landlords, wealthy peasants and leaseholders hired workers for both seasonal and year-round work.

Landless peasants hired themselves out to work on manors where they also usually lived. They worked as cart-men, shepherds, horsemen, house servants and field workers. However, even larger numbers of peasants were mobilized during the times of seasonal agricultural work. Seasonal workers were often farm owners (or belonged to a family of farm owners) themselves and were hired as day laborers and seasonal workers for plowing, sowing, mowing, harvesting, threshing, etc. The pay varied from county to county and was especially low in the mountainous northern part of Verkhovyna with poor soil quality. Therefore, as the harvest time approached, many Transcarpathian peasants rushed to the lowlands and further towards the Hungarian plain, where they knew field workers were in high demand. A contemporary ethnographer has noticed that

Rusyns have their largest earnings from reaping and mowing, especially those who live in the middle and northern parts [of Transcarpathia]. *Verkhovyntsi* [people from Verkhovyna — the highlands], as soon as they have planted their potatoes and sown their oats, which usually happens in the second half of May, go down in large caravans, to the Magyars [*na madiary*], for earnings [*na zarobitky*]. Oftentimes they stay there until the second half of August. Then they

⁷⁵ Magocsi, 18-19.

⁷⁶ V. I. Il'ko, "Do pytannia rozsharuvannia selianstva Zakarpattia v drugii polovyni XIX st." *Naukovi zapysky Uzhgorod's'kogo derzhavnogo universytetu* XXX (1957), 42.

return back and tend to their oats.⁷⁷

Other sources mention that seasonal workers could return back much later — even in late October or early November.⁷⁸ This suggests that families that had their own land to work would not sacrifice all able-bodied members for seasonal hired labor, since the hired worker's obligations to the landlord would interfere with the need to tend to their own harvest and household. Thus, the family decided who would leave for hired work and who would stay at home. It is fair to assume that the first choice would fall on the strongest members of the family because physical strength ostensibly equated higher earnings. Another matter that was taken into consideration was gender. Men's wages were on average higher than those of women and children.⁷⁹ This was also affected by the traditional gender role of women in East-Central European peasant societies, who were primarily expected to bear children, manufacture clothing, perform housekeeping duties and tend to the farm chores.⁸⁰ However, the allure of augmenting the household income with help of the employment of women often tended to overpower the cultural prescriptions of family "dignity."⁸¹ Consequently, women became increasingly involved in seasonal migration as well. As men started traveling longer distances, women, usually unmarried girls, followed in their steps. From neighboring Galicia women were known to travel in groups of mothers, daughters, cousins and village neighbors to the places in Russia and Germany that hired "female" workers in the fields.⁸² Even though child labor was least valued on the market, parents often sent them to work as well. In 1913, children younger than 15 years old in Kolodne village did not show up for the beginning of the school year because they were still working in the Hungarian fields.⁸³

The earnings of seasonal workers contained an important in-kind supplement. In Ung county, a worker received 32 kronen, 62 measures of grains, 2 kilos of salt and 8 litres of *palinka* for their work from 15th of May until the end of September.⁸⁴ Mowers used to receive a set percentage of hay, which varied from county to county, as well as daily food.⁸⁵ In 1901, a Hungarian landlord from Nitra county hired 80 Transcarpathian workers to crop 497 holds of land (≈214.5

⁷⁷ Il'ko, "Do pytannia rozsharuvannia selianstva Zakarpattia...", 42.

⁷⁸ Il'ko, *Zakarpats'ke selo*, 76.

⁷⁹ Il'ko, 76.

⁸⁰ I. F. Symonenko, "Do istorii simeinoi obshchyny na Zakarpatti," *Materialy z etnografii ta khudozhniogo promyslu*, no. 1 (1954): 8.

⁸¹ Morawska, *For Bread with Butter*, 49.

⁸² Morawska, 53.

⁸³ Il'ko, *Zakarpats'ke selo*, 77.

⁸⁴ Il'ko, 74.

⁸⁵ Il'ko, 75.

ha). For their work they received 6 kronen from a hold,⁸⁶ and also grains, 160 kronen for palinka, 20 kronen for vinegar and 160 kronen for other food stuffs.⁸⁷ In kind payment in grains was especially valued, since wheat was not cultivated in Transcarpathia. It was usually substituted with corn, which in this area yielded better harvests.

The demand for seasonal labor constantly fluctuated. In 1880, the year of famine, landlords in Hungary lowered their rates.⁸⁸ By contrast, at the beginning of twentieth century, the demand for seasonal labor was so high that the recruitment of agricultural workers was institutionalized. The local administration was instructed to enlist seasonal workers for the most important harvesting months according to the demands of employers. Each year these intermediaries recruited and directed large cohorts of contracted laborers from Transcarpathia to the state and private farms in Hungary. In 1905 this agency alone hired 7,158 workers, in 1906 — 11,550, in 1907 — 10,782.⁸⁹ The preliminary contracts for summer work were made with the peasants during winter. In 1913, the demand for workers grew so much that the local administration had to inform some employers that they would not be able to hire agricultural workers for the upcoming year because the available ones were already booked earlier that autumn.⁹⁰ The concerns of local landowners also grew. The wages they offered were lower than those in Hungary proper, so they struggled to find workers who would commit to their rates. Coupled with mass emigration to America, the preferences of Transcarpathian agricultural workers to sell their labor outside their own region pushed reluctant local employers to increase their pay.⁹¹

The second largest segment of economy (after agriculture) that attracted crowds of local seasonal workers was timber felling and rafting, both traditional crafts in Transcarpathia. The first mention of timber procurement for constructing floats to raft salt date back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁹² In the late nineteenth century, forestry in Transcarpathia gained momentum. Most of the timber was rafted down the rivers to woodworking plants in Hungary and West Europe, as well as to the local sawmills and chemical plants. In the 1870-80s, the yearly number of seasonal workers employed in logging and rafting reached 20-30,000.⁹³ The

⁸⁶ Hold – Hungarian unit of area measurement. 1 hold = 0.57 ha = 1.0665 acre

⁸⁷ ІІ'ко, *Закарпато́ке село*, 76.

⁸⁸ ІІ'ко, “До питання розшарування селянства,” 42.

⁸⁹ ІІ'ко, *Закарпато́ке село*, 80.

⁹⁰ ІІ'ко, 78.

⁹¹ ІІ'ко, 81.

⁹² M. P. Tyvodar, *Etnohrafiia Zakarpattia: istoriko-etnografichniy narys* (Uzhgorod: Grazhda, 2011), 147.

⁹³ Tyvodar, *Etnohrafiia Zakarpattia*, 149.

“first class woodcutters” from the Máramoros county were known to regularly work in Romania, Transylvania, Bosnia, Bukovina, and Galicia.⁹⁴ As we will see, this practice of self-organization would later be revived by Transcarpathian peasants in the completely different social and economic setting of the Soviet Union, as soon as they pinpointed the geographical directions for the application of their skills and identified opportunities to safely conduct their work.

Thus, since the mid-nineteenth century, long and short distance movement became a habitual practice for thousands of Transcarpathian peasants. In addition to the neighboring provinces and areas in Hungary and Transylvania, they were prepared to travel as far as Western Austria, Germany, France, and Belgium,⁹⁵ and even across the Atlantic. The peasants learned about the work that was available from the experiences of their neighbors and relatives, the rumors they heard at the village market, and from the travelling merchants, foreign recruiters and other seasonal workers at the manors in Hungary and Austria. With all this information circulating between and within the communities, the peasants were keenly aware of the earnings they should expect in different places for various kinds of work,⁹⁶ and selected the most plausible options: “...harvesting for a Rusyn is [a time] of benefit. There is no surprise then that so many of them trek out [of their homes].”⁹⁷

SEASONAL MIGRATION IN THE SYSTEM OF LOCAL VALUES

The Soviet historical tradition invariably interpreted the social situation of Transcarpathian peasants during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century through the prism of victimization. Poverty, hunger, landlessness, the remnants of feudalism, the “agrarian overpopulation,” and omnipresent “exploitation” fitted perfectly with the dogmatized Soviet version of Marxist historical analysis and were presented as undeniable causes of migration. These economic circumstances did put enormous pressures on the peasantry, however their overall representation as victims of these circumstances has robbed them of any kind of agency or any kind of choice. They certainly had choice. The first evidence of this is in the variety of

⁹⁴ Il'ko, *Žakarpats'ke selo*, 79.

⁹⁵ *Ukrainskie Karpaty: Istoria*, 101.

⁹⁶ On the differences in pay rates in East Central Europe, see: Morawska, *For Bread with Butter*, 45; Berend and Ranki, *Hungary: A Century of Economic Development*, 82-84; Il'ko, *Žakarpats'ke selo*.

⁹⁷ Yu. Zhatkovych, “Zamitky etnografichni z Ugors'koi Rusy,” *Etnografichni zbimky* 2 (1896). Accessed 14.10.2017 at <http://litopys.org.ua/rizne/etno02.htm>.

migration and employment options that were available. Peasants could either work in industry, wait for the summer and capitalize upon several months of harvesting, or try their luck overseas. Undoubtedly, these decisions were not made lightly and involved calculation, planning, risk-taking and family discussion.

Seasonal migration, as a choice, was neither accidental nor predetermined. In order to understand the reasons for this particular choice and grasp its social value, we ought to go beyond strictly economic explanations. The usual justification for seasonal migration in most cases was the pursuit of “additional income” by actors who found it impossible to earn a sufficient income in their places of permanent settlement. However, this explanation is insufficient if we want to understand the particular purpose of this activity: what exactly was this supplementary income for? For the daily needs of peasants whose own crops were not sufficient to ensure their survival and the survival of their families? Or, was it to earn funds to be invested? If so, what kind of investment were these individuals hoping to make? These questions call for a change in methodological perspective and require us to enter the social world of a peasant in the late nineteenth century.

As previously stated, the gradual penetration of the money economy into rural communities stimulated the search for waged work. Taxes, mortgages and loans were supposed to be paid in cash and the cash could be obtained from either trade or individual labor. For a large number of peasants, seasonal work became the means of obtaining these sums. In 1900 alone, the temporary workers that were hired to work in the fields, forests and on the enterprises of Count Schönnborn’s dominium received a total payment of 1,200,000 kronen.⁹⁸ Although not all families and villages relied on seasonal migration, by 1900 it became a significant element of rural economic existence. In the beginning of the twentieth century, there were over 90,000 families in Transcarpathia that made a share of their income from hired labor.⁹⁹ Considering the transformations that the money economy was bringing into the traditional peasant way of life, seasonal workers were sociocultural “diffuse agents”¹⁰⁰ who were still tightly connected to rural social and economic organization, but also operated on the margins of nascent capitalist relations in the region.

Regardless of the infusion of money into the rural economic life, however, it did not have the

⁹⁸ Il’ko, *Žakarpatske selo*, 75.

⁹⁹ Il’ko, 72.

¹⁰⁰ Morawska, *For Bread with Butter*, 39.

immediate transformative impact on the traditional attitudes and mores of peasants. While money entered economic interactions and became an indispensable element of household survival, perceptions were still rooted in the values system that assigned exclusive importance to property rather than to income. The economic functions of property at the time were intertwined with its social expression: “the economic situation is socially important only in view of the social standing which it gives and ... it is property which expresses the social side of economic life.”¹⁰¹ In the mind of an emancipated peasant, land was the primary asset that ensured his socioeconomic existence. Land was a cultural and social priority and the economic center that unified the family and supported its structure. William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, who analyzed the internal organization of the peasant groups at the turn of the twentieth century, observed that:

...there is no equivalence possible between land and any other economic value; they are incommensurable with each other. Land is a unique value, and no sum of money can be too large to pay for it; if there is bargaining or hesitation, it is only because the buyer hopes to get elsewhere or at another moment [buy] more land for the same money, not because he would rather turn the money to something else.¹⁰²

According to this principle, land was a desirable object even if its “objective” economic value was not worth the investment. Considering the economic ethos of the peasants at the time, the income that came from wage labor was often viewed as a reserve to augment property ownership. Thomas and Znaniecki noticed a tendency “to make money pass from a lower into a higher economic class,”¹⁰³ in other words, to be initially viewed as a property of a defined kind rather than a liquid asset, or else, capital for potential enterprise development. Money earned outside had qualitative differences from the income derived from farming, be it selling a cow or home produce at the local market, and was often kept separately, waiting to fulfill the purpose for which it was intended.¹⁰⁴ Paradoxical as it may seem, this purpose-oriented attitude to money often meant that with the increase of income the standards of living of the family could drop, at least for a time.¹⁰⁵

The relationships inside the family were also mediated by the relation to land, its management and the form of its ownership. Up until the mid-seventeenth century, Rusyns in Transcarpathia

¹⁰¹ William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 166.

¹⁰² Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 190.

¹⁰³ Thomas and Znaniecki, 165.

¹⁰⁴ Morawska, *For Bread with Butter*, 42.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 169.

were known to have extended families that could consist of 10–20 blood relatives that lived under the same roof. These familial groups were usually formed by a parental couple and their married sons (occasionally daughters) with children, and were united by common property, household and consumption.¹⁰⁶ The head of the family was in charge of managing the family property and distributed the chores and represented the family in the community. After the pater familias' death, married brothers sometimes continued to maintain the household together, but usually they built separate houses where they would then live with their own immediate families. These would be built next to the father's house, so over time houses would accumulate where patrilineal blood relatives resided.

This form of close settling was also shaped by the taxation laws that imposed taxes on farmyards rather than on houses. As people sought to minimize the taxes they paid, by the seventeenth century some farm yards could consist of up to ten houses of relatives and more.¹⁰⁷ The Soviet ethnographer I. F. Symonenko observed that the remnants of this tradition were still preserved in a number of Transcarpathian villages in the mid-twentieth century. During his ethnographic expedition in 1946, he established that the custom of patronymic settlement was maintained by generations of familial groups who believed that they had one common male ancestor, whose name the group usually bore.¹⁰⁸ In Danylovo village, for instance, the largest name group had 80 farmyards out of a total 207. In Krainykovo village, the largest kin group had 26 farmyards, resulting in this group being held in the highest esteem in the village.¹⁰⁹ Even if they were scattered around, however, these familial groups maintained internal connections through collective work and using common property, such as pastures and forests. The group was also a source of social power in the village community depending on its reputation, wealth and respectability. The social and economic existence of an individual was thus heavily determined by his or her relation to the family and to the group.

Up until the mid-nineteenth century, common familial property and land ensured the social unity of the extended familial group and made it identifiable among other groups. At the same time, a farm was not an association of individual share holders, to which family members could make separate claims. It established the basis for rights and obligations between the members

¹⁰⁶ Tyvodar, *Etnohrafiia Zakarpattia*, 250.

¹⁰⁷ Tyvodar, 250.

¹⁰⁸ I. F. Symonenko, "Perezhytki patronimii i brachnyie otnoshenia u urkaintsev Zakarpatskoi oblasti," *Sovetskaia etnografia*, no. 1 (1947).

¹⁰⁹ Symonenko, "Perezhytki patronimii...", 76.

and the group:

The members of the family have essentially no economic share in the farm; they share only the social character of members of the group, and from this result their social right to be supported by the group and their social obligation to contribute to the existence of the group. The farm is the material basis of this social relation, the expression of the unity of the group in the economic world. The rights and obligations of the members with regard to it do not depend upon any individual claims to property, but upon the nearest of the social relation to the group. ... land property is evidently the main condition of the social standing of the family. Without land, the family can still keep its internal solidarity, but it cannot act as a unit with regards to the rest of the community; it ceases its social power.¹¹⁰

After the emancipation of the peasantry, the process of partitioning the lands between their heirs intensified. By the end of the nineteenth century, land increasingly became the individual property of nuclear or two-generation families.¹¹¹ However, certain customs still applied to the land of the “grandfathers and great grandfathers”: it was not to be passed on to non-family and, if sold, this could only to the members of the homonymous group. Land was only sold to outsiders if the members of the group refused to buy it, which was a rare occurrence. It was more common that land would be passed on to the homonymous group, who then divided it between its members.¹¹² In this way, the connection between property and the kin group was preserved even though the individual owners were changing.

Individual property ownership and the right to administer it did not separate a nuclear family from the kin group completely. Overall, household management still depended on the economic activities and solidarity of the whole group. A villager from Transcarpathia, interviewed in 1946, recalled that the members of a homonymous group always carried out some of the work collectively: be it harvesting, threshing, or dung disposal.¹¹³ In a number of villages a kin group came together to transport wood and stones for construction work, to pug a house, to plow, weed the crops, make hay, and to conduct labor-intensive activities.¹¹⁴ As Symonenko observed, these traditions of collective help inside kin groups was firmly in place even when Soviet power was established in the region:

On the land of Shymon I. from Danylovo village ... there were 350 square meters of rye. On

¹¹⁰ Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 159, 162.

¹¹¹ Symonenko, “Do istorii simeinoi obshchyny na Zakarpatti” (1954), 12.

¹¹² Symonenko, 12.

¹¹³ Symonenko, 13.

¹¹⁴ Symonenko, 13.

July 25, 1946, 25 women and girls — the relatives of Shymon — came to cut the corn. All of them came with their sickles and wore clean clothing. They gathered cheerfully, in a festive mood. After the work the feast was arranged. The next day the reapers headed off to another member of the same homonymous group, then to the third, and so on. Matii Koshan from Krainykovo village had sown 400 square meters of oats. On July 16th, his relatives came and reaped the oats, on July 26 those relatives collectively helped him to thresh them.¹¹⁵

In a traditional peasant household where common property united the family members into a single unit of production, individual work, as illustrated by the mentioned examples, was everyone's compulsory contribution. Working the land was an obligation that did not entitle a family member to anything equivalent to wages or a determined share of the produce, but it did secure their right to expect reciprocal support to the extent that the farm was capable of providing. The peasants' attitudes towards work were thus based upon its mandatory nature, which explains their willingness to perform these activities regardless of their tediousness or difficulty. This outlook was supported by a form of Christianity that condemned laziness and prescribed hard work no matter the outcome.¹¹⁶ As Thomas and Znaniecki pointed out, the acceptance of hard work was also informed by "a particular kind of fatalism." Regardless of the results of their labor, peasants attributed neither success nor failure solely to the applied efforts — whatever the outcome, it was luck or God's will.¹¹⁷ The combination of these social and religious attitudes contributed to the idea of work as an activity that was devoid of any quantifiable value: "It was a value in and of itself; its mere quality bore little or no relation to its practical function."¹¹⁸ Work was perceived as an attribute of human existence, an unquestionable obligation that came with belonging to a peasant family.

Seasonal labor started transforming the economic life of peasants, as well as some of their customary attitudes to work. The wages earned alongside more traditional in-kind payments stimulated the awareness that their work had a functional value and could be translated into a quantifiable award. The peasants' decisions to travel significant distances and endure inconveniences arising from substandard transportation indicate that they made their choices based on economic calculations. As they arrived at the understanding that they could make more money by working harder, they tried to find ways to augment their earnings. They also discovered that the wages for the same agricultural works varied depending on location, and

¹¹⁵ Symonenko, "Perezhytki patronimii...", 80.

¹¹⁶ Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 173.

¹¹⁷ Thomas and Znaniecki, 173.

¹¹⁸ Morawska, *For Bread with Butter*, 42.

on that ground could require higher pay at home if they found the pay too low. Morawska showed that “in some regions of East-Central Europe such farm labor shortages developed by the end of the century that within the fifteen years between 1890 and 1905 the average daily wages of local farm help increased more than 30 percent, and the rates paid to the seasonal (immigrant) workers even more, by 50 to 100 percent, depending on the province.”¹¹⁹

As the peasants developed a greater awareness of the value of their labor, their attitude to work slowly started incorporating new elements: new ideas of gain and benefit guided their efforts to maximize their earnings. However, they did not exert a determining influence on either the peasants’ general economic behavior, or their off-seasonal-work way of life, or the traditional system of familial and communal dependencies and cohabitation. Rather, the old and the new attitudes to work coexisted, being separated geographically and conceptually, each of them attributed to distinct social contexts and granted different (economic) meanings. Seasonal migrants as “diffuse agents” inhabited both the social spaces of waged work and the traditional environment of a peasant farm. They might have earned some income on the side, but they still had the obligation to work the land. The time of their yearly leave did not exceed several months and, as Zhatkovych observed, the migrants tried to postpone their moment of departure until they had finished their work in their fields and always returned in time for their own harvest. Even when their absence from home was prolonged and they had to miss collective agricultural work on their own lands, it did not sever their ties to the farm as their social and economic existence still depended on their family and the familial property. Furthermore, the time and work devoted to the activities off the farm nevertheless maintained an intimate connection to the farm, this connection stemming from the fundamental traditional link between an individual and the family. Thomas and Znaniecki also noticed this persistent link that tied the members of a family to a parental farm:

They have the right to live away from the farm, but they have the obligation to work the farm; and if, later on, they go to work outside, the money they earn is not their own, because the work which they gave for this money was due to the family-farm and diverted from its natural destination. Of course, the collateral branches of the family lose to some extent the connection with the farm, but the connection is only weakened, never absolutely severed.¹²⁰

Seasonal work did enable the possibility for individual gain that could have allowed personal enrichment and economic distance from a larger group of relatives. Yet, the ethnographic

¹¹⁹ Morawska, 44.

¹²⁰ Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 159.

materials on Transcarpathian peasants, however scarce, suggest that migrants' income served as a contribution to familial wealth rather than as a means for individual enrichment. Acquisition and the augmentation of familial property, most of all land, was still the main drive for peasants, both those who migrated and those who stayed at home. Economic individualism in this case applied to the whole family, since the prosperity of the family also ensured social acknowledgement of the individual's hard work and ensured the community's approval, which was valued as highly as economic success.

Thus, in the late nineteenth century seasonal migration firmly entered the economic and social life of Transcarpathian peasants. During the almost one hundred years between the abolition of serfdom in Austria-Hungary and Transcarpathia's inclusion into the borders of the Ukrainian SSR and the Soviet Union, seasonal migration had become a habitual local practice that not only supported the peasants economically, but was also integrated into their traditional way of life. The temporary absence of family members was legitimized by their eventual return and the prospect of augmenting the family wealth. It is quite possible that the necessity to earn a supplementary income was accepted and normalized throughout Transcarpathia to the extent that its economic alternatives, such as employment in the industries, were downplayed. Seasonal migration allowed peasants to react to the new external economic demands and internal economic needs, whilst at the same time retaining the basic elements of their traditional existence, that is their attachment to property and strong familial and communal ties.

These needs, attitudes, traditions and social practices characterized Transcarpathian peasants when they faced a new political power that was about to transform their lives in ways that no other reformer had before. The Soviet state addressed Transcarpathia with its own blueprints for social and economic institutions, which it started implementing shortly after securing its power over the region. However, as the previous sections of this chapter have demonstrated, the region was not a social *tabula rasa* and could not serve as a passive recipient of imported socialist policies. Its cultural background informed the ways in which people reacted to the rapid changes and the tactics they worked out to make the socialist way of life livable. The exploration of these tactics will be the subject of the following chapters. The remainder of this chapter will investigate the state-sanctioned regimes of migration that were imposed on Transcarpathia upon its annexation by the USSR. These regimes created a new framework of constraints, choices and possibilities towards the east, while free movement westwards stopped for half a century.

3. SOVIET MIGRATION POLICIES AND TRANSCARPATHIA_____

INTRODUCTION

After Transcarpathia's inclusion within the borders of the USSR in 1945, the Soviets quickly subjected the region to social and economic integration. Some measures duplicated the policies that structured the entire Soviet Union (nationalization of property, collectivization), while others reflected specific regional policies directed at Transcarpathia as part of the broader region of Western Ukraine. These specific policies were shaped by a particular understanding of the economic potential of the region and its capacity to contribute to the post-war Soviet economic recovery. They also responded to the authorities' ideas of how exactly industries should develop, where, and with what resources. The application of these various policies brought sweeping changes to the social life of Transcarpathia, changes that Soviet historians repeatedly underlined as examples of success of the Soviet socialist system.

However, during the four post-war decades the Soviet policies regarding the territorial development of industries, as well as demographic policies, underwent changes that affected the idea of "regional development". The "extensive" policies of Stalin's industrialization and Khrushchev's agrarian explorations were superseded by the "intensive" economic plans under Brezhnev's leadership that abandoned narrow regional specialization and focused on shifting from labor-intensive to service-oriented industries. The latter aimed at limiting the rigid industrial profiling of the regions and moving towards self-sustainable geographic areas with "complex" production/consumption patterns. The population of Transcarpathia responded to these innovations in ways that the planners and officials had not fully predicted. Many people took the jobs at plants and factories that gradually appeared in both large cities and small towns of the region, and many adapted to the rules of collective farming. Others discovered different possibilities to support themselves and their families economically. They developed life and labor strategies that implied certain social compromises, but at the same time fulfilled the needs and desires of individuals and families.

Migration was one of many complex interactions between the Soviet planners' social intervention techniques and the local communities' tactics of adaptation. The latter assessed contemporary changes and new economic possibilities from the point of view of the local values and traditions that constituted an on-going historical continuum from the pre-communist

times. The triumphant narrative of rapid change and progress employed by Soviet historians to trumpet the post-war transformations in the region tended to veil these continuities by either entirely disregarding them or attributing them to the unfortunate “survivals of the past”. Continuities such as the tight internal connections within rural communities, prevented largescale migration from the Transcarpathian countryside to the urban centers — a problem also faced by other rural regions of the Ukrainian SSR by the 1970s. Paradoxically, it was self-organized seasonal labor migration that served as the “stabilization factor” and made it possible for the rural population to remain in the region. In this chapter, I will analyze the government policies directed towards the management of population movement in the region — the regimes of migration — and the ways in which they changed from the 1950s to the 1970s. I will also discuss how sociologists and policy makers viewed the phenomenon of Transcarpathian seasonal labor migration in the light of their changing views on population management and social and demographic development.

TRANSCARPATHIA JOINS THE SOVIET UNION

For Transcarpathia, the political consequence of World War II was its incorporation into the Soviet Union as a part of the Ukrainian SSR. By the end of October 1944, Transcarpathia was under the control of the Red Army, which was moving westwards and drafting volunteers from the local villages and towns to join the troops. The army has also provided protection for local communist activists to seize power in the region. In a less than a month, at a conference of communist organizations, the founding of the single Communist Party of Zakarpats'ka Ukraine (CPZU) was proclaimed and its central committee selected. In order to legitimize communist political control over the region and establish “the unified centralized power (*vlast'*) of the people in Transcarpathia,”¹²¹ the conference issued a decree calling for the First Congress of the People's Committees to be held on November 26 — just 7 days after the conference. The Congress, held in Mukachevo, was attended by 663 delegates from around the region. It ended with the election of the *Narodna Rada*, the legislative body of Zakarpatska Ukraine, and it issued a manifesto stating that Transcarpathia's popular will was to join its “great mother Soviet Ukraine and exit Czechoslovakia.”¹²² At the same time, members of the Czechoslovakian government led by minister František Němec arrived in Khust at the end of October 1944 and

¹²¹ *Narysy istorii zakarpats'koi oblasnoi partiinoi organizatsii*, Vol. 1 (Uzhhorod, 1968), 302.

¹²² *Narysy istorii zakarpats'koi oblasnoi partiinoi organizatsii*, 304.

tried to establish a Czechoslovakian provisional administration. Their work was disrupted by the activities of the communists, who had the support of the Soviet Army. In the beginning of 1945, Němec and his delegation left Transcarpathia.¹²³ Other rival political forces, such as the Greek Catholic Church, were outlawed by the communists and the CPZU started to implement its own administrative apparatus.



Figure 4. Transcarpathia within Ukrainian borders after 1945 represented as it is called in Ukrainian, *Zakarpattia*



Figure 5. Transcarpathia ("*Zakarpatskaya Oblast*") can be found at the westernmost edge of the USSR

¹²³ *Narysy istorii zakarpats'koi oblasnoi partiinoi organizatsii*, 331-332.

From the rhetorical and political moves made by the CPZU, it was clear that Transcarpathia's joining the Ukrainian SSR was the primary issue on the communists' agenda since autumn 1944. It was repeatedly brought up in speeches at the meetings and in the press. The argument in favor of such unification was based on claims regarding Transcarpathia's millennium-long colonial oppression and its ethnic commonality with the people of "great Ukraine" which had to be "restored." The treaty that officially sanctioned the ceding of Transcarpathia to the USSR was signed on June 29, 1945 in Moscow with representatives of the newly formed Czechoslovak government, and was ratified by the Czechoslovak and the Soviet governments in November that year. Thus, Zakarpatska Ukraine remained a self-proclaimed, formally autonomous status for more than one year, since it was only incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR in January 1946.¹²⁴ According to the general principles of Soviet administrative-territorial division, it was renamed Zakarpats'ka oblast', and the CPZU was absorbed by the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU).

During that short period of nominal autonomy, Narodna Rada primarily established and secured Transcarpathia's western borders, before taking first steps towards the social and economic reorganization of the region. Adhering to Soviet blueprints of economic centralization, it set in motion the processes of confiscation and nationalization of industries, banks and transportation infrastructure that had predominantly belonged to Hungarian, German and Jewish private owners,¹²⁵ while people of German and Hungarian origins were deported from the region as "occupants."¹²⁶ At the same time, the Narodna Rada established trade connections with the Soviet Union and agreed to supply food to the Red Army that resided in the territory of Transcarpathia.¹²⁷

Yet, the question of land was probably the most urgent for a region where the peasants constituted the majority. By late 1945, 77.2 percent of the estimated total of 791,900 of the annexed region's population were peasants.¹²⁸ Its 12,900 square kilometer territory comprised 19.7 percent plowed fields and gardens, 1 percent orchards and berry fields, more than 12

¹²⁴ M. P. Makarov, *Zakarpatska Ukraina: shliach do voz'jednannia, dosvid rozvytku (zhovten' 1944 – sichen' 1946)* (Uzhgorod: Patent, 1995).

¹²⁵ Decree of NRZU about the Transfer of Property Rights from the Former Territorial Corporations and Funds into Property of Zakarpatska Ukraine, DAZO, f. RN17, op. 1, sp. 122, a. 1.

¹²⁶ For more on the deportation of the Jewish population from Transcarpathia during the World War II see Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora: The Jews of Subcarpathian Rus' and Mukachevo, 1848-1948* (Boulder, New York: East European Monographs, 2007).

¹²⁷ *Narysy istorii zakarpats'koi oblasnoi partiinoi organizatsii*, 325.

¹²⁸ DAZO, f. 4, op. 1, sp. 142, a. 6.

percent hay meadows, 14 percent grasslands, 48 percent forest, and 5.3 percent other types of land. Even these sketchy figures show that arable lands were scarce in this predominantly agrarian region. With that said, Transcarpathia was not suitable for cultivating grains; it had greater potential for animal husbandry, forestry and potato and corn cultivation.

The land reform that was announced in December 1944 and was implemented during the following year was reminiscent of the early communist revolutionary slogan “land — to the peasants.” According to the Narodna Rada’s decree, all the land confiscated from the Hungarian landlords, churches, monasteries and the “enemies of the people,” among whom were the collaborators with the fascist regimes, was to be first nationalized and then transferred to Red Army volunteers and to landless and land-poor peasants.¹²⁹ The collectivization of the land was not implemented immediately in Transcarpathia. However, this was hardly a sign of benevolence of the self-proclaimed communist authorities. Firstly, these authorities sought popular support, and there was no better way to win over the peasantry than to allocate land. Secondly, it would be legally dubious to organize collective farms without the land having been previously owned by peasants, who, in theory, were supposed to unite their individually owned plots to establish collective agricultural households — *kolkhozes*. It would be also a practically difficult task, since not only the productivity of the unmechanized agriculture in the region was low, but there was also a desperate lack of professionals and managers who could guide the process of organization and operation of collective farms. Finally, the fact that the land was transferred to peasants’ (temporary) personal ownership meant that it would not stay idle.

Meanwhile, some elements of centralized governing of agriculture were introduced early on. The peasants were not allowed to dispose of the fruits of their labor as they wished. In the same fashion as in the Soviet Union, it was now forbidden to sell, buy or rent the land or to trade harvested products. In July 1945 the Narodna Rada issued a decree that obliged the peasants of Zakarpatska Ukraine to deliver compulsory supplies of grain, meat, potatoes, milk, hay and wool.¹³⁰ The quotas of supplies were tailored to individual groups of peasants and the prices were fixed. At the end of the summer of 1945 the first procuring organizations were created.¹³¹ With these actions the authorities started to incorporate Transcarpathia into the Soviet centralized economy, approaching the countryside as the supplier of agricultural products to

¹²⁹ Decree by NRZU about the Nationalization of Land on the Territory of Zakarpatska Ukraine, DAZO, f. RN14, op. 1, sp. 15, a. 1.

¹³⁰ Decrees by NRZU about the Compulsory Supplies by the Peasant Households of Zakarpatska Ukraine, DAZO, f. 4, op. 1, sp. 154, aa. 1–24.

¹³¹ DAZO, f. 4, op. 1, sp. 66, aa. 1–13.

the cities.

The merger with the Ukrainian SSR brought further social and economic transformations to the region, as Transcarpathia was officially under the Soviet centralized jurisdiction. In March 1946, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted “The law about the five-year plan of reconstruction and development of the national economy for the years 1946–1950,” where it was stated that the socialist reforms should be completed in the Western oblasti of Ukraine by the end of this period. The main focus of these reforms was on industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture.¹³² Following this guidance, by the end of 1946 the Regional Committee of the CPU reported that it saw its primary aim in the “transformation of the region according to the Soviet principles of production and completing the land reform started by the Narodna Rada of Zakarpatska Ukraine.”¹³³ Collectivization started that very year in 1946 and was completed by 1950 with a total of 294 collective farms in the region.¹³⁴

With the establishment of the collective farm system, over 94 percent of the peasantry was involved in the collective agricultural production.¹³⁵ Much evidence from oral and archival sources illustrates that the authorities and local party activists used force, blackmail and deception to convince peasants to join the collective farms. Only a few abstained from joining the kolkhozes, choosing instead to remain as individual farmers, even though it cost them high taxes. However, although the majority of peasant lands and cattle were collectivized, not all peasants became collective farm workers. Contemporaries recall that it was enough for one family member to work at a collective farm in order to have the right to a private land plot. Since collective farm members received low salaries and only had the right to a share of the farm’s yearly production, most families found it detrimental to have more than one member working in a kolkhoz. Still, it was vital that one family member joined the collective farm in order to both comply with the Soviet reforms and to receive the private plot necessary to maintain some semblance of their previously self-sufficient lifestyle.

The modest involvement of Transcarpathian peasants in collective farm production also resulted from the generally limited production capacities of local agriculture. The newly created collective farms needed preliminary investments for construction, crops, equipment, and transportation means and consequently the underdeveloped agricultural sector could not fully

¹³² *Ukraiński karpaty: Istorii*, 179.

¹³³ DAZO, f. 1, op. 1, sp. 83, a. 2.

¹³⁴ Vasyl’ Mishchanyn, “Novi document pro kolektyvizaciiu na Zakarpatti,” *Rusyn*, no. 2 (2009), 16.

¹³⁵ Vasyl’ Mishchanyn, *Radianizatsiia Zakarpattia* (Uzhhorod, 2018), 261.

employ the available rural labor power of the region. At the same time, the regional priorities of the Soviet government regarding the intensified development of agriculture lay elsewhere — in the Southern oblasti of Ukraine. Seen from a broad perspective of the “rational” utilization of national productive resources, Transcarpathia, alongside with the rest of Western Ukraine, was treated as a prospective supplier of labor power to the more industrially and agriculturally promising regions inside and outside of the Ukrainian SSR. Thus, the post-war agricultural potential of Transcarpathia, or lack of thereof, became the defining factor for the migration policies the Soviet authorities developed for the region. The state initiatives of agricultural resettlement and organized recruitment were introduced in Transcarpathia in the late 1940s, setting individuals and entire families on the move eastwards, in directions previously unknown to local travellers.

AGRARIAN RESETTLEMENT IN SOVIET UKRAINE

The quick restoration of agricultural productivity in the post-war years was the primary concern of the Soviet authorities, especially since the urban population depended heavily on the collective farms’ produce. In the years 1946–1947 the entire population of the USSR faced a serious food crisis following the crop failures of 1946, which subsequently led to famine in some rural regions of Ukraine and Moldova.¹³⁶ Alongside Russia, Central Asia, and Belarus, Ukraine was the prioritized area of the Soviet agricultural development, where wheat, sunflowers and potatoes were cultivated.¹³⁷ The agriculturally promising central and southern regions of Ukraine suffered from wartime destruction and depopulation, which prompted the government to develop a re-vitalization program in these areas through the construction of irrigation systems and the centralized resettlement of peasants from those regions deemed to have “surplus labor power.”

In order to guarantee a sufficient supply of labor power for the enlarged and newly created collective farms in Southern Ukraine, the Head Department of Evacuation and Resettlement elaborated a five-year plan of centralized population transfer, according to which, in 1951-1955, roughly 125,000 families of peasants would find new homes in the broad and barren lands of

¹³⁶ Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labour and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.

¹³⁷ In 1950 cultivation areas of Ukraine constituted 21 per cent of total area under crops in the USSR – 117,227,000 ha (statistics are taken from *Posevnyye ploshchadi SSR. Tom 1* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye statisticheskoye izdatelstvo, 1957), 156).

the Ukrainian steppe.¹³⁸ However grand the plan was, the Department admitted that even these efforts would not fulfill the labor needs completely, since, for example, the five-year plan took into account only 35–40 percent of the demand for manpower in the Kherson region.¹³⁹

Inquiries into the possibilities for resettlement in the southern regions started immediately after the war and mass peasant resettlement inside the Ukrainian SSR was specifically explored in 1946. The project was seen as a measure to eliminate “the unequal settlement of the rural population on the territory of the U[krainian] SSR”¹⁴⁰ that had resulted from peasants fleeing from the territories of German occupation, the forced transfers to Western labor camps, and the general human losses of the war. In the 1940s–60s, ideas about the role of migration in socialist society shaped state policies regarding the internal movements of people. Migration was seen as a permanent change in place of residence and was supposed to be guided by the state towards the regions of planned economic development. As the Soviet sociologist, A. Topilin summarized, “Conscious regulation of migration requires the development of the system of its management, which would allow to make systematic [*planomernoie*] impact on the migration flows in required amounts to the directions that are necessary for the entire society.”¹⁴¹ Migration was supposed to enhance the effective use of labor resources and to facilitate their distribution. In the course of Soviet history, the authorities modified their approach to migration management, depending on the formulation of economic tasks and the available knowledge of actual migration processes. From the late 1940s until the mid-1950s the main focus of territorial redistribution was on agrarian resettlement and the organized recruitment of workers.

Within this productivist logic, the “surplus labor power” legitimated the mass resettlement of the rural population. This policy was officially launched in August 1949 and embraced all regions of Ukraine. The territory of Ukraine was divided into “oblasti of departure” and “oblasti of settlement”. The main share of prospective settlers were recruited from the western regions, which joined the Ukrainian SSR from 1939–1945. From the rationalist perspective of the balance between labor power, on the one hand, and the industrial and agricultural capacities of certain regions on the other, these territories seemed an obvious choice since they not only

¹³⁸ It is worth mentioning that since Crimean Peninsula was not an administrative part of the Ukrainian SSR until 1954, the resettlement to the Crimean region of RSFSR fell into a different section – outward republican resettlement. For this reason, the plans of population transfers to the Crimea are not included in these numbers.

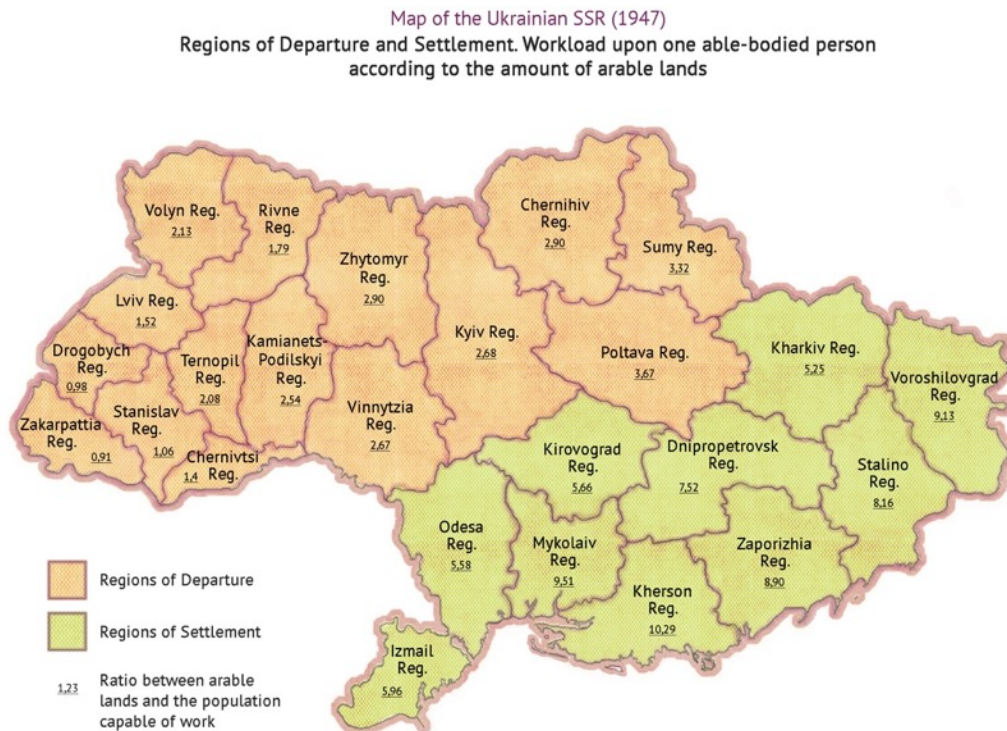
¹³⁹ Central State Archives of Higher Authorities and Governance of Ukraine (TsDAVOU), f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 125, ar. 8, 14.

¹⁴⁰ TsDAGO, f. 1, op. 80, sp. 432, 1.

¹⁴¹ A. V. Topilin, *Territorial'noie pereraspredelenie trudovykh resursov v SSSR* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1975), 4.

had less arable land, but also land which was difficult to cultivate and even access. Many peasants still lived in isolated farmsteads in the hills, which in itself was an obstacle to implementing a system of collective farming. The average proportion between the arable lands and one able-bodied person residing in the area — the number which was presented as the “scientific” basis for the resettlement project — was 2,39 ha in the Western and Northern oblasti of Ukraine, while in the southern regions, which accepted settlers, this ratio was 7,10 ha.¹⁴² In Transcarpathia, the ratio was the lowest: in the 1950s, it was measured as 0,91 ha of arable lands per able-bodied person.¹⁴³

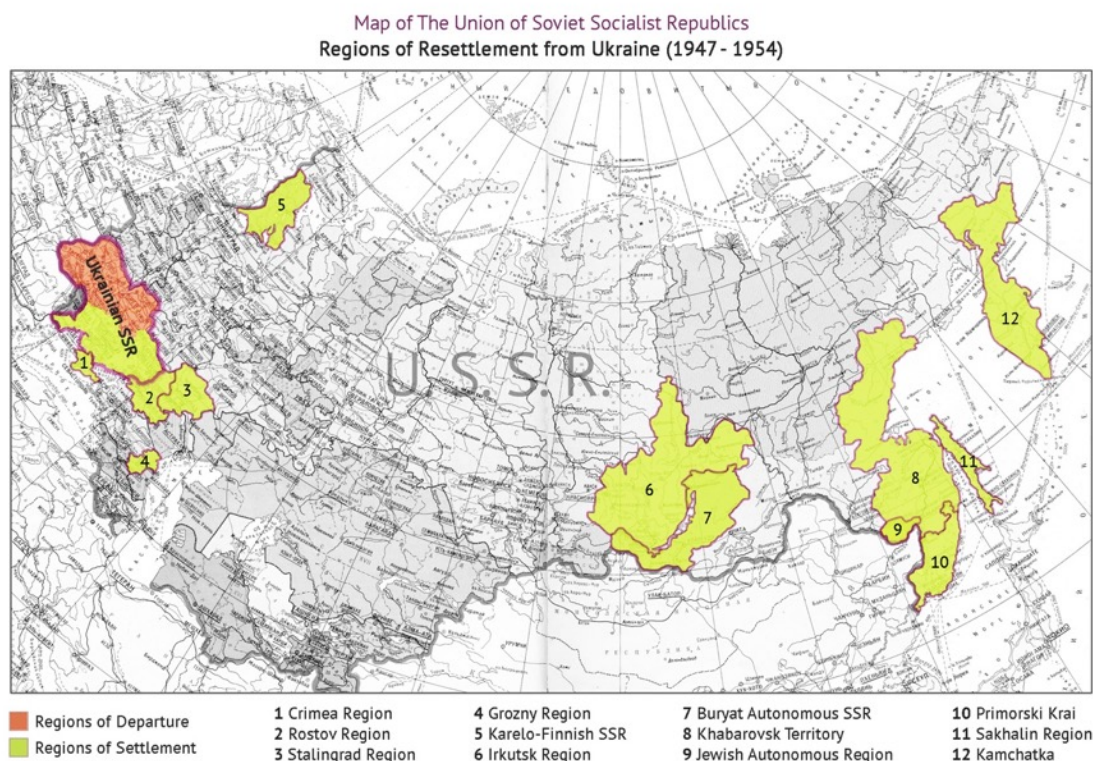
Figure 6.



¹⁴² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 125, ar. 15.

¹⁴³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 125, ar. 15.

Figure 7.



Thus, resettlement was a quick solution to the demand for labor in the southern regions. In addition, it concurrently integrated the peasants from the Western oblasti into the already established system of centralized agricultural production, which was still developing in the western parts of the republic. It was frequently hard to elicit commitment to collective organization of work from the peasants with strong traditions of individual farming. In some kolkhozes the “work ethic” of the peasants prevented them from reaching targets: one irritated official reported that there were cases where only 15–30 percent of peasants showed up on the fields.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, besides economic reasons for resettlement there may also have been disciplinary ones: the authorities hoped that breaking social ties with the place and community would smoothen integration of the peasants into the Soviet production process.

Ukrainian peasants were resettled not only inside the Ukrainian SSR. Some were incentivized to leave for other Soviet republics. “The Great Constructions of Communism” on the Volga — namely the building of the Volga-Don canal and the Stalingrad HES — drew some peasant families to Stalingrad and the Rostov regions of Russia. Forestry, fisheries and the kolkhozes in

¹⁴⁴ TsDAGOU, f. 1, op. 80, sp. 432, ar. 2.

the Far East and Western Siberia constituted another priority for national economic development. These vast territories could not rely on the scarce supply of the local labor resources and, as Donald Filtzer has shown, forced labor, which was used in Siberia, did not meet demand. From 1949–1954 the General Department of Evacuation and Resettlement of the Ukrainian SSR annually received requests for several thousands of families to be transferred from Ukraine to the collective farms, fisheries and timber industry enterprises (*lespromkhozy*) in Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic, Khabarovsk Territory, Altai Territory, Primorsky (Maritime) Territory, Sahalin and the Irkutsk region.

Unlike the organized recruitment that targeted individual workers, the resettlement was directed at peasant families, this “least mobile and the most stable category of labor reserves.”¹⁴⁵ Peasants were familiar with agricultural labor and were expected to export their traditional way of life to the new settlements. The resettlement campaigns even involved episodic attempts to move entire villages, but these initiatives failed due to the absence of consensus or active resistance within the communities selected for resettlement.¹⁴⁶ In total, during the period of 1949–1954, 154,085 families¹⁴⁷ left their previous places of residence in Western and Northern Ukraine: around 110,000 went to the oblasti of Southern Ukraine and over 44,000 were transferred outside of the republic, to Crimea and the regions and republics in Western Siberia, Karelia, Caucasus and the Far East.¹⁴⁸ In 1954, there was a sharp decline in the numbers of resettled families inside the Ukrainian SSR.¹⁴⁹ At this point the priorities of resettlement shifted in favor of population transfers outside of the republic, even though resettlement to the Southern oblasti was not curtailed completely and continued until the 1980s.

The shift in the priorities of resettlement reflected a general change in state politics regarding the use and development of agricultural resources. Nikita Khrushchev’s policy was adopted in September 1953 and became known as the Virgin Lands campaign. Similar to Stalin’s plans to expand arable lands by introducing irrigation systems and the electrification of the collective farms, the Virgin Lands campaign aimed to reduce food shortages by increasing agricultural

¹⁴⁵ A. F. Zagrobs’ka, *Organizovani pereselennia v systemi migratsiy naselennia URSR* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1974), 44.

¹⁴⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4262, op. 1, sp. 115; TsDAVOU, f. 4262, op. 1, sp. 163, 96–100; TsDAVOU, f. 4262, op. 1, sp. 173; TsDAVOU, f. 4262, op. 1, sp. 103, ar. 102; TsDAVOU, f. 4262, op. 1, sp. 181, ar. 11; TsDAVOU, f. 4262, op. 1, sp. 208, 88.

¹⁴⁷ The constitution of an average resettled family included 2,35 able-bodied persons and 4,5 members of a family. As a result of a considerably rough calculation we may assume that the approximate number of persons transferred during 1949–1954 was around 693, 400.

¹⁴⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 247, ar. 47.

¹⁴⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 247, ar. 44.

production, which would be achieved by cultivating the lands of the right bank of the Volga River, the Northern Caucasus and the Kazakh SSR.¹⁵⁰ This change in state politics resulted in a partial withdrawal of the authorities' attention from the Southern regions of Ukraine. It was redirected towards the Kazakh SSR and the Caucasus: the new homes for Ukrainian rural settlers. The initial willingness of the citizens of the Ukrainian SSR to participate in the Virgin Lands campaign is captured by the large numbers of applications. Even though there was still no official plan for the centralized resettlement from Ukraine to the Virgin Lands in 1954, people reacted to the advertisements for the campaign and volunteered for resettlement. The process was then taken up by the state planning agencies and in the course of the following ten years, 57,000 families that included 207,000 persons were transferred to the Kazakh SSR from Ukraine.¹⁵¹

To be successful, the process of resettlement required a smooth coordination of work between various ministries, departments, distribution agencies and local officials, who were often geographically disparate. As these intricate chains always had some (or many) loose links, resettlement was far from successful, and those who suffered the most from the uncoordinated plans and bureaucratic mistakes were the resettled persons. Often they preferred to return to what was left of their previous lives. Thus, even from the very beginning of the campaign, officials faced the problem of the uncontrolled departure of transferred populations from the settlement regions, as a large number of settlers did not find their new living and working conditions acceptable. According to the revision of the resettlement plans completion held in 1953, nearly 20 percent of the total number of families who were transferred between 1949 and 1953 did not stay in the villages or regions of settlement: they either returned to the oblasts of departure or moved somewhere else.¹⁵² Yet, these figures cannot be taken as conclusive, since the revision commissions warned that the departments of resettlement frequently tended to conceal the real numbers of the dropouts in order to escape penalties.¹⁵³

The biggest complaint of the settlers was the lack of proper housing. This problem resulted from the inability of the local kolkhoz chairmen to keep pace with the plans for individual house construction to accommodate the arriving families. After six years of resettlement, it was revealed that only half of the 180,527 required houses had been finished.¹⁵⁴ When

¹⁵⁰ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004).

¹⁵¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 283, ar. 44.

¹⁵² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 251, ar. 37.

¹⁵³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 160, ar. 117.

¹⁵⁴ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 251, ar. 6; TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 247, ar. 38.

accommodation was not available, settler families were expected to reside with local families until their houses were ready. Such coexistence understandably resulted in conflict and hostility: families were frequently transferred from one neighbor to another and many had difficulty not only in finding suitable and sufficiently paid jobs, but also in establishing friendly contacts in the new communities.¹⁵⁵

The settlers also provided other explanations in order to justify their return. Some were unable to find jobs that responded to their qualifications.¹⁵⁶ Families with children often resented the lack or absence of nurseries and schools, which subsequently tied women to the house. Others lamented the inadequate climate of Southern flatland Ukraine, Crimea and Kazakh SSR.¹⁵⁷ The settlers found it difficult to adjust to the dry, hot and windy weather of the Ukrainian steppe, especially when they lacked sources of drinking-water¹⁵⁸ close to their domiciles. They blamed the climate and the “bad water” for the illnesses that spread among the settlers. As one of the returnees explained, “When I departed from Stanislav oblast’, I was a healthy man, here I got sick and I am being sent back as an unwanted man.”¹⁵⁹

The settlers created pressures on the local officials: they demanded housing, desirable employment, initial provision subsidies, cattle, and satisfactory private plots, therefore raising numerous additional concerns that often could not be addressed immediately due to justified (such as lack of construction materials) or unjustified (such as lack of empathy) reasons. Wishing to release themselves from the burdens of care that came with resettlement, many chairs of village councils and collective farms managers did not prevent the settlers from leaving. In some cases, the administrators even assisted the peasants with their departure by supplying them with the papers (*spravka*) which allowed them to travel and return to their places of previous residence.¹⁶⁰ The local managers in the settlement districts were often not aware of the direction of departure of the “returnees.” If the peasants consequently did not reappear at the previous places of residence, where they were supposed to be re-registered, the track of their movement was lost, and the officials reported that the families of the unemployed departed in “unknown direction.”¹⁶¹ Sometimes they reappeared in neighboring villages or factories.

¹⁵⁵ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 91, ar. 147.

¹⁵⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 199, ar. 31.

¹⁵⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 91, ar. 146.

¹⁵⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 91, ar. 14.

¹⁵⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 91, ar. 146.

¹⁶⁰ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 208, ar. 192.

¹⁶¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 90, ar. 56.

AGRARIAN RESETTLEMENT AND TRANSCARPATHIA

What kind of impact did the resettlement project have on Transcarpathia? It was one of the regions defined as obtaining “surplus labor power” (even though its volume was far from the largest compared to other western regions), so it was assigned certain quotas which served the territorial distribution of labor. In 1953, the state inspection discovered that only 76.7 percent of the Transcarpathian kolkhozniki — 139,681 persons — were involved in the collective farm production during the busiest periods. Thus, the available labor reserves of the region amounted to approximately 60,000 peasants who were supposed to be sent to the labor deficient collective farms inside or outside of the Ukrainian SSR, or be recruited to the various Soviet industries.¹⁶² By that time, however, resentment towards the practices of resettlement was already growing and peasants evaded recruitment. In 1950, the plan was to recruit 3,600 families from Transcarpathia, but only 510 agreed to move to the southern regions.

In 1952, 965 families from Transcarpathia were resettled in Grozny oblast’ in RSFSR.¹⁶³ However, many found their new conditions of life unacceptable. The peasants were reported to have returned in large groups starting in April 1953.¹⁶⁴ They were dissatisfied with the environmental conditions and the climate of the Grozny region.¹⁶⁵ Their various complaints about inadequate housing and transportation were either ignored or met with “rudeness and offence on the part of the foremen and chairmen of kolkhozes and village councils.”¹⁶⁶ A man from Transcarpathia reported that a kolkhoz chairman went so far as to tell the settlers, “No one wants you here!” and suggested that the settlers should build their own houses.¹⁶⁷ Feeling unwanted, unprotected and offended, 345 families returned back to Transcarpathia and made sure that their acquaintances would think twice before embarking on such a journey.¹⁶⁸ As in many similar cases, the officials in the unfortunate collective farms did not prevent the peasants from leaving. On the contrary, they assisted their departure by supplying them with the required

¹⁶² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 208, ar. 175.

¹⁶³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 165, ar. 58.

¹⁶⁴ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 208, ar. 172.

¹⁶⁵ Grozny *oblast’* was created by the Decree of the Supreme Council of the USSR from March 22, 1944, after the forced deportation of the Chechens and the Ingushs from this territory and the abolishment of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In January 1957, the Chechens and the Ingushs were officially allowed to return from the exile, Grozny region was in its turn abolished and the Chechen-Ingush ASSR reestablished.

¹⁶⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 208, ar. 172.

¹⁶⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 208, ar. 173.

¹⁶⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 208, ar. 172.

documents.¹⁶⁹

Given the peasants' dissatisfaction and the "mass return" that made the efforts of the resettlement officials and the state's expenses futile, the inspectors of the Transcarpathian regional department of resettlement suggested taking into account the life experience and the habitual environment of the people from Transcarpathia, and in future to plan the directions of resettlement with these considerations in mind. Some of them suggested resettling Transcarpathian families collectively, since people preferred to keep their community ties and "live together — in entire groups and streets."¹⁷⁰ Others found it more reasonable to send Transcarpathians to the northern part of Grozny, where the landscape resembled that of their home, than to the Grozny flatlands. Alternatively, some suggested changing the destination of the centralized migration to Crimea or some of the Ukrainian oblasti (Stalino,¹⁷¹ Zaporizhzhia, and Dnipropetrovsk), with which the Transcarpathian peasants were more acquainted thanks to their agricultural seasonal migration to the kolkhozes of these regions.¹⁷²

The mention of seasonal work with regards to the collective farms in the areas of the irrigated farming is particularly important, although in the early 1950s it was still not very impressive in its numbers and not especially visible in the reports. Seasonal workers, mentioned in passing by an inspector in 1953, quickly started exploring the opportunities of temporary employment in the growing southern collective farms, which still did not have sufficient manpower. The resettlement project's aim was to balance the delivery plans imposed by the state with the human capacities of the collective farms, but since the campaign turned out to be an unpredictable and messy enterprise, and the peasants were difficult to retain, the directors of the collective farms sometimes faced a lack of labor at the times when it was most needed: during the short and particularly demanding periods of planting and harvesting. The other reason why the collective farms annually encountered labor shortages, was imbalanced workloads during the year. Apart from in the busiest periods, the kolkhozes needed significantly fewer workers. In the period of the highest work intensity — the third quarter of the year — the labor demand in the eastern regions of the USSR used to be two times higher than in the first quarter and in July the farms

¹⁶⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 208, ar. 173-174.

¹⁷⁰ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 97, ar. 6.

¹⁷¹ In 1961 the city was renamed into Donetsk.

¹⁷² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 208, ar. 175.

employed 30 percent more workers than on average during the year.¹⁷³

In the mid-1950s, the state had started assisting the collective farms that were short of manpower, in employing additional workers for the harvesting period, and issued recruitment quotas for select administrative units. The Ministry of Agriculture covered the transportation costs of the collective farm workers that were recruited in the western regions and the students from higher education institutions who were also drafted to help with the harvesting.¹⁷⁴

Transcarpathian peasants showed significantly larger interest in opportunities for seasonal work than in permanent resettlement. In 1953, following the decree of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, 3,500 peasants from Transcarpathia were enlisted to help with the harvesting in other regions of Ukraine.¹⁷⁵ The following year, seasonal migration was mentioned at the republican meeting of the Department of Resettlement and Evacuation of the Ukrainian SSR as a disturbing fact that was interfering with the resettlement campaign: “they [kolkhozniki] leave for three months, earn a lot of wheat and provide a year supply of bread for the family. It is very difficult to convince these people [to resettle]”.¹⁷⁶ The peasants were migrating to work in the fields and animal farms, and stayed from three months to around one year depending on the type of their contract and the work they had on the farms. After spending some time in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, a few might have considered staying or even moving their families to the places they became familiar with, taking advantage of the benefits of the resettlement program. Many more, however, preferred annual or less regular seasonal work trips during the harvest. In 1961, over 3,200 seasonal workers from Transcarpathia were invited to select collective farms around the Soviet Ukraine. However, the official reports show that another 40,000 peasants left for unknown destinations without proper procedure.¹⁷⁷ It is fair to assume that not all ended up working at the kolkhoz fields, since the peasants had discovered the opportunities of seasonal work in such industries as construction and forestry, and this differentiation often was not reflected in the statistics.

Finding a seasonal job was an easy task for those who so desired it, especially considering the

¹⁷³ D. D. Moskvina, *Naselenie SSSR: voprosy migratsii: ekonomiko-statisticheskii obzor tendentsiy 60-80kh gg.* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1991), 41–42.

¹⁷⁴ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 129, ar. 7.

¹⁷⁵ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 1, sp. 208, ar. 175.

¹⁷⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 243, ar. 13.

¹⁷⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 152, ar. 52.

fact that the collective farms themselves sent around recruiters who employed people beyond the established quotas or even without ministerial permission. State officials often lamented these initiatives that tended to disrupt labor discipline. Since the extensive expansion of arable lands caused permanent labor shortages, which were not solved by the equally extensive resettlement campaign, many kolkhoz chairmen in the undermanned collective farms resorted to practical solutions that were intended to create attractive conditions for short-term workers. In 1971, several kolkhoz chairs from Vynogradiv district of Transcarpathia wrote a joint letter to the head of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR, in which they described the chaos that uncoordinated recruiting has brought to their collective farms. They complained:

Some kolkhozes of Kirovohrad, Sumy, Poltava, Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv oblasti have acquired themselves freelance recruiters who, in an under-the-table manner, [and] without notifying the kolkhoz boards, make deals with the kolkhoz members for various works and periods. It is quite strange that the payment for the same work in different collective farms varies from 100 to 180 percent and changes each year. In recent years, this recruiting has turned into something quite ridiculous, as if it was a market — “who gives more.” ... We are also surprised that those collective farms pay the recruited workers substantially more than their own kolkhozniki.¹⁷⁸

The concerned chairs of the Transcarpathian collective farms feared that this “disorder, haphazardness and blatant violation of the Collective Farm Statute” would inflict losses on the kolkhozes and the republic in general. Attracted by the high wages, peasants and workers disobeyed the collective farms boards and “en masse and without permission abandoned equipment, farms, fields, brigades and left to the kolkhozes of eastern regions.”¹⁷⁹

Starting from the 1960s, when the principles of governing in the Soviet Union departed from Stalinist monumental initiatives and moved towards “intensive” rather than “extensive” methods of economic management, the approaches to migration, both conceptual and practical, also started changing. There was a gradual departure from the idea that migration was a process that could be entirely guided by the higher authorities. The shift in the understanding of migration as a phenomenon was part of a changing sociological paradigm that brought a more nuanced and informed vision of society and demography. The new challenges

¹⁷⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 547, ar. 93-94.

¹⁷⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 547, ar. 94.

and pressures that the Soviet state faced in the 1960s–1970s, such as the depopulation of the countryside, the fall in birth-rates and the expectations of demographic crisis, the out-migration from economically prioritized districts, the imbalanced development of rural and urban areas as well as entire economic regions, were all factors that influenced the changes in migration policies.¹⁸⁰ While the “extensive” methods of the previous period — agrarian resettlement, organized recruitment, professional placement, and public call-ups — were still in use, the authorities, with the help of sociologists, developed more subtle approaches to the movement and stability of the Soviet population. Seasonal migration emerged on the margins of the scholarly interest as one of the “types” of migration with a low research priority, and it was not addressed as a separate topic of academic inquiry up until the late 1980s. Among local and higher state officials, however, the awareness of seasonal migration was rising, as the daily interactions with migrants increasingly posed challenges to their management, the legal regulations of their employment, and the interpretation of their social position.

SOVIET MIGRATION POLICIES AND TRANSCARPATHIA, 1960–1980

1. Migration in the Soviet study of population

The understanding of what migration is and how this process should be managed changed significantly in the 1960s and 1970s. This change was reflected in the state policies and priorities that were officially outlined at the XXV Communist Party Congress in 1976. In particular, the Congress called for an effective demographic policy, which would solve the problems of population.¹⁸¹ In this socio-political framework, migration was perceived as an integral part of the new approach to Soviet modern governmentality:

The active demographic policy is characterized by mediated influence on the processes of migratory and natural population movements with the purpose of their optimization in the long-term perspective. The shaping of such policy depends heavily on the profound knowledge of the dynamics of the demographic changes, as well as the peculiarities of the reproduction and migration of the population in the country’s diverse regions, republics, and economic

¹⁸⁰ V. M. Moiseienko, “Migratsionnyie protsessy naseleniia i upravlenie imi,” in *Problemy migratsii naseleniia i trudovykh resursov* (Moscow: Statistika, 1970), 22.

¹⁸¹ *Materialy XXV s’yezda KPSS*, Moscow, 1976, 73; B. S. Khorev, V. N. Chapek, *Problemy izucheniia migratsii naseleniia* (Moscow: Mysl’, 1978), 6.

districts.¹⁸²

As this statement shows, in just twenty years the understanding of migration as a social phenomenon had undergone a drastic conceptual transformation. Migration was no longer treated as an isolated matter of the mechanical distribution of population with regard to the state's productive and territorial interests — it was instead placed into the larger scope of demographic concerns:

Spatial flows of population influence the distribution of labor resources between various districts of the country, and the increase of the labor productivity in these areas; it influences the processes of urbanization, geography-specific distribution of population, the shaping of local workforce, the improvement of the demographic situation in sparsely populated areas... When the place of residence is changed, the place of work is also changed, so migration has an impact on industrial and agricultural enterprises. Migration in large amounts complicates the issues of transportation, supply, accommodation in large cities, it deforms the demographic structure of the population in the places of departure and arrival. This makes the mechanical movement of population a serious social-demographic problem, which requires solving through the regulation of migration processes and future estimations. It is also important to take into account the evolution of mechanical movement while making demographic forecasts.¹⁸³

The Party statement also explicitly stated that the key to an effective demographic policy was “profound knowledge” of the population and society. Such a scientific approach to population management had crystallized under the economic pressures that the country faced, and the corpus of sociological data that had been accumulated by the mid-1970s, when the Congress took place. In particular, the data demonstrated that the old strategies of incentives and restrictions did not produce a desirable effect, and that most of the people in the Soviet Union were migrating in the directions of their own choice and following other motivations than those developed by the state to stimulate the flows of migration. State officials became acutely aware about migration as a social process that resists direct control. At the same time, migration had significant economic consequences, so the Party wished to have an effective impact on it. It was therefore necessary to understand the actual driving forces behind human mobility and to adjust

¹⁸² *Regional'nyie osobennosti vosproizvodstva i migratsii naseleniia v SSSR* (Moscow, 1981), 3.

¹⁸³ Zagrobs'ka, *Organizovani pereseleniia*, 12-13.

the methods of social intervention accordingly.

The main Soviet planning body, *Gosplan*, started expressing concerns regarding the issues of labor supply and demography soon after Nikita Khrushchev left office. In 1965, the head of the Gosplan's research institute, Iefimov, presented an internal report on Soviet industry, and suggested changing the current mechanisms of labor supply management.¹⁸⁴ Iefimov stressed the problems encountered by various regions and offered "a good diagnosis and a warning about the dire consequences to be expected in the absence of reform."¹⁸⁵ These problems involved the imbalance between the labor force and its employment, persisting labor shortages in some regions (for example Siberia) and surpluses in others regions (for example Central Asia), labor shortages due to the placement of production facilities in scarcely populated areas or, alternatively, in large cities to the disadvantage of small ones, and the need for periodic agricultural labor during the harvest.¹⁸⁶ Multifaceted, interlinked and co-dependent problems escaped the possibility of simple solutions. To quote Moshe Lewin, "the task now was conceptualizing and managing complexity itself."¹⁸⁷ Thus, migration was linked to employment, and it became part of the demographic and economic puzzle, defined as "a complex social-demographic process that should be studied with regard to its multidimensional nature. The object of such study includes migration itself, as well as its determining factors and the consequences of these processes."¹⁸⁸

After the twenty-year gap in migration studies, whose beginning dated back to the turbulent late 1930s, migration once again entered the orbit of scholarly investigation.¹⁸⁹ The interrupted academic tradition meant that young scholars had to start their inquiries from scratch.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the 1960s and 1970s saw a steep rise in the number of publications on migration in the Soviet Union, and specialized institutions for migration research were founded, one of the most prominent being the Siberian Division of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁴ Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (London: Verso, 2016), 205-206.

¹⁸⁵ Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, 206.

¹⁸⁶ Lewin, 206-208.

¹⁸⁷ Lewin, 214.

¹⁸⁸ *Sotsial'nyie factory i osobennosti migratsii naseleniia SSSR*, ed. L. L. Rybakovskii and V. Ia. Churkova, (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 4.

¹⁸⁹ L. L. Rybakovskii, "Glava 22. Issledovaniia migratsii naseleniia v Rossii," in *Sotsiologiia v Rossii*, ed. V. A. Yadov (1998). Retrieved from https://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_Buks/Sociolog/yadov/14.php on 23.07.2018.

¹⁹⁰ Rybakovskii, "Glava 22. Issledovaniia migratsii naseleniia v Rossii."

¹⁹¹ V. I. Perevedentsev, *Sovremennaia migratsiia naseleniia Zapadnoi Sibiri* (Novosibirsk, 1965); V. I. Perevedentsev, *Migratsiia naseleniia i trudovye problemy Sibiri* (Novosibirsk, 1966); *Sotsial'nyie problemy trudovykh resursov sela* (Novosibirsk, 1968); *Metodika vyborochnogo obsledovaniia migratsii sel'skogo naseleniia* (Novosibirsk, 1969); T. I. Zaslavskaiia, *O tseliakh i*

The material for this research was shaped by varied, mostly quantitative sources that traced the “mechanical” movement of population: the censuses from 1926, 1939, 1959, 1970 and 1979; the publication of the yearly records of migration that were based on tear offs of arrivals and departures at the Resident Registration Offices for urban population; the reports of village councils about the age-sex composition of the rural population; and sampling inquiries of selected groups, enterprises, and regions.¹⁹² These methods had their shortcomings, as the data that they delivered lacked precision or could be incomplete. For instance, the 1959 census did not include questions about migration, and the records of the rural population were only taken on occasion.¹⁹³ But even this incomplete data allowed scientists to identify the major tendencies of migration and to formulate judgments about the historical, economic and demographic implications of the movements of people.

Migration thus became an object of attention for planners, economists, geographers, demographers, and sociologists. In their publications and at academic conferences, these scholars discussed methodological and theoretical approaches:¹⁹⁴ they debated classifications, typologies and terminology, and factors and structures of migration.¹⁹⁵ They also formulated the key themes and problems of migration as a field of academic investigation and as an issue of concern for domestic politics. By the 1970s, it was accepted as fact that non-state supervised movements dominated the total migration flow. The sociological research conducted in the second half of the 1960s in the Far East showed that the proportion of organized resettlement

metodakh planirovaniia migratsii sel'skogo naseleniia v goroda (Novosibirsk, 1970); L. L. Rybakovskii, “Struktura i factory mezhraionnykh migratsionnykh protsessov,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 1 (1976).

¹⁹² *Sotsial'nyie factory i osobennosti migratsii naseleniia SSSR*, ed. L. L. Rybakovskii and V. Ia. Churkova (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 39; L. S. Bliakhman, *Dvizhenie rabochei sily na promyshlennnykh predpriiatiakh* (Moscow, 1965).

¹⁹³ F. G. Dolgushevskii, “Aktual'nye voprosy issledovaniia migratsii,” in *Problemy migratsii naseleniia i trudovykh resursov* (Moscow: Statistika, 1970), 13.

¹⁹⁴ See V. I. Perevedentsev, *Migratsiia naseleniia i trudovye problemy Sibiri* (Novosibirsk, 1966); *Metodika vyborochnogo obsledovaniia migratsii sel'skogo naseleniia*, ed. Zaslavskaiia T. I. (Novosibirsk, 1969); M. N. Rutkevich, F. R. Filippov, *Sotsial'nyie peremeshcheniia* (Moscow, 1970); *Migratsiia sel'skogo naseleniia*, ed. Zaslavskaiia T. I. (Moscow, 1970); *Problemy migratsii naseleniia i trudovykh resursov* (Moscow, 1970); *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie sela i migratsiia naseleniia*, ed. Zaslavskaiia T. I. and Kalmyk V. A., (Novosibirsk, 1972); L. L. Rybakovskii, *Regional'nyi analiz migratsiy* (Moscow, 1973); *Metodologicheskie problemy sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia mobil'nosti trudovykh resursov* (Novosibirsk, 1974); B. D. Breiev, V. P. Kriukov, *Mezhotraslevoi balans dvizheniia naseleniia i trudovykh resursov* (Moscow, 1974); *Migratsionnaia podvizhnost' naseleniia SSSR*, ed. Khorev B. S. and Moiseenko V. M. (Moscow, 1974); V. I. Perevedentsev, *Metody izuchenii migratsii naseleniia* (Moscow, 1975); V. I. Staroverov, *Sotsial'no-demograficheskie problem derevni. Metodologiia, metodika, opyt analiza migratsii sel'skogo naseleniia* (Moscow, 1975).

¹⁹⁵ See *Statistika migratsii naseleniia* (Moscow, 1973); B. S. Khorev, D. Ziuzin, “Osobennosti demograficheskoi situatsii v Moskve,” in *Narodonaselenie. Prikladnaia demografiia* (Moscow, 1973); I. S. Matlin, *Modelirovanie razmeshcheniia naseleniia* (Moscow, 1975); V. I. Staroverov, *Sotsial'no-demograficheskie problem derevni. Metodologiia, metodika, opyt analiza migratsii sel'skogo naseleniia* (Moscow, 1975); *Sotsial'nyie factory i osobennosti migratsii naseleniia SSSR*, ed. L. L. Rybakovskii and V. Ia. Churkova (Moscow: Nauka, 1978); B. S. Khorev, V. N. Chapek, *Problemy izucheniia migratsii naseleniia*, (Moscow: Mysl', 1978); A. U. Khomra, *Migratsiia naseleniia: voprosy teorii, metodiki issledovaniia* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1979).

in the post-war period had noticeably decreased compared to the 1930s, when its part in total inflow to these regions was over 50 percent.¹⁹⁶ According to statistical data, since the mid-1950s, the share of organized recruitment and centralized agrarian resettlement did not exceed 5 percent of geographic mobility nationwide. Between 1951–1970, the organized recruitment of workers – one of the main channels of guided migration in the USSR – fell by four times the average of the previous twenty years.¹⁹⁷ The increase in living standards had a negative impact on the attractiveness of resettlement benefits and the adaptability of the new settlers in the regions of active industrial exploration.¹⁹⁸ It was clear that the effect of organized mobility was insignificant compared to the “spontaneous” movements of population. From the official standpoint of the Party authorities, these movements rarely corresponded to the economic interests of the state.¹⁹⁹ Thus, the practices of guided migration were rightly questioned: “Instead of the [measures of] direct regulation, more indirect methods should be applied, as it is utterly important to improve the mechanism of management of this social-demographic process.”²⁰⁰ Science was expected to provide clues and instruments for its management:

Current demographic situation, established patterns of the reproduction of population and their evolution over a long period in large regions and republics of the country are setting a problem of a more elaborate study of their social and economic determination in order to control demographic processes in a scientifically grounded way.²⁰¹

In view of the state’s determination to have an impact on the process of geographic mobility, the practical value of the research on migration was constantly emphasized:

Among the scientific methodological approaches, the one that is especially valuable is programmatic and purpose oriented, which is directly connected to the tasks of administration and forecasting social development. Its value for these purposes is indispensable since it enables the planning of intersectorial as well as territorial connections and solves the corresponding problems.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ *Vosproizvodstvo trudovykh resursov Dal'nego Vostoka* (Moscow, 1969), 22–25.

¹⁹⁷ *Migratsia naselenia RSFSR* (Moscow, 1973), 65.

¹⁹⁸ *Sotsial'nyie factory i osobennosti migratsii naseleniia SSSR*, 81.

¹⁹⁹ *Sotsial'nyie factory i osobennosti...*, 92.

²⁰⁰ *Sotsial'nyie factory i osobennosti...*, 25.

²⁰¹ *Regional'nyie osobennosti vosproizvodstva i migratsii naseleniia v SSSR* (Moscow, 1981), 8. See also A. Kazakov, V. Likhoded, “Upravlenie migratsionnymi protsessami v usloviakh razvitogo sotsializma,” *Ekonomicheskie nauki*, no. 2 (1975).

²⁰² *Problemy migratsii naseleniia i trudovykh resursov*, 10.

Thus, the main research questions were directed at identifying and solving the problems that migration posed to the effective management of the population with regard to the administered economy and “the common interests of society.” Among the most prominent themes discussed within the scholarly community were the migration of the rural population; the accelerated urbanization in some regions and its insufficient pace in others; interregional mobility and its effect on population distribution with regard to industrial interests of the state; the dependencies between migration and labor shortages; and the investigation of cultural factors (living conditions, education, health care, social mobility) as primary drivers of migration. For instance, V. I. Perevedentsev showed that in the late 1960s the prospect of improvement in living conditions had more impact on interregional migration than the availability of working places. This conclusion was based on a study that had shown that every year 14–15 million people changed their places of residence,²⁰³ while the annual increase in jobs was only 2–3 million, many of which were taken by non-migrants.²⁰⁴ There was other evidence in favor of the argument that living conditions were a primary cause of migration. Other research showed that, contrary to the expectations of the planners, people were migrating not only to labor deficient regions, but also to regions with sufficient or surplus labor supply, and they were leaving not only from areas with surplus manpower, but also from those where the labor reserves were scarce.²⁰⁵ From 1959 to 1968 there was an outflow from almost all eastern and northern regions of the USSR, which were facing an acute deficit in manpower, while a disproportionate inflow was recorded in some republics of Central Asia, Moldavia, Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus, as well as large cities like Moscow, Leningrad and Kyiv, which by the 1970s were comparatively comfortable with a labor supply of their own.²⁰⁶

These findings made it clear to the participants in the debates that there were significant differences in migration trends in various regions of the country. Thus, the Nonchernozem belt of Russia faced a general outflow of people. Siberia and the Far East — the areas of active territorial and industrial development — had to deal with poor adaptation of the settlers given that migration was quite intensive. In the republics of Central Asia, the out-migration was slow,

²⁰³ The current record of migration and censuses did not give a complete data about the volumes of migration in the USSR. The amount of permanent migration in the 1970 was estimated between 10 and 15–16 million a year. See *Sotsial’nyie factory i osobennosti migratsii naseleniia SSSR*, 81.

²⁰⁴ See V. I. Perevedentsev, “Sovremennaia migratsia naselenia v SSSR,” in *Narodonaselenie i ekonomika* (Moscow, 1967).

²⁰⁵ *Problemy migratsii naseleniia i trudovykh resursov*, 63.

²⁰⁶ Dolgushevskii, “Aktual’nye voprosy issledovaniia migratsii,” 15–16.

especially in the rural areas where communities showed tendencies toward immobility and people were reluctant to move either to urban or other rural areas.²⁰⁷ It was acknowledged that the reasons behind these differences were economic, cultural, and even ethnic.²⁰⁸ However, the general direction of research has developed within a scientific framework of sociology and demography and overwhelmingly relied on the methods of quantitative analysis, while for a long time qualitative investigations were scarce and lacked scientific validity within Soviet scientific paradigm. At the same time, it was widely accepted that variations in migration trends around the USSR required different approaches in the organization of sociological research and, moreover, required diverse demographic and migration policies as a response.

2. The curse of urbanization in Ukraine and its effect on agriculture

The Ukrainian SSR faced an outflow of people from the countryside to the cities. In general, this reflected union-wide tendencies of urbanization. In the fifty-year span from 1927-1976, the USSR's urban population had increased sixfold. The process of urbanization had especially intensified in the decade of the 1960s.²⁰⁹ By the mid-1970s, 62 percent of the Soviet population resided in the cities, and only 25 percent were involved in agricultural production.²¹⁰ The number of rural residents who constituted the labor reserve for agriculture, decreased so quickly that in the beginning of the 1970s, Soviet sociologists and authorities claimed that there was a threat of depopulation in several rural areas.²¹¹ According to experts, movement to the cities was a logical outcome of industrialization and the distribution of labor between the spheres of production, but at that point urbanization was so intensive that it countered the national interests as it led to labor supply tensions in rural regions.

The Ukrainian SSR continued to supply workers and specialists to other Soviet republics through administered channels of labor distribution, and was itself accepting new voluntary settlers whose arrival contributed to the general growth of the Ukrainian population.²¹² However, Ukrainian villages continued to lose inhabitants, especially those of working age, to the cities. The annual outflow from the countryside to the cities rose from 206,600 people in

²⁰⁷ *Sotsial'nyie factory i osobennosti migratsii naseleniia SSSR*, 62, 81, 89.

²⁰⁸ *Sotsial'nyie factory i osobennosti*, 73; *Migratsiia sel'skogo naselenia*, 59-62.

²⁰⁹ *Regional'nyie osobennosti vosproizvodstva i migratsii naseleniia v SSSR*, 47.

²¹⁰ *Regional'nyie osobennosti vosproizvodstva*, 48.

²¹¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 714, ar. 34.

²¹² *Regional'nyie problemy naselenia i trudovye resursy SSSR* (Moscow: Statistika, 1978), 60.

1961 to 310,700 between 1971–75, and was steadily growing.²¹³ This trend, in addition to the drop in birth rate and general aging of the population in the rural areas, provoked the authorities' concerns:

...the existing scale of migration of the working-age population from the countryside exceeds the pace of the accumulation of the material-technical base that would ensure the increase of labor efficiency, and it does not meet the interests of the economic development of kolkhozes and *sovkhozes*. The mass departure of the working-age population, and first and foremost young people from the countryside is accompanied by the deterioration of the age structure of the rural workforce.²¹⁴

The decades-long problem of labor supply in Soviet agriculture peaked in the 1970s. A selective survey of the collective farms in fifty Ukrainian rural districts shows that only fifteen of them — mostly in the western regions — did not hire additional help for agricultural work.²¹⁵ At the same time, in every oblast' many local kolkhozniki failed to deliver the required amount of workday units or avoided work at the collective farms completely.²¹⁶ The vicious circle of inefficient organization of labor led to increasing state expenses and price inflation, prompting the state to seek more cost-effective and efficient approaches to the agrarian sector. Once again, the term “rational labor utilization” gained currency, only now the principles and policies of rational management were supposed to change. New policies were supposed to be based on profound knowledge of the composition of labor resources and their location, which resulted in a campaign directed towards “revealing” the true extent of the labor reserves.

In the late 1960s, the study of labor reserves became a systematic activity of the statistical agencies.²¹⁷ By that time, the authorities had acknowledged the value of science-based administration:

...without the study of the composition of unoccupied population, without the study of the structure of population, general inquiries into the population of those territories where work is required, it is impossible to accomplish the tasks that are posed in front of the regional branches

²¹³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 851, ar. 41.

²¹⁴ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 714, ar. 34.

²¹⁵ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 714, ar. 35.

²¹⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 646a, ar. 35.

²¹⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 391, ar. 48.

of distribution of labor resources and to supply the national economy with manpower.²¹⁸

The inquiries into population studies were also stimulated by the growing demand of the industries and the diminishing pool of workers.²¹⁹ In 1967, the State Committee for the Utilization of Labor Resources was founded, one of its responsibilities being to monitor the state of the working population in the republic.²²⁰ Migration, as a process tightly connected to the location and utilization of labor resources, was an integral part of its population research agenda. The activities of the Committee and the reports that it produced granted the opportunity to systematically track the trends in seasonal migration and create an image of their approximate scale and gender composition.

In the late 1960s, however, the Committee's main task was to identify the size of the non-working population that was involved in housekeeping and subsidiary plot tending. These inquiries were undertaken in order to investigate the possibilities of mobilizing those who were unemployed, and to "improve the utilization of labor reserves" in the countryside.²²¹ The Committee followed the trends of natural population changes and migration, and the dynamics of the distribution and utilization of labor resources in the oblasti of Ukraine over ten years.²²² So, in 1967, 32 percent of the Ukrainian working-age population — 6.4 million — were involved in agriculture. This group included 1.1 million of the non-working individuals.²²³ The census of 1970 also clarified the size of the labor reserves: depending on the area, 80–90 percent of this category consisted of married women occupied with domestic chores.²²⁴ According to the results of the survey held during the census, 504,000 women in Ukraine were willing to work if there were jobs closer to their place of residence and better childcare facilities.²²⁵

The conclusions of this investigation played a decisive part in identifying the problems of the countryside. One of the most pressing issues that impacted the mobility of labor reserves was the seasonality of agriculture. The labor-demanding summer months were followed by a down period that resulted in the non-involvement of one-third — around two million — of the

²¹⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 354, ar. 147.

²¹⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 379, ar. 139; TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 392, ar. 74; TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 354, ar. 130.

²²⁰ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 359, ar. 1.

²²¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 606, ar. 2.

²²² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 606, ar. 2.

²²³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 391, ar. 51.

²²⁴ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 541, ar. 111.

²²⁵ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 541, ar. 32.

kolkhoz workers.²²⁶ By contrast, in summer it was rare for a kolkhoz to not experience labor shortages. In order to hastily resolve labor supply issues, the collective farms hired seasonal workers. The situation was aggravated by the fact that, even in the most intense periods of harvesting, not all kolkhoz members were willing to work at their local farms. Discouraged by low wages, they either refused to turn up or sought employment at more affluent farms. As a result, collective farms were undermanned all over the country during summer — in both “overpopulated” regions in the West and “underpopulated” regions in East and South Ukraine alike, although to a different extent.

The fluctuating labor demand in the agrarian sector, combined with better wages and living standards in the cities, encouraged rural residents to leave their villages. In Ukraine, this outflow was more intensive than the average across the Soviet Union.²²⁷ Despite the decades-long resettlement program, the rural population in the areas of intensified agricultural development was diminishing.²²⁸ This was not helped by the high numbers of young people leaving the countryside, which resulted in even larger labor supply tensions as the rural population aged. The young specialists who were assigned positions in the countryside after graduating from higher education institutions also did not stay for long, disappointed by the living and working conditions.

Since one of the goals of the planners and executives was the much-discussed efficiency of labor resources utilization, the situation in the countryside called for changes in the policies directed at labor force management and the distribution of workers. The attempts in previous decades to regulate migration via administrative methods had clearly failed to deliver the desired results. The limitation on passports issued to rural residents and the limitations on residence registration (*propiska*) in large cities — the so-called passport/*propiska* system — did not stop the outflow from villages, because the economic interests of the cities and their labor demand were stronger than the state measures of migration control.²²⁹ Agrarian resettlement, itself costly and bureaucratically intricate, did not solve the problem of labor shortages in the Southern regions of the Ukrainian SSR either. To the contrary, in its early stages, the campaign exacerbated rural homelessness and unemployment. A Soviet sociologist pointed out that the whole strategy

²²⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 391, ar. 52.

²²⁷ Zagrobs'ka, *Organizovani pereselennia*, 15.

²²⁸ Zagrobs'ka, *Organizovani pereselennia*, 26.

²²⁹ *Problemy izuchenia migratsii naselenia*, 210.

of the localization of production during this period had devastating consequences for the economy:

...until recently [in the planning of localization of production facilities] the connection between labor resources and other aspects of productive forces was not taken into account. When the new [industrial] construction was planned in one district or another, its economic rationale was determined by natural resources, transportation and other [related] factors, while the main productive force — people ... were viewed not as factors of placement of industries, but only as consumers of their products. ... The underestimation of the population's role in the development of production ... leads to significant economic losses. ... Currently the level of industrial development and the distribution of population are the [defining] factors of [the location of economic activities].²³⁰

The idea of placing production facilities in locations where there were people to be hired, instead of moving people to the places where the new farms and enterprises were established, dominated Soviet economic planning in the 1970s. It had two main aims: firstly, to provide possibilities for full-time or part-time employment for women involved in domestic work and, secondly, to indirectly influence the outmigration from the villages by broadening the scope of locally available jobs and balancing the side-effects of agricultural seasonality. It was consequently suggested that placing new industrial facilities in small and middle-size towns and limiting the construction of the new plants in large cities might be effective. New industrial facilities were proposed for around 75 small and middle-sized towns in the Ukrainian SSR. These new factories were expected to attract not only the populations of those towns, but also the residents of surrounding villages.²³¹ The new workshops were predominantly oriented towards female labor which preconditioned their profiles.²³² Among these new industrial branches were electrical and radio manufacturing industries, textile and clothing enterprises, and service related industries, such as tourism.²³³ The collective farms were also expected to add more animal husbandries and to organize ancillary crafts, such as souvenir manufacturing, that could occupy kolkhozniki during the low agrarian season.

3. Seasonal migration and Transcarpathia's economic life

²³⁰ Moskvina, *Naselenie SSSR: voprosy migratsii*, 21-23.

²³¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 390, ar. 64.

²³² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 541, ar. 9.

²³³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 541, ar. 111.

In the mid-1970s, western regions still retained considerable labor reserves. The estimates from 1976 suggested that 270,000 people in rural Western Ukraine were occupied in private households and were not officially employed.²³⁴ Unlike the rest of the Ukrainian SSR, the rural population of the Western oblasti were not so keen to leave the countryside. Transcarpathia, for instance, was one of the very few regions in Ukraine where the rural population actually increased by 10.5 percent in the period 1959–1977.²³⁵ On the one hand, this resistance to urbanization was the result of a comparatively slow rate of industrial development combined with the unwillingness of locals to move permanently to distant locations, as was encouraged by the state programs of resettlement and organized recruitment. On the other hand, it resulted from the particular economic balance between maintaining private households and relying on earnings from seasonal migration, upon the latter of which local villagers increasingly relied during the post-war decades: more than one third of the western regions' non-working individuals were involved in seasonal migration within and beyond the Ukrainian SSR.²³⁶

Transcarpathia was an exemplary case of this particular economic configuration. Firstly, the numbers of people found to be involved in private household and individual farming was the highest in the republic. While in Ukraine the number of non-working people was at 13.9 percent in 1968, in Transcarpathia it was 34 percent, and in some districts it reached 44 percent.²³⁷ Only 26.8 percent of the Transcarpathian working-age rural population were involved in agriculture in 1965.²³⁸ Yet, it was not only that the agricultural sector was unable to employ all the countryside dwellers — the argument that was usually presented as a reason for agricultural resettlement. More importantly, the low wages of the collective farms made employment unattractive and uneconomical for many inhabitants. Instead, they invested considerable time and effort in cultivating their private plots. Here, like anywhere in the Soviet Union, the private plot was the real source of subsistence: it compensated for the shortcomings in the centralized

²³⁴ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 854, ar. 80.

²³⁵ The calculations are made from *Itogi vsesoyuznoi perepisi naselenia 1959 goda: Ukrainskaia SSR* (Moscow: Gosstatizdat “Moskva”) 14-15; *Narodne gospodarstvo Ukrainiskoi RSR: iuvileinyi statystichnyi shchorichnyk* (Kyiv: “Tekhnika”) 11. There were only other two regions in Ukraine where there was population increase in this period. In Ivano-Frankivsk region – the neighbouring region with Transcarpathia with similarly high rates of seasonal labour migration, the rural population grew by 1 percent. Another region with rural population growth was Crimea. It increased by 63 percent, possibly due to intensive resettlement activities since 1959, which in this particular case was actually effective.

²³⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 854, ar. 80.

²³⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 379, ar. 138.

²³⁸ A. I. Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsiia sel'skogo naselenia zapadnykh oblastei USSR (Ukrainiskoi SSR) i puti ieiie uporiadochenia*, [Dissertation manuscript] (L'vov, 1968), 126.

distribution and was indispensable for country life. However, the high percentage of people involved in household production also indicated that familial farming was rooted in pre-Soviet economic and social values.

Secondly, the rates of involvement in seasonal migration suggested that it was an important component of the region's local economy and an enterprise pursued by men and women alike. Indeed, the rates of seasonal migration from Transcarpathia were the highest in the Ukrainian SSR: in 1966, over 66,000 people were reportedly leaving the region for seasonal earnings,²³⁹ a number that constituted almost 20 percent of the local working age population.²⁴⁰ In Transcarpathia, self-organized migration accounted for over twelvefold that of state-organized migration,²⁴¹ and some mountain villages, where seasonal migration was especially intensive, saw up to 200–300 dwellers regularly leaving for seasonal work.²⁴² Although the neighboring Western oblasti also relied on seasonal migration as a recurring employment opportunity, none integrated seasonal labor into the economic existence of the population to the same extent.

The majority of those who were regularly involved in seasonal migration from Transcarpathia — over 50,000 people — were rural residents.²⁴³ Many families combined tending to private households with their seasonal earnings, which impacted the composition of the labor reserves in the region. In contrast to the statistics regarding non-working Soviet (generally female) citizens,²⁴⁴ the gender distribution of non-working individuals in Transcarpathia was rather peculiar. Here, 52 percent of the non-working individuals were in fact men, and in some districts their share made up to 64 percent.²⁴⁵ The category “non-working” typically encompassed the citizens who did not have a permanent job. It did not mean, however, that those included in this group avoided work altogether and dedicated their time solely to their domestic chores. In Transcarpathia, many of these who were officially considered “non-working” were in fact taking occasional seasonal jobs. In 1966, almost 23 percent of the people included in the category “non-working” claimed earnings from seasonal migration as a source of subsistence, while

²³⁹ To compare: the second region with the largest seasonal outflow of workers was the neighbouring Ivano-Frankivs'k oblast', whose annual rates of seasonal migration amounted to 20 thousand people – 7,3 percent of local working-age population.

²⁴⁰ Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsiia sel'skogo naselenia zapadnykh oblastei USSR*, 176.

²⁴¹ Bereziuk, 177.

²⁴² Bereziuk, 178.

²⁴³ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 213, a. 20.

²⁴⁴ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization*, pp. 62–70; TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 541, ar. 111.

²⁴⁵ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 463, a. 14, 16.

another 44 percent relied on a personal subsidiary plot.²⁴⁶ A little over 11 percent of this group even admitted that seasonal work was the reason why they turned down permanent employment options:²⁴⁷ the income it delivered was enough to live off throughout the year.



Figures 8 and 9. Transcarpathian seasonal workers during the corn harvest. Location unknown. Most likely 1960s. The photographs are from the private archive of a seasonal migrant

²⁴⁶ Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsia sel'skogo naselenia zapadnykh oblastei USSR*, 196.

²⁴⁷ Bereziuk, 195.

In order to grasp the significance of the earnings from this seasonal work for the local economy in Transcarpathia, it is sufficient to examine an example from a single year. In 1961, the average pay for a seasonal workers' work-day was 4.70 rubles. In Transcarpathia, kolkhoz members received 1.18 rubles on average for the same unit of work.²⁴⁸ In addition to their significantly higher earnings, seasonal workers were entitled to various in-kind bonuses. The collective farms readily sold wheat, sunflower seeds, beetroot and other agricultural produce in large quantities to the seasonal migrants at state-set price.²⁴⁹ Thus, in 1961, 37,000 seasonal workers from Transcarpathia earned 16.4 million rubles in money and in addition brought home almost 43,000 tons of grain worth 6.4 million rubles. At the same time, Transcarpathian collective farms paid their members 20.8 million rubles and 20,400 tons in kind.²⁵⁰ In five months of seasonal labor, migrants earned more in-kind produce than their colleagues earned in a year while working for local collective farms. Another example is especially striking: in 1961, seasonal migrants from the two Transcarpathian districts with the highest migration intensity — the mountainous Tiachiv and Rakhiv districts — received 25,000 tons of corn, wheat and flour via the railroad, while the crops grown in these districts produced only 5,400 tons.²⁵¹ Even the delivery was organized and paid by the employing collective farms: both by railway and highway transport. Thus, five months of agricultural seasonal work could provide a higher income than year-long work for the local kolkhozes. The gap between the payment of local and seasonal agricultural workers persisted: in 1971, the average wage of a kolkhoznik was 3.50 rubles per work-day, while a seasonal worker received 9.30 rubles.²⁵²

The migrants' wages were certainly welcome, but the in-kind bonuses were arguably the most lucrative part of this deal. While earning similar amounts of grains locally was impossible due to the limited capacity of Transcarpathian farms, and considering that there was no official animal feed market open for individuals, the in-kind bonuses were indispensable for rural dwellers who kept livestock. Their wheat and corn bonuses provided the necessary fodder for their pigs, sheep and cows, and increased the possibilities for sustaining and enlarging local individual farming, however constrained by the Soviet legal framework. Any surplus went straight to the black market. In 1971, seasonal workers bought a centner of wheat from the

²⁴⁸ Bereziuk, 193.

²⁴⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 547, ar. 93.

²⁵⁰ Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsia sel'skogo naselenia zapadnykh oblastei USSR*, 191-192.

²⁵¹ Bereziuk, 193.

²⁵² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 592, ar. 61.

collective farms for 5 rubles, which they then privately sold for 25–30 rubles; sunflower seeds were traded for 60–70 rubles per centner.²⁵³ These activities undeniably fit the rubric of “speculation,” and they further tarnished the reputation of seasonal migrants and increased wariness of the very practice of seasonal migration. However, apart from the profiteering opportunities that seasonal migration occasionally provided in the context of otherwise extremely limited access to the state-rationed agricultural produce, secondary trading in in-kind bonuses created local animal feed markets, which, on the whole, supported local individual farming. One could earn grain to feed cattle by investing four or five months of work, or one could buy it from a neighbor. However steep the price, the opportunity was there.

The gap between what one could earn as kolkhoz member and as seasonal worker, meant that they had little incentive to work for their collective farms, if at all. The maladies of Soviet agricultural management were prominent in Transcarpathia as well: given the seasonal fluctuations in labor demand, 55 percent of working-age kolkhozniki were left uninvolved in collective farms’ activities during the winter months,²⁵⁴ while the delays of wage payments further discouraged them from active participation in the collective households.²⁵⁵ However, being a member of a collective farm brought a number of benefits, which rural dwellers were not willing to lose, such as the right to keep a private plot, and tax breaks. Therefore, they did not abandon kolkhozes, but instead avoided investing too much effort in them. Transcarpathia was a regional leader in the number of collective farmers who did not deliver the minimum number of work-days. In 1965, 22,600 local kolkhozniks did not participate in agricultural production at all.²⁵⁶ This tendency triggered the vicious circle of shortages, which meant that some collective farms were forced to employ seasonal help to compensate for the local workers who simply refused to turn up.²⁵⁷ Such manifestations of “non-rational labor organization” became a systematic problem of the Soviet labor process in agriculture, which was only exacerbated with time.

²⁵³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 547, ar. 93. On the in-kind payments of seasonal workers see: TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 392, ar. 22; TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 822, ar. 84; TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 871, ar. 89; TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1049, ar. 30.

²⁵⁴ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 213, a. 20.

²⁵⁵ Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsia sel'skogo naselenia zapadnykh oblastei USSR*, 135.

²⁵⁶ Bereziuk, 128.

²⁵⁷ Bereziuk, 191.

Due to its large labor reserves in the republic and extremely high rates of seasonal drops in labor demand in collective farming, Transcarpathia was subjected to the state policies of industrial intensification in the 1970s, that were supposed to employ the mobile labor reserves. These policies were not only aimed at reducing migration to the cities, but also at restraining the uncontrolled seasonal migration flows. A Soviet economist came to the conclusion that:

The only ... effective method to fight unorganized seasonal migration [otkhodnichestvo] from the villages [of Western Ukraine] is the scientific organization of labor in agricultural industry. Its task is twofold: first, to find ways to retain the labor reserves, necessary for agriculture during the peak period, which is possible if there is a work load during the whole year; second, to elaborate the program in order to provide jobs for the surplus labor reserves, considering the decline of the employment opportunities for rural population in the cities...²⁵⁸ Only deeply thought through and scientifically substantiated measures can facilitate the solution of this issue and bring to order both the permanent and seasonal migrations of the rural population.²⁵⁹

Despite the migrants' undeniable contribution in other regions of the country, it was considered preferable to bring them back into the pool of locally accountable and officially (and permanently) employed workers. To do so, it was suggested that the number of jobs in the region should be increased. Sixteen industrial hubs in the rural districts of Transcarpathia were to be created, as well workshops in small and middle-size towns.²⁶⁰ Among these small countryside workshops were juice and wine houses, factories that produced ceramic tiles, wooden boxes for packaging, souvenirs and carpets, and brick and canning plants.²⁶¹ In larger towns, furniture factories and electronics plant branches were opened. Soon the changes in the employment rates were showing: according to the official statistics, the number of non-working people of working-age in Transcarpathia had dropped to 14.4 percent by 1975,²⁶² but to what extent the introduction of the new industrial branches influenced this change, who filled these jobs, and whether people were working full or part-time, would be questions for further research.

Even though the new plants and workshops built in Transcarpathia in the 1970s created additional jobs, they did not stop people from pursuing seasonal earnings. In 1979, around 22–

²⁵⁸ Bereziuk, 128.

²⁵⁹ Bereziuk, 215.

²⁶⁰ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 213, ar. 14.

²⁶¹ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 213, ar. 22–31.

²⁶² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 769, ar. 117.

23,000 residents of Transcarpathia were reported to still be working outside their oblast', continuing the practice that was labeled a "negative tendency" among both scholarly circles and the state authorities.²⁶³ Why was it negative and, more broadly, how did socialist ideas construe seasonal work? Where did its economic effectiveness come from, and why did it worry the authorities, whose main concern at the time was to raise the effectiveness of labor? In other words, was seasonal migration a solution or a problem?

SEASONAL MIGRATION: PROBLEM AND/OR SOLUTION?

Despite their growing interest in migration, Soviet academics left seasonal migration at the margins of their attention for a long time. Their research was primarily directed towards the types of spatial mobility that resulted in the permanent change of residence, as these types of migration were assessed as having the largest economic and demographic impact. Additionally, seasonal migration was viewed as either a side-effect of temporary economic irregularities that were supposed to be eliminated by the technical progress and mechanization of production, or simply as a remnant of the capitalist past, alien to the economic structures of centralized socialist society, presumably immune to the seasonal fluctuations of labor demand or at least capable of covering the shortages via the channels of organized recruitment. This academic prejudice, coupled with political bias, prevented Soviet scholars from approaching seasonal migration as a social phenomenon in its own right. The "still observable negative tendencies of seasonal migration in some regions" were mentioned in passing in the monographs dedicated to issues of migration without any proper discussion. Only in the 1980s did articles with a specific focus on seasonal migration start appearing in the pages of specialized sociological journals, such as *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania* [Sociological research]. The first monograph dedicated entirely to seasonal migration was published only in 1991. Its author, Maria Shabanova, was a student of a famous Soviet sociologist of migration Tatiana Zaslavskaia, the founder of the influential Novosibirsk School of Social and Economic Research. Shabanova's research combined the traditional for Soviet academia methods of economic sociology with questionnaires that were offered to seasonal migrants working in Siberian villages. The survey included questions about their place of origin, duration of stay in the places of destination, age, gender, motivations and

²⁶³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1187, ar. 154.

number of years spent in seasonal work which, for the first time in the history of the Soviet sociology, helped to build up an unbiased social “portrait” of the seasonal migrant. Interestingly enough, many of Shabanova’s respondents originated in Transcarpathia. These first attempts to approach seasonal migration in the Soviet Union with proper analytical rigor came at a time when the country itself was falling apart. By this time, unnoticed by scholars, seasonal migration had already transformed into a socially reproducible practice that lasted at least three decades before the collapse of the USSR, and had established itself as an integral part of the economic reality of late socialism as well as a cultural phenomenon in certain regions of the country.

In addition to its lack of credibility for “serious” academic or demographic research, or perhaps as a result of such disdain, seasonal migration suffered from reduced visibility in statistics. Soviet instruments of monitoring of spatial mobility were often not adjusted to tracking short-term movement as opposed to permanent change of residence. For instance, following the suggestion of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the census of 1970 did not include any questions about temporary departures, defined as no longer than six months, and seasonal work, since residents did not permanently change their addresses and place of work.²⁶⁴ The statistical registries also often missed seasonally migrating individuals: the fact that rural dwellers were not issued passports did not substantially limit their mobility in the 1960s and 70s, but it did reduce the effectiveness of monitoring of their movements.²⁶⁵ Moreover, many migrants left for seasonal work without completing the required paperwork, so their movements were not reflected in the statistics.²⁶⁶ Alternative scenario was also likely: a single person could have left for seasonal works several times a year, but the number of his or her departures could have been misleadingly equated with the number of migrating individuals. Overall, until the late 1960s, statistical records of seasonal movement were not on the state agencies’ agenda. With such structural obstacles and deficient monitoring tools it was impossible to properly estimate the volumes of seasonal migration.

Although seasonal migration was a marginal phenomenon from a national sociological and economic perspective, the regional authorities in Transcarpathia were forced to acknowledge its presence and weight, since in the 1960s, one in five working-age inhabitants were migrating.

²⁶⁴ V. N. Korovaieva, “Migratsia naselenia SSSR,” in *Vsesoiuznaia perepis’ naselenia 1970 goda*, ed. Maksimov G. M. (Moscow: Statistika, 1976), 246.

²⁶⁵ Dolgushevskii, “Aktual’nye voprosy issledovaniia migratsii.”

²⁶⁶ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 473, a. 1.

The decades of seasonal migration made “spontaneous seasonal migration” the region’s most prominent stock-in-trade, second only to the famous local spas. Migration was thus more closely observed locally, through sampling inquiries and inspections demanded by higher authorities. As result of these investigations, seasonal migration became a separate avenue of administrative inquiry in Transcarpathia by the end of the 1960s. Important data was collected on the destinations, occupations, age and gender characteristics of seasonal migrants, and although far from sufficient, it was a first step towards understanding this social practice. Like all sociological knowledge produced in the USSR, its value was not only in facilitating the understanding of social processes, but assessing them and developing the tools for regulation. This was pertinent as seasonal migration was almost unanimously recognized as an undesirable phenomenon.

Before reviewing the causes of this negative perception, it is important to first point out that the late Soviet economy could not function without seasonal help. Despite the implementation of additional small production facilities in villages and towns that was supposed to “stabilize” the labor force in the countryside, the number of working age kolkhozniks continued to decrease in most of Ukraine.²⁶⁷ So, by the end of the 1970s, over 90 percent of the Ukrainian rural districts experienced yearly labor shortages of over 1.5 million workers.²⁶⁸ As the decades of failed attempts to instigate “change from above” have shown, there was no structural solution to seasonal labor. In the late 1980s, the harvest labor demand across the Soviet Union grew by five million workers, as compared to the average yearly demand.²⁶⁹

As shortages increased, the farms and the state tried to find solutions to the labor deficit. Throughout the 1970s, the number of additional workers hired by collective and state farms grew annually.²⁷⁰ Among the citizens drawn or simply sent to help with agricultural works, were the employees of the plants and factories from nearby towns and cities, and university students. Their involvement was compulsory, but the outcomes of these initiatives were ambiguous. While the contribution of the students was generally assessed as plausible, since they had material incentives to work and resided at the assigned farms uninterruptedly for a prolonged period of time,²⁷¹ the plants’ employees had to combine their workloads at their regular jobs

²⁶⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 705, ar. 26.

²⁶⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1031, ar. 119.

²⁶⁹ Moskvina, *Naselenie SSSR: voprosy migratsii*, 47.

²⁷⁰ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 705, ar. 25.

²⁷¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 646a, ar. 52.

with periodical visits to the farm.²⁷² Many kolkhoz chairmen admitted that the results of such short term visits was not worth the effort, since the logistical deficiencies in commuting and labor management turned it into an enormous hassle for all parties, and involved unjustified additional expenses.²⁷³

Seasonal workers, hired by the collective and state farms with or without the assistance of the state agencies, constituted a separate pool of “additional help” and were known for their industriousness and productivity. However, there was great disagreement over the economics of their involvement. This controversy was expressed by a Soviet sociologist D. Moskvina:

It seems that the simplest solution to the problem [of agrarian seasonality] is to annually hire workers only for the summer period. But this solution is also, perhaps, the worst. ... The recruitment of workers, coverage of their transportation to and from the places of work, arrangement of their lodging requires considerable amounts of time and money... tens of millions of rubles annually.²⁷⁴

In addition to the subsidies for lodging and transportation, seasonal migrants were working according to the guaranteed payment scheme, meaning that their pay was substantially higher than the other members of the collectives. Their wages were “inflated... through groundless augmentation of rates and the amounts of works actually completed, and through illegal premium payments and salary supplements. It all undermines work discipline and leads to financial overspending.”²⁷⁵ This overspend also accounted for the increase in costs of production. According to the official records, in 1971 the migrants’ heightened wages increased the expenses of the collective farms by 90 million rubles.²⁷⁶ From the point of view of the national economy, seasonal migration was thus a symptom of internal crisis, and it perpetuated the crisis further by amplifying abnormal labor distribution processes: while (predominantly young) kolkhozniks fled villages seeking better paid jobs and better living conditions in the big cities²⁷⁷ or simply avoided work at the collective farms,²⁷⁸ the farms grew increasingly dependent on expensive hired labor.

²⁷² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 849, ar. 82.

²⁷³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 809, ar. 52–58.

²⁷⁴ Moskvina, *Naselenie SSSR: voprosy migratsii*, 43.

²⁷⁵ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 649, ar. 18.

²⁷⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 592, ar. 61.

²⁷⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 851, ar. 42.

²⁷⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 592, ar. 64.

The state expenditures were, however, only a part of the problem. Even more economically ambivalent were the effects of seasonal migration in Transcarpathia itself, above all the issue of “work discipline.” Seasonal migrants, as a generalized group, created constant tensions and disturbances in the work of the recruitment agencies, industrial enterprises, and collective farms. Annually, the Transcarpathian villages and small towns witnessed the outflow of seasonal migrants. As it was mentioned in an internal report:

In the spring, summer and early autumn period some districts [of the oblast’] lose from five to ten thousand people, and sometimes even more. ... Such departures acquire mass character, the migrants don’t ask for permission to leave, and it leads to the following consequences: first, people are frequently going not to the places where they are most needed (i.e. to the enterprises included into organized recruitment plans), but where they are paid more; and, second, Transcarpathia, which has surplus labor reserves, suddenly ends up itself experiencing labor shortages. ... This has negative effect on the organization of local labor and production.²⁷⁹

The migrants were not only people who had no permanent occupation. In fact, 76 percent of them were actually registered at farms and enterprises as permanently or partly employed, and only 24 percent were not involved in “public production.”²⁸⁰ The workers from local factories and plants left their jobs, sometimes without a warning or official authorization from the enterprises’ management, and joined migrant brigades. The sampling inquiries have shown that 0.4–38.4 percent of the permanent employees of Transcarpathian plants and factories left their jobs for seasonal employment, and returned back to their permanent positions after completing their contracts.²⁸¹ Moreover, while the majority of migrating men were working on various construction projects around the USSR,²⁸² the Transcarpathian construction organizations were short of staff.²⁸³ Local collective farms also experienced the toll of seasonal migration’s appeal: the seasonal migrants included many local *kolkhozniks* who neglected their obligations and travelled to work at other Ukrainian or Russian farms where there was a promise of better earnings.²⁸⁴ On top of this, seasonal migration completely overshadowed the state-managed forms of labor distribution from the region — organized recruitment and agrarian resettlement.

²⁷⁹ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 486, a. 51.

²⁸⁰ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 463, a. 6.

²⁸¹ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 463, a. 7.

²⁸² DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 463, a. 3.

²⁸³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1052, ar. 131–132.

²⁸⁴ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 289, a. 1.

Only 6 percent of migrating workers signed their employment contracts via *orgnabor*,²⁸⁵ while the recruitment agency was constantly struggling to fulfill its quotas. Overall, seasonal migration in Transcarpathia was a mass movement that relied solely on the principles of individual and local initiatives of self-organization, which interfered with the economic, administrative, and ideological structures supported by the Soviet state.

The inquiries of the late 1960s unambiguously showed that thousands of people were migrating annually for seasonal works without the official permission of the local authorities.²⁸⁶ In 1972, local statistical observations revealed that 55,000–60,000 people were involved in seasonal migration from Transcarpathia.²⁸⁷ Given the “disruptive tendencies” of migration, the state was compelled to address the issue, which it did through trying to introduce more restrictions or enforcing the restrictions that were already legally in place but were widely neglected by the responsible parties. In 1973, the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued a resolution entitled “About the regulation of kolkhozniks’ otkhodnichestvo for seasonal works.” In this document, the government pointed out that there were records of numerous violations of another resolution from 1951 entitled “About the regulation of conducting of organized recruitment of workers.” In particular, kolkhozes, sovkhozes, enterprises, interkolkhoz and construction organizations were reported to frequently hire “kolkhozniks-otkhodniks” without authorization of the local administration, without the kolkhozniks presenting permissions for departure from their collective farms, and without the enterprises signing contracts with the collective farms that were supposed to supply workers, as the law required.²⁸⁸ At the same time, the hiring farms and enterprises were reported to not use their local resources — people and equipment — to their fullest, and many collective farms failed to deliver the state recruitment quotas of temporary and permanent workers.²⁸⁹ In this legal and administrative mayhem, the seasonal worker operated as a free economic agent, whose structural identity (labor history or registration) was of no importance to the immediate employer. The state consequently sought to re-establish its role in this opaque managerial-workers relationship.

It is remarkable that the Ukrainian branch of the Department of Organized Recruitment of

²⁸⁵ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 463, a. 6.

²⁸⁶ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 463, a. 6.

²⁸⁷ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 463, a. 6.

²⁸⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 649, ar. 18.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

Workers and Resettlement, alarmed by the migrants' unintentional interference in its work and the incidents of unequal remuneration that "caused legitimate discontent among the honest kolkhozniks," put forward a proposal to limit seasonal migration as early as in 1963.²⁹⁰ It took ten years, however, for the Soviet government to issue the new resolution that was aimed at putting the "unregulated" and "spontaneous" movements under control. Criminalization of the practice was out of the question, as forbidding the pursuit of free employment was not only illegal in the USSR but would ultimately lead to economic crisis. The government's main concerns were, in essence, to "strengthen the principle of planning," in other words, to intervene more effectively in the territorial redistribution of labor flows, and, no less importantly, to make employers and workers accountable for their actions, with transparent contracts between them. The resolutions emphasized administrative accountability: the collective farms, enterprises, and other employers were not allowed to hire seasonal workers without the written permission from their main place of work — usually the kolkhozes; seasonal workers were to be paid according to tariff rates and the schemes of material incentives which were used for analogous works in the region of destination; the local party authorities, charged with the supervision of the farms and enterprises, were not to violate these regulations; the control should have been intensified over the planned organized recruitment of workers, so that the enterprises that did not have official permissions to independently hire temporary workers only used the state channels of recruitment.²⁹¹

At first glance at the statistics, the reforms appear to have had some effect, since there was a steady decline in the numbers of individuals migrating for seasonal work. According to the official statistical surveys, in 1975, 97,000 Ukrainians were involved in seasonal migration. This fell to 87,000 in 1979, while the percentage of seasonal workers who bypassed the state's labor recruitment agencies fell from 69.2 percent to 64 percent throughout the republic during that period.²⁹² However, the decline in the number of migrants did not mean that the principles and practices associated with seasonal migration had changed. In fact, the implementation of the

²⁹⁰ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 214, ar. 70-71. Among the restrictive measures that this proposal contained was one that never entered the official resolution, but it is worth mentioning nevertheless. The Department suggested that the migrants' earnings were taxed: 10 percent of their monetary remuneration and 20 percent of their in-kind bonuses were about to be sent directly to the funds of the collective farms of which the migrants were members. This measure was supposed to limit the speculation and protect the common wealth from the individualist "grabbing inclinations."

²⁹¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 649, ar. 19-20.

²⁹² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1052, ar. 43.

resolution was met with numerous obstacles. For its regulations to work, there needed to be a willingness to cooperate between the administrations of the regions of departure and the employers in other Ukrainian oblasti and outside the republic. For the most part, the employers' priority was still the fulfillment of economic tasks, so they proceeded with hiring as many helping hands as they needed (or could). As the vast territory of the Soviet Union made the flow of information between administrations slow and piecemeal, it was easy to conceal seasonal labor migrants in cases when their employers preferred not to report the exact number of their temporary workers. Migrant workers themselves also learned to be invisible: bribery or other private arrangements here and there were common. In effect, the administrative responsibility stipulated by the resolution only forced the managers to push their employment practices deeper into the shadows.

Mirroring the trends in the republic, the volume of seasonal migrants in Transcarpathia also noticeably declined during the 1970s. In the beginning of the decade, the number of migrating individuals reached over 55,000, but by 1979, local administrations registered only 17,000 migrants who left for seasonal work without proper authorization, and the rates of seasonal departures were especially high in the south-eastern submontane and highland districts of Transcarpathia.²⁹³ This change, I argue, was due to two complementary reasons: one, structural, the other, covert cultural. The structural, or the "objective" explanation, was celebrated by the party officials as the result of the successful regional employment policy, that helped to provide more work places for the local population. From 1971–1979, 35 new enterprises and workshops were opened in Transcarpathia,²⁹⁴ and another 772 auxiliary workshops were based on collective farms.²⁹⁵ The new production units absorbed significant amounts of the labor reserves: the share of working-age population involved in public production raised from 69.6 percent in 1970 to 91.6 percent in 1979.²⁹⁶ This turn towards internal regional employment solved the issue of surplus labor reserves to the point that, in the beginning of the 1980s, the Transcarpathian regional administration proclaimed that the oblast's potential for organized recruitment and resettlement was nearly exhausted. Workers were now commuting over 30–50 kilometers daily from the countryside to the district centers

²⁹³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1052, ar. 126.

²⁹⁴ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 590, a. 30-31.

²⁹⁵ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 590, a. 32.

²⁹⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1052, ar. 110.

to work at the newly established enterprises: the commuters constituted over 30 percent of employees at the plants and factories of the two biggest cities of the region — Uzhhorod and Mukachevo.²⁹⁷ With the growing local employment opportunities, circular migration looked like a viable solution to the problem of seasonal migration. However, seasonal labor migration continued to hold a special place in the economic and cultural life of the region due to its potential for fast earnings and the local toleration of the migrants' prolonged absences.

The second explanation for declining migration rates stemmed from local developments during the previous two decades. For many migrants, seasonal ventures helped to maintain their cattle. Private plot and cattle provided main dietary support for the families, who kept cultivating their own vegetables and crops, and raising cows, sheep, goats, and pigs for dairy products and meat. Therefore, in-kind supplies, earned from seasonal works in agriculture, were indispensable for the household subsistence. Apart from this, seasonal work had another particular material purpose: the money earned from work, in particular, in construction and forestry, was put towards building individual houses, just as it was used to buy land in the pre-communist period.²⁹⁸ Thanks to seasonal migration, Transcarpathian villages were entirely rebuilt in the 1960s and 70s. The old wooden huts were replaced with modern houses made of brick, stone, cement and other mass-produced materials, which were almost inaccessible for individual consumers. This construction boom went into decline by the 1980s. Transcarpathians had already improved their living conditions during the previous two decades, and the declining birth rate meant that little expansion was necessary. As individual property became an asset to be inherited, and fewer people found themselves needing to establish private households from scratch, seasonal migration ceased to be the best solution to the material demands and the only remedy against local unemployment.

According to the official reports, the rate of seasonal migration dropped drastically in the 1980s. The records show that at least 10,000 people left Transcarpathia in 1985, although as their registration was not carried out with great accuracy, there could be notable flaws in this data.²⁹⁹ Additionally, in the 1980s, the administrative attention towards seasonal migration was much reduced, which diminished the record trail and made it once again difficult to trace the

²⁹⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1052, ar. 95.

²⁹⁸ I discuss the role of private construction in the migration project in detail in Chapter 6.

²⁹⁹ DAZO, f. 1546, op. 1, sp. 729, a. 3-4.

development of this phenomenon. However, as the authorities continued to express their discontent with the recruitment and payment procedures, it is clear that the 1973 resolution had no long-term effect, barely influencing the decisions of both seasonal workers and employers, and failing to consolidate any enforcement mechanisms. Rather, the resolution served as a nominal governmental gesture that indicated the acknowledgment of the “problem”. Nevertheless, it inadvertently revealed its inability to intervene in established informal employment structures through mere administrative regulation. By contrast, the investments into local production and the increased number of workplaces, proved to be a more effective strategy of intervention into labor distribution patterns. The increase in employment opportunities, combined with the advancement of regional education and the social welfare requirements that linked permanent employment and pension benefits, did reconfigure the status of seasonal migration in Transcarpathia. It was not eliminated entirely, as the available statistical data shows, but during the last Soviet decade seasonal earnings were apparently viewed by the locals as one opportunity among many others. They could still pursue seasonal work if the circumstances so warranted it, but it was no longer a matter of mere subsistence.

So, in rural Transcarpathia during the 1950–1980s, seasonal work became a socially accepted norm, a kind of economic behavior that has grounded itself into the local way of life. Oral sources suggest that the older generation of labor migrants, whose first experience of seasonal work dated back to the late 1950s, continued to rely on the familiar seasonal trade as long as they were physically able. The wider choice of local employment was thus mostly accessible to the younger generations, who were better equipped in terms of education, training, and skills than their fathers and mothers. At the same time, it was the youth, and the male youth in particular, that was especially pressured to start bringing in an income as soon as they legally and physically matured, especially if they planned to start a family of their own. By the end of the 1980s, over 70 percent of labor migrants from Transcarpathia were men.³⁰⁰ The observations regarding their age were, however, rather contradictory: some authors suggested that the dominating age group was 21-30 years old,³⁰¹ while others were inclined to believe that seasonal labor migrants from Western Ukraine were older, around 35-40 years old.³⁰² Yet, even without a conclusive age profile of the seasonal labor migrant, we know that while local

³⁰⁰ *Ukrainskie Karpaty. Ekonomika*, ed. M. I. Dolishniy (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1988), 91.

³⁰¹ *Ukrainskie Karpaty. Ekonomika*, 91.

³⁰² S. A. Voitovich, Ya. D. Nikiforak, “‘Perspektiven’ li sovremennyyi shabashnik?” *EKO*, no. 6 (1988), 133.

employment was now an easily available opportunity, it was not always immediately taken and people still chose seasonal work.³⁰³ The local economic traditions, therefore, kept seasonal migration alive and attractive, even though the state policies of production development in Transcarpathia managed to displace it from the occupational mainstream by the mid-1980s.

CONCLUSION

Part I of this thesis traced the historical continuity of seasonal labor migration in Transcarpathia from pre-communist times to the establishment of state socialism in the region. I also focused on Soviet ideas about migration and the ways in which they affected governmental policies, and their application in Transcarpathia. Internal migration had an indispensable economic value for the Soviet Union, which was launching ambitious industrial and agricultural projects in locations which originally had very limited labor reserves to support these initiatives. The understanding of migration was thus informed first and foremost by the demands of a planned economy — it was perceived as movement that could and should be regulated and guided from the center. This idea was fundamental to imagining migration in the socialist society. It remained intact regardless of the ample empirical proof of the large and “spontaneous” voluntary mobilities of Soviet citizens, and the evidence of the ineffectiveness of state-led migration campaigns. The authorities were compelled to admit that some of their methods and tools were ineffective, but they never gave up the very basic idea of controlled mobility, even if it worked better on paper than in practice.

Seasonal migration was one of the most nagging “irregularities” in the neat theoretical framework of planned economy, since it was chaotic, invisible, “unsupervised,” and involved remuneration principles that appeared to be outside of the Soviet laws and regulations. In Transcarpathia, seasonal migration seemed to be inextricable. It was believed to result from the imbalance between the available arable lands and human resources in the region, which ultimately caused “overpopulation.” It is remarkable that the size of the population was always weighed against land, and not against the general shortage of jobs in Transcarpathia, which would be the responsibility of the planners. The word “unemployment” was never heard, and

³⁰³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1052, ar. 96.

the more neutral “overpopulation” was used instead.

The outdated argument of land scarcity in explaining labor migration in Transcarpathia held the upper hand even in 1970s. However, it grew increasingly evident that neither the availability of land, nor the rates of employment were decisive in people’s choice to engage in seasonal work. With the rise in local employment opportunities, the pool of labor migrants did shrink, but let us not forget that in the 1970s over 70 percent of the labor migrants from Transcarpathia had permanent local jobs, and some enterprises remained understaffed while large numbers of people were migrating. This evidence suggests that seasonal migration was certainly a choice under late Soviet socialism, and not one made out of dire necessity. From the mid-nineteenth century up until World War II, seasonal migration had supplemented individual farming activity, which indeed had a direct connection to the land, its scarcity, and a wish to augment one’s property. After Soviet collectivization, land ceased to be an asset of private possession. The peasant was deprived of the right to own or accumulate it, so its role in the household economy changed: while the private plot was decisive for rural subsistence during Soviet times,³⁰⁴ the land was no longer the source of wealth or status in the pre-communist sense. During the first, especially hard, Soviet decades, seasonal migration, a familiar local trade, served as an adaptation to the newly implemented economic regime. Seasonal work constituted a bridge that connected new employment opportunities to the local traditions of labor. The fact that the possibility of seasonal work was so readily seized by the Transcarpathian peasants, can be only explained by their cultural familiarity to the idea and practice of seasonal migration. Eventually, migration itself became an element of local rural culture.

In the 1960s, a little over half of Transcarpathian seasonal migrants worked in agriculture; almost one third worked in construction; and the remaining 18 percent, in forestry.³⁰⁵ They explored job opportunities inside the Ukrainian SSR, but also in the European part of Russia and Siberia, in Latvia and Kazakhstan, as well as in Bashkiria, the Buryat Republic, Georgia, Belarussia, and Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Komi ASSR).³⁰⁶ These directions differed significantly from the planned destinations determined by the labor recruitment

³⁰⁴ See, for example, Karl-Eugen Wädekin, *The Private Sector in Soviet Agriculture*, ed. George Karcz, translated by Reith Bush (University of California Press, 1973).

³⁰⁵ Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsia sel'skogo naselenia zapadnykh oblastei USSR*, 184.

³⁰⁶ Bereziuk, 180.

agencies.³⁰⁷ This suggested a strong component of active initiative in discovering job opportunities. After the initial stage of discovery and the mapping of the Soviet labor space, a number of patterns of professional specialization and trans-regional ties emerged, and they ensured the continuity and reproduction of the practice of seasonal migration:

In the beginning, all directions [of seasonal migration] were shaping spontaneously. In the present time [1965], however, they can be viewed as constant, since the population of the investigated [western] regions have acclimatized itself on the receiving end. It got adjusted to the conditions of labor and everyday life, got acquainted with the locals, and the management of the enterprises had a chance to practically evaluate their work. These directions vary enormously depending on the region and the district.³⁰⁸

In the 1960s and especially the 1970s, the irregularities of the Soviet-administered economy enabled seasonal migration to develop into an informal and lucrative enterprise. In these decades, seasonal labor, previously despised as tedious, precarious, unskilled, and low-paid, suddenly offered yearly incomes that (in forestry and construction) bordered on the salaries of top Soviet professionals and administrators, and frequently exceeded them. Monthly earnings of the labor migrants reached around 1,200–1,300 rubles a month in a good season.³⁰⁹ The prospect of high earnings was arguably the strongest pull when faced with land shortages and meager job opportunities.

To conclude, this chapter was inspired by the representation of seasonal migration in the Soviet Ukrainian archive. It is, for the most part, a story “from above,” concerned with management, control, and economic rationale, that attempted to fit Transcarpathia, with its natural and human resources, into the “big picture” of the Soviet national economy, while staying systematically blind or disinterested in the actual patterns behind the phenomenon of seasonal migration. In the rest of my thesis, I will engage with the themes that are missing from the official Soviet story and I will offer answers to the following questions: 1) What made seasonal migration so attractive for Transcarpathians in the late Soviet period? 2) How did the migrants search for jobs and organize their labor routines? 3) What made them choose this path over others, and why did they think of themselves as the only heroes of labor in a country riddled with poor work ethic? 4) Why did men migrate more frequently than women, and did this

³⁰⁷ Bereziuk, 179.

³⁰⁸ Bereziuk, 185.

³⁰⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1052, ar. 114.

enterprise affect their sense of masculinity? Finally, why did their constant movement keep bringing them back home?

PART II. WORK

It is never realistic, under the guise of “totalitarianism,”
to assume that the men on the spot
are mere cogs in a machine.
Their character, interests, habits,
can help to determine how the machine works.

Alec Nove³¹⁰

We would work for six months, or four months, or eight months,
then we would come home for a bit, and then we would go and work again,
because one has to earn one’s living. And this was our life.
Some of us were wandering around the woods, others went to construction sites, building farms.
As for me... I never liked construction. I was always in the forest.

Danylo³¹¹

³¹⁰ Alec Nove, “Peasants and Officials,” in *Soviet and East European Agriculture*, ed. Jerzy F. Karcz (University of California Press, 1967), 57.

³¹¹ Interview with Danylo, December 2014.

4. FORESTRY: STATE AND PRIVATE INITIATIVES AROUND SEASONAL MIGRATION

INTRODUCTION

The son of illiterate peasants from Transcarpathia, Ignat, born in 1934, did not receive even a full primary education. He started school during the war, when Transcarpathia was re-annexed from Czechoslovakia by Hungary. After starting a Hungarian school, he was re-enrolled in the first grade each year as work obligations at home distracted him from obtaining a certificate and progressing to the next grade. When the Soviet Union definitively and officially secured its power over the region in 1945 and administratively incorporated it as one of the oblasti of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Ignat was once again enrolled into the first grade, but this time at a Soviet school. However, the story repeated itself — his mother required his help around the house, and Ignat only managed to attend classes when household obligations — shepherding, scything, or agricultural works — did not demand his attention. At the age of 12, he dropped out of school completely. Long after, he tried to trace his education history in the local archive, but discovered that there was no mention of him.

Work, not education, was always expected of Ignat at home, and this obligation shaped his childhood. Being an only child — quite a rarity in Transcarpathia where, before World War II, it was more common to be one of five children — and the son of a single mother put even more pressure on him to provide all the support he could. For Ignat, these were not only the household chores. From the age of nine he served as a day laborer. Four years in a row, every spring and summer his mother would send him to work for the rich peasant families in his village or the village nearby. There he looked after the cattle while they were put out to pasture in the hayfields, fifteen kilometers from the village. Ignat spent the entire day in the hayfields, milking and tending to the cows and picking the apples, and in the evening, he had to bring ten to twenty liters of milk down to the village. The next day, at four o'clock in the morning, he would face another day of hard work. While one family was kinder to him, and the work was slightly easier due to the fact that the milk and the apples were brought to the village with the help of the horses, the other family did not treat him nicely at all. He said bitterly, “The food I received was rationed, like in the army. I was hungry more often than I was full.”

Apart from the daily food, the payment for his service took the form of some lard or meat, a pair of trousers and a warm winter coat made of lambswool, a pair of shoes and, sometimes, a sheep. His mother did all the negotiations. From the listed items it is clear that the aim of his service was as modest as it could be: to support his own basic needs of nutrition and clothing, with a sheep as a generous bonus. As child labor was very cheap, he received no money at all. Like many other day laborers in pre-Soviet Transcarpathia, he came from the poorest strata of peasants, often without any land of their own. In-kind payment, however small, was a minimal offering that his mother simply could not turn down since, if Ignat obtained his clothing, it freed her from making or procuring it herself.

The story of Ignat's work as a child surfaced only during our second interview. It was not himself, but rather his wife, who mentioned that he used to be a day laborer. When I admitted that it surprised me that he had not recalled this experience, she guessed that this particular memory might have embarrassed Ignat. To work for someone else and not "own" one's labor was a point of shame for the poorest members of rural communities. For Ignat, the experience of manorial labor did not endure, but it might not have been the experience he wanted to bring up while narrating his life and identity. When asked directly about this part of his life, he nevertheless filled this gap with the similar descriptive rigor he displayed when telling me about his work as a seasonal labor migrant.

Ignat did not live through the pre-Soviet rural social reality to the full extent, but he was born early to feel its indignities from the least privileged perspective possible: as an only child from a poor family who had to start selling his labor as soon as he was physically able to work. In his story, the pre-communist and Soviet experiences of labor aligned to reflect the social transformations that Transcarpathia experienced in the mid-twentieth century. This early life experience gave Ignat an important point of reference when evaluating his labor at each point of his later employment. The requirement to work deprived him of the education and professional skills that would give him a chance at social mobility, and he consequently relied on his diligent work ethic to get by.

When Ignat was slightly older, he briefly worked at the local lumber camp. There were five or six young men in their brigade and a foreman. Their earnings were low and unreliable, and the workers had to put up with delays: "We worked almost for free. We were never paid the full sum. Just in little bits... Even when we finished our work, they still continued paying us in small portions during the whole winter... In the end we didn't receive what we earned, so we

left it as it was.” From 1949 to 1950, Ignat’s village was collectivized and his mother joined the collective farm. She wanted him to become a worker at the kolkhoz as well, and to stay with her and help run the house. She would not allow him to leave the village, so he decided to run away. One morning she gave him a task: taking sacks to the fields to collect potatoes for the kolkhoz, which would help her to fulfill her duties. But he had other plans: his suitcase was already packed, hidden away and ready for the journey. He did not know yet where he was heading, but he was told that there were plenty of places where his labor was in high demand, and he was prepared to take a chance. The potato sacks were left behind, and seven years passed before he saw his mother again.

In the autumn of 1953, Ignat and four other men of similar age from his village responded to the call of the local organized recruitment agency and signed contracts to work on the construction of water pipe-line in Rostov oblast’ in Russia. With the new construction projects of the last Stalinist decade, the state was anxiously recruiting volunteers from all over the USSR, above all the surplus labor power of the recently annexed regions of Western Ukraine, including Transcarpathia. In the course of these labor mobilization campaigns, the agents of organized recruitment (orgnabor) pursued and persuaded young people like Ignat and his friends to apply to enterprises and construction sites around the USSR. Consequently, Ignat spent two years at the pipe-line construction, and then was recruited to the army. After leaving the army, he eventually returned to his home village for the first time in seven years. A mere twenty days at home were sufficient to discover that the job prospects in Transcarpathia had not improved or were not satisfactory enough for Ignat. His goal was clear, “I needed to build a house, because the one we had was so low that I wasn’t able to comb my hair [and not hit the ceiling]. ... So we [the villagers] needed a lot of money. We wanted to build houses.” Ignat’s first initiative was return to his previous job in Rostov oblast’, where he was re-employed as a miner with another two friends from the village. The earnings at the mine were not high, and when the opportunity to change jobs emerged after six months, Ignat and his friends seized the opportunity. They had received word from acquaintances, who were working as woodcutters at the logging camp in Kirov oblast’, Russia, that replacement woodcutters were needed after two workers had been seriously injured. Ignat accepted the invitation, left his job at the mine and moved to Kirov oblast’ to try his hand at woodcutting. After a short, informal test, the foreman welcomed him as a new member of their woodcutting brigade.

This event was decisive for Ignat’s future. Seasonal work at the Russian forestry enterprises became his life’s occupation. During twenty-seven years of changing lumber camps and

locations, Ignat and his nomadic woodcutting brigade drifted across the Urals and Siberia looking for better pay, more satisfying working conditions, and accommodating managers. Their brigade asked for high wages, but they knew that skilled labor was in scarce supply at the remote and undermanned lumber camps. The winter season was thus devoted to intensive work, while the spring and summer months, when the forest roads were destroyed by floods, they spent in their home village in Transcarpathia, where they took on other social roles as husbands, fathers, and members of the local community. With time, Ignat's sons also joined his brigade, as he passed his knowledge and connections to them. At that point Ignat was the foreman, in charge of contract negotiations and generally responsible for his brigade. Even though he did not receive any formal education and did not have any formal career, his practical knowledge of the job and his personal experience within the timber industry helped him to get by and even create levers to effectively negotiate with the system.

Ignat's life and labor story was shaped by the constraints and possibilities of late Soviet society, as was that of many other Transcarpathians who joined the "flows" of seasonal migration from the region from the 1950s to 1980s. Their narrated biographies not only intricately connect the dots on the map of the USSR, they also draw complicated trajectories between the "first" and "second" economies, demonstrate the conflict between the planners intentions and actual economic practices, and expose the scope of opportunities for exercising economic and entrepreneurial agency under Brezhnev's informal "Little Deal" of "acquisitive socialism."³¹² Oral testimonies of the direct participants also flesh out the importance of the details, which usually escape the eye of a scholar who approaches the topics of labor or migration in grand statistical terms and from generalizing perspectives, imagining migrants as forced, organized, or spontaneous "flows" of impersonal masses. The oral stories, instead, provide a sharp contrast to the archival records and ideologically loaded pieces in the Soviet press, allowing the history of migration in the late Soviet Union to be rewritten from a personalized, although socially situated and historically conditioned, angle.

With help of the lived experiences of migrants, in the following two chapters I will show that there was an important informal layer to the story of labor migration in the USSR that has been largely unnoticed. Only partly and sporadically surfacing in the official reports, this layer constituted the major asset of the seasonal workers' labor practices. These oral testimonies help

³¹² James R. Millar, "The Little Deal: Brezhnev's Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism," *Slavic Review* 44, no. 4 (1985): 694-706.

us to think about migration in cultural terms: of relations, connections, networks, and agreements, rather than abstracted “push” and “pull” factors which largely simplify the mechanics of the phenomenon. Oral history provides a deeper insight into history of migration as “a human process – not the shuffling of economic atoms but rather movement of historical actors embedded in systems of family, politics, religion, education, and sociability.”³¹³ These chapters consequently align with Martha Lampland’s ambitious claim that “economics and politics are always cultural forms, and must be analyzed as such.”³¹⁴ Like any other economic system, the Soviet administered economy with its informal, semi-legal underbelly was brought into existence by the decisions, actions, and motivations of social actors.

In bringing together the administrative efforts to organize labor mobility and the workers’ response to these measures, I intend to go beyond the assessment of seasonal labor migration as merely an incentive-driven enterprise and instead claim that it altered labor process in certain industries, in particular, forestry. Russian forestry traditionally relied on seasonal labor, but the transformation it underwent after 1953 significantly redefined economic incentives and the legal framework that informed the status of migrant workers. Further legal changes, implemented in the early 1970s, turned out to be even more influential and ambivalent in their results. Although intended to facilitate the procurement possibilities of the collective farms and manpower timber enterprises, these legal changes provided the conditions for the emergence of a private timber trade within the Soviet centralized economy. In the previous chapter I argued that Transcarpathia was notorious for its high rates of “unorganized” seasonal migration (that was not state sanctioned) which in the late 1960s suddenly emerged as a systematic labor distribution problem. Professional migrant brigades were reported to depopulate villages when the felling season began, meaning that local industries were not fully staffed. I use this case study to sketch out a multi-layered genealogy of regionally specific migration patterns, which were not only marked by distinct dynamics of independent organization, but, in staying within the labor structures of the Soviet system, also provided a contrast to standard labor practices in forestry.

³¹³ James H. Jackson Jr., Leslie Page Moch, “Migration and the Social History of Modern Europe,” *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 22, no. 1 (1989): 33.

³¹⁴ Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labour: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 16.

MANPOWER ISSUES IN SOVIET FORESTRY

The timber industry played a strategic role in the post-war economic recovery. Further industrial development posed the need for an increase in timber outputs.³¹⁵ The USSR economy required extensive amounts of timber as an important raw material for construction, the automobile and furniture trades, chemical and cellulose production, mining, and defense industries. As the forestry resources in the European parts of the USSR and the felling sites close to communication hubs were exhausted shortly after the war, felling was pushed further into the remote and dense forests and away from the timber-demanding industries.³¹⁶ By the end of the 1950s, the majority of Soviet timber harvesting was relocated to the North of the European part of the Soviet Union, as well as the Urals, Siberia, Karelia and the Far East. These territories contained 60 percent of the wood reserves and maintained 65 percent of total timber stock in the country.³¹⁷ At the same time, over 75 percent of timber was consumed in the European part of the USSR, which had at its disposal only 27 percent of the total timber reserves.³¹⁸ Thus, during the post-war decades, a number of governmental provisions were made to reform and modernize forestry, and technically equip the industry in order to meet the growing demand. The modernization of forestry involved investment in mechanization and industrial infrastructure, as well as significant changes in labor practices.³¹⁹ In the late 1940s, forestry still relied on low-productivity manual labor and animal-drawn transport, so the intention to mechanize all production operations – from felling to hauling – was ambitious and challenging. Another challenge was posed by sourcing a regular labor supply, since the felling and logging facilities had moved further away from the populated areas. One of the aspects of the forestry reform was directed at this issue precisely: forestry was supposed to overcome its seasonal nature and become an all-year-round functioning industry with a pool of permanent workers instead of a seasonally hired workforce.

Before 1917, all works in Russian forestry were performed by seasonal workers.³²⁰ Logging companies normally recruited artels (crews) of woodcutters and wood floaters from peasants of

³¹⁵ Dominique Moran, “Lesniki and Leskhozy: Life and Work in Russia’s Northern Forest,” *Environment and History* 10, no. 1 (2004): 86.

³¹⁶ Moran, “Lesniki and Leskhozy,” 86; *Lesnaia promyshlennost’ SSSR 1917-1957*, ed. N. N. Boiev, I. I. Volkov, V. K. Dobrovol’skii, V. A. Gatskevich, Vol. 1 (Moscow, 1957).

³¹⁷ N.V. Timofeev, *Lesnaia industriia SSSR* (Moscow, 1980), 44.

³¹⁸ Timofeev, *Lesnaia industriia SSSR*, 26.

³¹⁹ Timofeev, 26.

³²⁰ M. A. Beznin, *Povinnosti rossiiskogo krestianstva v 1930-1960 gg.* (Vologda, 2001), 76; V. N. Davydov, “Iz istorii razvitiia lesnoi promyshlennosti avtonomnoi oblasti Komi (zyrian) v 1921-1925 gg.,” *Istoriko-filologicheskii sbornik*, no. 6, (Syktyvkar, 1960): 3-12.

the nearby provinces.³²¹ During the 1920s, the first forest trusts were organized, causing the mechanism of labor mobilization to change. As the newly centralized industry required a regular inflow of workers, local collective farms were obliged to provide a certain number of workers to the timber enterprises yearly.³²² Thus, from 1930s and throughout the war, timber stockpiling was still carried out seasonally and mainly relied on seasonal workers from the local peasantry as well as Gulag prisoners and forced settlers.³²³ In the first post-war years, seasonal workers were still the dominant group among the woodcutters in Siberia, and the share of collective farm members constituted 30–60 percent.³²⁴ In 1946–1955, nearly 526,000 people arrived to stockpile timber in the North.³²⁵ They were recruited for seasonal work and permanent settlement from Belorussia, Ukraine, and some regions of the RSFSR.³²⁶

Despite the still prevalent reliance on seasonal workers, the objective was to bring it to the minimum. Employers were pushed to prioritize one-year or longer employment contracts over temporary seasonal contracts. Official sources suggest that combined measures directed at turning forestry into an all-year functioning industry were, in fact, effective: by the end of the 1950s, the total number of seasonal workers in certain regions fell to 0.7 percent compared to 52.7 percent in 1946.³²⁷ These figures, however, might have concealed turnover, which during the 1950–1960s was higher in Siberia than in the USSR, and approached the unprecedented levels of population movement during the First Five Year Plan.³²⁸ Additionally, seasonal workers could have been made less “visible” in the official reports if they were hired on one-year contracts, but left before their term was over provided that they fulfilled their quotas.³²⁹

Although the labor shortages of the 1930s–1940s were largely covered by the forced labor of deportees and convicts,³³⁰ Khrushchev’s policies of de-Stalinization included the amnesty of political prisoners and deportees, which affected the timber industry which could no longer rely on forced labor. From 1956, wage increases based on regional premium rates (*raionnyi koeffitsient*), as well as other material and social benefits such as better housing, higher pensions,

³²¹ I. R. Shegelman, *Lesnye transformatsyi (XV–XXI vv.)* (Petrozavodsk: PetrGU, 2008), 35.

³²² Beznin, *Povinnosti rossiiskogo krestianstva*, 77.

³²³ Beznin, 76–77; Shegelman, *Lesnye transformatsyi*, 69–70.

³²⁴ V. G. Makurov, *Razvitiie lesnoi promyshlennosti evropeiskogo severa SSSR v poslevoiennyi period (1946–1955)* (Petrozavodsk, 1979).

³²⁵ Shegelman, *Lesnye transformatsyi*, 74.

³²⁶ A. S. Zherbin, *Promyshlennye rabochie Karelii (1948–1958 gg.)* (Petrozavodsk, 1971), 31.

³²⁷ Beznin, 88.

³²⁸ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and de-Stalinization*, 69.

³²⁹ Individual interviews with seasonal workers.

³³⁰ See, for example, Dominique Moran, “Lesniki and Leskhozy”: Dominique Moran, “Exile in the Soviet forest: ‘special settlers’ in northern Perm’ Oblast,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 30 (2004).

longer periods of annual leave entitlement, and early retirement, were offered as incentives to attract workers to the industries in Siberia.³³¹ This system of benefits, called the “Northern bonuses” (*severnyie nadbavki*), was supposed to compensate for harsh labor conditions and increase the pool of permanent employees. Forestry employment laws were also deliberately simplified, for example, with regards to the duration of the probationary period.³³² Even with these incentives, labor shortages continued. The low population density of the areas of extensive forest exploitation was compounded by a growing out-migration from villages to Soviet cities. The desire to move to an urban center usually trumped the appeal of Northern bonuses, since forestry work often meant not only hard labor in a harsh climate, but also the acceptance of a life deprived of the cultural activities and services available in the cities. In sum, the bonus program failed to secure the required labor supply or spare it from the necessity of seasonal labor.³³³

In addition, despite the state’s efforts to modernize forestry, the mechanization process was slow,³³⁴ so the necessity to engage seasonal workers turned out to be impossible to overcome. In these circumstances, the state reluctantly continued to exploit the strategies of labor mobilization initiated in the 1930s. One of these was the *orgnabor*, the agency of union-wide labor distribution, which was informed about labor-deficient industries, instructed about prioritized enterprises, and expected to move workers accordingly. *Orgnabor* (organized recruitment of workers) presupposed the facilitation of individual contracts between workers and enterprises for permanent (one year and longer) or seasonal (no longer than six months) employment. These measures also failed to deliver satisfactory results. Organized recruitment and the direct employment of workers by enterprises — the very measures that were supposed to stabilize manpower at a permanent level — not only failed to increase the numbers of workers, but even struggled to maintain these numbers. Difficult working conditions, harsh climates, and the lack of housing and other facilities discouraged people from seeking

³³¹ John Sallnow, “Siberia’s demand for Labour: Incentive Policies and Migration, 1960–1985,” in *The development of Siberia, people and Resources*, ed. Allan Wood and R.A. French (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 188–189.

³³² E. A. Subbotin, “Poniatie sezonnykh i vremennykh rabot i rabotnikov,” *Trudy: Voprosy razvitiia trudovogo prava v osnovakh zakonodatel’sтва Soyuza SSR i soyuznykh respublik o trude. Trudy BYuZl*, Vol. 24, (Moscow: RIO BYuZl, 1972), 208.

³³³ For the assessment of population dynamic in Siberia in the 1960s–1980s, see, for example, S. G. Prociuk, “The Manpower Problem in Siberia,” *Soviet Studies* 19, no. 2 (1967); T. I. Zaslavskaiia, V. A. Kalmyk, L. A. Khakulina, *Social Development of Siberia: Problems and Possible Solutions*, in *The Development of Siberia, people and Resources*, ed. Allan Wood and R. A. French (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 177–187; M. A. Shabanova, *Sezonnaia i postoiannaia migratsia naseleniia v sel’skom raione* (Novosibirsk, Nauka. Sibirskoie otделение, 1991).

³³⁴ In 1981 only 3.7% of the enterprises of timber, wood-working, cellulose and paper industry were fully mechanised. See *Narodnoie khoziaistvo SSSR v 1982* (Moscow, 1982), 96, 109.

permanent employment in these territories. With a 23 percent turnover, the enterprises of Komi ASSR independently hired around 11,000 new workers each year, while the number of workers delivered by the system of organized recruitment diminished from 6,800 in 1968 to 2,800 in 1971.³³⁵

The manpower shortages at timber enterprises were especially tangible during tree felling in the winter season and timber-rafting in the spring. In order to fill the gaps, the enterprises “were bound to go through the colossal expense of recruiting seasonal workers from the Moldavian and Ukrainian SSR, who only rarely guaranteed the success of the business [i.e. annual quota fulfillment].”³³⁶ Some enterprises were more dependent on seasonal labor than others. For example, the director of the regional industrial association “Komilesprom”, V. Karasiov, wrote in his report in 1971 that “Pechorlesosplav” logging trust was heavily reliant on seasonal workers in timber rafting and was not prepared to stop hiring seasonal workers for the foreseeable three to five years in favor of those provided by organized recruitment, due to the absence of housing and cultural and social facilities.³³⁷ As the turnover rates in the timber industry remained among the highest until the mid-1980s,³³⁸ the issue of labor shortages was more acute in this branch of the economy, and managers sought all possible solutions to this issue. As a result, enterprises continued hiring seasonal workers: according to the official statistics, in the 1980s, at least three percent of the Soviet timber was annually harvested by seasonal workers.³³⁹

The orgnabor’s overall effectiveness as a country-wide recruitment agency was undermined as early as the 1950s.³⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it continued to be one of the main channels of manpower relocation to the forestry and construction enterprises in Siberia and Far East.³⁴¹ In particular,

³³⁵ *Lesnaia promyshlennost’ respubliki Komi 1961–1990 gg. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov, Kniga I*, (Syktyvkar, 1994), 101-102.

³³⁶ *Lesnaia promyshlennost’ respubliki Komi 1961 – 1990 gg.*, 106.

³³⁷ *Lesnaia promyshlennost’ respubliki Komi 1961 – 1990 gg.*, 101.

³³⁸ V. I. Markov, *Oplata truda v sisteme upravleniia ekonomikoi razvitiia sotsializma* (Moscow, 1980); See also *Zaniatost’ naseleniia: izuchenie i regulirovanie* (Moscow, 1983), 54-64.

³³⁹ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 1394, ar. 13.

³⁴⁰ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and de-Stalinization*, 70-71. For more on *orgnabor*, see Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Armonk, N.Y: Routledge, 1976); Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labour and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁴¹ Lane, *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 47; V. G. Makurov, *Tekhnicheskaia rekonstruktsiia lesnoi promyshlennosti Evropeiskogo Severa SSSR v poslevoennnyi period (1946–1955 gg.)*, " *Voprosy istorii Evropeiskogo Severa* (Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo Petrozavodskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1976), 45; I. V. Popova, "Organized hiring as a form of attracting the population to the European North in the period of the second half of the 1940s to the beginning of the 1960s," *Izvestiia Rossiiskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta im. A.I. Gertsena*, no. 126 (2010): 65.

in 1974, 11.8 percent of recruits in timber felling were still coming via orgnabor.³⁴² In any case, the relevance of orgnabor for my argument is not its labor supply effectiveness. Rather, it is viewed here as an instrument which was used by the state to implement its region-specific policies regarding the utilization of the labor force. Orgnabor's recruitment plans reflected the state's pragmatic labor-focused optics, through which Western Ukraine, and Transcarpathia in particular, was, up until the 1970s, seen as a region of significant surplus labor power, that was not sufficiently employed due to the lack of local industry and its modest agricultural potential.³⁴³ For this reason, the region was subjected to decades of labor redistribution, which took shape in the population resettlement campaigns to the southern regions of Ukraine, the Far East and Kazakhstan, and region-focused labor drafting to selected industries, such as forestry.³⁴⁴

FORGING TRANS-REGIONAL RELATIONS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE SOVIET BUREAUCRACY

Ukrainian Soviet archives reveal that seasonal labor migration to timber enterprises in the North of the USSR mostly involved individuals from the Western oblasti of Ukraine, and especially, Transcarpathia.³⁴⁵ Existing literature has explained neither this socio-geographical peculiarity nor the reasons why Ukrainian workers found the timber industry in the North and Siberia so attractive. My purpose is thus to examine the interplay between the systematic, region-specific recruitment to forestry maintained by the state agencies for decades and the independent initiatives of seasonal migrants, who began by embracing state relocation, only to radically reject it later on.

Let us start with a discussion of the regional preferences of orgnabor, which helped shape the connections between labor-deficient forestry enterprises and particular regions of the Ukrainian SSR. Ukraine's labor recruitment plans for Russian forestry usually projected 15–20,000 workers annually, and this number included both permanent (one year and longer) and seasonal contracts.³⁴⁶ This policy ostensibly followed the initial organized recruitment initiatives established in the 1930s, which channeled the labor force from the rural areas into

³⁴² I. S. Maslova, *Ekonomicheskie voprosy pereraspredelenia rabochei sily pri sotsyalizme* (1976), 153.

³⁴³ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 316, ar. 21.

³⁴⁴ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 496, ar. 95.

³⁴⁵ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 395, ar. 28; sp. 397, ar. 62; sp. 854, ar. 70, 78.

³⁴⁶ See, for example, TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 349, ar. 31; sp. 357, ar. 17; sp. 766, ar. 101.

industry and construction. There were, however, several reasons why the Soviet bureaucracy preferred the recruitment of workers from the Western oblasti of Ukraine throughout the 1950s to 1980s.³⁴⁷ Firstly, until at least the 1970s, Soviet authorities saw Western Ukraine as an area with a large pool of untapped labor reserves that could not be utilized locally and would therefore be of greater use if transferred elsewhere. Additionally, the number of unemployed local forestry workers grew in the beginning of the 1960s. The decade of extensive woodcutting in Western Ukraine, which was carried out as part of the post-war economic recovery, led to the drastic depletion of local forests.³⁴⁸ Alongside the structural reorganization of the timber industry in the early 1960s, which was a part of a post-reform recentralization campaign in the Soviet Union, the amount of timber felling in Western Ukraine was significantly curtailed. From 1960 to 1965, the timber harvest was halved.³⁴⁹ Production cuts, accompanied by the gradual mechanization of felling operations, resulted in the job losses of over fifteen thousand people from 1959 to 1965.³⁵⁰ A. Bereziuk hypothesized that these layoffs contributed to the intensification of “unsupervised” seasonal labor migration from the Western oblasti of Ukraine.³⁵¹

The second reason why inter-republic organized recruitment was focused on the Western oblasti, was due to the fact that other Ukrainian regions, such as the coal-rich Donbas, or the mining and smelting areas of Kryvbas, Zaporizhzhia, and Dnipropetrovsk, were oriented towards satisfying their own industrial labor needs, to the extent that they also relied on labor reserves from the Western oblasti. Thirdly, the mountainous regions of the West, especially Transcarpathia and Ivano-Frankivs’k oblasti, were viewed as territories where skilled workers could be found more easily due to the local traditions of forestry. The Transcarpathian orgnabor office, therefore, participated in the all-union campaign of industrial development of the North, Siberia, and the Far East by recruiting workers for seasonal and permanent work in forestry enterprises in Karelia, Komi ASSR, Arkhangel’sk, Irkutsk, Perm’, Amur, Kirov and other regions.

The documents from the official Soviet archive suggest the story which is, due to this archive’s selection bias, is a reflection of the state apparatus’ operation. As such, the archive portrays the

³⁴⁷ L. A. Okun’kov, “Sovershenstvovanie zakonodatel’sтва ob organizovannom nabore rabochikh i obshchestvennom pryzve molodiozhy,” *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo* 6 (1986): 51.

³⁴⁸ *Lesnoie khoziaistvo i lesnaia promyshlennost’ zapadnykh oblastei Ukrainiskoi SSR*, ed. Chekin V., Gerushinskii Z., Oksanich Z., Ivashova A. (L’vov, 1967), 47.

³⁴⁹ *Lesnoie khoziaistvo i lesnaia promyshlennost’ zapadnykh oblastei Ukrainiskoi SSR*, 37.

³⁵⁰ Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsia sel’skogo naselenia zapadnykh oblastei*, 124.

³⁵¹ Bereziuk, 124.

internal migration process as a top-down mechanism. From this perspective, the Transcarpathian *orgnabor* office was a mediating link between the job-seeking locals and the distant employers. The oral accounts of the seasonal workers, however, present a rather different narrative. Not a single respondent from Transcarpathia, all of whom regularly travelled for seasonal work to the Russian North from the late 1950s to the 1980s, mentioned any connection to *orgnabor*. Some had never even heard of the agency, and others had only a vague idea of its purpose and function. Others still recognized *orgnabor* by its colloquial name *verbovka*, which is translated as “recruitment.” For them, *verbovka* was a distant memory, a tale they might have heard of, but which was never a part of their personal story. Instead, many of them presented their first engagement with seasonal work as joining a group of more experienced co-villagers who had already explored job possibilities in Siberian forestry and were putting together independent brigades to go and apply to specific enterprises, or just blindly search for jobs in regions with high labor demand.

In this respect, Ignat’s story was typical. As was the story of Matvii (born in 1940) from the village of Krychovo, Transcarpathia. He joined a brigade of lumberjacks for the first time in 1957, when he was just 17. They followed a man who had been working at the logging enterprise “Pechorlesosplav” one year earlier and proceeded to convince the other villagers that he had earned good money. It was common that older, more experienced men invited younger men to join a brigade. They usually had better knowledge about the geographic locations of the potential work sites, or even had a preliminary agreement with a particular lumber camp. The volunteers, excited by the promise of good money and often without any plausible alternatives at home, lined up to join the ranks of the nomadic tribes of “un-official” labor migrants. The generation of men who were coming of age in the late 1950s saw the beginning of the “movement” and actively participated in developing the ways of self-organized seasonal labor migration. In Matvii’s memories, in the summer of 1957, several brigades left Krychovo for seasonal work in Russia. Ten years later, dozens were migrating.³⁵² According to the official data, Tiachiv raion — Matvii’s native district — was the most active in self-organized seasonal labor migration: in 1966, almost 16,000 people from this district were seasonal workers.³⁵³

³⁵² Interview with Matvii, December 2015.

³⁵³ Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsia sel'skogo naselenia zapadnykh oblastei*, 177.

Even though direct invitation by a relative or a fellow village resident was the entry point for many migrants, sometimes a rough guess, an overheard rumor or a tip-off served as the only available guide for a newly formed team of villagers who had decided to leave home for better job prospects. Many observed the success of their neighbors and assembled their own brigades, even if they lacked any experience with work in the industry, and relied more on luck than on knowledge. Another former migrant, Danylo (born in 1936), recalled that his first experience of job searching in Russian forestry was rather spontaneous. His brigade arrived at a particular train station, where they were “asking around where [to find] logging enterprise[s], forest districts... Then we were looking for it. For example, we are coming to some oblast’, then channel off by two to the raions. Then we come back to the place where we parted, and recount about the equipment and wages [in different enterprises]. Then we choose the best option, and go to work.”³⁵⁴

Such job-hunting tactic did not guarantee a successful outcome. The jobs might have been plentiful, but the working conditions and the wages did not always correspond to the initial aspirations of the job seekers. The risks of failure were high. Danylo mentioned a particularly disappointing season in the late 1950s, when he and his colleagues were looking for a workplace in the Siberian forests for six exhausting weeks. The little money they had on them ran out, and a suitable employment option was not found, so they were forced to return home. According to Danylo, the experience was so devastating for some members of their team that they refused to engage in migrant labor in the future. Instead, they settled for safer jobs at home.

The interviews give the impression that it did not take long for the audacious and haphazard tactics of job seeking to fall into oblivion. While in the late 1950s seasonal workers were still weighing up their alternatives and investing great time and effort into identifying suitable locations, establishing contacts with the enterprises, and building up skills, by the 1960s the breadth of their networks, both at home and in the places of destination, grew wide enough to generate job opportunities based almost exclusively on inside knowledge and personal contacts. There was always someone who knew someone who knew potential places where one could work and earn. Familial connections played a crucial role in “un-official” labor recruitment: fathers, brothers, sons, in-laws, friends, neighbors, and “*kums*” (godfathers of one’s child) teamed up to travel and work together. Even without relatives familiar with the industry, one only

³⁵⁴ Interview with Danylo, April 2014.

needed to head to the village square to find the necessary information. All it took was to ask around.

The tendency to rely on local connections when choosing between job opportunities was so strong that it influenced the specialization profile of entire villages. For instance, Krychevo village in Tiachiv raion of Transcarpathia, where I collected some of the interviews, provided seasonal workers who were predominantly specialized in timber rafting and each year sought employment at the enterprises of the timber rafting association “Pechorlesosplav” on the Pechora river. By contrast, the seasonal workers from Keretski village in Svaliava raion were overwhelmingly involved in forest felling. Both villages, however, had groups of workers who specialized in construction.

Self-organization proved to be remarkably more successful at attracting workers than the state’s labor mobilization campaigns. The migrants’ vague memories about *verbovka* barely reached late 1950s as an insignificant background of a more powerful, indeed, dominating current of self-reliant search for better job opportunities. According to Petro (born in 1936) from Keretski village, they were plenty. “We became so adjusted [to this kind of work]. There was a job for everyone – able-bodied or otherwise.”³⁵⁵ The “long-standing economic connections” between Transcarpathia and certain timber enterprises in Siberia, which Transcarpathian *orgnabor* officials proudly mentioned on the republican meetings in Kyiv, were thus maintained by the independent activities of self-organized migrants, whose relation to *orgnabor* was, in fact, fiercely oppositional.

Is it possible that *orgnabor* recruitment and independent migration trajectories existed separately and did not intersect? Did the Soviet authorities miss the vast and “unsupervised” migration waves? Did they welcome this “spontaneous” outflow of workers? As I have shown in the previous chapter, officials were aware of the high mobility rates in the region and were deeply concerned about the scale of the phenomenon. As I have already mentioned, the outflow of seasonal migrants from Transcarpathia for different industries and jobs reached over 60,000 people annually in the 1960s. Against this backdrop, the regional *orgnabor* office in Transcarpathia struggled to satisfy its annual recruitment quota, which, compared to the “unsupervised” migration rates, was miniscule — from 2,800 to 3,500 persons annually. The

³⁵⁵ Interview with Petro, April 2014.

authorities blamed “unsupervised” migration for interfering with the central plans of the republican and all-union labor distribution and agricultural resettlement plans.

In fact, workers had numerous reasons to avoid cooperating with the orgnabor system. Recruiters were aware of the general poverty and unemployment in the region and therefore offered the volunteers prospects of high and fast earnings. However, the state recruitment system quickly acquired a bad reputation for deceptive advertising and misrepresentation of the real working conditions and pay rates at the places of employment. In the late 1960s, disappointed workers bombarded the Transcarpathian orgnabor branch with bitter letters of complaints. Arkadii Iurchenko, a resident of Uzhhorod, decided to enlist himself for a season at “*Sivakles*” association in Amur oblast’, Russia, in order to earn enough money to build a house for his family. When he applied to the orgnabor office, he was advised to choose Amur oblast’ for advantageous work benefits. In his letter Arkadii wrote,

I was shown an announcement on the board. An average monthly wage of an unskilled worker is 300 to 400 rubles plus regional bonuses of 30 to 50 percent. A worker is provided with accommodation and all the conveniences of a flat or a dormitory. A worker receives a full set of work clothes and shoes. I was told that the shops were full of foodstuff and that there were many canteens for workers. Everyone is free to work according to their qualifications and can even apply for training to acquire qualifications on the spot.³⁵⁶

Inspired by such promises, Arkadii signed a six-month contract and arrived at “*Sivakles*” only to discover that his flat lacked amenities, the work clothes did not include a warm hat and gloves, the only canteen was 2km away from the depot camp, the shops were virtually empty, and the actual workplace was 20km away from the camp. On top of that, he was denied the regional bonuses and the only appointment he could get was as a lumberjack, with a monthly wage not exceeding 100–150 rubles.³⁵⁷

There were plenty of such remarkable examples. In 1967, a group of 11 workers applied to “Amurles” trust via the regional orgnabor office and signed their six-month individual contracts. Like Arkadii, they were promised at least 300 rubles per month or more, but after two weeks of work their daily pay was only 2 rubles 40 kopeks. The workers were indignant and demanded a revision of the quotas and payment rates from the logging enterprise. The official reply was that the quotas and payment rates were the same for the whole Ministry of

³⁵⁶ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 237, ar. 64.

³⁵⁷ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 237, ar. 64-65.

Forestry and could not be increased.³⁵⁸ Facing further deterioration in the quality of their working conditions, the upset workers wrote:

We must get up at 5–6 o'clock in the morning and run to the canteen, which is located one kilometer away from the dormitory. We have our breakfast on foot and grab "lunch", which we take to the forest. Then we run to the garage in order not to be late for the truck that departs for the forest at 6.30 am. The garage is 500 meters away from the canteen. Everything is done at a run. The lunch that we receive at the canteen gets cold while we get to the work pitch in the forest. The only way to warm it up is on the fire, but when you start warming up the patties or sausages, they get covered in ashes, and then you don't want to eat them anymore... So, practically, we work without having lunch. We have to drive 35 kilometers one-way to get to work on a very bad road, so it takes us 1.5 hours to get there. The food is cooked badly at the canteen. [...] For two months we have been living in the dormitory room with one handmade table and one handmade bench for 11 people. The bench could be occupied by 4 people, but we are 11. For a long time, we did not have a radio, and when we got it, there was no loudspeaker. [...] Over a month no one has read a newspaper. [...] The post office works 2–3 days a week, and correspondence is delivered to the office with 3–5 days' delay. [...] [We are] extremely outraged by the fact that we were deceived by being promised 300–350 rubles per month. Instead we found out that it was a pure lie, since we got only 35–46 rubles a half-month, and there is no chance we can earn more in the future. [...] We, the workers, are not satisfied with such pay. We left our families and travelled over 10,000 kilometers in order to get a decent money, but the money we get is not enough to subsist on our own, let alone support our families.³⁵⁹

Workers' letters tell similar stories in various details. Many complaints concerned inadequate living and working conditions and startling discrepancies between the advertised payment and actual earnings. Some recruits signed contracts that promised work according to their specializations, but on the spot, they were instead assigned to perform low-skilled and badly paid jobs.³⁶⁰ Others struggled to acquire any jobs at all, since the enterprises seemed not to be as desperate for workers as the recruiters claimed:

You asked us to write to you, so we decided to write a few words. The conditions here are bad. [You promised us work], but what we experience here is derision. The dormitory is bad and cold, the blankets and mattresses are torn. The wood that we received for the furnace is rotten, so we have nothing to burn. There is no work for us here. We are separated and assigned each to different brigades. ... We asked to get work in the forest, but they don't want to listen, they are afraid that we will get ourselves killed and tell us: "Why did you come here? We don't need you." [The director] avoids us and tries not to be seen. ... Before noon we work, in the afternoon there is no assignment

³⁵⁸ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 205, ar. 4.

³⁵⁹ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 205, ar. 5–6.

³⁶⁰ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 183, ar. 76.

for the wood to be cut. If there is wood, the tractors happen to be broken. We ask you to either to make sure that there is work for us here, or to send us back home. Ivan Petrovich! You know how industrious Transcarpathian people are. You came to our houses and asked us to go far away and work, and we trusted you and went. Why did you recruit us and subject us to such humiliation? There are no earnings here, we are hungry like dogs. There is no Soviet power here, people are dark, there is no point in complaining. ... We came to work in the forest, but here we are sent wherever the director wants.³⁶¹

These excerpts capture the offense and rage which is frequently very personal and directed at specific recruitment representatives from the *orgnabor* system. The cited letter repeatedly addressed “Ivan Petrovich,” presumably a recruiter, who failed a group of workers by making false promises and exploiting their trust. The workers thus put the weight of responsibility of their losses and misfortunes on specific individuals and expected them to solve the difficulties they created. Most of the letters did not cross the line of polite reprimands. Occasionally, however, the workers’ bitter disappointment resulted in outright threats:

...we [the workers] did not think that you are such a sly person who would send us here just to fulfill the plan and let us die of hunger. But there will be time when I come home, and the two of us will meet again. We earn here 40–70 rubles, the food is very expensive, so what we earn we eat away, and you promised us 350 rubles. I don’t know where your conscience was when you made these contracts with your own people. I write to you this letter so that you did not send anyone else here. But just so you know: I will not be working here. I will leave even if they don’t give me my documents: I will find employment even without the papers, don’t you worry. So, solve this problem or I will be writing to Uzhhorod, or to the Ministry of Forestry in Moscow and you will lose your job. We want our full payment here. If I don’t receive a response from you, I will leave here and follow wherever the road takes me.³⁶²

The repeated failures of *orgnabor* to ensure that the workers would be provided with what they were promised when signing the contracts generated profound distrust in the recruitment agency. Another unsuccessfully employed worker Iurii Bodnia, complained that he was sent to the worst forest pitch, treated rudely and was told that if “he didn’t like the work, he was free to leave”. At the end of his resentful letter he expressed the opinion of many workers, misled by *orgnabor*: “I will never get job via *orgnabor* and will tell everyone not to do so either, lest

³⁶¹ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 193, ar. 5.

³⁶² DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 193, ar. 21.

they starve. You are only concerned with enlisting a man, but you are not bothered by how much he gets paid. Never again will I go with orgnabor.”³⁶³

Quite predictably, the disappointed workers were not only writing to the orgnabor office seeking justice or simply to make it aware of the inadequacies of the information it was spreading, but also dissuaded their relatives, friends, and neighbors from considering an option of employment via orgnabor. Such “anti-agitation” was an effective tool in casting doubt on orgnabor’s reliability or even completely dissuading peasants from seeking employment through the system of organized recruitment. The head of the Transcarpathian regional branch of orgnabor, Tarakhonych, openly admitted that the rumors about unsatisfying living and working conditions were impairing the work of the department.³⁶⁴

Many cases from the orgnabor representatives’ reports would provide eloquent illustrations of the workers’ frustration with the outcomes of their unsuccessful job placements and their subsequent actions upon arriving back home. In the summer of 1961, Iurii Molnar, an orgnabor representative in Tiachiv raion of Zakarpats’ka oblast’, reported that their plans were delayed due to the early return of the 100 workers, who had been sent to the forestry enterprises of “Pechorlesosplav” in Komi ASSR earlier that spring. Upon finding poor living conditions and a lack of jobs, which failed to provide them with sufficient earnings to at least support their subsistence, the workers left before completing their contracts. The workers were drafted from various villages of the Tiachiv raion, and after their return they managed to turn their co-villagers against the orgnabor system, stopping all those who planned to apply.³⁶⁵ This incident was immediately followed by another significant failure of orgnabor to fulfill their contractual responsibilities. The orgnabor division contracted 409 seasonal workers, commissioned by the collective farms in Kharkiv, Kherson, Kirovograd oblasti of Ukraine and the Crimea, which sent their representatives to Transcarpathia to facilitate the recruitment of the workers. However, a group of 40 workers, sent to Kherson oblast’, returned after only 8 days. They were refused admission into the collective farm due to the absence of the farm representative that recruited them. After this group returned to their villages, Molnar reported, “the impression of orgnabor among the people is such that we might as well avoid showing up in those villages.”³⁶⁶

³⁶³ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 183, ar. 57-58.

³⁶⁴ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 193, ar. 6.

³⁶⁵ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 131, ar. 133.

³⁶⁶ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 131, ar. 133.

These cases provide a perfect illustration of how the numerous organizational gaps, miscommunications and active deceit generated a poor reputation for organized recruitment among potential workers and managers alike. Among the rural population — the main target of the orgnabor activities in the 1950s and 1960s — information which circulated by means of informal networks was considered more trustworthy than the official propaganda spread by the agents of orgnabor, despite the mass communication apparatus possessed by the offices of organized recruitment. Radio and newspaper announcements, public notice boards at the rural councils and personal meetings of the orgnabor agents with people in the countryside,³⁶⁷ fell on deaf ears. Instead of attracting crowds of willing volunteers, official labor drafting campaigns faced increasingly stronger resistance against the system of orgnabor. Already in 1962, at the republican meeting of the orgnabor officials, the head of the Ukrainian branch of resettlement and organized recruitment, Mohyla, admitted that the reputation and authority of the orgnabor system was diminishing. As a disappointing example he mentioned Transcarpathia, which failed to deliver 400–500 workers per quarter, even though large numbers of people were leaving that oblast’ to search for work independently of orgnabor. Such behavior, Mohyla commented, was a sign of deep disrespect towards the system of organized recruitment.³⁶⁸

When not avoiding orgnabor entirely, workers were particularly selective about the industries to which they were willing to apply. While the recruitment quota to the Russian forestry were usually fulfilled by Transcarpathia, metallurgy, construction and coal mining positions were habitually ignored by the workers.³⁶⁹ The workers’ inclination to favor forestry pushed the local orgnabor officials to demand preference for this industry in labor recruitment plan allocations, since they expected to achieve better results if Transcarpathia’s cultural “specificity” was taken into account.³⁷⁰ The attempts to adjust planning to the preferences of population, however, did not change the fact that by the mid-1960s, labor migration was driven by self-organization rather than state regulation. People were indeed interested in seasonal jobs, however, they preferred to be hired on their own terms, bypassing the centralized recruitment bureau.

The case with 40 workers from Tiachiv raion, who were sent back from Kherson oblast’, raises an issue regarding the reputation of orgnabor among another important group of actors — managers. At first, this incident might strike as surprising. Labor shortages were common in

³⁶⁷ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 185, ar. 22.

³⁶⁸ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 183, ar. 12.

³⁶⁹ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 315; TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 592, ar. 62; TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 822, ar. 82.

³⁷⁰ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 315, ar. 19.

Ukrainian agriculture, especially during the hottest harvesting season, and the collective farms in East and Southern Ukraine annually hired hundreds of thousands of seasonal workers yearly to complete the field work. Given this circumstance, the refusal to accept the workers requires an explanation. The administrative reason given in the report — the absence of a person responsible for recruitment — would be acceptable if the outcome of the situation did not turn out to be so dramatic. If the farm manager needed manpower and was willing to admit the workers, he could simply wait for the representative to return to the farm and finish the paperwork. Instead, the recruits' contracts were terminated before they started work. One explanation might have been mistakes in central planning. Miscalculations at any stage of the planning process may have resulted in a misallocation of the labor force, which perhaps did not have labor shortages or were not prepared to accept newcomers due to the absence of available housing or suitable positions which would correspond to the workers' training or preferences. In 1964, only 10.1 percent of the workers sent by the Russian republican department of *orgnabor* found jobs consistent with their specialization; the rest required professional training upon arrival.³⁷¹ The mismatch between the occupations advertised by *orgnabor* and the jobs available at the enterprises was one of the main reasons of workers' dissatisfaction, besides low pay and poor living conditions, and often ended in their withdrawal from the enterprise.³⁷² Managers were reluctant to rely on a labor supply system that delivered unfit or poorly trained workers, whose demands often could not be met by the enterprises' capacities, and who were likely to flee if these demands were not satisfied.

It was the pressure of the central plan that affected the actions of labor recruiters. Struggling to reach monthly and quarterly quotas, officials frequently violated the rules of selection: for instance, enlisting persons whose medical condition did not allow for physical work or whose work record was far from perfect. In general, *orgnabor* offices welcomed any applicant despite numerous selection restrictions that were supposed to ensure the reliability, productivity, and capability of a recruited worker.³⁷³ As a result, the recruits included individuals who, far from intending to offer their committed labor to the enterprises or even hoping to earn more money, used the *orgnabor* system to change jobs or find an excuse and resources to leave their current place of residence. So-called "job-hoppers" (*letuny*), persons with previous convictions and men

³⁷¹ F. M. Leviant, *Vidy trudovogo dogovora*, (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia literature, 1966), 82.

³⁷² Leviant, *Vidy trudovogo dogovora*, 85;

³⁷³ Leviant, 68-88; V. Artemenko, "Osobennosti trudovykh dogovorov, zakliuchaiemykh v poriadke organizovannogo nabora rabochikh," *XXVII sjezd KPSS i razvitiie trudovogo prava i prava sotsial'nogo obespecheniia. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Moscow: 1987), 76-89.

who tried to renege on their alimony payment,³⁷⁴ in theory, were on the black list of orgnabor. In practice, however, the orgnabor office turned a blind eye to the personal and work history of the recruits as long as they boosted the numbers in the orgnabor's reports.

The tendency to recruit an unreliable workforce generated irritation and distrust on the part of the managers of the receiving enterprises. In 1962, the chairman of the Atka Settlement Executive Committee, Magadan Province (in the Far East Region), reported to *Izvestiia* that the department of resettlement and organized recruitment had failed to deliver workers with the required training and, in fact, "has been sending cheaters, drifters, and drunkards."³⁷⁵ Forestry, as one of the most labor deficient industries, faced similar problems. In 1977–1978, a logging company in Kemskii raion of Karelia requested additional manpower. The workers recruited via orgnabor on the basis of two- to six-month contracts were sent from Tula oblast'. The majority were either kolkhoz members or *sovkhoz* (state farm) workers with no relevant experience in forestry. Among the recruits were also "accidental people," who did not belong to any of the farms of Tula oblast' and used to "repeatedly violate work discipline" at the logging company, which served as a reason to fire 30 of 172 workers recruited in 1978.³⁷⁶ A Soviet journalist pointedly stereotyped this sort of recruit:

Restless adventurers, seekers of an easy ruble, and inveterate slackers go to the timber industry enterprises through recruitment. Their amount is small, but they cause a large percentage of production stoppages at timber cutting areas and roadsteads. They are responsible for breakdowns and idleness of machinery, violation of labor discipline, drunkenness, and hooliganism."³⁷⁷

With such experiences and publicity, there is little wonder that the workers sent by orgnabor were met with hostility and mistrust. This bias often resulted in the managers' improper treatment of the workers, which aggravated their already dire circumstances. Workers from Transcarpathia complained that "[The manager] sent us to the worst pit, treated us roughly and told us to leave if something was not to our liking."³⁷⁸ Orgnabor recruits' poor reputation and their subsequent mistreatment had two roots. On the one hand, the orgnabor employment contracts entitled workers to the reimbursement of transportation costs, accommodation, work

³⁷⁴ Peter J. Grandstaff, *Interregional Migration in the U.S.S.R.: Economic Aspects, 1959-1970* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1980), 40; DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 155, ar. 38.

³⁷⁵ CDSP, IV, no. 37, October 10, 1962, 18, cited in Grandstaff, *Interregional migration*, 40.

³⁷⁶ O. I. Kulagin, "Problemy trudovoi motivatsii rabotnikov lesnoi promyshlennosti Karelii v kontse 1960kh-1970kh gg.," *Istoria i sovremennost'*, no. 1 (2012): 171.

³⁷⁷ *Komsomolskaia pravda*, December 1, 1955, cited in W. Donald Bowles, "Soviet Timber. Two Steps forward, One Step back," *Soviet Studies* 16, no. 4, (1965): 393.

³⁷⁸ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 183, ar. 57.

clothes, and certain living standards, which the enterprises were often not equipped to provide. In this case, the *orgnabor* newcomers, dissatisfied with the work and living conditions, issued complaints to the *orgnabor* office which enlisted them, which could provoke unwelcome inspections at the enterprises. On the other hand, the infamously poor living and working conditions in forestry, and the generally poor reputation of *orgnabor*, meant that the department of organized recruitment often fell short of satisfactory applicants, and was therefore compelled to enlist all available volunteers, thus jeopardizing the quality of recruited labor cohorts.

In public discussion, seasonal workers were sometimes placed alongside *orgnabor* recruits in terms of their questionable credibility and described as demotivated nomads whose temporary presence prevented them from developing any commitment to the enterprises and maintaining a decent work ethic.³⁷⁹ Donald Bowles expressed the common tune of the Soviet media circa 1950–60s, suggesting that “in the Soviet institutional context ... seasonal workers ... are a disruptive factor, and are generally poorly trained to use equipment.”³⁸⁰ This presumption was especially prominent in the official discourse of the time due to a state campaign that encouraged permanent employment over seasonal recruitment. Indeed, some of the details in the seasonal migrants’ stories, such as fleeing the unsatisfactory work places without notice or even stealing a saw from the enterprise with the aim of selling to buy a ticket home, did contribute to the portrait of a seasonal worker as an unreliable employee. Such allusions, however, were strongly overshadowed by the workers’ convictions that their labor was exceptionally professional, productive and even more highly valued by the managers of the enterprises than that of the permanent workers.

I will further explore this contradiction later in the chapter. I will also discuss in detail the cultural and economic conditions of incentive shaping for seasonal work, as well as a set of informal strategies that supported and maintained the whole enterprise of “un-official” labor migration. Before proceeding to these central points of discussion, some final remarks should be made about the paradoxical local effects that the system and practice of *orgnabor* had on the workers’ labor.

The general inefficiency of organized recruitment as a body of all-union labor redistribution was widely acknowledged by Soviet scholars and publicists, and Western observers alike. My

³⁷⁹ Kulagin, “Problemy trudovoi motivatsii rabotnikov...,” 170.

³⁸⁰ Bowles, “Soviet Timber. Two Steps forward, One Step back,” 393.

own findings support this conclusion through endless letters of complaint and reports of unsatisfactory performance, which draw a picture of bureaucratic inefficiency and economic mismanagement by the governmental body which, contrary to the very purpose of its existence, failed to deliver adequate services to both its target groups: the undermanned enterprises and the unemployed population. However, to consider orgnabor as a complete failure would mean overlooking the subtleties of its effects, in particular, a contorted historical link that connected centralized labor redistribution plans and the activities of orgnabor offices with the self-organized seasonal migration patterns that started evolving in the late 1950s, as in Transcarpathia.

Such a historical link, at least regarding forestry, follows from the general similarities of locations officially selected for labor recruitment from Transcarpathia and the independent destination choices of migrant brigades. Even though the authorities have claimed that the directions of organized recruitment and “unofficial” seasonal migration did not align, these differences were on a district or specific enterprises level: there were noticeable regional overlaps in the locations for both ognabor and independently-organized labor migration. As previously mentioned, forestry was one of the exceptional industries which usually managed to meet recruitment quotas, regardless workers’ dissatisfaction and the generally hostile attitudes of the employers to the orgnabor recruits. However, out of 15–20,000 Ukrainian workers (up to 3500 of whom were recruited from Transcarpathia) who signed contracts each year with orgnabor for employment in the Russian forestry, only 5–10 percent remained in permanent positions. The rest returned home after their contracts were finished with stories of inappropriate treatment, wasted time, and disappointment with the recruitment system, but also with new information regarding the geographical locations of forestry enterprises, an insiders’ knowledge of the functioning of the industry, awareness of the overwhelming labor shortages, immediate knowledge of labor practices, newly acquired skills, and, possibly, even established contacts with potential employers.

These new assets facilitated the development of migration patterns which no longer required state labor recruitment. The historical significance of orgnabor for Transcarpathian workers, was thus in realigning the geographical direction of migration, reorienting the local peasantry, already culturally accustomed to seasonal work in Hungarian manors, Belgian mines or, indeed, local forestry before the region was incorporated into the USSR, towards the forests of the Russian North, Karelia and Western Siberia. By the mid-1960s, mobile woodcutting

brigades from Transcarpathia migrated to nearly 30 forest areas outside their native region.³⁸¹ Seasonal work thus was used by the local population as a tool of adaptation to the new state-socialist power and labor regimes by re-introducing familiar cultural practices into the new social framework of Soviet institutions. When the advantages of *orgnabor* as one such institution were exhausted, and the system was largely discredited, it was surpassed by self-organized, popular initiatives, enriched by the trial and error of official employment experiences.

Officially, the Soviet authorities considered labor migration outside of the state's immediate supervision as a parallel, or even opposite phenomenon to the practice of *orgnabor*, despite the fact that they served the same purpose: supplying labor to the labor-deficient regions and enterprises. One of the reasons for the authorities' dissatisfaction with self-organized migration was, firstly, its interference with the organized recruitment agency's labor mobilization plans and central priorities of enterprise-specified labor allocation. Additionally, it uncovered the imperfections of planning and added to the discreditation of *orgnabor*. Secondly, and more generally, migration opportunities tended to distract the population from participation in local agricultural and industrial production.³⁸² The possibilities of high earnings tempted many collective farm members, state farm workers and even factory workers from the cities to abandon their positions temporarily, or even permanently, for the risky, but attractive "long ruble". "Long ruble," a colloquial name for the seasonal workers' high earnings, became a pejorative companion of the newspaper stories and feuilletons featuring seasonal workers.

Finally, the authorities disliked the fact that the minimization of the state's involvement in labor redistribution and its diminished control over the employment process, gave way to market forces of supply and demand to govern labor flows. Even though "recruitment at the factory gate," i.e. hiring directly at the enterprises, was anyway a dominant way of employment in the Soviet labor-demanding economy,³⁸³ and many scholars have admitted that the labor market in the USSR was an undeniable reality, the "free seasonal workers" provoked additional concerns due to their informal employment and their assumed semi-legal or even illegal activities, usually attributed to the sphere of "second," or "shadow" economy. Thus, in the eyes of the authorities, the seasonal migrant became a suspicious figure who prioritized his own

³⁸¹ Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsiia sel'skogo naseleniia zapadnykh oblastei*, 187.

³⁸² On the built-in tendency of the Soviet enterprises to hoard material and labor resources in view of constant labor shortages, see Janos Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Clarendon Press, 1992).

³⁸³ Lane, *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 59.

interests over cooperation with the government, frequently “at the expense of the state.” The economic advantages of his labor were overshadowed by the ideological clash between his personal motivations and the Soviet belief in active participation in production and fair remuneration.

THE SOVIET LABOR PROCESS AND THE ISSUE OF PRODUCTIVITY

Given forestry’s overall unattractive profile, it is still puzzling why the residents of Transcarpathian villages persisted in attempting to find seasonal jobs in this particular industry. In the 1960s, one in five seasonal labor migrants from Transcarpathia were working at the Russian forestry enterprises.³⁸⁴ One explanation, used to justify all kinds of seasonal labor in the USSR and particularly favored by the officials, was the lack of local enterprises and arable lands in the region to provide sufficient jobs for all individuals of working age. This is somewhat plausible. Many of the former seasonal workers interviewed in the course of my research expressed motivations which closely corresponded to the official discourse. They unanimously confirmed that, at least in the 1950s, local industries failed to secure jobs for everyone, so people had to leave the region to look for other sources of income. This explanation, however, is hardly satisfactory. Considering the scarcity of jobs in the region, it is understandable that people started looking elsewhere and engaging in labor migration. The mere absence of jobs, however, did not determine the precise social arrangement that migration would take. The choice of seasonal migration to the Siberian forestry enterprises became even less obvious after the expansion of production bases in Transcarpathia in the 1970s, which created new workplaces in many small cities with a view to locally employing the surplus labor force from the countryside. However, if the land scarcity issue was that profound, peasants could have moved to another Ukrainian agrarian region or even another republic by responding to the resettlement call. Alternatively, the migrants could have moved to the places of work with their families and started new lives there. Yet, what many residents of the region chose was annual, prolonged departures of one or more family members, usually men. The reasons for this particular arrangement had an undeniably economic basis. However, it was also grounded in the Soviet culture of labor, the culture that constituted the contrasting background for the migrant workers’ own work organization.

³⁸⁴ Bereziuk, *Sezonnaia migratsia sel'skogo naselenia zapadnykh oblastei*, 184.

One of the main reasons behind the choice to prioritize seasonal trips for earnings was the migrants' discovery that they could arrange profitable contracts by directly applying to the forestry enterprises as a complete brigade. Applying as a complete unit, instead of individual workers, as was promoted by *orgnabor*, the workers could negotiate better with the directors of the enterprises. In the following two sections I will focus on the circumstances of the contractual relationships between the seasonal workers and their employers, and I will claim that their productivity was linked to these, often informal, arrangements.

The increase in labor productivity was one of the main objectives of Soviet “scientific management” and policy making in the 1960s–1980s. Socialist competitions between enterprises and morally charged incentives were devised to motivate workers to improve the quality of their labor, meanwhile reports from the factories drew attention to the perpetual losses and underutilization of human resources. Even though labor productivity was steadily rising in absolute terms from the 1940s, it was not rising equally across the industries and the rate of increase slowed from the mid-1960s.³⁸⁵ The USSR's rates of labor productivity fell behind those of the USA, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy.³⁸⁶ Western economists and social historians of the Soviet Union have shown that the waste of resources was rooted in the structure of the Soviet labor process, which demotivated workers and had a negative effect on their productivity. Considering these circumstances, the industriousness of the Soviet seasonal workers was rather the exception than the rule. As a rare quality among Soviet workers, this industriousness was welcomed by employers and it played an important role in their success at employment “at the factory gate” as did labor shortages. In this section, I will delineate the environment within the Soviet labor process where the conditions for the migrant forestry workers' productivity — i.e. the quality and effectiveness of their labor — were generated.

Labor productivity is a complex phenomenon, and it is influenced by various factors, including education, technology, and equipment, as well as custom and the organization of labor process. Therefore, “differences in labor productivity can only be fully explained by studying the development of firms and the environment in which firms and their employees have operated over a period of many years.”³⁸⁷ So, I shall start with the outline of the main properties of the

³⁸⁵ Lane, *Soviet Labor and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 98–101.

³⁸⁶ Lane, *Soviet Labor and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 96. On labour productivity in the USSR, see also Abram Bergson, *Productivity and the Social System – the USSR and the West* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1978).

³⁸⁷ Clifford Frederick Pratten, *Labor Productivity Differentials within International Companies* (Cambridge: Cambridge

Soviet economic environment. The most prominent scholars who have shaped our understanding of the Soviet economy agree that there are central features in the Soviet economic system that were intertwined and eventually resulted in low productivity.³⁸⁸ First, in the Soviet economy, the output of the enterprises was not distributed through market channels, as in capitalist economies, but was appropriated and re-distributed by the state. The central state bodies devised product mixes, established production targets for the firms, and allocated material supplies on the basis of the plan drafts. Central planning thus provided the ground for shaping general economic incentives. The measure for the enterprises' success was not the profit from market sales, but the fulfillment of the output targets devised by the sectorial ministries in collaboration with the State Planning Committee — *Gosplan*. Administrative control replaced the regulative functions of the market, and fused the economic and political spheres into a system with numerous internal contradictions.³⁸⁹

Second, the extensive growth in production led to the systemic overconsumption of labor inputs: “the growth of state socialist societies intensified the demand for labor, so that reserves become exhausted and shortages prevail.”³⁹⁰ Since the 1930s, the Soviet economy was facing virtually permanent shortages of labor in both the old and the new industrial centers. In its initial extensive stage, “the hypertrophic pace of new construction and industry created an unprecedented demand for labor power.”³⁹¹ As the enterprises sought to expand or maintain the levels of production, they were met with the inefficiencies in the Soviet system of production which caused them to consume more labor per unit of output,³⁹² and resulted in the shortages

University Press, 1976), 22.

³⁸⁸ See Joseph S. Berliner, *Factory and Manager in the USSR* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957); Gregory Grossman, “The structure and organization of the Soviet economy,” *Slavic Review* 21, no. 2 (1962): 203-22; Alec Nove, *Political Economy and Soviet Socialism* (Allen Unwin, 1979); Janos Kornai, *Economics of Shortage*, Vol. A (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1980); Alec Nove, *Soviet Economic System* (London, Boston: George Allen & Unwin Publishers, 1980); Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Socialism and Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1985); Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Armonk, N.Y: Routledge, 1986); David Lane, *Soviet Labor and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.* (Brighton, Sussex: Boulder, Colo: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987); Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and de-Stalinization: The Consolidation of the Modern System of Soviet Production Relations, 1953-1964* (Cambridge, 1992); Janos Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Clarendon Press, 1992); Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR 1917-1991* (Penguin Books, 1992); Bobo Lo, *Soviet Labour Ideology and the Collapse of the State* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: New York: Macmillan Press; St. Martin's Press, 2000); Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labour and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy. An economic history of the USSR from 1945* (Harlow: Longman, 2003).

³⁸⁹ For more on the Party's control over industry see William J. Conyngham, *Industrial Management in the Soviet Union: The role of the C.P.S.U. in industrial decision-making 1917-1970* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1973).

³⁹⁰ Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*, 162.

³⁹¹ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and de-Stalinization*, 59.

³⁹² Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and de-Stalinization*, 60.

continuing beyond the industrialization stage. János Kornai has famously labeled the economies of state-socialism “the economies of shortages,” where supply, and labor supply in particular, acted as the constraint of economic expansion, as opposed to in capitalist economies where the constraints are posed by demand.³⁹³ With pressing labor shortages and high turnover striking the Soviet economy with new force during the liberalization of labor policies and economic growth of the Khrushchev era, enterprises were competing for labor power.³⁹⁴ Consequently, a quasi-labor market emerged in the Soviet Union that depended on the labor “seller.”³⁹⁵ As manpower demands continued, the labor utilization rates were very high, to the extent that some scholars described the Soviet economy as one of “full employment.”³⁹⁶ As demographic patterns, especially the fall in the birth rate, were putting limits on economic expansion, enterprises grew even more dependent on effective management and labor productivity.³⁹⁷

Despite the high rates of labor utilization, labor efficiency remained an issue. Some “objective” causes of low productivity were the disruptions in the centralized supply system that caused down times at the enterprises. The malfunctioning of outdated or worn-out equipment, and the lack of spare parts for repairs, all led to further delays. As meeting targets was the responsibility of the managers first and foremost, they often inflated the labor reserves in order to counter the unpredictable but inevitable resource shortages, pushing the workforce to their maximum potential when supplies were available – in the period of “storming” during the end of a month or a plan year. As the enterprises’ financial security was ensured by the state and there was no threat of take-over or bankruptcy, the management had no incentive to economize on the labor costs. Given the total wage fund, the managers overspent on wages and hired more workers than they required, constantly going over the centrally planned number of jobs.³⁹⁸ The phenomenon of inflating labor reserves became known in the literature as labor “hoarding” – a negative tendency that led to the well-known paradox of the Soviet economic system: in the

³⁹³ Kornai, *Economics of Shortage*, 254.

³⁹⁴ Nove, *Soviet Economic System*, 205.

³⁹⁵ On the discussion of the peculiarities of labor market in the USSR, see: Nove, *Soviet Economic System*, 204-207; Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 259; Lane, *Soviet Labor and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 173-180; Simon Clarke, “Rossiiskii rynek truda,” *Ekonomicheskaiia sotsiologiia* 2, no. 3 (2001): 91.

³⁹⁶ Lane, *Soviet Labor and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 214. See also: David Lane, “Full Employment and Labour Utilization in the USSR,” in *Understanding Soviet Society*, ed. Michael Paul Sacks and Jerry J. Pankhurst, London & New York, 1988), 221-239. Note also Lane’s discussion of full employment in terms of a value: as a ground for ideological legitimacy of the Soviet power and the founding principle of the socialist society.

³⁹⁷ Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R., 1917-91*, 389.

³⁹⁸ E. Manevich, “Ratsional'noe ispol'zovanie rabochey sily,” *Voprosy ekonomiki* 9, (1981): 56.

background of ubiquitous labor shortages the enterprises were over manned. Thus, the underutilization of both labor and capital was a systemic problem in the Soviet economy.

Apart from supply disruptions and machinery malfunctioning, however, Soviet and Western analysts have concluded that the losses of work time and low labor productivity were to be blamed on low motivation among the workforce. On the one hand, in the circumstances of permanent labor hunger, it was hard to elicit maximum effort on the part of the workers. As Kornai observed, absolute labor security and the virtual absence of the fear of unemployment was “promoting irresponsibility at the place of work by anybody susceptible to it.”³⁹⁹ On the other hand, even though the Soviet population was nearly fully employed, it was generally low-paid. The wage schemes were developed by the higher administrative bodies for each industrial sector, profession, and skill classification, and the thresholds could not be amended by the management. This is why the Soviet labor market is referred to by some scholars as a “quasi-labor market”: despite the shortages, the price of labor was not sensitive to demand and remained artificially regulated by the state. The managers, in fact, resorted to informal techniques of budget manipulations in order to augment the workers’ income and incentivize them to fulfill their quotas. They used systems of premiums, in-kind bonuses and the re-grading of skills to recruit or retain labor. However, this was ultimately limited by the wage budget, which could not be overspent without a complex bureaucratic procedure that involved the higher bodies of the Soviet power.⁴⁰⁰ Thus, the Soviet economic system was one of both full employment and low wages. Because of the labor shortages the workers’ chances to successfully change jobs were always promising, but the chances of significantly raising one’s income were much lower. Moreover, increased personal productivity was not lucrative. A professor from Gomel University pointed out, “A machine-tool operator who is ten times more disciplined and conscientious than a fellow worker with the same job receives only slightly more money and sometimes he even gets the same.”⁴⁰¹ Therefore, in “subjective” terms, the low productivity of the Soviet workers resulted from the weak link between the output and the workers’ wages, effort, and incentive.⁴⁰²

Employment security and the wage cap produced low productivity and motivation among the Soviet workforce. Under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the violation of labor discipline and work

³⁹⁹ Lane, *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 107.

⁴⁰⁰ Nove, *Soviet Economic System*, 211.

⁴⁰¹ Lane, *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 115.

⁴⁰² Lane, 115.

time losses was a problem broadly discussed in the press and within industrial departments. Donald Filtzer's interpretation of such workers' behavior differs from the account described above, since he suggested that the workers' disengagement was as an expression of their agency in production. In the Soviet Union, the workers' ability to collectively organize and actively participate in the economic process through trade unions was limited by political constraints,⁴⁰³ but their individual labor was crucial for the economic survival of the system. Therefore, individual labor constituted a worker's only asset, which was in his or her partial control and provided leverage for negotiation with management.⁴⁰⁴ As Filtzer has shown, the workers' response to the political and economic constraints of the Soviet production system was characterized by atomization, defensiveness towards management, isolation and individualism, since it was "only as individuals, or ... as relatively small groups of individuals, that people could function".⁴⁰⁵ One tactic for adaptation and intervention in the labor process as individuals was the "appropriation of work time," which meant using work time "unproductively": either for their private needs or simply evading work whilst at the workplace. Truancy, absenteeism, insubordination and general neglect of the quality of labor remained Union-wide problems.⁴⁰⁶ Since their jobs was guaranteed and they could not significantly increase their earnings in proportion to their applied effort, the workers resorted to these tactics to reduce their working hours. Eventually:

the behavior of the worker became merged into the general fabric of production as an integral part of the pattern of disruptions and dislocations affecting Soviet industry. This then became the norm, which defined the contours of the system of shop-floor relations within which both management and workers now accepted that they had to work.⁴⁰⁷

The timber industry was no exception to these patterns of behavior. According to the surveys conducted in the mid-1960s in timber enterprises in one of the districts of Novgorod oblast', among the most common work discipline violations were truancy, late arrivals to and early departures from the workplace (absenteeism), and refusals to work or to obey the direct orders of foremen.⁴⁰⁸ The survey also revealed an increase in absenteeism in the spring and summer, when the local workers started cultivating their own private plots and dedicated more time to

⁴⁰³ On the workers' protests during Khrushchev era, see: Vladimir Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, E. McClarnand MacKinnon, Trans (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

⁴⁰⁴ Filtzer, *Workers and de-Stalinization*, 192.

⁴⁰⁵ Filtzer, 125.

⁴⁰⁶ Filtzer, 41.

⁴⁰⁷ Filtzer, 140.

⁴⁰⁸ V. A. Bushuiev, V. N. Smirnova, *Trudovaia distsiplina na predpriiatiakh lesnoi promyshlennosti* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1971), 82.

household obligations. Another malady that diminished workers' productivity was, indeed, immoderate drinking.⁴⁰⁹ These violations were a commonplace and were not perceived by the workers as a potential threat to their employment, since they were well aware of the general labor shortages in the region and were convinced that there would be another position waiting for them, even if they were dismissed. The managers were compelled to be forgiving since they could not afford to fire all violators. In the words of a manager, "I did not take any measures [against work discipline violators]. Since if any measures are taken, [the workers] will leave for other enterprises, and I have a plan to fulfill."⁴¹⁰ Thus,

the scarcity of labor power, and the consequent elimination of unemployment as a sanction, meant that managers were almost powerless to enforce rigid discipline. On the contrary, they openly disregarded increasingly severe disciplinary legislation because they simply could not afford to dismiss workers, no matter how troublesome their behavior.⁴¹¹

At the forestry enterprises in Siberia, the issue of labor shortages was further exacerbated by demographic and geographical specificities, and it put additional constraints on the managers' capacity to enforce disciplinary measures. Because of the lack of motivation on the worker's side and the permissiveness of the management, evasive labor behavior and poor work ethics eventually became part of the norm of the Soviet labor relations, a compromise reluctantly accepted by both managers and workers.

Whilst the Soviet industry generally experienced "the crisis of labor motivation,"⁴¹² migrant workers' performance and labor discipline were exceptionally and surprisingly good. Against all the odds of Soviet labor relations, their productivity was curiously high. So, it was not only the labor shortages that pushed managers to employ contractual seasonal workers repeatedly, but their industriousness. I argue that labor migrants' productivity was linked to a differently structured work motivation, based on semi-formal, collective piece-rate contracts, distinctive intra-brigade labor dynamics, and autonomous work routines. These characteristics might have been favorable for them as employees, but they also placed labor migrants on the politically and ideologically uncomfortable margins of socialism as violators of the common principles of remuneration, and as intruders into locally balanced employment arrangements. As the latter, they disturbed the hierarchical fabric of intra-enterprise dependencies and compromises,

⁴⁰⁹ Bushuiev, Smirnova, *Trudovaia distsiplina na predpriiatiakh lesnoi promyshlennosti*, 84.

⁴¹⁰ Bushuiev, Smirnova, *Trudovaia distsiplina na predpriiatiakh lesnoi promyshlennosti*, 86.

⁴¹¹ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and de-Stalinization*, 59-60. See also: Lane, *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 44.

⁴¹² Kulagin, "Problemy trudovoi motivatsii rabotnikov..."

heightened production expectations, and even created inequalities in equipment distribution practices.

INFORMALITY RULES: CONTRACTS, CONNECTIONS, COMPROMISES

1. Collective piece-rate contracts as a motivational principle of labor migrants' work in forestry

The motivation of migrant workers was structured by different principles than that of permanent local workers. Unlike the local workers, whose everyday life encompassed a combination of paid work and household activities, seasonal workers perceived their employment as a temporary duty, strictly separated in time from “real” life at home and the obligations that came with it. The conscious refusal of private life whilst on the job allowed seasonal migrants to devote all their waking hours exclusively to work. A simple phrase I heard from many respondents expressed the essence of their motivation: “We went there to make money.” With that aim in mind, migrant workers were eager to make their own agreements with the managers. This negotiation meant that in exchange for excellent production results, achieved within the constraints of the shortcomings of the industry and contractual labor relationships, such as poor housing, health risks, climate severity, truncated social security, the workers were paid doubled or tripled wage rates. As I mentioned above, the voluntary inflation of wage tariffs was virtually impossible, so how did the labor migrants manage to have their wage demands satisfied? How was it legally and structurally possible? As I will show, this flexibility was facilitated by informality, which penetrated the conditions of migrant workers’ employment, accompanied with the enterprises’ soft budget constraints, and the financial opacity of collective piece-rate contracts. Migrant workers’ labor practices were firmly grounded in informal private settlements between them and the managers, and state administrators found themselves incapable of interfering in or controlling either their relationships or the alternative organization of the migrant workers’ labor routines. Informality served as a fragile basis for the migrant workers’ relations with their direct employers, which, considering the legally dubious components of there arrangements, had to involve trust and personal bonds (of sorts) between the parties.

Development economists and economic sociologists define the concept of informality as a set of “phenomena whose main shared characteristic is that they escape taxation, registration, regulation, and many other forms of public scrutiny in a context where similar activities are

supposed to be and, to a certain extent are, taxed, registered, regulated, and available for public scrutiny.”⁴¹³ Understood more broadly, informality is a “way of doing things” that escapes, evades, and finds ways around its formal counterpart for, as József Böröcz notes, “where there are formal rules, there will be informal ways of bending them: informality is omnipresent.”⁴¹⁴ Although informality is not an exclusive feature of Soviet and state-socialist societies,⁴¹⁵ the rigidity of the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus, its commitment to over-control and over-centralization were balanced by the unprecedentedly pervasive “sea of informality.”⁴¹⁶ Informal networks were developed by virtually every citizen in order to gain access to better healthcare, educational opportunities, better food or other resources in scarce supply. Considering the shortages of many basic items in the USSR, building informal networks became a survival strategy.

Informal practices also penetrated Soviet relations of production. In order to navigate the economic uncertainties and make production possible, Soviet managers applied a myriad of informal solutions. In the relations between managers and seasonal workers, informality was a key element. Their employment in itself was not illegal, but the actual content of the contracts surpassed labor contract regulations and, in many cases, contradicted the rules of wage distribution, placing the seasonal worker in a grey economic area and raising public suspicions around his figure. For managers, informal contracts enabled incentives which went beyond the scope of those offered by official remuneration schemes, and thus increased the chances of attracting workers. For the workers, the flexibility that informality provided was a means of starting active negotiations regarding their wages and bonuses in order to achieve the best deals. Aware of the labor shortages and the high demand for their services at select enterprises,

⁴¹³ József Böröcz, “Informality Rules,” *East European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 348 (2000): 354. See also: Alejandro Portes and Saskia Sassen-Koob, “Making it Underground: Comparative Material on the Informal Sector in Western Market Economies,” *American Journal of Sociology* 93, no. 1 (1987): 30-61; Alejandro Portes, “The Informal Economy and Its Paradoxes,” in Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, eds., *The Handbook of Economic Sociology* (Princeton, 1994), 426-450; Alejandro Portes and Richard Shauffler, “Competing Perspectives on Latin American Informal Sector,” *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 1 (1993): 33-60.

⁴¹⁴ Böröcz, “Informality Rules,” 352.

⁴¹⁵ Böröcz, “Informality Rules,” 352. See also Alena Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Charles F. Sabel & David Stark, “Planning, Politics and Shop-Floor Power: Hidden Forms of Bargaining in the Soviet-Imposed State-Socialist Societies,” *Politics and Society* 11, no. 4 (1998); Bruno Dallago, *The Irregular Economy: The ‘Underground’ Economy and the ‘Black’ Labour Market* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990).

⁴¹⁶ See Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, “Ch. 8. Informal Adjustive Mechanisms,” in *How the Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956); Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours*; Böröcz, “Informality Rules.”

workers turned informality into a valuable asset that allowed them to increase their incomes in a short period of time.

It is now important to discuss in detail the process of obtaining and the conditions of maintaining of the contracts suitable for the workers, since these informally made contracts constituted the basis for the benefits and willingly accepted disadvantages of employment. The legal basis for contracts between seasonal workers and forestry enterprises was provided by the Decree of the General Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR on 7 March, 1933, "About the Conditions of Work of Workers and Employees Working in Timber Industry and Forestry."⁴¹⁷ This decree maintained legal power through the following decades of Soviet history, even though legal experts attempted to draw the authorities' attention to the outdated nature of the document, which was drafted and issued when animal-powered transport and manual, un-mechanized labor were still the basic conditions of the industry.⁴¹⁸ The decree implemented a division of workers into permanent and seasonal, ascribing the status of a seasonal worker to any unskilled worker who worked at the enterprise for less than eight months. The decree also introduced certain flexibility regarding the labor contract: it could be made for fixed term, unfixed term, or for the duration of an agreed amount of work. Consequently, the wage payment terms could also vary — the payments could be either piece rate or time-based.

In practice, collective piece-rate contracts were more advantageous for workers. Piece rate, or colloquially called "direct ruble" (*"priamoi rubl"*), contracts indicated the total agreed amount of timber that the brigade was expected to fell (or raft) and the agreed price for one cubic meter of the felled (rafted) wood. With these figures set in advance, the workers of the brigade could estimate their total earnings and decide whether staying for a season at a certain enterprise was justified. The calculation also included the quality of wood that the enterprise was willing to allocate to the brigade, and the availability and reliability of support service vehicles and machines (power saws, tractors). All these factors were taken into account when the members of a brigade were deciding whether to accept or decline a contract. Dmytro (born in 1933) emphasized that the quality of wood was a crucial factor for accepting a job, "[We went to the enterprise] where we were paid more. [First,] we went to see the forest. If the trees were thin,

⁴¹⁷ Subbotin, "Poniatie sezonnykh i vremennykh rabot i rabotnikov," 197-220; Forestry works were also mentioned in the List of Seasonal Work, another legal document that acknowledged a status of short term workers in forestry as seasonal workers.

⁴¹⁸ V. M. Rubinshtein, "Nekotorye voprosy regulirovaniia truda na lesozagotovkakh," *Voprosy grazhdanskogo prava i processa. Sbornik statei* (Leningrad: Izd-vo Leningr. un-ta, 1969), 154-165.

[managers] might have put as high price as they wanted, but no one would agree to work with it. ... There was no cubic capacity. And those poles [trees] were useless.”⁴¹⁹ The “cubic capacity” was so essential for the workers that some preferred to work in distant Siberian forests rather than in forestry enterprises in Transcarpathia as the Siberian flat landscape was easier to operate in and had larger numbers of the trees, which allowed them to fell more in less time. Before signing a contract, the foreman or the workers tried to assess the pitch: “The forestry officer takes us to the pitch, we accept it and assume the obligation to harvest an agreed number of thousands of cubic meters of wood and clean the pitch up afterwards.”⁴²⁰

However, even a set contract did not provide a guarantee of the workers’ satisfaction with their earnings and, therefore, their loyalty. Stepan (born in 1932) was generally pleased with the outcomes of his seasonal trips to the Russian forest, but claimed he “had no luck” in the Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Komi ASSR). At first it looked promising: Stepan’s neighbor from Keretski village was recruiting a brigade of lumberjacks to work in Komi, he was in contact with the director of the lumber camp, and the conditions seemed to be exceptionally competitive. The workers were promised high piece rates and even a percentage of wood for their work. Indeed, on the site in Komi, the brigade was given three new gas chainsaws, three tractors, and new uniforms. Despite these exceptionally advantageous working conditions, which were supposed to enhance the brigade’s productivity, Stepan had a bad feeling about the whole affair, “The forest was very thin, very weak... I didn’t like it, I thought there would be no cubic [meters].” After a month of work and the receipt of the first round of payments, Stepan’s concerns were confirmed: the total earnings were not worth the effort. He tried to convince his brigade to leave the pitch, but was only able to gain the support of three colleagues, the rest were willing to continue working at the enterprise. Eventually, Stepan arbitrarily decided that “every man [was] for himself,” and abandoned his brigade, taking a train to Perm’ oblast’ where he knew his brother was working with a construction brigade. The construction brigade’s deal looked better, so Stepan stayed with them for two weeks, until he received a call from his wife in Keretski who informed him that another brigade from the neighboring village (in Transcarpathia) was heading to Kirov oblast’, and they were lacking a feller, which was Stepan’s specialty. Stepan was satisfied with his current working conditions and “did not want to leave the guys,” but after some hesitation he accepted the offer and rushed to catch a train to Kirov. Thus, in one season, Stepan had changed between three brigades and

⁴¹⁹ Interview with Dmytro, December 2014.

⁴²⁰ Interview with Danylo, April 2014.

three jobs and, to his own surprise, even managed to earn good money (“What was mine I did not lose”). For the members of the first brigade, however, the season was less fortunate. Abandoned by several members, they could not continue their work as a brigade and were forced to return home before the end of the season, harboring hard feelings towards Stepan.

As this case shows, the conditions of seasonal employment were uncertain and unpredictable. The equipment was usually old and unreliable, the work flow was often interrupted by sudden decreases in temperature or injury, and it was impossible to guarantee the commitment of members of within one’s own brigade. Collective piece-rate contracts thus enabled workers to claim partial control over their productive capabilities. They established motivation for collective effort and delivered some confidence to the workers who, once the contract was signed, “knew what they were working for.” In the interviews, the relative economic security of the collective piece-rate contract system was contrasted with, for instance, individual permanent employment contracts which implied norm (*norma*) based payments. As defined by David Lane, “‘Norming’ or ‘norms’ (*norma*) refers to the amount of time necessary for the fulfillment of a particular work activity, given the qualification of a worker and the level of technology. Wages are paid on the basis of such norms. The value of output is then fixed in relation to the norm, and wages are directly linked to the normative net output of labor. ... It is assumed that there should be a technologically-determined ‘norm’ for each work process.”⁴²¹

In Soviet forestry, wages were also linked to skill grades and the qualification of the workers. Since the late 1950s, so-called small complex brigades (*mal'ye kompleksnye brigady*) became the main form of labor organization in forestry.⁴²² Each brigade was, in theory, provided with a logging vehicle and consisted of four to seven workers who performed different operations while fulfilling a common task.⁴²³ The division of labor in the brigades was supposed to increase coordination and productivity while ensuring the execution of a range of works from wood cutting to timber stockpiling and skidding. However, they failed to do so as the division of operations, reflected in the differences in wage tariffs, resulted in poor coordination. The unequal mechanization of operations led to differences in individual outputs, and resulted in inconsistencies in rewards, and it did not encourage equal productivity among the members of

⁴²¹ David Lane, *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 120.

⁴²² Shegelman, *Lesnye transformatsyi*, 79. On the earlier forms of labour organization in Soviet forestry, see Shegelman, *Lesnye transformatsyi*, 51, 56, 70.

⁴²³ V. I. Erusalimskii, A. N. Zevakhin, G. M. Kiselev, *Nauchnaia organizatsiia truda v lesnom khoziaistve* (Moscow: Lesnaia promyshlennost', 1977), 12, 15.

the brigade.⁴²⁴ Additionally, the workers were paid according to their skill grades and the tasks they performed, and the output norms within a single brigade could vary for the workers performing skills of different levels of complexity and risk. Power saw operators and tractor drivers, for instance, were considered to require particular technical skills and were therefore better paid than grab drivers or branches cutters. Michael Burawoy noticed that the individual piece-rates system had a dividing effect on the workers, it promoted “competition and antagonism.”⁴²⁵ By strengthening the individualist work psychology described by Filtzer, the piece-rate system weakened a brigade as an integrated production unit: down times and delays were common outcomes as workers focused on their individual tasks instead of the collective result.⁴²⁶

Although seasonal migrants’ brigades followed a similar division of labor between the members of a team, their income was proportional to the amount of fallen timber indicated in the contract and was not dependent on wage tariffs and work norms. Seasonal migrants found norm-based wage payments, linked with permanent employment, to be unsuitable and unjust for a number of reasons. First, norm output and wages were differentiated according to the qualification of the members of the brigade, and the tariffs varied by work types: felling, logging, debranching, branch collection and burning, cross-cutting and loading of timber, and others.⁴²⁷ Thus, the state wages of a chainsaw operator (feller) or a tractor operator were higher than that of a limber, and their norm outputs were not in direct correspondence: since the chainsaw operator’s labor was considered to be more skilled, his output norm was lower than that of a limber. Consequently, a limber was supposed to spend more time than a chainsaw operator in fulfilling his norm, but since the amount of felled wood depended on the speed of a chainsaw operator, a limber was bound to stay behind in his norm output, unless he served in several brigades or there was more than one chainsaw operator in a brigade. As Luka (born in 1944) said,

For example, a chainsaw operator is supposed to fell 100 cubic meters of wood to fulfill his norm. A limber, on the other hand, is expected to disbranch 150 cubic meters. So, how can one disbranch this

⁴²⁴ *Lesnoie khoziaistvo i lesnaia promyshlennost’ zapadnykh oblastei Ukrainiskoi SSR*, 72.

⁴²⁵ Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*, 179.

⁴²⁶ V. S. Trishin, L. V. Shcherbakov, T. A. Belova, I. S. Bulakh, *Organizatsiia truda v lesnom khoziaistve* (Moscow: Soyuzgiproleskhoz, 1968), 15-17.

⁴²⁷ A. B. Bronina, V. K. Lazarev, *Trudovye prava rabochikh i sluzhashchikh lesnoi promyshlennosti* (Moscow: Gosizurizdat, 1960), 87. See also: G. M. Kiselev, *Organizatsiia i oplata truda rabochikh v lesnom khoziaistve* (Moskva: Izd-vo “Lesnaia promyshlennost’”, 1975).

much if it was not felled? The system was not thought through very well. But they said it was an easy job to disbranch, and to a hard one – to fell...⁴²⁸

The individual-based norm system also contradicted the collectivist ethics of a brigade, who often resisted such imposed income differentiation. By contrast, a collective piece-rate contract defined the total wages earned by a brigade, regardless of rank or specialization, and left the workers free to distribute the income among themselves according to their own principles of justice, which usually presupposed equal distribution.

A norm was not a stable or transparent enough category to satisfy workers' expectations. Even though there was an institutional initiative to standardize norms, they differed in different regions. In theory, a norm was supposed to take into account multiple contingent factors: the landscape, the volume of trees on the logging site, the availability and quality of the supporting equipment, wood species, wood assortment, labor productivity, among other features. In effect, the norms could vary from enterprise to enterprise, and were also subject to unexpected fixing and revision.⁴²⁹ The opacity of a norm's formation, coupled with the unpredictability of the circumstances and unreliability of the various participants of the process, confirmed migrant workers' preference for collective piece-rate contracts, which ostensibly eliminated all "behind the scenes" calculations. As one of my interviewees claimed, "According to their norms, there were different tariffs for thin or thick wood. But for us the norms did not matter. We had a price for a cubic meter, and that was it."⁴³⁰

The collective piece-rate contracts had a unifying effect on the brigade as a work collective. As completing the contract was their only purpose, they imposed exhausting work schedules on themselves, which extended their working day to all daylight hours both in winter and in summer. This extension of the eight-hour work day was the subject of critique in the press and a breach of the labor code. However, it enabled workers to finish the task as quickly as possible. Since laziness or truancy would affect their timely performance and delay their return home, such behavior was not tolerated within the brigade. Alcohol consumption was also strictly supervised.⁴³¹ Such internal rules were intended to preserve the reputation of the brigade, as any violations could potentially influence their credibility in future, and not only for this particular brigade, but for the whole home village, where word travelled fast. Inviting someone

⁴²⁸ Interview with Luka, April 2015.

⁴²⁹ Lane, *Soviet Labour and the Ethic of Communism in the U.S.S.R.*, 122.

⁴³⁰ Interview with Fadii and Mykola, January 2015.

⁴³¹ On the internal rules within the brigades of seasonal migrants see also Patrick Murphy, "Soviet Shabashniki: Material Incentives at Work," *Problems of Communism* 34, no. 6 (1984).

new to the brigade was a risk: “In the village no one knows what kind of a worker he is. And there [at the work place] he receives a few rubles and on Sunday [drinks] like the Russians. And then does not come to work for a week or two because of drinking.”⁴³²

Workers’ accountability shifted from management to the brigade as a collective, and who had a vested interest in the success of each individual worker. The collective motivation of a brigade to complete tasks in due time not only helped to increase its productivity, but also incentivized helping colleagues who experienced difficulties in performing their specialized operations, for fear of jeopardizing the final output. Dmytro (born in 1933) from Kerestki village remembers that his whole brigade was involved in the least skilled and the worst-paid (according to the wage scale) activity — disbranching: “Everyone had his own task in the brigade. ... [But] In the evening we all went to disbranch, so that tomorrow [the vehicle could collect the poles], because one person ... was not able to disbranch fast enough. It was a torment.”⁴³³

Sometimes there was an additional source for the brigade’s consolidation and work alignment: kinship ties. Dmytro observed that “the majority tried to go [to work] with their own [people]. Strangers could do anything to you.” Stepanh also remembers that in 1967 he went for the first time to the Irkutsk oblast’ for felling – the place to which he would return for another 29 seasons – and stated that it was the relatives of his wife who recruited him: the foreman was his father-in-law, and the other four men were his brothers and another in-law.⁴³⁴ Ignat had places in his brigade for his sons when they came of age.⁴³⁵ Close kinship relationships increased the extent of individual responsibility, since individual work was imagined to be a contribution either to the financial well-being of the family or the extended kin. It also reproduced the dynamics of patriarchal power, since the foreman was usually an older, more experienced man who, as kin elder, encapsulated both roles of the head of a family and work leader. These personal dependencies and familial hierarchies translated into workplace helped to elicit maximum labor effort, and effectively complemented the motivation of collective piece rates. However, the recruitment of brothers and in-laws and “giving [the ones of your own] the opportunity to earn” was also an obligation inbuilt into the customs of reciprocal help in the home communities. If one had relatives or very close friends who were savvy seasonal workers,

⁴³² Interview with Yosyp, December 2014.

⁴³³ Interview with Dmytro, December 2014.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Stepan, December 2014.

⁴³⁵ Interview with Ignat, December 2014.

with good connections and sure contracts, it was easier to enter the trade and skip the stage of struggling to find the “right” or “successful” brigade and a good place to work.

As Yosyp remarked, kinship was not the only channel of local recruitment: “If you couldn’t find anyone of your own [kin], you went with those who came with an offer.”⁴³⁶ The only rule that was never broken was that the brigade was formed in the home communities and never on the spot. The only exception could have been a tractor driver: if the brigade lacked this specialist, the lumber camp assigned one together with the vehicle. It could be difficult to subject these “strangers” to the brigade’s self-imposed discipline: “...he took instructions from the lumber camp director, not from us. So, if he was drinking or something we complained to the director who then sent us someone else.”⁴³⁷ Yosyp himself was a certified tractor driver, and his skills “sold like wild fire” among the woodcutting brigades in Keretski, because in the 1960s there were still not many people who could operate a tractor. Yosyp thus had a good choice of brigades, which was to his advantage, since the brigades rather varied in their success and profile: “Some brigades were earning a lot, and others were earning nil. You can get involved in a brigade that has no luck. Then you come home with nothing. But then comes another offer – and you know that those guys have earned well, [so next time you go with them].”⁴³⁸ In an attempt to avoid such a gamble, the two brothers — Fadii and Mykola — both experienced woodcutters who used to work in Russia, tried a different strategy: instead of sticking together, they decided to join different brigades each time in order to minimize their chance of failing all together.⁴³⁹

The internal workings and structures of authority within a brigade ensured the labor performance, and brigades tried to distance themselves from the common practices of work at the enterprises in order to preserve this dynamic. The emphasis on autonomous work regimes, uninterrupted by the general regulations of the enterprise, was their foremost requirement upon signing a contract and re-emerged repeatedly as one of the central points in the migrant workers’ narratives. Some even mentioned that they refused to start working without guarantees of the regular supply of equipment and transportation. And again, collective piece-rates contracts served as justification for the special status of the seasonal workers: “We worked for the “direct ruble.” ... We did not work for the “norms.” He [the manager] pays us for what

⁴³⁶ Interview with Yosyp, December 2014.

⁴³⁷ Interview with Dmytro, December 2014.

⁴³⁸ Interview with Yosyp, December 2014.

⁴³⁹ Interview with Fadii and Mykola, January 2015.

we have felled. So why should he care when we work or when we don't work?"⁴⁴⁰ Autonomy at work was crucial for the brigade to independently manage its work time and establish a work pace that would guarantee the quickest delivery of the wood stated in the contract.

It is important to mention that the possibility of such autonomy was due to the labor organization characteristic for the small complex brigade. At the same time, the possibility to transform the application of intensive labor into the increased output was preceded by the mechanization of forestry. The mechanization of various operations, above all felling and transportation, significantly changed the productivity of individuals, brigades, and the industry in general. In the first post-war years, manual labor still prevailed in forestry: felling and cross-cutting were conducted with two-handed saws or bucksaws, and animal-drawn transport was used for logging and hauling.⁴⁴¹ The movement towards total mechanization started in the late 1940s. At first, the two-handed saws were replaced by electric power saws, but these were unwieldy and needed to be in close proximity of power stations: "employment of the large amounts of mobile power stations with cable networks ... overcomplicated and raised the price of the logging operations, [since] over 25 percent of the time was spent on relocation of the cable ... from one cutting area to another, and it restricted the fellers' maneuvering capability."⁴⁴² The transition from electric saws to gas saws eliminated these problems and eased the fellers' movements considerably, even though the first gas saws were still heavy. The mass manufacturing of the "Druzhba" power saw started in 1955, and even though the mechanization was not uniform across the industry and in a number of places manual felling was practiced till the late 1950s,⁴⁴³ gas saws soon became the basic equipment of the small brigades. So did the logging tractor, which went through a number of technical improvements and remodeling during the 1950s-70s.⁴⁴⁴ This was a technical leap which, in the course of fifteen years, eliminated the pre-industrial forestry practices and enabled qualitative changes in labor productivity. From the point of view of a brigade as a small labor collective, this technical advancement was crucial, since it allowed for an increase in output whilst requiring less effort, and therefore raised the profitability of timber harvesting. It also increased the mobility and labor autonomy of the brigade — the workers could use the allocated equipment to follow their work pace. The work was still hard, tedious, and dangerous, but as far as labor migrants were

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Dmytro, December 2014.

⁴⁴¹ Shegelman, *Lesnyie transformatsyi*, 78.

⁴⁴² Shegelman, *Lesnyie transformatsyi*, 81.

⁴⁴³ Interview with Fedir, December 2015.

⁴⁴⁴ Shegelman, *Lesnyie transformatsyi*.

concerned, it became better paid. The regular supply of equipment was the enterprises' responsibility, so the seasonal workers tried to make sure from the start of their contracts that the enterprises did not lack gas saws and tractors.



Figures 10 and 11. Seasonal migrants at work. On the top picture the man holds the gas saw “Druzhba”

The productivity of the labor migrants was highly valued by managers, and the fact that they usually applied as a complete brigade was an additional advantage as woodcutting depended on coordinated team work. As a preformed brigade, it was easier for them to achieve higher production targets and increase the total output of the enterprise. This strengthened the brigades' bargaining power. Utmost dedication to work as their exclusive activity while at the enterprise generated stronger collective agency for the brigade, which allowed migrant workers to turn their labor into a valuable asset while negotiating their wage rates and some benefits. Enlisting themselves as a separate production unit, they entered a lumber camp as an external work team that not only operated under a distinct informal remuneration scheme, but also followed the self-imposed labor routine which usually deviated from the habitual work tempo at those enterprises and typical Soviet labor process in general.



Figure 12. Seasonal migrants at work. Photo from personal archive of a labor migrant

Seasonal labor migrants usually took pride in their productivity and discipline. In their narratives, this pride was often expressed through comparison with the work habits of local workers, usually referred to as the “Russians,” and through the emphasis on their own ethnic predisposition for hard labor and endurance. Luka recalls: “We could work the whole year round, and we were not drinking tea like they did: they would come in the morning, have their

tea, then they start working at eleven, and they go home at three. Of course, they couldn't fell enough."⁴⁴⁵ Yurii (born in 1945) reasoned:

Russian people are nice, kind. But they live for the day. They earned ten rubles — they squandered it on drink. This is why there is no one left to work in Russia. Our people, to the contrary, they think long-term – to do so that it lasts even for their children. Our people are a hard-working lot.⁴⁴⁶

Dmytro's resentment towards the lack of discipline among the local forestry workers resonated in its bitterness with the moral reprimands of the Soviet public discourse that condemned slacking:

...our people are hardworking. Listen, four of our guys with a tractor harvested a hundred cubic meters of wood per day. And they cannot make it in a week. Our people like money. And those people like drinking. Whatever one earns... some can even make it to the payment day, but when they receive their wage, [they would drink] for a week or two, until the money lasts, and they won't come to work until they spend it. If the foreman sees him and urges him to go to work, it's no use... The work waits, and he is drinking... Our people didn't drink. We only had one day off – Sunday, – and a [religious] holiday if we remembered about it, and that was it. ... And to our fellow you just show the money, and he will do anything. ... Any hard work for money.⁴⁴⁷

It is clear from the quotations that alcohol consumption was a frequent point of comparison that distinguished the seasonal from permanent workers, in their own eyes. As they knew that excessive drinking would interfere with their contract completion and cause delays, they would make any possible effort to avoid it. The “dry law” would not apply elsewhere. At home, for instance, they admitted they would sometimes spend their hard-earned money on alcohol, but while they were “at work” they were too aware of the managers and their families at home who relied on them, to give in to distracting habits. Immoderate drinking, however, was not only a vice that lowered the productivity of their local colleagues. Some of my respondents recognized that laziness was the outcome of the motivational structure of the Soviet workplace. Dmytro recalls that a group of workers were not interested in combating the fire or saving the logs when the wood started burning at the pitch. He told:

They were sitting and playing cards. I asked why they wouldn't do anything to address the situation. And the response I got was: “Why would we? We are paid our average wages. So isn't it better to sit here rather than roll the bananas [logs]?”

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Luka, December 2014.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Yurii, December 2014.

⁴⁴⁷ Interview with Dmytro, December 2014.

Unlike the local workers, who were saving their effort and indulging in the tactics of work-time privatization, seasonal migrants did not require external stimulation or persuasion, as their purpose coincided with that of the management: to ensure regular outputs. Their earnings were directly linked to the fulfillment of (their portions of) the production plans. Just enduring one's shift was not an option: they had to actually achieve results. The cooperation of the seasonal workers with the heads of the enterprises was secured by the informality of the agreements and the nature of their contracts. By intensifying their labor process, they aligned their efforts with the goals of the management, and therefore appeared more hard-working and more reliable than regular workers. Ignat was assured that his team's assiduity earned them the management's acknowledgement and respect: "We were conscientious, so the superiors respected us very much." Dmytro went further and assumed that the contribution of seasonal migrants was essential for the general performance of the enterprise:

Of course [they loved us]! Listen, we did not go around drinking. We were working. At one timber mill some people said that the *hutsuls*⁴⁴⁸ have to leave, because they take too much money for the cubic meter. But the director told them: "Shut up, because if [they are not here], you are also not needed at the accounting office. Who is going to work? It's them you hand out wages to. If not them, who is going to work? And you are going to sit at home."

As Dmytro hinted, local workers, blue and white collar alike, also had their grudges against the seasonal migrants who "made a fortune" and "cozied up" to the management. Seasonal workers refuted these accusations by restating their dedication and industriousness:

We were always working under the contract, and the locals... You know, they work seven hours, and we sometimes work 10–15. From dusk till dawn. We made twice, sometimes thrice as much money as they did. So, they thought we had some deal running with the director. So, the director told them, "Please, I will give you the same amount of money for a cubic meter as I give to them. You will have no vacation – one. No uniform – two. No premium – three." He deducted all that – now work. So, they tried to work like that for one month, and they did not even manage to earn what they earned before, so they decided to work the old way.⁴⁴⁹

This is a curious quote from the interview with Yosyp, which implies that collective piece-rate contracts only worked for those who had the determination not just to use the work time "in a productive way," but to overexploit oneself to the point of exhaustion, and, moreover, to voluntarily neglect the social provisions of the "worker's state," which constituted the founding

⁴⁴⁸ Hutsuls – the name of the ethnic group of Ukrainians who reside in the Carpathians.

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Yosyp, December 2014.

principles of the socialist society, in exchange for monetary compensation. Some migrants resented the fact that seasonal employment denied them certain privileges, available to the permanent workers, such as bonuses for exceeding targets, paid vacation leave, and paid medical leave, among others. However, the workers still found the “direct ruble” arrangement more advantageous, because they were convinced that even with a premium cap, the regular workers’ earnings fell short compared to “direct ruble” deals.

From the point of view of the managers, the “direct ruble” contracts minimized their responsibilities towards migrant workers, reducing them to exclusively financial obligations. This observation made some of the migrants believe that collective piece-rate contracts were as favorable for the managers as they were for the labor migrants. While permanent workers had legal grounds to demand certain benefits, the migrants had limited formal rights, and their (usually inflated) remuneration was perceived as a compensation for these lost benefits (“direct ruble contains it all”). This observation was confirmed by Ignat:

With us, it was easy. We make a contract for five to ten thousand cubic meters. We do not need a kindergarten for children or school – nothing. We make a contract and receive our money each month.⁴⁵⁰

The migrant woodcutting brigades were indeed low maintenance. Another compromise they were willing to make for the sake of the “direct ruble” contracts was their living conditions and comfort. If the enterprise was able to provide them with any housing, such as a dormitory room or an abandoned house, they would take it, but often enough the pitch they had to work was too far from the populated locations for daily commuting. Consequently, they would make temporary dwellings directly at the place of their work in the forest, such as slate-covered dugouts reinforced with planks, or even carriages, which became their home for the whole period. Danylo recalls:

...How did we live? Well, we survived... somehow. We used to wake up at four o'clock in the morning... Then we had something to eat. Then we threw something in our bags to have for lunch, and off we went and stayed at the pitch till ten o'clock in the evening. One had to stay there till ten o'clock if he wanted to earn something. And only on Sunday we used to go [to the town or village] to buy food [for the next week]. ... A car or a bus would come to pick us up. So, we would take food

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Ignat, December 2014.

and go back to the forest. ... So, what did we see? Nothing good at all. ... We lived [there] like wolves.⁴⁵¹

Inside their temporary dwellings they had some mattresses provided by the lumber mill and a stove, which they used for heating and cooking. They took shifts in cooking, which were utterly disliked by most of my respondents, since they were an additional burden. He who was in charge of the cooking was still a part of the brigade, so was not exempt from regular work obligations at the pitch, but in order to feed his fellows he had to wake up earlier, extending his working day even more. On occasion, some of the housekeeping duties were delegated to the local women, who would do migrant workers' laundry for a small fee. Cooking, however, was such a tedious task for the workers that, if they could afford it, they brought a woman with them from their home village — usually the wife of one of the brigade's members — who freed the woodcutters from domestic labor and cooked full time. This was a service that the seasonal workers paid for out of their own pockets, so, as Yosyp pointed out, “we only started [bringing the women] when we began to earn enough money.”

The migrant workers' limited demands (bar wages) combined with their high productivity made them exceptional workers. By outperforming their local colleagues and overworking themselves, seasonal migrants achieved results that were desirable for managers and planners, and, at the same time, almost unattainable for the permanent workforce given the common labor practices and attitudes. While migrant workers' productivity was possible due to the numerous economic contradictions of late socialism, such as ineradicable labor shortages, pressing delivery requirements, and the systematic alienation and atomization of the workforce in general, their subjective interpretation of their own labor tended to overlook these structural circumstances and attributed their economic achievements to inherent ethnic qualities.

In true Stakhanovite fashion, seasonal workers were breaking records of productivity, but their lifestyle proved that such achievements were only possible if one was willing to give up any idea of privacy, family, rest, leisure, entertainment, proper hygiene and nutrition. Seasonal migrants cheated the system in many ways, but this was their biggest betrayal: they willingly chose self-exploitation and therefore rejected the achievements of socialism. Essentially, this compromise was acceptable for migrants, because in their perception, the time that they spent on the contract was carved out from the flow of “real life” they temporarily left behind, and it was the wish to improve the quality of “real life” that justified the deprivations of the work time. The

⁴⁵¹ Interviewed with Danylo, April 2014.

migrants' seasonal life had its own rhythms and priorities, and personal comfort whilst working was not one of them. The period of intensified work had its beginning and end, and even though it lasted at least half the year, it had an unequal relationship to the off-work season: it lacked the social value of the time spent at home. While "in the North," seasonal migrants focused their sense of identity on that of workers, and enacted it fully since their other immediate social responsibilities were delayed or interrupted.

Additionally, considering the fact that migrant workers were paid solely and exclusively by result, their productivity was the only measurement of their performance. Informality strengthened their motivation, therefore they actively sought it, but it also weakened their rights as workers. Their wage security – the clear monetary target attached to a felled cubic meter – was combined with employment insecurity, since their position at the enterprise was dependent on the good will of the manager, instead of being protected by the labor law, as was the case for permanent workers. Therefore, being good at work meant not only getting paid, but also forging the reputation of diligence that would become the basis for future contracts. The uncertainties of employment were accompanied by the uncertainties of the production process that they were beyond migrant workers' control: faulty equipment that threatened to disrupt their work flow, transportation delays, or sudden weather changes. Burawoy suggests that uncertainty of outcomes was the main reason behind the workers' willingness to embrace a dehumanizing pace of production: "Insecurity is the main driving force in all payment by result. ... The manifest coercion and dependence which characterize payment by the hour change into a semblance of independence with piece-rates. ... Uncertainty is the great magician of piece-work."⁴⁵² Similar to Miklos Haraszti, a piece-rate worker at the "Red Star" tractor factory in state-socialist Hungary, who experienced "a certain feeling of triumph" when he managed to exceed the norm and therefore "has beaten the system ... and got better of someone,"⁴⁵³ seasonal workers were completing their contracts with the sense of overachievement and personal pride, while it was the contract itself that generated predispositions for their attitudes to labor and their self-evaluation.

2. *Beyond monetary remuneration: in-kind bonuses*

Informality provided relative flexibility and a possibility for negotiation. This enabled seasonal workers to have active involvement in determining their income through collective piece-rate

⁴⁵² Miklos Haraszti, *Worker in Worker's State* (Penguin, 1977), 56, 57, cited in Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*, 171.

⁴⁵³ Haraszti, *Worker in Worker's State*, 63, cited in Burawoy, *The Politics of Production*, 170.

contracts. This made seasonal employment in forestry a viable alternative for the workers who were not satisfied with the labor market at home and searched for more financially beneficial options. Beyond the financial advantages, there were other bonuses that could stimulate their interest in seasonal employment. In particular, there was an additional incentive for members of collective farms to be drafted for seasonal works in forestry, since they were entitled to priority wood acquisition following a decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR from 1956.⁴⁵⁴ This regulation proved to be a decisive incentive for the workers. Acquiring wood in kind at state prices equipped the workers with an invaluable material resource which was practically inaccessible on the consumer market. The wood to which the workers were entitled, was intended for individual construction in the rural areas from which most recruits came. The wood was primarily put towards this cause. When the regulation was extended to the orgnabor recruits for several years during the 1960s, it appeared to be a crucial incentive for those countryside residents who were contemplating building houses,⁴⁵⁵ since access to building material was largely limited and collective farms provided little help in this matter.⁴⁵⁶ Numerous letters of complaint which reached regional orgnabor department in Transcarpathia during the 1960s emphasized rural residents' specific interest in having access to construction materials through seasonal labor migration to the Siberian forestry enterprises. In the late 1960s, most of the orgnabor recruits in forestry expected to be rewarded with timber, and were deeply frustrated on occasions when miscommunication between state departments resulted in them losing this bonus.

Prioritized wood acquisition was a paramount priority. At times, it was not only a welcome addition to the wages, but an equally crucial part of the contract. Luka mentioned that there were occasions, when the members of his brigade would agree to lower wages, but still consider themselves to be fairly compensated through the percentage of wood offered: "We were not paid [as much], but it was still advantageous, because we received wood. ... We brought the wood to collective farms [in Ukraine] and exchanged it for grains or sugar."⁴⁵⁷ The timber, which some seasonal forestry workers had a legal right to buy from the enterprises where they worked, was doubly valuable as it could be bartered for a high price. If not used for individual

⁴⁵⁴ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 139, ar. 51; TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 357, ar. 17.

⁴⁵⁵ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 183, ar. 29; TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 358a, ar. 9.

⁴⁵⁶ For more on rural construction, see Neil J. Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside: Policy Innovation and Institutional Decay* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴⁵⁷ Interviewed with Luka, December 2014.

consumption, the wood was traded for profit with other private persons or enterprises on the black market.

Legally, the timber bonus was reserved for those *kolkhozniki* who were delegated by collective farms for timber stockpiling. On paper, a private person who could prove he was a member of a *kolkhoz* and applied for seasonal work in forestry, had the opportunity to purchase timber at the state price — seven cubic meters of industrial wood per each 100 fulfilled norms. While this regulation was frequently mentioned in the official reports as an essential right of the eligible citizens, the interviews revealed that it was not common knowledge among the migrants. When asked about payment in kind, some confirmed that it was “possible to arrange,” but others remarked that this bonus was a special privilege available only to those “on friendly footing” with the management. Such an “arrangement” was possible if, first of all, a worker could produce a certificate (*spravka*) from the *kolkhoz*, which confirmed that he was a member of a collective farm and had received permission to leave his *kolkhoz*. Countryside residents were not granted passports until 1974, but they had the right to be recruited temporarily into certain industries if they obtained this certificate from the collective farm.⁴⁵⁸ Even though the press and official reports suggest that the employers often ignored the requirement to hire only those in possession of the certificate, in many cases this document was a necessary condition for employment. Therefore, many seasonal migrants from the Transcarpathian countryside who were not collective farms members, tried to get a hold of certificates in their home villages by any means possible just to be on the safe side when applying for jobs. It was not uncommon that the process of obtaining a *spravka* required a small bribe, but the practice of such informal exchange became normalized to the extent that in most cases it did not appear as a serious obstacle. As with many other Soviet *blat* (personal connections used for private purposes) practices, described by Alena Ledeneva, obtaining a certificate was “nothing special at all – just a daily routine, habitual and therefore fairly automatic.”⁴⁵⁹

Even though the collective farm members’ entitlement to prioritized wood distribution was secured by law, in practice this right was not automatically exercised when drawing up a contract. Just like piece-rate tariffs, the bonuses were subject to negotiation between the workers and the management, and required that migrants knew about the legal benefits and constraints

⁴⁵⁸ Robert A. Lewis, Richard H. Rowland, *Population Redistribution in the USSR: Its Impact on Society, 1897-1977* (Praeger Publishers, 1979), 23.

⁴⁵⁹ Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia’s Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange*, (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

of their labor status, as well as that managers were willing to satisfy such requests. The silences and hesitation of my respondents on this topic signaled the opacity surrounding in-kind bonuses, or at least the respondents' mixed feelings about the propriety of their actions. For instance, Fadii alluded that one of the tactics to ensure the successful negotiation of timber bonuses, was a brigade's informal agreement with a collective farm back home. Since the wood was supposed to be distributed via the kolkhoz that allegedly sent their members to the lumber camps, and not allotted to the workers directly, "those brigades that were smarter... There was a law that allowed to give a percentage of wood. So, it could be sent to kolkhoz... But one needed to 'grease' [the administration] of a kolkhoz..." The transportation of the timber back home could also cause trouble, since district (raion) authorities at the home train station could demand a share of wood in exchange for unloading the carriages,

[For instance] there comes a carriage for a brigade. Let's say, there were ten of us. So, there are 70 or 80 cubic meters of timber [in the carriage], seven or eight for each of us. But our [local] authorities wanted something for themselves. ... There was one [official] in Svaliava, worked in *orgnabor*... He refused to issue a permission for unloading. So I had to take him to the court. ... You know how much they wanted? 13–15 cubic meters from a carriage.⁴⁶⁰

Consequently, the prioritized acquisition of construction wood was subject to informal negotiations between workers and managers. The "smart" brigades were aware of the conditions upon which they could claim the percentage of timber and made sure that they either had a formal confirmation of their collective farm membership, or informally demanded this bonus while discussing their payment. The concept of "smartness" can be further utilized to signify the overall formal and informal literacy that seasonal migrants had to learn and apply in order to navigate in the "sea of informality" that stretched beyond their workplace. Their capacity to develop such literacy had a direct effect on their success in the arrangement of profitable contracts and safety networks that would cushion them against sudden misfortune, as well as shielding them from social uncertainties that necessarily came with habitual, although precarious, seasonal employment.

3. Navigating in the "sea of informality": migrant workers' tactics of adaptation

The tactical solutions exercised by migrant workers in order to adjust to the employment and labor laws went beyond petty administrative fixes for the sake of bonuses. There were cases when formal conditions of employment at enterprises were particularly strict, and the labor

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with Yosyp, December 2014.

migrants' preferred employment option – by contract – was simply unavailable. The interviewees admitted that some employers, mainly state timber industry enterprises (*lespromkhoz*), sometimes refused to hire workers on temporary, collective piece-rate contracts, which created additional inconvenience for the who wanted to reduce their time away from home and purposefully sought temporary jobs. However, these requirements were also open for informal negotiation, and compromises were reached, meaning that some migrant brigades were able to work for Ministry of Timber enterprises posing as company workers. At least three of my respondents were, at some point in their careers, registered as permanent workers while working seasonally. Such an arrangement involved higher risks than other “adjustments” to the legal framework, and therefore required even stronger relations of trust between the participants. Yosyp characterized this situation as explicitly dependent on the administration's benevolence, “If the director and the book-keeper were cooperative, you could do anything at that time. ... We were changing the registration (*propiska*), and it counted as if we were working legally... but in fact it was a sham.” The mentioned “sham” reflected workers' own perception of their actions, but at the same time was misleading, since the workers honestly fulfilled their yearly plan, deliberately managing to deliver it within shorter periods of time in order to return home as planned.

Official work registration as permanent workers made seasonal migrants eligible for bonuses – such as premiums, paid vacation, and early retirement benefits, which were especially generous for forestry workers. It is the retirement benefits and, in some cases, high regional premium rates, that incentivized migrant workers to divert from their usual collective piece-rate schemes. Ignat confirmed the value of the regional premium rates, “Yes, sometimes we were registered as regular workers. [The administration] tipped us off about this option... Why? Because regular workers received high increments, so we could win something out of it.” Iakutia, a region in the Russian Far East where Ignat was working with his brigade, was the largest area of the RSFSR with an extremely low population density. The conditions of work were excruciating: the snow was high, there were days when temperatures dropped so low that the workers were forbidden to even go outside for fear of freeze burns, and the pitches were so deep in the woods that they had to be accessed by helicopter. On the one hand, the disadvantages caused by climate and work conditions, made for high regional premium rates. On the other hand, official employment presupposed that the brigade was assigned a mandatory yearly plan, and the fulfillment of this obligation might have made the workers' presence in Siberia undesirably long and could postpone their return home. Therefore, in some

cases, they were forced to break up their year into several segments of intensive work and were given permission to return home to participate in yearly chores such as scything only if they then returned to finish their work obligations.

While the workers' registration as regular workers granted them a number of privileges and employment security that was a rarity for seasonal migrants, it is less clear why managements agreed to such a scenario and were even prepared to "tip off" the workers about possible ways to circumvent legal regulations. A point to keep in mind, is that this arrangement was only possible where accounting staff were willing to undertake a potentially incriminating administrative offence, since the paperwork that would record a brigade's yearly performance would have to be arranged in a way that suggested that their workload was distributed over eleven months, even though their actual working time was much shorter. Considering multiple and punishable circumventions of the rules, why was the management eager to provide privileged conditions to the workers who, in theory, could legally be employed as seasonal staff? My speculation here stems from the structural constraints of acute labor shortage in the industry, which, besides widespread tactics of labor hoarding, involved other "scarcity management" techniques. In this instance, labor scarcity encouraged the management to attempt to retain the labor force, especially considering forestry's high turnover. It was in the management's interest to incentivize efficient seasonal brigades to return for multiple seasons. Retirement bonuses, as well as premium rates, were tied as much to permanent contracts, as to the duration of employment. Consequently, in exceptional cases, a brigade of seasonal workers could end up working for a single enterprise for a decade or longer, and even take the retirement from that enterprise. In this manner, Yosyp worked for a *lespromkhoz* in Tver' oblast' for fifteen years. It is quite possible that another, less obvious reason for the management to "disguise" seasonal workers as permanent ones was their desire to decrease the number of seasonal workers on the payroll. The campaign to eliminate reliance on the seasonal work force continued to be the part of the official agenda throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and this factor might have pressured the enterprises into appearing to be compliant with the general party line.

Often "successful," mutually beneficial deals between management and seasonal workers were based on the personalization of their contacts. Indeed, the examples given here are sufficient to highlight the importance of strong informal connections and mutual trust for ensuring good piece rates, bonuses, and additional privileges, to which seasonal workers were not entitled *per se*. While the efficiency and satisfactory performance of workers, and the managements'

willingness to provide workers with scarce resources (equipment, machinery) and other material privileges, were decisive in the development of long-standing working relationships, the dimension of personal involvement was of equally significant value. It instilled personal responsibilities within the structures of formal obligations — a crucial shift of the mode of cooperation for the temporary contractual workers who, in the face of legal insecurity, sought some guarantees of fair pay and treatment. As the personal experiences of many migrant recruits have shown, state officials and enterprise managers frequently ignored their formal obligations, further undermining workers' trust in the Soviet bureaucracy. Soviet citizens consequently developed personal networks of “useful” people who could provide access to scarce resources, commodities, and services, a tactic that contributed to their survival in a country where good relationships with the “right” people were more valuable than money.

For the labor migrants, “the informal connections within formal structures”⁴⁶¹ provided a sense of reliability that helped to stabilize the circumstantial uncertainties of seasonal employment. Such relationships were unlikely to have been established immediately. Usually, they required time, and sometimes involved personal commitments, which blurred the boundaries between strictly professional relationships and friendship or patronage. Those of my respondents who used to work as foremen (*brigadir*), and as such represented their brigades and were in closer contacts with managers, mentioned that some directors of the Siberian forestry enterprises used to visit them in Transcarpathia, in order to enjoy the picturesque mountainous landscapes and warm local hospitality. They also occasionally received presents from seasonal workers, such as local home-made produce. The contacts with “good” directors were cherished and deepened during the informal socialization of mutual feasts and holidays.

The stories about informal bonding with directors were told with a sense of pride, as a sign of achievement, and aimed to demonstrate that their narrators were “on a first-name basis” with their superiors. The instrumentalization of the contacts that the workers developed with their managers should not be overemphasized, since doing that would deny the affective component of these relationships.⁴⁶² Nevertheless, I suggest that personal involvement with those in positions of power equipped seasonal workers with a sense of security, opened the possibility for further negotiations or preserved existing agreements. For the seasonal workers, whose real, if not formal, benefits directly depended on informal negotiation upon every new enrolment,

⁴⁶¹ Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours*, 85.

⁴⁶² Nicolette Makovsky, David Henig, “Re-imagining Economies (after Socialism): Ethics, Favours, and Morals,” in David Henig and Nicolette Makovsky, *Economies of Favour after Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-21.

ensuring of the plausible basis — and a convenient bias — for such negotiations meant broadening the opportunities for better deals. It is worth noting, however, that despite the friendly attitude cherished by some labor migrants, the relationship between the managers and the seasonal workers was fiercely hierarchical. Even though the workers possessed the labor needed by the managers, there was still a significant power imbalance between the parties. In this respect, I suggest that their cooperation could be considered as one that involved the features of *blat*, inscribed in the Soviet informal economy of favors, and economic patronage.

The respondents interviewed by Alena Ledeneva about the practices of *blat* in the USSR usually described it in terms of friendly help, and they stressed the altruistic and disinterested component of the delivery (and obtaining) of a favor. The respondents' denial of the instrumental nature of *blat* connections was interpreted by Ledeneva as a “misrecognition game,” a psychological trick that facilitated those involved in *blat* relations to resolve the moral and ideological contradictions of this practice. Importantly, this was not the case regarding the relationships of seasonal workers and the managers of enterprises. The informal dimension of these relationships shaped the conditions for formal transactions, but they were by no means reducible, even for the sake of psychological coherence, to simply informal interactions. In other words, the economic stakes in the manager-worker relationships were more explicit and openly recognized by the participants than in the case of *blat*. By developing informal relations, workers hoped that managers would bend the rules and regulations in their favor and provide material incentives for them to work.

Even less “well-connected” workers mentioned that they very often had to change enterprises when there was a change in management, since existing deals did not necessarily still with the authorities. Luka said that he

always changed the organization when the command changed. ... In the 1980, a new director was appointed, and he said that he did not need workers like us, that he would hire local workers, and they would work better. So we transferred to [another district]... He was young and listened to what other people were saying to him. ... [And] They said that we earned too much, and hiring locals would be cheaper, so we transferred... But in that other place there was a different problem: it didn't matter how much you harvested, your wage was the same. ... So in 1981 we transferred again to a large state lumber mill, and worked there six winters. ... But there they put in our work record books only the exact number of months that we worked.

Luka's experience of frequent job changing in the beginning of the 1980s illustrates how precarious the employment of seasonal workers could be, as well as the difference in the

conditions of employment at various locations. When they found a decent job and a compliant manager, they tried to make it last, and invested considerable effort into strengthening their relationships with the directors. However, as the quote above shows, this relationship was only useful for as long as the director remained in his position.

In fact, there were cases when the managers' interest in the migrant brigade's productivity was not limited to the pressures of plan fulfillment. The informal agreements could contain manager's share, so, by delivering their quotas the workers also earned additional money for their employers. Yosyp shared a hypothetical description of such an arrangement:

For instance, we make a contract, and the director promises to give us five rubles for a cubic meter. But he also wants something out of it. ... When we already knew each other well, he told us: we make a contract for five rubles for a cubic meter, but we [as a brigade] only receive four, and one ruble goes to the director. And no one else knows about it, only the foreman and the brigade. The brigade has to know. But the cashier or the accountant – they don't have to. Everything could be hidden. ... So, we are handed [the money] by the cashier, and then one ruble from each cubic meter we give to the foreman and he then hands it to the director. The cashier does not know, and the accountant does not know.

It would be incorrect to suggest a solid connection between the practices of financial embezzlement in forestry and seasonal employment: it is impossible to establish any regularity of such occurrences due to their careful concealment, which was emphasized by Yosyp.⁴⁶³ To do so would also mean accepting the Soviet public consensus which saw seasonal migrants as inherently corrupt agents, and which overshadowed other political and economic dimensions of the migrants' operation, motivation, and labor. What I aim to achieve with this quote, however, is to underline the depth of informal connections between workers and managers, which could, but did not necessarily have to, include overtly criminal elements. Such

⁴⁶³ For more on corruption and embezzlement in the Soviet forestry see M. S. Brainin, *Rassledovanie khishcheniy pri zagotovke lesa* (Moscow: Gosjurizdat, 1960); I. Ya. Moiseienko, "Rassledovaniye khishcheniy deneg, sovershennykh pri zagotovkakh lesa upolnomochennymi-zagotoviteliami," *Voprosy ugolovnogo prava, protsessy i kriminalistiki. Uchenye zapiski*, no. 187 (Perm', 1967): 92-107; N. I. Khliupin, "K voprosu klassifikatsii khishcheniy pri zagotovkakh lesa," *Materialy konferentsii po itogam nauchno-issledovatel'skoi raboty za 1966 god* (Sverdlovsk, 1968), 104-106; N. I. Khliupin, "Ustranit' usloviia, sposobstvuyushchiye soversheniyu khishcheniy v lesozagotovitel'nykh organizatsiiakh," *Sbornik aspirantskikh rabot* 10 (Sverdlovsk, 1969): 221-229; G. K. Kurashvili, "Deyatel'nost' sledovatel'ia po vuyavleniyu obstoyatel'stv, sposobstvuyushchikh khishcheniyam v lesozagotovitel'nykh i lesotorgovykh organizatsiyakh," *Problemy bor'by s prestupnost'yu. Materialy chetvertoy nauchnoy konferentsii aspirantov i soiskatelei* (Moscow, 1971): 69-71; N. I. Khliupin, *Metodika rassledovaniia khishcheniy v lesozagotovitel'nykh organizatsiiakh* (Kaliningrad, 1976); E. G. Akimov, Yu. A. Zakroishchikov, "Nekotorye osobennosti rassledovaniia khishcheniy denezhnykh sredstv, sovershaemykh pri zagotovke lesa," *Sledstvennaia praktika* 149 (Moscow: Yuridicheskaya literatura, 1986), 3-14.

involvement, should it occur, was potentially dangerous with regards to criminal responsibility, and therefore only deepened mutual personal dependencies.

Another instance of the labor migrants' informal intelligence refers to their attempts to balance the insecurities of seasonal employment by making their best of the work opportunities back home. As I have shown in the following chapter, the majority of seasonal workers from Transcarpathia were employed by local farms or enterprises even though they either did not work there or worked there sporadically, while they were traveling around the USSR harvesting potatoes, beetroots, corn, wood, or building barns. Local jobs might not have delivered the desired incomes, but they provided an employment safety net in case of breaks in seasonal employment; ensured occupation for migrants for the periods back home; and enabled migrants to later claim employment benefits, which required a permanent employment record, called "*stazh*." Securing these positions heavily depended on informal connectedness and the willingness of third parties to cover for an absent migrant. Yosyp was noticeably proud of the shrewdness he exhibited throughout his employment history. He managed to diligently collect certificates of his employment in Russian forestry, which amounted to a total of 26 years, but he also had a record of ten years of work as a tractor driver and mechanic at the local collective farm in Keretski village:

I worked as a tractor operator at the *kolkhoz* during the summer, while in the winter we went for seasonal work, but my place at the *kolkhoz* remained. I knew an engineer... We were the same age... He made all necessary notes [while I was away], so my *stazh* was counting, and the money... Well, I had nothing to do with the money, I only cared about my *stazh*.

Yosyp's friend, the helpful *kolkhoz* engineer, received a salary for keeping a job for Yosyp. Similar instances of informal job holding were admitted by several other respondents. Such actions did not seem to be morally questionable. To the contrary, they were perceived as demonstrations of social dexterity, subtleness, shrewdness and initiative, which were to be admired, not condemned, by those who were involved in labor migration.

I will conclude this section by drawing on Ledeneva's work on the Soviet economy of favors. While formal channels were often dysfunctional, unreliable, ineffective and preferably to be avoided, "the personalizing of formal contacts ensured a positive decision. On the other hand, when a positive decision was taken, the bureaucracy became personalized... The informal ways of dealing with the system were perceived as most natural, simple and efficient."⁴⁶⁴ The legal

⁴⁶⁴ Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours*, 84-85.

precarity of seasonal workers resulted in the even stronger dependence on informal connections than that of an average Soviet citizen. In fact, the nets of informal contacts – with the authorities in the home villages and regions, the management of the enterprises, accountants and local residents’ registration officers – formed geographical clusters of connections in diverse parts of the USSR, which at a certain point could be activated for various purposes linked to seasonal migration practices: to obtain a registration certificate, a permission to unload carriages with timber on the train station, or a signature in a work record book, to name just a few.

Ledeneva’s term “economy of favors” touches upon, but does not fully encompass seasonal migrants’ economic practices, since some of the seasonal migrants’ activities were more directly contradicting legal regulations. These activities, such as false output reporting (*pripiski*) at the enterprises and the black-market sale of wood earned as an in-kind bonus (which could easily be interpreted as “speculation” – a criminal offence in the USSR), were further towards the illegal pole of the wide spectrum of informal practices that flourished in the Soviet Union. The metaphor of “spectrum,” in my opinion, captures the ambiguous, blurred nature of the practices in question, which cannot be neatly defined, and reflects my conviction that the strict border between “legal” and “illegal” regarding seasonal employment and the practices which surrounded it was often profoundly obscured.

The moral ambiguity and legal opacity surrounding the employment and remuneration of seasonal workers contributed to their public image as swindlers, which will be further discussed in the Chapter 6. Additionally, the substantial ambivalence⁴⁶⁵ of the conditions of employment provoked the workers’ own uncertainty about their legal and ethical status. When asked if their employment was legal, they would respond positively, since the law permitted such a form of employment and their contracts with enterprises were by and large official. However, they realized that these contracts were the results of informal negotiations and concealed or omitted a number of personal agreements and additional benefits which were not foreseen by the law. This self-awareness was the reason for the respondents’ recurrent reference to their activities as a “scam”, though one which they justified by their intensive labor and high productivity.

⁴⁶⁵ Alena Ledeneva, “The Ambivalence of Favour: Paradoxes of Russia’s Economy of Favours,” in Henig and Makovsky, *Economies of Favour after Socialism*, 22-49.

SEASONAL MIGRATION AND THE MAKING OF ALTERNATIVE TIMBER TRADE

1. Windfall of change

In the memory of the residents of the village of Keretski, Transcarpathia, the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s saw a significant rise in the profitability of seasonal migration to Russia and other locations in the USSR. Many recalled that, during the 1960s, good wages were out of reach for labor migrants, but that in the 1970s there were far better possibilities. Maria, who frequently migrated for agricultural seasonal work, and was herself the chief of a migrant brigade (when not working at the local kolkhoz), stated that: “Our people [in Transcarpathia] never lived as well as during Brezhnev’s time. During those eighteen years we lived a great life.” This shift in the economic opportunities that seasonal migration and in particular migration in forestry provided, was associated in the in the narrators’ testimonies with a particular event: sometime around 1968, a dreadful storm in Latvia felled enormous parts of the forest. Fallen trees had to be removed as soon as possible to prevent rotting and to ensure the productive utilization of the timber. Seasonal woodcutting brigades from Transcarpathia and other Ukrainian oblasti were recruited to clear the timber by the representatives of Latvian lumber mills and Ukrainian collective farms,⁴⁶⁶ who jumped at the chance to buy the damaged wood. The rumor of endless work possibilities spread in Keretski:

My brother finished his military service and then went to work in Latvia. He returned and said to me: “I earned four thousand [rubles] in three months.” I said: “What the hell? How could you earn such money?” He opened his work record book: “Here, look.” So, he brought us presents and nice clothing for himself, and put three thousand on credit. Then I left my job here in the village and also went to Latvia.⁴⁶⁷

Danylo did not regret his decision: he also earned enough money to not only buy new clothing for his whole family, but also build a house. The harvesting of felled wood in Latvia continued for at least seven years. Everyone in Transcarpathia tried to get involved and the stream of migration temporarily shifted from the West of Siberia to the Baltic region. According to the official statistics, in 1970 at least 2,100 people from Transcarpathia worked for Latvian timber enterprises, and the duration of their work varied from three to ten months.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 479, ar. 89-92.

⁴⁶⁷ Interview with Danylo, April 2014.

⁴⁶⁸ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 298, ar. 4.

The conditions of their employment, however, were at times quite curious. The woodcutters were hired as “subcontracting parties” by various collective farms around Soviet Ukraine to harvest construction wood for, and in the name of, the collective farms.⁴⁶⁹ These collective farms were almost always located outside Transcarpathia. Most of the workers hired in this way were reported to receive their salaries from both the kolkhozes and the lumber mills in Latvia. For the same work they received a double wage, bringing their income to a total of 500-1000 rubles per month.⁴⁷⁰ Danylo was himself astonished by the sudden increase in earnings:

[Before 1970] we could hardly earn any money in Russia. It was very difficult. ... we were paid 1 ruble 40 kopek for a cubic meter of felled wood [for the entire brigade]. It was a lot of work, but very little money. And when we went to Latvia, we earned 26 rubles per cubic meter. It was huge. I earned 28 thousand rubles for three seasons.⁴⁷¹

Danylo was particularly lucky. While other labor migrants confirmed that their pre-1970s wages hardly exceeded two rubles per cubic meter,⁴⁷² their Latvian earnings varied from 7 to 16 rubles,⁴⁷³ so 26 rubles was unprecedentedly high, even for Latvian standards. In addition, Latvian lumber mills were reported to

Sell industrial wood in quantities from 15 to 60 cubic meters to the workers, ship it to them directly or to the companies themselves (the lumber mill could act as a sender in Latvia and a receiver at the [Transcarpathian] train stations of Rakhiv, Svaliava and Velykyi Bychkiv), which led to malpractice on the part of certain directors of lumber mills. The workers sell the wood they received for inflated prices: 40–70 rubles per cubic meter. Sample data [from the mentioned train stations] has revealed that in 1969 various individuals and Latvian lumber mills have received over one thousand cubic meters of wood. ... The illegal operations regarding the shipment of industrial wood to the private persons continued in remarkable volumes in 1970 and also took place in 1971.⁴⁷⁴

So, the Baltic storm led to a windfall for Transcarpathian woodcutters. “Latvia lifted us all up,” Danylo said, as everyone who was lucky enough to jump on the bandwagon in the early 1970s supported his statement in individual interviews. However, the wave did stop even after the fallen wood was collected. There was a further increase in earnings from Russian forestry as well, “then Russia also started giving us a raise, not as much as Latvia, but one could earn good

⁴⁶⁹ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 298, ar. 4.

⁴⁷⁰ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 298, ar. 5.

⁴⁷¹ Interview with Danylo, April 2014.

⁴⁷² Interview with Dmytro, April 2014.

⁴⁷³ Interview with Stepan, December 2015.

⁴⁷⁴ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 298, ar. 5-6.

money. And it all lasted till 1990. One could make good living. From 1970 till 1990, it was communism.”⁴⁷⁵

Whether the workers recognized it or not, this shift in economic possibilities was structured by changes in economic priorities and in the legal environment. A handful of laws that were adopted by the government in 1968 and 1971 were aimed at increasing the access of collective farms to timber. However, these rather cautious rearrangements in the legal framework were misused by multiple actors as a cover for impressive in their range and ingenuity corruption schemes. In particular, the “informal liberalization,” as I call it, of the internal timber distribution and trade created a space for the flourishing activities of middlemen, who took the role of professional, and yet illegal and extremely low profile, negotiators of timber trade deals. These two interconnected factors — formal (the laws) and informal (the activities of middlemen) — had a profound influence on the migrant workers’ labor conditions. While the workers might have appreciated the financial advantages of the contracts made through the middlemen, they, first, dwindled into the legal and economic shadow of Soviet economy; second, entered into labor relationships where their employer was a *de facto* private entrepreneur, and not a socialist enterprise; and finally, it placed them in informal labor hierarchies which were outside the laws and regulations of the Soviet state. I will focus on the two sides of “informal liberalization”: its legal side, and its informal inversion as associated with the entrepreneurial initiatives of the middlemen, in order to explain how these transformations affected seasonal migrant workers in forestry.

2. De-centralized channels of internal wood distribution in the USSR and the legal framework

At this point it is worth mentioning that timber stockpiling in the Soviet Union was not entirely centralized. While the majority of the timber enterprises were structural parts of the Ministry of Timber and Woodworking Industry and conducted timber harvesting for further internal redistribution and export, a certain section of the forest fund was reserved for so called self-suppliers (“*samozagotoviteli*”): various bureaus, organizations, local collective and state farms, and in some cases even private persons.⁴⁷⁶ Enterprises from various oblasti and even union republics arranged their bases in forested areas of the Siberian taiga to procure timber for their own needs.⁴⁷⁷ Often smaller enterprises from the unforested regions, such as state farms, were

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with Danylo, April 2014.

⁴⁷⁶ Brainin, *Rassledovanie khishcheniy pri zagotovke lesa*, 7.

⁴⁷⁷ V. Rasputin, “Znat’ sebia patriotom,” *Pravda*, June 24, 1988.

encouraged to take responsibility for their own timber procurement to alleviate the pressure on centralized redistribution.⁴⁷⁸ In 1975, a Soviet journalist wrote that in Tyumen oblast', only 75 percent of the forest fund was worked by the Ministry, the rest was "reclaimed by lumbermen from Georgia and Tataria, Saratov, Moscow, Omsk, Volgograd oblasti. ... Substantial raw material base is reserved for them – 118,620,000 square meters [of forest]. Each ministry establishes their [procurement] enterprise..."⁴⁷⁹ Similarly, in Perm oblast, there were at least 30 forestry-related enterprises administered by various organizations and regional executive committees based in the Saratov, Rostov, Krasnodar oblasti, among other places.⁴⁸⁰ Consequently, every self-supplying enterprise had its office, small village, industrial log depot, timber harvesting equipment, and even its own approach road to the train station.⁴⁸¹

Like many Soviet industrial units, self-suppliers were often short of manpower for timber procurement purposes, and were frequent employers of seasonal workers. The recurring remarks in the press that the average price of a cubic meter at a self-supplying enterprise was higher than that of a state forestry enterprise also suggests that seasonal workers could expect more competitive wages.⁴⁸² Two brothers, Fadii and Mykola, admitted that it was much easier to make a piece-rate contract with either a self-supplier or a forestry section that was procuring wood specifically for farming needs. They were convinced that large ministerial timber industry enterprises, which were working the so-called "state forest," only employed workers on permanent contracts. So, for seasonal migrants, there were certain advantages to the apparently simplified process of temporary employment with self-suppliers or collective farms in Siberia, such as higher piece rates, less adherence to labor codes, and the possibility to leave in the case of dissatisfaction without facing legal accountability. Disappointingly, such employment could be short-term because the volumes of procured timber were often set in advance, meaning that there was little possibility of returning for the next season. Moreover, it was possible for the enterprise to distance itself from any legal obligations to the workers entirely: for instance, labor migrants did not receive any mark in their work book. The brothers also called such forestry divisions "vorui les" ("steal the forest"), pointing out that they misused their access to the "green gold" of Siberia and frequently exceeded the allowed procurement quotas.⁴⁸³ According to M.

⁴⁷⁸ B. Matov, "Bez prava vybora," *Pravda*, August 6, 1967.

⁴⁷⁹ S. Blinkov, S. Vtorushin, "Taige nuzhen odin khoziain," *Pravda*, April 8, 1975.

⁴⁸⁰ I. Ia. Moiseenko, "Rassledovaniia khishchenii deneg, sovershennykh pri zagotovkakh lesa upolnomochennymi-zagotoviteliami," 93.

⁴⁸¹ Blinkov, Vtorushin, "Taige nuzhen odin khoziain."

⁴⁸² F. Varaksin, "Taige – iedinyi poriadok," *Pravda*, February 17, 1972.

⁴⁸³ Brainin, *Rassledovanie khishcheniy pri zagotovke lesa*, 33.

Brainin, the cases of embezzlement in forestry were most frequent during the timber procurement in the collective farm forests.⁴⁸⁴

In fact, the discussion on strengthening the “direct ties” between producers and consumers of production goods and raw materials had its moment in the mid-1960s, when the so-called Kosygin reforms were gaining momentum. The main argument in favor of direct ties between enterprises was circulation costs saving and the limitation of the functions of countless centralized supply channels of the union republics and the ministries, which delayed distribution and raised the prices of the goods.⁴⁸⁵ Decentralization was expected to optimize freight traffic and ensure the timely delivery of goods. However, this sound idea did not receive wide support as it clashed with the political principle of the planned economy. The Soviet authorities were reluctant to commit to decentralized distribution, as they feared to lose their grip over economic processes.

Collective farms, however, were comparatively small enterprises with only the occasional need for construction materials, which was not always planned in advance. A kolkhoz’s status of a cooperative gave it a certain autonomy in the shaping and disposing of its budget. Kolkhoz administrators were also allowed to make decisions regarding some internal economic issues. Kolkhozes were not allowed to decide on the crops they would cultivate, but they could fund minor construction out of their own budget, sometimes without even requiring approval from above. At the same time, the inclusion of collective farms in the circuits of centralized distribution overburdened the raw-material bases with small orders. This could be considered as unviable given the transportation costs. Since autonomous construction, as it will be shown in the next chapter, continued to be the collective farms’ preferred method of building, rethinking the central allocation of materials was a pressing economic issue.

By the beginning of the 1970s, collective farms all around the USSR received an official permission to procure wood at various forestry enterprises, provided that they delegate their own workers, equipment, and even food for the workers. The legal basis for these self-supplying deals was ensured by the governmental regulations from 1968 and 1971.⁴⁸⁶ The regulations

⁴⁸⁴ Collective farm forests refer to the forest plots, which are situated on the lands that are reserved for collective farms in perpetuity. See Brainin, *Rassledovanie khishcheniy pri zagotovke lesa*, 7; Akimov, Zakroishchikov, “Nekotoryie osobennosti rassledovaniia khishcheniy denezhnykh sredstv, sovershaiemykh pri zagotovke lesa”; Khliupin, *Metodika rassledovaniia khishchenij v lesozagotovitel’nykh organizatsiyakh*, 5.

⁴⁸⁵ Yu. Koldomasov, “Razvitiie priamykh khoziaistvennykh svyazei i raspredeleniie sredstv proizvodstva,” *Voprosy ekonomiki* 11 (1965), 17-18.

⁴⁸⁶ See, for instance, DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 298, ar. 3.

stated that those kolkhozy and sovkhozy that delegated their workers for seasonal work to timber industry enterprises located in the RSFSR, were allowed to buy 15 cubic meters of industrial wood per each 100 work quotas (*trudovaia norma*) completed by the delegated brigade of woodcutters. The regions where representatives of timber enterprises were allowed to recruit workers on the basis of these regulations and make contracts with the farms were specified by the collaborative decisions of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Sovkhozy of the Ukrainian SSR, and the Ministry of Forestry of the Soviet Union.⁴⁸⁷ The regulations assumed that the wood-deficient oblasti would have stronger incentives to commission their workers for timber harvesting and believed that their dependence on centralized distribution would be reduced if they were provided with direct access to this scarce construction material.

These regulations built upon the legal norm from 1956. At first glance, the only difference was the increase in the amount of wood allocated per each 100 work quotas, from seven cubic meters in 1956 to 15 in 1971. However, there was another important difference. The regulation from 1956 mentioned farms and timber enterprises as the main actors in the deal, however, the recommendation was that the farms sell the shares of timber at the retail price to individual workers according to their completed workloads.⁴⁸⁸ This made workers and peasants, who were often in need of construction materials to build their houses, the most interested party in the deal, which motivated them to apply for seasonal jobs in forestry. This provision disappeared in 1971, and, compounded by the increase in the timber quota, it shifted the incentive from individual workers to the collective and state farms. From then on, they obtained a legal right to purchase sufficient amounts of wood for the construction of new facilities.⁴⁸⁹ In theory, the amount of wood that could be sold to the collective farms was tied to the amount of work performed by a team of workers — 15 cubic meters for 100 workloads. In practice, the brigades of seasonal workers harvested as much wood as the farms required. With the poor centralized distribution of construction materials, especially for rural construction, collective farms' managers resorted to this shortcut to guarantee the fast acquisition of wood in the quantities necessary for their farms. After receiving all required permissions, the farm would

⁴⁸⁷ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 766, ar. 64.

⁴⁸⁸ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 139, ar. 51.

⁴⁸⁹ E. Soia-Serko, "Kak vyiavit' narushenia pri oplate truda lesozagotovitelei-sezonnykh rabochikh," *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, no. 4 (1987): 49-50.

sign a contract with a lumber mill, and the lumber mill would assign a forest tract for timber harvesting.⁴⁹⁰

Soon after being passed, the regulations brought statistically visible results. By December 5, 1971, numerous kolkhozy and sovkhozy of the Ukrainian SSR had established contacts with timber enterprises in heavily forested areas of the country and assigned 34,000 workers for the upcoming season.⁴⁹¹ The Ministry of Forestry reported that the successful accomplishment of the log hauling quarterly plan was possible thanks to the arrival of 45,000 seasonal workers, mostly from Ukraine and Moldova.⁴⁹² These numbers tripled Ukraine's yearly *orgnabor* plans for the recruitment of both temporary and permanent workers to the forestry in the European North of Russia and Siberia. They also reflected the immediate response of the workers to the rearranged framework of economic incentives.

Such animation in the small-scale timber trade, however, engendered a range of activities that concerned the authorities. Investigations revealed that there was a number of violations regarding the quasi-independent timber procurement by the collective farms, especially concerning the practices of remuneration of workers. Firstly, the investigations uncovered an overestimation of the payment rates for lumberjack work, which increased the price of wood. For instance, kolkhoz "Russia" in the Odessa oblast was buying one cubic meter of wood for 69 rubles 50 kopecks, while the state-set wholesale prices varied between 22 and 30 rubles.⁴⁹³ Secondly, in addition to receiving higher wages than those envisaged by the authorities, the workers managed to negotiate further in-kind benefits. Many farms, such as the kolkhoz "Kommunar" in the Nikolaiev oblast, sold or gave away extra wheat or sunflower seeds to the members of temporary brigades.⁴⁹⁴ These cases suggested that even though the services of temporary wood harvesting brigades were expensive, collective farm managers were still willing to agree to their demands.

The regulations required a farm to sign two separate contracts: one with a timber enterprise and another with a woodcutting brigade. The contracts should then have been confirmed by the kolkhoz board, and copies were to be submitted to local district authorities. In practice, however, it was not uncommon that a brigade foreman and a farm's director were the only

⁴⁹⁰ Akimov, Zakroishchikov, "Nekotoryie osobennosti rassledovaniia khishcheniy denezhnykh sredstv, sovershaiemykh pri zagotovke lesa," 3.

⁴⁹¹ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 547, ar. 139.

⁴⁹² TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 551, ar. 31.

⁴⁹³ Soia-Serko, "Kak vyiavit' narusheniia pri opiate truda lesozagotovitelei-sezonnykh rabochikh," 49.

⁴⁹⁴ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 1049, ar. 101.

people involved in the process of composing and signing the contracts. They also independently negotiated workers' wages, timber prices and additional benefits, and were thus completely out of the control of any Soviet authority or specialized department. This was made possible by the ambiguity of the law: there was no standard regulation pertaining to the content and the procedure for the conclusion of such contracts.⁴⁹⁵ Normally, workers would be paid by timber enterprises through work orders, to which the collective farm would then pay another 50 percent. However, occasional inspections uncovered that some contracts included exaggerated timber prices or higher workload payments.⁴⁹⁶ All in all, double payments to the seasonal workers by collective farms and timber enterprises, compounded with various illegal increments, allowed workers to earn 2,000–3,000 rubles in a successful month.⁴⁹⁷

The regulations were meant to further galvanize the inflow of seasonal manpower into the timber industry from wood-deficient regions, and to put the responsibilities for wood procurement on the collective farms, thus reducing the pressure of distribution on the centralized agencies. However, the process quickly spiraled out of control, as the actors involved in wood procurement — mainly kolkhoz chairmen, the leaders of brigades, and workers themselves — subverted the intentions of the law. In theory, the brigades sent for wood harvesting would be composed of members of the collective farms that signed a contract with the timber enterprises. The law also allowed workers from outside of the kolkhozy to be hired on equal terms for seasonal timber harvesting. As I mentioned in the Chapter 3, many collective and state farms in the 1970s suffered from labor shortages, caused by outmigration to the cities and decrease in birth rates, so they often chose to outsource manpower from other locations of the republic for wood harvesting.

In addition, instead of compiling a brigade from unqualified agricultural workers, who had no experience in forestry and were unfamiliar with the specialized equipment, it was considerably more convenient for farm managers to hire a brigade of professional and experienced lumberjacks, who took responsibility for all organizational tasks concerning the timber enterprises, such as wood transportation and delivery. As a result, collective farms hired workers from other regions, or even other Soviet republics, regardless of the regulation adopted of 1973, which was intended to restrict “unsupervised” labor mobility. The farm managers did everything they could to hire skilled workers: they registered workers as members of their

⁴⁹⁵ Soia-Serko, “Kak vyiavit’ narushenia pri oplate truda lesozagotovitelei-sezonnykh rabochikh,” 49.

⁴⁹⁶ Soia-Serko, 49.

⁴⁹⁷ “Rvachi naleteli,” *Izvestia*, April 4, 1980.

collective farms, if needed, without discussing it with the kolkhoz board, or avoided notifying the district party authorities about the contracts they were making. For example, in September 1976, Iu. P. Kurylo, the director of sovkhos “Krupskaia” in Donetsk oblast’, enrolled a brigade of eight men from Rakhiv district, Transcarpathia, for seasonal work. According to the contract, the brigade was supposed to harvest wood for the sovkhos in Chita oblast’, RSFSR. The brigade members themselves never showed up in the sovkhos and did not present their documents in person – they went directly from Transcarpathia to their work place in Chita, never met the director of the sovkhos, and communicated through their leader. The labor contract was made solely with the foreman of the hired brigade, A.D. Kostich. The director of the sovkhos, in disregard of the current norms and rate scales, agreed to pay 120,000 rubles. Despite the objections of the lawyer, the director of the trust approved the contract.⁴⁹⁸

Thus, when a farm director lacked manpower at his own kolkhoz, he would turn to the services of migrant woodcutting brigades, which were in abundance in Transcarpathia. Once labor migrants found out about the new opportunities secured by the laws, they rushed to offer their services before the kolkhoz directors even started looking for them. It was not uncommon for Transcarpathian seasonal workers to take the initiative and knock on the doors of the directors of kolkhozy that had construction budgets. With the 1971 timber trade regulation, many workers saw an opportunity to apply the expertise they acquired in the industry within the refurbished legal framework, and travelled around Ukraine, eager to offer their services and knowledge to whoever paid more. As a result, the majority of the Ukrainian collective farms that undertook independent wood harvesting in other regions of the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s were reliant on migrant professionals.⁴⁹⁹

3. The entrepreneurial logic of late socialism: “the clients”

When collective farms received the right to exercise de-centralized timber stockpiling, a new group of actors became prominent in the process of creating contracts between the farms and timber enterprises. In the official literature they are referred to as procurement agents, who functioned as middlemen between the parties. The role of these “fixers” grew significantly throughout the 1970s and 1980s, since the system of self-managed timber stockpiling required establishing connections between very distant production and consumption units. Without any

⁴⁹⁸ TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 851, ar. 15-16.

⁴⁹⁹ In 1980, 120 such contracts were made with migrant woodcutting brigades in Sumy oblast’, Ukrainian SSR. See TSDAVOU, f. R-4626, op. 3, sp. 1049, ar. 32.

specialized state department or agency that could assist in the exploration of harvesting options and supervise the logistics of timber delivery, procurement agents became key figures in these deals. They were in charge of all managerial functions, from signing the of the contract and to the delivery of wood. The degree of independence that they enjoyed during the arrangement and fulfillment of contracts, and the profit they made out of these deals, qualify them as one of the first private entrepreneurs in the post-war Soviet Union.

Ukrainian archives contain very little information about procurement agents. There is more to be found in the juridical literature regarding criminal activities in forestry, and more to be heard in oral interviews of seasonal workers, who colloquially referred to the middlemen as “clients” (*kliyenty*). Seasonal forestry workers from Keretski village vividly remember that it became common to make contracts with collective farms and forestry enterprises through middlemen at the beginning of the 1970s, after the windfall in Latvia. It was easy to get permission to harvest in the Latvian fallen forest, so the clients from Transcarpathia and other locations seized the opportunity, traveling across the sparsely forested regions with intensive agriculture and animal farming in search of buyers. However, it is fair to assume that the history of the clients starts earlier than the 1970s and is presumably connected to the mechanism of self-supply. One of the few official reports that directly addressed the issue of the clients in 1971, suggested that “during the last 10 to 15 years, a group of people has come together in Transcarpathia that arrogated to themselves the right to act as foremen. This group amounts to at least 2,000 persons.”⁵⁰⁰ These “self-avowed foremen,” (*kirony*):

On their own initiative put together brigades out of seven to twenty persons and act as middlemen between the brigade and an enterprise or a collective farm. The foremen go about enterprises [and] collective farms of the country, do correspondence on behalf of the brigades, [and] make contracts with those enterprises, which agree to pay more than they pay to the local kolkhozniki and workers.

... Some foremen get in contact with kolkhozes or sovkhozes as “general contractors.”⁵⁰¹

Like seasonal migration itself, the organizational activities of middlemen in forestry predated the establishment of the Soviet rule in Transcarpathia. The activities of the pre-Soviet clients constituted an essential part of seasonal migration. The clearance of a plot of forest was traditionally organized by a middleman who picked a group of woodcutters, made arrangements regarding the pay, and was in charge of all issues concerning organization of the

⁵⁰⁰ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 298, ar. 2.

⁵⁰¹ DAZO, f. R-1546, op. 1, sp. 298, ar. 2.

process.⁵⁰² During the first post-war decade they were less visible, but as the funding of agriculture and the investments in construction for collective farms grew, in parallel with increasing shortages of labor and construction materials in the countryside, they switched their qualification to timber procurement and adjusted their repertoire of skills to the Soviet formal and informal spheres of operation. The informal liberalization of the timber trade granted even more space for those middlemen who already had some experience in facilitating small-scale timber acquisition or labor migration, who could apply their organizational skills with new energy.

There were various ways to become a middleman. In some cases, savvy seasonal workers or brigade leaders would take the responsibilities of procurement agents. Matvii (born in 1940), a resident of Krychovo village, Transcarpathia, worked every summer at the logging enterprise “Pechorlesosplav” on the Pechora river, Komi ASSR. He started in 1957 and returned every year until 1991. For the final 15 years of this period, he was both a brigade foreman and a procurement officer, responsible for selling the timber earned by his brigade to the farms in the Ukrainian SSR. Unlike the seasonal wood rafters from his village, he rarely stayed at home during autumn and winter. When the works on the river Pechora were over, he usually traveled around Ukraine in search of potential buyers, or he supervised log loading in Komi ASSR for fear that the timber enterprise would ship wood of lower quality. When the wood was shipped, delivered, and the contract with a collective farm completed, he received the total payment for wood and distributed the money among the workers according to their fulfilled quotas. Thus, Matvii was at once a worker, a brigade foreman, a procurement officer, and an accountant. Every year he gathered a brigade or two in his village and departed for the Pechora river. Among those he recruited were regular seasonal workers like himself, but also students and school teachers, who came for shorter periods during their vacations. There was never a shortage of volunteers. As Matvii recalls, “many brigades were going to Pechora – the whole village.” There was also a dozen of village-born middlemen who were arranging the annual seasonal departure for the brigades.⁵⁰³

Yurii represented a slightly different type of a “client”. Born in 1945, he was younger than the rest of my respondents, and at the time of the windfall had just finished his military service. Latvia was his first destination of seasonal work, and the first location where he revealed his

⁵⁰² Tyvodar, *Etnografia Zakarpattia*, 147.

⁵⁰³ Interview with Matvii, December 2015.

talent for brokering. He first went to Latvia as a member of a seasonal workers' brigade to harvest wood for a collective farm in Kirovohrad oblast', Ukraine. Soon enough, he exhibited an exceptional understanding of the timber trade system. He quickly made replaced a collective farm representative from Kirovohrad region, and started recruiting brigades from his home village to harvest wood in Latvia for a number of collective farms in Kirovohrad oblast'. During his 27 years as a procurement agent (as he called himself) he never physically worked in the forest again. Instead, he went to "Moscow, Kirov, Perm', Arkhangel oblast', Mordovia, Latvia — wherever there was forest... traveled around Russia and looked for the forest [he] could order"⁵⁰⁴ and then sell to the collective farms in the Kirovohrad region. Yurii was a manager, responsible for all the logistics of the process:

I was an intermediary between the collective farm and the forestry enterprise. I was in command. I had all the warranties of authority, check book, permissions to make orders for freight cars at the railway station, I was in charge of everything. I had my brigade, and made a contract for two or three thousand cubic meters [of wood], whatever the collective farm needed.⁵⁰⁵

Yurii is a textbook example of a middleman, as described in the specialized juridical literature that was intended to identify the undercover brokers. He was officially an employee at the collective farm where he was registered as "responsible for finances," but he was at the same time officially registered as an employee of the forest farm once the contract was made.⁵⁰⁶ In practice, however, his authority had a much broader reach and included various professional functions and responsibilities were normally divided between different staff members. The procurement agents' powers included the negotiation and signing of contracts on timber purchases; the hiring of brigades and individual workers for various tasks required in the process — from tree felling to log hauling and road laying; payroll and accounting for all temporary workers; supervision of all financial operations and transportation; and the purchase of all required materials and equipment related to timber stockpiling.⁵⁰⁷ A procurement agent was effectively performing the functions of a cashier, an accountant, and an administrator, even though such conflation of responsibilities contradicted institutional regulations at all enterprises.⁵⁰⁸ On the one hand, the fact that the procurement agents were entrusted with such

⁵⁰⁴ Interview with Yurii, December 2014.

⁵⁰⁵ Interview with Yurii, December 2014.

⁵⁰⁶ Akimov, Zakroishchikov, "Nekotoryie osobennosti rassledovaniia khishchenii denezhnykh sredstv, sovershaiemykh pri zagotovke lesa," 4.

⁵⁰⁷ Moiseenko, "Rassledovaniia khishchenii deneg, sovershennykh pri zagotovkakh lesa upolnomochennymi-zagotoviteliami," 93-94.

⁵⁰⁸ Moiseenko, 96.

broad responsibilities enabled them to bypass bureaucratic red tape, resulting in greater speed and efficiency. On the other hand, the limited supervision of their financial activity was reported to bring about incidents of financial abuse, theft, speculation, and exploitation.⁵⁰⁹ Regarding the latter, Brainin noted that the difficulties in supervision were informed by the geographical distance between the involved locations.⁵¹⁰ Moiseenko added:

The oversight of the activities of a [procurement agent] is very weak, since the enterprises that delegated him are practically interested in the volumes of harvested and received wood and the total costs of the works. The issues regarding the ways the funds were spent, and the actual costs of various works are cleared up only superficially, although there is, of course, some documentary audit.⁵¹¹

For practical reasons procurement officers were entrusted with immense autonomy in finances and decision-making. A procurement officer received expense money from the delegating enterprise in the form of postal orders. In most cases, the enterprise would open an account with the Gosbank (the State Bank of the USSR) division in the district where timber harvesting was held. A procurement officer then received warranties of authority to perform financial operations, as well as a cheque book. After spending the money, a procurement officer was obliged to produce financial statements and periodically report to the enterprise.⁵¹² With every financial operation, and every issue regarding organization and communication left entirely up to the procurement officer, Yurii did not exaggerate when he said he was “in command.”

As Moiseenko suggested, the delegating enterprise, usually a collective farm, was mostly concerned with receiving the harvested wood and paying a total sum for the product, without going into details about the related expenses. Yurii started his procurement missions by negotiating the price that the collective farm was willing to pay for a cubic meter of wood — just as the labor migrants who worked in Siberian forests negotiated with the directors of the enterprises — and the amount of wood the farm needed. The total sum at which they arrived was intended to cover the purchase of the wood itself, all the logistical operations connected to its delivery, and all labor costs:

I was responsible for finances. The [wood] had to arrive, and I had to give the account of the money spent [to kolkhoz]: wood for each ruble. [At the lumber camp] I had to clear the pitch according to the contract. If they needed me to burn the branches, I burned. If they needed me to plant new trees,

⁵⁰⁹ Akimov, Zakroishchikov, “Nekotoryie osobennosti rassledovaniia khishchenii...” 4.

⁵¹⁰ Brainin, *Rassledovanie khishcheniy pri zagotovke lesa*, 3.

⁵¹¹ Moiseenko, “Rassledovaniia khishchenii deneg, sovershennykh pri zagotovkakh lesa upolnomochennymi zagotoviteliami,” 97.

⁵¹² Moiseenko, 95.

I planted. I hired people and planted. I distributed all from that sum I got. I was allowed 55 rubles [per cubic meter] and I was managing the funds. I bought food for the workers. ... I didn't pay the gas oil though — it was given [by the kolkhoz]. Then I had to transport the wood to the closest train station, load the freight cars and send it to the station nearest to the collective farm.”⁵¹³

The collective farms paid Yurii 45–55 rubles in the 1970s and 1980s, but there were cases in the USSR when the negotiated price rose to 160 rubles per cubic meter of wood.⁵¹⁴ According to Yurii, the stumpage price of wood that he paid to the timber enterprises was approximately one to five rubles per cubic meter. Thus, the cost of wood itself was not more, and frequently considerably less, than 9 percent of the sum he was allowed. The rest went towards operational costs, with the largest part being reserved for labor expenses.

As there was no uniform wage to regulate the payment for forest harvesting works organized by procurement agents, clients usually estimated the value of hired labor by themselves, taking into account various local conditions.⁵¹⁵ Yurii always recruited workers from his home village in Transcarpathia. Actually, he had a trusted brigade that consisted of his brothers, uncles, and even his father, and he only hired non-relatives when there was a large workload. The brigade's share was 22 rubles per cubic meter, and the amount of the wood it was assigned to harvest always varied. So, the “client” was practically the workers' employer, even when they were registered as members of the delegating collective farm. The “client” took care of all the nuances regarding shaping and distribution of the wages. Yurii compiled reports on the works executed, in which he pointed out who performed which task. After the reports were finished, he put together the wage lists, where he named the workers and indicated the amounts due. Then the workers equipped him with warranties, and he collected the money for entire brigade at the collective farm or in the bank. All that Ivan needed in order to represent the workers of the brigade at various bureaus and enterprises was their signature. They trusted him with their passports, employment record books, and were overall dependent on their informal agreement.

Yurii stressed that he treated the workers he hired fairly — he paid on time, never left the workers unrewarded, and “arranged a share of wood” for their individual needs. In his eyes, he was a good manager that took a good care of his team. The rates that Yurii gave his workers were indeed quite generous, but the income that he received was significantly higher.

⁵¹³ Interview with Yurii, December 2014.

⁵¹⁴ Soia-Serko, “Kak vyiavit' narusheniia pri oplate truda lesozagotovitelei-sezonnykh rabochikh,” 49.

⁵¹⁵ Moiseenko, “Rassledovania khishchenii deneg, sovershennykh pri zagotovkakh lesa upolnomochennymi-zagotoviteliami,” 96.

According to Yurii, he normally made 10–15,000 rubles from 1000 cubic meters of harvested wood. If the collective farm paid 55 rubles per cubic meter, his share then constituted from 18 to 27 percent of the total sum, while the share of the entire brigade was 40 percent. The brigade would harvest 1000 cubic meters in a month or two, so 5–6 months of the brigade’s work would make him 30–45,000 rubles. For Soviet standards, it was fantastic money. Yet, procurement missions were only his part-time occupation. In the beginning of the 1980s, during the construction of the natural gas export pipeline Urengoy – Pomary – Uzhhorod, which was built through Transcarpathia, Yurii’s main position was deputy inventory manager in the neighboring village. There he earned 180 rubles per month. Here he also showed great talent, so much so that the director was eager to promote him. Yurii refused and instead went back “to the forest,” because at his official job the money was not good enough, and he needed to build a house — curiously, he was on the same footing with the workers. The director tried to prevent Yurii from resigning by promising him a nice flat in the central town of the raion, but Yurii declined. He refused to leave his village and to abandon his plans. The risks in his illegal undertakings were high, “but the returns [were] evidently correspondingly high, and the combination has succeeded in generating what may be regarded as the most vigorous sphere of entrepreneurship in the Soviet economy”:⁵¹⁶ the so-called “second economy.”

The disengagement of the clients from physical work and the opacity of their financial operations, distinguished them from the workers, who subsequently treated the clients with mistrust. Many workers defined them as “businessmen,” free agents who were not permanently attached to any place of work, and who were constantly in search of the opportunities for supply and demand. Some workers appreciated the high rates that the clients offered, as well as the fact that the tedious task of exploring the locations for seasonal works was delegated another party. At the same time, they were aware that the “clients’” wage was disproportionally and inexcusably high. Additionally, not all clients were as responsible as Yurii. Except document forgery, they were reported to sometimes fail to pay the promised wages. The “clients’” wealth was always associated with profiteering and corruption, and since the exact mechanisms of their enrichment were always opaque, and the extent of their affluence never fully apparent, local imagination sometimes brought about fascinating and fantastic stories, similar to one recounted by Irina: “[The clients], they were dishonest people. ... They owed to the whole village. When [a clients’] old house was dismantled so that a new one could be built on its place, the money

⁵¹⁶ Joseph S. Berliner, “Entrepreneurship in the Soviet Union: An Overview,” in *Entrepreneurship in Imperial Russia and Soviet Union*, ed. Gregory Guroff and Fred V. Carstensen (Princeton University Press, 1983), 196.

was falling out of the walls.”⁵¹⁷ In their own local communities, the clients did not inspire respect, like the diligent migrant workers, but caused the mixed feelings of suspicion, jealousy, apprehension and awe. They were impressive tricksters who clearly abused the law, but their masterfulness made them unstoppable.

To be a procurement agent, one had to possess certain skills and characteristics. You needed a practical knowledge of geography, economy, local labor markets, and infrastructure, as well as how to identify, build, and bypass the bureaucratic and geographical routes. You needed to be able to produce paperwork that would cover for expenses, but also to be sociable and presentable, “business-like”, not to mention discreet. The “client” was a late Soviet incarnation of two of Ilya Ilf and Eugene Petrov’s famous characters from their 1931 novel *The Golden Calf* — its protagonist Ostap Bender, the great “combinator” and adventurer who always emphasized that he “hallowed the criminal code,” and his foil, Aleksander Koreiko, an undercover millionaire who made a fortune out of various fraudulent schemes but was afraid to give himself away by spending a single ruble. The contradictory figure of the “client” was symptomatic of the contradictions of the late Soviet economy, and encouraged by the economic “informal liberalization” of Brezhnev’s “Little Deal.”

Discretion and cautiousness enable clients to maneuver between the domains of the “first” and “second” economies, i.e. between the official, centrally planned business and what is sometimes referred to as “second,” “informal,” “unofficial” or “shadow”⁵¹⁸ economy. Their private initiatives thrived in the conditions of shortages and misdistribution, and in an economic sense were “at once liberating, corrosive, and lubricating.”⁵¹⁹ The absence of official regulation concerning the financial content of the contracts, and the only superficial supervision by control bodies, opened a legal void for potential manipulation. The procurement agents were suspected to cross socialist moral and legal lines, since they were known to inflate timber prices, trade wood privately, and forge financial accounts. Clearly, corruption was not a necessary attribute for the position of a procurement agent, but the ill-defined borders of the legal space they inhabited enabled them to exercise certain economic creativity and effectively evade authoritative control. In a broader sense, this “creativity” blurred the line between “right” and “wrong” economic behavior within the Soviet society. Even during the Perestroika years, when

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Irina, December 2014.

⁵¹⁸ F. J. M. Feldbrugge, Government and Shadow Economy in the Soviet Union, *Soviet Studies* 36, no. 4 (1984): 528-543.

⁵¹⁹ Steven L. Sampson, The Second Economy of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Europe, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 493, The Informal Economy (1987): 122.

financial motivation at work gained official recognition, the actions of the procurement agents and some brigade foremen, often labeled as “dealers” (*del'tsy*), led to sharp controversies.

The underlying concern about the actions of the “dealers” referred to the breach of the norms and ideals of socialist economic exchange and the “disfiguring” of the economic space to the extent that it started resembling market relations. While other actors of the “second economy,” such as petty fruit vendors, who sold the produce from their private plots at local bazaars, or jeans ‘speculators,’ also exploited their individual resources, the procurement officers spread their operating area to the industrial level. With their help, resource-deficient enterprises and farms obtained building materials more effectively than through the system of centralized distribution. Their mobility, relative independence, initiative and resourcefulness triggered the establishment of the practices of exchange, which functioned according to the economic formula that enabled certain sectors of economic life to cooperate and trade avoiding the involvement of the central state authorities.

Eventually, the type of relations that emerged between the clients and the workers violated the basic principle of socialist justice in its ethical and legal sense: namely, the prohibition of exploitation of one person by another. Maria Shabanova’s conclusion regarding “non-working foremen” emphasized this particular dimension of seasonal migration:

The uncontrollability of internal social and economic relations inside seasonal brigades, and the occasional emergence of unearned income resulting from the fact that some foremen perform duties of brokers, constitute the most regretful element of seasonal labor migration.⁵²⁰

While many seasonal workers were still hired by the timber enterprises directly, some chose to work with the middlemen. In this case, he was effectively their direct employer, if not on the books. The wages and benefits of the workers depended on him as much as on the hiring collective farm. This positioned workers and procurement officers rather differently. While the workers justified their higher wages by hard labor, the middleman was able to make profit by, for instance, falsifying the actual cost of works. Therefore, the emergence of the “alternative” timber trade, with its patterns of private entrepreneurship, further redefined the position of seasonal workers in the industry. On the one hand, the “alternative” timber trade made use of already existing patterns of seasonal labor migration in forestry. These patterns were conveniently taken advantage of by the clients who did not interfere with the brigades’ proven

⁵²⁰ Maria Shabanova, “Sezonnyie stroiteli v sibirskom sele,” *Izvestiia Sibirskogo otdeleniia Akademii Nauk SSSR. Seriia ekonomiki i prikladnoi sotsiologii* 7, no. 2 (1986): 54.

effective and efficient labor routines and work organization practices. On the other hand, the procurement agents pushed the workers away from the negotiation and communication process, therefore making their situation and their contracts even more precarious than before.

CONCLUSION

While the state-organized labor mobilization efforts, such as *orgnabor*, failed to mitigate the shortages in labor-hungry forestry, it did serve as a channel for exploring job possibilities. However, the “long-term business ties” between the timber enterprises of Siberia and Transcarpathia were not maintained via the centralized labor distribution agency, but through the independent initiatives of the migrant workers who managed to establish personal contacts with local managers and secured their positions through high labor performance in exchange for generous remuneration. Their labor organization and the compromises they were willing to make with the managers and with the state came to define the success and continuation of seasonal labor migration.

As I have shown, in the 1960–1970s, the Soviet state’s migration regimes and its incentive structure, which aimed at attracting workers to the labor-deficient regions and industries, led to the emergence of “unsupervised”, self-organized migration flows that became entrenched as seasonal migration patterns in certain regions of the USSR, especially in Transcarpathia. Furthermore, the legal framework that allowed direct trade between timber enterprises and collective farms, facilitated new trade and labor relationships that ran contrary to the ideals of a socialist economy and society. While clearly in conflict with official Soviet economic principles, these practices introduced a certain flexibility into the distribution of construction materials in the USSR, where rural construction was usually a low priority.⁵²¹ Paradoxically, the set of restrictions that framed seasonal employment and the procedures of decentralized timber harvesting essentially legitimized direct purchases of wood from timber enterprises and increased the profitability of timber felling for the workers. At the same time, the rise of the procurement agent changed the configuration of labor relations. While still nominally employed by the state enterprises, workers were dependent on private agents, and their communication with the management was minimized. This did not necessarily affect their wages, but it decreased their ability to directly influence their conditions of employment.

⁵²¹ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*.

Seasonal migrants who worked with the clients entered into informal market labor relations even before the Soviet Union collapsed, however, they still enjoyed the general benefits of social security, independent of their jobs.

5. CONSTRUCTION: ECONOMIC PRACTICES OF SEASONAL WORK

INTRODUCTION

Even though Transcarpathia became famous in the USSR for its professional migrant lumbermen, forestry was not the most popular occupation among the local migrant workers. While agriculture occupied first place in annually drawing thousands of migrants of both genders, the majority of Transcarpathian male seasonal workers — one third from the total number of seasonal migrants — specialized in construction. Small-scale rural construction engaged a significantly higher number of seasonal workers than forestry. In fact, in the USSR, rural construction was synonymous with short-term labor migration as the countryside became dependent on seasonal labor. The labor demand in the rural areas of the USSR was higher, and construction projects were often more geographically accessible than the distant Northern lumber camps, which resulted in this type of seasonal labor attracting a larger and more diverse group of temporary workers. It is true that rural Transcarpathia and Western Ukraine in general, alongside several other Soviet regions with distinct labor migration profiles, were singled out in internal reports and in the press as stable sources of seasonal construction workers.⁵²² However, it was not uncommon in the 1970s and 1980s for urban dwellers of various social backgrounds, from students to highly skilled professionals and academics, to seek the “long ruble” in Soviet villages during their official summer vacation.⁵²³ As a much broader social phenomenon in demographic and economic terms, seasonal migration in construction received significant visibility in the mass media. Labor migrants raised discussions among lawyers, sociologists, and planners, and became a constant presence in the Soviet public imagination.

The Soviet public knew seasonal construction workers as “*shabashnik*”. I have largely avoided this word so far as it is loaded with connotations of unscrupulous, shady dishonest, and corrupt

⁵²² See for example Patrick Murphy, “Soviet Shabashniki: Material Incentives at Work,” *Problems of Communism* 34, no. 6 (1984): 49; M. A. Shabanova, “Sovremennoie otkhodnichestvo kak sotsiokul’turnyi fenomen,” *Sotsiologicheskii issledovaniia*, no. 4 (1992): 55.

⁵²³ See for example “Engineers Get Easy Jobs in Service Sector to Earn ‘Easy Money’,” *Pravda*, July 23, 1984; I. S. Kruglianskaia, “S diplomom na zarabotki,” *Izvestiia*, December 12, 1985; Ie. Davydov, “Kak izuchali shabashnika,” *Posev*, no. 6 (Munich, 1986); Nina Maksimova, Viktor Gal’chenko, “Zhytie odnogo shabashnika,” *EKO*, no. 3 (1987): 100-136; S. A. Voitovich, Ya. D. Nikiforak, “‘Perspektiven’ li sovremennyi shabashnik?” *EKO*, no. 6 (1988): 128, 132; S. N. Bykova, “Nereglementirovannyi trud nauchnykh rabotnikov,” *Sotsiologicheskii issledovaniia*, no. 1 (1988): 64.

work. Moral judgement became intrinsic to the very term shabashnik, and it overshadowed the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the phenomenon. However, since “shabashnik” embodied such a vivid representation of migrant construction workers and was commonplace I will proceed to this term, whilst keeping in mind its inherent bias. In Chapter 6 I will discuss this contentious popular label in greater detail.

In this chapter, I will continue exploring the personal histories of Transcarpathian labor migrants and their development within the contexts of local labor market opportunities, state policies of labor distribution, and the particular economic environment of small-scale rural construction. On the whole, *orgnabor* was not obliged to recruit seasonal labor for rural construction: its main concern was the supply of workers to the large construction sites. There were some exceptions though, for instance, the Virgin Lands campaign, which was intended to quickly build many new farms in the Kazakh SSR. For a minority of migrant construction workers, *orgnabor* was a point of transition to self-organized migration, as we saw in the case of forestry, but most individuals relied on their own initiative to discover job opportunities and establish productive contacts. I suggest that the economic status of the Soviet farms (*kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*) and their mode of management made them a unique space in which informal labor relations could flourish, particularly with seasonal workers. As I explore small-scale rural construction as another corner of the Soviet economy that actively welcomed seasonal workers, I will emphasize the administrative power of the collective farm chairman (or a *sovkhoz* director) as a manager and employer. Working under the similar pressures of plans and delivery outputs as all managers in the USSR, this group of managers had particular autonomy regarding labor organization in the farms, and were able to choose the most viable options of their own volition. Here, as in forestry, the culture of informal arrangements, as well as the high economic efficiency of seasonal workers’ brigades, constituted the decisive conditions for the rise of the shabashnik.

BECOMING A SHABASHNIK: TWO STORIES FROM TRANSCARPATHIAN SEASONAL WORKERS

The majority of my narrators were born in the interwar period, when Transcarpathia was still under Czechoslovak jurisdiction. They witnessed the war, the drafting of volunteers to the Red Army when it was moving westwards through Transcarpathia in the fall of 1944, and the

inclusion of the region into the administrative body of the Ukrainian SSR and the subsequent implementation of the Soviet political and economic structures, especially the forced collectivization of agriculture. Their first experience of school was in Hungarian village schools. This was soon interrupted by the Soviet annexation of the region, after which the Soviet education system took over, and they proceeded with their primary and secondary schooling as Soviet pupils. Like Ignat, many did not manage to finish high school due to family expectations, which were oriented towards the immediate contribution from the young adults, especially men.

The lives of Ivan from Keretski village, Svaliava raion (born in 1933) and Fedir from Krychevo village, Tiachiv raion (born in 1939), were not exceptional. Fedir dropped out of school after his seventh year, and Ivan completed only four grades in Hungarian school before stopping his education all together when the new Soviet schools were established. After some years of job hopping in the 1950s–1960s, both Fedir and Ivan eventually ended up working as seasonal construction workers for more than two decades. Both managed to establish and maintain long-standing connections with their employers: Fedir's brigade worked in one of the sovkhoz trusts in the Omsk region, RSFSR, for 11 years, while Ivan was a foreman of a construction brigade that went to the Kazakh SSR each summer from 1977–1987.

1. Fedir

Fedir was one of 11 children in a single-parent family (his father died in 1950). With his older brothers either drafted to the army or to the Donbass factory training schools (*shkola fabrichno-zavodskogo obrazovaniia* – FZO),⁵²⁴ Fedir's prospects were limited:

There were no jobs here [in the village], it was impossible to live. We were entitled to the multiple children family pension and received 140 rubles. But there was old money. ... 140 rubles were the same as 14 rubles.⁵²⁵ It was impossible to live [on that money]. We had nothing but what we have grown by ourselves, and also a cow, some livestock. So, I went for work.⁵²⁶

Fedir's story of seasonal employment started in 1956. At the age of 17 he joined a group of 25 young people who departed from Krychevo village to Dnipropetrovsk oblast' under the supervision of a man who was in contact with a collective farm in the Marjivka village. Their

⁵²⁴ For more on factory training schools under late Stalinism see Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism: Labor and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II*.

⁵²⁵ The monetary reform in the USSR was conducted on January 1, 1961, in the form of denomination and devaluation. The bank notes implemented under the monetary reform of 1947 were exchanged during the first quarter of 1961 to the currency units of a new cropped format by the ratio of ten-to-one.

⁵²⁶ Interview with Fedir, December 2014.

group separated in the Dnipropetrovsk oblast' and they ended up in diverse villages and collective farms, wherever they could find work. Fedir was working in the fields, performing whatever task was asked of him, from harvesting to transporting forage by horse and oxen, which were still widely used as draft animals. He and his friend resided with local villagers who were willing to host and feed them in exchange for compensation from the collective farm. As far as earnings were concerned, they were low and disappointing for Fedir:

...What have we earned? What we earned we ate away. We were working for labor days [*trudodni*] — three rubles in money and three kilograms of grain in kind. It summed up to 30–40 norms per month, so what kind of earnings is that? The only thing was that we got fed.⁵²⁷

From this first trip Fedir brought home 2.5 centners of wheat and 2.5 centners of dredge corn, only the dredge corn was delivered the following year as the collective farm was short of supply when they finished their work. He returned home in the fall of 1956, but many other young women and men from their group decided to permanently remain in Dnipropetrovsk oblast'. Fedir suggested that the departure of seasonal workers in 1956 was one of the first from his home village, and before that year it was uncommon for people to leave for seasonal agricultural works to other regions of Ukraine. Around this time the republican authorities of the Ukrainian SSR started registering the growing numbers of *kolkhozniki* who were independently leaving their villages for seasonal work.

The movement of Transcarpathian seasonal workers to the East and South of Ukraine grew over time and spread onto the new localities. There was always work in the fields or in animal husbandry. The following year, however, Fedir decided against farming, where the payment, he knew from experience, was not always as lucrative as described by the state officials. He did not give up on seasonal labor migration though. This time, he joined a brigade of six or seven people from his home village, and together they went to Vinnytsia oblast' to work as lumbermen. The working conditions at the tree cutting site in Vinnytsia oblast' were terrible, so they abandoned their positions after two weeks of work. However, instead of returning home they decided to turn to the local Vinnytsia branch of *orgnabor*, as they knew that the *orgnabor* were always ready to enlist people.

Fedir was one of the few professional seasonal migrants who admitted his voluntary application to *orgnabor*. Many had never considered employment via *orgnabor* or never mentioned this

⁵²⁷ Interview with Fedir, December 2014.

service agency in the interviews, which signaled its utter insignificance for them: they either ignored or profoundly distrusted it. Ivan, for example, expressed a common disbelief to the system with his convinced account that:

People were recruited to the places where there were only the worst kinds of work were available or where the payment was very low. To be honest, they were simply lying to people. “Come to us, we will give you this and that.” So, people went but never found what was promised to them. In the end people were leaving these jobs... or left the jobs they were recruited for and went around searching for something else.⁵²⁸

Ivan’s observation was correct in Fedir’s case. The largest incentive that orgnabor office could offer was covering their travel expenses and a one-time allowance of 300 rubles in “old money”. The travel expenses — a small “uplift,” as Fedir called it —was not much, but nonetheless helpful for a group of traveling workers who were in desperate need of new employment opportunities. Thus, Fedir and his companions recruited themselves to the local orgnabor office, which directed their group to Krasnoyarsk Krai in East Siberia for pine tree resin tapping. Here Fedir worked in the forest, enduring the cold weather of early spring, and lived with his group in one of 5 or 6 houses, located 35 kilometers away from the road, next to other workers employed for similar work. It had an all too familiar ending: disappointed with the working conditions and low pay, Fedir with his companions waited for their first paycheck before leaving to find another workplace. He said:

We were working there for a month, then we didn’t like it. ... We earned 700 robes each – like 70 rubles. So... at night we packed out suitcases and left. Walked 35 kilometers to the route with the suitcases and everything... We couldn’t stay there. ... So, we decided to go to Arkhangelsk.⁵²⁹

They chose Arkhangelsk because some of the members of the group were tipped off that they could find jobs there, “Someone gave us an address of a timber industry enterprise, so we went there to look for woodcutting jobs. It was our brigade and two more guys from Zvenigovo.⁵³⁰ One was a tractor driver, the other one — a brigade foreman.”⁵³¹ After making a contract with the enterprise for harvesting a certain amount of timber, they worked for this “firm”, as Fedir called it, for the rest of the summer of 1957. They lived in a dormitory not far away from the pit, leaving early in the morning and returning late at night. The living conditions and work regime were harsh, especially as the workers were also responsible for their own food and

⁵²⁸ Interview with Ivan, April 2014.

⁵²⁹ Interview with Fedir, December 2014.

⁵³⁰ A town in Russia.

⁵³¹ Interview with Fedir, December 2014.

cooking, and, according to Fedir, it was impossible to earn good money. The enterprise provided the brigade with the skidding tractor, but the wood logging and sawing were supposed to be performed manually. This process was exhausting and time consuming. In their brigade, two workers felled the trees with an arm-saw, and another two cut and lopped. Then the tractor trailed the wood to the deck, where it was lashed. Then they calculated the approximate volume of the wood.

As Fedir's experience confirms, even by the end of the 1950s, Soviet forestry was still not fully mechanized. The industry still relied on manual labor, even though the "Druzhba" chainsaw, the basic woodcutting instrument used in the Soviet national forestry during the 1960s–1980s, was already mass-produced by 1955. When he returned to the Arkhangelsk forests for another season in 1962, Fedir noticed that there were improvements in mechanization. However, that first time in 1957, left him discouraged. After returning back home in the fall of 1957, he did not pursue employment at the Arkhangelsk enterprise, or in forestry in general for the following year. He also did not consider any other Ukrainian region, since "in Ukraine it was already impossible to earn money even during the Soviet Union, and those who wanted to turn a ruble were going to Perm', Omsk, Krasnoyarsk." Instead, in March 1958, Fedir recruited himself to *orgnabor* once again, this time via the Transcarpathian regional branch in Tiachiv. Together with 30 other people from different raions of Transcarpathia he was dispatched to a construction site in the Karaganda region in the Kazakh SSR.

At that time, the *orgnabor* ticket to the building sites of the Kazakh SSR also included the possibility to train in various construction professions. The severe lack of skilled workers and the growing number of construction projects in the USSR meant that it was common for the building organizations to offer professional training during or upon completion of the contract. Fedir was one of those who lacked any specialization and was eager to acquire one. Consequently, he returned back to Transcarpathia the next year as a bricklayer, but grew increasingly incredulous towards *orgnabor*. As he was seeking opportunities to increase his income, the *orgnabor* system, bound by the state wage rates and infamous for embellishing information about the wages and conditions of labor, gradually lost its appeal. After Karaganda he concluded that:

Orgnabor is like this... they were bringing you to the place of work, yes, but there was no opportunity to earn money whatsoever. Everything was according to the norms. No matter how much you work, you receive the same amount of money. I was working there for a year, and what I had 100 rubles

per month. But this money was spent for food and survival, and what was left was thin on the ground.⁵³²

In the course of just two years, Fedir had held numerous jobs and acquired various skills from his forestry experience and construction work. His new specialization, bricklaying, made it possible for him to also consider more specialized jobs. In the late 1950s, Fedir's generation of rural Transcarpathian youth was in a very similar position to his in terms of education — at best, they had a secondary school certificate — and they prioritized work over further education. Thus, they usually acquired skills on the job. Work as a woodcutter was considered physically harder, but less skilled, bar the more technical positions of chainsaw and tractor operators. Meanwhile, construction brigades were always in need of experts especially in bricklaying. Fedir's new specialization happened to be in demand in his home village, where people started discovering the ways to organize seasonal workers' brigades independently from the state coordination of labor. His new profession gave him an additional advantage when searching for work, and from that point forth construction was his first choice, if nothing considerably better was on offer.

Fedir admitted that he usually asked around in order to find and join the brigades of workers who either had contacts with employers or the intention to search for particular jobs. Disheartened by his previous experience in forestry and completely dismissing Ukraine as possible location for agricultural work, he decided to investigate the construction opportunities in the Russian North, and in 1959 he joined a brigade of construction workers who were heading to Altai, Western Siberia.

At this point, Fedir's story reaches an important landmark, which is significant both for his life and work biography and for the development of seasonal migration in construction. Fedir noticed that at this time, at the very end of 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s:

People started compiling brigades on their own. For example, a man has found a job... He'd go and find job somewhere in a kolkhoz or sovkhoz. ... So, when people took over, I joined them. ... It was possible to earn more. ... So, we were going there, building houses, farms, sheds. And I was working like this all my life. I would stay at home for only one season. We never worked in Ukraine. Mostly in Perm' or Omsk regions... In one sovkhoz [trust] I was working for 11 years.⁵³³

⁵³² Interview with Fedir, December, 2014.

⁵³³ Interview with Fedir, December 2014.

Fedir's observation about "people taking over" the organization of seasonal migrant brigades in his village coincided with the spread of self-organized seasonal migration around the country in response to the growth of local construction sites in the rural areas of the non-Black Earth Belt of Russia, Kazakh SSR, and Western Siberia, as well as in Ukraine, Latvia.

2. *Ivan*

Ivan similarly explored various employment opportunities in the 1950s-1960s, before finally settling on construction. From 1947, he worked at the local forestry enterprise in the nearby village, which was the main employer for the five or six surrounding villages. Later, after finishing his three-year army service, he returned to his home village, only to find that his job was no longer available because of the liquidation of the local forestry enterprise.

When the opportunity to join a brigade of woodcutters presented itself in 1957, Ivan did not hesitate, especially considering his felling experience. Unlike Fedir, Ivan was used to hard work in the woods and was not deterred by the prospect of harsh working conditions. Thus, each summer season from 1957–1965, Ivan went to Kirov, Sverdlovsk, or the Kostroma regions, frequently changing places in search of better options. Echoing Fedir's observations, Ivan mentioned that earning prospects in Russia were significantly higher, and this location consequently gained popularity among his fellow villagers. His impression of the "forestry specialization" of Transcarpathians resembled the statements of the regional officials, who lobbied for the prioritization of Russia's timber industry in the *orgnabor* plans for Transcarpathia. He pointed out with certain pride and exaggeration, "they all knew, all the world, that Transcarpathia is a mountainous territory with plenty of forests. We had forest workers. They knew how to do the job."⁵³⁴ He also pointed out that centralized or enterprise-based labor recruitment for woodcutting and building sites in both Russia and Ukraine (for example, for preliminary swamping before the Kakhovka reservoir construction) preceded the mass movement of self-organized workers to Siberia, Central Russia, the Kazakh SSR, and the Urals.

Overall, the nutrition and living conditions of workers were very poor, and although they improved in the mid-1960s, this very much depended on the region, as did the pay rates. For Ivan, however, the most exhausting aspect of felling was its monotony:

⁵³⁴ Interview with Ivan, April 2014.

...You start felling, and you fell until the end of summer. Half a year, or the whole year – the forest is endless. One fells, the other one bucks, yet another one chops... This one disbranches, that one chokes for the tractor to drag away, sheaves, a tractor drags to a trestle... The same kind of work all the time. Very annoying.⁵³⁵

After working for almost ten years as a woodcutter, Ivan decided to change his craft. In 1965, he left for Russia for the first time to work for a migrant construction brigade. He learned about this work opportunity from a fellow villager who used to assemble large brigades of 20 to 30 people from Keretski for corn harvesting at the kolkhozes and sovkhozes of Rostov oblast' in the RSFSR. The head of one of these kolkhozes was planning constructions at the farm and required construction specialists, so the foreman from Keretski assured the head of the kolkhoz that there were people in his village who would gladly take the job. The next year, their brigade of nine people arrived in Rostov oblast' to build a 90x18 meter pigsty.

This marked Ivan's transition from woodcutting to construction work. The only exception was in the mid-1970s, when he took a break from building in order to take advantage of the Latvian windfall. However, for the rest of his working life he remained loyal to seasonal construction works. Unlike Fedir, who received professional training while working on the large building site in Karaganda region, Ivan was not familiar with construction. He was taught on site by the oldest member of their brigade, a 60-year-old man, who noticed that Ivan was eager to learn, but lacked experience. He showed him how to lay foundations, bricks, and complete roof works. Ivan proudly mentioned that he later developed into a universal specialist:

I could do all kinds of work... Starting from a shovel – I could dig trenches, lay concrete and bricks, plaster, do the roof work, lay the wooden floors in the sheds we were building...⁵³⁶

The initial lack of professional skills was not an obstacle for Ivan thanks to the strong familial ties which guaranteed him a place in the brigade, at least at the beginning. He never had “to ask around for jobs,” because their construction brigade had a stable number of members, all of whom were close family. They had been building in the Russian countryside since 1965, and first went to the Kazakh SSR in 1971. After several seasons of wood-cutting in Latvia, Ivan's brigade of six people returned to construction in the Kazakh SSR in 1977, where they remained for seasonal work until 1987. During this time, Ivan worked as the foreman in addition to his usual labor, meaning that he was responsible for supervising the construction works and

⁵³⁵ Interview with Ivan, April 2014.

⁵³⁶ Interview with Ivan, April 2014.

communicating with the kolkhoz administration. Ivan confessed that this 10-year period in the Kazakh SSR was the most financially successful for their brigade, since one season of 5–6 months of work brought each member of the brigade 10,000–11,000 rubles.

Ivan's story is curious, since it shows a different angle to the general experience of the Ukraine-Kazakhstan labor supply relations. Ukraine played an extensive role in supplying the Kazakh SSR with low and high-skilled workers during the Virgin Lands campaign. Following the decision of the 1954 February-March Plenum of CC CPSU (Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) "About Further Increase of Grain Production in the Country and Reclamation of the Virgin and Long-Fallow Lands," during 1956–1974, 65,500 families (around 230,000 people) were sent from Ukraine to Kazakh SSR with an aim of permanent settlement in the countryside.⁵³⁷ The departments of resettlement and organized recruitment held yearly all-republic campaigns to fulfil the plans for relocation of peasant families, professionals, and blue-collar workers for vast construction projects and agricultural work in the Kazakh SSR.⁵³⁸ During this period, the Ukrainian *orgnabor* forces recruited over 300,000 workers for the construction of granaries, grain elevators, cattle farms, residential houses, as well as for industrial, power and transportation projects.⁵³⁹ Fedir's trip to the Karaganda region was part of this state effort to "liquidate the labor shortages" in the Kazakh SSR during the Virgin Land campaign, which outlived its main ideological propagandist, Nikita Khrushchev, and continued under Leonid Brezhnev, a former first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR. Thus, Kazakhstan's industrial and rural construction projects proceeded through the coordinated outsourcing of manpower from Ukraine and other Soviet republics⁵⁴⁰ to Kazakhstan until the late 1970s, although the yearly plans decreased significantly over time, from 18,000 in 1965,⁵⁴¹ to 7,000 in 1969,⁵⁴² and only 700 in 1977.⁵⁴³

⁵³⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 697, ar. 13.

⁵³⁸ *Orgnabor* and permanent resettlement were not the only tools of attraction of the workers to Kazakh SSR in the arsenal of the Soviet planners. The all-union youth league, *Komsomol*, was using their infrastructure and resources to mobilize the Soviet youth for participation in the Virgin Lands campaign, while the highly qualified professionals and newly graduated specialists were assigned to the positions in Kazakh SSR via the postgraduate work assignment system. These centrally administrated campaigns were accompanied by the public call-up of volunteers to Kazakh SSR, which was framed as a civil patriotic duty and the act of mutual aid and support between the two brother nations (TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 714, ar. 72-73).

⁵³⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 697, ar. 13.

⁵⁴⁰ RSFSR, Belorussian SSR, and Moldavian SSR, together with Ukrainian SSR were the largest labor suppliers to Kazakh SSR.

⁵⁴¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 282, ar. 27.

⁵⁴² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 444, ar. 13.

⁵⁴³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 871, ar. 123.

When Ivan's brigade made their first contract for construction works at the collective farm in Kazakhstan in 1971, the program of populating Kazakhstan had been underway for 15 years. Meanwhile, Ivan's overall positive assessment of the wages, working conditions, and the general attitude of the local managers and authorities were rather exceptional. Most of the workers, sent to Kazakhstan via the *orgnabor* system, returned back before the completion of their contracts due to extremely low wages and poor living and working conditions.⁵⁴⁴ The Ukrainian *orgnabor* officers repeatedly lamented that their colleagues in Kazakhstan failed to take sufficient care of the arriving workers and, by doing so, discouraged them from fulfilling their contractual obligations, and actively dissuaded them from permanently settling in Kazakhstan.

3. "*Shabashniki*" and *orgnabor*

The inadequate conditions of the Ukrainian workers in Kazakhstan provoked a number of inspections that were supposed to confirm or contest the allegations of the wronged parties. One such inspection discovered the inequalities in payment and treatment between the workers sent by *orgnabor* and the self-organized brigades.

In 1968, 70 percent of the Ukrainian workers to be recruited to Kazakhstan were supposed to undertake rural construction.⁵⁴⁵ Ukrainian *orgnabor* officers were rarely instructed to draft workers to this area of industry and they claimed that it was the main obstacle for the plan completion — they managed to enlist only 7,900 people. In their words, workers were reluctant to take these jobs, since the construction works in the Kazakh countryside were ill-paid, and workers were housed in trailers or were assigned rooms in local houses. The salaries for construction workers in Kazakhstan in the late 1960s varied between 50 and 70 rubles per month,⁵⁴⁶ and were especially low during the winter season, when poor organization and the lack of mechanized equipment and construction materials interfered with the work flow,⁵⁴⁷ and cold weather provoked substantial expenses for warm clothing and shoes.⁵⁴⁸ In some cases, miscoordination between the Kazakh industries and Ukrainian *orgnabor* departments, resulted in workers being sent to enterprises which could not accept them due to the absence of working positions or housing facilities. For instance, in 1970, a team of workers from Chernivtsi oblast',

⁵⁴⁴ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 400, ar. 59. In 1967, *Gosplan* (State Planning Committee) reported that during 1956-1967, 240,000 workers were drafted by *orgnabor* from the Ukrainian SSR, and for the most part the workers fled their jobs.

⁵⁴⁵ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 400, ar. 62.

⁵⁴⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 444, ar. 35.

⁵⁴⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 430, ar. 6.

⁵⁴⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, ar. 77.

Ukraine, arrived to the train station of the Dzhaksymai town in Kazakhstan. Since no one showed up to meet them at the station, they searched for the trust, where they were supposed to be working. Upon arrival, they were explained that the trust was unable to employ them due to cuts in building materials. In the end, the four Ukrainian workers were employed for one month, so that they could earn money for their return tickets.⁵⁴⁹

Such stories were not exceptional, meaning that the workers generally either left their work places and returned back to Ukraine, or kept searching independently for better options at nearby enterprises or construction sites.⁵⁵⁰ Already in 1965, the *orgnabor* reported that people were increasingly evasive when encouraged to take jobs in Kazakhstan.⁵⁵¹ due to the fact that the working conditions at enterprises and construction sites in Ukraine were better, and the salaries were comparatively higher than in Kazakhstan.⁵⁵² The early return of workers and their stories regarding the living and working conditions in Kazakhstan severely affected the recruitment offices' drafting routine. In spite of the annual reduction in the numbers of requested workers during the 1970s, the *orgnabor* plans still failed systematically,⁵⁵³ especially in the Western oblasti.⁵⁵⁴

While most of the *orgnabor*-hired workers spoke negatively of their experiences in Kazakhstan, Ivan confessed that he was so eager to preserve their jobs in Kazakhstani *kolkhoz*, that he tried to convince his fellow villagers that there were no jobs, in order to reduce the competition. He said:

There we could earn more than in Ukraine. ... Ukraine was uptight. For example, in Kazakhstan we were paid 20 thousand rubles per cowshed, while in Ukraine we could expect only 8-10 thousand. So, it was unfavorable to work here, and people would be rather willing to join us... But, to be honest, we didn't want them to come. The more people, the worse the pay. ... They might have liked to go as a separate brigade. But I used to tell them that at the *kolkhoz*, where we were working for ten years, there were no more jobs. So, I told them, 'I will give you the address of the *kolkhozes* in other raions, so go and search for work on your own.' ... We didn't want them around.⁵⁵⁵

The differences in attitude towards the *orgnabor* workers and the members of temporary construction brigades outraged the head of the *orgnabor* department, N.M. Vivdenko, during

⁵⁴⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 487, ar. 126.

⁵⁵⁰ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 430, ar. 20.

⁵⁵¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 282, ar. 28.

⁵⁵² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, ar. 32.

⁵⁵³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 400, ar. 62.

⁵⁵⁴ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 450, ar. 199.

⁵⁵⁵ Interview with Ivan, April 2014.

his inspection trip to Kazakhstan. Throughout the 1960s, the complaints about the unacceptable state of living and working conditions were accumulating. The discrepancies between what was promised and described in the *orgnabor* brochures and the media, and the actual state of the jobs, housing, medical care, preschool and school facilities were increasingly deterring people from settling. The republic *orgnabor* and resettlement departments were regularly forced to look for the excuses to explain the failed recruitment plans, even though they annually reduced the requested number of workers in order to align with the decreasing number of applicants. Gosplan consequently initiated an official inspection visit to Kazakhstan in order to assess the treatment of Ukrainian workers and peasants.

In December 1967, Vivdenko was the head of the Ukrainian commission of *orgnabor* officials, delegated to examine the quality of life and work for Ukrainian workers and settlers. The commission visited four oblasti in Kazakhstan: Tselinograd, Kokchetav, Kustanai, and Pavlodar oblasti. The inspection confirmed the mistreatment of the new workers and settlers. Settlers were placed in houses which lacked basic amenities, and which were too small or located too far from the water supply systems, and there was a lack of hospitals and child care facilities.⁵⁵⁶ In his report to Gosplan, Vivdenko and his colleagues directed their critique at the local managers, who were accused of failing to listen to the needs of the arriving settlers and to integrate them into local communities. Whether fault lay with the central planning officials their miscalculation of resource distribution, or the local managers' indifference towards the settlers, is beyond the scope of this research. What was clear, however, is that Kazakhstan was drastically unprepared in economic and maintenance terms to accept large numbers of settlers and workers.

After familiarizing himself with the living and labor conditions of the workers, sent to work at the construction enterprises of the Ministry of Rural and Industrial Development of the Kazakh SSR via the organized recruitment system, Vivdenko reported the housing arrangements to be unsatisfactory, and which he rightly identified as one of the causes of excessive labor turnover. The turnover was especially high at the building trusts and Mobile Mechanical Divisions (*Peresvizhnaia mekhanizirovannaia kolonna — PMK*) of the Ministry of the Rural Development of Kazakhstan. For example, during the nine months before the inspection in 1967, the

⁵⁵⁶ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, ar. 74-76.

construction sites of “*Sovkhozstroï*” № 17 trust employed 261 new workers, and lost 293.⁵⁵⁷ A similar situation was encountered at other building organizations around Kazakhstan.

Vivdenko claimed that low wages were another cause of high turnover. He remarked that the average monthly wage of a trained professional varied from 80–120 rubles, including all the wage premiums to which these workers were entitled.⁵⁵⁸ Monthly wages for unskilled workers, inclusive of bonuses, barely exceeded 70–80 rubles.⁵⁵⁹ At the same time, daily expenses for food constituted 1.50–2 rubles per person.⁵⁶⁰ Essentially, the wages covered of the cost of living for one person at best, so if the worker wanted to save or was considering bringing their family, the conditions he encountered at the Kazakh enterprises were highly discouraging.

Vivdenko only confirmed the circulating information about employment in Kazakhstan. However, he made an observation, which rarely surfaced in the reports of his colleagues from the orgnabor department. While traveling around rural Kazakhstan, Vivdenko noticed that “the problem” of the independently employed construction workers was prominent. In his report Vivdenko wrote:

In Kustanai, Kockchetav, Pavlodar, Tselinograd, and many other regions, kolkhozes and sovkhoses hire hundreds of brigades of the so-called “shabashniki” or “*zhuravli*” [cranes], who come from Armenia, Chuvashia, Transcarpathia, Verkhovina, Checheno-Ingushetia and other republics and oblasti with high density of population. These ‘brigades’ of qualified workers arrive for only 6 months, take only piece-work jobs, and by means of good organization, high professional skills, and irregular working hours manage to earn significant amounts of money — 300–400 rubles per month.⁵⁶¹

Remarkably, the wages of the seasonal workers, or shabashniki, as Vivdenko called them, were described as significantly higher than the wages of state-employed workers, and not only those who were recruited by the orgnabor system. Ten years later, in 1977, the average monthly wage of the construction workers in Ukraine was 157.8 rubles, for industrial construction it was 171.5 rubles, and for some skilled professions in Kyiv, 223 rubles.⁵⁶² Apparently, shabashniki enjoyed special conditions and treatment that allowed for such a drastic increase in wages. However, Vivdenko noticed that, in contrast to state-employed workers, these brigades did not demand

⁵⁵⁷ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, 77.

⁵⁵⁸ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, 77.

⁵⁵⁹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, 78.

⁵⁶⁰ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, 77.

⁵⁶¹ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, ar. 78-79.

⁵⁶² TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 854, ar. 6.

better living conditions and did not complain about the cold weather, partly because of the fact that they stayed for a maximum of six months, never worked during the winter, and paid less attention to their material conditions as they had no intention of settling. According to Vivdenko, the seasonal brigades and students' construction brigades, which also arrived in the summer, enabled some of the Kazakhstani oblasti to fulfil up to 50–60 percent of the yearly plans for rural development in 1.5–2 summer months.⁵⁶³ Their economic prowess impressed Vivdenko, especially in comparison with the constant failures of *orgnabor* to supply reliable and hardworking laborers.

Vivdenko strikingly produced some suggestions which not only acknowledged the economic contribution of the seasonal construction brigades, but also integrated them into the plans for construction management. For example, his proposals to Gosplan included the termination of recruitment of Ukrainian workers for the Ministry of the Rural Development of the Kazakh SSR, since, in his opinion, seasonal and students' brigades were able to fulfil all construction needs during the summer months, while in the wintertime, when the amount of construction works diminishes, the demand could be covered by the local peasantry. Vivdenko had the impression that large industrial objects and the enterprises of other Ministries of Kazakhstan would benefit significantly more from the Ukrainian *orgnabor* than rural development. He also recommended that the Labor Resources State Committee keep statistical accounts of the seasonal and student's construction brigades coming from Ukraine.⁵⁶⁴ The presence of *shabashniki* in the Russian, Ukrainian, and Kazakh countryside (to name just a few republics) became habitual by the mid-1960s. However, before transferring to the closer investigation of economic, legal, and social persona of *shabashnik*, I would like to once again refer to the stories of the two Transcarpathian men, whose lives exemplify the precariousness of the process of becoming a *shabashnik*. Even though the tradition of seasonal work had existed in rural Transcarpathia since the nineteenth century, in the post-war decades, *otkhodnichestvo* mutated from a survival practice into a profitable undertaking.

Even though seasonal workers from Transcarpathia rarely mentioned *orgnabor* or tried to avoid it, and the archival records vastly confirm the unreliability of *orgnabor* as an employment option, Fedir's story is especially important as it illustrates the circumstantial involvement of *orgnabor* in the work biographies of the workers. It frequently provided information about the

⁵⁶³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, ar. 79.

⁵⁶⁴ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 357, ar. 80.

spheres and industries which had a demand for labor. The information could travel unpredictably, as both Fedir's and Ivan's cases show, reaching the workers not only in their home villages, but also at their new workplaces. This unpredictability led Fedir from Vinnytsia in Ukraine to Krasnoiarskii Krai and then to Arkhangelsk in Russia, and even though he was dissatisfied with his options, his experience influenced his subsequent work locations and the types of work he was willing to do.

While the choice of the workers and the preferences of the state planning offices might not have coincided, it is not wrong to assume that the organized recruitment system was an equally useful tool for the workers as it was for the state. Workers used it for different purposes: out of curiosity, trial and comparison of opportunities, and for the possibility of legitimized departure from the village, supported by the contract and specifically issued travel documents. Notwithstanding the risks, the transfer to a different geographical location provided more freedom of movement for migrating workers. At their new location they encountered less supervision from the authorities and felt that it was easier for them to leave and move forward to search for better opportunities in the case of failure or dissatisfaction. So, before "the people took over," as Fedir put it, the workers from Transcarpathia used *orgnabor* as an instrument of trial, comparison, investigation and the localization of the employment options, which were considered more plausible than the others. Naturally, such an attitude subverted the initial ambition of *orgnabor*, which was designed to serve the purpose of "rational" labor distribution and manpower supply to the industries and particular enterprises, identified by the corresponding Ministries. On the other hand, as Vivdenko has witnessed in Kazakhstan, autonomous labor behavior of the "wild brigades" did not directly contradict the economic interests of the state.

Fedir's and Ivan's work biographies exemplify the process of "shabashnik in the making". *Shabshnichestvo* was not an openly available option when they reached working age (mid-1950s), since the trajectories of self-organized labor migration, specific to Transcarpathia, were still developing during the 1950s–1960s. The time in which Ivan claimed "it was possible to earn more," was during the mid-to-late 1960s. At this time there was already significant disparity between the payment of "nomadic" brigades and the employees of the state building organizations, including those of the Ministry of Rural Development. This difference was noticed by Vivdenko's commission and repeatedly displayed in the media as evidence of the moral degeneracy of *shabashniki*. The disproportion in payment grew during the 1960s, as the rural development projects received increasing amounts of state investment, intended for construction.

The trajectories of Fedir and Ivan's work biographies suggest that they were not predestined to become shabashniki, even though they came from an overpopulated region with scarce employment opportunities and strong traditions of seasonal or short-term migration. Additionally, they found their callings as construction workers as a consequence of trial-and-error, and after comparing the advantages and disadvantages of this career with other employment options. These biographical details invite for a historically nuanced interpretation of Shabanova's observation that the strong national traditions of high-quality construction in the Western Ukraine and the South Caucasus influenced a powerful outflow of seasonal construction workers from these regions to the labor-demanding villages of Siberia.⁵⁶⁵ Shabanova's survey, undertaken in the late 1980s, reflected the regularities of the arrival of seasonal construction workers, whose migration patterns had become somewhat of a tradition during the 1950s–1960s. The vitality of this inter-regional connection was informed not only by the stable demand and gradual establishment of the autonomous farm construction ("khozspособ") as a dominant construction method in the countryside, which tended to prioritize shabashniki's services. As many commentators have mentioned, and as confirmed by my own research, many migrant brigades engaged male family members as soon as they finished school or after some additional technical training. The spread of migration practices throughout the regions and villages made it significantly easier for subsequent generations to find jobs in construction or woodcutting brigades, even if close relatives were not involved in shabashnichestvo/otkhodnichestvo. Thus, the "traditions of high-quality construction" were not inherent in the regions mentioned by Shabanova, but were simultaneously evolving alongside the general rise of shabashnichestvo caused by increased investments in small-scale construction during the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the inability of state construction organizations to satisfy demand. It resulted in the strengthening of economic ties between certain regions, which were based on autonomous migrant labor flows. Thus, in the late 1950s, the workers' biographies were developing in parallel, and intersected with the shaping of the social and economic conditions in the post-war USSR, which made shabashnichestvo possible as a phenomenon.

⁵⁶⁵ M. A. Shabanova, "Sezonnye stroiteli v sibirskom sele," *Izvestiia sibirskogo otdelenia Akademii Nauk SSSR. Seriya ekonomiki i prikladnoi sotsiologii* 7, no. 2 (1986): 48.

SOVIET AGRICULTURAL POLICIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL CONSTRUCTION

The transformations in rural construction during the 1950s and 1960s depended on the governmental consensus regarding agriculture and the Party's decisions regarding financial investment in the countryside. Rural construction was not a priority before 1967.⁵⁶⁶ However, it implicitly followed the ambitions of growth: the increased outputs of grain needed new granaries, the enlargement of livestock required new pigsties and cowsheds, and the rural population — especially those who were resettled — needed houses, schools, hospitals and other basic amenities. The growth of agriculture and the exploration of new lands required construction, and construction in turn demanded infrastructure, financial investment and material and labor supplies. These issues could not be solved without organizational interventions from the top. In this section I will thus trace the development of the officials' views and decisions regarding the organization of rural construction and its financial support, since the emergence of the Soviet *shabashnik* was linked to the rural economic landscape during Khrushchev and Brezhnev's leaderships.

As the agricultural agenda was a core component of Khrushchev's consolidation of power,⁵⁶⁷ his time as Secretary General of the CC CPSU was accompanied by his persistent lobbying on agricultural issues. The first important step towards establishing agriculture as a political priority was Khrushchev's initiation of a Central Committee Plenum on agriculture in September 1953. Here he appealed to the Central Committee to seriously rethink the agrarian situation and the state's relationship with the countryside, and called for an increase in agricultural investment, including production facilities, such as farms and granaries, and non-production spheres of rural economy, such as housing and rural services.⁵⁶⁸ According to Neil Melvin, "this shift in agrarian policy marked an onset of a prolonged struggle to place the problem of the countryside firmly on the official policy agenda."⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ The notable exception is Khrushchev's 1950s projects for building "agrotowns" that would change traditional peasant way of life with its gravitation towards private plot households into industrialized rural settlements. The project turned out to be socially and economically unsustainable and was scrapped by the mid-1960s.

⁵⁶⁷ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside: Policy Innovation and Institutional Decay*, 44.

⁵⁶⁸ Decree of the September 1953 Plenum of the CPSU, "*O merakh dal'neishego razvitiia sel'skogo khoziaistva SSSR*", *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdov, konferentsiy i plenumov TsK, 1941–54*, vol. 6, ed. A.P. Kolupaeva, (Moscow, Gospolitizdat, 1971), 387.

⁵⁶⁹ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 45.

The following February-March Plenum of 1954 initiated the famous Virgin Lands campaign,⁵⁷⁰ which aimed at cultivating arable lands in the North Caucasus, Western Siberia, Altai Krai, the right bank of the Volga, and Northern Kazakhstan, where it planned to swiftly build 500 new grain sovkhozes, accompanied by settlements and facilities.⁵⁷¹ With the Virgin Lands scheme, Khrushchev promised to increase livestock production, increase the harvest, and technically reinforce agriculture.⁵⁷² The cultivation of the new lands was accepted by the Party as a response to the food crisis. This option was chosen over the strategy of the “intensification” of the agrarian sector in the European USSR, which had been the main alternative for agricultural development after Stalin’s death, and which was denied due to the country’s unpreparedness in terms of materials and mechanical equipment.⁵⁷³ If the Virgin Lands campaign was originally conceived, as Thane Gustafson claims, as a temporary measure that was supposed to buy time for the reanimation of agricultural efficiency of the European part of the USSR, by 1963 it had become a permanent concern, which pulled over the agricultural budget funds from other Soviet regions.⁵⁷⁴ Moreover, the Virgin Lands program stayed on the state dotation list after Khrushchev was dismissed from the office in 1964, and continued to receive funding until 1977.

In his speeches, Khrushchev was vocal about putting rural development on the political agenda. He initiated the process of restructuring the collective farms through the “amalgamation” of the small kolkhozes to form bigger ones, which resulted in the gradual liquidation of “unviable” farms and the reduction of their total number from 91,000 in 1955 to 39,000 in the early 1960s.⁵⁷⁵ In February 1955, he made a speech on agrarian issues, where he specifically stressed the matter of rural construction, mentioning, for instance, that the general output of the kolkhoz granaries should increase by 45 million tons in the upcoming six years.⁵⁷⁶ His views on how the construction and agricultural targets would be achieved, however, became a matter question of debate among Western political and social scientists of the time. Sidney Ploss and Carl Linden were inclined to be sympathetic to Khrushchev’s image as “agriculture’s friend”, and saw him as a lobbyist of the investment increase in agriculture throughout his tenure. His failure, they

⁵⁷⁰ Decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU of 2 March 1954, “*O dal’neishem uvelichenii proizvodstva zerna v strane i ob osvoenii tselinnykh i zaleznykh zemel’*”, *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s’ezdov, konferentsiy i plenumov TsK, 1941–54*, 430-63.

⁵⁷¹ Martin McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture: The Virgin Land Programme, 1953-1964* (Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1976); Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 46.

⁵⁷² Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 46.

⁵⁷³ Thane Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics: Lessons of recent policies on land and water* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 18.

⁵⁷⁴ Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 17.

⁵⁷⁵ *Sel’skoe khoziaistvo SSSR* (Moscow, 1960), 50; *Sel’skoe khoziaistvo SSSR* (Moscow, 1971), 479.

⁵⁷⁶ *Pravda*, February 3, 1955.

suggested, was due to the strong military and industrial opposition, which Khrushchev had to balance in order to retain power.⁵⁷⁷ However, Gustafson points to the pattern of the allocated funds to agriculture in order to challenge this interpretation of Khrushchev's priorities of budget distribution. He claims that investment in agriculture plunged when Khrushchev's power as Party secretary was at its peak.⁵⁷⁸ In fact, "from 1956 to 1960 [they dropped] to levels not seen since the late 1940s (perhaps as low as 12 percent of the total investment budget), [and] there is no evidence that Khrushchev opposed the decline."⁵⁷⁹ To explain these counterintuitive financial cuts, Gustafson sides with George Breslauer and suggests that, at least until 1960, Khrushchev "was convinced that the solution to the country's agricultural problems lay not in more investment but, rather, in better organization and mobilization of the farmers."⁵⁸⁰

Khrushchev's vision concerning the organization of rural construction supports Breslauer's explanation. In his abovementioned speech from 1955, Khrushchev underlined that the construction of livestock houses and other kolkhoz buildings was crucial, since only small parts of the collective farms were equipped with adequate production facilities. At the same time, he denied the possibility of the state actively subsidizing rural development:

As a result of government's measures targeted at the ascent of agriculture, the income of the collective farms and their members has grown significantly. Literally, in one year the income of many collective farms has increased by several times. Now, kolkhozes have an opportunity, like never before, to allocate funds for expansion of their production base, in particular, for construction of livestock houses. The capital expenditures of the collective farms should be primarily directed at improvement of their farmsteads and making the kolkhozes high-yielding. ... At the moment the state cannot take on a duty of building livestock houses and other production facilities at kolkhozes. This work should be conducted by the effort of kolkhozes themselves.⁵⁸¹

The collective farms were expected to take financial responsibility for building production facilities and housing. At the same time, the government expected them to increase their production base in order to be able to fulfil the economic demands associated with agricultural growth. As a result, rural construction was not only carried out in isolation from direct

⁵⁷⁷ Sidney Ploss, *Conflict and Decision-Making in Soviet Russia: A Case Study of Agricultural Policy, 1953-63* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965); Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership, 1957-64* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

⁵⁷⁸ Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 20.

⁵⁷⁹ Gustafson, 19-20.

⁵⁸⁰ George Breslauer, *Dilemmas of Leadership in the Soviet Union Since Stalin: 1953-1976* (1978, unpublished), cited in Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics: Lessons of recent policies on land and water*, 20.

⁵⁸¹ *Pravda*, February 3, 1955.

supervision by the central authorities, but also without significant financial support. The reclaimed Virgin Lands and newly irrigated territories in South Ukraine constituted a certain exception, since, considering the resource demands of mass resettlement and building the completely new farms, the state provided credits for construction for settlers, which kolkhozes, responsible for construction, were entitled to use on behalf of the credit receivers. In Ukraine, it was not uncommon that farm managers “redirected” the funds allocated for the construction of houses for resettled families to the farm’s construction needs. In this way they aggravated the housing shortages.

Collective farms were also warned that the government could not take responsibility for supplying kolkhozes with manpower or that organization of construction works. Consequently, the collective farms were encouraged to form their own construction brigades by involving kolkhozniki during the less labor-demanding periods and relying on their own locally manufactured or self-manufactured construction materials.⁵⁸² However, this sector of work faced chronic labor shortages due to several reasons. Firstly, the suitable seasons for construction and agriculture overlapped. In most agricultural areas of the USSR neither building nor agricultural cultivation could be performed in winter. Secondly, already by the late 1950s, rural areas of the North and European part of the USSR faced the exodus of inhabitants from the rural areas to the cities,⁵⁸³ which further reduced the available labor resources of the countryside. From 1959–1969, the population of Western Siberia diminished by 788,000 people, and the population of Eastern Siberia shrank by 136,000 people.⁵⁸⁴ The decrease in rural labor reserves was thus already faced by the USSR in the 1960s. During 1960–1979, the rural population of the RSFSR, Ukraine and Belarus diminished by 18.5 million people.⁵⁸⁵ Finally, a large amount of construction work was supposed to be carried out in the newly reclaimed areas of the Virgin Lands project, whose territories were so under-populated that the central authorities had to launch resettlement campaigns in order to populate the new kolkhozes and sovkhozes. The combination of these interdependent factors made rural construction a complicated task for the collective farms managers. Thus:

Until 1957 construction in the countryside was conducted on an informal, ad hoc basis and contract organization in the countryside were virtually non-existent. Housing construction was usually

⁵⁸² *Pravda*, February 3, 1955.

⁵⁸³ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 54.

⁵⁸⁴ Zh. A. Zaionchkovskaia, D.M. Zaharin, “Problemy obespecheniia Sibiri rabochei siloi,” *Problemy razvitiia vostochnykh raionov SSSR* (Moscow, 1971): 43-44.

⁵⁸⁵ V. Mashenkov, B. Shliakhtin, “Trudovoi potentsial sela,” *Sotsialisticheskii trud*, no. 2 (Moscow, 1984): 27.

undertaken by individuals or groups of kolkhozniki, while the small number of public buildings that were built in this period were based on the internal construction resources of kolkhoz, both personnel and materials.⁵⁸⁶

However, rapid improvement of the countryside production facilities and housing fund was impossible without a fundamental systematic transformation in the methods of rural construction and development. In 1954, the all-union and republican Ministries of Urban and Rural Construction were organized. They were held responsible for construction in sovkhozes.⁵⁸⁷ For kolkhozy, the solution, proposed in the late 1950s, was aimed at alleviating the construction burden for individual collective farms without draining state funds and without the need for founding a centralized construction agency. The December Plenum of 1958, where the subject of rural construction was discussed, issued a decree, which invited kolkhozy to create the infrastructure of *inter-kolkhoz construction organizations* (*mezhkolkhoznyie stroitel'nyie organizatsii*) — IKCOs — under the supervision of local authorities.⁵⁸⁸ Discussion about the organization of IKCOs had been ongoing for several years already, since the first organizations of this kind were created in the end of 1955 and at the beginning of 1956, following the recommendation of the January Plenum of CC CPSU (1955). The kolkhozy with large construction volumes and material reserves were encouraged to found IKCOs and enterprises, which would manufacture bricks, sand-cement blocks, and tiles. They were also supposed to be responsible for the building of the inter-kolkhoz hydroelectric power stations and other large constructions.⁵⁸⁹

The purpose of IKCOs was to combine the financial, material and labor resources of kolkhozes for cooperative construction in the countryside. Kolkhozes were encouraged to collectively purchase construction materials and equipment. The decision about founding an IKCO was supposed to be made by a number of kolkhozes participants. They entered into a contract, which envisaged the sizes of share contributions of each kolkhoz and building up the organization's material resources and equipment, workers' compensation scheme, and the accounting conditions between the organization and the collective farms for the tasks performed.⁵⁹⁰ The inter-kolkhoz construction initiative was expected to ensure the technical

⁵⁸⁶ Mashenkov, Shliakhtin, "Trudovoi potentsial sela," 66-67.

⁵⁸⁷ T. Ya. Valetov, "Samoorganizovannyye sezonnyie brigady (shabashniki) v SSSR v 1960-1980-kh gg.: ekonomicheskiye i sotsial'nyie aspekty," *Ekonomicheskaya istoriya. Obozrenie*, no. 14 (2008): 214.

⁵⁸⁸ Decree of the Central Committee (15-19 December 1958), "Itogi razvitiia sel'skogo khoziaistva za poslednie piat' let I zadachi dal'neishego uvelicheniia proizvodstva sel'skokhoziaistvennykh produktov," op. cit., vol. 7, ed. Kolupaeva (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1971), 364.

⁵⁸⁹ *Pravda*, February 3, 1955.

⁵⁹⁰ Z. S. Beliaeva, "Pravovoe polozhenie mezhkolkhoznoi stroitel'noi organizatsii," *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo* (Moscow, 1957): 50. Apart from inter-kolkhoz construction enterprises, other initiatives, aimed at rural development were introduced in the 1950s. While lacking a centralized coordination point, the issue of rural

advancement of the rural construction, especially as the machine and tractor stations (MTS),⁵⁹¹ which had previously rented agricultural machinery to the kolkhozy, were abolished in 1958, and their agricultural equipment and machinery was transferred to the farms. IKCOs, with their permanent technical base and pool of workers, were envisaged to ensure year-round construction capability, which was not bound to the limitations of seasonality in rural construction.

Khrushchev changed his views on the issue of agricultural financing around 1960, and argued that, “only massive investment in infrastructure would solve the agricultural problem.”⁵⁹² The New Party Program, ratified at the Twenty-Second Party Congress in October 1961, officially declared political loyalty to the objective of rural transformation.⁵⁹³ Indeed, from 1961 until Khrushchev’s demise in 1964, the agricultural investment increased substantially.⁵⁹⁴ In spite of Khrushchev’s declining popularity among the ruling elite, the agricultural cause was not abandoned after his removal. On the contrary, the pro-agricultural coalition that shaped during Khrushchev’s tenure was responsible for the structural changes in agricultural investment under the new Party General Secretary, Leonid Brezhnev. Gustafson saw the paradigmatic shift between the first two generations of the Soviet leaders and the new third generation in these transformed attitudes towards agriculture. Despite Khrushchev’s reputation as a reformer, he still possessed certain convictions of the old Stalinist generation, especially in the “belief that agriculture could be set in the right direction without a major restructuring or a permanent increase in agriculture’s share of the investment budget.”⁵⁹⁵ Nonetheless, his enthusiasm shaped the political agenda, transformed elite attitudes towards agriculture, and made it a point of political consolidation for the new actors who made their way into power under Khrushchev’s rule. Khrushchev left, but his political legacy regarding agriculture lived on in the Kremlin. So, while Khrushchev’s actions regarding financing of agriculture were not straightforwardly supportive, it was Brezhnev who took over the task of transforming agrarian investment. Under

construction was delegated to various state institutions. Melvin writes, “The Union-Republican Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction was fashioned from the construction organizations of several ministries, including those of the Ministry of Residential-Civil Construction and the Ministry of Agriculture, and also the main administrative sections for rural and kolkhoz construction.” (Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 49).

⁵⁹¹ Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, 375-376.

⁵⁹² Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 20. For more on Soviet agricultural policy before 1965, see Roy D. Laird, “Khrushchev’s Administrative Reforms in Agriculture: An Appraisal,” in *Soviet and East European Agriculture*, ed. Jerzy F. Karcz (University of California Press, 1967), 29-50; Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1969); Lazar Volin, *A Century of Russian Agriculture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁵⁹³ *Programma KPSS* (Moscow, 1974).

⁵⁹⁴ Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 20.

⁵⁹⁵ Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 16.

his leadership, Melvin suggests, “the Party had rejected organizational reforms and there was no new land that could be brought under the plough, ... and increase in investment seemed the most logical answer to the pressing needs of agriculture.”⁵⁹⁶

Gustafson adds, “persuasion, key alliances, and crisis combined by the end of 1960s to form a strong ... pro-agricultural coalition,”⁵⁹⁷ which was prepared to accept the argument about the necessity of the new scheme regarding agricultural reconstruction. The March Plenum of 1965, held several months after Khrushchev’s removal from power, was decisive in establishing the “new program” for countryside development and agricultural “intensification.” Agriculture was the central issue of the plenum, which declared the commitment to allocate 71 billion rubles to agricultural investment.⁵⁹⁸ The 1966–1970 Five-Year plan contained direct distributional advice: 12 billion rubles were put towards the development of the residential and civic sector, and 41 billion for industrial facilities and the acquisition of machinery.⁵⁹⁹ During these five years Brezhnev continued to build up the pro-agricultural lobby. He launched important agricultural programs, including initiatives directed at the transformation of the countryside: the Rural Construction Ministry was founded in 1967 and the rural construction program was started in 1968.⁶⁰⁰ The forthcoming transformations were intended to develop rural communities “into well-appointed settlements with good housing, cultural, and living conditions that satisfy the demands of the rural population, as well as appropriate production units that will make it possible to create all the necessary conditions for high labor productivity ... and an intensive development of agriculture.”⁶⁰¹

The succession of agrarian initiatives of the late 1960s culminated in the acceptance of an ambitious 1971 program, intended to modernize and expand animal husbandry. The commitment to expand livestock became Brezhnev’s priority, which during 1971–1975

⁵⁹⁶ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 76.

⁵⁹⁷ Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 13.

⁵⁹⁸ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 77.

⁵⁹⁹ Decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR “*O kapital’nykh vlozheniakh na razvitiie sel’skogo khoziaistva v 1966–1970 godakh*,” *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s’ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK, 1961–65*, vol. 10, ed. B. V. Naryshkin (Moscow: *Gospolitizdat*, 1986), 432.

⁶⁰⁰ *Pravda*, October 2, 1968. Gustafson points out, however, that the internal ministerial struggles for budget funds had a tendency to redirect the investment from agriculture to other sectors of economy. For instance, “Gosplan ... rerouted resources planned for agriculture to cover industrial emergencies,” and “twenty percent of the five-year allocation to agricultural construction and equipment was diverted to other sectors.” (Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 25).

⁶⁰¹ *Pravda*, October 2, 1968, cited in Karl-Eugen Wädekin, “The Countryside,” *Problems of Communism*, no. 18 (1969): 12.

engulfed 40 percent of the total investment in agriculture.⁶⁰² The overall magnitude of agricultural investments skyrocketed during Brezhnev's tenure: if the Virgin Lands campaign absorbed 21.1 billion rubles in 25 years, the cost of Brezhnev's intensification program, that started in 1965 and spanned a roughly similar time period, was 50 times higher.⁶⁰³ Kolkhoz workers received a guaranteed minimum income and pension benefits, new rural roads were built, and farms started expanding.

These investments had a transformative effect on rural construction. The number of IKCOs has risen from 361 in 1956, to over 2000 in 1966.⁶⁰⁴ Further industrialization and mechanization of rural construction was supposed to be fostered through the invention of a new form of construction organization in the countryside, the PMK (*peredvizhnaia mekhanizirovannaia kolonna*), a mobile construction brigade, "capable of using industrial techniques to erect modern buildings in the countryside."⁶⁰⁵ However, they could not satisfy the growing manpower demand of the financially revitalized countryside, which was now encouraged to expand the farms by building new production and non-production facilities.

While the state attempted to create rural infrastructure that would satisfy the construction demand by initiating IKCOs, PMKs, and other government contract construction organizations, kolkhozes and sovkhozes still frequently resorted to the so-called *khoziaistvennyi sposob stroitel'stva* or *khozsposob* (construction using internal resources of the farm),⁶⁰⁶ which presupposed a farm's total self-reliance in construction in terms of financial and material resource allocation and labor input. Before 1954, the "do-it-yourself"⁶⁰⁷ method of construction was the only way in which building was conducted, and the program of rural transformation failed to eliminate it, hence *khozsposob* continued to coexist with the IKCOs and the PMKs.

⁶⁰² Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 26. For assessments of agricultural performance during the five-year plan 1971-5, see David W. Carey, "Soviet Agriculture: Recent Performance and Future Plans," *The Soviet Economy in a New Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 575-600; W. Klatt, "Reflections on the 1975 Soviet Harvest," *Soviet Studies* 28, No. 1 (October 1975): 485-98. For more on Soviet agricultural policy see Werner G. Hahn, *The Politics of Soviet Agriculture, 1960-1970* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); *The Future of Agriculture in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: The 1976-1980 Five-Year Plan*, eds. Roy D. Laird, Joseph Hajda, and Betty A. Laird (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977).

⁶⁰³ Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 18.

⁶⁰⁴ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*, 67.

⁶⁰⁵ Melvin, 67.

⁶⁰⁶ *Khoziaistvennyi sposob stroitel'stva* was a legitimate way of conducting construction works in the rural localities. See, e.g. Article 372 of the Civil Code of the RSFSR, 'Rules of Contract Agreements for Capital Contrustion.' In the Commentary to the article construction in the collective farms is divided into governmental contracting and *khoziaistvennyi sposob*. (*Kommentarii k grazhdanskomu kodeksu RSFSR* (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia literatura, 1982), 442).

⁶⁰⁷ Murphy, "Soviet Shabashniki: Material Incentives at Work," 49.

For example, in 1962, 60 percent of all construction works in the countryside were still performed by *khozsposob*.⁶⁰⁸

Not all collective farms were involved in IKCOs, and many were not sufficiently supplied with the machinery and building materials. Therefore, the amount of construction they carried out in the countryside was limited.⁶⁰⁹ In 1968, the thousand IKCOs carried out only 30–35 percent of construction works at the Soviet collective farms.⁶¹⁰ Additionally, it was not uncommon for some local non-rural enterprises to subcontract the IKCOs for larger construction projects, which were prioritized over small-scale rural construction. As Brovin remarked:

For them the construction of individual housing and cultural and social facilities, road construction, basic and minor repairs of production areas were unfavorable due to their singularity, territorial sparsity, and, above all, their low cash budget. ... IKCOs and PMKs were mostly interested in expensive and input-intensive construction projects.⁶¹¹

Even by the late 1970s, the construction organizations barely covered half of the building works in the countryside. In 1977, Oblsel'stoi in Novosibirsk oblast' spent only 26 million out of 60 million of allocated funds for *sovkhoz* construction: there were available funds, but no infrastructural capacities to fulfil the plan in the countryside.⁶¹² In Tver' oblast', 1968–1978, the local PMK commissioned 66 buildings at the cost of 12.2 million rubles, only 21 of which were built to the value of 2.2 million rubles. Notably, in the late 1970s these volumes tended to decrease, so from 1975–1977 only 11 percent of the works performed by this PMK were conducted in the rural areas.⁶¹³ The disparity between the construction demand, which was linked with the *kolkhozes'* plans of production output, and the capacities of the state contracting organizations, contributed to the use of *khozsposob* as a viable construction option. In 1981, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture of the USSR, I. P. Bystriukov, announced that *khozsposob* remained a longstanding aid in rural construction, and its volumes grew from 35 percent of the total construction works in the countryside in 1975 to 38 percent in 1979.⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁸ "Stroit' v selakh razumno, ekonomno," *Pravda*, December 3, 1962.

⁶⁰⁹ "Stroit' v selakh razumno, ekonomno."

⁶¹⁰ N. B. Mukhitdinov, *Pravoye osnovy khoziaistvennoi deiatel'nosti mezhkolkhoznykh stroitel'nykh organizatsiy* (Alma-Ata, 1968), 3.

⁶¹¹ A. Brovin, "Sezonnyie brigady: pliusy i minusy," *Sotsialisticheskii trud*, no. 10 (1983): 78.

⁶¹² "Ne shtukatury my, ne plotniki," *Sovetskaia Rossia*, July 10, 1977.

⁶¹³ Valetov, "Samoorganizovannyye sezonnyie brigady (shabashniki) v SSSR," 215.

⁶¹⁴ I. P. Bystriukov, 'Problemy stroitel'stva na sele,' *Ekonomika sel'skogo khoziaistva*, no. 1 (1981): 16.

The endurance of *khozspособ* preserved the role of seasonal construction brigades.⁶¹⁵ *Khozspособ* and *shabashniki* became economically interdependent, and supported each other throughout late Soviet socialism. There are no reliable statistics for the construction workers involved in seasonal migration, but sometimes it is possible to trace the state expenditures on the services of this group of workers, which show that it was growing from the mid-1960s. In 1965, when the rural transformation program was initiated, seasonal workers earned 80 million rubles in the RSFSR alone.⁶¹⁶ During the following two decades, the earnings of the seasonal construction brigades grew further thanks to the steady pace of investment in the countryside and the demand for rural construction. According to Brovin, during the Tenth Five-Year Plan (1976–1980), seasonal brigades annually conducted works worth 2 billion rubles on collective farms. In total, state and collective farms spent 27 billion rubles during this period, which constituted 8 percent of all construction works carried out in the Soviet countryside. In some Soviet republics the share of building and installation works performed by *shabashniki* was even higher. For instance, in 1978, the total volume of these works reached 43 percent in Kazakhstan.⁶¹⁷ Following the course of the March Plenum of 1965 and other of Brezhnev’s agricultural initiatives, the 1982 May Plenum adopted the Food Programme, which envisaged allocation of total 160 billion rubles of capital expenditures for the rural housing and the buildings of culture and service purposes during the decade of 1980-1990. It implied that the annual investments were raised from 5.2 billion rubles to 16 billion.⁶¹⁸ By the mid-1980s, seasonal construction brigades were in charge of at least half of the projects, built via *khozspособ*, in the USSR.⁶¹⁹

By the late 1960s the state had a number of institutionalized options for rural construction. However, it was up to the collective and state farms to choose how to organize their construction. Since there was only one important figure at the farm — the *kolkhoz* chairman or *sovkhos* director — the method of construction was their personal decision, taken on the grounds of economic calculation, production plans, risk estimation, and considerations of convenience. The *kolkhoz* chairman as a resolute manager with substantial autonomy in

⁶¹⁵ “Brodiat slukhi po derevniam,” *Pravda*, December 10, 1979; “Na fundamente sdelki,” *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, April 17, 1981.

⁶¹⁶ “Chestnyi rubl’,” *Pravda*, November 20, 1966.

⁶¹⁷ Brovin, “Sezonnye brigady: plusy i minusy,” 80.

⁶¹⁸ Decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR ‘*O merakh po dal’neishemu uluchsheniui zhylischnykh, kommunal’no-bytovykh i sotsial’no-kul’turnykh uslovii zhizni sel’skogo naseleniia*’, *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s’ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK, 1981 – 84*, vol. 14, ed. B.V. Naryshkin (Moscow: *Gospolitizdat*, 1987), 333-341.

⁶¹⁹ A. Kazarina, O. Sokol’skii, “Trud otkhodnikov: pol’za i vred,” *Sotsialisticheskaiia zakonnost’*, no. 8 (1986): 50.

decision making played a crucial role in the process of the rural construction's shaping as yet another economic sphere where informal seasonal employment became a grey area of private negotiations, welcomed equally by the seasonal construction workers and the managers of the collective and state farms themselves.

FARM MANAGERS — THE “FRIENDS” OF SHABASHNIKI

The position of this group of managers was fairly peculiar. It is worth mentioning that Brezhnev's approach to management is frequently described as conservative: it abrogated the de-centralization reforms of his predecessor and rejected Kosygin's ideas regarding the reform of management, which was aimed at deconcentration of economic administration and eliciting efficiency through motivating management to increase sales and profit.⁶²⁰ Kosygin thought that farm managers were supposed to “have incentives to use their own initiative, should specialize according to local conditions, and should make their own production decisions. To maintain overall control and correct imbalances, the state should manipulate prices instead of interfering by administrative means.”⁶²¹

These innovations were short-lived, and already in 1968, the Politburo succumbed to the practice of centralized investments, reflecting the broader political trend during Brezhnev's rule — the solidification of the centralized economy. However, the legal framework and the extra-legal power relations in the countryside did equip farm managers with comparatively significant leverage, at least within the boundaries of their own domains. In November 1969, the Third All-Union Congress of Kolkhozniki adopted the new Model Charter of the Collective Farm — the basic law for kolkhozes — which was ratified by the Central Committee soon after.⁶²² The authors of the new Model Charter proclaimed that it was supposed to respond to the current economic situation in the countryside, which had substantially changed since 1935, when the previous Model Charter was designed. In particular, the new document stated that kolkhozes had the right to administer their monetary funds and material resources, receive loans from the state, and open accounts in Gosbank for the storage of funds. Kolkhozes were officially allowed to enter into contracts with the state and cooperative organizations regarding the sale of produce

⁶²⁰ Gustafson, *Reform in Soviet Politics*, 25.

⁶²¹ Gustafson, 25.

⁶²² Decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR “O primernom ustave kolkhoza,” *KPSS v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK, 1966–70*, vol. 11, ed. B.V. Naryshkin (Moscow: *Gospolitizdat*, 1987): 443-462.

and purchase of machines, materials, livestock, and other kinds of property.⁶²³ It is fair to take the Party statements with a grain of salt. Collective farms were not free to sell their produce as they pleased since they were bounded by the state delivery plans. However, the right to manage their financial and material resources — their property — and establish contractual relations with other enterprises, for instance, with *Mezhkolkhozstroi* organizations or, as I have shown, with the forestry enterprises regarding the purchase of timber, was not merely a legal clause, but a true prerogative of the collective farm. Collective and state farms were the loci of concentration of capital in the countryside (which grew after the abolition of the MTS in 1958, when the agricultural machinery was transferred to the farms), and the right to administer this capital put one in an unrivalled position of power.⁶²⁴

Kolkhoz was a cooperative of free members. In theory, they were in charge of the land that was state-owned, but given to the farm in perpetuity, and they elected the kolkhoz board and chairman to solve internal issues. This “kolkhoz democracy” was, perhaps, the biggest mystification of the Soviet rural life. Starting from 1950s, kolkhoz chairmen were frequently local party officials or representatives from agrarian professions who were outsiders to the kolkhozes, appointed “from above” with “recommendations” to the collective farm members to support these candidates.⁶²⁵ The general meetings then provided the required consensus,⁶²⁶ and the candidate became a kolkhoz chairman who “exercises day-to-day direction over the collective farm’s activity, ensures the fulfilment of the decisions of general meeting and the board, and represents the collective farm in its relations with state agencies and other institutions and organizations.”⁶²⁷

Beneath the democratic process was a near dictatorial essence: kolkhoz chairmen also appeared to be the heads of the kolkhoz boards, and despite it being required that they discussed important issues with kolkhozniki at the general meeting, decisions were finalized even before meetings were organized. Since meetings occurred only four times a year, many decisions were

⁶²³ Decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR “O primernom ustave kolkhoza,” 447, 449.

⁶²⁴ According to Alec Nove, the Party officials’ control over *kolkhoz* chairmen was fairly weak. See Alec Nove, “Peasants and Officials,” in *Soviet and East European Agriculture*, ed. Jerzy F. Karcz (University of California Press, 1967), 59.

⁶²⁵ M. A. Beznin, T. M. Dimoni, “Sotsial’naia evoliutsiia verkhushki kolkhozno-sovkhoznykh upravlentsev v Rossii 1930-1980-kh godov,” *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 2 (2010): 29. See also Jerry F. Hough, “The changing Nature of the Kolkhoz Chairman,” in James R. Millar, ed., *The Soviet Rural Community* (Champaign, 1971), 103-120.

⁶²⁶ Roy D. Laird and Betty A. Laird, “The Soviet Farm Manager as an Entrepreneur,” in *Entrepreneurship in Imperial Russia and Soviet Union*, ed. Gregory Guroff and Fred V. Carstensen (Princeton University Press, 1983), 259, 264.

⁶²⁷ Laird and Laird, “The Soviet Farm Manager as an Entrepreneur,” 263-264.

made by the chairman alone.⁶²⁸ The board, usually comprised of a vice-chairman, a chief-accountant, a head agronomist, head zootechnician, and the Party secretary, would not interfere with the chairman's authority, with the possible exception of the Party secretary, who was the only member with any power to restrain the chairman's privileges of internal decision making.⁶²⁹ As Roy D. Laird and Betty A. Laird argued, "not only does the chairman have the final word in all on-farm decisions not predetermined by outside control ... but he controls the lives of the farm members as thoroughly and completely as the commander determines the affairs of those who live on a military post."⁶³⁰

The image of the collective farm chairman as a powerful, although not independent, rural bureaucrat is important when examining rural construction, especially with regards to buildings meant for production purposes. Because of the specific social and economic position of the farm managers, some scholars have tended to see them as rural proto-entrepreneurs since, "they had all rights to manage the farms' capital equipment, exercise the management of labor, production, and income,"⁶³¹ and were personally interested in and officially encouraged to increase the productive capacities of their enterprises. They could hardly take initiative in determining the selection of crops for planting, but it was up to them whether the kolkhoz should build a new barn of a certain size and where it would be placed. It was also their prerogative to choose whether to build independently by *khozspisob*, or to contract a government or cooperative organization, and the Model Charter allowed them to directly hire external workers to help with construction or any other farm works.

The decision as to which method of construction to choose involved certain economic and legal considerations. The two differed fundamentally in terms of work organization and the control a chairman could exercise over the process. If the contract were made with a construction organization, all the functions of labor and supply management were delegated to the external enterprise.⁶³² While, in theory, this could be an efficient way to share responsibilities, many farm managers disliked this option. First of all, these organizations were notorious for delays and interruptions due to disruptions in the supply of materials, poor work discipline, or sudden more

⁶²⁸ Laird and Laird, 265.

⁶²⁹ Laird and Laird, 260.

⁶³⁰ Laird and Laird, 260.

⁶³¹ Beznin and Dimoni, "Sotsial'naia evoliutsiia verkhushki kolkhozno-sovkhoznykh upravlentsev v Rossii 1930-1980-kh godov," 34. See also Laird and Laird, "The Soviet Farm Manager as an Entrepreneur"; V. I. Staroverov, "Novoie kachestvo sotsiostratifikatsionnoi struktury sovremennoi Rossii I problem ieie analiza," *Rossiia nakanune XXI v.*, no. 2 (Moscow, 1995).

⁶³² For more of contracting a construction organization see A. P. Tkach, *Dogovor podriada na kapital'noe stroitel'stvo v SSSR* (Kiev, 1967).

urgent orders.⁶³³ Moreover, they often neglected the quality of work, and there was always a risk that the buildings would remain unfinished.⁶³⁴ Moreover, construction enterprises could only be used for selected, usually material intensive, industrial-type works: in 1967, the Ministry of Rural Construction was intensively building in the cities.⁶³⁵ So, even with the rural development program, the countryside ended up not being a priority. In 1966, a journalist of *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, who was exploring the phenomenon of shabashnichestvo in the Chita region (Eastern Siberia), pointed out that the local PMKs were poorly equipped, and that they experienced constant problems with the workforce — out of 3500 workers the yearly turnover was 3000. The head of the trust complained that, “in our time it is difficult to find a volunteer who would be willing to go not to Bratsk [administrative center in Irkutsk *oblast'*], but to the regional center Borzia, to live in the middle of nowhere and be preoccupied with the building of a shed for a thousand head of cattle rather than the power station of nationwide significance.”⁶³⁶ Another example reflects the general reputation of the state construction organizations. In 1969, the satirical magazine *Krokodil* published an article that drew a grim picture of the Soviet rural landscape. It depicted the bare foundations of culture centers, whose construction was started and then abandoned by *Mezhkolkhozstroi*, and rural kindergartens, hospitals and cowsheds that were waiting in vain for completion. After several years of neglect, the buildings fell into disrepair and could not be rescued. The author from *Krokodil* did not hold back on this pressing issue: “Heifers, which were born in the old cowshed, became grandmothers in the same building. And the new barn is still not ready! The complexities of architecture, they say! The peculiarities of the soil!”⁶³⁷ (Figure 13)

⁶³³ V. Kanaiev, “Petrozavodskii kolizei,” *Krokodil*, no. 28, (Moscow, 1972): 6.

⁶³⁴ Brovin, “Sezonnye brigady: plusy i minusy,” 78; “Stroit' v selakh razumno, ekonomno,”; “Zhuravli,” *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (1 June 1966).

⁶³⁵ “Bum mestnogo znacheniiia,” *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, April 15, 1981; Ustin Malapagin, “Davaite bez liriki!” *Krokodil*, no. 2 (Moscow, 1969): 8.

⁶³⁶ “Zhuravli.”

⁶³⁷ Malapagin, “Davaite bez liriki!” 8.

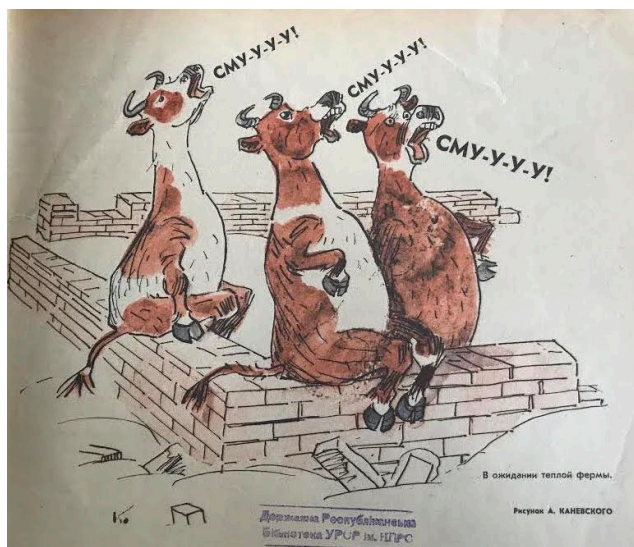


Figure 13. The cows are sitting in the unfinished cowshed, calling for the construction organization. The caption says: "Waiting for the warm farm"⁶³⁸



Figure 14. Rural construction workers stand idle while waiting for the delivery of materials, and the officials in charge of construction are distributing production schedules. The caption says: "While waiting for the bricks"⁶³⁹

⁶³⁸ *Krokodil*, no. 4 (Moscow, 1972): 3.

⁶³⁹ *Krokodil*, no. 7 (Moscow, 1966): 4.

These were the excuses that farm chairmen and directors might well have heard from contractors, who tried to justify the delays and failures of construction, whilst providing endless certified commitments that the works would be finished. Another issue of *Krokodil* revealed the reality: construction materials were not supplied, the workers were happy to have a break, and progress was minimal (Figure 14).

By choosing *khozposob*, the farms took all responsibilities for construction upon themselves, including the supply of materials and equipment, the allocation of finances from their budgets, the search for workers, and the payment of their wages. For the farms in distant rural locations, which could not attract large construction organizations, but still had new buildings in their production plans, *khozposob* was the only possible method for construction. Seasonal brigades thus became constant helpers in small-scale construction endeavors.

The Kolkhoz Model Charter allowed collective farms to employ external construction (and other kinds of) workers if they lacked the required specialists. According to the law, such agreements were allowed to be made when: 1. the construction was a part the yearly production plan of the kolkhoz, but there was no possibility to engage other contractors; 2. there were available funds in the kolkhoz budget to hire a construction brigade, or construction was covered by state loans; 3. it was impossible to accomplish construction works with the labor reserves of the collective farm; 4. there was an officially approved cost estimate for the upcoming construction project. Matters were made easier by the fact that if the project did not exceed one million rubles, it did not need the approval of the higher authorities, and could be approved by the farm's board alone.⁶⁴⁰ The law prescribed that a contract to be signed with each worker individually, which specified the specialization and the position of an employee, and defined their labor functions, the conditions of work, amount and method of payment, accommodation, etc.

In practice, kolkhozes often employed construction brigades on lump sum contracts (*akkordnyi podriad*). The basic document of this kind of construction agreement was a construction estimate, where all works and services were supposed to be mentioned. The process of deducing labor costs, however, posed a problem. Article 362 of the Civil Code declared that the cost of works, performed according to the contract, was defined by the accepted price list, but it was not

⁶⁴⁰ N. Kovalenko, "Podriadnyi dogovor kolkhoza s brigadoi stroitelei," *Sovetskaia iustitsia*, no. 12 (Moscow, 1975): 10-11.

specified, which acts regulated the price of subcontracting. The logical conclusion would be that remuneration would be negotiated between the two sides, which would contradict the letter and the spirit of the Soviet laws. While the kolkhoz had the full right to dispose of its financial and material resources as it wished, the price of the works could not be defined by the collective farm chairman, a brigade, or any other individual, since the pay rates were estimated centrally and sometimes specifically adjusted to the regions and territories of the USSR. Other sources suggest that the contracts with seasonal migrant workers should have been regulated by the Labor Code: lump sum contracts were supposed to be drafted on the basis of a calculation of the labor inputs and the salary, agreed with the foreman, in accordance with the United Norms and Prices for Construction-Installation and Repair Work. The works, which were not envisaged by this document, were recommended to be paid according to the institutional and local norms and prices.⁶⁴¹ While legal specialists were preoccupied with clarifying, or further obscuring, the confusing legal labyrinths regarding the methods calculating seasonal workers' wages,⁶⁴² the farm managers exercised their right to subcontract external labor and used the simplest method of payment known to them: by piece, which could mean a house, a shed, a kilometer of the road, or a cubic meter of bricklaying. Such contracts, the authorities and legal experts kept emphasizing, were the most vulnerable to corruption.

Just as in forestry, the lack of precise regulations regarding seasonal workers' payment created the space for informal wage negotiations between the managers of collective and state farms and the brigades, and allowed for loose interpretations of the law. As official wages in the Soviet Union were meticulously and intricately calculated, there was little possibility to deviate from the formal schemes of wage distribution in the case of registered workers and the kolkhoz members who went through the "white accounting." However, the opaque legal of the seasonal worker became uncharted territory: a blind spot in the socialist jurisdiction, where employment relationships were created on the spot by the two parties. For a country with a reputation for

⁶⁴¹ I. Khlamov, "Organizatsiia i oplata truda vremennykh stroitel'nykh brigad," *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, no. 12 (1987): 25.

⁶⁴² For the legal debates regarding the status of seasonal workers see A. F. Bochkov, "Nekotoryie voprosy regulirovaniia truda sezonnykh rabotnikov sovkhozov," *Voprosy sovetskogo prava i zakonnosti na sovremennom etape* (Minsk, 1965): 157-164; N. Syroiedov, "Novoie zakonodatel'stvo ob usloviiakh truda na sezonnykh rabotakh i vremennykh rabochikh i sluzhashchikh," *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, no. 1 (1975): 27-30; M. Baru, "Pravovaia otsenka trudovykh soglashenii s brigadami 'shabashnikov'," *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, no. 3 (1978): 54-55; A. Tsybulenko, "Dogovory s naiemnymi brigadami," *Khoziaistvo i pravo*, no. 2 (1980): 36-38; Sh. Vakhitov, "Nekotoryie voprosy praktiki rassmotreniia sporov, vznikaiushchikh iz dogovora na raboty, vypolniaemye kolkhoznikami-otkhodnikami," *Sovetskaia iustitsiia*, no. 22 (Moscow, 1981): 4-7; Iu. Ivannikov, M. Pankin, "O rabote vremennykh stroitel'nykh brigad," *Khoziaistvo i pravo*, no. 10 (1986): 73-75; N. Utkin, "O vremennykh stroitel'nykh brigadakh," *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, no. 11 (1986): 42-43; I. Khlamov, "Organizatsiia i oplata truda vremennykh stroitel'nykh brigad."

Kafkaesque bureaucracy, the state was strikingly absent from these relationships. As the managers were not incentivized to minimize the costs of production as much as they were pushed to deliver production plans (construction objects included), they were more motivated to reach targets than to save on wage funds. Furthermore, their knowledge of the Soviet financial ins and outs helped them to produce the amounts that migrant workers demanded. Even if shabashniki were as economically damaging as some Soviet experts claimed,⁶⁴³ their wages put a strain on the state, which was, in the end, the sole barer of the risks of the Soviet enterprises. The risks for the managers were not profit, but position related: they feared not fulfilling their plan or failing the production goals, which would put their career in jeopardy. As a result, they were eager to overspend if there was a guarantee of meeting targets. Seasonal brigades, in turn, wanted to know exactly what they would earn. The meagre statistical accounts suggest that shabashniki's wage percentage from the estimated cost of the completed project reached up to 40 percent, while the workers' wages at the state construction organizations averaged 18–24 percent.⁶⁴⁴

For the farm managers, shabashniki were expensive, but “easy,” and the slightly higher price tag of their services outweighed the bureaucratic headache that could span for months. The state and cooperative contractors were known to be “top-heavy with economists, bookkeepers, supervisors and foremen.”⁶⁴⁵ Before building even started, many pavements had to be pounded and stamps applied, projects confirmed, lists of construction works agreed and permissions received.⁶⁴⁶ Hiring a brigade of shabashniki thus saved precious time and significantly reduced the paperwork, as the only document that was composed — in those cases when a written contract was even made — was the estimate of construction and labor costs. Another advantage of seasonal construction workers was their acceptance of poor living conditions. As they built houses for other people, the shabashniki stoically endured the discomforts of living in carriages, old shops, half-constructed buildings, and other places unfit for habitation. They had to put up with the absence of clean sheets, baths and showers in the villages where they worked.⁶⁴⁷ Their concern for payment surpassed all inconveniences.

⁶⁴³ N. N. Alekseenko, “Shabashniki: Stereotipy i real'nost',” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 6 (1987): 89-94.

⁶⁴⁴ TSDAVO, op. 3, sp. 930, ark. 12; A. I. Kniazev, “Nekotorye voprosy bor'by s khishcheniiami i narusheniami gosudarstvennoi distsipliny v usloviakh bystrogo ekonomicheskogo razvitiia regiona,” *Aktual'nyie voprosy ukrepleniia zakonnosti i pravoporiadka v raionakh intensivnogo ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Urala, Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka* (Moscow, 1979), 55; Tsybulenko, “Dogovory s naiemnymi brigadami,” 37.

⁶⁴⁵ Murphy, “Soviet Shabashniki: Material Incentives at Work,” 50.

⁶⁴⁶ *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, August 29, 1982, 3.

⁶⁴⁷ Shabanova, “Sezonnyie stroiteli v sibirskom sele,” 51.

The shabashniki were unprecedentedly efficient. Their piece-rate contracts and payment by result triggered patterns of motivation and influenced the internal brigade organization similar to those found in forestry. Motivated to finish as soon as possible, and undistracted by any other obligations except their work, shabashniki worked extremely long hours from 10–11⁶⁴⁸ to 14⁶⁴⁹ hours per day. Discipline was the root of their productivity, so the brigade managed itself in such a way as to ensure efficiency: alcohol consumption was strictly banned and slacking was not tolerated. This internal self-monitoring ensured high performance, which was duly noted by the employers, “if the Hutsuls have taken a project to built – you can be sure that it will be made for a full due. Tinkering is not to their advantage: if they fail, we will not accept them another time, an on top of that, they will be named and shamed around the whole steppe.”⁶⁵⁰ A journalist from *Komsomol'skaia pravda* was amazed that the brigade of shabashniki could build a cow shed in a month and a half. According to the standard norms, such a shed would be built in 8 months by the same number of workers.⁶⁵¹ For farm management, fast construction was especially important, since such works were seasonal and it was risky to leave projects unfinished.⁶⁵² The buildings had to be finished before winter, otherwise they could fall into decay, or the farm animals would be left unsheltered.

Most managers praised shabashniki as industrious workers, experienced professionals and all-round specialists.⁶⁵³ They were hardly unskilled, as Shabanova's research proved, since around 60 percent of her respondents said that building was their main occupation, and for 36 percent, their only occupation.⁶⁵⁴ One manager explained why he preferred shabashniki: “I hire those who want to work. Shabashniki are at the building site at 7 o'clock in the morning, and they leave at midnight. They are all-round specialists and would take any job. Besides, these people actively take initiative.”⁶⁵⁵ Oriented for good results, shabashniki presented a striking contrast to the labor efficiency of the state construction enterprises. A. Priadilov, an experienced shabashnik from Leningrad, was convinced that, “a good brigade of shabashniki ... outdoes state-employed construction brigades by minimum 4–5 times.”⁶⁵⁶ In 1973, *Krokodil* poignantly

⁶⁴⁸ Voitovich, Nikiforak, “‘Perspektiven’ li sovremennyyi shabashnik?” 135.

⁶⁴⁹ M. Shabanova, ‘Portret stroitel'ia-sezonnika,’ *Nauka i zhizn'*, no. 9 (1986): 23.

⁶⁵⁰ “Chestnyi rubl'.”

⁶⁵¹ ‘Zhuravli.’

⁶⁵² V. V. Mishchenko, “Sotsial'nyie problem sel'skogo stroitel'stva,” ed. L. A. Khakhulina, *Sovremennoie razvitiie Sibirskogo sela: opyt sotsiologicheskogo izucheniia* (Novosibirsk, 1983): 143.

⁶⁵³ Shabanova, “Portret stroitel'ia-sezonnika,” 22.

⁶⁵⁴ Shabanova, “Sezonnyie stroiteli v sibirskom sele,” 49.

⁶⁵⁵ “Perekur na sezon. Pochemu shabashnik pobedil v spore s brigadnym podriadom,” *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, November 25, 1977.

⁶⁵⁶ A. V. Priadilov, “A mozhet, shabashnik vechen?” *EKO*, no. 6 (1988): 140.

illustrated this suggestion by depicting a squad of shabashniki as the saviors of rural construction. In the illustration, an official-looking character, presumably a kolkhoz chairman, is asking the brigade of shabashniki to “rescue” the rough work of *Mezhkolkhozstroï*, a lop-sided granary, which is oddly reminiscent the leaning tower of Pisa. The “tower” is unusable, and the spilled grain is rotting on the ground and being eaten by the chickens.

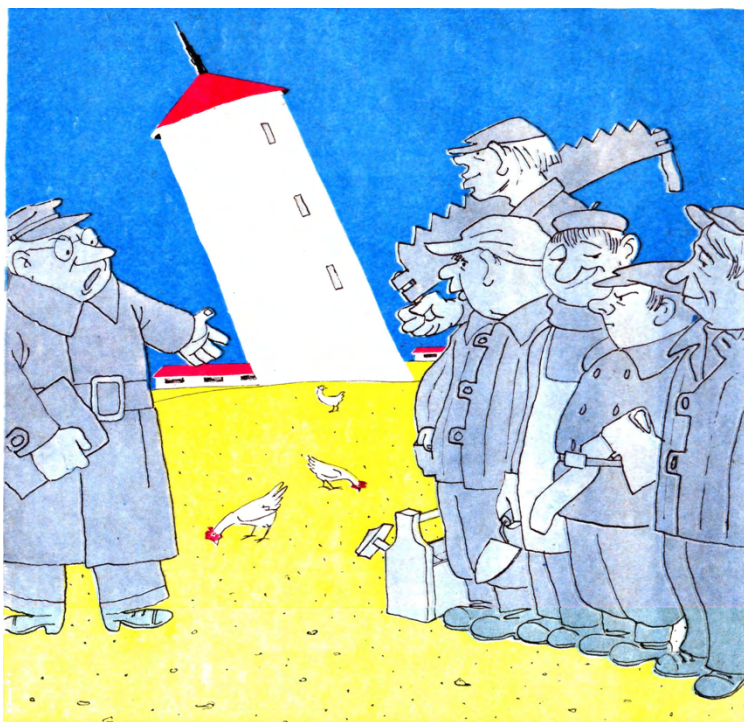


Figure 15. The farm manager is disappointed with the *Mezhkolkhozstroï*'s quality of building. He calls shabashniki to the rescue. The caption says: “Comrades shabashniki, there is a contest call for the rescue project of the tower built by *Mezhkolkhozstroï*”⁶⁵⁷

The high motivation of the shabashniki, alongside the construction organizations' unwillingness to be subcontracted to small, rural projects, made them indispensable, “like air,”⁶⁵⁸ in some regions. Siberian villages could hardly do without seasonal migrant workers who, by the mid-1980s, exceeded the number of local construction workers threefold.⁶⁵⁹ The heads of collective and state farms tried to attract shabashniki by raising the pay rates. In Krasnodarskii krai, the cost of a building reached 12,000 rubles to 100 ha of farming acreage; in Chuvashia the costs were 10,600; in Omsk region, 5,000; in Novosibirsk, 3,600 rubles.⁶⁶⁰ Aware of these differences, seasonal construction workers tended to select the regions with higher earning opportunities. Even though there were plenty of construction projects in the Ukrainian countryside, those

⁶⁵⁷ Illustration by E. Gurov, *Krokodil*, no. 30 (1973): 7.

⁶⁵⁸ “Zhuravli.”

⁶⁵⁹ Shabanova, “Sezonnyie stroiteli v sibirskom sele,” 49.

⁶⁶⁰ “Chestnyi rubl.”

seasonal construction brigades, which were expected to work the entire season, ignored the long distances and preferred to root themselves in the most labor-demanding regions, like Omsk and Kazakhstan in the case of Fedir and Ivan, where the pay rates were higher and competition was lower.

TRYING TO CONTROL THE “SPONTANEITY”

In 1977, a collective farm called “Ukraine” in the Crimea oblast’ hired a brigade of six shabashniki to build a warehouse for finished products. Alongside this externally hired brigade, was a team of the local kolkhoz builders. The construction of the warehouse started without any design or estimate documentation. From March to August of 1977, the externally hired brigade earned 16,100 rubles, totaling 56 percent of the construction costs for the warehouse. The wages of each worker were: in March 527 rubles; in April 490 rubles; in May 550 rubles; in June 493 rubles; in July 453 rubles. The members of the commission who made a later revision of this case came to the conclusion that these wages, which were considerably higher than the average and local state rates for similar work, were paid to the brigade with numerous violations of the existing protocols: working time figures were falsified and wage rates improperly applied. According to the commission, a sum of 5,440 rubles was overspent as a result of this intended miscalculation. The procedural violations did not end there. The workers did not have a local residence registration as they were seasonal workers, but they were nevertheless registered as members of the “Ukraine” kolkhoz after one month of works, even though it was against the collective farm statute. This nominal membership allowed them to avoid income tax and enjoy other benefits reserved for collective farm members. Meanwhile, the fifty local builders who were also constructing the warehouse earned 70–120 rubles per month.⁶⁶¹

This disparity in payment violated the principles of communist coexistence and morality. Shabashniki ended up in a financially more privileged position than the state-employed workers. However, the privileges did not end there. In some cases, shabashniki were given priority even when the region was sufficiently equipped with state construction organizations. Salaried construction workers from Perm’ were complaining that shabashniki were given better building projects, so the state construction brigades were forced to accept what was left or pick up the

⁶⁶¹ TsDAVO, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 933, ar. 109.

jobs which shabashniki refused, for instance, sweeping floors.⁶⁶² This injustice upset the local workers, who logically concluded that they would be better off working as shabashniki themselves. Thus, they found jobs in neighboring villages or oblasti, but this time they posed as “free builders” who did not belong to any organization. Paradoxically, when the construction organizations found themselves undermanned, they had no other options as to hire brigades of shabashniki. It happened, for instance, at the building sites of “Ternopil’sil’bud” in Ternopil’ oblast’, Ukraine. This region, theoretically, had sufficient labor reserves in the rural areas, but the construction organizations still hired “outsiders.” In 1969, the PMK-5 of the “Ternopil’sil’bud” trust hired a brigade of plasterers from neighboring Transcarpathia to help with the repair works in Kamjanka village. For one month of work, each of member of the brigade received 690 rubles, and their foreman received 790 rubles. On top of that, for each earned ruble the collective farm board additionally gave one kilogram of wheat in kind. Again, a member of the local brigade of plasterers who worked on the project received only 93 rubles per month.⁶⁶³

Such occurrences became commonplace in the Soviet Union, and multiplied from the 1960s onward. Reports from all over the USSR accused managers of employing costly seasonal help while underusing the human and material resources of their enterprises. Systematic labor shortages may have been a significant factor in the shabashniki’s success in rural Kazakhstan and Siberia, but the cases from Crimea and Ternopil clearly showed that it was something about shabashniki themselves that made them stand out. At the same time, it would be a mistake to assume that the reason was the individual qualities of the workers. On the contrary, registered construction workers relinquished their communist morals and stepped into the shabashniki’s murky world merely for the opportunity to work and earn. This alluring effect of shabashnichestvo was branded as a violation of labor discipline. In fact, the actual offence was deeper than that — shabashnichestvo was a violation of the Soviet labor regime and its ethical and formal norms, but also its exposed the Soviet economy’s downsides of waste and inefficiency. Shabashniki, with their alternative labor process, became the competitors of state construction organizations. What the Soviet system desperately strived to achieve but failed to elicit — motivation and efficiency — was reached under the cover of “informal liberalization.”

⁶⁶² “Khodim v podmastariakh,” *Pravda*, April 19, 1983.

⁶⁶³ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 445, ar. 24. On shabashniki hired by corporate and state enterprises see also TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 930, ar. 13.

The inspections continued to register that most contracts made with shabashniki were made either informally or disguised the real earned income through “various machinations, falsifications of figures, overestimation of the volume of works,”⁶⁶⁴ and the administrative requirements of employment were neglected: for instance, the employers did not require the workers to present the official leave permission from their main place of employment. In addition to the inflated wage rates, migrant workers were often incentivized with various bonuses in kind: they received grain, flour, sunflower seeds, and watermelons — anything to keep them from leaving. The informal patterns of employment and remuneration continued reproducing and soon became a part of the structure of the multilayered and multishadowed Soviet economy. Shabashniki became a constant presence in the countryside, and the gap between official worker and shabashniki’s pay rates grew ever deeper.

The critical voices of seasonal construction work started sounding more distinctly and loudly. While the press carried its moral banner and condemned the vices of shabashnichestvo from the late 1950s, Soviet authorities and experts entered the discussion in the 1970s. The range of opinions varied from radical recommendations to outlaw seasonal construction workers entirely, to milder suggestions to utilize the productive potential of the movement by introducing some correctives in order to “steer it in the right direction.” Since the economic contribution of seasonal migrant brigades was statistically confirmed and reluctantly accepted, and the authorities could not risk ridding the countryside of construction workers, the “radical” voices were never seriously taken into consideration. So, the outcome of this discussion was an attempt to “tame the spontaneity” — to enforce formalization on the seasonal workers in order to limit the unaccounted and illegal actions.

In 1978, a decree was issued that obliged all employers to sign contracts with each hired construction worker individually and strictly avoid collective or lump sum contracts. The “model contract” for hired construction workers was enclosed.⁶⁶⁵ This regulation was adopted, in particular, to fight the practice of payment for fictitious laborers, which enabled farm managers to increase the payments to a small group of people without attracting the authorities’ attention, and to control other actions that illegally increased the income of shabashniki.⁶⁶⁶ The

⁶⁶⁴ Kniazev, “Nekotorye voprosy bor’by s khishcheniiami i narusheniami gosudarstvennoi distsipliny v usloviakh bystrogo ekonomicheskogo razvitiia regiona,” 55.

⁶⁶⁵ “Confirming of a Model Contract for Fulfilment by Kolkhozniki and Other Citizens of Work on Construction of Objects in Rural Places, May 24, 1978, No. 168/16-23,” *Biulleten’ Goskomtruda*, no. 8 (Moscow, 1978): 20-27.

⁶⁶⁶ Murphy, “Soviet Shabashniki: Material Incentives at Work,” 53. See also Kazarina, Sokol’skii, “Trud otkhodnikov: pol’za i vred,” 50-51; “S kem v nogu shagat’,” *Pravda*, October 26, 1981.

decree also reminded the employers that it was their responsibility to ensure administrative reliability of the workers they hire. Workers had to provide certificates (*spravki*) from the main place of work or study, permits from *kolkhozes* for *otkhod*, or other documents that would certify their labor status. These regulations were in place before, but they were neglected so often that the reports of the State Committee on Labor repeated the same story annually: violations of seasonal employment regulations are ubiquitous, the local administrations turn a blind eye to the violators, workers receive payments that are incompatible with labor inputs plus tons of crops in kind.⁶⁶⁷

The story did not change with the passing of the 1978 decree. After local party organs' initial selective severing of the supervision of the farms' adherence to the regulation,⁶⁶⁸ they soon loosened their grip. As with the decree of 1973, which was supposed to regulate labor migration, there was little enforcement due to either the lack of will or power: informal patterns turned out to be stronger than administrative instructions. If anything, the regulation had a reverse effect as it tended to push *shabashniki* deeper in the shadow of informality. Instead of formalizing their relationship with externally hired labor, some farm managers preferred to avoid registering the contracts with the district authorities, therefore concealing the very fact of hiring external workers.⁶⁶⁹ As ineffective as these measures were, the authorities kept falling back on the futile administrative instruments when it came to seasonal labor migration. In 1986, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted another decree that basically duplicated that of 1978.⁶⁷⁰ With this last attempt to control the "spontaneity" of seasonal workers, the regime inadvertently proclaimed its failure to do so, as all similar attempts had repeatedly failed from the early 1970s onwards.

The Soviet officials' dream that labor productivity could be reached via the combination of control and moral stimulation did not stand the test of practice. The conditions under which productivity was manufactured were unlikely to receive the regime's full approval. However, the desire to "distil" the positive elements of labor migration from its "negative" aspects by bringing formalizing all employment was either naive or, more likely, a political trick of a purely ideological value: to officially identify and recognize the "problem", to make a political gesture

⁶⁶⁷ See, for example, TsDAVO, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 930, ar. 11-17; TsDAVO, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 933, ar. 108-111; TsDAVO, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1049, ar. 25, 28-31; TsDAVO, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1253, ar. 78-80.

⁶⁶⁸ Murphy, "Soviet Shabashniki: Material Incentives at Work," 53.

⁶⁶⁹ TsDAVO, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1049, ar. 29; TsDAVO, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1253, ar. 80.

⁶⁷⁰ Decree from May 1986, no. 576 "Ob uporiadochenii organizatsii i oplaty truda vremennykh stroitel'nykh brigad," *Sobranie postanovlenii Pravitel'stva SSSR*, no. 23 (1986): 134. See also Utkin, "O vremennykh stroitel'nykh brigadakh," *Sotsialisticheskaia zakonnost'*, 42-43.

by issuing instructions and regulations, and when they are not adhered to, to blame the officials at the local level, thereby protecting the myth of political and economic coherence of the Soviet system. Meanwhile, the attempts to eliminate informality from labor relations between seasonal migrants and their employers were futile, since it constituted the very basis of their contracts. Without informal agreements desired incentives could not be produced, and without sufficient material incentives workers would not respond to the labor demand, as demonstrated by the *orgnabor*. So, regardless the disapproval of their behavior, *shabashniki* remained the unvirtuous companions of the Soviet system until its collapse. It was they who kept building in the steppe of Kazakhstan, in depopulated Siberian villages, and in the undermanned Ukrainian farms.

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION: INFORMALITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

As a social phenomenon, *shabashnichestvo* grew out of the economic pressures and opportunities of the Soviet countryside and forestry in the 1960s–1980s, and the legal ambiguity regarding the *shabashnik* as an employee, which allowed informal employment relations to thrive. With this last subchapter I would like to round off the discussion on work, which was the main topic of Part II of this dissertation, by collecting the central points regarding migrant workers' informal labor, its place and significance in the Soviet economy, and its effect on their own social position.

First of all, it is worth underlining that seasonal workers' activities were to the benefit of the Soviet economy. Out of their own initiative, they helped solved the labor redistribution problem, with which the state institutions had struggled for decades. As Shabanova stated: "For the central power, *otkhodnichestvo* was albeit objectionable, but essentially the most preferable out of realistically possible means to abate some socio-economic problems and disproportions, to a great degree generated by it."⁶⁷¹ Seasonal migrant workers reached the labor deficient regions and did the work that local workers were either unwilling or incapable of doing. They contributed to the augmentation of state capital, since, in the centralized economy, the state was the official owner of all property, including the farms, schools, granaries, and other buildings that they constructed. Additionally, their movement was far from "spontaneous".

⁶⁷¹ Shabanova, "Sovremennoie *otkhodnichestvo* kak sotsiokul'turnyi fenomen," 56.

Even though it was not supervised by the state, it followed the principle of economic necessity and relied on the informal networks of recruitment and informal channels of employment.

These informal channels were carefully established and supported if they were to the migrants' benefit, or abruptly abandoned if they became a burden. Permanent contracts firmly tied a worker to the organization, and abandonment of such a position without a serious reason could result in an administrative offense. Informal contracts, to the contrary, were based on weak ties with very low potential for legal enforcement in the case of broken employment rules.

Informality, however, cut both ways. It gave workers the opportunity to move freely and quickly earn large amounts of money, but it also implied risks. As contractual workers, seasonal workers did not have the social security net that protected permanent workers. They were not a part of any trade union. If a manager was dissatisfied with a brigade's performance, he could dismiss it immediately without fearing any institutional sanctions, and if the workers happened to not receive the promised payments, it was difficult for them to appeal to the authorities and demand compensation. Considering the proliferating informality of their employment, it is not surprising that very few lawsuits were lodged by labor migrants.⁶⁷² Since the workers were not under the protection of trade unions, their overtime did not have to be agreed upon by this institution.⁶⁷³ Health risks were also not covered by the contract, so in the tragic event of losing one's employability while at work, it was impossible to claim disability benefits. Vacation payments, promotion prospects, and retirement benefits, which were a part of the regular employment package, were a closed road for labor migrants.⁶⁷⁴ All this made them convenient for the state: seasonal workers took all the responsibilities of job searching and contract making upon themselves, as well as all the risks regarding their activities. They accepted this truncated social security in exchange for their inflated wages, and a side effect of the informal conditions of their employment.

The absence of guaranteed retirement benefits was the largest concern for seasonal migrants. Their main motivation to quit seasonal work was the law that required an individual to hold a permanent work position for at least five years before the pension age in order to be eligible for a pension. Since most migrant workers were employed on the basis of temporary contracts, they either did not keep the track of employment, or the working time they have accumulated was

⁶⁷² Vakhitov, "Nekotorye voprosy praktiki rassmotreniia sporov...", 4

⁶⁷³ Voitovich, Nikiforak, " 'Perspektiven' li sovremennyi shabashnik?" 130.

⁶⁷⁴ Shabanova, "Sovremennoie otkhodnichestvo kak sotsiokul'turnyi fenomen," 58; Shabanova, "Sezonnyie stroiteli v sibirskom sele," 52.

not sufficient to be eligible for a decent pension. However, when older members of the family made a decision to stop their work trips, younger men in the family usually continued working as shabashniki, thus taking over the role of main providers and maintaining the habitual income level of the families. Even if there was no one to carry on with seasonal labor in the family, the necessity of claiming retirement benefits was strong enough for former migrants to eventually accept permanent local positions.

Informality played a peculiar role in the emergence of the Soviet shabashnik. Parenthetically, seasonal labor migrants were hardly an exclusive group that utilized informal connections to their own advantage within the Soviet system — far from it. Scarcity and the low quality of material goods and services generated many informal mechanisms of survival and acquisition that touched upon individuals and enterprises. It penetrated every segment of life, from health care and education to the highest echelons of the Party elite. Informal, however, did not necessarily mean illegal. The shabashniki's case stands out as their informal activities often signaled illegal or at least semi-legal actions. The scholarly discussion about the “second economy” might help put shabashnik in perspective. This discussion was started in the late 1970s by Western sovietologists from various disciplines, who questioned the previously accepted image (in the West) of the Soviet economy as a monolith and coherent, centrally planned system of a nearly totalitarian type. Their inquiries shed light on the less visible parts of Soviet economic life, which escaped the control of officials and could be located somewhere on the spectrum between legal and illegal regarding the Soviet law. The definitions of “second economy” were elaborated by most scholars in political and legal dimensions: regarding its relationship to the centrally planned economy and Soviet law. The “second economy” emerged where the state underperformed in terms of consumer demand, and the plethora of activities enmeshed into this notion involved, for instance, selling privately grown produce on the market, giving “private” lessons, or stealing and then re-selling state property.

It is curious that shabashniki were cursorily included in the “second economy”. Gregory Grossman, followed by F. J. M. Feldbrugge, classified them as basically private agents who subcontracted their services to the state organizations, filling the gap in supplying a scarce resource.⁶⁷⁵ The distinctive feature that made shabashniki different from other social agents involved in the “forbidden trades and activities,” was the fact that they offered their services not

⁶⁷⁵ Gregory Grossman, “The Second Economy of the USSR,” *Problems of Communism*, 26/5(1977): 31; F. J. M. Feldbrugge, “The Soviet second economy in a political and legal perspective,” in *The Underground Economies: Tax Evasion and Information Distortion*, ed. Edgar L. Feige (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 324.

to individual consumers affected by the failures of Soviet provision and distribution, as did teachers, dentists, or tutors, but to the state itself — their “client” was the socialist sector of economy, represented, for instance, by the kolkhoz. Deeming shabashniki’s activities “private” was sufficient for Grossman, whose definition of “second economy” was based on the two characteristics: “being for private gain... and being in some significant respect in knowing contravention of existing law”.⁶⁷⁶

As I have sought to demonstrate, seasonal labor migrants inhabited economic niches that were impenetrable for the state’s direct regulation, therefore it was fair to question their legality. The shabashniki’s activities being perceived as “private” quite literally put them outside of the official planned state economy. A. Katsenelinboigen, in his own sectorial classification of the Soviet economy through the scheme of “coloured markets”, did not mention shabashniki specifically, but his definition of semi-legal “grey market,” located between legal “red,” “pink,” and “white” markets, and illegal “brown” and “black” ones, accommodates the seasonal labor migrant. Katsenelinboigen writes:

The articles that act as commodities in this market are consumer goods originally released by the state, and services, which are “brought out” there by their legal owners and sold. The illegality of these operations lies only in the fact that the transactions that arise are not recorded officially and the income received is not taxed.⁶⁷⁷

Similar to Katsenelinboigen’s “grey market” economic space, Igor Birman located shabashniki in the “intermediary” economy (he placed it between, on the one hand, legal state and cooperative, and on the other, legal private and illegal economies). Birman called the “intermediary” economy, “everything that happens quite officially, however, essentially, is on the verge of law... [for instance] building in the kolkhozes (sometimes sovkhozes) with help of shabashniki.”⁶⁷⁸ Katsenelinboigen’s and Birman’s definitions differ from Grossman’s in a sense that they place emphasis on *how* things are done in the “grey market,” rather than *what kind* of things are done. Shabashniki were the legitimate “owners” of their labor, and their right to sell it to the employer was secured by the Soviet Constitution and the Labor Code. It was something in the mode of their employment that did not allow them to be accepted as the earnest participants of the “first,” official economy. The last two definitions, however, still do not make

⁶⁷⁶ Grossman, “The Second Economy of the USSR,” 25.

⁶⁷⁷ A. Katsenelinboigen, “Coloured Markets in the Soviet Union,” *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1977): 68.

⁶⁷⁸ Igor Birman, “Second and First Economies and Economic Reforms,” Occasional Paper No. 108 of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, in Russian (1980): 3, accessed August 16, 2018, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/op108_second_first_economies_Birman_1980.pdf

the further analytical step in order to separate informality and illegality. This conceptual overlap in the intellectual tradition of “second economy” was noticed by József Böröcz. He pointed out that the idea of informality was submerged in the notion of the “second economy”, and simultaneously conceptually pushed out of the sphere of the “first economy”, so the resulting model looked as follows: “first economy=redistribution=formality” and “second economy=market=informality.”⁶⁷⁹ It was a simplified and flawed view, since the operation of the “first economy” included elements of informality, and the “second economy”, notorious for its informal networking, was often linked to the channels of official distribution. This framework complicates the position of shabashniki, as their labor was entirely utilized by the “first economy,” but the informality of ties with management “shadowed” their labor status and linked them to the sphere of activities that could be characterized as illegal. They seemed to belong to both “second” and “first” economies, so the location of their economic behavior was difficult to ascertain, and scholars ended up inventing “grey” and “intermediary” spaces for these economic actors. In their case, “legal, semi-legal and illegal activities constitute[d] a single intricately interwoven network.”⁶⁸⁰

These complexities can be partly alleviated if the economic sphere is perceived not as divided, but as an integrated mechanism. In his discussion of the concept of the “second economy,” Feldbrugge admitted its primarily heuristic purpose and its functional value as an instrument that allows participation in a certain intellectual conversation. He, however, came to a plausible conclusion that the activities abstractly located in “first” and “second” economies exist in symbiosis, complement, and reinforce each other with a “spiral-like effect”:

The second economy supplements the unsatisfactory performance of the official economy – as the level of dissatisfaction declines, there is less incentive for the authorities to improve the performance of the official economy – the demands of the second economy increase – the potential of the second economy gradually atrophies.⁶⁸¹

The blending of the “first” and “second” economies explains why no radical actions were taken against certain “forbidden” activities: their prohibition would require changing the whole Soviet system. Admitting their systematic nature and embracing them on an official level would, however, be politically hazardous for the regime: it would undermine its legitimacy, which was based on the belief that the socialist economy was administered from the center. Indeed,

⁶⁷⁹ Böröcz, “Informality Rules,” 355-357.

⁶⁸⁰ Feldbrugge, “The Soviet second economy in a political and legal perspective,” 312.

⁶⁸¹ Feldbrugge, 325.

economic centralism served as the Communist Party's claim to power, historical progress, and political superiority over capitalist countries. The economic activities which smoothed the rigidities of Soviet centralism indicated features of economic exchange that were politically unacceptable for the Party. *Shabashnichestvo* was one such activity. This social phenomenon harbored the system's economic and political controversies, since it could only thrive under a certain set of constraints and possibilities, which conditioned the demand, production of incentives, development and encouragement of private interests, and creative interpretation of opportunities. As Shabanova wrote in her 1992 article, published already in post-Soviet Russia and therefore allowed to contain the phrase "labor market" in the title, *shabashniki* accumulated "large experience of operating within market (although often "shadow") conditions"⁶⁸² within the system, which claimed to be socialist, but in fact was "rather a historically unstable social formation that was neither capitalist nor socialist, and as such had no effective regulator either of the economy or the reproduction of its social structure."⁶⁸³ The legally intransparent spaces of economic life incorporated these systematic convergences more readily and rapidly.

The principal incompatibility of the "consistently socialist economy" and "other"⁶⁸⁴ economies engendered political and moral collision that the Soviet system attempted to alleviate by supporting the myth of "parallel" economies as separate spheres. It kept nurturing the idea of "second economy" as a twist in the socialist way of life, alien to it in spirit and parasitical in its nature: like a leech that feeds on "temporary economic difficulties". As there was no way to painlessly expel something that became a cog in the machine, the Soviet system accommodated itself to informality, and even incorporated it. At the same time, the regime tried to keep political distance from ideologically questionable activities. It continued to stress its disapproval of informal mechanisms "in principle," and tried to shield its false innocence with moral judgement and the scapegoating of those who were too close and could expose its contradictions. With their economic behavior, seasonal labor migrants uncovered the inconsistencies of the Soviet system but, as recipients of unjustly exaggerated wages, they were an easy target to be attacked as the root of the problem, rather than a symptom of structural issues. They were singularized as harmful "elements", unreliable individuals, who were seemingly outside, if not against, the otherwise controlled and coherent system. Public shame

⁶⁸² M. A. Shabanova, "Otkhodnichestvo i rynek rabochei sily," *Region: ekonomika i sotsiologiia*, no. 2 (Novosibirsk, 1992): 29.

⁶⁸³ Filzer, *Soviet Workers and de-Stalinization*, 122.

⁶⁸⁴ Birman, "Second and First Economies and Economic Reforms," 7.

and suspicion accompanied them throughout late socialism, even though they became virtually indispensable for its operation.

PART III. CULTURE

6. IDEOLOGY: THE PROJECTED AND PERCEIVED MEANINGS OF SEASONAL WORK

THE ERA OF SHABASHNIK: CHANGES IN MEANING

The migrant seasonal worker was a constant companion to Soviet society, stubbornly overcoming the changes in the economic organization of the state, the shifts of the party leaders' political lines, and the constant attempts to regulate or guide the "un-organized" labor flows. In fact, the seasonal migrant predated the Soviet state. In pre-revolutionary Russia and during the first decades of the USSR, this type of a migrant worker was known as "otkhodnik" (literally, someone who temporarily leaves their permanent place of residence for earnings elsewhere). While the phenomenon of labor migration persisted, its cultural meaning and social reception underwent a change in the late 1950s and 1960s. The metamorphosis of the representation of a labor migrant in the Soviet social imaginary was marked, first of all, in common language. The neutral term *otkhodnik* was replaced by the derogatory label *shabashnik*, a name heavily invested with moral reprehension and distrust. By the 1980s, the label *shabashnik* was so deeply rooted in the everyday use that *kolkhozniki*, interviewed by a Moscow journalist I. Kruglianskaia, failed to understand the meaning of such neutral terms as *otkhodnik* and *sezonnik* (literally – "seasonal worker").⁶⁸⁵ These terms appeared in the official state documentation, normative acts and juridical literature, but to the wider Soviet public a seasonal migrant was a "shabashnik."

The general dynamics of the use of the words "otkhodnik" and "shabashnik" in the articles published in one of the biggest official Soviet media resources and voice of the Communist Party, the *Pravda* newspaper, in the period 1957–1991 confirms the observation made by I. Kruglianskaia. Seasonal migrants were addressed as "shabashniki" in over 160 articles on the subject of migrant labor, while "otkhodniki" or "otkhodnichestvo" appeared only in 22 pieces. In addition to being considerably less favored by Soviet journalists in discussions of seasonal labor migration in the USSR, the term "otkhodnik" was frequently used for seasonal migrants in articles addressing the economic situations in foreign countries. *Otkhodniki* were found in Bulgaria, Indonesia, South Africa, Lesotho, Cuba, Mozambique, Zambia, etc. In total, 7 articles out of 22 did not deal with seasonal migration in the USSR. Moreover, the general tone of these

⁶⁸⁵ "The Road," *Izvestia*, April 18, 1985.

articles suggested that seasonal migration in these countries was (at the present moment or in the past) a practice resorted to by utmost necessity, which the disadvantaged groups used as their only tool to escape extreme poverty. The existence of the practice of *otkhodnichestvo*, according to these newspaper pieces, indicated a dysfunctional, inefficiently organized society with apparent social inequality.⁶⁸⁶ *Shabashniki*, on the other hand, were mentioned exclusively as an unfortunate defect in the Soviet economy, portrayed, as I have argued, not as an inherent element, but as a temporary social ill.

During the Khrushchev era, the terms “*shabashnichestvo*” and “*otkhodnichestvo*” were both still in use, although the former prevailed. The latter, however, was mostly referred to while discussing the practices of seasonal labor migration during the periods of Imperial Russia and pre-World War II. It was referred to as a sad remnant, an anachronistic “survival of the past,” and an undesirable historical effect of capitalist labor relations, alien to the modernized, mechanized, and rationalized socialist economy, promoted by the ideologues of post-Stalinism. In the 1960s, *otkhodnichestvo* was associated with seasonal inoccupation in the countryside, which was not supposed to last, since the collectivized village was expected to eventually provide everyone with work during both the winter and summer, and the responsible state offices were expected to distribute the labor power surpluses between under and over-populated regions according to the principles of the centrally planned economy. Before these transformations would completely eliminate the demand for and the supply of the seasonal labor, *otkhodnichestvo* was to be limited, controlled, and preferably avoided.

From the 1970s until the mid-1980s, the authors of *Pravda* systematically avoided using the term “*otkhodnichestvo*,” unless their subject matter was outside of the USSR. As I mentioned before, even here the evaluation of the phenomenon suggested that the practice of labor migration was an outdated and exploitative feature of capitalist society. While *otkhodnik* was completely forgotten by the Soviet press during this period, *shabashnichestvo* became the main definition for seasonal labor migration. The *otkhodnik* was a pitiful, disadvantaged countryman from the past, and the *shabashnik* was an annoying and omnipresent character of the present. While the nature of the practice had barely changed, its reception, evaluation, and its core social essence was profoundly re-defined. Put bluntly, the *otkhodnik* was a victim of social inequality and economic mismanagement, and the *shabashnik* was a sneaky villain who compromised the

⁶⁸⁶ See, for example, “*Zhivnye rodniki*,” *Pravda*, August 16, 1960, 3; “*Sezon trevog i nadezhd*,” *Pravda*, May 12, 1972, 4; “*Statistika rasizma*,” *Pravda*, October 26, 1972, 4; “*Mezhdru proshlym i budushchim*,” *Pravda*, January 12, 1991.

socialist system. As this Chapter will show, it also reflected the evolution of the controversial social relations which seasonal labor migrants established and maintained, and their uneasy co-existence with the Soviet laws, moral principles, and the very idea of the socialist way of life.

In the second half of the 1980s until the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the term *otkhodnik* was gradually rehabilitated and extracted from the outdated vocabulary to signify further normative and axiological shifts (although not as abrupt, as that in the late 1950s) in the social understanding of economic and moral meaning of temporary labor migration. While in some cases, “shabashnik” and “otkhodnik” were used interchangeably, the newly revoked old “otkhodnik” symbolized a public questioning of the validity and appropriateness of the label “shabashnik.” In the climate of general ideological liberalization and Perestroika’s policy of *glasnost*, which created the space that allowed for more pluralism and dialogue, *shabashnichestvo* was recognized as an historically durable, although controversial, social phenomenon. The partial, occasional replacement of the colloquial and derogatory “shabashnik” with the consciously neutral “otkhodnik” in the last years of the Soviet rule, signaled the opinion-makers’ awareness of the three-decades of condemnation of the seasonal migrant which were tied up in the term “shabashnik.” As seasonal migrants started gaining sociological credibility, the re-naming attempts were targeted at resituating seasonal migration in society as something to be accepted and explored, instead of being alienated as a social ill.

One last remark should be made concerning the range of terms and meanings around seasonal migration in the second half of the twentieth century USSR. The words “migration” or “migrant,” common for sociological vocabulary, made almost no appearance in the Soviet press regarding seasonal workers. “Shabashnik,” “otkhodnik” and even less frequently “sezonnik” constituted the possible triad of denominators. Official documents, instructions, normative acts, and professional literature, such as juridical and economic articles and thematic books, made use of the terms “seasonal worker” (“*sezonnnyi rabochii*,” “sezonnik”) or “otkhodnik.” Meanwhile, “shabashnik” monopolized colloquial speech and public imagery to the extent that his identity in the system of Soviet law was hardly compatible with his popular image. For the last three decades of Soviet rule, a seasonal worker in rural construction, whether building farms, schools, clubs, or individual houses in the Ukrainian countryside, Central and Northern rural Russia, Siberia, or Kazakhstan, was known as a shabashnik. As was a seasonal worker in agriculture and forestry. Even though the term “shabashnik” was rather abstract, unstable and inclusive of variety of earning practices considered conflictual with communist understandings of morality and social justice, it was also synonymous with a seasonal worker.

Thus, the investigation of the cultural meanings around seasonal labor migration during late socialism is intimately connected to the cultural persona of the shabashnik, and the Soviet press is an exceptional source for studying this phenomenon. Long before seasonal migration entered the orbit of the Soviet sociologists' professional interests, the topic was scrutinized by journalists. The cases they described are now the most prominent examples of the shabashniki's activities. The writers' literary imagination gave their characters color which contrasted with the dryness of their appearance in the internal reports. These pieces, however, presented the seasonal migrant worker in a specifically ideologized light, very often stripping him of social and cultural complexity, and transforming him into a caricature. The typical Soviet shabashnik was, undoubtedly, a construction worker. He was featured in the satirical feuilletons and journalistic investigations since the early 1960s, ridiculed for his uprootedness, inconstancy, unreliability and attachment to the "long ruble." Thus, the first part of this chapter will explore the discursive production of the most important elements which came to constitute the popular image of a seasonal migrant, as based upon the discussions in the official Soviet press and the public speeches of the Party leaders.⁶⁸⁷

The representations of seasonal migrants in the press contrasted sharply with the migrants' own self-image. Despite their marginalization in the media, they found a way to build self-esteem based on their own perception of their labor and effective contribution. By instrumentalizing the categories of labor and industriousness — some of the central categories of the Soviet ideology — they negotiated their social position in order to make it acceptable for themselves.

SHABASHNIK AND THE COMMUNIST MORALITY

The first appearance of the word "shabashnik" in the Soviet press is quite remarkable: it was used by the Communist Party Secretary-General, Nikita Khrushchev, in his speech at one of the meetings with agricultural workers in the Nonblack Earth Belt of Russia in March 1957.⁶⁸⁸ Khrushchev was allegedly answering the question given to him on a note. The author of the note was wondering when kolkhozes would be spared from "near-kolkhoz elements" (*"okolokolkhoznyie elementy"*), the "so-called shabashniki," which disturbed the work of "honest

⁶⁸⁷ I base my analysis of the image of labor migrants in 1960-80s on the materials published in such Soviet newspapers, as *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, *Trud*, *Sotsialisticheskaia industriia*, and others.

⁶⁸⁸ *Pravda*, April 3, 1957, 2.

kolkhozniki.”⁶⁸⁹ In his reply, Khrushchev expressed decisive confidence that these “elements” would shortly be eradicated from the collective farms and suggested that kolkhozniki themselves should have taken responsibility for detecting and disciplining those “elements.” The question about shabashniki reappeared the following year at another meeting of agricultural workers held in January 1958, this time in the Belorussian SSR.⁶⁹⁰ A farmer requested when exactly “shabashniki, those who do not work at the collective farms and live out of unearned income, would be eradicated.” This time, Khrushchev’s elaboration on the issue went slightly further. He compared shabashniki to “idlers,” “loafers” (“*lodyri*”), and “grabbers” (“*rvachi*”), as individuals whose occupation is unidentified and whose sources of income are intertwined with “dishonest labor.” He further revoked his call for moral reprehension of those who “knock off” from work and emphasized the moral responsibility of the whole community to “influence” those black sheep of socialist labor.⁶⁹¹

Despite their generality and opaqueness, these short interventions initiated the mapping out of the discussion which unfolded around shabashniki during the following three decades, especially in the domain of Communist ethics. First, Khrushchev seemingly conflated the “idlers,” widely reproached by the post-War ideology of productivism with those individuals whose means of existence were derived from sources incompatible with the socialist principles of “honest labor”. Second, he defined shabashnichestvo as a problem from the point of view of communist morality: a vice, which should be eradicated by means of collective intervention and active influence on the part of the “conscious” (“*soznatel’nyie*”) members of society.

⁶⁸⁹ Despite the fact that I did not succeed in finding any mentioning of shabashniki in *Pravda* before 1957, this event suggests that the word “shabashnik” was already in use in informal speech by this time, although this short mentioning does not give a clear understanding of who exactly “shabashnik” is. The Soviet dictionary definitions of this phenomenon from 1935-1940 and 1961 (see *Tolkovyi slovar’*, ed. B. M. Volin and D. N. Ushakov, Vol.4, (Moscow, 1935-1940), 1310; S. I. Ozhegov, *Slovar’ russkogo iazyka*, 4th ed. (Moscow, 1961), 874) also do not give a clear picture. The etymology of the word, suggested by these dictionaries, is summarized by Siegelbaum and Moch as follows, “the word is distantly derived from the Russian word Sabbath (shabat) but more closely comes from the noun *shabashka*, meaning “to finish work” or to take a break from work.” (Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land*, 88). Wikipedia article explains the etymological reference to Sabbath by the fact that the Jews in the Russian countryside used to hire someone else to do temporary works on Saturday. This temporary work, the work on the side of the main occupation has become known as “shabashka.” In the end, etymological reconstruction hardly adds much to the understanding of the phenomenon of “shabashnichestvo” in the post-World War II Soviet Union, and is rather relevant for the comparison with the subsequent mutations of the meaning of the term “shabashnik.” On the other hand, Khrushchev’s mentioning of shabashnik in his public speech, the word that could be previously found only in an oral tradition, might have legitimized the following wide use of the term in the official press. It seems to be a valid presumption, since after Khrushchev has brought up the term again in his speech in January 1958 at the meeting of the foremost workers of agriculture of Belorussian SSR (*Pravda*, January 25, 1958, 2), *Pravda* authors picked it up already in the 1959, and in the beginning of the 1960s, “shabashnik” became a frequent character of “problematic” pieces and sarcastic feuilletons.

⁶⁹⁰ *Pravda*, January 25, 1958, 2.

⁶⁹¹ *Pravda*, January 25, 1958, 2.

Not simply labor, but “honest labor” was required of a good Soviet citizen. This requirement went beyond the formalistic demands to appear at work on time, ensure the quality of the work performed, or abstain from stealing items of state property from the work place. The imperative of “honest labor” concerned the very essence of the performed work, including its means, motives and remuneration, since it constituted the basis of the relationship between the individual on the one hand, and the state and collective, on the other. Labor was both a constitutional right and responsibility, but in the eyes of paternalistic party-state it transcended the borders of the legal and economic spheres and intervened in the domain of collective values that should have been internalized as personal values. Thus, “honest labor” was the duty of an individual in their quasi-personal relationship with the state. As Deborah A. Field has noted on the Soviet morality, “Soviet citizens ... were obliged to conduct their personal lives in such a way as to ensure the greatest good for society. In cases where people refused to follow officially sanctioned standards, the community, in the form of trade unions, the party, the Komsomol (Communist Youth League), and voluntary organizations, was empowered to intervene and scold or punish the erring individuals.”⁶⁹² In the countryside, the power of moral supervision was assigned to the kolkhoz board.

By performing “honest labor”, an individual ensured their respect to the state and to the collective, and their devotion to communist ideals. As labor was one of the defining elements of human decency in the communist system of values, “honest labor” became of utmost importance. It ensured good socialist citizenship, public acknowledgement, the very sense of accomplishment, which is necessary for self-respect. As one member of a kolkhoz wrote in her letter concerning the “high honor of the Soviet citizen”, “...every worker has to value his honor and work to the full extent of his power.” She called everyone who read her letter to look at himself from the outside, to consult with his consciousness and decide how he should live and work so that there would be no shame in front of the people, the party, the children and oneself.⁶⁹³ From this point of view, the shabashnik appeared as a morally dubious figure, if not the outcast of the Soviet society. Numerous articles furiously incriminated him with “living out of dishonest labor,” deemed his income “unearned,” and underlined the fact that his values clashed with the ideals of socialism.

⁶⁹² Deborah A. Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2007), 1.

⁶⁹³ *KPSS – Vospitatel' sovetskikh liudei v duhe kommunisticheskoi morali* (Volgograd, 1964), 24-25.

The conflation of the seemingly contradictory categories of “idler” and “grabber” and their relationship to the figure of the shabashnik had roots in the widely propagated code of communist morality and behavior. This was designed by the Soviet ideologues and moralists, and proclaimed in the newly adopted Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1961 and developed, in particular, in its ethical guide, the “Moral Code of the Builder of Communism.” Some scholars tend to qualify the adoption of the third Party Programme at the XXII Party Congress as “the main ideological event of the Khrushchev era,”⁶⁹⁴ since its mission involved the reunification of Soviet society during the potentially destabilizing years of de-Stalinization, and the reanimation of the Soviet project.⁶⁹⁵ It was particularly important, because “for the post-Stalinist state that was intent on civilizing its citizenry and winning the Cold War by demonstrating its superiority of its socialist values to the world, issues of morality and its appropriate inculcation were matters of prime social concern.”⁶⁹⁶ Although the particular steps to free distribution, delineated by Khrushchev, such as the elimination of charges for public transportation, canteen meals, and housing were not fulfilled by his followers, the “‘building of communism’ remain[ed] the declared aim, legitimizing the monopoly rule of the Communist Party, which claim[ed] to lead people towards this objective.”⁶⁹⁷ The ideological manifesto for a progressive, homogeneous society, the Programme’s influence even outlived Khrushchev’s term: the next Party Programme was adopted only in 1986 with only minor changes to Khrushchev’s text.⁶⁹⁸

Next to the well-known promise to reach communism in twenty years, increase productivity in industry and agriculture, and meet the population’s housing needs, the program introduced twelve moral tenets for the “builders of communism”, whose devoted efforts were a pivotal part of the building of the collective “bright future”. As Lenin famously stated, “Communism will not come by itself, you cannot build it, lying on your side, communism has to be fought for, all efforts should be given to it.”⁶⁹⁹ In this spirit, the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism was supposed to become the moral benchmark for matters both public and private, since its didactical message concerned interpersonal relationships, international awareness, and social

⁶⁹⁴ Alexander Titov, “The 1961 Party Programme and the fate of Khrushchev’s reforms,” in Melanie Ilić and Jeremy Smith, *Soviet State and Society Under Nikita Khrushchev* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 8.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid. The previous, second, Program of the CPSU was adopted under Lenin’s guidance in 1919. Thus, for Khrushchev the act of adoption of the new Program was a certain ideological tool in itself to draw the heredity line between re-legitimized leader and himself.

⁶⁹⁶ Brian LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance during the Thaw*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 164.

⁶⁹⁷ Alec Nove, *Soviet Economic System* (London; Boston: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 1981), 21.

⁶⁹⁸ Alexander Titov, “The 1961 Party Programme and the fate of Khrushchev’s reforms,” 22.

⁶⁹⁹ Cited in L. F. Illichev, *Ocherednyie zadachi ideologicheskoi raboty partii* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1963), 28.

conduct.⁷⁰⁰ Apart from patriotism, humanism, and collectivism, the attitude to labor constituted an important part of the good Soviet citizenship, crystallized in three of the twelve moral tenets: “conscientious work for the good of the whole society: who does not work shall not eat”; “everyone should care for the public (collective) wealth”; “high awareness of the public duty, intolerance to the violation of the public interests.”⁷⁰¹

The Communist attitude to labor was central to the educational function of the paternalistic party-state:

Labor for the good of the whole society is every person’s sacred responsibility. ... This is why every able-bodied person should participate in creation of the means necessary for his life and activities, for the fortune of society. The one who would gain the goods from society, but would not participate in labor, would be a parasite (tuneiadets) and would live at the cost of others.”⁷⁰²

Labor as a personal matter was characteristic of capitalist societies, where public and private interests are in conflict. By contrast, the progressive socialist model envisioned labor as inevitably collectivist (*obshchestvennyi*) in its purpose.⁷⁰³ In the framework of the communist civilizing project, selfless labor for the common good should have become an everyday habit and an inner need.⁷⁰⁴

Although the refurbished ideological labor paradigm of Khrushchev’s government did not deny the importance of material stimuli for good work (“from each according to his ability, to each according to his work”), the principal imperative of labor should have stayed in the domain of public, collective interest, only then it would be worthy of respect and appreciation. In the end, an individual should always consciously subordinate their private interests to the interests of the whole society.⁷⁰⁵ As Field notices, from the point of view of communist morality, there was no contradiction here, since “Soviet citizens ... would have no difficulty putting aside private desires because they knew that ultimately, the development of Communism would ensure them the most fulfilling personal life possible.”⁷⁰⁶ At least in theory, common wealth, thoughtfully

⁷⁰⁰ Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev’s Russia*, 9.

⁷⁰¹ *Programma KPSS* (Moscow, 1974), 120.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, 118-119.

⁷⁰³ V. A. Bushuiev, V. N. Smirnova, *Trudovaia disciplina na predpriatiiakh lesnoi promyshlennosti*, 12.

⁷⁰⁴ *KPSS – Vospitatel’ sovetskikh liudei v duhe kommunisticheskoi morali* (Volgograd, 1964), 19.

⁷⁰⁵ M. L. Chalin, *Moral’ stroitelia kommunizma* (Moscow, 1963), 54.

⁷⁰⁶ Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev’s Russia*, 13, 9-25.

distributed by the party authorities, would eventually become the guarantee of the secure and abundant existence of every member of society.⁷⁰⁷

SHABASHNIK AND UN-EARNED INCOME

Shabashnichestvo did not exist outside of this system of values. Its moral vice sprang, first of all, from the disproportionately high income of seasonal workers. The estimation of their remuneration sometimes reached mythical amounts. For example, the reporter of *Sovetskaia Rissia*, who investigated a case of financial embezzlement in 1982 in the Ulianovsk region, suggested that the monthly income of a member of the construction brigade constituted 3100 rubles.⁷⁰⁸ Even though the salary of the shabashniki rarely reached this level, it significantly exceeded not only that of a permanent construction worker, employed by a state organization, but also the salary of higher rank white-collar professionals, such as esteemed in the Soviet Union engineers, and doctors. As the Minister of the Interior, V. V. Fedorchuk, noted, the average monthly income of a state-employed construction worker in Perm' region in 1984 constituted 221 oubles, while an average shabashnik received 725 rubles.⁷⁰⁹ From the point of view of the Minister, this wage gap was “offensive” to an honest state-employed worker with a set salary, especially taking into account the fact that the numbers provided could hardly be reliable, since the shabashniki rates were not fixed and depended on negotiations between a brigade and an employer. This striking difference in the income of workers in the same industry generated feelings of “moral discomfort” and social injustice, as well as raising suspicions regarding the legality of the earning practices of the shabashniki.

During 1960s–1980s, the Soviet media were actively participating in construction of the popular image of the shabashnik, constantly questioning his ethical acceptability. The shabashnik was commonly placed on the margins of the Soviet society and its moral values. The Chair of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of Chechen-Ingush ASSR, Kh. Bokov, summed up the general attitude to shabashniki in his interview with *Pravda*: “It turns out that the notions of “sezonnik” and “otkhodnik”, these seemingly clear social categories, in public opinion are frequently associated with the image of a rascal of sorts, whose passion for the long ruble makes him

⁷⁰⁷ *Nravstvennyie printsipy stroitel'ia kommunizma* (Moscow: Mysl', 1965), 39.

⁷⁰⁸ “Delets na podriade,” *Sovetskaia Rossia* (January 14, 1982).

⁷⁰⁹ “Po strogomu shchetu,” *Literaturnaia gazeta* (August 29, 1984), 10.

repeatedly compromise with his consciousness.”⁷¹⁰ The “long ruble” was seen as the shabashniki’s main motivation for work. Their passion for the “long ruble” was graphically represented in *Krokodil*: a rough-looking man with a construction workers’ toolkit hurriedly follows the rolling ruble (Figure 16). In another illustration, the shabashnik was depicted as a flying insect rushing towards a flower with money instead of petals (Figure 17).



Figure 16. The caption says: “Worlds away...” The caricature from *Krokodil* depicts a shabashnik who is eager to follow the “long ruble” as far as it will take him.⁷¹¹

⁷¹⁰ “Shabashnik ili udarnik,” *Izvestiia* (December 16, 1983).

⁷¹¹ *Krokodil*, 1973, № 23, 7.

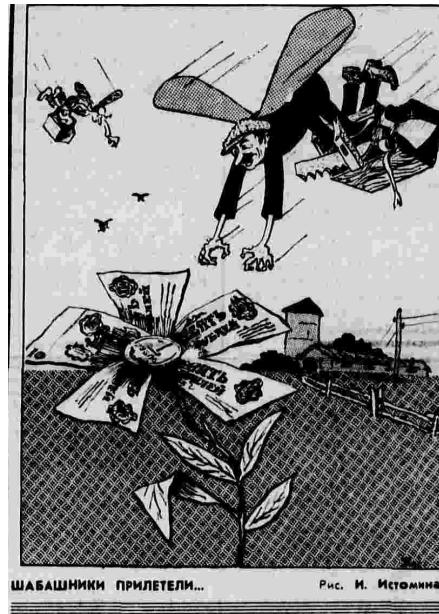


Figure 17. The caption says: “Shabashniki have arrived”⁷¹²

Personal interest, stripped of the socially conscious drive to selflessly contribute to the common good, was deemed both immoral and anti-communist: “Shabashnichestvo is a violation of the life imperatives of communism, which makes itself visible in public life and in the private (“*u bytu*”), but the most essential is his attitude to work.”⁷¹³ The Shabashnik was so “greedy” that the very value of his work was questioned: did society actually benefit from his services or was it exploited by his “itch for gain”?

The public discussions over the shabashniki’s input usually evolved around an economic dilemma. On the one hand, the authorities and the press continued insisting that shabashniki were exploiting the temporary economic difficulties in the country, while at the same time state and cooperative contractors were unable to cover rural construction demand. Hiring shabashniki was usually represented as an utter necessity, where the employer was a victim of circumstances with little to no choice, and the shabashnik, driven by greed, disrespected the economic needs of his home and hit the road in search for the most lucrative places or the most amenable managers.

The moralistic assumptions about the “materialistic” motives of seasonal migrants, widely subsumed into the concept of shabashniki, were not incorrect. According to Patrick Murphy,

⁷¹² *Pravda*, 1976, № 141.

⁷¹³ “Razgovor ob odnom postupke,” *Pravda*, October 6, 1980.

shabashniki could easily be one of the most well-paid groups in the Soviet Union.⁷¹⁴ The combination of profound labor shortages in small-scale construction and the blurred legal regulations regarding temporary workers' employment, facilitated flexibility and created the space for negotiation on the part of local officials and brigades. This flexibility, however, was interpreted as a lack of transparency. Although it was hard to pinpoint shabashniki as criminal deviants, they were frequently accused of avoiding state control and accountability, which not only resulted in moral condemnation, but also placed them “‘in the conjunction’ of legality and illegality.”⁷¹⁵

Whether the incomes of shabashniki were legal or not, whether they corresponded to the amount of the work applied and to the state-set payment rates or if they were a result of criminal deals with the local managers, was a subject of heated debate in the 1970s–1980s.⁷¹⁶ In search of a formula for such a blurry phenomenon as shabashnichestvo, sociologist N. N. Alekseenko suggested defining it as a “discrepancy between the proportion of labor and its remuneration.”⁷¹⁷ This disproportion, he claimed, immediately turned the “economically acceptable and even necessary otkhodnichestvo”⁷¹⁸ into the morally questionable shabashnichestvo.

In the stream of attempts to evaluate the “objective” contribution of the shabashniki’s work for the common good, shabashnichestvo was mentioned in the discussion among legal and economic specialists about non-labor income, a concept that covered a wide spectrum of economic behaviors, which were in opposition to the socialist principles of acceptable work and legitimate reward. It is remarkable that, even from its outset, this discussion stumbled upon the fact that there was no clear juridical or economic definition of “non-labor income.” According to the Civil Code, the court had the power to determine such income in each individual case. While accepting the arbitrariness of the term and its “intuitively” identified nature, the participants of the discussion suggested differentiating between non-labor income derived from legal and illegal actions. Illegal actions were easier to identify, since they were listed under the corresponding articles in the Criminal Code — theft, embezzlement, bribery, speculation, and the actions which could be qualified as private enterprise. It was more problematic, however,

⁷¹⁴ Murphy, “Soviet Shabashniki: Material Incentives at Work,” 48.

⁷¹⁵ “Netrudovoi dokhod,” *Izvestiia*, July 7, 1985.

⁷¹⁶ See, for example, Alekseenko, “Shabashniki: stereotipy i real’nost’”; “Levyi podriad,” *Sovetskaia Rossia*, 13 June 1982.

⁷¹⁷ Alekseenko, “Shabashniki: Stereotipy i real’nost’,” 89.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

to decide upon disproportionately high incomes derived from work. Another difficulty was to establish the “earned” and “un-earned” parts of such an income.

Among the possible kinds of non-labor income within the framework of legally allowed practices, the experts included the maintenance of salaries for absent workers, receiving bonuses for performing low-quality work, and enjoying social benefits (free medical care, same tax rates as the working population, free education, etc.) while avoiding work. A range of economic disparities, the experts suggested, provided the opportunity “to take more and to give less to society” without breaking the boundaries of the law.⁷¹⁹ Another kind of activity that occupied the murky area between legal and illegal was individual services outside of the main place of employment, that allowed for independent price negotiation and direct monetary exchange between a buyer and a provider. These actions were not considered illegal *per se* if they did not involve public or cooperative funds for the purpose of personal profit, even though they were widely used for individual enrichment.

The lack of control over such economic activity, which led to significant differences in the incomes of ordinary Soviet citizens, raised moral concerns regarding the justness of social distribution and demanded closer supervision of the shabashniki.”⁷²⁰ While experts agreed that the lack of control had encouraged “anti-socialist” and “immoral” practices, they were reluctant to accept the suggestion that the state should impose stricter regulations, since these might impinge on the rights of loyal workers, whose income was well-earned and who should not be put in the position of constant suspicion and reporting. Moreover, with the liberalized views of Perestroika, Soviet society arrived at the necessity to re-evaluate private boundaries, and M. S. Gorbachev reflected this in his comment regarding non-labor income: “While setting a limit on the non-labor income, we cannot allow for throwing the shadow on those who earn additional money via honest labor.”⁷²¹ Thus, the argument failed to reach any legal solution or even a clearer definition of the notion of “non-labor income”. Some even claimed that separating the juridical and moral damage from the evasion of honest participation in labor relations was artificial and could potentially lead to the spread of the “parasite psychology.”⁷²²

⁷¹⁹ “Netrudovoi dokhod.”

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

⁷²¹ N. Kuznetsova, O. Osipenko, “Shabashnichestvo: sut’ da delo,” *Molodoi kommunist*, no. 5, 1987, 49.

⁷²² “Tuneiadets v profil’ i anfas,” *Izvestiia*, April 5, 1985.

There was consequently not enough ground for the criminalization of shabashnichestvo.⁷²³ At the same time, many Soviet citizens would have agreed with I. Karpets, who claimed that the shabashnik's work had to be acknowledged, but no honest worker would consider him "a comrade in labor."⁷²⁴ He added that the shabashnik was not "a freeloader, not an idler in the strict sense of the word [since he is working, and sometimes working hard]... but this form of labor breaks the established ties in the economic mechanism."⁷²⁵ Karpets also voiced the common association of the "idler" with the "shabashnik," which can be traced back to Khrushchev's first mention of the phenomenon in 1957–1958. Just like the "tuneiadets", the shabashnik was "the violator of the basic principle of ... society – the principle of social justice," only the tuneiadets received social benefits without working, and the shabashnik demanded too much for his services, "exploiting" the bottlenecks of economy management.⁷²⁶ In the most extreme cases, shabashniki were qualified as "grabbers" ("rvachi")⁷²⁷ and were accused of "speculation with their own work"⁷²⁸ in the industries with high labor demand. "Living on the account of society"⁷²⁹ and the violation of the principle of fair distribution according to one's work,⁷³⁰ placed both shabashniki and tuneiadtsy on the same scale from the point of view of honest work, collectivist values, civil responsibility, and communist morality. In the public opinion, the shabashnik could easily transition into a tuneiadets in between seasons if he remained unemployed and lived off his summer earnings. The "seasonal idleness" that followed the period of seasonal work also contained social dangers. The poor management of earnings and extended periods of free time were reported to result in extensive drinking and road traffic incidents.⁷³¹ Such media observations hinted that the shabashnik could easily turn into a danger

⁷²³ There was a common suspicion, however, that shabashniki could use their semi-legal status for further violations, which entered the sphere of criminal responsibility – participation in embezzlement, bribery, private enterprise, speculation with the building materials, misappropriation of state property, etc.

⁷²⁴ "Tuneiadets v profil' i anfas."

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Ibid. For more about the resemblance between tuneiadets and shabashnik, see "Kot-Vas'ka-1984," *Pravda*, March 27, 1984; "Za chuzhoi shchet," *Pravda*, October 5, 1984. For the alternative opinions, which denies the association between tuneiadets and shabashnik see, for example, "Smeniv emitsii na schety," *Izvestiia*, August 29, 1982.

⁷²⁷ "Delo vsei partii, vsego naroda," *Pravda*, September 7, 1963; "Nel'zia mirit'sia s liubiteliami magarycha," *Pravda*, February 21, 1965; "Chestnyi rubl'," *Pravda*, November 20, 1966; "Potvorstvuiia rvacham," *Pravda* (May 15, 1976); "Kak grachi vesnoi," *Pravda*, September 8, 1976; "Razgovor ob odnom postupke," *Pravda*, October 6, 1980.

⁷²⁸ "Shabashnik: blago ili zlo,"; "Juridicheskaiia mysh'," *Pravda*, December 4, 1977; Alekseenko, "Shabashniki: Stereotipy i real'nost'," 92.

⁷²⁹ "Delo vsei partii, vsego naroda."

⁷³⁰ See the discussion on social justice and non-labour income in N. F. Naumova, V.Z. Rogovin, "Zadacha na spravedlivost'," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 3 (1987).

⁷³¹ V. Vuchkai, I. Melesh, "Sezonni rozvagy," *Zakarpats'ka pravda*, January 5, 1973.

to the society during his months of leisure, since there was no permanent collective to restrict him from irresponsible behavior, and he himself had poor moral values.

Finally, as independently traveling workers, shabashniki were perceived as distanced from society and its political and educational structures. In a regional Transcarpathian newspaper *Zakarpats'ka Pravda*, a journalist characterized seasonal workers as “people without a collective, they are not registered in any organization, no one asks them by which means they live.”⁷³² This could cause administrative problems with regards to, for instance, future retirement benefits, but the moral dimension of such institutional evasiveness was specifically emphasized in the piece. Another journalist wrote in a national newspaper:

They are working away from home, from the collective, from the communal interests. Only for the sake of their personal enrichment. Without the pride for their work, without public acknowledgement and respect, without the joy of labor that makes someone a conscious worker instead of a consumer.”⁷³³

This quote explicitly connects work in a (stable) collective with the respect granted by society. While migration was a desirable and necessary process, it was expected that professionals, workers and peasants would migrate permanently and root themselves in the new collectives, plants, farms, and regions. Instead, seasonal migrants' ways of life and work meant constant mobility and temporary attachments to the places of work, as they stayed for no more than six (in exceptional cases eight) months, and returned home after finishing their contracts. The labels “fliers” (*letuny*) and “nomads” (*kochevniki*) emphasized their uprootedness and their lack of serious commitment to permanent labor and to building their life according to the communist principles. As the migrants extracted themselves from the centralized labor process, they were beyond the supervision of the established Soviet collectives and the ideological messages they transmitted. It presumably exacerbated their moral corrosion, fuelled by social isolation: “Shabashka in most cases means full isolation from the outside world, from the events that are happening in the country. No one subscribes for a newspaper for a season, there is neither time nor opportunity to listen to the radio.”⁷³⁴ This distancing from social affairs and the primacy of private interests pushed the shabashnik to the margins of the socialist moral citizenship, which complemented his economic and legal marginality.

⁷³² M. Lukecha, “Zarobitchany,” *Zakarpats'ka Pravda*, November 4, 1979.

⁷³³ M. Kriukov, “Tem i sil'ny,” *Pravda*, November 11, 1973.

⁷³⁴ Voitovich, Nikiforak, “‘Perspektiven’ li sovremennyi shabashnik?” 135.

As the controversy around shabashniki became ever more acute in the 1980s, and since the phenomenon started raising questions regarding the actual organization of economic processes, social scientists, including economists, legal specialists, and sociologists, began to reflect upon seasonal migration. Along with the attempts to identify the legal space in which shabashniki existed,⁷³⁵ and the extent of their economic contribution and participation in society,⁷³⁶ a new trend of inquiry developed regarding the social persona of the shabashnik, mainly within the fields of sociology, but also within the media's broadened moral framework of the glasnost' period. This new trend of interest transformed the shabashniki into actors in the public dialogue on seasonal migration, who could partly speak for themselves. These public appearance of shabashniki were inevitably partial and mediated, since the official discourse, however decentered at this point, continued to reject them as the bearers of compromised morality. Therefore, the arguments highlighted by the individual shabashniki in their comments and stories were commonly presented in a "dialogue" with some authority figures who defended a different point of view, which usually coincided with the official dogma.⁷³⁷

SHABASHNIKI AS A HETEROGENEOUS GROUP

With the helping hand of the Soviet media, the shabashnik came to represent the rejection of the socialist mores of honest work, exaggerated incomes, the disrespect of the principles of rationally planned labor redistribution, and the neglect of the Soviet way of life. Defined in relationship to work and income rather than to specializations or skills, the term "shabashnik" was not strictly reserved for particular professions. Until the end of the 1980s, the term was used to define individuals and groups of people who offered diverse kinds of services in both urban and rural settings. This is how A. Brovin summarized the possible spheres of activities of shabashniki:

In the sphere of material production, it is first of all rural economy, specifically major construction works and renovation of the production facilities and housing, production of the construction materials out of local raw materials (production of ceramic bricks, cinder blocks, the simplest reinforced concrete structures, metal gauze, reed-fiber mats, quarry rock extraction, etc.), asphalt covering of the roads, manufacturing of obeli, decoration of cultural property with ceramic tiles and mosaics, decoration of clubs, offices, kindergartens

⁷³⁵ See, for example, Kazarina, Sokol'skii, "Trud otkhodnikov: pol'za i vred."

⁷³⁶ Alekseenko, "Shabashniki: stereotipy i real'nost'."

⁷³⁷ See, for example, "Esli skazat' otkrovenno," *Izvestiia*, (16 June 1985).

and other premises, watching of *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* gardens (with payment in kind with a share of the harvested fruit and gauds). In the sphere of consumer services, the most widespread are vegetable, fruit and flowers production and selling, flat renovation (door lining, parquet floor laying and sanding, tiling, plastering, wallpapering, carpentry and other works), building of *dachas* and garages, auto service, breeding of fur-bearing animals with valuable fur. There are even “wild” concert brigades.⁷³⁸

Urban shabashniki were helpful when the Soviet system of consumer services failed to fulfill the needs of the population. If a flat needed renovation, an old lock needed replacement, or water pipes required repairing, the public was firmly in favor of hiring an independent subcontractor. His prices might have exceeded the prices of the state organizations, but the quality of the work was significantly better and faster than that provided by the state centers of consumer services. Urban shabashniki usually had a permanent place of employment, or were at least “on the books”, and made extra money on the side by offering individual services to both private persons and enterprises.⁷³⁹ While their activity on the side could well be more lucrative, shabashniki were reluctant to abandon their official places of work, which they could use as a source of specialized tools and materials, which ensured the timely performance of their side work.⁷⁴⁰

Even though only some of the activities, which Brovin mentioned as attractive for shabashniki, were dependent on seasonality, he chose to unite them under the catchall “sezonnik” (seasonal worker), no doubt in an attempt to use a less colloquial and emotionally charged term. While the label shabashnik felt more precise, Brovin deemed this term inappropriate for a discussion for a specialized audience (the article was published in an academic journal). After all, what was important was not the seasonal regularity of these varied activities, but their relation to the socialist morality, and Brovin repeated the popular view that shabashniki “sponge off (*parazitiruiut*) the temporary economic hardships of our state.”⁷⁴¹ The vitality of the shabashnik, however, kept proving Jonathan Swift’s widely used saying that, “there is nothing more permanent than a temporary fix.” Despite the reoccurring predictions that the shabashnik would vanish when temporary hardships were overcome, the multiplying press reports suggested that the movement was only strengthening.

⁷³⁸ Brovin, “Sezonnyie brigady: plusy i minusy,” 77.

⁷³⁹ For more about urban *shabashniki* see, for example, “Otkazat’sia vseгда proshche,” *Pravda*, March 20, 1984; “Komu on nuzhen, etot shabashnik?” *Izvestiia*, June 25, 1986.

⁷⁴⁰ Kuznetsova, Osipenko, “Shabashnichestvo: sut’ da delo,” 43-49.

⁷⁴¹ Brovin, “Sezonnyie brigady: plusy i minusy,” 77.

Let us now look closer at another type of shabashnik, also included in Brovin's list, who made even more frequent appearances in the media and was closely related to seasonal migration. He was usually represented by seasonal construction workers who arrived in the countryside in early spring and left in autumn, after finishing their contracts. Their nomadic way of working and traveling earned them another nickname, "*grachi*," which meant "rook", the bird of passage. The convenient assonance between the two labels — *grachi* (rooks) and *rvachi* (grabbers) — inspired the creativity of more malevolent journalists, who repeatedly underlined the shabashniki's drive towards both disobedient, unregulated nomadism ("*stikhiinost*") and the "long ruble."⁷⁴²

Apart from the rural "professional" labor migrants, some city dwellers also undertook for shorter work trips to the countryside for additional income in the 1970s–1980s. They gathered in brigades and worked as construction workers on a contract basis during their vacations. These city shabashniki, or "summer brigades,"⁷⁴³ found it especially difficult to accept the label, since it blended them with the category of less socially integrated and less educated workers, whose motives did not align with the communist morality and socialist legality. The moral reproach and disapproval, which was immediately imposed with the label "shabashnik", sickened those city professionals who considered themselves fully-fledged members of Soviet society, who honestly undertook honest work, but occasionally sought for the slight improvement of their families' material conditions.⁷⁴⁴ This group of seasonal workers lies

⁷⁴² "Kochevniki," *Pravda*, May 25, 1960; "Ne shtukatury my, ne plotniki," *Sovetskaia Rossia*, July 10, 1977.

⁷⁴³ Valetov, 210. Next to "professional seasonal workers" and "summer brigades" Valetov suggests the third "type" of the brigades of seasonal workers – seasonal brigades with temporary membership. Referring to A. Brovin, Valetov contends that these brigades were formed on the spot out of local residents by the out-of-town foremen. He suggests that they were usually accidental people with little or no professional experience in construction and worked no more than one season. The foreman was the one hiring the workers and he (or she) tended to suggest considerably lower pay, appropriating most of the income from the project. While this form of temporary employment was not impossible, the media and the articles on shabashnichestvo, except the one by Brovin, have little mentioning of it. Presumably, professional shabashniki and "summer brigades" were significantly more habitual guests at the rural construction site than their occasional counterparts, since they had more experience and trust from the employers. The typologization of shabashniki, suggested by Valetov, might be useful if we take the self-organization principle as a criterion for categorization in one separate field where shabashnichestvo was flourishing – small-scale construction. However, as I have already mentioned earlier in this chapter, shabashnichestvo was not strictly attached to any specific industry or profession, it crossed social, educational, age, and even gender boundaries; while it was usually associated with brigade subcontracting, in urban (and sometimes rural as well) environment shabashniki worked individually, offering their professional services for small-scale repair works or in taxi driving. Shabashnichestvo could be either part-time or vacation-time enterprise, or practiced as main or only source of income. Thus, phenomenon of shabashnichestvo was a label that encompassed moral judgment, relation to income, attitude to work and the degree of integration into the Soviet social system of wealth distribution, labor distribution, and centralized economy.

⁷⁴⁴ For more about city *shabashniki* going for seasonal work during vacations, see "My ne shabashniki," *Sovetskaia Rossia*, March 29, 1985; "Otpusk s brigadai," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 21, 1986; "Kto vmesto shabashnika, Ili ispoved' o 'dlinnom' ruble," *Sotsialisticheskaia industriia*, April 29, 1987.

outside of my primary research focus, but it certainly deserves greater attention, if only to emphasize heterogeneity of the practices and people amalgamated under the terms “shabashnik” and “shabashnichestvo”.

Male city professionals who preferred spending their paid vacation at rural construction sites instead of going to the Black Sea resorts with their families, were not immune to the public image of the shabashnik and its associations. In the late 1980s, in the pages of the Soviet press they carefully underlined that, “it seems that the times when it was considered unpatriotic to receive high payment for hard work have long gone,” but this excuse still delivered little comfort and hardly reconciled a former “grabber” with the socialist norms of society, which had only recently entered Perestroika. In order to ideologically redress the cultural profile of a nomadic shabashnik, put themselves in a more acceptable light, or even stress their ultimate necessity for fast completion of the rural construction, the members of such brigades usually stressed their temporary and strictly limited involvement in seasonal works (their official vacation was a maximum of 45 days) and their high professional status: “Simply everyone is there in our brigade: candidates of sciences, athletes, engineers, workers, programmers, journalists, and simply good guys.”⁷⁴⁵ In her research on the subsidiary earning strategies of Soviet academic specialists in the late 1980s, S.N. Bykova confirmed that academics, especially younger fellows, were frequently members of summer construction brigades. She calculated that 10–12 percent of those who choose summer shabashka as the source of supplementary income were junior research associates whose monthly wages were around 50–150 rubles. The number of senior research associates was 9 percent, and the heads of departments, 3 percent.⁷⁴⁶ For those young professionals who were at the beginning of their careers and just started having families it was easier to acknowledge that low wages were their main motive to join a temporary construction brigade.⁷⁴⁷ After spending his vacation at the construction site, a young engineer could supplement his family’s budget with the equivalent to half his permanent yearly income, which was a significant support, especially for those who rented their accommodation.⁷⁴⁸

Other arguments favored by the summer brigade members, included the continuation of the traditions of youth construction brigades, another Soviet state-sanctioned practice, which was supposed to support rural construction through involving students during their summer

⁷⁴⁵ “Kto vmesto shabashnika?”

⁷⁴⁶ Bykova, “Nereglamentirovannyi trud nauchnykh sotrudnikov,” 64.

⁷⁴⁷ Kruglianskaia, “S diplomom na zarabotki,” *Izvestiia*, December 13, 1985.

⁷⁴⁸ Voitovich and Nikiforak, “‘Perspektiven’ li sovremennyi shabashnik?” 132.

vacations. These trips, they suggested, facilitated the meeting of old friends decades after their graduation: “Ten years have past since I graduated from the institute, but me and my friends still spend our summers in the countryside. There we build different objects in the Udomel’ski raion, Kalininskaia oblast’.”⁷⁴⁹ Sometimes professional accomplishments and praise for the experience were combined:

My companions have great achievements at their main place of work. But it is absolutely clear to us that our achievements in science, art, and sport are due in no small part to our youth construction brigade. Collective work has truly educated us, taught genuine effort, has bound us by rare, special friendship. I think that for many of those, who used to be a [university] student, nearly all the brightest memories are related to the student construction brigade. ... And it seems completely illogical to us, the young specialists who have recently graduated from the universities and entered the spheres of production, science and art, to alienate ourselves from the mass movement of the Soviet studentship.⁷⁵⁰

In this manner, the rural construction trips were presented as loyalty to the student mass movement, the traditions of urban patronage over the countryside, the romantic allure of the rural climes, and the attractiveness of doing “something with one’s hands”. Some of these city professionals were deeply offended by the association with the unregulated, semi-legal phenomenon of *shabashnichestvo*: “The countryside enterprises are short of working hands, but at the main place of work we are looked askew, as if we ask for too much. We are often being confused with *shabashniki* — those who do not care what and how to build, as long as it is paid for with plum money, so big it cannot be legal.”⁷⁵¹

It is remarkable that the city professionals’ condescending attitude towards the countryside *shabashniki* was also shared by the village professionals. I happened to interview a representative of the village intelligentsia, a teacher and a former Communist Party member, who also did occasional construction and repair works in the village, as well as in other Ukrainian regions, in his free time. His activities could be easily qualified as “*shabashka*”, since they provided him with an additional income and digressed from his official duties. He reluctantly admitted that he did work with a construction brigade and earned some money that he used to buy a TV-set, but he refused to be mixed up with a social group which he called “swindlers” and “lumpenproles.”⁷⁵² His disdain towards labor migrants was similar to that of

⁷⁴⁹ “My ne shabashniki.”

⁷⁵⁰ “Otposk s brigadoi.”

⁷⁵¹ “Otposk s brigadoi.”

⁷⁵² Interview with Vasyl’, December 2014.

the official Party propaganda and the city shabashniki. As he considered himself to belong to a “dignified” profession, he rapidly assumed this identity in contrast to the morally questionable identity of the shabashniki. Two of his three sons were also teachers and intellectuals, who nevertheless had to occasionally join seasonal construction brigades in order to afford a car or a house. He took pride in their official career success, but avoided any extended discussion of their experience as shabashniki. Just as the official Soviet discourse employed the tactic of belittling the significance of shabashnichestvo as part of the Soviet economy, the village teacher suppressed its economic significance for his own family due to its image. His third son became a “full-time” shabashnik, and was treated like a black sheep in our discussion. His intellectual potential was admired by his father, but it was regretfully left “unrealized” since he chose the path of a “lumpenprole.” In the system of Soviet hierarchies, the shabashnik stood very low, and practices associated with this identity put a stain on the otherwise clean reputation of qualified specialists. Moreover, the shabashnik was often imagined as a rural, uneducated and ethnically inferior subject, a worker from the ethnic peripheries of Armenia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, or a hutsul. The city professionals’ distancing from the countryside shabashniki thus might have signaled not only unwillingness to be associated with their moral reputation, but also cultural racism.

While ostentatiously pushing the stereotype of shabashniki as grabbers, the self-proclaimed “good” and “honest” summer workers underlined their high level of labor management, work discipline, group cohesion, and professional technical skills. They found it difficult to deny that “the driving force of the shabashnik brigade was and still is the long ruble,”⁷⁵³ but they tried to distance themselves from this morally incriminating incentive and add virtue to their working vacations. They put emphasis on the discipline within the brigade, which was so strict that sometimes the experience of work in such collectives could re-educate idlers and alcoholics, who returned home as new men after having an opportunity to “work at full capacity,” “without nerves” and practically “in the wild.” They also claimed that it was they who might had been disadvantaged in terms of remuneration: the intensity of their labor allowed for the earlier completion of the objects, which regular construction workers would build for a longer period of time, but receive the same amount of money, or more:

Our working hours are, certainly, irregular. We have no days-off, everyone works on their own consciousness, we never let each other down. The local enterprises prefer us to the local workers.

Why? If our brigade, which consists of five people, can finish an object in 45 days, the local

⁷⁵³ “Kto vmesto shabashnika?”

construction workers extend the building to a year. Their payroll budget constitutes 9.000 rubles.

We earn 5.000.⁷⁵⁴

The money issue, however, was presented as secondary after the romantic attractiveness of the upcoming adventure in, for instance, the Russian Taiga: “the first thought was: new undiscovered places, romanticism, estimable force application during the vacation time.”⁷⁵⁵ The material incentive was even further sidelined by poeticizing of the idea of spending time in the countryside while working physically. The value of such trips was elevated as an opportunity to “better realize one’s potential,”⁷⁵⁶ challenge oneself, receive satisfaction from physical work, and even spend time in high intellectual exchange with representatives from different professions. The building experience was compared by one vacationist to the “emotional explosion,” related to the intensity and delight from work, the feeling that could only be found in extreme situations, like hiking or battle. The brigade was represented as a democratic workshop where everyone could test themselves, improve their endurance in labor, carry out team work, elect leaders and polish one’s leadership skills. The collectivist and productivist vocabulary was often used, presumably to highlight their adherence to communist work principles and distance themselves from their anti-social, morally ambiguous half-brothers, the shabashniki.

City professionals would leave the summer brigades as their careers advanced, wages increased, and living conditions improved, while the rural “professionals” relied on seasonal earnings throughout their lives. The social stigma of shabashnichestvo thus followed them, as, for many, seasonal labor migration was their main occupation. As I sought to show, from the point of view of the Soviet Moral code, work itself was judged not only by results, but also by the intentions of those who performed it. This put seasonal migrant workers in a difficult position, as their alleged self-interest and gain-oriented motivations undermined the value of their labor as “socially useful.” While they found ways to arrange substantial contracts, they were denied social recognition and state respect, as was awarded to “honest workers.” Official moral values, however, were in conflict with the economic significance of seasonal migrants’ work, as it surfaced distinctly in the oral interviews. The issue of economic significance became central to the workers’ own perception of the value of their labor, and crucial for their identity. I will proceed with exploring this issue in the following section.

⁷⁵⁴ “Kto vmesto shabashnika?”

⁷⁵⁵ “Levyi podriad,” *Sovetskaia Rossia*, June 13, 1982.

⁷⁵⁶ “Kto vmesto shabashnika?”

CONTESTING NOTIONS OF WORK

“Professional” migrant workers met accusations of immoral labor behavior with infuriated resistance. For many, seasonal work was an annually repeated activity, not the occasional side job, to which city shabashniki resorted during their summer break. Transcarpathian migrant workers’ sense of identity and self-respect had a tighter link to physical work than that of the members of summer brigades. For them, seasonal labor migration was never a romantic retreat to the village, spiced up with the challenge of physical endurance and sweetened with the “long ruble”. It was a period of hard work and concentration, which was, in their eyes, a reason for respect and recognition, as well as the legitimization of their “inflated” remuneration. Work performance was a core point in the seasonal migrants’ narratives, their self-representation and their feeling of self-worth. The contrast with their portrayal in the Soviet media was striking, as they resented the very term shabashniki: “Yes, everyone called us “shabashniki. Nothing else. ... [But] Work like shabashniki, and you will earn accordingly.”⁷⁵⁷ With this, Yosyp presented the criterion for migrant men’s self-assessment as (good) workers: their exceptional industriousness.

As it was mentioned earlier in this thesis, the seasonal migrants’ self-image as industrious workers was the inverse of the perception of local workers, whom they found unmotivated and unproductive. This contrast was further extended by the migrants’ attribution of their industriousness to their “ethnic character”. However, it was not “Ukrainian” industriousness that they were praising, but their local “Transcarpathian” identity. The teacher Vasyl’ suggested that his village’s prosperity was due to the hard work of the local people:

Our people are very hard-working. No one can take it from them. [Especially] the mountainous districts. ...our people — [the villages of] Keretski, Berezhnyky, Bron’ka, Sukha, Dovge — are woodcutters from time immemorial. When they worked in Russia or even in Ukraine — one brigade worked for three or four [local ones]. ... And you think they worked eight hours? No way. From dusk till dawn! It’s already dark, but they are still in the forest. In the morning — once the sun is up — they are already on the pitch. When I was building a school in Kirovohrad region, locals told us: “Good people, we do not see neither when you go to work nor when you come back.”⁷⁵⁸

The endurance of Transcarpathian migrant workers surfaced again in this citation as a cause

⁷⁵⁷ Interview with Yosyp, 2014.

⁷⁵⁸ Interview with Vasyl’, December 2014.

for ethnic pride. The industriousness of the Hutsuls was compared to a tractor in their machine-like persistence in accomplishing tasks. Woodcutting (and woodrafting), as their traditional ethnic craft, was underlined as a skill that had a history and reputation. The perception of Transcarpathians as skilled woodcutters also infiltrated into the regional migration policy making, which was reflected in the orgnabor quotas to the Siberian forestry enterprises.

Industriousness was inherent to the productivity discourse, which acquired a central place in the late Soviet work ideology. Thus, emphasis on industriousness had the discursive potential to redeem some of the shabashniki's activities within the Soviet system of values. Even though seasonal migrants frequently admitted to their opaque relationships with the law and confirmed a number of corrupt schemes that were described in the media, their belief in the honesty of their physical labor psychologically outweighed their semi-legal status. In this sense, their ethics of intensive physical work was concordant with the Soviet productivist drive.

The accusation that the “long ruble” motivated seasonal workers was offensive, but not to their dignity. It was offensive as it denied their right to receive fair payment for their selfless work. As far as “socially useful” labor was concerned, seasonal migrants were convinced that their social participation was of high importance not only for the enterprises, but for communities, especially for those particular places where they worked. They admitted that there were cases when they were first met with suspicion, which could even result in difficulties finding accommodation, but that the locals would soon get used to them, learn their names, and even have mutual celebrations. Such situations were especially discussed by those migrants who returned to the same place of work season after season. With confessing such emotional, and not only economic, attachment, seasonal workers also negotiated the accusations of the “uprootedness” of their lifestyle. Perhaps omitting the stories that involved conflicts, seasonal labor migrants depicted their presence as amicable and even vital, since it was them who helped the locals in the Russian periphery with wood supplies and small household chores.

Industriousness, which resulted in high earnings, was also a way to assert the shabashniki's social worth. They turned the argument that they were overpaid into a tool to negotiate their social position. Two brothers who worked seasonally in the Russian forestry, emphasized that the money they earned made them more financially comfortable than those who occupied higher social and professional positions:

F.: The head of the village, a position for which people were fighting, he was a zero against us, the lumbermen! His salary was 70–80 rubles. We had the money, and he didn't. ... We were not

billionaires, of course, but we had enough cash. ... We could even earn more than the head of a collective farm if we were lucky. This is why we were so eager to work [in Russia]. There were seasons when we came back with 10,000 rubles. ... It was good money. ... An engineer was not making that much. ... There, in Russia, the director of the timber enterprise did not have more than 250 rubles. The employees of the enterprises where we worked – women, accountants – they envied us. “Look,” they used to say, “look how the hutsuls are raking the dough.” And the director tells them, “You go and [try to] work [like them].”

M.: Everyone called us “grabbers.” But they forgot to mention that we were toiling like galley slaves.

F.: They only said we came for the “long ruble.”

M.: Long ruble...

F.: We were indeed sweating blood. We did not have our families there, so we worked from dusk till dawn, and we lived where we worked – in the forest.⁷⁵⁹

High wages were instrumental in asserting migrant workers’ superiority: they referred to their earnings as markers of success and a basis for comparison with those who enjoyed higher social positions, such as administrators and professionals. By using money (which they earned while “sweating blood”) as a measurement of achievement, they symbolically belittled other occupations, which tended to require skills and backgrounds that the migrants themselves lacked, such as professional training, higher education and social status. While the official discourse blamed them for exploiting the deficiencies of the socialist economic organization, they used their informal financial privileges to invert social hierarchies to their advantage and present themselves as luckier, richer, and more successful.

The migrant workers’ sense of entitlement to higher wages was grounded in their self-imposed work ethics, oriented towards productivity and achievement, and their austerity of living standards. Against the background of labor shortages and generally poor work discipline in forestry and construction, they saw themselves as the unrecognized heroes of labor, deprived of public acknowledgement, but at least appropriately paid. In the seasonal migrants’ opinion, their wages were nothing but fair considering the economic advantages of the work they provided. In underlining their industriousness, migrant workers were reclaiming dignity and the social value of their labor. They fought the degrading public image of “grabbers” and “dishonest workers” by redirecting the ethical argument away from the official rhetoric of the

⁷⁵⁹ Interview with Fadii and Mykola, January 2015.

moral code, and instead stressed their unacknowledged contribution and economic worth. Material remuneration was inbuilt into their logic of “fair pay for fair work” and generated a sense of pride rather than a sense of shame.

CONCLUSION

The notion of shabashnichestvo, as I have shown, was prone to shifts of meanings and redefinition by various actors, such as journalists, party officials, concerned citizens, local managers, police authorities, and shabashniki themselves. Trying to capture the essence of shabashnichestvo, N. Kuznetsova and O. Osipenko suggested that what united shabashniki in the sphere of service and migrant shabashniki in construction and agriculture, was “the nature of these phenomena. In both cases, from the economic point of view, they are spontaneous reactions to the objectively existing demand in society, which is being looked away by the state organizations, or which the state organizations for some reason cannot fulfill.”⁷⁶⁰ Thus, beyond moral connotations, the term “shabashniki” had a set of economic meanings, which were also far from uniform. The shabashnik was filling the gaps in the mismanagements of the centralized economy, while at the same time exposing the clash between Soviet economic theory and practice.

Next to the “kulak,” “Trotskyite,” “hooligan,” and “tuneiadets,” the shabashnik became one of the Soviet vocabulary’s slippery labels of “indistinct social categories... that were often vulnerable to overinterpretation, outright invention, and arbitrary abuse.”⁷⁶¹ Brian LaPierre’s general evaluation of the fuzziness, instability and amorphousness of the understanding of one of these labels — hooligan — in Soviet legal practice and everyday life, can be applied to the discursive shaping of the category of the “shabashnik” as “an ascribed identity whose symbolic power and prominence rose with the regime’s determination to purge its population of the people and behaviors unworthy of its bright communist future.”⁷⁶² Unlike hooligan, however, whose negative profile hardly raised any controversy, the shabashnik was an ambiguous figure,

⁷⁶⁰ Kuznetsova, Osipenko, “Shabashnichestvo: sut’ da delo,” 48.

⁷⁶¹ LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia*, 10. For the discussion of the label “Trotskyite,” see J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939, Updated and Abridged Edition*, trans. Mr Benjamin Sher, (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010), 272–274; for the discussion of the label “kulak,” see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 28–32; for the discussion of the label “hooligan,” see LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia*, 8–13; 28–31.

⁷⁶² LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia*, 10.

balancing on the border between legality and illegality, economic necessity and civil irresponsibility, immoral self-interest and unprecedented productivity. The general public distanced itself from the shabashnik, attributing him with an anti-social kind of “morality, psychology, state of mind, or even different philosophy,”⁷⁶³ which made him a threat to the economic balance, and a bad example for the youth. The official ideology shied away from him, while local managers could not refuse his services. His values definitely clashed with the modernizing communist project of the post-Stalinist Soviet state, but all attempts to discard him faced his utter economic necessity.

The official discourse placed seasonal migrants at the intersection between collective social good and self-interested individualist gain. The schematic dualism of “individualist” and “collective,” as it was articulated in the Soviet dogma, however, presented a false dichotomy, one that exclusively served the goals of the regime: legitimizing an obdurate ideology and, in this case, diverting attention from the inefficiency of the Soviet labor process. The real conflict laid elsewhere: namely, between labor practices based on different kinds of workers’ individualist motivations of adaptation to the Soviet labor regime. Migrant workers were certainly individualist in their economic behavior, but so was any worker in the Soviet Union. The atomized individualism of the average Soviet worker manifested itself in the privatization of work time, demotivation, psychological disengagement from an alienating labor process, and the subsequent neglect of its outcome, especially in the rural regions, where even the prospect of a higher income through intensified work did not guarantee any improvement in living conditions. Seasonal migrants, however, collectively developed self-exploitative work routines in order to maximize their income through increased productivity. Paradoxically, it was they who actually operated as a self-motivated work collective, and their coordination facilitated individual (and individualist) achievement through informal bargaining.

The labor migrants’ work practices affected the articulation of their social identity. In their life stories, narrators from rural Transcarpathia emphasized their labor performance as a core reason of their success as employees and the basis for self-respect and the respect of others. Although publicly labeled as “grabbers” and “parasites,” seasonal migrants managed to preserve their sense of respectability by negotiating the meanings of “socially useful labor” produced by the late Soviet ideology and conveyed by the media. Meanwhile, our understanding of seasonal labor migration will not be complete without a deeper exploration of

⁷⁶³ “Shabashnik: blago ili zlo.”

the motivations for this endeavor. In order to reveal them, it is crucial to look closer at the pre-Soviet local values and to trace their transformations under the shifting political regimes, since it was the approval of local communities that justified seasonal migration even though it clashed with the official socialist morality.

7. CONSUMPTION: INDIVIDUAL HOUSES AS DRIVERS OF MIGRATION

INTRODUCTION

Dmytro and I are sitting in his kitchen in Keretski village. Dmytro was born in 1933 and is 82 years old. He patiently answers my questions about the post-war socialist transformation of his region, when the predominantly rural Transcarpathia was incorporated into the economic and political body of the Soviet state. Then we talk at length about his experiences as a seasonal labor migrant, employed by Russian forestry enterprises. Starting in 1955, after having served his term in the army, he left Keretski with a group of co-villagers to explore job opportunities in the Perm oblast', RSFSR. From then on, seasonal earnings would become the main source of his family's income. When I asked Dmytro what he and his family were collecting the money for, he made a wide circle with his arms pointing at the walls, the floor, and the ceiling: "Well, for this." A new house, or renovations, were mentioned in every interview as a primary goal of the migrants. This goal was usually stated with an air of obviousness, reflecting the presumed commonality of the desire to own a large, modern, and well-built house. This "commonality" of the desire to own a house, I suggest, was produced in post-war Transcarpathia as the result of transformed property relations and shifting consumption standards.

In the Soviet sociological tradition, Maria Shabanova was the first to explicitly discuss axiological configurations and consumption habits as a cultural driver for seasonal migration. Shabanova's research was based on 290 interviews with migrant workers from different areas in the Soviet Union, whom she contacted in the mid-1980s in Altai region, Siberia. The survey allowed her to investigate the origins, social background, motivations, and objectives of the seasonal migrants.⁷⁶⁴ She came to the conclusion that:

Even under the strong centralized power, social community can also strongly influence both the composition of the needs of an individual, and the ways they can be fulfilled: through the customs, traditions, respect to those achieves certain social statuses, consumption standards, who follows certain examples of labor, migration, family, consumption and other kinds of behavior, and the condemnation of those, who do not achieve them (or do not follow them). Without taking into account the socio-cultural specificities of the way of life, the values of the representatives of different

⁷⁶⁴ Shabanova, "Sovremennoie otkhodnichestvo kak sotsiokul'turnyi fenomen," 55-63; Shabanova, *Sezonnaia i postoiannaia migratsia naseleniia v sel'skom raione*.

ethnic communities, which take part in this process, it is difficult to protect it from the judgment from the position, which is alien to *otkhodniki's* system of values, different life style norms, it is impossible to understand their needs and the role of the departures for the earnings in the alteration of their socio-economic standing and social advancement of the individuals and the members of their families.⁷⁶⁵

Among the desired goods and purposes for the “migration money”, Shabanova’s respondents mentioned weddings (theirs and their children’s), cars, motorcycles, vacations, and other items of long-term use: furniture, color TV sets, carpets; they also saved for the future and wanted to help their parents.⁷⁶⁶ Many of these items were also mentioned by the narrators from Transcarpathia. Local traditional weddings used to be (and still are) important social events that tested the bride and grooms’ family wealth and hospitality, and tended to involve all extended kin, neighbors, friends, with guests numbering two or three hundred people. Seasonal migration helped fund these monumental receptions. Personal vehicles became more accessible in the 1970s, and around this time a number of labor migrants acquired this prestigious commodity to the envy of the whole village. However, in the narrated biographies of the migrants, neither of these had the symbolic meaning of the construction of an individual house. Shabanova’s research also indicated that a high proportion of migrants were in need of houses. This proportion varied according to age and was the highest among married men from 17–39 years old, who did not have separate dwellings and resided with their parents.⁷⁶⁷ The consumption standards and demands also changed through time. The growing number of personal vehicles in the 1970s is probably the best example. It is impossible to compare the change in the demand for personal housing among the Soviet labor migrants, since no such survey was taken in the 1960s or 1970s, but the univocal consensus among the narrators regarding the centrality of construction to their migration pursuits allows us to assume that it was inbuilt into the expectations of their communities.

In the rapidly growing literature on the connection between transnational migration and construction projects, “migrant houses”⁷⁶⁸ or “remittance houses”⁷⁶⁹ have been discussed for

⁷⁶⁵ Shabanova, “Sovremennoie otkhodnichestvo kak sotsiokul’turnyi fenomen,” 56.

⁷⁶⁶ Shabanova, *Sezonnaia i postoiannaia migratsia naseleniia*, 146-147.

⁷⁶⁷ Shabanova, 146.

⁷⁶⁸ Paolo Boccagni, “What’s in a (Migrant) House? Changing Domestic spaces, the Negotiation of Belonging and Home-making in Ecuadorian Migration,” *Housing, Theory and Society* 31, No. 3 (2014): 277-293.

⁷⁶⁹ Sarah Lynn Lopez, “The Remittance House: Architecture of Migration in Rural Mexico,” *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Form* 17, no. 2 (2010): 33-52.

locations as diverse as Mexico, Albania,⁷⁷⁰ Uzbekistan,⁷⁷¹ and others.⁷⁷² Domestic spaces built by migrants in their places of origin were explored by a number of authors as a source and site of belonging, as well as “a means to negotiate their [migrants’] social status vis-à-vis non-migrants”,⁷⁷³ “at once a consumer item and an icon of family and community values”,⁷⁷⁴ and as a marker of status, pride, social prestige, and success overseas.⁷⁷⁵ While this trend of literature is helpful in forging conceptual tools to capture the social meanings, as well as individual motivations behind the phenomenon, and also provides a compelling comparative framework, migrant houses in socialist Transcarpathia can hardly be added to this plethora of inquiries as just another case study. The specificity of individual building in Transcarpathia requires the careful reconstruction of the immediate and remote historical contexts that conditioned changes and continuities in the value that was ascribed to the material domestic spaces inside “sending communities.” On the one hand, building an individual house during late socialism was an enterprise and a process that unfolded within the constraints of the “economy of shortages,” under the structural regulations of professional agencies, and within the ideological climate that contributed to shaping understandings of what the domicile should be. On the other hand, local history and memory in Transcarpathia had an equally influential, if not stronger impact on the crystallization of the idea that a good house was a symbol of a good living.

Given the construction boom in post-war rural Transcarpathia, my main question is: what was a seasonal worker from Transcarpathia doing in building a house in the times of late socialism? To answer this question, I will emphasize the historicity of the house as an object of work and desire in order to claim that for seasonal migrants from the Transcarpathian countryside, the

⁷⁷⁰ Dimitris Dalakoglou, “Migrating-Remitting-“Building”-Dwelling: House-Making as “Proxy” presence in Post-Socialist Albania,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16, no. 4 (2010): 761-777.

⁷⁷¹ Madeleine Reeves, “Migration, Masculinity, and Transformations of Social Space in the Sokh Valley, Uzbekistan,” in *Migration and Social Upheaval as The Face of Globalization in Central Asia* (Brill, 2013), 307-331; Sergei Abashin, “Vozvrashcheniie domoi: semeinyie i migratsionnyie stsenarii v Uzbekistane,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2015): 125-165.

⁷⁷² On the migrant home see also Bruno Riccio, “Senegal Is Our Home: The Anchored Nature of Senegalese Transnational Networks,” in *New Approach to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home*, ed. Nadjé Al-Ali and Khalid Koser (London, New-York: Routledge, 2002); Kari Telle, “Entangled Biographies: Rebuilding a Sasak House,” *Ethnos* 72, no. 2 (2007): 195-218; Jessica B. Leineweaver, “Raising the Roof in the Transnational Andes: Building Houses, Forging Kinship,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 4 (2009): 777-796; Lothar Smith, Valentina Mazzucato, “Constructing Homes, Building Relationships: Migrant Investments in Houses,” *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 100, no. 5 (2009): 662-673. On the meanings of home, and migrant home in particular, see Alison Blunt, Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London, 2006): 196-252.

⁷⁷³ Boccagni, “What’s in a (Migrant) House?” 279-280.

⁷⁷⁴ Peri L. Fletcher, *La Casa de Mis Sueños: Dreams of Home in a Transnational Mexican Community* (Westview Press, 1999), 5.

⁷⁷⁵ Boccagni, “What’s in a (Migrant) House?”; Russell King, “Generalizations from the History of Return Migration,” in *Return Migration: Journey of Hope or Despair?* B. Grosh ed., (1999), 7-56.

house used to be (and still is) the node of social relationships that marked their standing in the community and reflected their attitudes to the past, present, and future. I will start by highlighting the political implications of post-war rural construction in Transcarpathia and the official narratives that represented this phenomenon, as a proof of the socialist system's success and a symbol of progress. Then, I will contrast these narratives to the actual practices of building individual houses which, for the most part, were carried out without state support, and sometimes even contrary to the official regulations. After "setting the scene" with the two mentioned sections, I will introduce the late socialist migrant house, and analyze it as both a sign of the shift in consumption habits and relations of production in the region, and as an expression of the desire of belonging to the local community by adhering to the values and aspirations, which themselves had roots in the recent pre-Soviet past, and the opportunities provided by the socialist transformations in the region.

THE END OF THE STRAW ROOF: BREAKING AWAY FROM THE POLITICAL PAST

Upon entering the geographical and political space of the USSR in 1945, Transcarpathia also entered official Soviet discourse as "the youngest" of the Union's territories. The youth of the region referred less to the duration of its inclusion within the USSR, as to its overall "immaturity" or "backwardness" in economic, cultural, and social terms, as compared to the advanced social structures of the Soviet Union. This backwardness had a political root, namely, the historical neglect of the region by the "foreign colonizers" and the social relations based on exploitation. A Soviet historian wrote about Western Ukraine and Transcarpathia: "Before joining ... the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic the toiling masses (*trudiashchiesia*) of the region were, in essence, a reserve of cheap workforce on half-colonial terms."⁷⁷⁶ The political explanation shifted the blame for "backwardness" to the rulers and away from the peasants (who were not favored by Marxism-Leninism as a social class), but also left them powerless to change their dire situation on their own. They were bound to await intervention from a stronger (and more enlightened) political actor, who would equip them culturally and socially to make the swift leap from the backwardness of the Middle Ages to twentieth-century modern life, and the Communist Party took that mission upon itself.

⁷⁷⁶ I. F. Symonenko, *Sotsialistychni peretvorennia u pobuti trudiashchykh sela Neresnytsi Zakarpats'koi oblasti* (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Akademii Nauk URSSR, 1957), 5.

Peasant “backwardness” was explored by Yanni Kotsonis as an ideology in itself, a “self-contained explanatory framework, a way to diagnose and lend meaning to facts, and a basis for recommending action or inaction.”⁷⁷⁷ As a category of historical description, “backwardness” had its own history, both in the West and in Imperial Russia and was usually paired with “progress” at its opposite pole.⁷⁷⁸ Together they set a conceptual framework that directed a teleological historical narration towards change and modernization. In this teleological manner, the pre-war backwardness of the Transcarpathian peasants became a mirror of progressive changes that were launched in the region as soon as the Soviet Union’s power was secured. After World War II, the official discourse, as represented in the media and the new socialist histories of the region, presented all aspects of pre-war life in Transcarpathia as “explained and were explained by” cultural and social backwardness: poverty induced by high taxation, exploitation, and debt; diseases, bad hygiene, and high mortality rates; landlessness, unemployment, and emigration; and overwhelming illiteracy among peasants. Their customs, beliefs, construction practices, and farm management techniques were often described as “archaic”⁷⁷⁹:

Until relatively recently ... the peasants of Transcarpathia ... were using antediluvian wooden tools of labor. Meagre huts leaned on the ground with their roofs. They didn’t even have chimneys, because the authorities charged a tax for it. [Peasants] fired a furnace black (*topili po-chernomu*), and the life was black.⁷⁸⁰

The results of communist intervention were carefully monitored and grouped under the rubric of progress: nationalization of private property and the implementation of new industries; socialist reconstruction of agriculture, compulsory public education and public health facilities; and the eradication of unemployment and overall “economic and cultural backwardness.” In a nutshell, already by the 1950s, socialist historical narration presented the rapid social modernization of Transcarpathia, a region that was subjected to the “half-feudal and capitalist forms of exploitation” only several decades ago.⁷⁸¹ The “progressivist” narrative prevailed in Soviet historical writing about the region until the very last days of the regime.⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁷ Yanni Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural Cooperatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861-1914* (Macmillan Press, 1999), 4.

⁷⁷⁸ Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward*, 5–7.

⁷⁷⁹ I. F. Simonenko, “Byt naseleniia Zakarpatskoi oblasti,” 63.

⁷⁸⁰ Iu. Il’nitskii, “Konets solomennoi kryshi,” *Pravda*, October 6, 1966.

⁷⁸¹ Symonenko, *Sotsialistychni peretvorennia*, 5.

⁷⁸² See, for example: *Ukrainskie karpaty: Ekonomika*, ed. M. I. Dolishnii (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1988); *Ukrainskie karpaty: Istorii*, ed. Iu. Iu. Slivka et al (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1989).

The transformation of the everyday life of the peasants was yet another symbol of the “new life of Transcarpathia.”⁷⁸³ “The new birth”⁷⁸⁴ of a Transcarpathian village was marked by public and individual construction. Alongside newly built hospitals, schools, libraries, kindergartens, stadiums, and tea houses,⁷⁸⁵ individual houses were also reported to be increasing in number and improving in quality. In 1968, a Transcarpathian regional newspaper announced that 96,000 residential houses were built during the last twenty years. At that moment, this astonishing number constituted half of the whole housing stock (*zhiloi fond*) of the region and reflected the unprecedented construction boom in local history.⁷⁸⁶ The quality of the changes was also a subject of pride and exemplified the region’s fast reconstruction:

Regarding the scale and the quality of the residential construction in the villages of our oblast’, they are quite well known. During the Soviet years virtually every village was rebuilt. On the place of the old huts there are now new, contemporarily furnished houses built of stone, tufa, or bricks. The houses made of wood also cannot be compared to the ones that used to be built in the region previously. These modern rural houses are an eloquent symbol of the new life of Transcarpathians.⁷⁸⁷

As this quotation shows, improved housing was rendered to symbolize the growth of culture and general “rebirth” of the region under the Soviet system in tangible, material ways: the walls became higher, the windows were larger, the rooms were brighter, and the infamous “hut with a straw roof,” a symbol of recent poverty and “backwardness,” was now placed in the local open-air museum as a grim reminder of the region’s social past and a contrast to the transformed present.⁷⁸⁸ This contrast was of major historical and political significance. The memory of “those parlous times when one had to break his back to have a roof over his head” or “to go overseas to make some money”⁷⁸⁹ needed to be preserved in order to emphasize the scale of the region’s progressive changes, which were frequently used as proof of the socialist system’s success.⁷⁹⁰ A reporter from Transcarpathia explained the emblematic importance of local history in the following words: “It is necessary to sometimes recall the terrifying past. In

⁷⁸³ “Speech of the elected official Turianytsia,” *Pravda*, 14 March 1949. On the representation of Transcarpathian population as accepting the new way of life see also Ia. S. Turchaninov, ed., *Narodzene novym chasom* (Uzhhorod: Karpaty, 1974).

⁷⁸⁴ Iu. Il’nitskii, “Konets solomennoi kryshi.”

⁷⁸⁵ I. Shevchenko, “Sela meniaiut oblik,” *Zakarpats’ka pravda*, February 7, 1965.

⁷⁸⁶ “Selam – harnishaty,” *Zakarpats’ka pravda*, February 24, 1968.

⁷⁸⁷ P. Nadobenko, “Kraina novosil’,” *Zakarpats’ka pravda*, January 6, 1979.

⁷⁸⁸ Iu. Il’nitskii, “Konets solomennoi kryshi.”

⁷⁸⁹ M. Rishko, “Novosillia,” *Zakarpats’ka pravda*, February 23, 1975.

⁷⁹⁰ I. Shevchenko, “Sela meniaiut oblik.” “Selo nashe onovylos’,” *Zakarpats’ka pravda*, July 28, 1966; “Khoroshiut’ nashi sela,” *Zakarpats’ka pravda*, March 24, 1968.

order to value our present. And by comparing our Soviet way of life to the capitalist ... to see the advantages of socialism more clearly.”⁷⁹¹

Transcarpathia’s transformation from one of the least industrialized and “modernized” peripheries in Europe, populated by wooden huts before World War II, into a “land of housewarmings”⁷⁹² (*strana novoseliū*), was instrumental to the official discourse in its demonstration that political change brought visible improvement to the everyday life (*byt*) of the peasants. The changes in construction materials and building techniques, as well as the number of newly built or renovated houses, supported claims regarding the small economic miracle in the youngest of the Soviet regions, at first sight at least. Seasonal migrants from Transcarpathia had a vivid memory of these changes, and confirmed that their villages “were totally rebuilt,” during 1960–1970s, after which some families built or renovated their houses more than once. Their narratives of these changes, however, were disconnected from the trope of “progress” and politically guided social transformation. Instead, they depicted these changes in terms of personal achievement and the results of the hard work of either those who chose to migrate and “earn for the house,” or those who found ways to secure financial and material resources without leaving the region. From their point of view, the involvement of the state in individual construction was neither direct nor completely supportive. Rather, the peasants themselves actively explored the formal and informal opportunities for construction, which became available upon Transcarpathia’s incorporation into the state-socialist institutional structures.

In what follows, I claim that the rapid increase in personal rural construction in post-war Transcarpathia was strongly influenced by the values of local communities. The context of the reproduction and partial reinvention of these values will be discussed before I address the subject of the migrant house, which was at once a project that emerged in close connection to these values, a means of adhering to them and, therefore, establishing the link of belonging, and, eventually, an attempt to turn the material dwelling into a symbol of personal success.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

⁷⁹² Nadobenko, “Kraina novosil’.”

HOUSE AS A DWELLING IN THE TRANSCARPATHIAN PRE-COMMUNIST RURAL CONSTRUCTION

In the late 1950s and 1960s, resolving the “housing question” (*kvartirnyi vopros*) was put on the state agenda as a political priority. Within Khrushchev’s ambitious program of building communism and “catching up with and overtaking” the capitalist West with regards to the living standards of the populace, the housing campaign became one of the most significant post-Stalinist reforms that affected urban dwellers and rural-urban migrants on a mass scale. From 1956–1970, the Soviet housing fund was increased by 34,176,000 apartments and houses,⁷⁹³ and 126,500,000 people moved into completely new dwellings, either built by the Soviet government or constructed individually.⁷⁹⁴ During this period, over one third of the population moved into newly constructed family apartments.⁷⁹⁵ Housing for all became an inevitable component of the Soviet government’s claim for legitimacy, inherited also by the Brezhnev administration, which was compelled to keep up with Khrushchev’s housing drive and promised to eliminate housing shortages in the upcoming decade.⁷⁹⁶

While city folk could expect to eventually receive a separate flat granted by the state or a workplace cooperative, countryside construction was a different matter. The urban mass housing campaign was initiated and carried out by the government with the participation of architects and civil engineers as an unprecedented act of state sponsorship, which ultimately strengthened the state’s paternalistic role as welfare provider. An urban resident’s right to a separate, one-family apartment was guaranteed by their registration (*propiska*) in the city or their employment record, and the only formal obstacle that separated them from an apartment was the length of the waiting list. In the countryside, however, the centralized construction of residential houses was considerably more precarious and less well organized. Even though some state organizations and collective farms were held responsible for the construction of residential houses, their help in housing construction in the Western oblasti was miniscule. In effect, rural dwellers had to secure deficit materials and organize construction on their own. Grossman

⁷⁹³ These figures are tabulated using official statistics in *Narodnoie khoziaistvo SSSR v 1974 g.* (Moscow: Statistika, 1975), 581.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 585. For the comparative analysis of the new housing construction pace in the Soviet Union before 1946 and after 1956, see Christine Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 2-3.

⁷⁹⁵ See Susan Reid, “Makeshift Modernity. DIY, Craft and the Virtuous Homemaker in New Soviet Housing of the 1960s,” *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 2, no. 2 (2014): 87–124.

⁷⁹⁶ Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 162; Steven E. Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin* (Washington, D.C.: Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press / Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 9.

claimed that by 1975, a great share of the new individual houses in the USSR were privately constructed.⁷⁹⁷ In the Western regions of Ukraine, 98 percent of residential houses were built by private persons. In Transcarpathia, the share was 88,7 percent, while in the mountainous districts it was even higher.⁷⁹⁸ Thus, the state was financially more distant from the housing demands of the rural population than in the case of urban housing. So, for countryside dwellers, housing was a private matter that involved private investments and labor arrangements.

According to Taras Protseviat, who conducted his research on housing in the Western regions of Ukraine in the late 1980s, the Transcarpathian construction boom corresponded to the period between the late 1950s and early 1970s, and then steadily declined.⁷⁹⁹ During this period, 50–70 percent of the housing was renewed in the majority of villages, and by the end of the 1980s, up to 90 percent of all individual houses in the region were built during Soviet times.⁸⁰⁰ Protseviat did not take into account the rebuilding of houses already constructed during the Soviet rule, otherwise the figures could have revealed the “waves” of individual building that followed local fashions and changes in consumer demands. However, even his general calculations demonstrated the tremendous effort by local individuals and families, who completely renewed their living spaces over 20–40 years.

I suggest that the intensification of individual construction was linked to the importance of private property among the Transcarpathian peasants, which had evolved under the influence of the socialist structural (and ideological) transformations and informed the shift in local consumption habits. In Transcarpathia, the 1950s and 1960s were marked by the fundamental transformations in the way of life, brought about by sovietization. The historical ruptures that the residents of Transcarpathian towns and villages experienced during these decades were largely informed by the changes introduced in order to “catch up” with the Soviet socialism, while the USSR as a whole was preparing to “catch up” with the capitalist West. In the post-war years, which were also the last decade of Stalin’s rule, Transcarpathia was subjected to the policies that the rest of the Soviet Union experienced in the 1930s. For the Transcarpathian countryside, the collectivization of agriculture was one of the most radical, life changing reforms that altered the relations of land use and property, conditions of production, and, ultimately,

⁷⁹⁷ Grossman, “The Second Economy of the USSR,” 26.

⁷⁹⁸ Iu. V. Samoilovich, *Arkhitektura sel'skogo usadbnogo zhilishcha zapadnogo regiona Ukrainskoi SSR*, [Dissertation manuscript] (Kiev: 1987), 22.

⁷⁹⁹ T. I. Protseviat, *Sel'skoe zhilishche Ukrainskikh Karpat sovetskogo perioda*, [Disstertation manuscript], (Moscow: 1990), 15.

⁸⁰⁰ Protseviat, 15-16.

the economic position of a household. The local collectivization campaigns, in general, repeated the common pattern of collectivization from the early 1930s, including the coercion and blackmailing of those who resisted, and the *dekulakization* and deportation of wealthy peasants. By 1950, the collectivization of agriculture in Transcarpathia was complete. Cattle and land became collective property, and access to a strictly measured private plot became available upon the condition of at least one family member participating in socialist production, agricultural or otherwise.

After the experience of the shock of the “accelerated” Stalinism, the following decade became the time of the steady, *longue durée* adaptation of the local population to the Soviet social structures and institutions, as well as the exploration of the ways of inhabiting them and negotiating the new rules. This was a period of gradual transition from lifestyles that were economically centered around family household production and subsistence, to state administered economic activities, which conditioned the cultural changes in values and attitudes. For heuristic purposes, I will call this process “sovietization,” keeping in mind that refurbishing or production of the local values was evolving through the tensions between the old and the new, rather than being a result of a passive reception of the ideological prescriptions introduced by the Soviet regime.

The transformation of the idea of house and home was driven by the changes to the countryside under sovietization. In order to see the change in the symbolic value of an individual house, it is vital to analyze its position in the peasants’ microcosm during pre-communist times. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a dwelling house was part of a farmstead — a complex of agricultural production buildings that supported the life of a family. Among these were a barn, a haymow, and a thrashing floor. The arrangement of the production buildings depended on the availability of land, which in turn depended both on the material standing of a family and the peculiarities of the mountainous landscape. Thus, on the mountain slopes they were often separated, and the farmsteads themselves were placed distantly from each other, usually along the hill torrent.⁸⁰¹ In the valleys, if the homestead was too narrow, the household buildings were lined close to each other or even structurally connected to each other and to the house itself under a single roof, forming a so-called “long house”. Given the land scarcity, the emergence of such “block” constructions was explained by better insulation, the possibility to

⁸⁰¹ I. F. Simonenko, “Byt naseleniia Zakarpatskoi oblasti (Pomaterialam ekspeditsii 1945-1947 gg.),” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 1 (1948): 74.

economize on building materials, and the simplification of tending to household chores and livestock management.⁸⁰²

In the Chapter 2, I discussed the importance of land as property for the material and social existence of a peasant family. In the nineteenth century, the basic unit of the Transcarpathian rural economy was individual small holders, and land was at the top of the hierarchy of desirable goods, especially in the highland areas where land scarcity resulted in the hereditary partitioning of the plots. Land and labor were tied into a close relationship that informed the idea of personhood. In particular, the praise and respect for the achievements in proper private property management went to the male head of the family, strengthening his authority not only in the family, but also in the local community. Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery claim that the peasant “hegemonic ideology of personhood” was “centered on the well-to-do farmer.”⁸⁰³ This ideology had three main elements: “social embeddedness, independent possession, and strong character, of which industriousness was a central virtue.”⁸⁰⁴ While social embeddedness with kin, neighbors and the broader village community was truly an identity-shaping and status determining factor for peasants in Transcarpathia, we will have to intentionally omit discussing it in order to narrow down the argument, and instead proceed with untangling the connection between personhood and material possessions, as epitomized by the land and its relationship to labor. It is important that the moral values connected to having possessions and exercising control over them were clearly masculine: “Preferably, such persons controlled their own labor process (rather than working for someone else, or working for themselves on someone else’s land)... they had characteristic moral traits – were hard-working and industrious..., had dignity..., did not attract ridicule..., and were decent... and hospitable... [They] could organize work for themselves and others... In these kinds of communities, that was what counted.”⁸⁰⁵ It was also important to take initiative and exercise agency, and to be self-directed in the application of one’s work and effort. This kind of moral ethos was reflected in the figure of a “*gazda*”, a high-status property owner and a household head. The term “*gazda*” entered the Transcarpathian dialect from Romanian (*gazdă*) and Hungarian (*gazda*),⁸⁰⁶ and meant a “good master” or a “household manager.” While this term was used to signify a social position

⁸⁰² P. M. Fedaka, *Narodne zhytlo ukraiintsiv Zakarpattia* (Uzhhorod: Grazhda, 2005), 96.

⁸⁰³ Gail Kligman, Katherine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949-1962* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 96.

⁸⁰⁴ Kligman, Verdery, *Peasants under Siege*, 96.

⁸⁰⁵ Kligman, Verdery, 96, 94.

⁸⁰⁶ F. T. Zhilko, *Narysy z dialektologii ukrainskoi mowy* (Kyiv: Radians’ka shkola, 1955), 151.

— the head of a household —, it also had implicit moral connotations, as well as social capital.

Pre-World War II, rural communities in Transcarpathia (and elsewhere in Eastern Europe) saw land as a source and support of patriarchal power. The male head of the family was in charge of the property management and distributed the chores among the family members. As head of the household, he took credit for its prosperity, epitomized by the economic flourishing of the farm. The thriving of the individual farm ensured the social acknowledgement of the family's hard work, which was considered both an inescapable obligation, fate and a virtue,⁸⁰⁷ and ensured the community's approval, which was no less valued than economic success. Kligman and Verdery found similar attitudes in pre-World War II Romanian villages: "In the rural status ideology, being prosperous was considered a sign of virtue and hard work: villagers often attributed such qualities to the well-to-do even if they were lacking. Being poor indicated lack of character, laziness, or bad habits, such as drinking (rather than, say, simple bad luck)."⁸⁰⁸ Thus, the proper care of property and dedication to its maintenance and augmentation had prominent moral overtones in pre-communist rural communities in Eastern Europe.

Even though the values attached to possessions, their quantity and the possibility to "own" one's labor, i.e. not to work for others, reflected the world view that was stemming from those households that were better off, they were nevertheless central to any peasant's identity, including those who were poor or lacking.⁸⁰⁹ The poor, who comprised the majority of the local rural population, did not necessarily fit the image of an esteemed and prosperous "well-to-do farmer" or great *gazda*, but they strove to fulfill the ideals of moral conduct associated with this image by practicing the principles of good farming, proper household management, and industriousness.

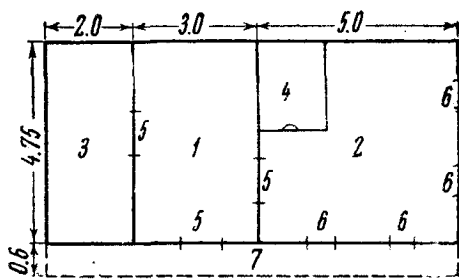
Therefore, in self-sustained farm-like households the priority of construction was given to production buildings. Their number and sizes were the markers of the social standing and wealth of a peasant. The wealthy peasants owned more land and had the opportunity to develop their farmsteads and their productive capacities through investing in further household buildings of larger sizes that could accommodate cattle and forage. Poor peasants, on the other hand, had fewer or no household buildings, often settling for a single barn for a goat, sheep, or

⁸⁰⁷ Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890–1940*, 1985, 42–43.

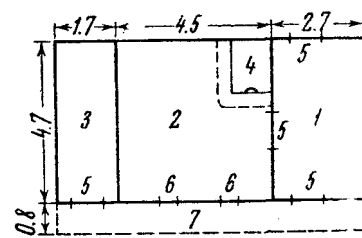
⁸⁰⁸ Gail Kligman, Katherine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949–1962* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 91.

⁸⁰⁹ Kligman, Verdery, *Peasants under Siege*, 99.

a pig.⁸¹⁰ In contrast to the production buildings, dwelling houses were not socially prioritized objects of investments pre-World War II. In most cases it was a two, or three-room house with a high roof. In 1945–47, the Soviet ethnographer I. F. Symonenko led broad research in Transcarpathia and together with his team collected enough anthropological, ethnographic, and folkloric material to describe such ethnic features of Transcarpathian Ukrainians as economic life, customs, costume, and architecture. In various villages of Transcarpathia, he observed houses that were built 20–150 years prior to the expedition, which gave him grounds to make conclusions regarding the principles of rural construction in Transcarpathia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. According to Symonenko and P. Fedaka, who conducted the most recent research into the nature of dwellings in Transcarpathia, a peasant house was a rectangular perimeter building of either two or (more commonly) three rooms. Only one of the rooms was habitable and had a furnace. In a three-room house, the two other rooms usually comprised an unheated hall (*seni*) and a storeroom for farming implements (*klit'* or *komora*). A two-room house often had only a living-room and the hall. The variations in houses' plans seemed not to break the general models of two- or three-room houses. Figures 18 and 19 show typical plans of Transcarpathian rural houses. The rooms could vary in size, arrangement, and sometimes function, but the general pattern of construction and the divided purposes of the rooms persisted until the end of World War II. Fedaka noticed that the social standing of a peasant could also be reflected in the number of rooms of the house.⁸¹¹



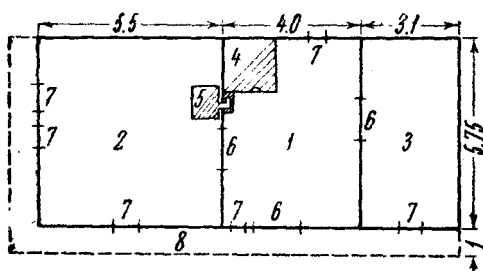
Фиг. 2. План хыжи гр. Р. (с. Кушница):
1 — сени, 2 — хыжа, 3 — «кліть», 4 — печь,
5 — двери, 6 — окна, 7 — турнац



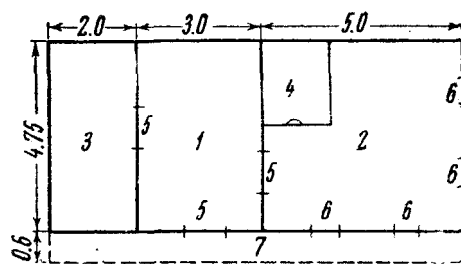
Фиг. 3. План хыжи гр. Д. (с. Пилипеп):
1 — сени, 2 — хыжа, 3 — комора, 4 — печь
с припечком и лежанкой, 5 — дверь, 6 —
окна, 7 — «прісінок».

⁸¹⁰ Fedaka, *Narodne zhytlo ukraiintsiv Zakarpattia*, 104.

⁸¹¹ Fedaka, *Narodne zhytlo ukraiintsiv Zakarpattia*, 97, 155.

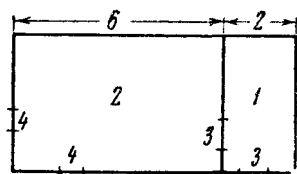


Фиг. 1. План хыжи гр. С. (с. Худльово): 1 — кухня (сени), 2 — хыжа, 3 — комода, 4 — палита, 5 — железная печь, 6 — двери, 7 — окна, 8 — ганок

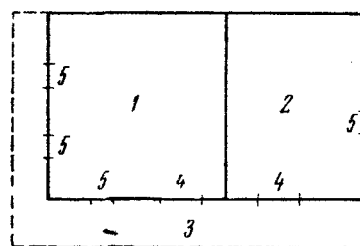


Фиг. 2. План хыжи гр. Р. (с. Кушница): 1 — сени, 2 — хыжа, 3 — «кліть», 4 — печь, 5 — двери, 6 — окна, 7 — турнац

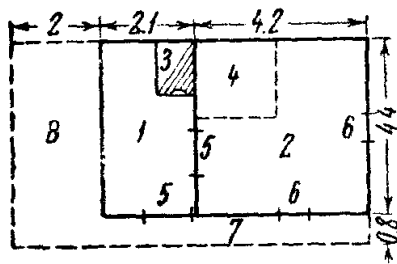
Figure 18. Examples of plans of three-room houses in rural Transcarpathia⁸¹²



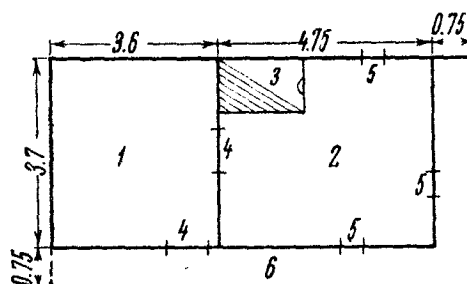
Фиг. 5. План хыжи гр. В. (с. Давилово): 1 — сени, 2 — хыжа, 3 — двери, 4 — окна



Фиг. 6. План хыжи гр. А. (с. Крайниково): 1 — хыжа, 2 — малая хыжа, или кухня, 3 — турнац, 4 — двери, 5 — окна



Фиг. 3. План хыжи гр. П. (с. Линцы): 1 — сени (кухня), 2 — хата, 3 — печь курная, 4 — место, где раньше стояла печь, 5 — двери, 6 — окна, 7 — ганок, 8 — навес



Фиг. 4. План хыжи гр. Ф. (с. Кобеляры): 1 — сени, 2 — хыжа, 3 — печь, 4 — двери, 5 — окна, 6 — ганок

Figure 19. Examples of the plans of two-room houses in rural Transcarpathia⁸¹³

The main construction material was local wood, though sometimes the walls were laid out with adobe bricks. The stone foundation was 15–75 cm deep, but older houses were sometimes built with no foundation. In some houses, the walls and the floor were coated from the inside and the outside, in others the wooden walls were left bare. A roof with four, or occasionally two slopes was considerably higher than the walls, and was usually covered with shakes, or sometimes straw

⁸¹² Cited from Simonenko, "Byt naseleniia Zakarpatskoi oblasti," 69.

⁸¹³ Cited from Simonenko, "Byt naseleniia Zakarpatskoi oblasti," 69-70.

or clay tiles.⁸¹⁴ Figures 20–23 show the appearance of traditional rural houses as documented by Symonenko at the time of his expedition, and by Protseviat during his research in the late 1980s. The high roof heavily overhangs the wooden walls of the buildings. The barns are adjacent to the main house and placed under the same roof. People mostly resided in the living room, where they cooked, slept, weaved, ate meals and accepted guests. The living-room rarely exceeded 23m².⁸¹⁵

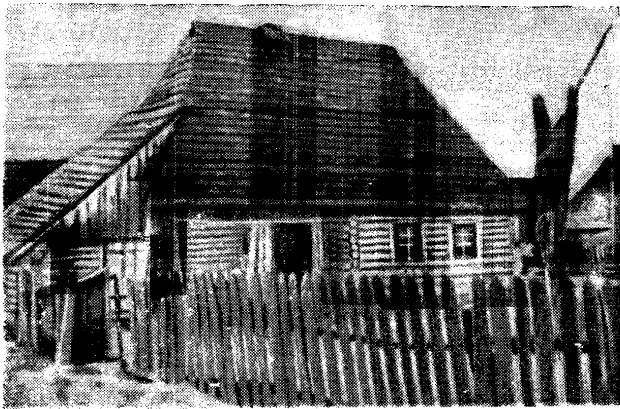


Figure 20. A house in Keretski, Svaliava district⁸¹⁶



Figure 21. A house in Krainikovo, Khust district⁸¹⁷



Figure 22. A house in Vuchkovo, Mezhyhirya district⁸¹⁸



Figure 23. A house in Izki, Mezhyhirya district⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁴ Simonenko, “Byt naseleniia Zakarpatskoi oblasti,” 68.

⁸¹⁵ Fedaka, *Narodne zhytlo ukraïntsiiv Zakarpattia*, 174.

⁸¹⁶ Simonenko, “Byt naseleniia Zakarpatskoi oblasti,” 71.

⁸¹⁷ Simonenko, 72.

⁸¹⁸ Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhylishche Ukrainskikh Karpat sovetskogo perioda. Appendix*, 51.

⁸¹⁹ Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhylishche Ukrainskikh Karpat sovetskogo perioda. Appendix*, 52.

These small dwellings accommodated large families with four to six children on average⁸²⁰ and sometimes even chickens and domestic animals during the winter time.⁸²¹ Sleeping-benches, a furnace, a table, chairs, and bassinets were placed inside this area to serve the needs of the family. Yet, Symonenko's expedition has shown that since at least the 1850s, no critical changes were made to the layout and construction of the houses. Specifically, the post-war ethnographers did not reveal any recent tendency of the rural residents of Transcarpathia to expand their dwelling spaces. It allows us to assume that in pre-communist Transcarpathia, the dwelling was built into the larger system of the value of possessions, in which the dwelling space was granted secondary significance next to the production buildings. Considering the pre-communist household's economic dependency on the productive potential of the farmstead, the farmstead as a whole used to be the primary object of investment, as well as a visible basis for social stratification and a demonstration of status in a village: "in short, they had means of production, and their social status depended on the amounts they controlled."⁸²²

With the collectivization of agriculture, carried out in Transcarpathia in the late 1940s, one of the main resources of the peasant economic subsistence — land — was taken into collective property and administered by the collective and state farms. Private ownership of land was banned. Collectivization altered the practices of land use and the traditional relations of possession, and therefore changed the rural social relations and symbolic structures that had constituted the peasants' existence for centuries. "Working of land" ceased to deliver the material and social capital that constituted the basis for a peasant's social standing and shaped his position in a local community. Working of land in a collective did not make one the self-directed, autonomous master of their own labor, but rather an employee who had no say in the way the farm was managed and could only claim a small part of the results of their work. Furthermore, the state was determined to eradicate the peasantry's pre-communist sentiments regarding the land, condemning them as "individualist" and "petty-bourgeois."

After collectivization, the amalgamated, de-personalized land lost its value as a marker of distinction and hierarchy, and as an object of care and virtue. The sizes of the private plots that the peasants were entitled to were regulated in size, and made everyone truly equal in terms of the individual access to land. It is true that the private plot continued to be vital for both the

⁸²⁰ Kopchak and Kopchak, *Naseleniie Zakarpat'ia za sto let*, 111-112.

⁸²¹ Fedaka, *Narodne zhytlo ukraiintsiiv Zakarpattia*, 174.

⁸²² Kligman, Verdery, *Peasants under Siege*, 97.

support of rural families and the Soviet national economy.⁸²³ Furthermore, even with their legally limited access to land, the rural population of Western oblasti, including Transcarpathia, preserved their tradition of the strong peasant household. Compared to the other regions of Ukraine, the peasants of the Western oblasti adapted to the new Soviet administrative economy and maintained the traditions of managing livestock, the procurement of fodder, animal produce processing, and vegetable and fruit gardening.⁸²⁴ However, the centralized management of agriculture reconfigured the participation of a family in production. The limits imposed by the state on the permissible sizes of the cattle stock and land resulted in a decrease in the productive activities of a peasant family and, consequently, the functional changes of a household.⁸²⁵ Some production buildings became underused, while others, like granaries and cart houses, became completely redundant and disappeared.⁸²⁶ The proletarianization of a number of villages, especially in the North-Western part of the region, also helped to minimize the productive household activities of Transcarpathian peasants. By the end of the 1950s, some villages had transformed into industrial townships, and most of their population was involved in industrial, rather than agricultural production. Peasants, now workers, stayed in the villages, but reduced the sizes of their private households.⁸²⁷

In these circumstances, instead of abandoning the centuries-long attachment to private property, which had previously determined peasant personhood and identity, the peasants reinvented the idea of possession and the object through which they expressed the relations of ownership and social distinction. Even before the soviet period, rich Transcarpathian peasants did not emphasize their social position through modifying or upgrading their private dwellings. First and foremost, they would invest in expanding their farming lands and the maintenance of the farmstead, including stables, storages, and other production facilities that would be useful for the development of the farm.⁸²⁸ Although the sizes and significance of a peasant household decreased after Transcarpathia's annexation by the USSR, the house as a living space quickly became the prioritized object for development and investment for peasant families. The dwelling house shifted to the ideological center of the household, acquiring more value as a commodity. Increasingly more significance was given to its shape, size, the quality of its

⁸²³ G. N. Rogozhin, "Ukrainskoie selo vchera, segodnia i zavtra," *Stroitel'stvo i arkhitektura* 6 (1976): 15.

⁸²⁴ Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhilishche Ukrainskikh Karpat soetskogo perioda*, 37.

⁸²⁵ Protseviat, 35.

⁸²⁶ Protseviat, 36.

⁸²⁷ Protseviat, 35-36.

⁸²⁸ Fedaka, *Narodne zhytlo ukraintsiv Zakarpattia*, 96.

construction materials, and its adherence to current fashions.

Starting from the 1950s, the main “possession” which was in total ownership and under control of the rural dwellers was their house. It adopted the symbolic markers of wealth and distinction, which had previously stemmed from the means of production and land. The house became an object of care, and emotional and material investment. The fact that the majority of the houses were built privately in Transcarpathia, without direct state involvement, made them an embodiment of wealth of the master of the house. The individualization of residential construction in the Soviet Transcarpathian countryside made space for the new expression of hierarchies and inequalities. When the land and live stock sizes became fixed, houses started growing. Such shifts in the ideology of possession bore cultural continuity with the pre-communist peasant ethos.

The mutated culture of possession, however, was only a part of the context of the development of the house into the most desirable good. The constraints and opportunities of Soviet socialism were also crucial as it provided an economic and legal framework, within which the house became a materially realizable project. The state did not subsidize private construction, as had happened, for instance, in late socialist Yugoslavia.⁸²⁹ The centralized economy also did not provide individuals with legally acceptable ways to access rationed construction materials, so the building process often included informal and illegal ways of acquisition. Given the legal constraints and limitedness of the official distribution channels, the “positive” component of the new economic situation, which I addressed as “opportunities,” was accumulated in informal (social) capital. Socialist property, which could be informally privatized, exchanged, bought from a trusted insider, or “stolen,” was within arm’s reach at the nearby brick-making plant or even local kolkhoz. In order to ensure access to these materials, myriads of social connections needed to be established and maintained within the blat structures of reciprocal favors.

SOVIET REGULATIONS AND THE GENEALOGY OF THE POST-WAR TRANSCARPATHIAN RURAL HOUSE

Individual construction grew thanks to structural changes in the village composition initiated by the Soviet government. The isolated farmsteads in the Transcarpathian hills were moved

⁸²⁹ For more on private construction in Yugoslavia during late socialism, see Rory Archer, “The moral economy of home construction in late socialist Yugoslavia,” *History and Anthropology* 29, no. 2 (2017): 141-162.

down to the valleys to create more densely populated localities, concentrated around newly introduced public facilities such as schools, hospitals, administrative centers, and village cultural clubs. The “condensation” of the scattered villages was supposed to bring efficiency to agricultural administration and production, and facilitate the construction of roads and the implementation of electricity, radio, and water and gas pipes.⁸³⁰ As a result of amalgamation and relocation, the newly created households were entitled to land parcels for construction purposes.⁸³¹ Quite shortly, these transformations galvanized the construction of new dwellings by the peasants.

The state authorities tried to closely coordinate rural construction. Their influence was supposed to be exercised through the district architecture departments, founded in 1963, which implemented the policies of rural development based on a number of legal acts that were intended to regulate private construction. For instance, a peasant was only allowed to start construction works on the allotment after the decision of the district executive committee was made and the technical documentation received, including the plan for the allotment allocated for construction. It was supposed to be approved by the supervising engineer of the state architectural and construction control bureau.⁸³² The size of the allotment was also regulated by law. Within the populated locality it was recommended to allow 0,08–0,12 ha for construction. In addition, a number of sanitary and fire protection regulations dictated the distance between the buildings in the peasant yard, taking into account the disposition of the buildings in the neighboring households.⁸³³ The sizes of the production buildings were also regulated,⁸³⁴ and the house itself had to be built in accordance with the type projects (*tipovyye proekty*) confirmed by the State Committee for Construction of the Ukrainian SSR.

The violation of these and other rules resulted in administrative, civil and criminal responsibility, for instance, financial penalties or the confiscation of part or the whole house, which would be transferred to the local Council. Despite these regulations and threats, there was rarely any household that would exactly follow the type project, and a large number had considerable deviations from the approved projects. In the late 1980s, Protseviat did not encounter a single household whose production buildings would “remotely resemble” the type projects. In his opinion, the low popularity of the projects suggested by the state architectural

⁸³⁰ Melvin, *Soviet Power and the Countryside*.

⁸³¹ Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhilishche Ukrainskikh Karpat*, 35.

⁸³² Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhilishche Ukrainskikh Karpat*, 38.

⁸³³ S. I. Laponogov, Z. V. Moiseenko, Iu. F. Khokhol, *Sel'skii zhiloi dom* (Kiev: 1971), 8.

⁸³⁴ *Usadebnyi zhiloi dom* (Kiev: 1985), 9.

committees was explained by the fact that they failed to take into account local construction traditions and the preferences of the peasants themselves.⁸³⁵ Additionally, the lack of reporting to the state authorities about the initiation of construction and the violation of regulations, which the local press called “unauthorized development,” was a mass phenomenon.⁸³⁶ It was allegedly facilitated by the local authorities who turned a blind eye, with the exception of sporadic, exemplary punishments.⁸³⁷

One outcome of the *de facto* independent development of peasant households, was the possibility to arrange domestic spaces according to personal taste. Contrary to the experiences of the majority of city residents, who had no opportunity to decide on the structural layout of their apartments, individuals in the countryside were directly involved in choosing how to build their house and with which materials. This relative freedom did not result, however, in a striking variety of house plans and arrangement of interiors, which were, in the end, dependent on the standardized Soviet production. What this limited construction agency revealed was the emergence of certain tendencies that reflected the peasants’ attitudes towards past traditions and the possibilities of the present. Without attempting to closely trace the genealogy of the peasant house in Transcarpathia from the 1950s to 1980s, I will briefly outline these tendencies.

First, locals followed construction fashions in the region. The type projects developed by the state architecture agencies might not have been successful or were implemented by the individual constructors with modifications, but the new house of a neighbor was a strong motivation to undertake one’s own construction project as soon as possible and to try to follow the features that the new dwellings started to acquire. For instance, in the 1950s and 1960s there was a shift from using wood to adobe bricks. The reason was the industrial exploitation of the Transcarpathian timber resources by the Soviet forestry enterprises after World War II, which resulted in severe shortages of construction wood for local needs. Adobe bricks, however, were cheap to produce using local resources. However, starting from the mid-1970s, this material was superseded with red clay bricks and other industrially produced materials. Consequently, houses built of adobe bricks were considered outdated and old-fashioned, and the peasants tended to destroy their homes built only 25–40 years ago and rebuild with red bricks in order

⁸³⁵ Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhilishche Ukrainskikh Karpat*, 39.

⁸³⁶ N. Tehza, “Nezaproektovana budova,” *Zakarpatska pravda*, March 24, 1977.

⁸³⁷ Iu. Martyn, “Pro samovil’ne budivnytstvo,” *Zakarpatska pravda*, February 6, 1977; Iu. Tehza, “Nezaproektovana budova”; I. Dius, “Konflikt,” *Zakarpatska pravda*, July 17, 1977.

to keep up with the changing tendencies of prestige and fashion.⁸³⁸



Figure 24. The new house of a kolkhoz driver, Keretski village, Svaliava district, 1958⁸⁴⁰

Figure 23. A



Figure 25. Street in Keretski village, Svaliava district, 1958⁸³⁹



Figure 26. The houses of kolkhozniki, Verkhni Vorota village, Volovets district, 1957⁸⁴²

Figure 27. New houses in Keretski village, Svaliava district, 1975⁸⁴¹



⁸³⁸ Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhilishche Ukrainskikh Karpat*, 81–82.

⁸³⁹ Central State Archive of film and photo documents of Ukraine (TsDKFFA), rozdil TI-I, no. 2-88674.

⁸⁴⁰ TsDKFFA, roz. TI-I, no. 2-65132.

⁸⁴¹ TsDKFFA, roz. TI-I, no. 2-129175.

⁸⁴² TsDKFFA, roz. 102, no. 2-66906.

As Figures 24–26 show, there is a significant difference in appearance between the traditional wooden houses and the houses that were built in the late 1950s, even though they were built only 10–15 years apart. In Figure 24, we see the new house of a kolkhoz driver next to an old wooden one. The new foundation is higher and the construction materials have changed as the roof is now covered with slates or tiles (Figure 25) instead of wooden plates (*shyngli*) or straw. More attention is given to the outside décor of the building: it is stuccoed all over, and even the black-and-white photograph shows that the façade is covered in different colors and has geometrical ornamentation. In Figure 25, similar houses with slightly different colors continue along street, reflecting the trends of fashion in Keretski village in the late 1950s.

The second tendency that evolved was the diversification of the functions of rooms and the increase in their number and sizes. Starting from the 1960s, the number of dwelling rooms grew to at least three, and the kitchen and living room became separate parts of the house, not used for sleeping. There were also several bedrooms and even a children's room, and a bathroom. According to Protseviat, the rural residents tried to replicate urban dwellings.⁸⁴³ This aspiration was not in contradiction to the official ideology, which, since Khrushchev's leadership, supported the idea of eliminating the gap between rural and urban lifestyles. The desire to emulate the layout of an urban flat explains the emergence of a bathroom even before plumbing was introduced in the village. Apart from the increase in the number of rooms and their functional separation, houses were supplemented with such structural innovations as verandas, mansards, loggias, balconies, and substantial basements that could be used as dwelling spaces. In the 1970s, wealthier rural residents started building houses with a second floor, thus further expanding the living spaces. The vertical growth of the house is shown in Figure 27. The photograph, taken in 1975, depicts a whole street in Keretski village populated with the new type of houses: they are much larger in size than those built just ten years earlier, and most have high foundations, garages, second floors and fences made of stone, cement, and iron.

A particular structural innovation in the household construction of the Transcarpathian peasants deserves special attention. In the 1960s, rural dwellers started building so-called “summer kitchens,” which were initially planned as auxiliary buildings, quite small in size, dedicated to household chores, for instance, bread baking in the summertime or food preparation for the cattle. In some cases, summer kitchens were constructed as extensions of the

⁸⁴³ Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhilishche Ukrainskikh Karpat*, 153.

maintenance buildings, and sometimes they were placed in basements or constituted a full-fledged part of the homestead complex. The first summer kitchens were merely makeshift huts (*vremianki*), simple wood frame spaces under single or double-pitch roofs. Starting in the 1970s, however, these huts were turned into permanent buildings made of the same construction materials as the main house. The summer kitchens constituted two or more rooms, and the most advanced had all the units that were common for an average rural house, including a kitchen, a storeroom, and a bathroom. The function of summer kitchens also shifted. If in the 1960s they were primarily used for cooking and preparing food for cattle, already in the 1970s they were used as dwellings, temporary at first but permanent soon after, for the whole family or some of its members, usually the elderly parents. According to Protseviat, summer kitchens had their prototype in a summer oven that was common in the South of Ukraine and in the Kuban, and which spread around rural Transcarpathia after local seasonal migrants learned about it in other regions.⁸⁴⁴ In my opinion, another interpretation is also possible: the development of a summer kitchen as a structural part of a household that often took over the dwelling function signaled the reproduction of traditional forms of inhabiting spaces.

The rural way of life sometimes kept the dwellers from making the houses properly habitable. They might have emulated the model of a city dwelling, but the peasants' daily routine was still tied to countryside activities. Tending to the cattle, for one, was a daily chore that required constant attention, and since the house was kept "clean" from any contact with the traces of the cattle barn, the summer kitchen provided an intermediary space between the barn and the house. Its layout almost identically reproduced the form of traditional one and two-room houses.

The emergence of summer kitchens did not diminish the significance of the main houses, though. On the contrary, they grew larger and more spacious. They excited admiration and envy in visiting strangers and were praised by state officials as signs of the new socialist era. However, their use as dwelling spaces was reduced as the summer kitchen often took over the functions of constant habitation. Depending on the size of a family, parts of the main house could be used by older children or newly married children, often before they built their own houses. Some of the rooms of the main house could be also used during summer months when heating was not required. Guest receptions were held in the large house, and it was properly furnished. In general, however, starting from the 1970s, the construction of large houses often

⁸⁴⁴ Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhilishche Ukrainskikh Karpat*, 64–65.

meant that they were underused. At the same time, their symbolic value was already firmly anchored in the communities' understanding of prosperity, well-being, and prestige. Thus, in the transformed Transcarpathian countryside, an individual house certainly became an object of aspiration for each family.

Ultimately, the type projects that were provided by the architectural bureaus must have had some influence on the architectural appearance of post-war Transcarpathian villages. They helped reorient the local population away from traditional construction materials when they became scarce. However, the villagers themselves actively participated in the selection, adaptation, and negotiation of official ideas about rural dwellings. Some of the suggested type projects did not attract any attention, some were simplified, and others gained popularity and spread around the region.⁸⁴⁵ The demand also affected the modification of the type projects over time: the aspirations towards urban comfort and facilities required structural changes to the plans. So, did the newly developed consumption demands for personal vehicles, which increased in the 1970s. Architecturally, Transcarpathian socialist villages developed through the dynamics of both Soviet modernization and local tradition. Meanwhile, when it came to the implementation of these projects, the villagers could only rely on themselves. They needed to accumulate material resources and mobilize their social connections in order to build a house. Thus, the construction project, from its inception as a prospective idea, through working, saving, and economizing, to its construction and completion, was a strongly individualized enterprise, in Thomas and Znaniecki's terms of familial collective individualism.

SEASONAL MIGRATION AND THE INDIVIDUALIZATION OF RURAL CONSTRUCTION IN TRANSCARPATHIA

As I have shown in the previous sections, the construction of a house was a strong social impetus for members of local communities. "It must be in our blood," explained a woman from Transcarpathia, "We must build a house once a couple gets married."⁸⁴⁶ Labor choices also could be guided by the need to build a house. Building a house was a time consuming and costly project that could take years, even decades, if financed by locally available jobs in collective farms or industrial plants. Seasonal migration facilitated the accomplishment of this goal due to the possibilities of acquiring comparatively large sums of money in short periods of time. With

⁸⁴⁵ Protseviat, *Sel'skoie zhilishche Ukrainskikh Karpat*, 153-154.

⁸⁴⁶ Interview with Palagna, December 2015.

some luck, two or three seasons in forestry or construction could pay for an average house. All narrators confirmed that building their own house was the main motivation for migration. The labor migrants I selected for interview participated in the “first wave” of seasonal migration from the post-war Transcarpathian countryside. Their experiences reflected and followed the changes that the region was going through during the forty years of its existence within the Soviet borders, and their desires and opportunities were shaped by both tradition and sovietisation. In the late 1950s and 1960s, they built new houses out of adobe bricks to escape the poverty and outdatedness of the “straw roof huts.” In the 1970s, their financial possibilities improved, and the houses they built ten years ago seemed as poor and out of fashion as the wooden huts of their parents just a few decades before that. So, the migration did not stop. Even if a house was already built, another construction project was on the way — a new and better dwelling, renovation, or houses for children. Since the house became a privileged object of investment, there could not be too many of them, as the passage from a *feuilleton* suggested in a satirical way:

Elderly people build houses. For themselves and for their grandchildren. Young people build houses. For themselves and for their future kids. They build, and then they improve their houses — renovate and reconstruct. In order not to, god forbid, be left behind by the neighbors and the fashion. At first, they were building one-storey houses. Then they added one more. Now three-storey houses are fashionable. And next to those palaces they build solid summer kitchens and garages.⁸⁴⁷

Those who chose forestry as their seasonal occupation, had an additional incentive. Seasonal workers had the right to a percentage of construction wood depending on the amount of the workloads they fulfilled at the enterprise. As construction materials were hard to obtain, the good quality wood they brought from Siberia could be more valuable than money, especially considering the deficit of construction wood in Transcarpathia from the 1950s onwards.

So, the personal attachment to the future dwelling started from the point when migrants went to find a job in order to “earn for their own house.” They endured months of living in harsh and austere conditions, in shacks, carriages, abandoned houses or village schools, just to improve the living conditions of themselves and their families back at home. They tried to save as much as possible because they had a purpose for the money they collected. In procommunist Transcarpathia, the earnings from seasonal work went towards the purchase of land. Similar logic governed the disposal of money earned from migration under socialism: building a house.

⁸⁴⁷ Rishko, “Fal’shyvyi blysk.”

This imperative was strong enough to prevent migrant workers from overspending, and often even pushed them to economize on necessities such as food.

In the case that seasonal workers had already built their houses, they remembered them as something good and valuable that waited for them and was worth returning. Melania, who used to be a forewoman of a brigade of seasonal agricultural workers, said that she had a picture of her house with her while working seasonally at the collective farm in Southern Ukraine. She showed it to the locals to boast about how well she and her family lived in Transcarpathia. The house was an exemplary object of pride and distinction in the local community. In addition, it was a marker of “civilization”: the house was a measure of living standards and a point of comparison with “outsiders”. Ignat mentioned that when he invited his boss from the distant forestry enterprise to Transcarpathia, he was amazed by Ignat’s house, saying: “Now I can see what the hutsuls are working for.” Then Ignat explained: “You see, what we have in our houses and what they do is a big difference. We like to keep our houses very nice. And they... you know, helter-skelter.”⁸⁴⁸ The attention to tidiness and order were emphasized on multiple occasions. The habits of housekeeping, common in Transcarpathia, became a point of comparison with living standards and even morality of the people who lived in other regions of the USSR, first of all the regions where seasonal migrants happened to work.

The very process of construction was entirely driven by private initiative and touched upon legal boundaries and regulations. The case of individual construction in Transcarpathian was similar to the “rogue construction” that Brigitte Le Normand⁸⁴⁹ and Rory Archer documented in the urban outskirts of socialist Yugoslavia:

The construction of such homes was most frequently neither entirely legal nor outright illegal but rather existed on a continuum. ... The majority of builders ... undertook home construction projects in the ambiguous space in between — not entirely legally ... but also not wholly illegally. In the absence of an established home construction industry, independent home-building projects took place through the invocation of rural reciprocal obligations and the informal exchange of goods and services.⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴⁸ Interview with Ignat.

⁸⁴⁹ Brigitte Le Normand, *Designing Tito’s Capital: Urban Planning Modernism, and Socialism in Belgrade* (Pittsburg: University Pittsburg Press, 2014).

⁸⁵⁰ Archer, “The moral economy of home construction in late socialist Yugoslavia,” 4. For similar processes in other socialist countries see Endre Sík, “The Reciprocal Exchange of Labour in Hungary,” in *On Work: Historical, Comparative and Theoretical Approaches*, ed. R. E. Pahl (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 527–547; Gerald Creed, *Domesticating Revolution: From Socialist Reform to Ambivalent Transition in a Bulgarian Village* (University Park, PA:

The divergence from regulations could start by not following the bureaucratic intricacies of the confirmation of the home project to the letter, or by trying to speed up the process with a petty bribe. The media reported that “unlicensed building” was a constant issue in Transcarpathia, meaning that some builders failed to notify the authorities about undertaking construction projects. The arrangement of materials and construction works were also held either informally or illegally. In the 1960s, many families were collectively involved in the production of construction materials. The builders, women and men, manufactured adobe bricks out of straw and clay, or had them ordered locally and informally. Ignat’s wife, Anna, recalled that her family members invested their physical labor at every stage of construction:

It was us who built all this. When we were building the house, my husband was not at home. My father and my brother were helping. My mother was handing in the adobe bricks, and I made mortar. At that time we made mortar out of clay... So, this way we made our house. And my husband was earning money. He only came when it was the time to put the roof up.

The collective participation of family members further personalized Transcarpathian “rogue construction”. Anna confirmed that when they were building their house, the type projects were indeed followed by the villagers, so many new buildings looked similar. However, she did not quite like the suggested arrangement of rooms, so they made slight modifications at the point of initial construction, and with time they made even more rearrangements to the house.

Acquiring materials was an issue for many builders. In order to make adobe bricks, one first needed to find straw. Even if the manufacturing was subcontracted, the customer was responsible for supplying raw materials. The wood for the roof was especially hard to find, and Anna’s father arranged the delivery of timber from another Transcarpathian district. Fedir’s wife was working in sovkhos in Tiachiv district. It helped her to legally acquire tiles, but its help ended there, and they also had to look for wood elsewhere. To finish the roofing before winter, Fedir had to work another season while his wife was pregnant. They arranged to buy wood from the local timber mill with his earnings.

Ignat recalled that legally purchasing construction materials was nearly impossible: “There was no such place where you could go and buy what you needed... Everything was stolen, and then resold. For instance, some boss steals cement and sells to us. And heaven help you if Militsiya

Pennsylvania University Press, 1998); Krisztina Fehérváry, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

catches you. You will be fined. But everything was stolen.”⁸⁵¹ The materials that were informally “arranged” — glass, cement, sand — were delivered at night to hide the illegal acquisition from nosy neighbors and authorities. Those labor migrants who had part of their payment in wood were in a better position, since they did not have to worry about at least one component of the construction process. Moreover, if the earned wood was not used for personal construction needs, it could be sold, or exchanged for other materials. One of the narrators, Dmytro, explained: “We were bringing wood [from Siberia] – two or three carriages [per season]. Here [in Transcarpathia] you could make an arrangement and for one cubic meter get 1000 bricks.” Such exchanges were illegal, but not uncommon for the Soviet economy, notorious for its shortages.⁸⁵²

The respondents described their quests for construction materials as risky, adventurous, and unnerving. Dmytro bartered the wood he earned during seasonal work in the Russian forestry for bricks at the local brickmaking plant. Another narrator arranged to obtain two tons of cement from the distribution base in exchange for one thousand eggs, which she collected from around the whole village. In this respect Ignat recalled, “one evening we visited ten craftsmen, when we were in the middle of building this house. With a motorcycle that we had then... Berezhnyky, Rososhi [the neighboring villages] – we were everywhere and could not find a carpenter to make the roof. You go to sleep and you can only think about one thing – where to find a carpenter... Rack your brain.”⁸⁵³ Since the works and materials for the houses needed to be “arranged” and “procured,” and everyone around knew that it required privileged access to the closed circuits of distribution, a house itself was a demonstration of not only the financial capacities and hard work of the family, but also certain moral characteristics. Beyond industriousness, the house embodied the virtue of initiative, reconfigured in the Soviet context as the ability to establish “useful” social connections that added to the family’s social capital.

Yosyp, like many dwellers of Keretski, built his house twice. In the late 1960s, his first construction project was especially challenging, both physically and materially. It involved the production of adobe bricks, searching for stone for the foundation and its collection and delivery, as well as other pitfalls regarding the access to and procurement of these construction materials. His experience building a house in the early 1980s was very different. After he

⁸⁵¹ Interview with Ignat.

⁸⁵² For more on “economy of shortages,” see Kornai, János, *Economics of Shortage* (Amsterdam: North Holland Press), 1980; Kornai, János, *Socialist economy* (Princeton University Press, 1992); János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁸⁵³ Interview with Ignat.

managed to save significant amounts of cash from his trips to Latvia in the 1970s, he only needed to manage and finance the construction: “when I made my second house, I was a king. There was a lot of money, so I blew much of it on booze. Everything was delivered to me — bricks, cement, iron. I only gave them the money. I hired people to work, and meanwhile did what I wanted.”⁸⁵⁴ By the mid-1970s, consumption demands had refined, informal acquisition tactics had been honed, and the construction materials themselves became more sophisticated and of a better quality. For those who, like Yosyp (or the “clients”), had enough disposable cash and useful and reliable connections, construction became easier and faster. Moreover, rural residents in Transcarpathia were already “competing” in building the most flamboyant houses, impressive in both size and design, by the 1970s, which raised the local standards of individual dwelling. This “fancy” building boom was especially prominent in those mountainous districts where seasonal migration prevailed, and officials observed these processes with concern:

In some villages ... there is an unhealthy competition between seasonal migrants (*otkhodniki*) in accumulation of real estate, as well as various tendencies of private ownership. For instance, in Dibrova village, Tiachiv district, which has the population of around 9,000 people, and in the village Verkhnie Vodiane, Rakhiv district, which has 1,830 households, according to the rough estimate the cost of a house is 50–60,000, and sometimes no less than 100,000 rubles. For construction and the development of the houses, the owners use the strictly centrally allocated (absent in the retail distribution) critically short materials: cement, metal, gas piping, heating equipment, and in many cases the materials of strategic assignation, such as duraluminium sheets, which they use for building fences and roofing. It seems that the administration of the oblast’ underestimates the potential danger and the vicious effect of these aspirations in the villages on the moods and consciousness of the wider public and especially the youths.⁸⁵⁵

This quote provides rare evidence of the value of some seasonal migrants’ dwellings. The amounts indicated in the report expose not only the wealth of the families in question, but also the amounts they were ready to invest in their dwellings, and the assumed trouble they were ready to go to in order to get hold of “critically short” and “strictly centrally allocated” construction materials. Such actions signaled moral corrosion and even anti-Soviet tendencies, which further aggravated the migrant workers’ ethical unreliability. Both union-wide and local media initiated a public shaming campaign that exposed and ridiculed the “consumerist” appetites of the seasonal migrants. Seasonal migrants were accused of philistinism, or petit-

⁸⁵⁴ Interview with Yosyp.

⁸⁵⁵ TsDAVOU, f. 4626, op. 3, sp. 1052, ark. 7–8.

bourgeois consciousness (*meshchanstvo*),⁸⁵⁶ which was the moral antithesis of the socialist mode of consumption. These notions, common in the 1920s Bolshevik rhetoric regarding imperial tastes and excesses, were revived in the Khrushchev era as, on the one hand, signifiers of the previous Stalinist decades,⁸⁵⁷ and, on the other hand, as discursive tools of moral regulation of consumption practices, which were rapidly changing in the 1960s.⁸⁵⁸ Immoderate consumption and excessive decoration were the signs of philistinism and “irrational consumer behavior,” while “functionality, rationality, simplicity, truth and clarity”⁸⁵⁹ were not only considered the features of “good design,” but also indicators of compliance to the standards of “socialist morality.” Despite the fact that the affluence of Transcarpathian villages was usually presented as an illustration of the advantages of the socialist way of life and a victory of the socialist present over the capitalist past, commentators noticed that some peasants took it too far:

Modern residential houses in the Transcarpathian countryside built by the local craftsmen are defined by the architectural and artistic expression which speaks for the fact that the new way of life found its reflection in the contemporary forms of the folk architecture. ... It does not happen often, but lately [the peasants] started to build the houses whose dimensions and decorations are indicative of the loss of the sense of moderation, their facades are overburdened with various hokey fanciful details in the form of squares, circles, diamonds with mirrors inside. It is difficult to comprehend how these details entered the architecture of the village. This “creativity” stinks with something philistine (*meshchanskii*). Clearly, the owner was trying to make his house better than those of the rest of the villagers and came up with these details for the sake of originality, but he has not been told that they are inappropriate.⁸⁶⁰

The builders’ desires to decorate their houses stemmed from individualized rural construction. The artistic adornment of facades was a means by which to express individuality against the background of standardized type projects. Considering the rural dwellers’ amount of control over the implementation of construction, and the presentability of the outer appearance of their homes, they were looking for individualized solutions for the décor.

⁸⁵⁶ M. Rishko, “Fal’shyvyi blysk,” *Zakarpats’ka pravda*, December 20, 1974; M. Rishko, “Na fundamenti mishchanyina,” *Zakarpats’ka pravda*, February 10, 1980; I. Kikinedzhi, “Dim, ne zihrytyi teplom,”.

⁸⁵⁷ Victor Buchli, “Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against “Petit-bourgeois” Consciousness in the Soviet Home,” *Journal of Design History*, Vol 10. No 2 (1997), 164.

⁸⁵⁸ On ethical regulations of home making during Khrushchev era, see: Victor Buchli, “Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against “Petit-bourgeois” Consciousness in the Soviet Home”, 161–176; Susan E. Reid, “Destalinization and Taste, 1953–1963,” *Journal of Design History* 10, no 2 (1997): 177–201; Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47/1-2 (2006): 227–268; Varga-Harris, “Homemaking and the Aesthetic and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home during the Khrushchev Era,” *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 3 (2008): 561–589.

⁸⁵⁹ Christine Varga-Harris, “Homemaking and the Aesthetic and Moral Perimeters of the Soviet Home...,” 570.

⁸⁶⁰ V. Diachenko, “Sil’skyi zhytlovyyi budynok,” *Zakarpats’ka pravda*, July 9, 1975.

The seasonal workers' recurring and prolonged absences gave way to their houses being labeled "empty palaces," and "homes devoid of family warmth," whose "exterior beauty raised suspicions"⁸⁶¹ and whose "glitter" was "false."⁸⁶² However, the empty houses did not only belong to the migrants. As I pointed out earlier, when summer kitchens started competing with the main houses as the primary dwelling spaces, many rural houses in Transcarpathia were emptied, regardless of whether their inhabitants were participating in seasonal migration. Furthermore, it was highly uncommon for the whole family to participate in migration. Even if one or more family members were departing, in most cases someone was staying behind. They took care not only of the houses, but of the entire household which involved livestock and a private plot. The migrants themselves were usually leaving for no longer than six months, and the rest of the year they stayed at home.

The values projected by the official ideology were, however, outweighed by the locally developed standards of consumption and the idea of ownership that was linked to rural patriarchal traditions. In local communities, building a house was considered as an achievement of the whole family, but it was also an assertion of the head of the family's manhood, since the seasonal migrants who brought the highest earnings were usually working in "masculine" professions of construction, timber felling, or rafting. As I have shown, women contributed tremendously with their labor. They also occasionally brought seasonal earnings, but their area of work was mostly confined to agriculture. Periods of seasonal work in agriculture were shorter — up to three months a year — and the form of remuneration was not equivalent to men's earnings. While seasonal migrants in agriculture received wages, which were usually higher than the earnings of the local collective farm members, their main gain was in hefty in-kind bonuses. The in-kind bonuses were valuable assets, but the financial gain rarely compared with that of "male" seasonal trades. Despite the fact that all wives of the labor migrants involved in my research were locally employed in the 1960–1980s, and some occasionally migrated for seasonal works in agriculture, the gap that separated their earnings from those of their husbands was fairly significant. A man was not the sole, but a principle earner in the family, and his disproportional financial contribution secured the continuity of the traditional patriarchal authority in the peasant family.⁸⁶³

⁸⁶¹ Kikinedzhi, "Dim, ne zihrytyi teplom."

⁸⁶² Rishko, "Fal'shyvyi blysk."

⁸⁶³ S. A. Smith, "Masculinity in Transition: Peasant Migrants to Late-Imperial St Petersburg," in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, 94.

By the end of the 1980s, over 74 percent of labor migrants from Transcarpathia were men.⁸⁶⁴ The goal of private construction justified their long absences from home, as their wives were usually cooperative in this project. They accepted the necessity of their husbands' annual departures, provided they were thrifty and reliable. This demand partly explains the migrant workers' inclination to save as much as possible during the period of work, even though their earnings allowed for larger current expenses. Wastefulness, recklessness, and alcohol abuse devalued labor migration in the eyes of the local community, as well as such behavior devalued the earned money, since it was not spent thoughtfully. The "legitimate" use for money was, of course, various: the education of children, the purchase of a car or motorcycle, or celebrations. Nevertheless, it was the duty of "building a house" that locally legitimized and even encouraged the practice of labor migration, as well as a type of masculinity that the migrant workers developed. The official discourse has attributed this normalization of men's seasonal departures to local attitudes that were labeled as a kind of "social psychology":

Under the influence of seasonal migration, which is accompanied by comparatively high earnings, a corresponding social psychology is being shaped, especially among the rural population.... In their villages, seasonal migrants are praised as "good masters" [*dobryie khoziaieva*] ... As a result, there is a tradition developing, which calls for migration predominantly young men. Their reputation [*avtoritet*, another possible translation: authority] among the fellow-countrymen is often related to seasonal migration, which gained social significance for many districts in the Carpathians.⁸⁶⁵

It is not hard to notice the resemblance of the "good master" to his predecessor, the *gazda* — "head of the household" and "a good manager." Some similar moral expectations allow for a comparison of these two figures: like that of a *gazda*, seasonal migrants' success also depended on exercising initiative, as they had to search for good work places around the entire country, arrange profitable contracts, and develop "useful" social connections at home. Seasonal workers' industriousness was another characteristic that connected them to pre-war peasant values: the narrators always underlined their austere lifestyle while "at work", emphasizing their self-control, frugality and dedication to responsibilities. At home, they could allow themselves more freedom in alcohol consumption, but it was also important "not to cross the line." Next, the importance of good management of land was replaced by the necessity to successfully manage earnings: one was not considered "a good master", or granted common respect, if he was wasteful or spent too much on himself. There always needed to be a bigger purpose for

⁸⁶⁴ *Ukrainskie Karpaty. Ekonomika*, ed. M. I. Dolishniy, Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1988, 91.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

investment. Above all, his identity was still determined by his possessions, especially where his prosperity could be “visible” and had a special social significance — at home.

CONCLUSION

The socialist assault on private property did not entirely eradicate peasant familial individualism. Transcarpathia was a special case in the history of the Soviet Union, as it was “Sovietized” abruptly and swiftly in the course of five years. The banning of private property was a trauma for the peasantry, but it did not prove enough to change the values of the villagers and to swiftly remodel them into exemplary “Soviet citizens”, as the authorities had hoped. “Having possessions” was constitutive of pre-communist Transcarpathian peasants’ personhood, and it continued to bear significance even when the main social expression of prosperity and industriousness — land — was deemed illegal to own. As the aspirations for socially valuable possessions maintained cultural currency, the peasants explored the possibilities to realize them through other material means. Only a few decades after Transcarpathia was annexed by the USSR, the traditional wooden hut that had served local peasants for centuries became associated with backwardness and poverty, while a new house was a symbol of renegotiated relations of ownership in the socialist Transcarpathian countryside.

But what were seasonal migrants from Transcarpathia doing when building their houses in the times of late socialism? The short answer would be: they tried to adhere to changing values in post-war, sovietized Transcarpathia. With the social and economic transformations of the region in the 1940s, an individual house became one such value. If, in the 1950s and 1960s, the peasants’ increasing capacity to improve their living conditions by building better dwellings was a sign of breaking away from the poverty of the past, by the 1970s, the builders’ aspirations were placed in presentability of the dwellings. An individual house was crystallizing as a symbol of the owner’s prosperity, a prioritized object of investment and collective family efforts, and even a means of creative expression. The relatively limited control that the state authorized departments, including the departments of architecture and design, exercised over the construction projects, facilitated their creative interpretation of the plans and the décor of their homes. The decorative diamonds and circles that the commentators deemed philistine and kitschy, as well as other kinds of adornment, might have been following local trends, but they were also a way of making homes their own. Eventually, the commitment to construction

projects evolved into a consumerist fashion, which influenced both migrants and non-migrants. In fact, local professionals with permanent jobs, such as doctors, teachers, and agronomists, also engaged in temporary, low-skill seasonal works in order to quickly earn money and initiate or continue their own construction. It is difficult to say whether migrants' houses contributed to the shifting of the tendencies of local construction over time or if they brought any new patterns to local house designs, but it is fair to assume that the increase of their financial investment in private construction raised the standards and aspirations of the broader public.

I suggest that individual houses in rural Transcarpathia did become an object of competition and conspicuous consumption, due to the owners' direct involvement in their construction projects. Everyone in the village knew that a house was a tangible representation of the owner's hard work and persistence, as well as good connections, which were indispensable for obtaining necessary permits, as well as scarce construction materials.

Finally, the attachment to houses as possessions which intertwined with experiences of personhood, coupled with social embeddedness, contributed to the spatial and social "fixity" of labor migrants. The lack of desire to relocate to other republics of the USSR or even to the nearest town, was informed by the fact that the values that granted meaning to the migrants' motivations, actions, and life strategies were rooted in their home communities. Soviet modernization interfered with these values and triggered their redefinition and reinterpretation, but it failed to "uproot" rural dwellers and turn them into truly mobile Soviet citizens, compliant with the state policies of population redistribution. One can notice a contradiction here, since it was the seasonal migrants — the *shabashniki*, — who were accused of spatial inconsistency, "uprootedness", and "spontaneous" unregulated mobility. In fact, it was spatial and social fixity that drove Transcarpathian labor migrants from the very beginning. Lacking locally available resources to fulfill their consumption demands, they explored other possibilities, and geographical distance did not stop them. The history of the local tradition of seasonal migration was instrumental in the way that it legitimized this practice in the Transcarpathian local communities, and ensured the legacy of the patterns of self-organization and collective work.

With the collapse of the USSR, the economic and social changes once again reconfigured the relationship between the migrants and their houses. It is curious that the tendency to build "palaces" not only persisted, but thrived in some Transcarpathian villages. The directions of migration might have changed towards the East and even Western European countries, but earnings were still channeled into the construction of even more impressive palaces, some of

which were, indeed, empty, others, unfinished, and a number, ultimately abandoned.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Since migration is often understood in terms of permanent relocation, studies on migration usually focus on the questions that are raised by the events of leaving, arrival, and the journey. They therefore investigate the circumstances of departure and settlement, making new homes and building relationships with the old ones. Seasonal migration presents quite a different case, as leaving is not permanent, but temporary, and the journey itself is not a line with a distinct point of departure and final destination, but rather a cycle, where the final and initial points coincide. The relationship between movement and place is reversed here: movement is not a means of transition or escape anymore — it is a means to sustain life in the place of departure. The journey has a story of its own, of course. It has its historical and social circumstances, its personal impressions and experiential richness, but it is nevertheless envisioned as a round-trip, with strings attached to the place of origin and the head always turned back. In this thesis, I therefore emphasized the relationship between seasonal labor migration and embeddedness within a place, and showed that seasonal migration was functionally integrated in the mechanisms of survival and economic advancement, as well as status acquisition and consumption.

As my study has shown, in the Soviet Union seasonal migration was entangled within a plethora of social phenomena not immediately connected to the process of migration: it reflected the collision between central planning and individual (and collective) initiative; the clash between labor ideology and labor practices; and constituted an element of local economic tradition that was translated into an entirely new politico-economic environment, thus supporting the continuity of the pre-Soviet forms of labor and culture in rural Transcarpathia. Seasonal migration's covert, yet profound infusion in various spheres of Soviet society informed the composition of this thesis, as did the disparate sources, each group of which provided a distinct rendering of the phenomenon and implicitly suggested the way it should be interpreted. As seasonal labor migration was so ideologically saturated, its representation in the official sources and media was always filtered through the prism of political judgement. The internal documentation of the Soviet ministries and agencies persistently reproduced the message that seasonal labor migration was an undesirable phenomenon, which was threatening the planned economy with its "spontaneous" nature and was responsible for a dozen of politically and ideologically disturbing effects. The mass media created an emotionally charged image of seasonal workers and provided the lexicon that inscribed them into the Soviet taxonomy of

communist terms and values. In this way, popular media sowed in public consciousness the seeds of prejudice against seasonal workers as (politically) unreliable, exploitative, and opportunistic — an image that proved to be widely shared by the end of the 1980s. The oral interviews did not just cut across the one-sided discourse of the political elite: surprisingly, in most cases they did not try to directly oppose or refute it — they hardly engaged with it. Oral histories mostly suggested an alternative logic and language to describe the engagement in seasonal migration, both governed by a narrative of necessity. It was my task in this thesis to bring together, to deconstruct and historicize these top-down and bottom-up narratives in order to provide a fuller picture of seasonal migration in its complexity, both in the broad socio-economic context of late socialism and in that of its local significance in Transcarpathia.

The cracks and fragmentation of my own narration partly have to do with these disparate historical voices and logics. If the topics mobilized by the reading of the sources were to be addressed comprehensively, they required methodological flexibility and the readiness to break (sub)disciplinary boundaries, to be more precise, to work at the intersection of migration studies, labor history and the cultural history of late socialism. This was a challenge in itself, to a large extent because of the massive corpus of untapped late Soviet archives and the general scarcity of investigations into the social history of the late Soviet Union. The trail of the scholarship in Soviet studies and Soviet history thins progressively as it moves forward chronologically from Stalin's death. Dealing with a markedly specialized topic, I found myself encountering more unexplored adjacent narrow themes, while lacking something that could be referred to as a paradigm — in other words, a conceptual framework for late Soviet society. My immersion into the study of labor migration revealed more trends of inquiry than I could follow. In these conclusions, I would like to discuss the outcomes of my research.

One of the longstanding themes that has been drawing the attention of scholars of “actually existing socialisms”⁸⁶⁶ and the Soviet Union, could be roughly formulated as “state vs individual”. While the “totalitarian model” that suggested total control of the Soviet state over its subjects has long been refuted by the scholarly community, this binary opposition still holds analytical value, for the totalizing *intention* of the party-state brought into existence the bureaucratic apparatus and institutional structures that embraces society with a grid of

⁸⁶⁶ The term is borrowed from Rudolph Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (London: Verso, 1978). See also Katherine Verdery's rendering of the term — “formerly existing socialism”. Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 19.

unavoidable (although ad-hoc bendable) constraints. In particular, the authorities' ambitions to govern and guide human mobility were inscribed in the idea of planned economy: migration was understood in economic terms as the relocation of the labor force. This idea found its actualization in such state programs as agricultural resettlement, organized recruitment, and job placement, to name just a few. On the other hand, the passport/propiska system was supposed to function as a restrictive mechanism for internal mobility. The regulatory measures and entire agencies created in order to suppress and supervise internal mobility manifested the extent of the state's aspiration to interfere with migration "flows" and set directions for them.

However, planning was based on distorted data and encountered numerous inefficiencies of implementation, to the extent that a historian of the USSR claimed that "there never was a planned economy in the Soviet Union." While plans and planners, of course, existed, "the actual economy was far removed from the neat statistical tables set out not only to describe but to prescribe its operations."⁸⁶⁷ It was the intersection of, and the tensions between, the "actual economy" and economic prescriptions (plans) that nurtured the success of seasonal migration initiatives. Like the managerial tactics of hoarding and barter, seasonal labor was one of the informal shortcuts to patching the holes in the Soviet economy, thus sustaining it. Informal exchanges added flexibility to an otherwise rigid economic system. Therefore, seasonal migrants subverted the Soviet migration regimes and violated the legal regulations regarding internal movement and labor, while at the same time supporting the Soviet economy, and thus once again illustrating the paradox of the mutual nourishing of the formal and the "second" economy that had been accompanying the Soviet Union since the Stalin era.

In an economy with such a high degree of improvisation and self-organization,⁸⁶⁸ individual and collective agency from below was as important as top-down initiatives to establish economic connections. While operating within a vaguely regulated legal space, seasonal migrants and their employers elaborated informal schemes of cooperation that incentivized workers to enthusiastically accept insecure and irregular jobs. The lack of institutional reliability was compensated by relations of trust and networks of support. In the case of seasonal migrants from Transcarpathia, these relations and networks were regionally, and often even more locally rooted, since they relied on the resources of extended families and the closest social environment, where information was shared, and labor was mobilized. It was these personal

⁸⁶⁷ Mark Edele, *Stalinist Society, 1928–1953* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 194–195.

⁸⁶⁸ Edele, *Stalinist Society*, 195.

connections of trust and mutual responsibility and dependence that constituted the backbone of “self-organized” and “spontaneous” seasonal labor migration.

The second circumstance that proved to be formative of the development of seasonal migration from Transcarpathia under late socialism was that of historical continuities. First of all, it was the practice of seasonal migration itself that endured from procommunist era. Under the Kingdom of Hungary and later Czechoslovakia, seasonal migration helped sustain individual households in the region: it delivered a supplementary income in cash and kind to maintain small farms. Seasonal labor migration was a part of the economic and social life of the region long before it was annexed by the Soviet Union. When Transcarpathia was brought into the geographical borders of the USSR after the Second World War, it faced the social and political transformations that followed this event, and seasonal labor migration manifested itself as a strategy of economic adaptation to the historical challenges of the time. The local population had at its disposal a tradition and mechanisms of autonomous labor mobilization and these were introduced into the new economic and geographical context.

Given, on the one hand, the slow development of the local labor market beyond the collectivized agricultural sector, and, on the other hand, the increasing need for seasonal laborers in the Soviet Union in general and in the Ukrainian SSR in particular, the local tradition vigorously responded to the emerging economic demand. In addition to partially occupying a portion of the local population, seasonal migration helped maintain a resemblance with individual farming within the Soviet collectivized agricultural system. By relying on comparatively high earnings from seasonal migration, Transcarpathian rural dwellers strengthened their household autonomy,⁸⁶⁹ organized around private plot production. Seasonal migration and private plot maintenance absorbed most of the rural dwellers’ energy, while the mandatory participation in collective agricultural production was kept to the required minimum, or even fell lower than that.

Moreover, I did not use “continuities” in plural by accident. It was not only the practice of seasonal migration that survived the socialist transition, there were other local cultural patterns, which, incidentally, were sustained in connection with and by virtue of seasonal labor. Pre-communist ideas about ownership were also preserved by the local communities, even though they were transformed under the Soviet political and legal constraints. The aspirations of

⁸⁶⁹ Edele, *Stalinist Society*, 200.

Transcarpathian rural dwellers shifted from land augmentation to the construction of pompous individual houses, but the psychological mechanism behind these aspirations was the same: to sustain relationships of ownership centered on certain kinds of possessions to which special value was ascribed.

In discussions with seasonal workers, building their own house was referred to as a basic necessity. It was the goal that preoccupied every family, and its achievement was often the measure of the family's financial capacity and status in the local community. The earnings from seasonal migration provided the means to reach this goal. Thus, seasonal labor migration helped preserve elements of the relations of ownership and belonging, constitutive of pre-Soviet ideals of personhood and household management.

Finally, I would like to highlight some themes that stayed outside of the scope of this research, but deserve further investigation. First, seasonal migration had distinct age and gender profiles, with men overtaking construction and woodcutting, and women and teenagers prevailing in agricultural seasonal labor. Gender and age should also be brought to the fore because the arrangements of seasonal migration relied on support back home provided by wives and the members of senior generation. Second, since the practice of seasonal migration in Transcarpathia survived the collapse of the Soviet Union, it would be worthwhile to look into how it changed and further developed under the new regimes of migration and in the context of the open Western borders.

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