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The Commercialization of Children's Television in Postsocialist Europe

By Katalin Lustyik

Abstract: By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the children's television business had become one of the fastest growing sectors of the European media industries. The emerging postsocialist media markets have become a high priority for both transnational and regional media companies looking for new audience groups. In this article, the author provides a historical overview of the transformations that occurred in the arena of children's media culture in Eastern Europe during the last thirty years. Children's television, which attained a symbolic importance in national public debates throughout the region after 1989, can provide a unique lens to examine broader social, political, and cultural issues related to the transformations of postsocialist media systems. The author analyzes the emergence of a new conceptualization of the child media user, who is more influential than ever before, but whose power is given, expressed, and experienced primarily through consumption. Children's television in Hungary is used as a case study to provide an in-depth and detailed analysis of such transformations using diverse sources including TV guides, television programs, and in-depth interviews conducted with media professionals and policymakers between 1998 and 2008.

Keywords: children's television, commercialization, Eastern Europe, Hungary, postsocialist

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the introduction of global capitalism gave rise to a "total reorganization of life, ending up in a privatized, globalised, de-monopolized economy" (Haraszti 34). Commenting on the importance of research into the transformation of media systems in the region, Colin Sparks argued that "the scope and magnitude of the changes are so great, and the challenge they pose to some of the established ways of thinking about the media so serious, that this kind of work is of pressing importance" (7). The academic research initially carried out, however, had several limitations in its scope and subject: The press and television were often singled out as key institutions in the process of transformation with the predominance of news and policy-related analysis (Downing).[1]

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Eastern European children's mediated culture, if mentioned at all, constituted little more than anecdotal evidence and was discussed mainly in publication footnotes (e.g., Szekfű). Children's media, however, can provide a useful lens to investigate a variety of broad social, political, and economic issues related to the transformation of media systems in the region. Children, suggests Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent, are "central figures—and actors—in contemporary contests over definition of culture, its boundaries and signifi-

cance" (2). As the political, cultural, and economic aspects and roles of the media change in a society, and society itself undergoes profound transformations, so does children's media and many of the characteristics of children's programming. Children's television in particular can be thought of as a battleground on which anxieties about the future of a nation (especially those in transition) are debated. The status and structure of children's television can be perceived as an index of changes within the broadcasting system such as the diminishing of its public service roles and commercialization of its content (Buckingham et al., *Children's Television*). In this article, the term *children's television program* refers to "any program produced or commissioned by a children's department and/or one placed in scheduling periods set aside for children, identified in the television schedule as 'for children,' or is shows on a dedicated children's channel" (Buckingham et al., *Children's Television* 80).

Historical period labels such as "communist era," "socialist era," or "Soviet era" as well as geographical labels such as "Eastern Europe," "East Central Europe," and "Central and Eastern Europe" are often used interchangeably in the literature with reference to some or all parts of the former Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Although there are fundamental differences among these countries, such "labels still describe a genuine unit of analysis for global system purposes" (Sklair 223). The term *East Central Europe* is used in this article to refer primarily to Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, (Visegrád countries) and secondarily to Slovakia and Romania. The period from post–World War II until 1989 will be labeled as "socialist" and since the turn of the 1990s as "postsocialist."

Although Hungarian children's television is being used as a case study to provide concrete examples, even the countries within East Central Europe differ considerably from each other; in general, however, the overall structural changes within children's media culture show many similarities. Undertaking this project has involved the collection and analysis of different types of data. In-depth interviews were conducted between 2000 and 2002 with representatives of children's television networks, Magyar Televízió (Hungarian Television [MTV]), the Hungarian National Radio and Television Commission (ORTT), Nickelodeon Hungary, and media research groups such as AGB Hungary (AGB Nielsen Media Research), with the aim of gathering valuable insight from those whose work is connected to children's media in the region. Data compiled from a longitudinal study of Hungarian television programming in Hungary was examined to detect changes in children's programming since the mid-1980s.[2] The Web sites of the most prominent Hungarian television networks, dedicated children's channels targeting East Central European viewers, regional media watch groups, and media regulatory bodies were monitored on a regular basis.

Projects embarking on the mission to examine the transformation of children's television and compare the "old" television with the "new" might be accused of using such debates as a "convenient vehicle for laments about cultural decline that are based on little more than nostalgic fantasies about an illusory bygone age" (Buckingham et al., *Children's Televsion* 183). The socialist broadcasting system educating and "looking after" children in comparison to new commercial channels bombarding them with cheap, violent, Japanese anime, as some parents lament, needs to be examined in a broader context (e.g., Lázár; Rosdy).

The first part of the article focuses on the transformation of children's television from a state-controlled broadcasting system in monopoly position to an emerging privatized, deregulated, and increasingly competitive national media landscape. The second part examines the process of children's television becoming fully integrated into the global entertainment industry. The period I discuss includes the expansion and growing influence of both regional and global media conglomerations targeting, specifically, young media consumers. The conclusion suggests that children's television, and more broadly children's media, differs greatly today from what existed in the socialist era, although both are based on an equally narrow conceptualization of childhood and the child media user.

Children's Television in Eastern Europe during the Socialist Era

Digitization, convergence, increased commercialism, and competition with the arrival of cable and satellite providers, the deregulation of state-controlled broadcasting systems, and the decline of public service principles are some of the processes that describe the massive changes that occurred within the media industries of Eastern Europe during the last decades (e.g. Downing; Havens; Splichal, Hochheimer, Jakubowicz). The significance of the changes that occurred within children's television cannot be understood without the acknowledgment of the overall changes that had taken place at various levels of media operation, such as at the level of political direction, the character of the material presented, broadcasters' relationships to their audiences, and the economic basis of the media activity (Lustyik, "Transformation;" Sparks).

During the socialist era, children's television existed within the confinements of the state-controlled media system, received continuous financial support, and operated by principles far removed from the market but under the guidance of the ruling party. One of the purposes of communication, even in the case of young viewers, was "to transmit the instructions, ideas and attitudes of the ruling party" (Williams, *Long* 54). György Aczél, a Hungarian high-ranking party official who directed the cultural life in Hungary between 1956 and 1988, wrote in *Socialism and the Freedom of Culture* that the mission was "to make sure that the genuine, socialist-oriented endeavours of most young people are not hindered or discouraged, but supported and developed" (20). Broadcasters and program makers had to share the party's responsibility to nur-

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ture loyal citizens. Children's programming constituted a regular and stable part of the television schedules in the region since the early 1960s. Most important was the five- to ten-minute-long evening programming block sometimes referred to as the "good-night tale" scheduled before the main evening news that was an essential part of the bedtime family rituals. Daytime programs ranging from puppet shows and studio competitions to television series based on required school readings aired on weekends and during school holidays. Many of these educational and entertaining programs were produced domestically, whereas others were acquired through Intervision, a highly politicized organization established in 1961 among Eastern European television broadcasters to facilitate information and program exchanged within the region (MTV, personal communication, 2002).

In the case of Hungary, children's television operated between the late 1950s and late 1980s under the supervision of the Children and Youth Department of the state-controlled MTV. During the 1960s and 1970s, later referred to as the golden era of children's television, the department employed twenty-five people, operated its own puppet studio, and commissioned some of the most popular children's shows of the socialist era such as *Mi újság a Futrinka utcában?* (*What's up in Futrinka Street?* 1962), *Mekk mester* (*Baa, the Handyman*, 1974), *Frakk, a macskák réme* (*Frakk, The Cats' Nightmare*, 1971), *Kukori és Kotkoda* (*Kukori and Kotkoda*, 1971), and *Magyar népmesék* (*Hungarian Folktales,* 1977; MTV, personal communication, 2002).

By the mid-1980s, children's television departments in the region found themselves in an increasingly unstable political and financial situation as their institutions, to achieve more political and economic independence, tried to appeal to wider adult segments of their slowly shrinking audiences. Under these circumstances, children's departments became an "endangered species" bullied by more powerful departments serving economically and politically important audience groups (MTV, personal communication, 2000). Normative principles such as "providing children with a diversity of programming designed specifically for their age, which encouraged their physical, mental and social development to the fullest potential without the intention of exploiting them" had been thrown out of the window according to Eszter Farkas who led the Children and Youth Department for years ("Dilemma"). The traditional and paternalistic type of service for the child audience had gradually disappeared from the realm of MTV by the late 1990s. Breaking down the figures presented in table 1, it becomes clear that MTV1 had gradually decreased the amount of programs dedicated to children and youth audiences between 1986 and 1998 while the total number of programs increased. By 2000, only 2.5 percent of the total airtime (440,720 minutes) was devoted to children and youth programming (Farkas, "A Dobogókői").

Table 1. Number of Television Programs Targeting Minors (ages 4–17) on MTV1 between 1986 and 1998

Year	Shows targeting minors	Total shows
1986	135	691
1992	82	874
1998	121	832

Source: Terestyén, "A magyarországi televíziós műsorkínálat 1999-ben."

Children's Television in Transition

In the turbulent political times of the late 1980s and early 1990s, children's departments faced severe budget cuts; many employees lost their jobs; puppet and animation studios shut down; and the international exchange programs ended—all without being noticed or debated beyond the institutional walls. The public only became aware of the downsizing and dismantling of the children's television department when the daily routines of millions of families with young children were affected by the disappearance of the traditional evening children's programming block that had been offered for decades.

The new, often viciously debated, national media laws of the early 1990s restructured the media landscape of the region, allowing an increasing number of stations to compete. In the race for viewers, political support, and advertisers, prime time was becoming a crucial and valuable broadcasting time that could not be "wasted" on children. MTV, in competition with the new national and regional private broadcasters launched after the passing of the Media Law of 1996, shifted its schedule several times before it finally ended up

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Table 2. Television Programs Targeting Minors (ages 4–17) between 1986 and 2001 in Hungary on the Five Main Broadcasting Channels

Year	Number
1986	153
1992	140
1998	580
1999	571
2000	368
2001	396

Note. The five main broadcasting channels were MTV1, MTV2, and Duna TV (launched in 1993), and privately owned RTL Klub and TV2 (both launched in 1997).
Sources: Terestyén, "A magyarországi televíziós műsorkínálat változása..."; "A magyarországi televíziós műsorkínálat 1999-ben"; "A magyarországi televíziós műsorkínálat alakulása 2001-ben."

dropping its children's evening block *Esti Mese* (*Evening Tale*) in 1997. The national papers reported the event as a whole nation "mourning" the symbolic "execution" of *Tévé Maci*, the little teddy bear character. As the host of the block, he welcomed the children and then wished them good night, encouraging them to brush their teeth, put on their pyjamas, and head to bed. He served as a key symbol for children's television and was labeled by the press as "the most loyal employee" of MTV, having worked there for more than 30 years (e.g., "Eltünt"; Lőcsei).[3]

Table 3. Percentage of Television Programs Targeting Minors (ages 4–17) between 1986 and 2001 on the Five Main Television Channels in Hungary

Year	Percentage
1986	15.3
1992	9.9
1998	14.1
1999	12.3
2000	8.0
2001	8.5

Note. The five main television channels in Hungary were MTV1, MTV2, Duna TV, RTL-Klub, and TV2.
Sources: Terestyén, "A magyarországi televíziós műsorkínálat változása..."; "A magyarországi televíziós műsorkínálat 1999-ben"; "A magyarországi televíziós műsorkínálat alakulása 2001-ben."

While MTV lulled children to sleep with lively game shows and romantic Latin American telenovelas, Russian children found news bulletins instead of their traditional evening block, *Spokoinoi nochi, malishi* (*Good Night, Little Children*). The press reported the change with a string of nostalgia and disbelief:

> The programme, featuring the unsophisticated yet charming puppets . . . had been on the air for some 40 years, from de-Stalinization to de-Sovietization. Several generations of Soviet and Russian kids, including myself, and my son (now 18), had been brought up on it. I knew many children who would refuse to go to bed until the programme's gentle concluding song, *All the merry toys are now asleep*, sounded in their crammed communal flats. (Vitaliev)

Those working within the industry described the overall transformations that occurred in children's television in the region during the 1980s and 1990s as "drastic and dramatic" (Farkas, "Dilemma"). As state broadcasters were "abandoning" their children audiences, bidders for new broadcasting licenses pledged to revitalize children's television and invest in domestically produced programming for young viewers as part of their public service commitments.

With the launch of two nationwide commercial broadcasters in 1997, TV2 (ProsiebenSat1) and RTL-Klub (RTL Group), the number of children's programs increased greatly by 1998 but dropped considerably by 2000, as shown in table 2.

During their first years of operation, both TV2 and RTL-Klub offered a variety of programs, especially on weekends, as laid out in their license agreements (ORTT, personal communication, 2002). Their initial "enthusiasm" and level of commitment, however, drastically plummeted once they realized that inexpensive U.S. and Japanese cartoons were often just as popular as their more expensive in-house productions (Hirsch). They also found it easier to obtain imported rather than domestically produced shows, most of which were safely guarded in the archive of Hungarian Television, which was reluctant to license them at a "reasonable" price to its new competitors (ORTT, personal communication, 2002; Minimax, personal communication, 2002).

If we look at the ratio of broadcast time dedicated to children to total broadcasting time on the five main broadcast channels between 1986 and 2001, the time actually decreased by close to 50 percent, as indicated in table 3 (Terestyén, ". . . alakulása 2001-ben"). An increase in the portion of children's programs imported from a small number of countries, particularly from Japan and the United States, was another tangible change throughout the region. Animation constituted the majority of the imports that, in general, tended to cross cultural borders easily and have a long shelf life (e.g., Thussu). In addition to its broad appeal, animation is a relatively "difficult genre for national competition" because of its high production cost and ease to dub into local languages (Straubhaar and Duarte 246).

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Specifically in Hungary, between 1986 and 2001, broadcast time devoted to animation (for all ages) increased nine times on national channels (Terestyén, ". . . alakulása 2001-ben"). As imported cartoons came to constitute the lion's share of children's programming, less popular and more expensive genres quickly receded from the schedules (Farkas, "Dilemma"). As shown in table 4, animation constituted between 80–100 percent of programs offered to children between April and July 2001 on RTL Klub and TV2.

Table 4. Television Programs Targeting Minors (ages 4–17) by Genre in 2001 ($N = 399$) on the Five Main Television Channels in Hungary

Genre	RTL Klub	TV2	MTV1 and MTV2	Duna TV
Animation	73 79.3%	149 98%	27 44.3%	12 35.3%
Clay animation	0	0	3 4.9%	3 8.8%
Puppet show	0	0	10 16.4	0
Play	1 1.1%	0	3 4.9%	0
Feature film	0	1 0.7%	4 6.6%	6 17.7%
Documentary film	9 9.8%	0	3 4.9%	5 14.7%
Entertainment show	9 9.8%	2 1.3%	6 9.8%	8 23.5%
Sport show	0	0	2 3.3%	0
Music show	0	0	3 4.9%	0

Note. Numbers refer to number of programs and percentages to percentage of air time on that channel. The five main television channels in Hungary in 2001 were MTV1, MTV2, Duna TV, RTL-Klub, and TV2.
Source: Terestyén, "A magyarországi televíziós müsorkínálat alakulása 2001-ben."

The once-again shrinking budgets allocated for children's programming forced commercial broadcasters to rely on inexpensive imports and state broadcasters, obligated more strictly to include some domestic shows and to continuously recycle their archived programs rather than to invest in new productions. In general, in 2000, one minute of a domestically produced children's program, on average, cost as much as an entire U.S. program in Hungary (MTV, personal communication, 2002). Out of the 399 children's programs collected and coded between April and July 2001 from five broadcasters (see table 4), close to 200 originated from the United States. Hungarian shows made up only 10 percent of the 261 programs offered on the two commercial channels ("Az országos").

The inability or disinclination of broadcasters to invest in diverse local production meant that Hungarian children rarely had the chance to see themselves on television after the end of the 1980s. Instead, they followed the lives of American teenagers on the screen or watched locally produced content that primarily targeted adults. Four out of the ten most popular programs among children in October 2001 were domestic productions: two prime-time fictional programs and a music show that consisted of Hungarian wedding and folklore-inspired music (see table 5).

Dáridó, launched in 1998 on TV2, soon became one of the most popular programs, with millions of predominantly rural viewers tuning in each week. While both locally and regionally produced children's programs completely vanished during this transitional period, some of them were brought back to fame in 1999 by a new generation of entrepreneurial parents filled with nostalgia disdaining imported, more violent cartoons.

The Arrival of the "Masters"

By the second half of the 1990s, the emerging media markets in East Central Europe became a high priority for global children's media networks already available in North and South American, Western Europe, and parts of Asia and the South Pacific region, leaving fewer and fewer unclaimed territories on the globe. Nickelodeon along with Disney and the Cartoon Network are often referred to as the "masters of the children's television universe" (Westcott). Owned by the largest transnational media corporations, Viacom, the Walt Disney Corporation, and Time Warner, respectively, "the accumulation of enormous capital, marketing experience and the control of the global market have given them a tremendous com-

Table 5. The Ten Most Popular Television Programs among Minors (ages 4–17) in October 2000 on the Five Main Hungarian Broadcast Channels

Program	Type of program
1. *Dáridó a világ körül (Dáridó' around the World)*	Hungarian music magazine for adults
2. *Pokemon*	Japanese anime
3. *Wild Angel*	Argentinean telenovela
4. *Jurassic Park*	U.S. feature film
5. *Tom and Jerry*	U.S. animation
6. *Barátok Között (Among Friends)*	Hungarian prime time soap opera
7. *Naked Gun and a Half*	U.S. film
8. *Pasik! (Those Men!)*	Hungarian sitcom
9. *Születésnapi Dáridó (Birthday 'Dáridó')*	Hungarian music magazine for adults
10. *The Adventures of Foxi Maxi*	U.S. animation

Note. The five main Hungarian broadcast channels in October 2000 were MTV1, MTV2, Duna TV, RTL-Klub, and TV2.
Source: "AGB Hungary Tables."

In Hungary, Mickey Mouse was among the first official "Western" visitors to children.

petitive edge" to expand globally (Wu and Chan 198). These companies owned and operated children's television channels, participated in joint ventures, or licensed third parties to operate their programming services.

Disney has been one of the most recognized and popular media brands among children in the region, especially in the forms of animated films, comic books, and well-known Disney characters. In Hungary, Mickey Mouse was among the first official "Western" visitors to children. In late May 1989, Disney promoted the very first performance of *Disney's World on Ice* in the region. Mickey's and Donald Duck's busy and well-publicized schedule included a visit to the U.S. Embassy in Budapest and to a traditional Hungarian restaurant, where they learned to make Hungarian goulash and dance the Csárdás, a Hungarian folk dance ("Mickey"). In the early 1990s, Disney was the only U.S. distributor offering a regular weekly series in Russia, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic. By the mid-1990s, 750 hours of the 3,500 hours of Walt Disney's licensed programming worldwide were broadcast throughout Eastern Europe, dubbed into local languages ("Robert"). Weekend afternoon Disney programming blocks such as *Walt Disney Presents Duck Tales* or *Chip 'n' Dales' Rescue Rangers,* a two-hour block broadcast on MTV sponsored by Johnson and Johnson, were not-to-be missed shows on television for young viewers ("Johnson"). Disney programs became an even more stable feature of children's television throughout the 2000s, although they gravitated from state (later public) broadcast television to national commercial stations and also to dedicated children's television channels owned by the Walt Disney Company such as Jetix Europe (today, Disney XD), Playhouse Disney, and the Disney Channel.

The Cartoon Network was the first among the three global children's television networks to make its dedicated channel available via cable subscription. The network had a strong recognition among viewers, especially with cartoon classics from the Hanna-Barbara Studio such as *Tom and Jerry* or *The Flintstones*, which were broadcast in East Central Europe in the 1980s and even earlier. The Cartoon Network became available in Hungary in 1994, and by the end of the decade, it reached approximately 1.2 million cable households in the country with a population of about 10 million ("AGB Hungary Tables"; AGB Hungary, personal communication, 2002).

The majority of children's channels operating in Hungary today provide a local language feed and a Web site but no locally produced content.

Nickelodeon television programs made their debut on commercial broadcast television in 1997 in Hungary, and the Nickelodeon Hungary channel was launched in 1999 as part of the company's expansion into Eastern Europe and the Baltic Republics (Nickelodeon Hungary, personal communication, 2002). The majority of children's channels operating in Hungary today provide a local language feed and a Web site but no locally produced content. As the sample schedule of Nickelodeon Hungary reveals, the channel primarily relies on relatively old U.S. Nickelodeon cartoons scheduled in endless rotation (see table 6).

Minimax and Children's Contemporary Media Environment

The biggest competition in the region for the U.S.-based channels was Minimax, a children's television network formed in the late 1990s in Poland, then in Hungary. Within a few years Minimax rapidly gained recognition and became one of the highest rated children's television channels in Hungary (AGB Hungary, personal communication, 2002). The idea of the network was conceived by four people in a Budapest apartment and backed by regional private investors who also strongly believed in the revitalization of children's programming originating from the region. The core mission of the network at the time was to offer mainly European content for children between the ages of four and fourteen years, with the inclusion of shows produced and exchanged during the socialist era (Lori). Minimax soon became an influential cultural entity and was proudly celebrated even in political circles as an Eastern European media success story in the early 2000s. Beyond being a trusted television channel, fans could soon purchase the monthly Minimax magazine, visit its popular Web site (www.minimax.hu), attend local cultural and charity events, even embark on the weekend Mimimax river cruise on the Danube. Books, videos, DVDs, toys, clothing, and food products displaying the Minimax logo soon made their way into supermarkets and department stores. The brand also expanded within the region by establishing a Minimax channel in Romania in the summer of 2001, followed by one in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the winter of 2003.

Although Minimax's programming once consisted of over 80 percent of European shows—with 20–25 percent from Eastern Europe (Minimax, personal communication 2002)—today, it relies heavily on global hits from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and Australia, such as *Postman Pat, Global Grover, Elmo's World, My Little Pony, Franklin,* and the *Magic School Bus*. In the sample schedule of Minimax Hungary from 30

Table 6. Nickelodeon Hungary Program Schedule: 6 June 2011, 4:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Program (origin, genre, production date)	Episodes per day
SpongeBob SquarePants (U.S., animation, 1999)	5
Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom (UK, animation, 2009)	3
Dora, the Explorer (U.S., animation, 2000)	3
Go, Diego! Go! (U.S., animation, 2005)	2
Back at the Barnyard (U.S., animation, 2007)	1
Penguins of Madagascar (U.S., animation 2008)	3
Cat Dog (U.S., animation 1998)	2
Ni Hao Kai-lan (U.S., animation, 2008)	1
The Wonder Pets (U.S., animation, 2006)	1
The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron (U.S., animation, 2002)	1
My Life as a Teenage Robot (U.S., animation, 2003)	1
Avatar: The Last Airbender (U.S., animation, 2005)	2
Drake and Josh (U.S., sitcom, 2004)	4
iCarly (U.S., sitcom, 2007)	4
Unfabulous (U.S., sitcom, 2004)	1
The Fairly Odd Parents (U.S., animation, 2001)	2
Fanboy and Chum Chum (U.S., animation, 2009)	1
The Troop (U.S.–Canada, live-action series, 2009)	1

Source: www.port.hu.

April 2010 (see table 7), only three five-minute programs, *Minimax News, Have You Read It?* and *Hungarian Folk Tales* represent Hungarian content, and one old Czechoslovakian cartoon *Bob and Bobek* adds regional flavor.

Minimax went through several owners during the past decade; it was proudly but briefly owned "100 percent" by the Hungarian company Mediatech ("Száz"). Since 2007, it belongs to Chello Central Europe, the Central European-based content division of Liberty Global, a transnational media company registered in the United States. Minimax is now branded as "Central Europe's leading children's channel with a target audience of 2–12," with local language feeds and dedicated Web sites in Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Moldova, and the former Yugoslavian countries with the exception of Slovenia ("Minimax"). In Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, Minimax debuted in early 2007.

Children's television has become one of the fastest growing and most lucrative sectors of the media entertainment industry in Europe (Papathanassopoulos). A pan-European study conducted in the mid-1990s with the involvement of twenty-two public television stations in seventeen countries concluded that even public service broadcasters, traditionally committed to children by providing diverse programming that addresses their special interests, were increasingly operating under a "market logic" (Biltereyst). "Now more than ever familiar in children's programming," observed David Biltereyst, are "programming strategies or processes such as standardization, routinization, competition, internationalization, the emphasis on entertainment, [and] the decline of local production" (101). Although the United Kingdom is often described as the most competitive children's media market in Europe, East Central Europe has been following in its footsteps at an accelerated speed (MAVISE Database of TV Companies and TV Channels in the European Union). Polish households with cable and satellite subscription can access thirty-eight children's channels, some targeting Polish children specifically such as Cartoon Network Poland, Disney Channel Polska, and Cbeebies Poland. Others, such as Cartoon Network Europe, Al Jazeera Children's Channel, or Baby TV (several versions available besides

Table 7. Minimax Hungary Sample Program Schedule Listed by Origin of Production: Friday, 30 April 2010

Program (origin)	Length in minutes
Local and regional content	
Minimax News (Hungary)	5
Have You Read It? (Hungary)	5
Hungarian Folk Tales (Hungary)	5
Bob and Bobek (*Bob a Bobek, králíci z klobouku,* Czechoslovakia)	8
Non-local content dubbed in Hungarian	
My Little Pony (U.S.)	20
Martha Speaks (U.S.)	25
Elmo's World (U.S.)	15
Global Grover (U.S.)	5
Adventures of Bert and Ernie (U.S.)	10
Mary-Kate and Ashley in Action (U.S.)	30
Viva Pinata (Canada/U.S.)	15
Busytown Mysteries (Canada)	25
Chuggington (UK)	10
Mr. Bean (UK)	10
Timmy Time (UK)	15
Roary the Racing Car (UK)	10
Fifi and the Flowertots (UK)	10
Lenny and Tweek (Germany)	5
Leo and Fred (Germany)	5
Once Upon a Time . . . Man (France)	25
Pat & Stan (France)	5
Geronimo Stilton (Italy)	25
Bindi, the Jungle Girl (Australia)	25

Source: Minimax program schedule (www.minimax.hu), 2010.

the Polish version), cater to panregional audiences (MAVISE Database of TV Companies and TV Channels in the European Union). Even in Hungary, given its much smaller media market, twelve children's channels are present in 2011 (see table 8).

Children's contemporary media environment has been increasingly shaped by transnational media conglomerations and commercial interests throughout Eastern Europe as well. Like in the Western markets, the continuous cross-promotion and cross-selling of media products—every cartoon selling another toy, every toy designed to get someone interested in a forthcoming book, magazine, film, or video game (e.g., Kinder; Pecora; Steemers)—has become prevalent in the region. In today's multiplatform and predominantly profit-driven media systems throughout Europe, even the Hungarian Tévé Maci, the teddy bear character discussed earlier, has been "revived" and is available to be purchased in the form of books and DVDs; children can play with him online and befriend him on Facebook where he had over 19,000 fans by 2010. A Hungarian online store specializing in stuffed cuddly bears offers a dedicated page to Tévé Maci fans within its "Famous Hungarian Bears" section ("TV Maci"), and many other television characters of the socialist era have been rediscovered and rebranded for new generations of children.

Conclusion

This article provides a brief overview of the transformations that occurred in the arena of children's television in the region of East Central Europe, focusing on the period between the mid-1980s and 2011. Although television programs made specifically for children composed an important, core broadcasting service during the socialist era, since the 1980s, they have increasingly been exposed to the pressures and regulations of a globally interconnected media environment, in which the survival of television practices aimed at children stem primarily from market principles closely following trends observed in Western countries for decades.

In today's media landscape, commercial media organizations promote the conceptualization of the child as an active and competent "media consumer," who is more influential than ever before, but whose power is given, expressed, and experienced primarily through consumption. Institutions primarily serving and defining children as consumers rather than citizens have been accepted as an inevitable consequence of East Central Europe's integration into the global media market. When a handful of Hungarian parents called Minimax to complain about the existence and frequency of advertising in 2000, the management assured them that it was a "small and inevitable price" for the operation of the only network offering regional and high-quality educational content (Minimax, personal communication, 2002).

Children's contemporary media environment has been increasingly shaped by transnational media conglomerations and commercial interests throughout Eastern Europe as well.

According to David Buckingham, Hannah Davis, and Ken Jones, "[T]he market can provide quality and diversity," and "it can foster children's social, cultural and intellectual development; it might even 'empower' them in certain ways. It is simply that these are not its primary aims" (65). Like McChesney, who questions our common assumptions about the "absolute naturalness" of the development of a commercial-based media system like that of the United States, we should critically examine the extensive marketization of children's media cultures in postsocialist Europe that is often perceived to be a "natural" progression. The rapid and substantial expansion in commercial media directed at children and young people in the region has not received nearly as much public attention and deliberation as some other aspects of contemporary children's mediated culture such as media violence (e.g., *Dragon Z Ball*) or children's online safety (e.g., Haszán).

Table 8. Children's Television Channels Available in Hungary (March 2011)

Name	Broadcasting company	Main targeted country
Baby TV (version in English)	Baby Network Ltd.	United Kingdom
Boomerang (version in Hungarian)	Turner Broadcasting International Ltd.	Hungary
Cartoon Network (version in Hungarian)	Turner Broadcasting International Ltd.	Hungary
Disney Channel	The Walt Disney Company Ltd.	United Kingdom
Disney Channel (version in Hungarian)	Jetix Europe Channels B.V.	Hungary
Duck TV	Mega Max Media S.R.O.	Slovakia
Duck TV HD	Mega Max Media, S.R.O.	Slovakia
JimJam (version in Hungarian)	Jimjam Television Ltd.	Hungary
KidsCo (version in Hungarian)	Kidsco Ltd.	Hungary
KIKA	Germany	Germany
Minimax (version in Hungarian)	Chello Central Europe, S.R.O.	Hungary
Nickelodeon (version in Hungarian)	Nickelodeon U.K. Limited	Hungary

Source: MAVISE Database of TV Companies and TV Channels in the European Union (http://mavise.obs.coe.int), 2011.

It is essential, however, to be cautious about conceptualizing children's culture during the socialist era as "better" or less problematic. How different are television programs created primarily to support the "socialist-oriented endeavors" of young people—to use Aczél's quotation (20) again—from those primarily created to encourage the "market-oriented" endeavours of toddlers and teens today? The media during the socialist era heavily guarded the traditional borders of childhood by serving, representing, and conceptualizing children as vulnerable, passive, helpless, impressionable, and needing continuous education and moral as well as political guidance.

Children in the region today, like children in so many other parts of the world, are addressed more informally, entertained even when educated with often more innovative, extensively researched, creative, and interactive programs than they were ever before (Banet-Weiser; Hendershot; Wasko). As part of a continuous "dialogue" with programmers, children are encouraged to write letters, draw pictures, participate in focus groups, and cast their votes on various issues (e.g., see Nickelodeon's Kids' Choice Award), although their voices can easily get lost when they try to communicate with pan-regional networks covering several time zones and languages (e.g., Lustyik, "Transnational"). After generations of East Central European viewers growing up in a paternalistic media system in which their voices, opinions, and preferences mattered little, today there might be more ways for some young consumers to shape their media environment. Such possibilities—often described by media professionals as children's "power" to create their own media environment and "freedom"—to cast their votes and express themselves, however, can be rather limited. As Raymond Williams put it, "[A]nything can be said, provided that you can afford to say it and that you say it profitably" (*Resources* 133).

> Institutions primarily serving and defining children as consumers rather than citizens have been accepted as an inevitable consequence of East Central Europe's integration into the global media market.

The consequences of the profound transformation of children's media culture in postsocialist Europe are proving to be more complex and contradictory than either critics or enthusiasts expected. Since Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck's first official visit to the region in 1989, children's television, once shielded behind the Iron Curtain, has become shaped by and fully incorporated into the global entertainment industry with rather limited real input from the region. The constructions of the child television viewer during the socialist and postsocialist eras in many ways seem equally narrow and ideologically charged. The difference is that, today, the narrow and limiting construction is obscured by the endless appeals to consumer "choice" and the "freedom" offered to younger and younger media users.

NOTES

1. See Downing; Giogri; Paletz, Jakubowicz, and Novosel; Sparks; Splichal; and Splichal, Hochheimer, and Jakubowicz.

2. A longitudinal study of television programming was conducted by the MTA-ELTE Kommunikációelméleti Kutatócsoport (Hungarian Academy of Science and Eotvos University Communication Research Group) since 1985. The primary purpose of the project was to assess the overall changes within television programming during a period of profound sociopolitical transitions in Hungary. The research team collected data about programs offered on five terrestrial television channels: MTV, Duna Televízió (after 1993), and RTL-Klub and tv2 (after 1997). The program schedule published in the weekly *Rádió and Televízió Újság* in March every year was used for data collection; each program that appeared in the schedule from the opening hour until the last program was coded. Results of the projects were published regularly (see all three Terestyén references).

3. MTV's second channel, MTV2 (also referred to as m2 today), which has minimum viewership, ended up hosting *Esti Mese,* scheduling it between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. in response to public pressure.

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