ABSTRACT. This paper discusses the reasons for the growing demand for social indicators in Hungary and in other European socialist countries. A brief history of the construction of a system of social indicators within the framework of the Council of Mutual Economic Aid is given. The subsystems and the main indicators are described. The present practice and the problems of social classifications used in the social indicator systems and in social surveys are treated. In addition to the existing data sources of social indicators, sample surveys were considered to be necessary to provide a full and detailed view of Hungarian society. In addition to objective indicators, recently, subjective indicators have also been collected.

1. THE REASONS FOR THE GROWING INTEREST IN SOCIAL INDICATORS AND ANALYSES

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office has a long tradition of collecting and publishing social statistical data of high quality. For example, data have been collected on the social position of parents of secondary school pupils and of university students since the end of the 19th century, so that tendencies in social recruitment can be analyzed for a period of over 80 years. The first national social mobility survey was performed in 1930, linked to the census, similar surveys were made in 1949, 1962–1964, and 1973, so that the changes in mobility can be investigated from the capitalist period through the early years of socialist transformations and the period of extensive industrialization up to the recent period which used to be called the ‘transition to conditions of intensive development’.

Following the Second World War economic statistics for some time overshadowed the statistical investigation of social processes. This was related to central economic planning, to the need for statistical control of the fulfilment of economic plans, and also to the optimistic belief that the socialist transformations and the rapid economic growth will sooner or later solve all the existing social problems. However, already in the mid-1950s it became clear that some social problems, like the relatively low standard of living of part of the population, would not disappear spontaneously or soon, and while some problems — e.g. the misery of the landless agricultural workers — really dis-
new problems arose parallel to industrialization and urbanization, such as the low level of fertility linked to the high rate of employment of married woman and the difficulties of workers immigrating from rural to urban areas, particularly those who lived in worker hotels. It was stressed that these social problems, if neglected, could endanger the achievement of economic goals (Kulcsár, 1973; 1980). This new awareness of social problems resulted in a growing demand for social information.

A second related factor in the increasing interest in social statistics was the development of long-term planning. The first long-term 15-year plan was prepared for the period 1970–1985. (Earlier, only 5-year plans and yearly plans had been prepared.) Since that time, after each 5-year period a new 15-year plan has been elaborated by modifying the earlier plan for the first 10 years. At present the long-term plan for 1986–2000 is being elaborated. These long term plans understandably give greater emphasis to social processes than do the 5-year plans, as these processes change relatively slowly and can hardly be modified significantly in 5 years, but are important elements of the changes occurring over a 15-year period and might be influenced in the desired directions by conscious policies during such a period. Therefore this plan for the next 15 years includes goals and policies in the fields of the standard of living, income inequality, the improvement of the position of the deprived strata, social mobility and the openness of society, the security of employment, the trends in material and service consumption, and the development of the network of settlements and transport (Illés, 1982).

The demand of the social sciences for data on the facts of the Hungarian economy and society might be considered to be the third important factor promoting the development of social statistics. In connection with the shift of interest in economics toward empirical studies and analyses aimed at proposals for the reform of the economic mechanism, research in economics has demanded more and better data on economic and related social phenomena. Also, around 1960, sociology was reborn in Hungary. The ‘new start’ in sociology was motivated by the same background factors as was the development of social statistics. At the same time sociology caused a new demand for social statistical data, the more so, as an informal division of labor was instituted between social statistics and sociology, the former collecting the basic national data from institutional statistics and from representative national sample surveys, the latter concentrating on finer analysis based on smaller samples. In the 1970s topics like social structure,