



Advertising Soda Water in Hungary between the Two World Wars

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Abstract. In my study, I will present the advertisements related to soda water in Hungary during the period in question from the perspective of press, media, and cultural history. In the 1930s and 1940s, just as today, the aim of the advertisements was to highlight the special characteristics of the product and to draw attention to it. In my work, I seek to find out what media techniques the profession used to promote its products during this period of soda water production and how it used the various advertising tools to attract customers. In addition to periodicals, I will focus on the forms and content of communication that convey the status of soda water in new ways. Thus, I will place particular emphasis on the advertisements for the textbook of the first industrial soda water course, as well as on small print, caricatures, theatre and cinematographic works, and mapping their social, cultural, economic, and ideological background.

Keywords: soda water, advertisements, media techniques, cultural history, cinematographic works

Introduction

Several aspects of the study are used as a basis for interpreting the cultural aspects of soda water. In my paper, I drew on the disciplines and methods that foreground the cultural paradigm such as *Alltagsgeschichte* [history of everyday life], new cultural history and media history. The Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan's well-known statement from his work *Understanding Media* (McLuhan 1964) that “the medium is the message” can be applied in this study, i.e. it is no longer a means to convey meaning but rather a framework for meaning making. Thus, the model-like basic movement of the media can be applied to this situation, i.e. the existence of a new medium does not make the existing one redundant, does not replace it but merely steps alongside it and at the same time forces it to reposition itself (Schanze 2001). The background to this is that no medium is by its very nature capable of representing reality in its entirety but only in the form of

a reduction of complexity (Szajbély 2016). In this study, the historical analysis is mainly based on primary sources and the sources of material and visual culture. So-called “sleeping sources” (Bourdé–Martin 1985) – e.g. *Kellnerzettel* (accounting slips) – further help to unravel the connections between the contents associated with soda water. My research methods are characterized by interdisciplinarity and the combination of different qualitative and quantitative approaches. The cultural-historical perspective, which differs from the traditional industrial, technical, and economic historical approaches, helps to create a more nuanced picture of the changing symbolic content of soda water and the role of the product in the food culture. In the following, I focus on the analysis of social practices, representations, and symbols. I will study how the product is integrated into everyday consumption and how this is reflected in the advertisements in the examined period.

The Emergence of Soda Water Advertisements in Hungary

As far as the history is concerned, the first advertising surfaces were the objects themselves: the porcelain heads with green dew water swing top bottles, then the eagle beaks, followed by the simple transparent white and coloured glass with metal heads, and the signs, inscriptions, and symbols on them. From the second half of the 19th century onwards, periodicals began to feature product promotions of “artificial sparkling water”. These are illustrated by the advertisements published in the pages of *Orvosi Hetilap* [Medical Weekly, 1865], *Esztergom és Vidéke* [Esztergom and Its Countryside, 1892], *Bácskai Hirlap* [Bachchan Newspaper, 1900], and *A szikviz- és szénsavipar lapja* [Newspaper of Soda Water and Carbonic Acid Industry, 1910], which show the changing content of the thematic advertisements. At that time, the production of soda water was part of the field of applied chemistry, and soda water was sold as a medicinal product in pharmacies, which sold not only medicines but also cosmetics, body care products, disinfectants, medicinal waters, ointments, syrups, and powders. So, the majority of advertisers are doctors and pharmacists, who try to take advantage of the specialized press. Advertisements at the turn of the century emphasize the health-promoting effects of carbonated water, as do placards on billboards and omnibuses recommending the consumption of soda water as a protective drink, especially during epidemics. The Fifth Paris World Fair¹ marks a turning point in

1 Ödön Miklós wrote about the World Exhibition in his book *Magyarország és társországai az 1900-ik évi párisi Nemzetközi Kiállításon* [Hungary and Its Partner Countries at the 1900 International Exhibition in Paris] and Béla Czobor in his study *Magyarország történelmi kiállítása* [The Historical Exhibition of Hungary]. A detailed description of the installations is given by Samu Boros in his work *A párisi magyar kiállítás kalauza* [The Guide to the Hungarian Exhibition in Paris]. In addition, several authors have written on the subject in the journal

the product's assessment, as it is transferred from the chemical category to the food category (Exposition Culinaire, Classe 55, Groupe 10).² This sets the course for the future of sparkling water internationally and then also in Hungary, i.e. it accelerates the move towards a more pleasure character. Subsequently, private entrepreneurs increasingly occupy a central place in the small-scale industry. A new feature after the First World War is the expression of the nation's search for identity, which is embodied in the name of the soda factories (e.g. *Hunnia or Hungária Szikvízüzem*), in the imagery of the advertising, and in the textual content. The symbols represented on the sparkling water bottles, such as the wreaths weaved in national colours with the slogans “No No Never” and “Everything Back”, reflect the revisionist attitude. The accelerated modernization between the two world wars favoured the growth of the small soda water industry: so, advertising itself was stimulated, and at the same time competition intensified. After the recovery from the Great Depression, industrial production expands and incomes rise.



Source: author's photo

Figure 1. Soda bottle with the inscription “Nem Nem Soha” [No No Never]

One of the consequences of industrialization, the growth of services, and urbanization is that the need for education comes to the fore. The Ministry of Industry commissioned the production of an educational material for the training of soda water makers, entitled *Szikvíziparosok Tanácsadója* [Soda Water Manufacturer's Advisor] (Erdélyi–Kozma 1939). The handbook is of great importance in the history of the craft, as it became the basic work for modern soda

Magyar Iparművészet [Hungarian Applied Art] (Miklós 1903, Czobor 1901: 1–19, Boros 1900, Pap 1900: 176–183, Mihalik 1900: 327–334).

2 From the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Hungarian Statistical Bulletins already classified the makers of soda water in the main group of the production of foodstuffs and pleasure articles. The 1900 census, which also shows the change in the category of soda water, lists the production of soda water as the one hundred and forty-eighth of the three hundred and twenty-eight occupations (*Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények* 1904).

water production and training in Hungary in the 20th century. The publication, which presents a specific type of advertising, also contains a significant number of advertisements.

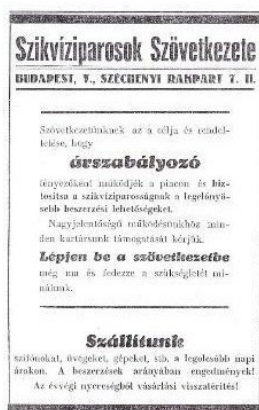
Thematic Product Recommendations from *Szikkvíziparosok Tanácsadója* [Soda Water Manufacturer's Advisor]

The National Board of Industrial Courses, in cooperation with the Hungarian Rural Soda Water Association, launches the industrial courses for sparkling water producers in the capital, at the Royal Hungarian State Higher Industrial School, with the permission of the Minister of Industry. On 16 October 1939, the course was inaugurated in a ceremony by Emil Ferenczy, Minister Councillor and retired Director General of Industrial Education. The bound book is published in Budapest in March 1939 by István Urbányi Book Printing Institute as the first volume of *Szikkvízipari Szakkönyvtár* [Specialized Library for Soda Water Industry]; four series followed in 1942 by another publication of specialized knowledge, *A szikkvízipar technológiája* [The Technology of the Soda Water Industry] by Mihály Károly Kozma (Kozma 1942). The foreword was written by Antal Czirják, a soda water industrialist and parliamentary representative of independent smallholders from Pécs, President of the Hungarian Rural Soda Water Association. In addition to the knowledge to be acquired, the course guide also contains paid advertisements featuring some of the representatives of the profession and its auxiliary industries, component manufacturers, protective clothing manufacturers. The inclusion of product offers is not only essential to finance the work but is also a relevant factor in attracting the public and gaining a better economic position. They have in common that they are mainly text-based, presenting information of a persuasive nature, drawing attention to the specific characteristics and uniqueness of the product. The presentation of the product mainly consists of printed information messages of varying size and type. Producers and distributors seek to market their products within the professional framework of expertise, reliability, and quality.

The educational material also includes calls from two professional advocacy organizations. The recruitment placards are also propaganda for the newly formed representative organizations, encouraging them to join and organize themselves. In 1935, Antal Czirják founded the Hungarian Rural Soda Water Association in opposition to the National Association of Soda Water Industrialist, founded in the second half of the 1920s by the great entrepreneur of Budapest, Ödön Süss, which

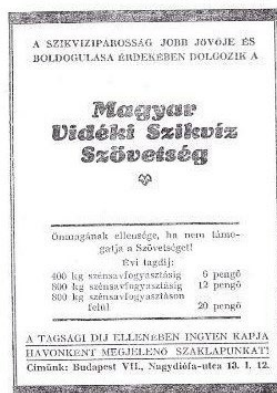
was concentrated in the capital. The declaration of the two associations shows the conflict of interests as well as the opposition between the capital and the countryside.

In its call to join, the Cooperative of Soda Water Industrials in Budapest wants to “serve the market” as a “price regulator” for soda manufacturers, providing them with the “most advantageous conditions”. Thus, it promises to supply siphons, bottles, and machines at the lowest daily price, and it even offers “a rebate on the year-end profit in proportion to the purchases made”. For the cooperative’s “large-scale” operation, it asks for the support of “the members of the cartel” (Erdélyi–Kozma 1939: 81).



Source: Szikvíziparosok tanácsadója. 1939: 81

Figure 2. A call to join forces from the Cooperative of the Soda Water Industrials between the two world wars



Source: Szikvíziparosok tanácsadója. 1939: 81

Figure 3. The recruitment placard of the Hungarian Rural Soda Water Association at the end of the 1930s

The recruitment placard of the rural industrialist body (Erdélyi–Kozma 1939: 79) builds on the national consciousness reflecting the ideology of the period. It proclaims in capital letters: “The Hungarian Rural Soda Water Association is working for the better future and prosperity of the soda water industry.” The call for self-organization, “You are your own enemy if you don’t support the Association”, is a strong invitation to join, with the monthly magazine free of charge. The notice also includes the membership fee, which is calculated on the basis of the company’s income.

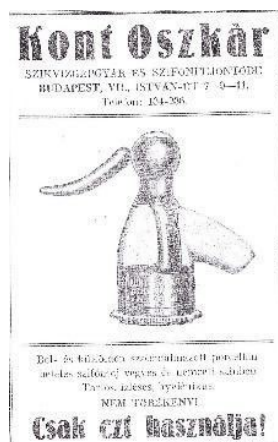
One of the product advertisements in the leaflet offers a rapid filter suitable for both filtration and iron removal, the quality of which has been repeatedly tested by the Royal Hungarian National Institute of Public Health (Erdélyi–Kozma 1939: 37). The advertisement draws attention to itself with bold, italicized highlights, different font sizes, and questions that directly address the customer: “Does your water taste of iron?” “Do you want to make good and healthy soda water?” “Filter out the foreign substances and harmful bacteria floating in the water!”



Source: Szikvíziparosok tanácsadója. 1939: 36

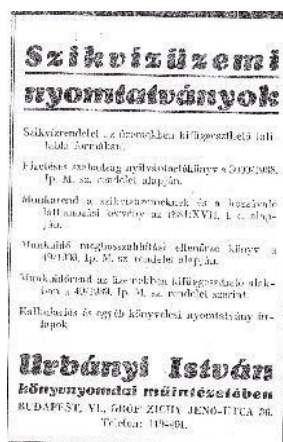
Figure 4. Water filter advertisement from the late 1930s

Manufacturers also lay great emphasis on the promotion of components. This is reflected, for example, in the advertisement of the Oszkár Kont Soda Water Machine Factory and Siphon Head Foundry, which features a patented graphic of a “porcelain-inserted soapstone head” with the name and address of the manufacturer (Erdélyi–Kozma 1939: 86). The large lettering emphasizes that the product is “beautiful, aesthetic, durable, hygienic” and has the big advantage of being “non-fragile”. A special emphasis is given to the appeal by the embossed call “Use only this!”. The product is available in a variety of forms, from “mixed” to patriotic “national colours”.



Source: Szikvíziparosok tanácsadója. 1939: 86

Figure 5. Advertisement of Oszkár Kont Soda Bottle Head from 1939



Source: Szikvíziparosok tanácsadója. 1939: 91

Figure 6. Drawing attention to the product of Urbányi Printing House in the late 1930s

In the textbook, the Book Printing Institute of István Urbányi advertises forms for the soda water works (Erdélyi–Kozma 1939: 91). The regulated soda production required their use in order to ensure transparency, controllability and to monitor the legal operation. The thickly-paged advertising text offers a full range of forms: a notice board to be displayed in the factories, on which the current soda water decree can be read, a book of paid leave records in accordance with the provisions of the Decree of the Minister for Industry No 3000/1938, a factory work schedule and the accompanying vision application to para. XVII of

the Law of 1884, a working time extension control book according to the Decree of the Minister for Industry No. 49/1939, plus calculation and other accounting forms. The fact that the training material is also published by the enterprise of István Urbányi is a quite excellent example for effective organization of orders for his own company.

Thanks to advertisements, the textbook as a media platform transcends its educational function. The handbook is read with great interest not only by prospective business owners but also by small-scale industrialists who are already running their own businesses, since the advertisements in the manual inform them about what and where to buy. The thematic advertising toolbox will be further expanded during this period.

Soda Water Advertisements in a New Cultural Environment

In the early 1930s, the *autosiphon*,³ the Sparklet, and the *autotank*,⁴ which started in the United States and later also made inroads into England and Germany, began to spread in Hungary, where they could be used to prepare refreshing drinks in households and catering establishments (Kozma 1942: 33–34). In addition to the tax burden, the emergence of new product types also made the situation difficult for soda water manufacturers, as restaurateurs, seeking cheaper solutions, did not order safe, high-quality but more expensive bottled soda water, but they prepared it themselves using the *autotank*. The growing popularity of the *autosiphon* and the *autotank* is also being sensitively reflected in various artistic disciplines. The change of product on the consumer side, which in many cases made it impossible for small-scale soda water manufacturers to survive, is the subject of theatrical adaptation, as reported by the correspondent of *The Soda Water Industry* (*A szikvizipar* 1930: 8). Lajos Zilahy's three-act comedy *A Tésasszony* [The Honourable Madam], presented in 1930 at Vígszínház, vividly reflects the changing soda water consumption habits. From the industrialists' perspective, the play shows the decline of a previously profitable sector, the artificially created and ever-increasing competition. The stage adaptation goes beyond a faithful portrayal of reality and exacerbates this crisis by having the honest but self-disappointed, good-natured industrialist even drive his wife out of his home to marry the cashier who banished the *tanksoda* from the café as a sign of his

3 Soda water could also be made at home. The *autosiphon*, used exclusively in private households, was a glass bottle covered with a dense wire mesh, which was used to produce one litre of soda water. Over time, the glass bottle was replaced by an aluminium bottle.

4 The *autotank*, which was mainly used in catering establishments, was a tin-plated copper cylinder with a capacity of twenty litres. Due to its rudimentary design and unsuitability, its use sometimes resulted in tragic accidents and was banned by decree in 1932 (Kozma 1942: 34).

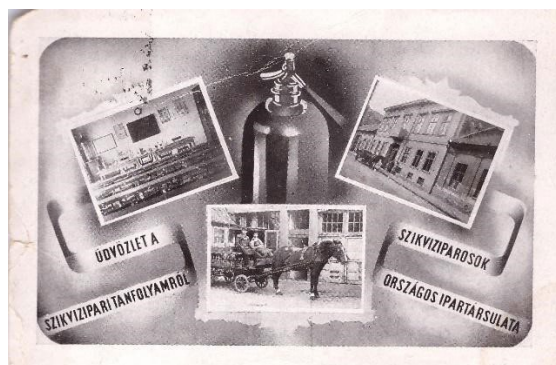
gratitude. The literary historian Aladár Schöpflin wrote a review of the play in the literary journal *Nyugat* [West], in which he noted that *A Tésasszony* [The Honourable Madam], with its theme and characters, modelled on the Viennese *Volksstück* [folk play], fitted in with the trend of staging the social problems of the period (*Nyugat* 1930: 24). The production is also mentioned in the newspaper *A szikvizipar* [The Soda Water Industry] by Ödön Süss, who was involved in the production as a consultant and who put his “own patented siphon bottles” at the disposal of the theatre in Nagykörút as props. On the placard promoting the performance, the much-quoted paraphrase “Soda water is the truth in the wine” (Kiss 2008: 67) became a widely used slogan. In his article published in the periodical *Színház* [Theatre], József Vinkó, a translator and playwright, writes, “The themes of the plays trace the interest of the audience: in the early twenties, the village was in vogue, then came the prisoner of war stories, then the irredentist themes, and finally the various occupations...” (*Színház* 1982: 6).

In addition to the types of advertising presented so far, small print is becoming increasingly important in the promotion of soda water. A separate category is the counting slip, the front of which offers a wide variety of advertising graphics (Virányi 2014: 143). The visual and typographic elements of a contemporary *Kellnerzettel*, which can also be considered a miniature placard, present the competition attacking the soda water industry in a creative way. Narrow, elongated counting slips, which are common in the trade, are typical advertising media of this period (Cseh 2002). Printed-paper blocks in bundles of 50 and 100 appear in large numbers, as the socio-economic boom of the second half of the 1930s creates a wider consumer base. The easy-to-handle paper with pictures is used in elegant shops in the capital as well as in small shops in the countryside. They are most popular in grocery and convenience stores, where many people pass through on a daily basis. They are also used in cafés and restaurants. The blank side is a handy payment slip, and the printed side advertises a product or service with short, concise, targeted, informative messages. The attention-grabbing drawing and rhymed advertising slogan of one of the most popular, humour-filled numbering slips – “The first thing you should do is buy an *autosiphon*” – is an effective communication tool against factory soda. The steel mesh siphon illustration, which mimics the human form and figuratively descends down the red staircase and into the consumer price point, focuses on the cost-effectiveness and practicality of homemade cartridge soda. In addition, it encourages consumers to buy by offering other discounts: “Get 12 dozen discounted merchandise cartridge exchange voucher booklets for P 2.88! For P 1.20 instead of P 2, you get a dozen of replacement cartridges for a voucher sheet and can make a litre of soda water, sparkling wine, and all kinds of carbonated soft drinks for 12 fillérs! Get a free recipe booklet too!” The soda siphon is gaining popularity in households despite

the fact that the quality of the soda water produced with the cartridge and the safety of the device are questionable.

What is new in the cultural dimension of soda water in this period is the appearance in some press organs, alongside commercial advertisements, of feuilletons, cartoons, short news stories, and a kind of distorting mirror of mockery. The latter genre also includes soda water, which the daily newspaper *Az Est* [The Evening] wrapped up in a humorous story – *Párbaj után édes az elégtétel. Szikvíz úr megreformálta a lovagias eljárást* [After a duel, satisfaction is sweet. Mr Soda Water has reformed the chivalry procedure] (*Az Est* 1935: 134). The question of authorship also comes to the fore, as the creator claims that his name should appear in a clearly visible manner on the depictions he creates. Imre Lányi is the creator of the figure, who is a corpulent, siphon-headed, jovial, and likeable figure, and who produced illustrations for the newspaper between 1934 and 1936, which was aimed at a large audience. Mr Soda Water is the hard-working, honest, tax-paying industrialist who needs a lot of ideas, ingenuity, and determination in his struggle to make a living. The topical message is embodied in an entertaining series of images. Situated comically, the scenes tell the story of Mr Soda Water's adventures in a comic-book style. The five black-and-white stills are intended to entertain the reader, but also to draw attention to the injustices of a more difficult life through powerful symbols, short captions, and the characters' clashes.

After the Second World War, compulsory training in the soda water industry and the craft itself were promoted through a new medium. The postcard, dating back to 1948, captures three episodes in the life of the soda makers: it announces the start of a course organized by the National Association of Soda Water Manufacturers, presents the organization's building in the capital, and arouses interest in learning the skills of the industry outside the institutional framework. The greeting card focuses on the horse-drawn carriage, indicating that the essential element of the craft is the delivery of goods to the customer.



Source: author's property

Figure 7. A postcard from 1948 promoting a course in the soda water industry

In the same year, the Hungarian Soda Manufacturing Guild was dissolved, creating its successor, the National Organization of Small Industrials. The publication of the just relaunched trade journal *Szikkvízipar* [The Soda Water Industry] is finally discontinued, so the profession no longer has a thematic organ under state socialism. The complexity of the media genre in which soda water is presented is further complicated by film as an audiovisual medium.

Soda Water and Spritzer in Films

Not only theatre but also cinema provides several examples of this stage of product presentation. In the feature films of the 1930s, the bourgeois milieu was characterized by the spritzer, the epitome of cheap and pleasant pleasure. Since the second half of the 20th century, the refreshing, carbonated water has also appeared in educational films, documentaries, newsreels, and series. In this work, I will not only look at some of the works from the two decades under review but also at the film drama by the Béla Balázs Prize-winning director and screenwriter Ferenc Török, which, although a contemporary work, has a plot that dates back to this period. I am not primarily interested in artistic and aesthetic aspects but rather in how soda water becomes part of the plot and what symbolic meaning the filmmakers attach to it, interpreting it as a specific historical source. In *Hyppolit, a lakáj* [Hyppolit, the Butler, 1931] Mátyás Schneider, a haulier, and his friends enter a small inn. On a table in the garden, there is a litre bottle of soda water with an aluminium head, and nearby are glasses with spritzer. In *Meseautó* [The Dream Car, 1934], filmed three years later, Vera Kovács, a typist who is head over heels in love with her boss, the manager of the factory, has the greatest desire to go to a small restaurant in Lillafüred to eat a stew and drink a *kisfröccs* (spritzer made from one decilitre wine and one decilitre soda water). It is remarkable that in the remake, set in 2000, the Kovács kitchen is no longer equipped with the traditional glass of soda water but with a round-bellied cartridge soda siphon as its competitor. In *Címzett ismeretlen* [Recipient Unknown, 1935], Teri, an orphaned girl, is put up for sale, and her guardians do not want her to marry her lover but rather their intended son-in-law, Hugo, a wealthy soda manufacturer from Újpest. This scene also reveals that a prosperous soda water factory then provides lasting financial security for its owner, who can afford to choose the beautiful but dowryless bride. In the film *Katyi* (1942), the glass of soda water, a must for hospitality, is also on the table. Kató, the title character, travels down to Lake Balaton, asks her friend to play the role of a fortune-teller and to predict to Peter, who wants to teach her a lesson, that she will drown in the lake. In his grief, he was hitting the bottle hard in the same restaurant where she and his partner are spending Katyi's dinner. A bottle of

wine and a litre of soda are in front of them. In the film drama *1945* (2017), soda water appears several times. The action takes place in August 1945, when the occupying Germans had been replaced by the Red Army for months. The setting is an unnamed village in eastern Hungary, preparing for the first free elections. The notary's son is about to marry, preparations are underway for the wedding, and guests are provided with bottled soda water to accompany the wine served in the *botellas*. Another scene takes place in a small restaurant, where four full bottles of soda are displayed on the drinking desk. István Szentes, the notary, comes in for lunch and, as he pours soda into his glass, the powerful splashing sound of soda water fills the room. Then he receives some unexpected news – two Orthodox Jewish men are returning to the village – and he suddenly gets up from the table and leaves his lunch, but not before drinking his spritzer. Another frame of film shows a woman in a headscarf working on a sewing machine, with bottles of soda lined up on the table beside her.

The historical reference value of these films from the 1930s and 1940s is primarily owing to the fact that the time of filming and the era depicted coincide, and the soda water is an integral part of the milieu. In the case of a black and white film drama made after 2000, it is relevant from a cultural anthropological and sociological point of view that the contemporary work presents a condensed, symbolically rich image of a day in 1945, where the glass of soda and the spritzer are recurrent elements as the concept of the director of the film. All of this shows that the product is part of everyday life in the two decades under consideration, and that this is expressed in the image constructed by the artists.

Summary

To sum up, the range of symbolic meanings associated with soda water has expanded over the period under study, and as the product has acquired new meanings and roles, the media and content elements expressing the change of function have changed. The message was communicated to the target audience through a wide range of advertising tools, including placards, leaflets, and postcards, which featured bottled soda water and its competitors, the *autosiphon* and the *autotank*. Theatre art also reflected this; nevertheless, caricatures were published in the press. In the meantime, the cost-effectiveness of the home-made cartridge soda was promoted on the counting slips, which further sharpened the battle for customers. The demand for apprenticeships had been present since the late 1930s, and from 1947 onwards, examinations were compulsory. A milestone in the history of the craft was the first easy-to-use teaching material with practical information. The textbook, which went beyond its original function – to help with the start-up and operation of the business – served to familiarize and promote the

goods of the back-end industry. It also expressed recruitment into the industry, the protection of interests, and the conflict between the metropolitan and rural sparkling water associations. The medial surfaces presented here provide a specific picture of the role of soda water in the society and can also add to the cultural history of artificial carbonated water, enriching, colouring, and further nuancing it.

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Legislation Sources

3000/1938. Ip. M. rendelet [Decree of the Minister for Industry No 3000/1938].

49/1939. Ip. M. rendelet [Decree of the Minister for Industry No 49/1939].

1884. évi XVII. tc. [Law paragraph No XVII of 1884].

Cinematographic Works

1945. 2017. Directed by Ferenc Török, produced by Katapult Film.

Címzett ismeretlen [Recipient Unknown]. 1935. Directed by Béla Gaál, distributed by Hunnia Filmstúdió.

Hyppolit, a lakáj [Hyppolit, the Butler]. 1931. Directed by István Székely, produced by Emil Kovács & Co. – Sonor Film.

Katyi. 1942. Directed by Ákos Ráthonyi, produced by Hunnia Filmgyár.

Meseautó [The Dream Car]. 1934. Directed by Béla Gaál, produced by Reflektor Film.

Meseautó [The Dream Car]. 2000. Directed by Barna Kabay and Katalin Petényi, produced by Budapest Film.