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## **Exploring women's employment in tourism under state-socialism: Experiences of tourism work in socialist Romania'**

### **ABSTRACT**

Recent academic debate into women's experiences of tourism employment has emphasised the extremely heterogeneous nature of such work and the need for sensitivity to local political, economic, social and cultural contexts. This paper focuses on one such context which has received little attention – state socialism – and we explore women's experiences of tourism work in socialist Romania. Such work had characteristics in common with non-socialist contexts, but in other ways took a form which was distinctive to the socialist state. It was characterised by extensive training, good pay, and opportunities for promotion (at least to middle management level). The socialist state also devised unique solutions to the problem of the seasonality of tourism work. However women also faced extensive surveillance by the state's security services and faced harsh penalties for under-performance.

**KEY WORDS:** tourism employment, gender, socialist-era tourism, Romania

## Exploring women's employment in tourism under state-socialism: Experiences of tourism work in socialist Romania

This paper explores the experiences of women working in the tourism sector of a state-socialist regime. The issue of women's employment in tourism is the subject of increasing academic scrutiny but, with a few exceptions, their experiences of tourism work in socialist regimes has been overlooked. This is a clear gap in the research literature and one which is important to develop, since an important theme which emerges from previous research is the heterogeneity of women's experiences of tourism work (Scott, 1997; Gentry, 2007) and the need to avoid over-generalisations about the nature of tourism employment for women. Furthermore, there is a need to be sensitive to "localised, contextualised and pluralised power relations" (Aitchison, 2005: 220) which means that women's work in tourism will take different forms in different locations, reflecting specific social, economic and cultural circumstances (Scott, 1997; Gibsen, 2001; Tucker, 2007; Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012).

Focusing on women's historical experiences of working in tourism in socialist states has an important role to play in understanding how tourism employment is influenced and shaped by its particular context. Socialist states are (or have been) characterised by an explicit rejection of capitalism and a high degree of state intervention in the planning and development of tourism. Moreover, they are often characterised by centralised and authoritarian rule. In such circumstances, tourism can unfold in a manner that is different from that in capitalist states, meaning that tourism employment can also take distinct forms that merit investigation in their own right. Moreover, a key ideological goal of socialist states was to challenge traditional gender inequalities (Zamfir and Zamfir, 2000) and, while it cannot be claimed that women achieved equality under such regimes, it makes them an important context in which to examine the nature of women's work in tourism.

This paper therefore contributes to our understanding of tourism employment for women by considering the nature of such work in an authoritarian socialist state. Here the paper has two main goals. First, it seeks to explore women's experiences of working in tourism in this little-studied context before this knowledge is lost. Second, by outlining the key characteristics of such employment, it addresses ongoing debates which have reached mixed conclusions about the nature of tourism work for women (and the extent to which it challenges or reinforces

normative gender roles and power structures). Our analysis focuses on socialist-era Romania. Using interviews with women who formerly worked for state tourism enterprises we examine issues of training, career development, pay, seasonality and job satisfaction in order to draw comparisons with previous work which has largely been grounded in capitalist contexts. We also highlight practices of surveillance and state discipline which are distinct to the socialist context.

## **TOURISM EMPLOYMENT AND GENDER**

There is a growing academic literature which focuses on gender and tourism employment. The tourism workforce is clearly gendered (Sinclair, 1997) and the majority of positions in the sector are occupied by women (Ferguson, 2011a). However, recent research has reached mixed conclusions about women's experiences. One approach stresses that structural and cultural factors (Baum, 2013) – in particular, the combination of capitalism and patriarchy (Sinclair, 1997; Gibson, 2001) – produces a situation where women are allocated to 'narrowly bounded (and often disadvantaged) niches in tourism labour markets' (Chant, 1997:120). This is particularly apparent where international tourism companies seek a cheap, flexible and non-unionised labour force. Thus tourism jobs for women are frequently low-skilled; part-time; seasonal; involve long, irregular and unsocial hours; and are characterised by subcontracting and flexible/casual working (Chant, 1997; Scott, 1997; Cave and Kilic, 2010; Ferguson, 2010, 2011a; UNWTO, 2011; Baum, 2013). Women working in tourism are frequently poorly paid and earn less than men (UNWTO, 2011; Baum, 2013). Moreover, women lack equality of opportunity: they are under-represented in senior management positions (Baum, 2013; Equality in Tourism, 2013) and their opportunities for promotion and upward occupational mobility are fewer (Chant, 1997; Cave and Kilic, 2010; UNWTO, 2011).

More broadly, tourism employment has been criticised for reproducing established gender roles and inequalities. Under patriarchal capitalism, many jobs in tourism conform to long-established stereotypes about the nature of 'appropriate' work for women (Gibsen, 2001). Thus, many women are employed in jobs (such as cleaning or washing) which reflect a traditional association with domestic household chores (Chant, 1997; Gibsen, 2001; Pritchard et al, 2007; Cave and Kilic, 2010; Ferguson 2010). In other cases, women are employed on

the basis of their physical appearance and their ability to perform emotional and aesthetic labour (Nickson and Warhurst, 2007) in a way that will appeal to male customers. Chant (1997) argues that such employment practices reinforce and intensify the subordinate position of women.

However, other approaches focus more on the agency of women who are able to take advantage of the possibilities represented by tourism. Tourism development creates opportunities for entrepreneurship (UNWTO, 2011) often in locations where few such opportunities exist (Gentry, 2007). Many women in the Developing World have been able to establish their own microenterprises such as providing accommodation or manufacturing handicrafts for visitors (Chant, 1997; Scott, 1997; Gibsen, 2001; UNWTO, 2011; Baum, 2013). Working in tourism can also give women greater financial independence (Gentry, 2007; Ferguson, 2010, 2011b) and they can gain confidence and prestige from their ability to contribute to household budgets (Scott, 1997). Tourism also enables women to interact with people from outside their own community, increasing their knowledge of gender roles in other contexts and potentially leading them to reflect on their own situation (Chant, 1997). Perhaps most importantly, tourism offers possibilities for women to question and renegotiate traditional gender roles (Ferguson, 2010; Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012).

Indeed, some analysis has highlighted the emancipatory potential of tourism employment for women. Chant (1997) argues that working in tourism can increase the visibility and public recognition of women within societies. It can also create the potential for collective action by women to demand fairer treatment in the workplace, home and society. More broadly, tourism is seen as able to empower women and offers “opportunities for a global revolution in the economic, social and political position of women” (Pritchard et al, 2007: 9). The role of tourism in empowering women is particularly important in the Developing World (UNWTO, 2011). In consequence, contemporary international development policies place considerable emphasis on tourism as a means to promote the empowerment of women (which, in practice, usually means economic empowerment) and gender equality (Ferguson, 2010).

A key theme which emerges from previous research is the highly variegated nature of women’s work in tourism in different contexts, so that any attempts to characterise such employment in simple ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ terms are problematic. Here it is necessary to

differentiate between different types of tourism. Gentry (2007) argues that, in the Developing World, mass tourism (particularly when under foreign ownership) can be more exploitative of women, whereas alternative or niche forms of tourism (in which women are more likely to own or manage a tourism business) offer more opportunities. A further important issue is that, while much tourism work may appear to be oppressive or exploitative to outside observers, many of the women who work in tourism report that they find their jobs enjoyable, satisfying and a source of pride (Scott, 1997; Toro-Morn et al, 2002; Ferguson, 2010).

Similarly, claims that tourism employment can empower women also need to be qualified. Working in tourism can generate additional tensions and pressures for women (Ferguson 2011b) by exacerbating the double burden of household duties and childcare in addition to paid employment (Gentry, 2007; UNWTO, 2011; Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012). Similarly there is mixed evidence about the extent to which traditional gender roles within the household have been redefined and restructured through women taking jobs in tourism (Tucker, 2007; Ferguson, 2010). Other research (Ferguson, (2011b) argues that tourism employment can create or reinforce inequalities *among* women.. For example, Ferguson (2010) examines how women who have benefitted financially from tourism work were able to employ other women (usually poorer migrants) to undertake household duties for them, thereby establishing new hierarchies of inequality that were structured by class and ethnicity. Overall, then, it is clear that women's experiences of tourism employment are extremely heterogeneous (Scott, 1997: Gentry, 2007) indicating a need for analyses that are sensitive to local social, economic and political circumstances and contexts (Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012).

To date, almost all the analysis of tourism employment for women has taken place in contexts which are broadly capitalist to the neglect of other forms of political economy. One example is state socialism (also known as communism), a form of political order based on an explicit rejection of capitalism. It is characterised by political rule by a single party; state ownership and control of almost all economic activity; and central economic planning intended to eliminate social inequalities. After the Second World War many states throughout the world adopted variants of state socialism (especially those of 'Eastern Europe' which were allied to the Soviet Union) although today only a handful of socialist states remain.

There is a growing inter-disciplinary research agenda exploring the nature of tourism in formerly socialist states but the principle focus is how tourism contributed to the ideological agenda of socialism, or the experiences of tourists in such states. There has been limited investigation of the nature of tourism work in socialist regimes, beyond occasional studies of the role of tourism in creating jobs (Pearlman, 1990; Colantonia and Potter, 2006; Xiao, 2006). Some research has examined tourism employment for women in socialist Cuba (Toro-Morn et al, 2002; Safa, 2009). The socialist state prioritised gender equality and women's participation in the labour force, and Cuban women were able to enter traditionally male-dominated occupations in large numbers. However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union the Cuban economy was placed under severe strain and embraced international tourism as part of a major restructuring. Consequently many professional women left poorly paying jobs in the state sector and established small tourism businesses, while others were redirected to poorly-paid and part-time positions in the service sector (particularly tourism) (Toro-Morn et al, 2002) so that many of the gains made by women during the post-Revolution period were eroded. Moreover, the traditional gendered division of household labour has been reinforced in recent years, as gender, class and racial hierarchies that were eroded during the Castro era have resurfaced (Safa, 2009). However, these studies deal with a situation of *transition* from socialism to a more market-centred economy and tell us less about tourism employment in states with an ideological commitment to socialism.

One of the few studies to directly address the intersections of gender, tourism employment and state socialism is Kristen Ghodsee's *The Red Riviera* (2005). Ghodsee's primary focus is gender and tourism work in *post-socialist* Bulgaria but she includes a discussion of the socialist era to establish the context for interpreting post-socialist developments. Socialist Bulgaria developed an extensive tourist infrastructure for domestic tourists and later began to accept tourists from non-socialist countries, particularly at the Black Sea. Ghodsee argues that women dominated the tourism sector and tourism jobs were highly valued. Working in tourism offered a rare opportunity to engage with people from non-socialist countries and learn about life 'beyond the Iron Curtain'. Since women needed to know foreign languages to work in tourism they were permitted greater opportunities to travel abroad and practice their skills with native speakers. Overall, Ghodsee argues that, although tourism was one of the less prestigious parts of the socialist economy, working in tourism gave women particular advantages over those working in other sectors (even if this was not something that the regime had explicitly intended). In particular, the economic, social and cultural capital

accumulated during the socialist era gave women greater opportunities to succeed after the collapse of Bulgaria's socialist regime in 1989.

Our analysis aims to build on Ghodsee's study through a distinct focus on women's experiences of tourism work under state socialism. With reference to recent debates about the nature of tourism employment for women, we also seek to identify how such work in a socialist state demonstrates commonalities with other (predominantly capitalist) contexts but also how it was shaped by the distinct circumstances of Romanian socialism. In particular we focus on key issues about the nature of women's work in tourism (such as pay, job satisfaction, opportunities for promotion, the socialist 'solution' to the issue of seasonality, and the forms of surveillance and regulation that women faced). We also highlight influences specific to socialist Romania including a state-enforced pro-natalist policy, and the intrusive presence of the internal security services.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Our aim is to explore the experiences of women who worked in the tourism and hospitality sectors in Romania during the 1970s and 1980s. Like Ghodsee (2005) we focus on the Black Sea coast since state planners made this the centrepiece of socialist Romania's efforts to promote mass tourism (for both domestic and international markets). Tourism at the Black Sea was a major source of employment for local people, and the region was also a significant point of contact between Romanians and citizens of other countries.

Tickner (2005) notes that much feminist research is suspicious of conventional ways that knowledge is constructed, particularly the reliance on methodologies and epistemologies which often have unstated masculine biases. While there is no standard feminist way of undertaking research, much feminist/gender research prefers qualitative, interpretivist and case study methods as the most appropriate way to better understand the experiences of women and the nature of gender inequalities. In this context, this paper adopts face-to-face semi-structured interviews with women who worked in tourism during the socialist period. However, there were difficulties in identifying potential participants. In the 25 years that have passed since the fall of the socialist regime many former tourism employees have retired, left the industry or died. This presented challenges in locating interview participants and it was

not possible to undertake systematic recruitment from the reduced population of former workers.

To locate research participants we adopted both convenience and snowball sampling. During visits to the Black Sea in September 2012 we visited every hotel we found open and asked the receptionist or manager if they employed anybody who had worked there during the socialist era. If this was the case we asked if that person was willing to share their experiences with us (only 1 woman was unwilling to be interviewed). We then asked our interviewee if they could put us in contact with anybody else who had worked in tourism in the socialist period. For reasons of time and convenience, we confined our research to the southern part of the Romanian littoral, particularly the 19<sup>th</sup> century towns of Eforie Nord and Sud, and the collection of resorts constructed during the 1970s (Olimp, Neptun, Jupiter, Cap Aurora, Venus and Saturn). Through visits to 53 hotels we conducted interviews with 19 people (15 women and 4 men) who had worked in a wide range of positions (from cleaner to manager).

Interviewing was undertaken in Romanian by two 'teams': the first comprised two of the authors (a Romanian woman and a British man). Both were Romanian speakers and both were broadly similar in age to the research participants. Moreover, having lived through the socialist period, the Romanian researcher had shared the broader experiences of the interviewees. The second team comprised a young, male Romanian research assistant and one of the authors (a British man who does not speak Romanian). Feminist/gender research stresses reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Tickner, 2005; Pritchard, 2014) and we must recognise our positionality in relation to our research participants. In particular, the women that we spoke to may have been uncomfortable about discussing their experiences of working in tourism with strangers, some of whom were both men, and not Romanian. However, most proved very willing to talk about working in tourism under socialism. Indeed, they were visibly more comfortable when it was apparent that we wished to discuss the socialist past rather than the contemporary state of tourism at the Black Sea. Only one issue – surveillance by the state authorities – provoked discomfort in some participants and we did not pursue this issue in such cases. The interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and, since Romanians are not generally comfortable with being recorded, we made notes which were subsequently written up into a more detailed account. These were then analysed using standard qualitative coding methods.

At this point, it is important to recognise that there may be an element of nostalgia in the way that our interviewees appraised the socialist era. Many analyses have highlighted the growth of ‘socialist nostalgia’ in the former ‘Eastern Europe’ (Boym, 2001; Todorova and Gille, 2012) shaped by the upheavals and uncertainties of the post-socialist period. However, these accounts have emphasised that post-socialist nostalgia is a highly complex phenomenon and not a simple perception that ‘everything was better under socialism’. We acknowledge that our interviews may have reflected a degree of professional nostalgia for working in tourism during the socialist period (particularly since Romanian tourism has experienced hard times in the post-socialist era). However, we reject the suggestion that our participants’ views were shaped simplistically by a generalised nostalgia. As will become apparent, the accounts of our interviewees were detailed and consistent. They pointed to specific characteristics of employment in the socialist era (and the advantages that they gained from it) but did not refrain from mentioning the negative aspects of their work.

## **WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES OF WORKING IN TOURISM IN SOCIALIST ROMANIA**

Tourism began to develop in Romania in the late nineteenth century but the tourism industry expanded considerably during the socialist period (1947-1989). Although always secondary to industrialisation, socialist Romania invested considerable resources in the planning and development of both domestic and inbound international tourism from the late 1950s onwards (Turnock, 1991; Light, 2013). Tourism was treated like other economic sectors in that it was carefully planned, financed, supported and staffed (Snak, 1976). Particular investment was directed at the Black Sea coast where the few existing resorts were enlarged and new ones constructed. This remained the most prestigious and busy tourism destination in Romania. By 1985 the country offered 2,751 accommodation units of various types, with a capacity of 337,570 bed spaces, half of them at the Black Sea (Caraciuc and Docsănescu, 1986). In 1972, 45,800 people were employed in tourism (Snak and Barbu, 1973), rising to 61,300 people by 1986 (Turnock, 1991).

Tourism employment in socialist Romania was distinctly gendered: several respondents told us that most positions were taken by women<sup>1</sup> (while men predominantly worked in positions

such as gardening and maintenance). This situation was little different from most non-socialist contexts. However, in Romania (and other socialist states) the promotion of tourism as a source of employment for women was part of broader state ideologies and employment policies. Socialist regimes had an ideological commitment to create equality between men and women, and they guaranteed women the right to work and sought to increase their participation in the labour force (Zamfir and Zamfir, 2000; Hall, 2001; Brunnbauer, 2002). To facilitate this policy (and enable women to return to the labour market after having children) socialist Romania guaranteed women various forms of social assistance. This included maternity leave with job security, and an extensive system of nurseries and childcare provision for children aged 3 months and upwards (Kligman, 1998; Zamfir and Zamfir, 2000). The proportion of women in the total workforce increased steadily, reaching 30.2% in 1970 and 37.2% in 1980 (Bacon and Pol, 1994). Although women did take jobs in traditionally male occupations, the pattern of employment in Romania and other socialist states remained gendered (Kligman, 1998; Ghodsee, 2005). Men tended to dominate in 'heavy' industries, while women were disproportionately represented in sectors such as healthcare, education, social welfare and 'lighter' industries (such as textiles) (Kligman, 1998; Brunnbauer, 2002). Tourism was another economic sector that socialist states regarded as appropriate work for women.

There are additional factors which explain the degree of involvement of women in tourism that are specific to socialist Romania. Several respondents claimed that Elena Ceaușescu (the ambitious but widely-loathed wife of the country's president Nicolae Ceaușescu) had decided that only women should work in the tourism industry. Whether this is the case is difficult to determine but certainly Elena Ceaușescu was increasingly politically active from the early 1970s (having been elected to the Communist Party's Central Committee in 1972). In June 1973 a Party meeting determined to increase the participation of women in a number of professions including electro-technical and chemical engineering, electronics, precision mechanics and food processing (Kligman, 1998). It is probable that tourism was also identified as a priority sector for female employment (particularly since the early 1970s was a period of vigorous expansion for the Romanian tourist industry).

Another important part of the context for understanding women's employment in tourism was Nicolae Ceaușescu's decision in 1966 to increase Romania's population in order to expand the industrial workforce (Deletant, 1995; Kligman, 1998). To achieve this Ceaușescu

introduced a draconian pro-natalist policy which included a ban on contraception and abortion, along with a propaganda campaign to promote motherhood as a patriotic obligation. For Romania's women the 'double burden' of paid work and unpaid domestic work became a triple burden once child-bearing was declared a patriotic duty (Kligman, 1998). The promotion of female employment in tourism was consistent with this pro-natalist policy. Tourism was comparatively a minor sector (both economically and ideologically) and any disruption that resulted from female staff taking maternity leave would not interfere with the principal project of rapid industrialisation. Overall, then, the high proportion of women working in tourism in socialist Romania was shaped by state ideologies and policies in a way that is not common in capitalist contexts.

### ***Professionalism, training and career development***

Socialist regimes attached considerable importance to education for raising the standard of living of the population, contributing to economic development, and instilling a socialist mentality in the populace. Furthermore, education was seen as an important way to improve the status and position of women (Kligman, 1998; Zamfir and Zamfir, 2000). Consequently, the state paid considerable attention to the creation of a skilled and professionalised tourism workforce. There was widespread agreement among our interviewees that socialist Romania took the organisation of tourism very seriously. As one woman said 'Tourism was very well organised...there was discipline, everything was very well prepared, very thorough' (receptionist, 60s). Many interviewees expressed the sentiment that 'in those days [socialism] we did tourism properly'.

Many jobs in tourism involved extensive training and preparation, and women were the principle beneficiaries. This training began at school where all Romanians were taught foreign languages (a high level of competency in at least one foreign language was required to work in tourism). Between the ages of 14 and 18 many pupils went on to high schools which prepared them for particular forms of employment. Some schools specialised in *alimentația publică* (public service) including training for jobs as waiters/waitresses or chefs. Other, more elite, high schools provided specialist training for particular professions. Upon completing their education some graduates from both types of school would be allocated jobs in the tourism industry (with the opportunity to take further training at a later stage). At the

higher education level, the Academy of Economic Studies provided specialist courses in trade and commerce and, again, some graduates attained positions in the tourism industry. In addition, specialist centres subordinated to the Ministry of Tourism provided training tailored to specific roles including *Centrul national de formare a cadrelor din turism* (National Centre for the Training of Tourism Personnel). Other adult training was provided independently by the Ministry for Foreign Trade. Finally, adult education was also provided by *Întreprinderea de hoteluri și restaurante* (Enterprise for Hotels and Restaurants), an organisation that operated in regions where tourism was a significant part of the economy. It provided various training courses tailored to the tourism job market and included a department specifically for employees who interacted with foreign tourists. Overall, then, training for tourism employees in every type of position was comprehensive, rigorous and well-organised by the various state authorities.

A common criticism of women's work in the tourism sector is that, in many contexts, there are limited opportunities for career advancement and promotion (Chant, 1997; Cave and Kilic, 2010). However, tourism in socialist Romania was organised so that there were clear opportunities for progression within the sector. Once an employee had worked a given number of seasons their employer (a state-owned hotel or restaurant) could propose them for additional training that would enable them to seek promotion (although they then had to commit to remaining with that enterprise for a certain period). One woman spoke of her pride in having started as a chambermaid and worked her way up to the post of receptionist, working only with visitors from other countries. To qualify for promotion the employee had to be a member of the Romanian Communist Party but, in official rhetoric at least, gender was not a barrier. Consequently, many women attained middle management positions (such as hotel manager) and they dominated this level within the tourism sector.

However, women working in tourism faced a clear 'glass ceiling' and few reached senior management positions. This was not unique to socialist Romania and mirrors the situation in a range of other contexts (e.g. Scott, 1997; Chant, 1997; El-Sherif Ibrahim et al, 2007; Cave and Kilic, 2010; Equality in Tourism, 2013). Thus the highest positions in tourism were dominated by men, usually those with good political connections (see Ghodsee, 2005) or, since tourism involved contact with foreigners, with links to the internal and external security services. For all its promises of equality, the division of labour in socialist Romania was firmly gendered in that the "core apparatus of socialism" - the state bureaucracy, the security

services and industry - was dominated by men (Kligman, 1998: 26). In this way, socialist Romania remained firmly patriarchal: indeed, based on research in Cuba, Toro-Morn et al (2002: 53) argue that “patriarchy transcends economic systems”. Moreover, in Ceaușescu’s Romania, the specific demands of the ‘triple burden’ placed additional constraints on women’s opportunities for career advancement.

### *Financial returns*

Many analyses of tourism employment for women have highlighted the issue of low (and unequal) pay for women (Chant, 1997; Gibsen, 2001; UNTWO, 2011; Baum, 2013). Conversely, our interviews revealed that many women who worked in tourism in socialist Romania considered that their work was well paid. The socialist regime was ideologically committed to the principle of equal pay for equal work and this principle was rigorously implemented by law (Zamfir and Zamfir, 2000). For example, one woman said that working in tourism ‘was very well paid, even for unqualified staff. You could live decently, you could make a living. You could follow a career and raise a family’ (manager, 40s). Another said: ‘The salary was satisfactory, you could get by, you were able to live decently working in tourism’ (receptionist, 60s). When asked to elaborate on what ‘well-paid’ meant, one woman (who had managed a hotel during the socialist era) stated that she earned 3000 lei a month, while her husband who was an army officer earned 5000 lei monthly (for comparison an experienced school teacher with a university degree also earned around 3000 lei a month).<sup>2</sup> While she was clearly paid less than her husband, she regarded her salary as a good wage.

The relatively high salaries paid to many tourism employees were partly a reflection of the education and training required for many posts. Although socialist states aimed for social equality they recognised the need to pay better wages to those with specialist professional skills and higher levels of training and education. Consequently managerial and technical workers in socialist Romania received above-average wages (Ionescu, 1962). Nevertheless, even unskilled workers in tourism received adequate salaries. For example, one woman who had worked all her life as a hotel cleaner stated that although her pay was not high in the socialist era it was enough to give her a good standard of living.

### *Seasonality and job security*

A frequent criticism of jobs in tourism (Sinclair, 1997; Ferguson, 2011a; Baum, 2013) is that they are seasonal (and therefore temporary) so that workers face a precarious existence (and potential financial hardship) in the 'close' season. Moreover, it is women who are most affected by such uncertainty and insecurity. However, the situation was markedly different in socialist Romania where employment in tourism was a year-round occupation. This situation has to be understood in the context of employment policy in socialist states. As part of the political project to create something radically different from capitalism, Romania (and other socialist countries) pursued a policy of creating full employment, offering their citizens job and income security in exchange for (tacit) political support (Woodwood, 1995). Indeed, in socialist states the adult population was obliged by law to work (Kligman, 1998) and to contribute to the project of building socialism. Consequently, socialist Romania kept no records of unemployment figures since unemployment was assumed not to exist.

In these circumstances, a situation where large numbers of tourism workers would need to be laid off once the season had finished was politically and socially unacceptable. Therefore the socialist state devised various strategies to address the seasonality of tourism employment. For example, the state promoted health tourism based on the therapeutic properties of local mineral waters, enabling some hotels to remain open during the winter. However, most hotels were open for a season that lasted from April to mid-October. Their employees were on permanent contracts but there was an expectation of considerable functional flexibility during the 'close' season. Once a hotel had closed at the end of the season the entire staff was allocated to thoroughly cleaning the building and its grounds. Regardless of their position, women employees were required to do whatever task was asked of them. When the cleaning and basic maintenance was completed the entire staff left the resorts and moved to nearby towns where they worked in factories established to service the tourism industry. These jobs were clearly gendered. Women were predominantly allocated to textile factories that produced items (such as carpets, bedding, towels, and tablecloths) needed by hotels and restaurants. Others worked in the production of souvenirs to be sold the following summer (cf. Pearlman, 1990). Again, they were expected to be flexible and take whatever task they were allocated. Male employees were allocated to the production, maintenance and repair of furniture. In March, the entire team would leave the factories and return to the resorts to prepare their hotel for the forthcoming season.

A further strategy to address the seasonality of tourism employment was known as *detaşare* ('secondment'). This involved the temporary transfer of skilled tourism employees from other parts of the country that were quiet in summer (such as mountain resorts or those towns and cities dependent on business tourism). It also included professional staff (such as doctors) who were needed in extra numbers at the coast during the summer. Such employees would spend a period of time at the Black Sea performing their usual role but in a different location. Such secondments were regarded as valuable perks and were highly sought-after. The strategy of *detaşare* was a means both of avoiding over-staffing at the littoral outside the peak season but also addressing any labour shortages at the Black Sea that might arise from employees being ill, on maternity leave, or otherwise unavailable for work.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

Working in tourism conferred a particular status and social esteem upon employees that was about more than simply the glamour of working at the coast during the summer. To work in tourism implied a particular level of training and associated qualifications and was regarded as important and responsible work. During our interviews many women expressed a strong sense of pride and professional satisfaction associated with working in tourism. For example, one woman stated: 'I was proud to work in tourism' (cleaner, 60s); another said: 'It was a big pleasure and a pride to work here [this hotel]' (receptionist, 60s). Some women also spoke about the pride they felt about welcoming foreign visitors to Romania. One spoke of the atmosphere in a hotel on the evening before a foreign group was expected: 'How proud everybody was. How excited! How nervous!' (receptionist, 60s). Other women recalled their pride in the standard and quality of Romania's Black Sea resorts and the welcome which was given to foreign tourists. In this respect their responses often indicated regret that such standards had not persisted into the post-socialist era (when much of the infrastructure at the Black Sea has deteriorated through years of neglect). Overall, the pride that many women felt about tourism in the socialist era seems to have been professional rather than ideological. Although inbound international tourism was intended to enhance Romania's international image and demonstrate the superiority and achievements of socialism to foreign (particularly Western) visitors none of our interviewees made any mention of pride in welcoming foreign guests to see for themselves the nature of life in a socialist state.

Our respondents also spoke frequently about the professional, skilled and challenging nature of their jobs. They gained satisfaction from being part of a collective enterprise that was well-organised, which functioned effectively, and was successful in providing holiday experiences for large numbers of visitors. Moreover, a clear professional identity seems to have developed among many women who worked in tourism. This contrasts with a lack of occupational affiliation and identity which is often commonplace among tourism and hospitality employees (Richard and Marks, 2007). Working in tourism in a socialist state involved – and required - a particular set of skills and competences that were quite distinct from other sectors of the economy. While they were aware that the state regarded their sector as relatively minor within the broader project of building socialism, many tourism employees had a belief in the importance and substance of their work.

### *Tourism as a sought after form of employment*

For the various reasons discussed above, jobs in the tourism sector were cherished and sought-after. As one woman said: ‘tourism jobs were privileged jobs’ (manager, 50s). Another pointed out that nobody was compelled to work in tourism but instead many wished to. The attractiveness of tourism work was partly due to the high wages and prestige associated with the industry. However, working in tourism also offered other rewards specific to the sector. For example, unlike most other Romanians, tourism employees were able to interact with people from other countries. This, of course, is not unique to a socialist state but it needs to be understood in the context of the state’s efforts to limit contacts between ordinary Romanians and foreign visitors. In 1971 Ceaușescu introduced a law (followed by a decree of 1985) which required Romanians to report all conversations with foreigners to the *Securitate* (security services) and failure to do so was deemed a criminal offence (Deletant, 1995). Tourism employees were privileged in that they could legitimately talk to foreigners on a daily basis. This was an opportunity to practice and refine foreign language skills which was denied to most Romanians. Working with foreign tourists (particularly those from non-socialist countries) also gave women unique opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of Western and other socialist countries which, in turn, proved to be a valuable form of cultural capital (see Ghodsee, 2005).

Working in tourism offered women other benefits. One was the opportunity to accumulate additional economic capital in the form of tips from tourists. These were particularly valuable if they were given by Western tourists in 'hard' currencies (see Ghodsee, 2005). Tourism also provided women with the opportunity to engage in '*mic trafic*' (petty trading or barter) with foreign tourists in exchange for Western consumer goods in a way which was not available to most Romanians. The failure of the centrally-planned socialist economy to supply many basic consumer goods in adequate quantities was well-known. This situation was compounded by a draconian austerity policy introduced by Ceaușescu in the 1980s in order to pay off Romania's foreign debt. Consequently most agricultural produce was exported and Romanians experienced great difficulty in obtaining food and other basic goods and faced extreme hardship. *Mic trafic* was a way to obtain consumer goods which were otherwise unavailable. For example, a hotel manager told of how she was able to buy Western cosmetics, toiletries and clothing, through selling Romanian currency at an advantageous rate to Western tourists. This activity was illegal but many women thought it worth the risk (particularly during the austerity of the 1980s) and the *Securitate* often turned a blind eye. The women who engaged in such trading gained a distinct advantage over those who worked in other sectors of the economy.

### ***Discipline, regulation and surveillance***

Women working in tourism in Romania enjoyed good working conditions in a paternalist state which ensured full employment and a range of social assistance. However, it was not the case that they had an easy and uncomplicated life. Many interviewees reported that the job could be extremely demanding in summer when hotels were full of pre-booked groups, particularly on changeover days. In addition, due to the requirement to work during the summer season, tourism employees had more limited holiday opportunities than other Romanians. Furthermore they were expected to perform to a consistently high standard, particularly when dealing with foreign visitors (and especially those from non-socialist countries). The state regarded frontline tourism staff as ambassadors not only for Romania but for an entire ideology and so subjected them to careful monitoring and scrutiny. For example, two women told of how the team in their hotel faced regular inspections of their fingernails and uniforms. Another woman (who was a hotel manager) spoke of how every

employee was expected to do whatever was necessary when an inspection by the state's tourism authorities was imminent and that she, on occasions, had helped to clean the toilets.

Many of those interviewed stated that they would have expected some form of sanction if they had not carried out their tasks to a high standard. For example, a worker's salary might be docked by 5-10% or, in more serious cases, that worker could be dismissed altogether. Employees in socialist Romania were not immune to dismissal even though the state guaranteed full employment. Under-performance (or political non-compliance) could result in an employee losing their position. In such a situation, they might be allocated a low-paid and/or unskilled job in another part of the country (which, in addition, might have involved a lengthy daily commute). The fear of dismissal instilled a sense of vulnerability among the workforce which acted as a very effective form of state discipline (Kligman, 1998). This was particularly apparent in the response of one woman who stated that 'anybody who did anything stupid would be sent to the canal' (manager, 40s). This was a reference to the nearby Danube-Black Sea canal, a notorious infrastructure project of the 1950s built by forced labour in exceptionally harsh conditions. Although it is unlikely that anybody dismissed from a tourism job actually faced such a sanction, this response indicates how seriously the consequences of under-performance were perceived. While tourism employees in non-socialist contexts also face scrutiny and potential dismissal by employers what distinguishes socialist regimes is that this role was taken by the state authorities.

In addition, tourism employees were subject to additional - and sometimes intrusive - surveillance from the state's security services (the *Securitate*), a particular division of which (the Third Directorate) was responsible for monitoring foreign tourists and the Romanians who came into contact with them (Deletant, 1995). Although international tourism was encouraged, foreign visitors were regarded with suspicion and consequently, any Romanian who worked with them would have been under particular scrutiny from the *Securitate*. Women who worked in tourism at the Black Sea would have experienced state surveillance as a routine aspect of their working lives. Furthermore, the *Securitate* recruited an extensive network of Romanians as informers, partly in response to the increasing number of foreign visitors to the country (Verdery, 2014). Their number had reached 144,289 by 1989 (Stan, 2013). Informers were expected to report on both foreign visitors, but also on 'inappropriate' behaviour among their co-workers. Such a situation created increasing mistrust among Romanians since nobody could be certain who among their family and colleagues might be a

*Securitate* informer. It is possible that some women who worked in tourism at the Black Sea were informers for the *Securitate* (although for obvious reasons none of those we interviewed mentioned the matter).

While most foreign visitors to the Black Sea would have had little awareness of, or contact with, the security services, tourism employees were well aware of their presence, though perceptions of the profile and visibility of the *Securitate* varied considerably (possibly reflecting a reluctance of some respondents to talk about the issue). Several respondents said that they were aware of the background presence of *Securitate* agents in the resort but that direct contact was confined to occasional visits to the hotel to ask if there was anything to report. However, on other occasions the security services adopted a much higher profile. One woman recalled a *Securitate* agent permanently stationed in the hotel lobby observing what was happening, while others spoke of having their bags searched. Several women stated that they were well aware that if they were seen interacting too much with foreign tourists they (and their family) could expect to face questioning. In addition, several mentioned suspicions that at least one employee in every hotel was an informer. We were also told one story of an employee who had changed money for a tourist but neglected to immediately write a receipt because she was distracted by other tasks: she was subsequently arrested by the *Securitate* and imprisoned for two years. Such stories produced a climate of what one woman called 'fear and tension' illustrating the effectiveness of the *Securitate*'s efforts to control social relationships through installing apprehension and uncertainty among the populace (Verdery, 2014). Consequently, tourism employees took care to regulate their exchanges (at least in public) with foreign visitors. Overall they were required to negotiate conflicting obligations: on the one hand, as tourism professionals they had responsibilities towards their visitors but as socialist citizens they had duties (which they could not overlook) towards the state. This introduced an affective dimension to working in tourism – fear of the state authorities - that is almost entirely absent from capitalist contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has presented a historical study of women's experience of tourism employment in a state-socialist regime. In some ways tourism work for women in socialist Romania was similar to that in many non-socialist situations. Tourism employment was gendered with most positions being taken by women. This, in turn, reinforced the association of women with the

domestic sphere. Tourism work involved long and sometimes anti-social hours. Socialism did not eliminate the double burden for women, who had to negotiate both paid work and unpaid domestic work in the home, although it did provide extensive assistance with childcare. Moreover, women faced limited opportunities to rise to senior management positions in a society which, although nominally committed to gender equality, remained firmly patriarchal. On the other hand, tourism gave women the opportunity for financial independence and, as in some other contexts, women found working in tourism to be enjoyable, fulfilling and sometimes empowering.

In other ways, women's experiences of working in tourism were qualitatively different from other (predominantly capitalist) contexts. Tourism work routinely involved extensive preparation and training. Women in all positions enjoyed opportunities for career advancement (at least to middle management positions). Rates of pay were good and enough to secure a good standard of living. Tourism employees enjoyed job security and were not subject to the uncertainty and insecurity of seasonal employment. And, in a state which sought to limit contacts between Romanians and foreigners, women who worked in tourism had regular and legitimate access to people from other countries. This created additional advantages, particularly the opportunities for trade and barter with foreign tourists which were a tactic for coping with the shortages characteristic of the socialist economy. Women working in tourism had unique opportunities to accumulate economic and cultural capital in ways which were not available to those working in other sectors.

All this meant that tourism in socialist Romania was a valued and sought-after career for reasons which are distinct from those in non-socialist contexts. Many women spoke of the prestige and sense of professionalism they enjoyed as tourism employees. Since their jobs offered so many formal and informal rewards, tourism employees were careful not to do anything that might jeopardise their position. However, while many women assessed their experiences of working in tourism as positive, we do not argue that the socialist era was some kind of utopia. Tourism work in a socialist state also had negative characteristics: tourism employees were subject to greater surveillance than the average Romanian and faced the threat of harsh penalties for perceived under-performance or excessive contact with foreign citizens.

In many ways, despite its professed rejection of capitalism, socialist Romania struggled to create a form of tourism that was distinctly socialist (Light, 2013). For example, many of the ways in which Romania used tourism had clear parallels with the situation in capitalist countries. However, our analysis suggests that, in the nature and form of employment for women, socialist states did succeed in organising tourism in a way that was genuinely different from most contemporary (capitalist) contexts. In particular, socialist Romania introduced progressive initiatives that have been identified as essential if tourism is to contribute to the empowerment of women who work in the sector (Chant, 1997; Ferguson 2011a; Baum, 2013). These included extensive education and training and, most notably, the provision of extensive childcare for working women. Under state socialism, therefore, tourism went some way in realising its potential to advance and empower women (Pritchard et al 2007:9) by bringing about a significant (if ultimately temporary) improvement in the lives of many working women. In this, socialism achieved, in part at least, the transformative and emancipatory potential of what Pritchard et al (2011) have termed ‘hopeful tourism’.

This analysis reinforces the importance of avoiding over-generalisations about the nature of tourism employment for women. Previous research in a range of contexts has highlighted the highly heterogeneous nature of women’s experiences of tourism work. Context is all important: in particular circumstances tourism can either be exploitative or empowering for women (who, in turn, can negotiate the constraints and opportunities of tourism work in diverse ways). Future analyses of gender and tourism employment need, therefore, to be sensitive to the ways in which local political, economic, social and cultural circumstances can produce very different forms of tourism (and consequently, experiences of tourism employment). Our findings also point to a need for more research into the specific characteristics of tourism work in contexts that, until, now have been largely overlooked. These include socialist states but also authoritarian political regimes more generally.

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<sup>1</sup> Romania's socialist-era employment statistics do not identify tourism as a specific sector so that it is not possible to calculate precisely the number of women who worked in tourism.

<sup>2</sup> The exchange rate of the Romanian leu with Western currencies was artificially fixed by the state. Therefore, expressing the equivalents of these salaries in Western currencies is not meaningful