

“A medium of revolutionary propaganda”: The state and tourism policy in the Romanian People’s Republic, 1947-1965

Duncan Light

Abstract

This paper contributes to recent analysis of tourism within socialist states by examining tourism policy in the Romanian People’s Republic, 1947-1965. It considers the development of tourism policy that was intended to support the broader political project of building socialism. Romania initially adopted the Soviet model of purposeful and collective outdoor recreation. It promoted domestic tourism to enhance the health of the working population and generate pride in the achievements of socialism. Romania also followed the Soviet Union in ‘opening’ to international tourism in the mid-1950s. However, after increasing tension with the Soviet Union Romania pursued a more independent course of socialist development from the late 1950s. This was reflected in tourism policy, particularly the vigorous encouragement of international tourism following the model of neighbouring Yugoslavia. This was a means to generate the foreign currency needed for an independent industrialisation programme and also enabled Romania to project its increasingly independent stance to foreign visitors (from both socialist and non-socialist countries). However, while tourism was an important part of state policy, many of the ways that the People’s Republic used tourism mirrored existing practices in capitalist states and there was limited success in developing a distinctly socialist form of tourism.

Key Words: Romanian People’s Republic, state socialism, ideology, tourism policy, Soviet Union

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Introduction

Over the past decade there has been increasing critical attention to the nature and role of tourism within state socialist (communist) regimes. This development can be situated within several broader trends in the academic study of tourism. First, there is a growing focus within tourism studies on the (often overlooked) role of the state in planning and coordinating tourism development¹. Second, historians of tourism have devoted increasing attention to the role of tourism in authoritarian political regimes, particularly during the 20th century². This paper contributes to these debates through examining the development of tourism in the Romanian People’s Republic between 1947 and 1965. It focuses on the role of the socialist state in planning and promoting tourism in a way that was consistent with broader political, economic and social objectives.

State socialism was founded on the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, as later interpreted by Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin). This model rejected political pluralism in favour of rule by a single party (the Communist Party) which claimed to provide political leadership on behalf of the working people. In economic terms socialism sought to eliminate the inequalities that Marx and Lenin argued were fundamental to capitalist development. Hence, the means of production were taken into state ownership and economic activity was centrally planned to reduce social and spatial inequalities, and maximise production of useful resources. Since this form of political and economic organisation generally lacked widespread popular support many socialist regimes relied on authoritarian rule and extensive surveillance of the population. The world’s first socialist state was installed in Russia following the revolution of October 1917. Socialist Russia joined neighbouring republics to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922. At the end of the Second World War the Soviet Union

¹ See for example: Hongliang Yan and Bill Bramwell, ‘Cultural tourism, ceremony and the state in China’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 35(2008), 969-989; Peter M. Sanchez and Kathleen M. Adams, ‘The Janis-faced character of tourism in Cuba’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 35 (2008), 27-46; Bill Bramwell, ‘Governance, the state and sustainable tourism: A political economy approach’, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 19 (2011), 459-477; Duncan Light, *The Dracula Dilemma: Tourism, Identity and the State in Romania* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

² For example: Shelley Baranowski, ‘Radical nationalism in an international context: Strength through joy and the paradoxes of Nazi tourism’, in *Histories of Tourism: Representations, Identity and Conflict*, ed John K. Walton (Clevedon: Channel View, 2005), 125-14; D. Medina Lanansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle and Tourism in Fascist Italy*, (University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); Kristin Semmens, *Seeing Hitler’s Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005)

(led by Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin) occupied a number of Central European states in which loyal socialist regimes were installed. Two further states also declared themselves socialist republics. Thus, socialism was the dominant form of political-economic organisation in Central and Eastern Europe for much of the 20th century.

In a series of pioneering articles published during the 1980s Derek Hall examined the specific character of tourism in socialist societies. He argued that while Marx and Lenin say little about tourism, socialist states were nevertheless able to use tourism to achieve a number of political and economic objectives³. He argued that tourism could support policies aimed at equalising the distribution of economic activity within a state by stimulating development in particular regions. The development of tourism activities could also stimulate infrastructural improvements. The promotion of international tourism was a means of generating Western currency that enabled the import of Western technology and machinery, thereby stimulating economic development. Tourism could also contribute to explicitly ideological objectives such as demonstrating to visitors (particularly from non-socialist countries) the achievements of socialism, as well as promoting international peace and understanding. Of equal importance, tourism promotion enabled a socialist state to project itself to the wider world in its own way and on its own terms. Domestic tourism was able to contribute to the well-being of the workforce, as well as stimulating pride in the achievements of socialism⁴.

The socialist regimes of East-Central Europe collapsed between 1989 and 1991, while the Soviet Union itself was dissolved in 1991. Academic attention swiftly turned to all things post-socialist and there is now an extensive literature about the post-socialist restructuring of the socialist-era tourism industry. However, in recent years there has been renewed interest in the nature of tourism during the socialist era, although now from an explicitly historical perspective. This reflects a recognition that the social and ideological role of tourism in socialist states is still poorly understood. At the same time the increasing availability of archival materials from the socialist era has created new opportunities to investigate how socialist states sought to develop a characteristically socialist form of tourism.

³ Derek R. Hall, 'Foreign tourism under socialism: The Albanian "Stalinist" model', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 11 (1984), 539-555; 542; Derek R. Hall, 'Stalinism and tourism: A study of Albania and North Korea', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17(1990), 36-54; Derek R. Hall, 'Evolutionary pattern of tourism development in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union', in *Tourism and Economic Development in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* ed Derek R. Hall (London: Belhaven, 1991), 79-115.

⁴David Turnock, 'Rumania and the Geography of tourism', *Geoforum*, 8 (1977) 52.

Much recent work has focused on the Soviet Union, and has examined state initiatives to promote both domestic and international tourism. For example, Koenker⁵ discusses the efforts of various organisations that were subordinate to the state authorities to create a distinct form of Soviet tourism in the 1920s and 1930s. Such ‘proletarian tourism’ was collective, purposeful, and intended to bring about intellectual and physical self-improvement⁶. The activities undertaken and the places visited were also intended to instruct tourists in the new realities of socialism in support of the state’s broader projects. After the Second World War domestic travel was again encouraged as a form of patriotic education intended to generate loyalty and admiration for the Soviet state. In the insular and suspicious era of late Stalinism knowledge of the world beyond the Soviet Union was actively discouraged and travel to that world was virtually impossible⁷. Yet this was to change during the Khrushchev era as the Soviet Union sought to normalise relations with the non-socialist world and adopt a policy of peaceful coexistence. Consequently the Soviet state actively encouraged its citizens to travel abroad, mostly to the fraternal socialist countries of East-Central Europe⁸ but sometimes to non-socialist countries.⁹ In addition, the state encouraged foreign tourists (from both socialist and non-socialist countries) to visit the Soviet Union. Moreover, international tourism was supported as a means to generate the foreign currencies that the Soviet Union increasingly needed to fund its military and intelligence operations. In particular, *Inturist* (the state body responsible for foreign tourism) actively promoted the country as a destination for tourists from Western countries.¹⁰

To date the study of socialist tourism has been dominated by the Soviet Union with much less attention to the socialist ‘satellite’ states of East-Central Europe. Each of these countries had a different pre-War experience of tourism but now faced the need to organise it in a new way

⁵ Diane P. Koenker, ‘The proletarian tourist in the 1930s: Between mass excursion and mass escape’ in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist Under Capitalism and Socialism* ed Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P Koenker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 119-140

⁶ Diane P. Koenker, ‘Travel to work, travel to play: On Russian tourism, travel and leisure’, *Slavic Review* 62 (2003), 657-665

⁷ Anne E. Gorsuch, ‘“There’s no place like home”: Soviet tourism in late Stalinism’, *Slavic Review*, 62 (2003), 760-785.

⁸ Anne E. Gorsuch, ‘Time travellers: Soviet tourists to Eastern Europe’, in *Turizm: the Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism* ed Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P Koenker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 205-226.

⁹ Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 106-129.

¹⁰ Shawn Salmon, ‘Marketing socialism: Inturist in the late 1950s and early 1960s’, in *Turizm: the Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism* ed Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P Koenker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 186-204.

that was appropriate to a socialist state. The limited evidence available suggests that these states fused their particular historical experience of leisure and tourism with something based on the Soviet model. For example, the Democratic Republic of Germany sought to co-opt a long pre-War tradition of countryside recreation (often associated with a celebration of the local region) and to replace it with a collective and purposeful form of proletarian tourism that would use the countryside to nurture love and respect for the socialist state.¹¹ Of the other socialist states of East-Central Europe only Yugoslavia (which, after 1948, split from the Soviet Union to pursue an independent course of socialist development) has received significant attention.¹² The Yugoslav authorities deliberately encouraged 'social tourism', intended to promote the well-being of the working people by giving them the right to a paid holiday (usually at the Adriatic coast). Moreover, tourism was a means to bring people from the country's different regions together in order to mould a new Yugoslav citizen with a socialist consciousness.¹³ As a non-aligned state, Yugoslavia maintained friendly relations with both socialist and non-socialist countries. Tourism was one means to demonstrate this independent and 'liberal' political identity so that Western tourists were actively encouraged to visit Yugoslavia from the 1950s onwards.¹⁴

This paper examines the development of tourism in Romania during the early period of state socialism. The history of socialist Romania is conventionally divided into two stages corresponding with two different leaders of the country. In the first stage (1947-1965) the country was known as the Romanian People's Republic (*Republică Populară Română*) and was ruled by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the General Secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party (*Partidul Muncitoresc Român*). This period was characterised by the installation and consolidation of the socialist state. The second stage (1965-1989) corresponds with the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu (who changed the name of both the country and party) and was characterised by independence in foreign policy but also increasingly authoritarian domestic leadership. There has been extensive academic analysis of the Romanian People's Republic,

¹¹Scott Modanda, 'East German nature tourism, 1945-1961: In search of a common destination', in *Tourism: The Russian and East European Tourist Under Capitalism and Socialism* ed Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P Koenker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 266-280.

¹²Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor, *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s-1980s)* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010).

¹³Igor Duda, 'Workers into tourists: Entitlements, desires and the realities of social tourism under Yugoslav socialism', in Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor, *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side*, 33-68; Rory Yeomans, 'From comrades to consumers: Holidays, leisure time and ideology in Communist Yugoslavia' in Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor, *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side*, 69-105.

¹⁴Igor Tchoukarine, 'The Yugoslav road to international tourism: Opening, decentralization and propaganda in the early 1950s', in Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor, *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side*, 107-138.

particularly within the disciplines of history and political science. Most of this work has focused on political strategies (and internal dynamics) of the Romanian Worker's Party; the processes of industrialisation and collectivisation; the nature of internal repression; and Romania's changing relationship with the Soviet Union. However, the nature of tourism has been almost completely overlooked. Indeed, the limited analysis of tourism in socialist Romania is confined to the later, Ceauşescu era.¹⁵

The analysis that follows focuses on the evolution of tourism policy in the People's Republic and the state's efforts to promote tourism in ways that supported broader socialist priorities and aspirations. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which tourism development mirrors Romania's changing relationship with the Soviet Union, particularly the move from loyal subservience in the immediate post-War years to increasing autonomy from the late 1950s onwards. Reasons of space do not permit a broader analysis of the experience of tourists themselves. A range of sources available in Romanian archives are used to explore these issues. These include acts of legislation; speeches by key figures in the party; reports in various tourism magazines and yearbooks intended for a Romanian audience; and *Rumania for Tourists* (an early publication intended for an international readership). Given the strict nature of censorship in socialist Romania these sources are treated as mirroring the position of the state towards tourism. However, an obvious source of information – the socialist-era archive of the Romanian Ministry of Tourism – was not available since, according to numerous reports, this archive was destroyed by fire some time after 1989.¹⁶

Tourism Development in the Romanian People's Republic

The Adoption of the Soviet Tourism Model

Romania was invaded by the Soviet Army in August 1944 and the Soviet Union swiftly extended its influence in the country.¹⁷ With Soviet support the Romanian Communist Party emerged as the dominant political force. The first communist-dominated government was

¹⁵Turnock, 'Rumania'; David Turnock, 'Tourism in Romania: Rural planning in the Carpathians', *Annals of Tourism Research* 17 (1990), 79-102; David Turnock, 'Romania' in *Tourism and Economic Development in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* ed D.R. Hall (London: Belhaven, 1991), 203-219.

¹⁶Light *Dracula*, 4.

¹⁷Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Rumania, 1944-1962*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

formed in March 1945 and in the following years the Communist Party took control of most government ministries. Opposition parties were bullied and intimidated, while their leaders were arrested and imprisoned. On 30 December 1947 King Mihai – the last remaining obstacle to the formation of a socialist state - was forced at gunpoint to abdicate and on the same day the Romanian People's Republic was declared.

At this time Romania was one of the most docile and obedient of the Soviet satellite states of East-Central Europe and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was a loyal follower of Stalin. Thus, the Soviet model was faithfully implemented in Romania. A new constitution (broadly modelled on that of the Soviet Union) was introduced in April 1948, while legislation of June 1948 provided for the nationalisation of industry, infrastructure, mines, transportation and banks.¹⁸ Collectivisation of agriculture followed in March 1949. Once most economic activity was in state ownership centralised economic planning could be introduced with the first Five-Year Plan in 1950. In 1948, education, police and security services were also reformed and Romania followed other Soviet satellite states in introducing intrusive state surveillance and repression that was intended to quell dissent and intimidate the population.

Given this huge project of economic and political restructuring, tourism was initially a low priority for the People's Republic (in common with neighbouring socialist states).¹⁹ Nevertheless, there were some immediate changes in the organisation of tourism. Romania had a well-developed tourist infrastructure before the Second World War, largely centred on the country's spa resorts, the Carpathian Mountains, and some beach tourism at the Black Sea coast. Tourism was confined to Romania's social elite, although the country had been successful in attracting wealthy visitors from other European countries. Tourism was of sufficient importance that a national tourist office – *Oficiul Național de Turism* (ONT) – was established in 1936 to organise and coordinate the development of tourism within the Romanian Kingdom and to promote tourism to both domestic and international markets.²⁰

This situation was to change dramatically in the Romanian People's Republic. The new project was to democratise tourism and transform it into an activity in which all working

¹⁸Dennis Deletant, *Romania under Communist Rule*, (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies, 1999).

¹⁹ Karin Taylor and Hannes Grandits, 'Tourism and the making of socialist Yugoslavia', in *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s-1980s)* ed Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 1-25, 8.

²⁰Traian Caraciuc and Nicolae Docsănescu, 'În Slujba Vieții', *Almanah Turistic 1986*, 7-9.

people could participate. The only template for such a transformation was the Soviet Union and given Romania's deference towards Moscow it was unsurprising that it faithfully adopted the Soviet model of collective, purposeful and uplifting tourism.²¹ To achieve this ONT launched a new organisation – *Asociația Turismul Popular* (People's Tourism Association) - to replace all the former, privately run tourism associations. Its dedicated magazine - *Turismul Popular* (People's Tourism) adopted the slogan "tourism in the service of the people".²² ONT was now charged with reformulating tourism as a "broad mass movement" and "a weapon in the hands of the people".²³

The following year ONT (perhaps still too closely associated with the now-disavowed pre-War regime) was dissolved. All its roles and material assets taken over by the General Confederation of Labour (*Confederația Generală a Muncii*), a nominally independent trade union movement that was subordinated to the state authorities. This development effectively linked tourism more closely with the workers' movement but also brought Romania more closely into line with the Soviet Union where the organisation of tourism was similarly undertaken by the trade unions.²⁴ At the same time an article in *Turismul Popular* articulated the roles of tourism in the People's Republic and the influence of the Soviet model of proletarian tourism is clearly apparent.²⁵ First, tourism and travel could contribute to the health of working people thereby benefitting the state's economic project. As the article stated: "Active leisure in the natural environment, on the mountain peaks, on the Danube and the coast, or in the forests and gorges surrounding the cities will contribute to reviving the physical strength of working people and building up their health. In this way they will be able to enthusiastically contribute to increasing and improving production, to the prosperity of our People's Republic, to the construction of socialism in our country, and to the well-being of all who work".²⁶ To this end the government allocated funds for organised excursions (usually by train and without an overnight stay) for working people to various locations around the country. Such an emphasis on the health benefits of tourism and travel was not unique to

²¹Koenker, 'Proletarian'.

²²Anon, 'Turismul Popular', *Turismul Popular*, no. 1, (June 1948), 3.

²³Radu Gheorghita, 'Inființarea Asociației de Turism „Turismul Popular”', *Turismul Popular*, no.3, (July 1948), 16.

²⁴Koenker, Proletarian, 123; Gorsuch 'No place' 762.

²⁵Koenker, 'Proletarian'.

²⁶A.Moisescu, '„Turismul Popular” organ al celor ce muncesc și iubesc frumusețile patriei noastre', *Turismul Popular*, Seria II, No 1 (May 1949), 3.

socialist Romania but instead mirrored the state-led promotion of outdoor recreation in many pre-war capitalist countries.²⁷

Second, the promotion of travel and tourism had an explicit role in contributing to citizenship-building projects and efforts to promote patriotism and social unity (once again, mirroring the Soviet Union²⁸). *Turismul Popular* stated: “Knowledge of the treasures of our country will deepen in the souls of working people a sincere and aware patriotism and ardent love for the Romanian People’s Republic, our beloved homeland”.²⁹ Furthermore, tourism was intended to strengthen the contacts between working people in the cities and the countryside (where, in 1950, the majority of the population lived and worked). However, it should again be noted that the use of tourism for such ends was not uniquely socialist since many capitalist countries also encouraged domestic tourism to promote national cohesion and deepen senses of belonging to the broader social community of the nation.³⁰ While socialist states such as Romania regarded the nation as an essentially capitalist concept that would wither away in a socialist society, the use of tourism to promote social homogenisation and encourage allegiance to a political unit closely paralleled the use of tourism within nation-building strategies in non-socialist contexts.

For all this rhetoric, few resources were initially allocated for tourism development since post-War reconstruction and socialist industrialisation were the priorities for the People’s Republic. Consequently, progress towards refashioning tourism as a mass activity was slow and, for example, only 30,000 Romanians stayed in tourist accommodation in 1949³¹ reflecting in part the limited accommodation that was available for overnight stays. An unapologetic article in *Turismul Popular* acknowledged that the 1949 State Plan made little provision for tourism³² but argued that the improvements in road and rail transport that were a key element of the plan would have significant implications for travel and tourism by facilitating the easier movement of people around the country. It also argued that the construction projects foreseen by the plan would bring about a significant transformation of

²⁷Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 271-3.

²⁸Gorsuch, ‘No place’, 771-772.

²⁹Moisescu, ‘Turismul’, 3.

³⁰Catherine Palmer, ‘An ethnography of Englishness: Experiencing identity through tourism’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32 (2005), 7-27.

³¹Mircea Banu, ‘Turismul – o largă mișcare populară’, *Almanah Turistic 1963*, 10-11.

³²Anon, ‘Turismul in Planul de Stat’, *Turismul Popular*, no. 3 (10), March 1949, 14.

the countryside, presenting tourists with visual proof of the new society that socialism was building.

Moreover, the regime's interest in tourism seems initially to have been lukewarm since *Asociația Turismul Popular* was dissolved in the summer of 1950. This development can be situated in the context of the state's domestic priorities at this time. In particular, the 1950-52 period was one of ideological fervour that Ionescu³³ describes as the 'apex' of Stalinism in socialist Romania. The state pursued a policy of rapid industrialisation (in which large numbers of people joined the industrial workforce). In this context, travel and tourism was a low priority (and indeed, a potential distraction from the industrialisation project). At the same time, the rapid development of industry (along with the need to pay war reparations) placed acute strains on the Romanian economy. This necessitated a currency reform in 1952, the effect of which was to severely reduce the purchasing power of the population.³⁴ This, in turn, reduced the already limited opportunities for domestic travel. Other policies directly discouraged travel within the country. A *Miliția* replaced the police force in 1949 as part of a strategy of internal repression that was intended to consolidate and extend the authority of the state and eliminate domestic opposition. One of its key roles was to issue residence permits for every citizen to enable monitoring and regulation of the movements of the populace. Although the new constitution of 1952 guaranteed paid holidays and the right to use hotels and sanatoria³⁵, in practice domestic travel was tightly restricted and permitted only for work, or for health reasons. Moreover, anybody staying overnight away from their normal place of residence (including hotel guests and those visiting relatives) were required to register with the *Miliția*.³⁶ In this insular and suspicious climate the regime had no interest in promoting international tourism and the country's borders were effectively closed to all but official delegations.

However, after Stalin's death in 1953 there was a gradual ideological relaxation in the Soviet satellite states of East-Central Europe. In Romania the authorities eased the Stalinist policy of industrialisation to focus instead on increasing the living standards of the population. The salaries of industrial workers were raised to address growing discontent and absenteeism.

³³Ionescu, *Communism*, 197

³⁴Ionescu, *Communism*, 203.

³⁵Marea Adunare Națională a Republicii Populare Române, *Constituitia Republicii Populare Române 1952*, *Buletinul Oficial* nr 1 (27 Sept 1952), http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.frame (accessed 23 January 2013)

³⁶Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989* (London: Hurst, 1995), 22, 24.

There was also greater attention to meeting the demand for consumer goods.³⁷ In this context there was renewed attention to tourism and leisure, and priority was given to expanding and enhancing the “material base” of tourism (that is, accommodation facilities and restaurants). By 1954 one source claimed that more than 2 million Romanians (of a population of about 17 million) now participated in various forms of tourism in the country³⁸ (although it is likely that most of this was excursions that did not include an overnight stay).

The Romanian Peoples’ Republic promoted tourism development in three types of destination. The first was mountains (since the mountains and hills of the Carpathians account for around a third of Romania’s territory). There was a long tradition of hill-walking and climbing in these areas³⁹ albeit among the more affluent social groups. Moreover, group mountaineering (*Alpinism*) was actively promoted in the Soviet Union where an activity previously confined to a social elite was now a form of beneficial socialist outdoor recreation open to all.⁴⁰ Thus, mountaineering was an ideal form of healthy outdoor recreation that the state authorities wished to support. Various state institutions (including workers’ unions) promoted weekend excursions to the mountains and there was considerable investment in the provision of accommodation in these areas. According to one guide book (which may need to be interpreted with caution) the number of mountain huts, shelters and cabins increased from 88 (with 4,400 beds) in 1948 to over 170 (with almost 10,000 beds) in 1957, while the number of participants increased from 30,000 to nearly 2,500,000 in the same period.⁴¹

The second principle type of destination was spa resorts. There were more than one hundred such resorts in Romania and balneotherapy (the treatment of disease through drinking or bathing in mineral waters) had been well established among the social elite. The socialist state sought to democratise this form of medical tourism and transform it into a mass activity intended to promote the well-being of the working people. The regime invested in new hotels to increase the capacity of spa resorts and various workers’ organisations arranged group travel to such places for treatment. The number of people using these resorts more than

³⁷ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 139-40; Ionescu, *Communism*, 234.

³⁸ Constantin Messinger, ‘Să cunoaștem și să iubim frumusețile patriei’, in *Almanah Turistic* (Editura Consiliului Central al Sindicatelor, București, 1954), 8.

³⁹ Turnock, Rumania, 51.

⁴⁰ Eva Maurer, ‘*Alpinism* as mass sport and elite recreation: Soviet mountaineering camps under Stalin’, in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist Under Capitalism and Socialism* ed Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 141-162.

⁴¹ Constantin Daicoviciu and others, *Rumania* (București: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 354.

doubled between 1950 and 1960⁴² and Gheorghiu-Dej himself announced in 1960 that 400,000 workers and 100,000 children visited spa resorts annually, either for a holiday or for medical treatment.⁴³

The third type of tourism was beach tourism at the Black Sea coast. There had been limited tourism development in this area since the late nineteenth century and six resorts (catering for a social elite) were established in the northern part of the littoral.⁴⁴ Again, the Peoples' Republic set about transforming these resorts into centres for health tourism for the masses. New hotels were constructed and again workers' organisations arranged group holidays to the coast. In 1955 46,790 Romanians had holidayed at the Black Sea but by 1960 this had increased to more than 200,000 people.⁴⁵

The period of gradual liberalisation in the mid-1950s also led to the first efforts to open the country's borders and allow visits by international tourists. Once again socialist Romania was obediently following the lead of the Soviet Union. In the context of Khrushchev's ideological relaxation the Soviet Central Committee passed a resolution in April 1955 permitting international travel to, and from, the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ Romania swiftly responded by re-establishing *Oficiul Național de Turism* in 1955, now under the direction of the Ministry for External Trade, and with the remit to launch Romania onto international tourist circuits.⁴⁷ This development achieved modest initial success: from fewer than 200 foreign visitors in 1955⁴⁸, Romania attracted 5000 tourists from 13 countries in 1956.⁴⁹ Most visitors were from other socialist states but access to the country from capitalist states was now possible. A number of visits to Romania (and the other socialist states of East-Central Europe) were made by trades unions and workers groups from Western Europe who wanted to see for themselves the realities of life in a socialist state and such 'ideological solidarity tourism' was supported by the state authorities.

⁴²Turnock, Romania, 215.

⁴³*Congresul al III-lea al Partidului Muncitoresc Român* (Editura Politică, București, 1960) 24.

⁴⁴Turnock, Rumania, 51-2.

⁴⁵*Congresul*, 559.

⁴⁶Gorsuch, *All This*, 10.

⁴⁷D. Marinescu, '50 ani de la crearea oficiului național de turism', *Actualități în Turism*, 2-3 (1985), 1-5; Caraciuc and Docsănescu, 'slujba vieții', 7-13.

⁴⁸Em Valeriu, 'Turism: recreație, cunoaștere, prieteniu', *Almanah Turistic 1961*, (București: ONT "Carpați", 1961), 20-21.

⁴⁹Carmen. D. Petrescu, 'România și fluxul turistic internațional', *Terra*, III(3), (1971), 10.

Tension with the Soviet Union and the Search for Alternative Tourism Models

The ideological thaw in Romania gathered new momentum in 1956 following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes. Gheorghiu-Dej, a committed Stalinist was profoundly shaken by Khrushchev's stance and developed a deep distrust of the Soviet leader and his reorientation of Soviet policy.⁵⁰ As a result, Romania started gradually to distance itself from the Soviet Union and pursue a more independent course, whilst remaining faithful to the broader Soviet model of socialism.⁵¹ This process started unobtrusively in the late 1950s and gathered momentum during the 1960s and 1970s. The pursuit of this more independent course was to have a significant impact on the state's tourism policy.

One of the early moves in this more independent stance was the request for the removal of troops from Romanian territory. Khrushchev was prepared to grant the Romanians their wish since it enabled him to present himself to the West as interested in *détente* and peaceful coexistence. In any case, Soviet troops were stationed in the various socialist states that surrounded Romania and could quickly intervene if necessary.⁵² In May 1958 the troop withdrawal was announced (and it was completed on 25 July 1958). At the same time there was a significant initiative by Romania to push ahead with the promotion of international tourism. In June 1958 ONT launched a monthly glossy tourist magazine entitled *Rumania for Tourists* (with equivalent editions in a number of other European languages). In this action Romania was no longer following the lead of the Soviet Union since it was not until 1959 that *Inturist* declared the USSR to be open to visitors from all countries (and it was not until 1966 that the Soviet Union launched a similar tourism magazine aimed at the international market⁵³).

Romania's pursuit of a distinctly Romanian road to socialism was affirmed by a Plenum of the Romanian Workers' Party in November 1958. Gheorghiu-Dej announced a renewed emphasis on industrialisation as the way to build socialism in Romania.⁵⁴ In order to fund such rapid industrialisation the plenum also approved a major increase in foreign trade, particularly with non-socialist countries and, in the following years, trade with Western

⁵⁰Tismaneanu, *Stalinism*, 144

⁵¹Deletant, *Ceaușescu*, 52; Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians: A History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991) 243.

⁵²Georgescu, *The Romanians*, 244.

⁵³Salmon, 'Marketing', 190, 196.

⁵⁴Ionescu, *Communism*, 305.

countries trebled.⁵⁵ In addition, socialist Romania embarked on a major drive for international recognition and affirmation in the late 1950s⁵⁶ which resulted in the prime minister visiting a number of Western capitals in 1959.

In these circumstances international tourism was something that the Romanian state could promote to further its principal economic and political goals: as a form of external trade it could generate foreign currency, while politically it was a means for the People's Republic to demonstrate its increasing independence from Moscow to the wider world. Moreover, Romania could not have failed to notice what was happening in neighbouring Yugoslavia which had experienced a marked reduction in tourists from other socialist countries following the split from the Soviet Union in 1948. Yugoslavia responded by targeting the Western market, a strategy that started slowly in the late 1940s and accelerated rapidly in the early 1950s. International tourism offered Yugoslavia the opportunity to generate foreign currency but was also a means to proclaim its status as an independent and liberal socialist state to an external audience (from both socialist and non-socialist countries).⁵⁷ The Yugoslav model was one that the People's Republic of Romania could unobtrusively follow in order to assert its independence from the Soviet Union. Moreover, Romania's neighbour Bulgaria (a country with which Romania had never enjoyed especially close relations) had also cautiously promoted beach tourism at the Black Sea from the mid-1950s.⁵⁸ Romania had the opportunity to do the same at its Black Sea coast.

Thus, the People's Republic introduced legislation to accelerate the pace of tourism development (and particularly the promotion of Romania as a destination for international tourism). In February 1959 the Council of Ministers passed a law to restructure ONT.⁵⁹ The preamble contained a clear statement of what tourism was now expected to achieve: again, tourism should contribute to maintaining the health of working people, as well as giving Romanians the opportunity to experience the beauty of their country and to recognise the achievements of socialism. But in addition, international tourism was now identified as a

⁵⁵Ionescu, *Communism*, 301; David Turnock, *An Economic Geography of Romania* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1974), 287.

⁵⁶Stephen Fischer-Galati, *The New Rumania: From People's Democracy to Socialist Republic* (Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1967), 69.

⁵⁷Tchoukarine 'Yugoslav road', 114-120.

⁵⁸Kristen Ghodsee, *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism and Postsocialism on the Black Sea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 86-87.

⁵⁹Hotărîrea nr.86, Published in *Colecție Legi, Decrete, Hotărîrii și Dispoziții 1 ianuarie-28 februarie 1959* (București: Editura Științifică, 1959), 164-7.

means of strengthening ties of friendship between the peoples of socialist countries and developing a spirit of international solidarity. It was also an opportunity to make the achievements of socialism better known to people of other countries. Moreover, mirroring Khrushchev's policy of *détente*, international tourism could demonstrate a policy of collaboration and peaceful coexistence to visitors from non-socialist countries. The legislation gave ONT greater autonomy and a broader remit. In addition to organising inbound international tourism (from both socialist and non-socialist countries) it was also charged with organising domestic tourism for the first time, along with outbound international tourism by Romanians. Among ONT's new attributes was promotion (described in typically socialist fashion as 'touristic propaganda') for both internal and external audiences. ONT also took over coordination of hotels, restaurants and tourist transport with the brief to ensure the best possible quality of services for tourists (particularly foreign visitors and delegations). Finally ONT was permitted to open offices in foreign countries (both socialist and non-socialist) and to establish contracts with travel companies outside Romania to enable foreign tourists to visit the Peoples' Republic.

In addition, the Council of Ministers introduced a comprehensive series of measures in April 1960 specifically intended to increase the number of foreign tourists visiting Romania.⁶⁰ These included the introduction of tourist visas; the introduction of facilities for the currency exchange (including a special tourist exchange rate); support for car-borne tourists (including enhanced border crossings and facilities for purchasing fuel); the development of Romanian-made handicrafts for sale as souvenirs and a customs regime that permitted foreign tourists to leave the country with such goods; a 'reconsideration' of prices charged to foreign tourists (in order to stimulate more visitors); environmental improvements in the principal tourist destinations; and an intensified campaign to promote Romania as a destination (particularly in non-socialist countries). The tight deadlines given to various state institutions to implement these measures suggested that the state was in a hurry to boost tourist activity before the 1960 summer season.

The newly established ONT moved swiftly to promote Romania to international tourists. It started working with foreign travel companies (from both socialist and non-socialist

⁶⁰Hotărîrea nr. 528, in *Acte Normative Nepublicate-Hotărîre ale Consiliului de Miniştri* (Bucureşti: Consiliul Legislativ 1960) 1-5, http://www.iiccr.ro/ro/arhiva_biblioteca/acte_normative_nepublicate/acte_normative_2/ (accessed 22 January 2013).

countries) to bring organised groups to Romania. By 1960 it was working in 30 different countries and was collaborating with 25 companies in the USA, 7 in France, 6 in Belgium and 5 in the UK (including Thomas Cook).⁶¹ It also opened offices in a number of other countries (both socialist and non-socialist) and developed a range of organised itineraries and excursions in Romania. These efforts started to bear fruit and in 1960 Romania received 103,000 international visitors (mostly from Europe), a 47% increase on the previous year⁶².

At the same time there was substantial investment in tourism accommodation to cater for the increasing number of foreign visitors. The fact that the state directed construction resources towards hotels when there was an urgent need for more apartment blocks⁶³ testifies to the importance that the state now attached to tourism. Most new building took place at the Black Sea in recognition of the increasing popularity throughout Europe of beach holidays. Between 1957 and 1960 new hotels with a total capacity of 15,000 bedspaces were built at the litoral.⁶⁴ In the resort of Mamaia alone a further 10,000 bedspaces were added in the early 1960s through the construction of a single hotel complex.⁶⁵ The Black Sea proved to be a popular destination and in 1962 was visited by tourists from 36 countries.⁶⁶ The state also invested in mountain resorts in the Carpathians in recognition of the growing popularity of ski tourism and a number of new hotels opened in the resort of Poiana Stalin (now Poiana Braşov) in 1959.

By 1960 both domestic and international tourism were of sufficient importance to be included in the 1960-65 state economic development plan (the Six Year Plan) presented at the Third Congress of the Romanian Workers' Party. The Plan prioritised increased industrialisation and also set a target for external trade to double by 1965. Receipts from international tourism clearly had an important contribution to make in achieving these targets. In addition, the plan allocated increased funds to enhance the capacity of spa resorts through the construction of new complexes and called for a 30% increase in the number of Romanians visiting such resorts by 1965. More broadly, the plan stated that increased funds and materials would be

⁶¹Untitled, *Rumania for Tourists*, III(3), (1960), back page.

⁶²Petrescu, *România*, 10.

⁶³In the November 1958 Party Plenum Gheorghiu-Dej had criticised architects and urban planners in 1958 for the slow pace of construction of housing. See Augustin Ioan, *Power, Play and National Identity* (Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Foundation, 1999), 137.

⁶⁴C.Lăzărescu, 'Ansamblu de case de odihnă cu 10,000 de locuri la Mamaia', *Arhitectura RPR*, VIII(4) (1960), 37-40.

⁶⁵Lucian Popovici, 'Complexul hotelier de 10,000 paturi de la Mamaia', *Arhitectura RPR*, IV(4-5) (1961), 4-7

⁶⁶*Rumania for Tourists* 4 (2-3) (1962), 25.

made available for the development of leisure, sport and tourism services.⁶⁷ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej even made reference to tourism in his opening speech to the Congress, declaring that improved conditions would be created for leisure, tourism, sport and recreation and noting the role of tourism in promoting peaceful exchange and cooperation with the other countries of the world.⁶⁸

Following the Congress Romania continued its gradual disengagement from the Soviet Union and the pursuit of an independent socialist course. One consequence was a changing domestic policy and, in particular, a relaxation of (hitherto severe) internal repression in the early 1960s.⁶⁹ This in turn created conditions in which the state would permit outbound international tourism. In fact, by the early 1960s the Soviet Union and most of its satellite states of East-Central Europe were sufficiently confident to permit their citizens to travel abroad (in carefully controlled situations). Consequently, 'intra-bloc' travel among the socialist states of East-Central Europe and the Soviet Union increased steadily during the 1960s⁷⁰ and the situation in Romania mirrored this broader trend. Legislation of 1959 had enabled ONT to arrange visits abroad by Romanians. In addition, between 1960 and 1962 the Romanian government had concluded agreements for various cultural exchanges with a number of non-socialist countries.⁷¹ An increasing number of Romanians were permitted to travel abroad although obtaining permission to do so involved a time-consuming series of checks by various security institutions. Unsurprisingly, travel to other socialist countries was more straightforward than travel to the 'West'.⁷² In 1955 just 172 Romanians (mostly official delegations) had left the country but this increased to 14,000 in 1960 and 25,000 in 1962⁷³ (and would reach 350,000 by 1969).⁷⁴

Romania's relationship with the Soviet Union reached a new crisis point in 1962, when the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (an economic and trading block for the socialist states allied to the Soviet Union) produced a proposal (backed by Khrushchev) for an

⁶⁷ *Congresul*, 650, 687, 683, 695

⁶⁸ *Congresul*, 66, 103.

⁶⁹ Georgescu, *Romanians*, 246.

⁷⁰ Hall, 'Evolutionary pattern', 89-90.

⁷¹ Ionescu, *Rumania* 314.

⁷² Adelina O Stefan 'Between limits, lures and excitement: Holidays abroad in socialist Romania during the 1960s-1980s', in K.Burrell and K. Horschelmann (eds) *Socialist and Post-Socialist Mobilities* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, forthcoming 2014).

⁷³ Valeriu 'Turism', 21; Stefan, 'Between', np.

⁷⁴ Petrescu, 'România', 15.

international division of labour in which different countries would specialise in particular economic activities. Romania was allocated a primarily agricultural role, something that was both an affront to Romanian pride and which collided with the country's drive towards rapid industrialisation. Romania resisted Soviet pressure to adopt the plan and responded by drawing still further away from the Soviet Union. The issue came to a head in April 1964 when the Romanian Workers' Party issued a statement (known as the 'Declaration of Independence') which insisted on Romania's sovereign right to pursue its own course of socialist development, without outside interference. In effect, the People's Republic was asserting its national interests and refusing to subordinate national aspirations to a supra-national socialist planning organisation.⁷⁵

Following the 'Declaration of Independence' Romania continued to strengthen links with both other socialist countries, and the West. Tourism was again one element of this reorientation of foreign policy. Romania increased its efforts to attract foreign tourists, both to enhance external trade, but also to present Romania's new independent course and demonstrate its commitment to peaceful relations between socialist and non-socialist countries. A decision of the Council of Ministers established a more relaxed border regime where tourists could obtain entrance visas at border crossings, while organised groups were permitted visa-free travel if they were spending less than 48 hours in the country.⁷⁶ New measures to facilitate travel within the country by international visitors were announced⁷⁷ while further legislation at the end of 1964 clarified the role of ONT to enable it take on this new role. The number of foreign tourists visiting Romania more than doubled between 1963 and 1964⁷⁸ and there was an increase in visitors from non-socialist countries (many drawn by curiosity to see an 'open' and 'independent' socialist state).

1965 was the last year of the Romanian People's Republic. Following Gheorghiu-Dej's death in March the leadership of the Party was assumed by Nicolae Ceauşescu. One of Ceauşescu's first initiatives was to rename the country the 'Socialist Republic of Romania' (while the Romanian Workers' Party was renamed the Romanian Communist Party). Tourism was, by this time, a well-established part of the state's economic and social policy, and foreign

⁷⁵Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 105.

⁷⁶Hotărâre nr.311, <http://www.monitoruljuridic.ro/> (accessed 26 January 2013).

⁷⁷ Anon, 'New measures concerning further promotion of international tourism in the Rumanian People's Republic', *Rumania for Tourists* 7(1) (1964), 28.

⁷⁸Petrescu, 'România', 10.

relations. The country now boasted an accommodation capacity of 101,612 bedspaces.⁷⁹ According to one source 3 million Romanians now participated in domestic tourism.⁸⁰ Moreover, the country was visited by 675,668 foreign tourists⁸¹ (an increase of 556% on 1960) of whom 30% were from non-socialist countries.⁸² The foundations had been laid for a further state-led expansion of both domestic and international tourism under Nicolae Ceaușescu in the 1970s. In particular, the Socialist Republic of Romania would continue to promote international tourism as a means of presenting its independent foreign policy to the wider world.⁸³

Conclusions

There is a growing body of work that explores histories of tourism in the Soviet Union. However there has been much less attention to tourism in the Soviet ‘satellite’ states of East and Central Europe. Before socialism these countries had a tourist infrastructure orientated to serving the needs of a social elite. They now needed to completely ‘reinvent’ tourism and to practice it in ways that supported the broader project of creating a socialist society and a new socialist consciousness. Moreover, this had to be done in a way that would not attract criticism or censure from the Soviet Union. This paper has examined this issue with reference to what was initially one of the most loyal Soviet satellite states: the People’s Republic of Romania.

Although socialist Romania did not give tourism the same priority and resources as industrialisation, construction and collectivisation it is clear that tourism had an important role in support of broader socialist objectives. Domestic excursions to the countryside and mountains were a means to improve the health and well-being of the working population thereby contributing to increased industrial productivity and output. Medical tourism to spa and coastal resorts had the same purpose. Domestic travel was also a means of demonstrating

⁷⁹Caraciuc and Docsănescu ‘în slujba’, 12.

⁸⁰Alexandru Sobaru, ‘Ora bilanțului’, *Almanah Turistic 1971*, (București: ONT Carpați, 1961), 5.

⁸¹Anon, ‘Dezvoltarea turismului în anii socialismului’, *România Pitorească* 152 (August 1984), 2.

⁸²Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Situation Report: Romania, 15 May 1968*, 4,

<http://www.osaarchivum.org/greenfield/repository/osa:0270c7d7-149f-4705-a983-ea5d57e37ece> (accessed 26 January 2013).

⁸³ Interview with Ștefan Andrei (Foreign Minister of the Socialist Republic of Romania 1978-1985), September 2007.

the achievements of socialism to the Romanian people. Later the People's Republic recognised that international tourism could also contribute to achieving broader state policies. On the one hand it was a form of external trade with the potential to generate foreign currency which would enable Romania to accelerate its ambitious industrialisation programme. On the other hand, international tourism had a propagandist role, being a means for socialist Romania to present itself to the socialist and non-socialist world in its own way and on its own terms. This assumed increased importance when the People's Republic drew away from the Soviet Union and pursued a more autonomous course of socialist development.

It is apparent from this analysis that tourism policy in the People's Republic of Romania was highly imitative of what was happening in neighbouring socialist countries. The state began by obediently adopting the Soviet model of purposeful, improving and collective proletarian leisure. The ideological thaw in the Soviet Union following Stalin's death was mirrored in Romania by an increasing emphasis on domestic tourism. In the mid-1950s when the Soviet Union started to promote both inbound and outbound international tourism Romania immediately did likewise. Romania did start to show some autonomy in tourism policy in the late 1950s when, following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, Gheorghiu-Dej started to detach the People's Republic from the Soviet orbit. The withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1958 was accompanied by concerted efforts to promote international tourism that appear to have surpassed what was happening in the Soviet Union at the time. Yet even this initiative was not unique to Romania since the country was now following the model of Yugoslavia (and to a lesser extent Bulgaria) in encouraging international visitors from both socialist and non-socialist countries. Indeed, by the 1960s the Soviet Union and its satellite states had all adopted broadly similar strategies of supporting international tourism in order to both generate external currencies and demonstrate the achievements of socialism to external audiences.

While socialist regimes defined themselves through an explicit rejection of capitalism they sometimes experienced difficulty in developing practices that were distinctively socialist and clearly differentiated from those of the capitalist world. This is certainly the case with tourism since many of the ways that tourism was practiced in socialist Romania (and indeed in other socialist states) had clear parallels with the situation in non-socialist countries. For example, the promotion of healthy outdoor recreation in order to improve the health and well-being of industrial workers was not unique to socialist regimes but instead mirrored practices in many

capitalist European states during the 1920 and 1930s. Similarly, the use of domestic tourism to develop senses of citizenship and collective loyalty to the socialist state paralleled the use of tourism within nation-building projects in non-socialist contexts. The use of international tourism to generate foreign currency to stimulate economic development was hardly a socialist innovation; neither was the propagandist role of such tourism in presenting a state and its achievements to the wider world. Thus, while tourism certainly had a definite role to play within socialist states, the evidence from the People's Republic of Romania suggests that such regimes were not successful in developing a distinctively socialist form of tourism.