

Tourism and Political Change



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Central and Eastern Europe: the End of the Soviet Union and its Satellites

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 Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

8 Central and Eastern Europe: the End of the Soviet Union and its Satellites

Derek Hall

Introduction

This chapter evaluates the relationships between tourism and political change in the former state socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), particularly in relation to the fall of communism in 1989–91, the disintegration of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, and EU accession of ten states in 2004/2007. Its major objectives are: (a) to describe the ‘region’ its tourism and political structure; (b) to describe and analyse the political changes over the last 25 years and their implications for tourism; and (c) to assess future implications and lessons to be learned.

The societies considered in this chapter include the now European Union (EU) member states of Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (members since 2004), Bulgaria and Romania (since 2007), together with Albania, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, (FYR) Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, (European) Russia (including the Kaliningrad exclave), Serbia, Ukraine. This list testifies to two significant characteristics.

First, although embracing former state socialist societies in Europe, it does not correspond with what used to be referred to as the Soviet bloc, but includes Albania, which effectively left the Soviet bloc in 1961. It also includes the states of former Yugoslavia, which was expelled from the bloc in 1948 and subsequently followed its own ‘third’ way – developing ‘market socialism’ in the 1960s – until destroyed by fragmentation and conflict in the 1990s. This litany of states, second, emphasizes the political and cultural (and environmental) diversity of CEE, and the importance of the role of the EU and other supranational bodies in bringing some coherence to post-communist fragmentation and consequent development processes, including tourism (e.g. Anastasiadou, 2006; Hall and Roberts, 2004).

Employing a crude evolutionary framework, general trends in the relationship between patterns of tourism development and political environment, prior to the disintegration of state socialism in the region, were identified (Hall, 1991: 79–115):

- (a) Early state socialism: the ‘Stalinist’ period saw heavy industrialization taking precedence over all other economic sectors. Inbound and outbound tourism was severely constrained for ideological reasons, but facilities were developed for subsidised, group-oriented domestic leisure and recreation;

- (b) Middle state socialism: in the years following Stalin's death in 1953 there slowly developed collective intra-bloc international tourism and the consolidation of facilities for domestic tourism. Exceptionally, Yugoslavia began attracting Western market mass tourism in the 1950s, and by the mid-1960s was receiving greater numbers of such international tourists than the rest of state socialist CEE combined;
- (c) Later state socialism: most Soviet bloc economies moved to an emphasis on attracting Western tourists in order to gain hard currency to help upgrade seriously outdated technology that was undermining their economic capacities. This programme had limited results because of inadequate infrastructure, service quality and capacity, coupled to an inflexible centralised organizational structure. Domestic tourism became more sophisticated with rising levels of car and second-home ownership in the more advanced economies (East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland). Intra-bloc international flows became more complex, including VFR travel.

Tourism and 'transition'

Fundamental to evaluations of the relationship between tourism and political change in CEE are two key terms - 'post-communism' (or 'post-socialism') and 'transition':

- (a) Post-communism: Czepczynski (2008, 3–4) distinguishes two perspectives. The first, particularly for researchers from CEE, views the concept of 'post-communism' as relating directly to the burden of the social, economic, environmental and cultural inheritance of the state socialist regimes. It has strong pejorative (and experiential) connotations. Second, for the majority of Western analysts, 'post-communism' acts largely as a shorthand term for the general political, economic, social and cultural environment of CEE (and beyond) since the period of state socialist implosion (1989–91).
- (b) 'Transition' entails movement between two specific points, the end point in the case of CEE being integration into the world (capitalist) economy and Western ('democratic') institutions, notably the EU (Agnew, 2000). But this political economy agenda has tended to marginalize social, cultural and wider environmental considerations (Marangos, 2003; Hall, 2004b, 2004c). 'Transformation' can be employed as an alternative concept. It can accommodate structural change, is less concerned with an end state, and acknowledges the substantial (converging and diverging) differences between individual countries.

Path dependency analyses can illuminate such differences by emphasizing that specific variables ('path contingencies': Johnson, 2001) play a critical role in creating and constraining each country's development path (Williams and Baláz, 2000; Saarinen and Kask, 2008). Thus 'transition' processes may perpetuate, reinforce or rejuvenate core-periphery, urban-rural, class, ethnic, gender and regional inequalities (Petrovic, 2008). For example, early post-communist privatization of power was often characterized by vertical and horizontal networks of reciprocity - 'survival networks' (Kewell, 2002) - which, with roots in the communist period, could support or impede restructuring processes, such as the privatization of hotels and other tourism assets and infrastructure. They could also ensure that individuals already in managerial and technocratic positions within tourism and tourism-related industries under state socialism were well placed to benefit from such processes while excluding others (e.g. Koulov, 1996).

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